

Is Homosexuality a Choice?

by Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D.

The question: "Is homosexuality a choice?" seems simple enough but it is cunningly complicated. The two nouns in the query require further reflection. What do we mean by homosexuality? What do we mean by choice?

By homosexuality, are we referring to feelings of attraction to the same sex? Or are we referring to a person who has adopted a gay or lesbian personal identity? Or both? Some people experience same sex attractions to varying degrees but choose not to act on them or to identify themselves as homosexual. For them, the feelings of attraction may not seem like a choice but pursuing same sex relationships and/or adopting a homosexual identity would be a conscious choice that they reject.

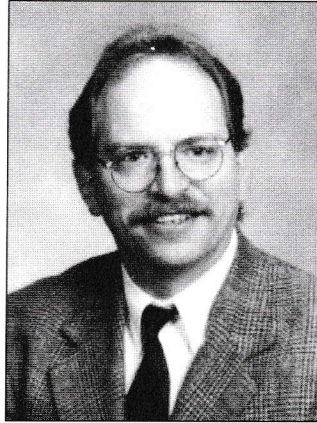
Choice is also a word that requires clarification. This part of the question is usually code for a related question: "Can a person change his feelings, or are they such an innate part of a homosexual's make up that any choice concerning them is impossible?"

For those who have experienced change in their sexual feelings from gay to straight, often known as ex-gays, the concept of choice is especially important.

In my research, many ex-gays say they did not choose to initially experience attractions to their own gender but at some point in their lives, they made a conscious choice to pursue change in not only how they perceive themselves, but in their affections and attractions.

Some people very consciously pursue same-sex relationships. In a 1997 article titled "Is sexual orientation a matter of choice?" Susan Rosenbluth found that 58% of women surveyed who were at the time in lesbian relationships chose to pursue a same-sex relationship for a variety of reasons beyond sexual attraction. In other words, many women prefer women for partners and experience that preference as a choice they make.

So for some people, homosexual feelings may not be a choice, while for some other people, cultivating these feelings to be in a preferred same-sex relationship may indeed



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be a choice. For many, pursuing a gay or lesbian identity is indeed a choice, whereas for others, it seems like a natural progression from awareness of same-sex feelings.

But is the feeling of choice a reliable indicator of the source of one's feelings? Many in my profession assume that a perception of naturalness means that feelings are inborn, hard-wired or perhaps even God-given. Many human affections including food and activity preferences seem quite natural but are almost certainly acquired, albeit imperceptibly. While the inborn theory may seem reasonable at first glance, the research into sexual

attraction implicates many more factors beyond genetics and is actually quite suspect.

For instance, in 2002, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics report concerning genes and behavior concluded: "There are numerous problems with genetic and other biological research into sexual orientation, which mean that any reported findings must be viewed with caution."

Now class, in reflecting over the answer, is homosexuality a choice?

Here's a possible response:

We know four things for certain.

- First, we know that genetic research has not found a gay gene even though same-sex attractions feel quite natural for a small percentage of the population.
- Second, research has shown that some people do regard their homosexuality as a choice.
- Third, research demonstrates that some people have made the choice to leave homosexuality.
- Finally, we all have a choice to live in accord with our deeply held personal values and religious beliefs no matter what research eventually tells us about sexual orientation.

Next question.....

