

# Homosexuality & Hope



*St. Augustine  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church*

The major causes of homosexuality (same-sex attraction) are summarized in this question-and-answer pamphlet, as well as approaches to prevention and healing. The complete text of the Catholic Medical Association's research paper, *Homosexuality and Hope*, can be obtained at [www.cathmed.org](http://www.cathmed.org).

## Are some individuals born with same-sex attraction?

No. A number of researchers have sought to find a genetic cause for same-sex attraction (SSA). The media have promoted the idea that a “gay gene” has already been discovered, but in spite of several attempts, none of the much-publicized studies has been scientifically replicated. A number of authors have carefully reviewed these studies and found that not only do the studies not prove a genetic basis for same-sex attraction, the reports do not even contain such claims.<sup>1-5</sup>

## If homosexuality is not genetic, what are the causes?

Same-sex attractions and behaviors are attributable to a combination of emotional, psychological, social, and biological factors. Persons with same-sex attraction may have one or more of the following in their personal histories:

1. In males, a weak masculine identity and loneliness resulting from a lack of male peer acceptance due to an inability to play team sports requiring eye-hand coordination, such as baseball, soccer, and basketball.<sup>6,7</sup>
2. Sadness and loneliness in the father/son relationship because the father was perceived as distant, critical, selfish, angry, or alcoholic.<sup>8-12</sup>
3. Failure to identify with and establish friendships with same-sex-peers and to embrace one’s own masculinity or femininity.<sup>13,14</sup>
4. In females, a father who deserted the family or who was angry, critical, distant, selfish, or alcoholic; a mother who was emotionally distant, critical, or domineering; peers who were rejecting; important males who traumatized them; and severe loneliness.<sup>15</sup>
5. Poor body image.<sup>7</sup>
6. In males, a mother who was perceived as controlling<sup>10,16</sup>, overly dependent, angry, or demanding.<sup>7</sup>
7. Sexual abuse or rape.<sup>17,18</sup>
8. Separation from parent during the critical time of development.<sup>17</sup>
9. Failure of parents to encourage same-sex identification and friendships.<sup>17</sup>
10. Narcissism or profound selfishness.<sup>15</sup>

## What are the warning signs that a child is at risk for developing same-sex attraction?

At-risk children often have few friends of the same sex, a limited ability to bond with same-sex peers, or lack a close father/son relationship. They may exhibit symptoms of Gender Identity Disorder (GID), which include gender identification with the opposite sex, cross-dressing, discomfort with their own sex, and social anxiety. If untreated, approximately 75% of males with GID may go on to develop same-sex attractions.<sup>17</sup>

## Can same-sex attraction be prevented?

Yes. Current clinical therapy shows that there is hope for prevention.<sup>19, 20</sup> Early identification of at-risk children, along with appropriate psychotherapy and parental support, are key factors leading to successful prevention and treatment of the emotional pain in these children and adolescents.

## Are psychiatric disorders more common in individuals with same-sex attraction?

Yes. Recent, well-designed research studies have shown several psychiatric disorders to be far more prevalent in teenagers and adults with same-sex attraction. These include major depression<sup>14, 21, 22</sup>, suicidal ideation and attempts<sup>14, 22, 23</sup>, anxiety disorders<sup>14, 21</sup>, substance abuse<sup>14, 21, 22, 24</sup>, conduct disorder<sup>14</sup>, low self-esteem in males<sup>25</sup> and sexual promiscuity with the inability to maintain committed relationships.<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that “homophobia” is not the cause of these disorders as most of these studies were done in cultures in which homosexuality is widely accepted. Another recent study has shown that a high percentage (39%) of males with SSA have been abused by other males with SSA.<sup>27</sup> In addition, those with SSA have a shortened life expectancy.<sup>28, 29</sup>

## If a person is manifesting same-sex attractions or behaviors, what can be done?

This individual can seek out mental-health professionals who are experienced in the treatment of same sex attractions (SSA). Specific causes of SSA can be identified and an effective treatment program initiated, especially if there is a spiritual component to therapy, as in the treatment of substance abuse disorders. Deeper relationships with the Lord as one's best friend, with God the Father as another loving father, and devotion to Mary and to St. Joseph are particularly helpful.

## What are the goals of therapy?

The first goal of therapy is to identify and to work to resolve the emotional pain from peer and/or parental relationships which has resulted in sadness, loneliness, lack of confidence, poor body image, lack of acceptance, anger and anxiety. A second goal is the freedom to live chastely\* according to one's state in life. Many individuals with SSA develop a desire to marry and have children. Others discover that they are called to the celibate life. There is every reason to hope that many will be able, in time, to achieve these goals. With the power of grace, the sacraments, and an experienced therapist, a determined individual should be able to achieve the inner freedom promised by Christ.

## How effective is therapy for SSA (same-sex attraction)?

The effectiveness rate is similar to those for other addictive or chronic disorders such as depression, substance abuse, or smoking. Studies in motivated patients have shown that 30% of those with SSA experience a freedom from SSA fantasies and behaviors, and another 30% experience an improvement in reducing unwanted same-sex attractions.<sup>5, 10, 30</sup> A recent study of 200 men and women who reported a sustained change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation for at least five years concluded that 61% of males and 44% of females satisfied the criteria for good heterosexual functioning.<sup>31</sup>

## What else can be done to assist people coping with same-sex attraction?

Every Catholic experiencing same-sex attractions should have access to mental health professionals, support groups, priests, and spiritual directors who unequivocally support Church teachings on homosexuality and all aspects of sexual morality. *Courage*, for individuals with SSA, and *Encourage*, for families of individuals with SSA, are excellent support groups faithful to the Church's teaching. Discretion is essential in evaluating support groups for SSA since many oppose the Church's teaching on sexual morality.

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\**Chastity*: The moral virtue which, under the cardinal virtue of temperance, provides for the successful integration of sexuality within the person leading to the inner unity of the bodily and spiritual being.<sup>32</sup>

## Are the Sacraments important for those with SSA?

Yes. Many individuals with SSA report that frequent reception of the Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration are essential in their struggle with loneliness, lack of confidence, anger, anxiety, and other areas of emotional pain. The graces in the Sacrament of Reconciliation are necessary for strengthening people in their struggles with same-sex temptations and behaviors.

## What is the role of the Catholic community?

Authentic Christian charity and prayer for those with Gender Identity Disorder (GID) and SSA and their families should be part of the Catholic community. Parents, priests and teachers have a serious responsibility to communicate the fullness of the Church's teaching on sexual morality, to counter false information about SSA and to encourage people with SSA to obtain help. Catholic mental health professionals, educators, physicians, priests and religious should recognize that medical science supports the Church's teaching on homosexuality.<sup>5</sup> True compassion toward those with SSA necessitates communicating the truth about SSA to them. Pediatricians should provide information and initial guidelines for treatment of Gender Identity Disorder.

## What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church teach about chastity and homosexuality?

The Catholic Medical Association supports the teachings as laid out in the revised version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

- "The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity". (CCC, 2358)
- "All the baptized are called to chastity." (CCC, 2348) "Married people are called to live conjugal chastity; others practice chastity in continence." (CCC, 2349) "...tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. Under no circumstance can they be approved." (CCC, 2357)
- "By virtues of self-mastery that teach them [persons with same-sex attraction] inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection." (CCC, 2359)

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Complete citations and more references can be found on the full document, *Homosexuality and Hope*, available at [www.cathmed.org](http://www.cathmed.org)

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## Where to find help

**Catholic Medical Association**, *Referrals for mental health professionals*

159 Washington Street, Suite 3  
Boston, MA 02135

Phone: 617-782-3356

Fax: 617-782-3362

[www.cathmed.org](http://www.cathmed.org)

**Courage**, *Spiritual support system for individuals with same-sex attraction*

**Encourage**, *Spiritual support system for families of individuals with same-sex attraction*

Founder: Fr. John Harvey, OSFS

St. John the Baptist

210 W. 31st St.

N.Y., NY, 10001

Phone: 212-268-1010

Fax: 212-268-7150

[www.couragerc.net](http://www.couragerc.net)

**National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH)**, *Informative website, books, pamphlets, referrals for reparative therapists*

16633 Ventura Boulevard, Suite 1340

Encino, CA 91436-1801

Phone: 818-789-4440

Fax: 818-789-6452

[www.narth.com](http://www.narth.com)

## Suggested Reading

*The Truth About Homosexuality* by Fr. John Harvey (Ignatius Press)

*Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2003  
[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Same Sex Attraction: A Parent's Guide* ed by Fr. John Harvey and Gerard Bradley (St. Augustine Press)

"The Biological Truth about Homosexuality" by J. Satinover in *Same Sex Attraction: A Parents Guide*, *ibid.*

*The Battle for Normality* by Gerard van den Aardweg, Ph.D. (Ignatius Press)

*Growth into Manhood* by Alan Medinger (Shaw)

*Beyond Gay* by David Morrison (Our Sunday Visitor)

*Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* by Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D. (Jason Aaronson)



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*On the cover*

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*By Benozzo Gozzoli (1465)*

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