**Client Describes Change Process**

*By Carey*

"Before I began reparative therapy, I felt trapped in an identity I had not chosen and did not want. I had homosexual thoughts and feelings, and occasionally engaged in sexual acts with other men, and I was very unhappy with myself. I hated my homosexuality. I wanted the intimacy and stability of heterosexual marriage, with a wife and children of my own, but my sexual feelings toward women were extremely weak compared to my desires for sex with men. By the time I reached my early thirties, the vast majority of my sexual experiences (including my very first genital encounter as a fifteen-year-old), had been with other males.

"For years I had kidded myself that I was bisexual, even though I had had almost no sexual contact with women. Ironically, it was only after experiencing heterosexual coitus in my mid-twenties that I began to confront my homosexuality; because my heterosexual experiences were vastly more satisfying than any of my homosexual experiences had been, I began to question my sexual priorities. Over the next several years, I had only very limited (and invariably unsatisfying) sexual contact with men.

"Then, as I entered my thirties, I began to make minor breakthroughs in understanding my sexual identity. Concern about a lack of physical fitness led me to begin swimming regularly at the aquatic center at the university where I worked, and my experience of being naked around other men led paradoxically to a lessening of my homosexual desires. An unexpected friendship with a star member of the school's baseball team allowed me to recognize in myself some of the masculine strengths that I saw and admired in my new friend. I realized, too, that no one in my family had even encouraged me to be athletic, and I began to understand that my lack of involvement in sports had robbed me of a vital masculine camaraderie in youth. I knew that the lack of this masculine influence had contributed to my state of sexual confusion.

"My work in therapy (and reparative therapy is work) clarified and reinforced what I had begun to discover on my own, and taught me a great deal more about who I am and how I got to be that way. I began to see my confusion about who I am as an adult man in the world. I learned the following: that I have problems asserting my needs and expectations in relationships, especially with men, and that I have a tendency to be passive, and to retreat from the challenges posed by those relationships. I also have a fear of being vulnerable that results from my sense of having been betrayed as a boy (by other boys, my parents, my siblings). Also, this "narcissistic injury" has given me a tendency to be self-centered, a tendency that manifests itself particularly in excessive self-pity and hypersensitivity to criticism--especially from other males. Through therapy, I began to recognize how much difficulty I have had establishing and maintaining intimate nonsexual relationships with other men, especially within my peer group.

"At the same time, I've learned that I have difficulty trusting women because of negative feelings toward my own mother, who is classically manipulative, controlling, and domineering, and with whom I was unnaturally close, especially during my adolescence.

Finally, I've learned that I have been afraid of facing adult responsibilities--again because I was rarely (if ever) encouraged to think of myself as a man capable of growing into the responsibilities of manhood.

"When I began reparative therapy I took on the task of growing from a wounded little boy to a whole (and heterosexual) man. In my relationship with my therapist I have directly received the masculine mentoring that I needed, but did not get as a child. More important, the therapy has equipped me to receive that mentoring from other men; it has given me the mental tools and the encouragement I have needed to reach out and connect nonsexually with other men."One of the primary avenues to finding this connectedness with other men and with my own dormant masculinity has been through sports. Within a couple of months of beginning reparative therapy, I joined the local branch of the YMCA and began playing basketball twice a week with a group of guys. Because of my low skill level (whatever talent I have for sports had never been developed), I had to overcome a lot of discouragement at first. But the experience of overcoming, of persevering through adversity rather than falling back into passivity, has been a crucial part of the therapy.

"That I have any athletic talent at all has come as a big surprise. But the biggest surprise for me has been how much I've come to enjoy playing basketball with the guys. What started out as a therapeutic chore has become a great joy. The reality that I am in fact 'one of the guys' is slowly sinking in, and I feel most connected with my true, masculine self when I am caught up in the here-and-now of athletic activity.

"Since I've been in therapy, my homosexual thoughts and feelings have decreased significantly both in frequency and in intensity. While I had already been celibate for a year and a half before I entered therapy, the therapy has made celibacy much less of a struggle. When I have sexual fantasies, they are almost always of sex with a woman, not another man. This is not to say that I'm completely cured: the homosexual feelings still creep in once in a while, but they have lost the compelling edge that they used to have. Whatever desire I might have to get sexual with another guy is now outweighed by my knowledge that this desire is false, and that such an encounter would fail to satisfy me deeply or lastingly.

"For the first time in my life I have a number of good, intimate, nonsexual friendships with men. In fact, most of my friendships now are no longer with women, but with men-- and I am actually more comfortable in my friendships with men than in those old platonic, feminine friendships. I have begun dating women, and am learning now how to relate comfortably with them as a man. I still struggle with trust issues with women, but I'm finding that as I learn to be more real with women (and as I work through my anger toward the women in my family), it becomes easier and easier for me to reveal my true self to women.

"As I approach the end of my first year in treatment I recognize that I still have work to do. But my progress so far gives me great hope for the future. The months since I began reparative therapy have been the happiest and most fulfilled time in my life."