

My Experience of Therapy

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“When I feel the connectedness to other men in terms of mutually expressed non-sexual affections – which I missed as a boy – I feel masculine inside and lose my sexual inclinations towards men. Reparative Therapy has provided me with real hope ...”

The therapy that I have received is known as Reparative Therapy (RT). Although the term is often used in a general sense to describe any attempt to reduce same-sex attraction, RT itself is a specific type of therapy. Given the many popular views propagated by the media, which often gravely distort or exaggerate what is actually involved, I thought it might be helpful if I say what this therapy is, and what it is not. It is a ‘talking therapy’ and doesn’t involve electric shocks. In fact, all my sessions were conducted by telephone. The therapist explores with the client their ‘body states’ experienced in connection with particular feelings being felt, and the accompanying experiences connected to important episodes in daily life. One of the main ‘body states’ the therapist looked at with me, was when feelings of shame were felt in the body and how this was symptomatic of not being in an emotionally assertive and truly relaxed state that naturally embodies my masculinity (i.e. at ease with myself in terms of my body and my place in the world, especially among heterosexual men, but also in terms of how I perceive women.)

RT involves neither repressing sexual feelings, nor any kind of ‘trying’ to be interested in the opposite sex, but rather learning to connect with men as brothers, along with developing an unconditional self-acceptance. If and when changes in sexual orientation occur, they flow naturally as a consequence of work in connection with overcoming shame issues around men, and feelings of ‘not fitting in’ with men and one’s place in their world as equals.

What made me want to receive RT? The RT was not religious in any way. However, the therapist was happy to hear me discuss aspects of my Christian faith as and when they arose. I entered RT hoping to develop my heterosexual potential. My same-sex attractions began in early adolescence, but I did not want to practise homosexuality. For me, sexual relations find meaningful expression in marriage between a man and a woman. I also knew that there were a number of markers in my upbringing that I believe led to my homosexual feelings in the first place.

At school I didn't like sport and never felt like 'one of the boys'. I experienced some trauma from bullying and name-calling. I had few friends and felt more at home with adults, but only on an emotionally superficial level.

RT has repeatedly corroborated the experiences of my upbringing. Books on RT read like my biography. So RT felt like the most natural and desirable course, offering me the prospect of letting go of something (homosexuality) that brought me huge unhappiness. I could never have found happiness in the gay world. In 1997 I began RT, with sessions every two or three weeks. I continued my engineering studies, supported by a part-time job.

For many years I had had a negative view of women. I also felt fear of being controlled by a woman. In my teens, every young woman reminded me of my older sister, who held a controlling and disapproving influence over me which I hated. I could see my sister's disapproving face overlaid on their faces. So I disliked (not hated) women and had no emotional or sexual interest in them. When I passed young men on the street, I had a feeling of terror and couldn't make eye contact with them. Through pornography my attraction to men became more sexual and compulsive. I became increasingly depressed. There was no religion in my home, but I began to experience the Christian faith in my late twenties. Before entering RT, I began making friends with other men in church. For the first time, I felt respected by my peers even when they knew about my same-sex attractions. When I changed churches (for unrelated reasons), however, I felt unable to find similar support.

I always felt 'let down' by the medical profession because, while officially therapists say they will not judge the client, they would not accept the validity of my choice not to identify as gay. I felt angry, cheated and discriminated against. The consultations contradicted the principle of self-determination that I was promised. I felt I had to defend myself and explain my position, and felt isolated and unsupported. I discovered that no professional in the UK, if they followed official guidelines, could unconditionally respect my values. This caused me deep upset and pain that words cannot express.

My RT therapist encouraged me to understand what was behind my same sex attractions. When I felt shame, my body would enter a less assertive state, and this would be a warning sign that predisposed me to fantasise and act out with masturbation and pornography. Before RT, I rarely felt able to expose my vulnerabilities with men. RT helped me realise that I wasn't getting my legitimate (non-sexual) needs met, because of my barrier of shame. But enabled to feel free of these feelings - through RT - I found that the compulsive sexual yearnings for men would lose their power. As I learned to connect with once-feared men, I was amazed to find that they also reached out to me and my attractions weakened.

When I feel connectedness to other men in terms of mutually expressed nonsexual affections – which I missed as a boy – I feel masculine inside and lose my sexual inclinations towards men. RT has provided me with real hope, and has demystified the issue of my needs around my male peers. I am not ‘different’ from other men, but their equal.

I no longer see women as like my older sister. I appreciate femininity in a new way. When I am at peace with my own body (no shame) I can be physically attracted to women. While I still have much to learn about the opposite sex, without the insights I learned from RT, these prospects would be nil.

I have experienced the joy of brotherhood with all men. I belong to their world and no longer feel ‘on the outside’. RT has taught me that same-sex attractions are built on unmet needs and childhood-derived hurts, and that without the triggering experiences of shame there is no homosexuality left. This discovery corroborates my belief that it makes no sense to stake ownership on an identity (‘being gay’) whose foundations are incompatible with the experiences I’ve had of healthy, shame-free manhood.