

Why Does the World Not Want to Face the Pain of Child Abuse and SSA?

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(Posted March 2014)

To Whom It May Concern:

A legal opinion rendered on January 27, 2014, by a United Kingdom Court of Appeal (Civil Division) profoundly spoke to a form of discrimination that I suffered during most of my life. The Court said, "Discrimination against a person because of his or her past actual or perceived sexual orientation, or because his or her sexual orientation has changed [from gay to straight, something most people in my life would not understand] is discrimination "because ofsexual orientation." My personal testimony below will show how inappropriate it is to box someone like myself into a gay identity, after all, change of sexual orientation is entirely possible and I am living proof of that fact.

I experienced what is called "unwanted same sex sexual attraction" (SSA) at the age of 10, when puberty began for me. Given the fact that I was sexually abused by my Father prior to that time, it is revealing that my first wet dream and several others thereafter were of my Father. His sexual abuse began at about age 3 (possibly earlier) and continued until I was 7 1/2 years old. All of this occurred while I lived in Toronto. After we moved to the U.K., I blocked out the sexual activity with my Dad in Canada, and I recall only a few suggestive acts with him in the UK.

My mother was constantly depressed and anxious. My father, on the other hand, was emotionally controlling and abusive. I always felt alone because of the interactions within my extremely emotionally dysfunctional family of origin. I also felt alone because my father would not permit me to have friends. Indeed, during childhood, I was unable to talk with anyone about my feelings. Throughout my childhood, I had no positive male attention, apart from some occasional attention from teachers.

I began to deal with my traumatic childhood only after leaving home at age 21. However, my Grandmother died when I was 24 and this event added considerably to my difficulties in life. Why? Because my Father behaved himself whenever she stayed with us and thus she was the only adult I felt safe with. Her death was therefore very traumatic for me. After her death, I began to have intense and frequent flashbacks of sexual activity with my Dad. I began to lose time and a sense of reality. I thought I was going mad.

Eventually I began to tell people. I told both my Mom and brother. Their responses were markedly different. My Mom was shocked and felt guilty she didn't know what had happened (she was too traumatised by my Dad to notice much). My brother's response was "I wonder if it

happened to me too". He is emotionally shut down and commented that if it did happen to him, it was likely too late for him to deal with it.

When I told my Aunt in the UK, she informed me about the significant physical, emotional and sexual abuse in my father's family. She confirmed I was not going mad.

My Aunt in Toronto initially believed me and informed me how my Father tried to have sex with her when she was 17. When I wanted her to publicly support me and speak of her own abuse by my Father, she reneged on her support. She began to belittle my memories, and denied them by suggesting that I was simply confused about my own sexuality. She proceeded to tell my cousins and their husbands that I was 'gay', thinking that this would 'help' me. In reality, it made my pain and sense of rejection worse as I was labelled 'gay' at secondary school by other boys and some teachers because I didn't fit their perception of what 'straight' meant. The discrimination against me became very real.

After confronting my Dad about the abuse he inflicted upon me, he died 3 days later. Thereafter, whether out of misplaced guilt or some other feeling, I shut down completely. Nevertheless, I was haunted by flashback memories, but without feelings, as if I was a dispassionate witness and was not really there. One vivid flashback I had was of him threatening me during the time we lived in Canada. He made it clear that I was not to tell anyone. After all, he said, did I want my brother and I to be put in foster care and see Mommy and Daddy put into prison? During this period of time (1990 to about 2004), I continue to attempt to block out all unpleasant thoughts of my abuse. Of course, I did not progress in my healing in any meaningful way during this time. In an effort to gain assistance, I sought help from the UK's National Health System (NHS) but recognized that not only could they not help me, but, in fact, had made things worse for me by medicating me and by providing "gay affirmative" counseling.

I was always told by my Aunt in Toronto who first "outed" me to family members, and by therapists of the NHS, and the few friends I told at college about my confused sexuality, that my problems were because I hadn't 'come out of the closet' and accept that I was 'gay'. The conflict between my innermost feelings and messages from the above sources grew intense. Thus, I ended up languishing in the mental health system. They betrayed me by not listening to me and my INNERMOST feelings. Their advice and counsel was simple: I'll be OK once I was 'honest' about being 'gay'. However, honesty was the last thing they wanted. They didn't want honesty any more than my family wanted honesty. They just wanted another box to fit me in, as they didn't see me fitting into the 'straight' box. This pattern of discrimination because of an assumed sexual orientation clouded my existence and my ability to be the real me.

All through this period of time, I could not find a therapist who would listen to me and help me overcome my sexual feelings for men. However, I noticed a particularly curious thing during this

period. Whenever I felt negative about myself and rejected by others, especially if the rejection was by other males, my sexual feelings for men increased. However, whenever I felt somewhat good about myself or affirmed by men, especially by peers and those I perceived to have a strong personality or to be in authority, then I felt more sexual feelings for women and the sexual charges I had for men disappeared. Also my sexual attraction to women would not last long because I perceived that people would consider such an attitude as 'sexually aggressive.' No one at that time could explain this phenomena to me.

It was only when I reached 40 (it was 2004) that I finally received some encouragement to fight to help myself. This help came from a Swiss Jewish friend who himself had been physically/emotionally abused in childhood and had received holistic help to overcome such abuse in his early 20's. That was a turning point in my life. I have been fighting ever since to find the same kind of help and to allow the inner child within me to be protected by the adult me. My inner child had been trapped and unable to express himself ever since the sexual abuse began when I was 3, or possibly earlier.

During my late 30s, before meeting my Swiss friend, I had contemplated getting married to a woman who herself was a sexual abuse survivor and who also suffered with sexual attraction to her own sex. I had sexual attraction to her, and she for me, but she used our relationship to blame me for her pain, rather than face her own inner pain and truth. So we broke up. The experience however taught me how I had to fight to first recognize my own inner truth and only after doing so would I be able to find another soul with whom I could connect in marriage.

To assist me in my healing, I went to a Men's Sexual Abuse Survivors Group Workshop. The facilitators asked us to identify either as homosexual or heterosexual. Of the 18 men present, only one other man and I said our feelings changed depending on how we felt about ourselves; that we have feelings for men most of the time because we felt un-affirmed by males. He also acknowledged the curious situation I discovered earlier in my life: Whenever we felt affirmed by men or generally felt better about ourselves, that was when we had feelings for women. In further discussion with him, we both found something else in common. Our respective mothers used us as surrogate husbands; they unloaded their emotional baggage on us. Moreover, both of us had also been 'stuck' in the mental health system. Unfortunately, he still was. Ultimately, he found he couldn't cope with the Survivors Group and stopped coming.

Another member of the group I got to know who identified as 'straight' admitted to me privately that he had sexual feelings for men, but was afraid of them, while another guy who identified as 'gay' admitted to me in private the opposite: he had feelings for women, but was afraid of them. Unfortunately, the Sexual Abuse Survivors Group refused to deal with these confusions. We either had to be "gay" or "straight" and they said it was impossible to change from one to the other and 'homophobic' to say it is possible. I wish the UK Appellate Court referred to in my

first paragraph would have spoken years earlier so perhaps this black and white discriminatory characterization would not have been present.

After my Mom died in 2007, my brother and his wife began to emotionally abuse me. So after dividing our Mom's estate, I chose to lose contact first with the extended family who wanted to box me in as "gay" and then separated from my brother. I haven't seen him since 2010 and I have not spoken to him since 2012. I believed this separation was beneficial as I found myself capable of exercising my free will and for the first time to choose who I wanted to be with or didn't want to be with. I started moving from a perception that I was stuck as a "gay" identified man and would be unable to experience feelings, behavior, and identify as a "straight" man to actually believe I could feel comfortable as a man with men of all kinds and some one who can relate to women as potential sexual partners and to one woman as a spouse.

Still seeking a path to healing, I found a charity based in London that provides affordable therapy for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Initially I was assigned to a woman but found I couldn't talk with her about sexual stuff. Therefore, the charity reassigned me to a male therapist who is older than me. I was able to inform him about my feelings concerning my various sexual experiences, whether they were with women or men. Given my past experience with counselors who felt that sexuality was immutable and unchangeable, I asked him in a most direct manor 2 critical questions for me: was he taught and did he believe that one's focus and sexual feelings are immutable and unchangeable? While he admitted that was how he was taught, he indicated his openness to learning differently from his clients. I felt a magical release because of his attitude and finally began to feel safe to reveal my most hidden secrets about myself and others in my life while affirmatively working to change (in the words of the Court of Appeal) my 'actual or perceived sexual orientation.'

Over the last few months I have, at last, been more honest with myself. My therapist encouraged me to go with my feelings as to what helps me and to get in touch with the feelings trapped by my childhood. With regard to the sexual feelings, he encourages me to let the feelings pass without judgement in order to see how significant they really are. The cumulative effect of all this has been that I have begun to re-experience the flashbacks I had before my Dad died, but now with FEELINGS; I was no longer simply a dispassionate witness. This included the strong urges I had as a kid to perform sexual things with other adult men just like I experienced with my Dad. I realized that my experiences set me up to believe that sex was the method by which love between men ought to be expressed rather than expressed in an authentic non-sexual method of healthy bonding. As a result, I have gradually been diminishing the desire to act out SSA feelings or even to experience such feelings. My feelings for connection with other men are transforming into healthy non-sexual desires to simply relate to them as friends.

I often watch movies in order to connect with others in similar situations as there is no group or individuals in London for me to connect with emotionally, only a Survivors Group in which I feel reluctant to talk about my intimate sexual feelings because in this particular group there are only women present and the prevailing attitude is that so-called "ex-gays" do not exist.

I often use DVD's that deal with traumas of different kinds and then journal or think through how I feel about what I watched. The last one I watched was of two 17 year-olds in Australia who find they have a sexual attraction for each other whilst working on a school project together. They both come from broken homes, one has an aggressive alcoholic Dad and the other has an emotionally detached Dad who divorced his Mom after his older brother died at 10. Unexpectedly this video reminded me of the loss I felt when I came to the UK at around 7 and when my older brother was 10. After the boy with the alcoholic Dad kills himself because his Dad found out about the sexual nature of the relationship with his friend, I began to grieve the loss I felt at losing the childhood relationship with my brother. I began to feel desperate to reconnect with him. I also remembered feeling lost as to how to connect with other children in general, but particularly boys. I always had girls at school who wanted to be with me. While it was comforting to have friends who were girls, I realized how much I also resented it because it deprived me of what I needed most: male companionship.

In 2008 I learned of JONAH and began connecting with them, first online and later in person. They became a lifeline for me. I was initially afraid of being too involved but I recognized from the information on their website and from their online support group several things that were clearly true for me. This trust factor enabled me to start dealing more directly with my difficulties in life. At their urging, I went to a JiM (Journey Into Manhood) weekend in England. The JiM weekend gave me a space to be with other men who felt similarly and also didn't want their feelings put into a box. I realized there was a world of men like me: people who were pushed into identifying as gay even though our personal and/or religious belief system as to the life we wanted differed. There were different processes in which I participated. Some helped, others didn't. The ones that most helped me were experiential in nature. I used props to act out various scenes from my life and in turn gain a greater understanding about them. Also, I let go of some repressed anger when I was able to hit a punching bag with a bat. I also learned how to "clear" feelings of envy that I was experiencing for another guy in the group, which in turn I had sexualised. After doing this process, the sexualisation was no longer there. Other helpful experiences involved my ability to shout and thus express some of my feelings of anger and lost connections to my Dad and brother.

I believe I need to do more of this kind of work, but I can't afford it at the present. Because of the continuing problems with my brother and his wife, I was forced to move and I lost my job. In spite of this adversity, I continue to fight to connect with my feelings and to work through the feelings that I internalized as a kid.

Over the last few years I found two guys who became my friends and confidants. They let me stay or invite me round socially at their family home when I despair of coping with life on my own, and now I feel equal to them and can look forward to socializing with them and others without my issues being the focus. Both families are very emotionally expressive and their openness to emotions helps me to express my own feelings without fear. As I mentioned earlier, I have gradually begun to have much less desire to act out SSA feelings and more feelings of “I like him or her, perhaps we can be friends”. In other words, even though I am nearly 50, I have finally begun to re-parent myself and to take responsibility for my feelings and in the process to grow out of my former compulsive behavior. I have also learned self care, accepting and properly interpreting my basic needs which were ignored as a kid.

I now feel a lot more hope for the future than I have ever felt in my life, including a belief that I am worthy and that I deserve to have male friends with whom I can connect in a healthy non-sexual relationship of mutual love and respect. Also, I am optimistic that I am in a position to find a wife who can be my partner in life and may also provide the ultimate in friendship and companionship. Finally, I look to pass onto future generations the knowledge that change of sexual orientation is possible and to be both a mentor and an example to so many others who have encountered the kind of discrimination that I have.

I have moved on from society’s labels of “gay” or “straight” and the mental health establishment’s label of “Bipolar.” My former mood swings and compulsive thoughts and behavior are becoming a thing of the past. I am a far more stable person because I am able to process my feelings better. A key aspect of this ability to focus better comes from being able to live in the present, rather than living either in the past or in the future.

Without organisations like JONAH, I wouldn't have known that others feel the same way as I do about SSA. I would have continued to exist isolated and alone. Learning from them that the Hebrew word "to'eviah" in the Torah (Leviticus 18:22 concerning sexual relations with other men), is explained in the Talmud as meaning one is ‘led astray’ (rather than abomination) truly resonates with me. I felt 'led astray' for the better part of my life as I was boxed into an identity as 'gay.' This is not to condemn other people with homosexual feelings or behaviour and who may not feel led astray. For those who identify themselves as "gay", I am not here to judge them nor to accept nor love them any less. On the other hand, why can't those who so identify, and society in general, accept my journey and let me get support? Perhaps the new decision of the British Court of Appeals may provide me and people like me with the recognition we have craved for so long, that is, to recognize that change of sexual orientation is possible and to allow us to live our lives consistent with our own personal and religious value structure.