

The Condition of Female Homosexuality

By Janelle M. Hallman-Burleson

The following is an outline of a speech given to parents and strugglers around the country.

For many years now, I have been professionally counseling women who struggle with same-sex feelings. I hope to be able to pass on some of the insights that I have gained, and I hope to do so in a way that respects and honors them and their internal truth and experience. **I work with incredible women.** They are very intelligent, multifaceted, gifted, energetic and carry a strong sense of justice and integrity.

Female homosexuality is complex. It involves many different factors, and one factor is a woman's family relationships. As I explain this condition, I will describe some of the family dynamics or imperfect relationships that could lead to a same-sex struggle within a daughter—but parents, it is important that you hear this first —

Remember, it is not just our relationships with our children that are imperfect and broken; our marriages are imperfect, our relationships with our own parents were also imperfect, and their relationships with their parents...and so it goes for all of us.

Every child is unique and therefore they perceives themselves and the world around them differently. One child may perceive that a situation is funny and laugh. Another may sense fear in the same situation and withdraw. **You as a parent cannot control your child's perceptions or reactions.**

So much of the homosexual struggle is based on a child's perception and interpretation of life events. When I discuss the potential breakdown between a daughter and mother or father, I am NOT implying that you as parents did not love your child, but I am implying that for some reason, your daughter may not have perceived or felt that love. This breakdown and confusion within relationships is part of the reality of living within a broken world. Unfortunately, these confusions can and often do eventually turn into life-controlling issues. Homosexuality is one such example.

So parents, I recognize how difficult a journey you have. It is important that you be open and face the problems that may exist in your relationship with your daughter, but it is equally important that you not become buried and paralyzed in a guilt that is not even fully yours to bear.

BETTY'S STORY –

I grew up on a small farm. My mother had a lot of farm chores to do during the day, so when I was little, she would leave me alone for lengthy periods of time in a playpen. I apparently got used to being by myself. I had an older brother and sister, but it was I who was Dad's favorite. However he inappropriately relied on me to meet his own emotional needs. My mother was jealous of my special relationship with dad.

I was a tomboy and my mom seemed to encourage it in me. She rarely nurtured me. I never remember being held or comforted by her. She never taught me anything that would have been considered feminine or female. She was not feminine herself and probably did not like being a woman. She thought women were weak.

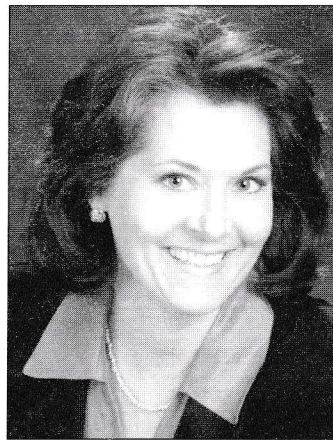
In the midst of the empty space and black hole left by my family, I was also sexually abused by a male when I was seven. The touch felt good, but I was demeaned and rejected by the boy afterwards. I vowed to never need anything again; I hated my femininity and thought it was weak.

As a teenager, I wore jeans and t-shirts or Army fatigues and combat boots. I eventually joined the Army Reserve. In college I met a girlfriend who cared for me and cried when she heard about the sexual abuse. I also had a close female friend who held me in her arms and comforted me when I felt pain. She was a lesbian. Was I, too, a lesbian? All I knew is that this relationship was what I had been looking for my whole life – a safe, loving, tender, non-abusive relationship with a sense of mutuality and of deep care.

No little boy or girl or young man or woman aspires or chooses to become homosexual. The growing feelings and attractions toward the same sex are confusing, frightening, overwhelming, and often shaming. These men and women need our compassion and help. So let's look at the particular pieces missing in my friend Betty's life that may have contributed to her same-sex attraction.

First, it's important to understand what a child needs in order to develop. As I describe these basic needs, notice how everything that a child needs to grow and develop healthily, comes through relationships.

continued



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The Building Blocks of the Lesbian Struggle

Stages of an "Ideal" Life

Here is a very quick lesson in human growth and development; I want to build an "ideal" life based on child-development theory. Notice how relationships are the basis for a child's survival, growth and development, process of self-discovery, formation of an identity, and ultimately, the development of the capacity to connect to and love others.

A baby girl's needs: food, warmth, protection, safety, nurturing, constancy, security, touch, attention, language, and a solid, warm attachment to her mom. This is the foundation for a future sense of self and ultimate solid feminine identity, and sense of trust or well-being so she can relax and simply "become" who she is to be.

The childhood needs of a girl: Continuation of the above, with acceptance and involvement from her mom so she can identify with or mirror her mom. She needs affirmation and blessing from her dad (the father is key in affirming gender identity in both children), as well as boundaries, encouragement, respect, opportunity for learning and achievement, and playmates.

Female Adolescent Needs: She needs a group of girl friends, which gives her a sense of belonging. She also needs attention and affirmation from males, the "mysterious other." There should be continued growth in knowing herself, through which she can solidify her identity and sense of femininity, while deepening friendships with both young men and women.

Needs of the Adult Woman: Intimacy or deep connectedness with others, and a sense of purpose and meaningfulness as a woman, if marriage occurs – with a union of body, soul and spirit with a complementary other so that sexuality blossoms.

Types of Significant Loves:

Mother/Parental love: Bond with the mother is of vital importance, but both parents are essential for healthy growth and development – relationally and in terms of identity development.

Friendship love: SIDE BY SIDE, within these same-sex friendships, a girl's interests and feminine identity are affirmed.

Romantic love: FACE TO FACE with another who is different. This is a much more intense encounter; here, a young woman gets to know herself through the experience of CONTRAST.

Sexual love: To come into blossom within the covenant of marriage, which provides safety and security along with complete vulnerability.

What if...?

So this is the "ideal" life. But *what if* some of the BASIC love needs are not met in this girl's life?

What if she is separated from her mom at birth and thereby not able to achieve a sense of being or well-being? Many of my lesbian clients say that they feel as if they haven't even "started," as if their basic internal foundation is missing. What if a baby is rarely touched? What if her mom was just not able to be present or available for the little girl because of mom's own difficult and hectic life? What if a girl moves with her family every year throughout childhood, and every friendship she makes abruptly ends? More importantly, every time she opens her heart to attachment – she is cut off.

As women with an empty spot in our hearts, we then become confused as to our true need for feminine love and nurturance and are deceived—thinking that a romanticized or sexualized relationship can fill the empty place left years ago by mom or dad or by the friends we never had.

The Missing Building Blocks Within the Lesbian Struggle

Female homosexuality can be defined by these missing developmental building blocks or imperfect childhood relationships. Typical in the story of my clients is a missing, strained or detached relationship with mom; lack of protection, disrespect or abuse at the hands of a male; few if any girlhood friendships, and sense of emptiness or shame in lieu of a full and rich identity as a woman.

"I was born into a family filled with anxiety, fear, confusion and sadness. Just after I was born, my father's mental health was so bad that he had to be institutionalized for years. When I was still an infant, my mother went from being a stay-at-home mother of seven to taking the role of breadwinner and head of household.

"In order for my mom to be able to work, I was taken to my aunt's to stay during the week and then brought home on the weekends. Although I knew my mother loved me, I don't remember her being warm and loving towards me, nor do I remember being drawn in by her. Mostly I remember wanting to receive love from her but often being pushed away instead."—Regeneration News, September 2002 edition. "Blossoming into a Woman" by Rebecca (a Living Waters Leader).

My clients often report that mom was so consumed with other children or with filling the role of an absent or unavailable husband, dealing with illness or poverty, depression, etc., that she simply could not be there in the way that her little girl needed.

Another woman confesses that *"I loved my mom and sisters, but I didn't relate to them at all. They wanted to go shopping and talk about boys. I just wanted to ride my bike or play the drums. There was a gap in our relationship that I could never*

quite put my finger on. This intensified my growing tendency to feel isolated and insecure as a girl." — Love In Action's women's support group leader – Kristy Keith, "God Is Able" Testimony of the Month.

This woman is identifying another issue that is common among female strugglers: a confusion or rejection of her femininity or gender identity. Many women who struggle with same-sex attractions admit that they did not like being a girl growing up, they were tomboys, dressed like boys and assumed male roles during play and even within their family system. This gender-identity confusion or rejection can start at a very early age and is an integral component to the lesbian struggle.

Missing Block # 2 – Lack of Protection, Disrespect or Abuse at the Hands of a Male —

"My father was unable to affirm me as a girl, and consequently I did not understand the value of my femininity. I didn't learn that being a girl was a good thing. What I did learn was just the opposite.

"... I don't remember being hugged by him or told that he loved me. I didn't feel protected by him and I didn't feel safe.

"Recently, God has been showing me that I have never really known the protection and safety of a man. I have never been able to fully rest in the arms of a man or of my Father God. My earthly father didn't teach me that, and I certainly didn't learn it from my grandfather and cousin, who sexually abused me. My first boyfriend cheated on me and did not protect what I had given him – myself." – Regeneration News, September 2002 edition. "Blossoming into a Woman" by Rebecca (a Living Waters Leader).

Sexual Abuse and its Shattering Effects

Sexual abuse is shattering to the psyche of a little girl. We have all watched how our fellow countrymen have come to the rescue of those affected by the tragedy at the World Trade Center. When people are hurt or injured, we naturally want to help. But when a little girl is secretly sexually abused, more often than not, she faces the shock, wreckage and chaos of her own soul all by herself. This isolation, in fact, can be almost as damaging as the abuse itself.

Girls who have been sexually violated usually struggle with deep feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, shame, and guilt. The sense of betrayal will naturally lead to a growing mistrust in ALL of her relationships, including with her mom and dad since they weren't able to protect her. The powerlessness she feels will often be turned into anger—first towards herself and then towards the world. Shame and guilt are like heavy blankets that bury a feminine soul. Underneath, the girl lies hidden in darkness believing she is bad, dirty, only valued enough to be used, worthless and ugly.

Sexual abuse does not cause lesbianism, but it can clinch

any existing relational deficits, betrayals, sense of neglect and/or abandonment AND the growing inner sense that she is "not ok" and that it is not safe to be a girl.

Missing Block #3 - Abuse or Disrespect from Males

My clients are often more connected to dad than mom—she, as a child, became his fishing partner or worked in the garage. She was his "little boy" or the son he always wanted. This dynamic is subtly disrespectful and disaffirming of a little girl's intrinsic value as a feminine being.

Missing Block #4 – Few, if Any, or Stormy Girlhood Friendships

Many of my clients grew up in military or missionary families – moving every two years, disrupting friendships with girlfriends. Many of my clients say they just didn't fit in with the other girls. I also hear many stories of pre-lesbian women taking the brunt of adolescent female cruelty and betrayals.

Missing Block #5 – Lack of Complete Gender and Identity Development

My clients describe a "dark hole" within them – it feels like it is full of desperation. There is a lack of connection with their emotions, "I don't know how I feel," with a deep hatred for their girlhood or femininity. Some appear masculine, some do not, but there is always an internal struggle related to gender. It is this psychic "hole" that often fuels their attraction to another woman, as they seek to find an identity and a sense of feminine nurturing through another woman.

Self Protection

But there is more to this puzzle. A young girl or woman is more than just a victim of her environment. None of us can be solely defined by our deficits or missing elements in our childhood. We are always choosing, creating, acting, responding, reacting, etc. to life's experiences. And so it is with a pre-lesbian girl.

A girl who is experiencing or perceiving rejection or neglect from her mom or disrespect and abuse from her dad will most likely begin to protect herself or shut down in these relationships. Unfortunately, the girl is unknowingly defending herself against the good and the love and care that is still being given, as well as the bad she fears. She makes an inner vow to protect herself from possible hurt, which creates even more emptiness, and results in more missing pieces in her life.

To summarize, as this young girl enters puberty, she is still longing for love, attachment and nurturing from mom; safety and affirmation from dad; she longs for same-sex peer relationships, and she is still confused about being a female or afraid of becoming a woman.

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Soon, she may begin to fantasize about being close to an older woman such as a teacher, or she may find herself longing to be the best friend of a cute and popular girl. In college, she may fall into the arms of another woman who feels safe. Is she a lesbian? That is what our culture says. Or does she simply need the missing developmental building blocks?

It is so dangerous to categorize a certain state of being (same-sex attraction) as an IDENTITY when that state of being is simply one of identity CONFUSION, where legitimate relational needs remain unmet. This is a person whose development is still in process. This woman does not need to be labeled a lesbian. There are some areas of normal growth and development that still need to occur in her life. She simply needs the missing pieces.

Relationship and the Development of the Female Self

At the core of the lesbian struggle, you will not find a sexual issue but a relational issue (the byproducts of gaps in significant relationships), as just described, as well as an identity (relationship with self) issue.

Women struggling with same-sex attraction often describe not only a gender-identity confusion, but a deep void in lieu of any core sense of self or being. They do not know who they are. Let me explain by contrasting the differences in development between a boy and girl.

Initially, both boys and girls are attached to mom at birth. To develop a healthy masculine identity, a boy must differentiate from mom and ultimately attach and align himself or identify with dad. A girl, on the other hand, is supposed to remain and rest in connection with mom, who is like she is. The girl will discover herself and her feminine identity within this ongoing attachment and thus internalize feelings of security, warmth, reciprocity and trust.

She then eventually receives her dad, who is to gently move towards her to offer his love and affirmation, as well as his protection of her special connection with mom. More and more relationships will enter her life, building on the "home" or foundation of mom.

As I've said, lesbianism becomes a possibility when a girl's primal relationship with mom is absent, disrupted or undesirable. It becomes a further possibility if dad's movement toward the girl is unsafe or disrespectful. But notice how these disruptions actually eliminate the primal foundation within a little girl's life. If the girl experiences a separation in her foundational relationship with mom, she: 1) is faced with severe insecurity and sense of utter abandonment (resulting in anxiety), and 2) loses the means by which to discover her most foundational aspects of self and identity (depression).

This is the beginning of that deep hole within. The girl has

never had the opportunity to rest in a safe place, mirror her mom, receive the love of others – and simply "become." She is left with a loneliness on the outside and an emptiness within. What woman can bear these two feelings simultaneously?

As women we will work, strive, and even control and manipulate to alleviate our aloneness and emptiness. Often our cry for connection will be turned into a neurotic and compromised hyper-dependency or need upon another. And since the heart of the lesbian condition is a specific need for mother, girlhood friends and a feminine identity, this dependency will naturally be played out within a relationship with a woman.

VII. Emotional Dependency: An Effort to Survive

Many of us who work in this field describe the core of a lesbian relationship as an "emotional dependency." Essentially, emotional dependency is when a woman relies on another woman to give her a sense of identity and relational well-being. She depends on this other woman to remove her emptiness, loneliness and anxiety. She subconsciously says, "My basic well-being depends on my connection with you. If our connection or relationship is constant, warm, secure and loving (perfect) I feel ok. If our connection is threatened in any way, I am in crisis. I am not ok."

One woman reports that: *"Lesbianism wasn't about sex for me.... All I really wanted was connection! A deep, emotional, heart connection. Someone who would complete me.. Someone to give me value and worth. In other words, someone to need me! The physical relationship came later and was the manifestation of the desire for connection, not the initial draw. ("What I thought People Already Knew, But Don't," by Kelley, Living Hope Letter, a publication of Living Hope Ministries. August 2002, Volume 6, Issue 8.)*

Unlike with male homosexuals, rarely do I find the women focusing on or becoming addicted to the sexual behavior. These women simply want to nestle into another woman's arms, gaze into her eyes and suckle at her breasts. Can you hear the very young, almost infantile, need for mom? Obviously this behavior will become sexual for an adult woman.

You can also see within these relationships the adolescent need for a best friend. In early adolescence, girl friends dress alike, sometimes hold hands together or clasp arms, and of course call each other five times a day. Women in lesbian relationships typically behave in these very same ways – dressing alike and believing that the sun rises and sets over their friend. In these lesbian relationships, the women are trying to find or appropriate their missing blocks. They so needed close friends during adolescence.

But there are problems within these incredibly close relationships. One woman admits that *"Because my need to be needed became bigger than God, that "needy" person became my*

god. I ended up doing whatever it was I needed to do to keep that relationship alive. That person gave me meaning and purpose even when it crossed physical boundaries."

Based on the nature (idolatrous) of these emotionally dependent relationships, most lesbian relationships are fragile and unpredictable. No human being can guarantee a perfect and continuously warm, secure and loving friendship. If our whole life or sense of self and well-being depend on it, our life will be very precarious at best. The more I depend on another woman to make me feel complete and ok, the more likely I will be disappointed.

This disappointment and failure however, creates even more of a need in me. So I grope even harder. My groping and need unfortunately suffocates or drains the other woman so she must eventually leave or distance herself from me. I am devastated, even close to emotional death—so I reach out even more desperately than I have in the past. And on and on it goes.

The lesbian condition is itself a condition of deep insecurity. And in this deep insecurity, these women, on the outside, will continue to live out of a very masculinized style of relating. They may be tough, self sufficient, competent, hard, and cold, pretending they don't need anyone or anything, creating a self-inflicted cocoon of isolation. But never believe or affirm the tough outer shell of a woman who struggles with lesbianism. On the inside she is just a small, tender girl who is simply longing to rest in a mother's arms, to enjoy a close girl friend, and to learn to love herself as a feminine being.

The more we can see this true tender heart inside, the more we can support the struggling lesbian in turning from this falsehood and embracing the truth.

Understandably, when these women have what they believe is a "secure attachment" in the midst of these emotionally dependent lesbian relationships, it is extremely hard for them to step back and "detach" or end the relationship. It literally feels like death to them. They have "identified" with the other woman to the point that if **they lose her, they also lose themselves**. This is not a healthy identification. They crawl inside, becoming "lost in the other woman." Yet for these women to move ahead in their own development and maturity, they must find a way to stand alone and return to their own personhood and identity.

When a woman finally decides to end a lesbian relationship because of her desire to grow and change, she will need our patience, grace and compassion. It will be a very difficult time for her.

Overview of the Lesbian Condition

Relationship issue: A search for mom, for feminine attachment, girl friends and a search for safety, and protection

and respect from the masculine.

I hear words and phrases repeated over and over almost verbatim by my clients:

"I just want to be held – and to hold."

"I want to be cared for."

"I don't want to be alone."

"There are no good men."

"All men are self-centered."

Friendships:

"I want to be liked."

"I want to have fun."

It is these cries for "mother" and for a close friend, along with their flight from men, that underlie any sexual attraction they might have for another woman.

Identity Issue: A Search for a Basic Sense of Self and Feminine Identity

Other words that I hear over and over from my clients are:

"I don't know who I am," and/or

"I hate myself and I hate being a woman."

If mom isn't the kind of mom a little girl wants to **aspire** to become, the girl may unknowingly reject her own **femininity** in fear of looking like or becoming like **her mother**. If dad abuses mom or the girl, the girl will quickly **perceive** it is **not safe** to be a girl or woman.

The lesbian condition is a process of self-rejection as a feminine being, culminating in a toxic self-hatred and ultimately a severe identity crisis or confusion. This need for a core self, and for her core feminine self, also fuels the sexual attraction for union with another who is most like her. She will seek her own life and identity through another woman.

Treatment

There is much hope for the woman struggling with lesbianism who is willing to take the time to reflect on her life, confront negative perceptions about her Creator, and about relationships and herself, and to own and admit her true neediness. She must take the initial step in reaching out for help; we cannot force her or make her do that. But when she does, she will need our patience, love, care and support.

Religiously grounded clients will take heart from their religious conviction that it is not all up to them to **change** themselves, and that God is ready and **willing to redeem** and restore anyone who desires to **return to His original** intent and design for their lives. ■