

Being Gay,

Living Silent

Understanding the true nature of our sexuality/gender
and the impact of religion.

A handbook for LGBT people, their family and friends.

3rd Edition

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Jim Marjoram

Silent Gays

Dedication

This little book is dedicated to the millions of “silent gays”, trapped in the cycle of religion – too full of fear, guilt and shame to be their true selves.

To those who have been abused emotionally/psychologically, spiritually and even physically by a system that is blinded by dogma and lack of knowledge.

And to those who have escaped, only to live crushed and broken, desperately needing unconditional love - the only force in the universe that can bring healing, joy and peace.

May this handbook bring knowledge, freedom, integrity, and life.

Live loved!

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And all my online friends from around the world – you inspire me more than you could imagine!

www.silentgays.com

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1. Intro

In my autobiography “It’s Life Jim...” I talk about my own journey with spirituality, Christianity and sexuality. I share my deepest fears and passions – my longing to just be “normal” – my attempts to do whatever it takes to get “straight” – and my subsequent unravelling of all the above, leading to a new life of integrity, freedom and love that I only ever dreamed of.

In this handbook, my goal is to put forth all I have discovered about the facts, myths and opinions of sexuality and gender.

Integrity is a very important part of my life, so the act of recognising my own biases and paradigms has been a huge part of my journey. I no longer feel I can be dogmatic or entirely objective about anything – as none of us really can.

I do have an agenda though, and that’s to challenge everyone to ask questions, to dig deep, to step out of the status quo, to not be afraid of where the questions take them, and to be confident that in the end, love is the only constant – the only thing that matters – and discovering what love really is.

But before we can look at the issues in any depth we first have to look at what we are actually talking about.

We all know that sexuality and gender are an integral part of all that we are, and form part of our core identity. Many spiritual and religious streams have gone to great lengths however, to separate them from our core nature, often to extremes of creating various monastic/celibate movements, developing principles around “denial of the flesh” to allow for greater spiritual growth, unfettered by the “lower energies” and “earthly” distractions of sexuality and gender.

There is some benefit to these ideas when we consider that we truly are so much more than our sexuality, and finding our identity outside of this can be beneficial, depending on the individual. But these spiritual views and disciplines are far beyond most people, and ultimately destructive to a large part of our psyche.

These religious ideas have influenced our cultures throughout history. Perhaps this is because our sexuality/gender has a direct psychological link to our sense of spirituality. But in terms of our daily struggles and our relationships and interactions with our fellow humans, our sexual/gender identity is extremely important.

Religion (for me that mostly refers to Christianity because of my own life journey) has consistently tried to define our gender (and by implication, our sexuality) in a simple dualistic concept – male or female as described by our physical bodies and outward characteristics. There are no other variations to that formula and to even consider anything outside that duality is questioning the very nature of God and how he created us.

But the facts reveal a much bigger picture.

The last 50 years or so have seen a lot of research in this area that is constantly expanding as

scientists and medical professionals from a diverse range of disciplines begin to focus on this strange conundrum that defines us so dramatically.

I'm not very good when it comes to trying to assemble references and sources for all my thoughts and quotes - filing systems are something that my brain has never managed to understand! I don't really like direct quoting anyway, and more often than not will reprocess what I read through my own filters and experience. The other factor is that research is constantly growing and changing, so anything I refer to now may be superseded in 6 months anyway.

Most importantly however, is the need for you to do your own research. Don't take my word for this stuff. If you are sincere in wanting to understand this, then do the work. One of our human weaknesses is to expect others to think for us, to do the hard yards on our behalf. We can just pick the voice that we feel most comfortable with. We have our favourite preachers/teachers/gurus because they do the spiritual work for us and then dish it out in bite size chunks, and we never even think that we can actually do this for ourselves.

So if you question my opinions and conclusions, as you should, please take the time and effort to follow them up with as much unbiased research and objectivity as you can.

In religious circles the most common view on anything outside the heterosexual world is viewed as sin, because the bible says so, and that's the end of the story.

It's not my purpose to argue scripture. Many excellent scholars have written extensively on the errors and assumptions used to enforce the traditional paradigms on this.

My aim is to present the bigger picture with as much relevant detail as possible – to expose the flaws in the fundamental approach to understanding the issues – and to challenge the religious mind-set that only sees black and white, thinking that God only sees the same way.

Throughout this booklet, I talk about religion, especially “fundamentalist” religion. By this I mean a belief system that is based on applying sets of external rules and dogma that govern our morality, ethics, behaviours and even our thought processes. Most fundamentalist religions apply the greatest value on literally applying the contents of their sacred scriptures to every part of their lives. A more liberal approach looks at applying the principles of the scriptures as a way of life. The most liberal belief systems only see any scripture's value in its metaphor and allegory and is often referred to as mysticism.

I also talk about spirituality as different from religion. Spirituality is the part of all of us that looks for deeper meaning in life – that feels or senses a greater realm, in some form, than that which the physical senses reveal. It's that sense of awe and wonder about the universe and our place in it. In general, religion is about the tools and methods of understanding and practically applying our particular sense of spirituality. I believe it's possible to explore spirituality without being “religious”, but we all adopt some form of religious process as a way to express and live our own spirituality. The form of that religious process can be as simple as communing with nature and allowing it to feed our souls, through to embracing complex rituals and sacred writings, and anything in between. In this sense, even atheists can be said to have a form of religion when they take the time to gaze in wonder at the universe and allow it to touch their heart.

2. Paradigms

Before we can even look at the whole LGBT/religion problem however, we have to look at a far deeper problem that affects every single person ever created.

Everything we are – our reactions, opinions, the way we think and feel, is founded and shaped by our paradigms. You could use the term “world view” but on it’s own, I feel it’s a bit too “wishy washy”, so after a lot of searching I decided to use the scientific term “paradigm”, creating the more emphatic and technically correct idea of the “paradigm of our world view”, if that makes any sense. Hopefully you’ll get the idea anyway.

A world view paradigm then, is the cumulative effect of every single event (no matter how big or small) that we have experienced from the moment we are conceived (or whenever that spark of life and consciousness begin) including things like:

- Genetics
- Climate/geography
- Local and national culture, history, politics
- Family values
- Family health (mental and physical)
- Personal trauma/abuse
 - Mental (emotional/psychological)
 - Physical
 - Sexual
 - Neglect
- Social standing
 - Family wealth
 - Societal/cultural privilege
 - Severe poverty
- Peer relationships
- Academic ability
- Media influences

All these factors, and innumerable others, combine to create the "lens" we use to perceive and interact with the world. Take the time to think about this. Imagine from the moment you were aware, every voice you could hear and the emotions behind them, the physical touch, the words of love, anger, frustration, sadness and joy, from every interaction that we have ever experienced. Imagine every sight we have seen, every piece of information we have received and the way that information was presented to us, right up to the TV show we watched last night. It’s mind-blowingly complex and totally unique to every human being.

The result of this is that even just one word can mean something totally different to the person next to us. Every word and concept we use is shaped by our paradigm. As we think and speak, our mind is processing all the background information behind the words and concepts, loading, interpreting and colouring everything to the point that we may be using the same words, but not actually communicating the same information at all.

This is extremely evident in the area of spirituality and religion, and sexuality and gender.

LGBT people are rejected and vilified by religion (and society to the extent its been influenced by religion) more so than any other source. Our paradigms deeply shape the way we view sexuality and gender. The way our family (immediate and extended) regard it, even if never directly spoken of, projects cues, from every action and word, that define masculine and feminine cultural stereotypes.

Most of us are prisoners of our paradigms until we begin to understand them. They shape our entire framework of life, so as we become aware of them we gain the power to change them. We begin to see the “fruit” of paradigms as we become more objective, and this can be a painful process, requiring a lot of personal honesty and a willingness to see the potential or actual damage our views cause.

Of course, having a “paradigm” in itself is neither right or wrong, we simply need to be aware of it and how it shapes our lives, and perhaps be prepared to work through the assumptions it creates in our thinking.

For religious people, the paradigms are often complex and intense – affecting our deepest levels of identity, in this life and, more insidiously, eternally! The idea that your sexual and gender identity can send you to “hell” can be enough to trigger chronic depression, mental illness and suicidality.

So if you have been raised in a very religious family, there will be powerful biases right at the deepest subconscious level, that colour every thought you have. When the weight of this fact sinks in, it can be rather scary. We can wonder if any of our thoughts are valid, and for some people, this indeed may be a serious issue!

Fortunately, we are all unique beings, and no matter how our paradigms have been shaped over the course of our lives, we always have the power to understand and change them.

For LGBT people in religious belief systems, this whole process can be unbearably painful, divisive and even tragic. To come to the realisation that everything you think about your sexuality or gender is nothing more than your unique paradigm created by years of influence and experience, can be a bitter pill, and there is often a process of grief as the reality hits home.

Take some time, before reading the next chapter, to consider how this could be affecting you and those around you. Carefully examine your thoughts, assumptions and your beliefs, even if they are “bible based”. Yes, the way we perceive the bible is completely based on paradigms as well!

3. LGBTQIPA...

This section may be totally confusing – and that’s OK, because it is – sort of!

One of the most basic mistakes we make is defining everything in terms of gay or straight.

We all have probably heard the term LGBT but may not have given it much thought. It stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (or the generic word Trans). There is also a range of other categories often added to this, such as Queer and Intersex, making it LGBTQI. Then there are Pansexual and Asexual, and the more recent category of Demisexual and so on, which makes the whole label thing totally unwieldy, which is why we often hear the term “Rainbow community”. Queer community is another term, although many aren’t comfortable with it due to it’s early derogatory usage. Often “Gay” is used to simply cover all the variations. There was a push in some circles to introduce the term GSD, for Gender and Sexually Diverse (which I kind of liked), but it hasn’t taken off. So LGBT (or even LGBT+) seems to be the basic generic term these days with all that it implies and includes.

Obviously, though, the fact that there are so many categories requires a lot of unpacking.

Firstly, there are two distinct areas that we are dealing with in the human make-up - sexuality and gender.

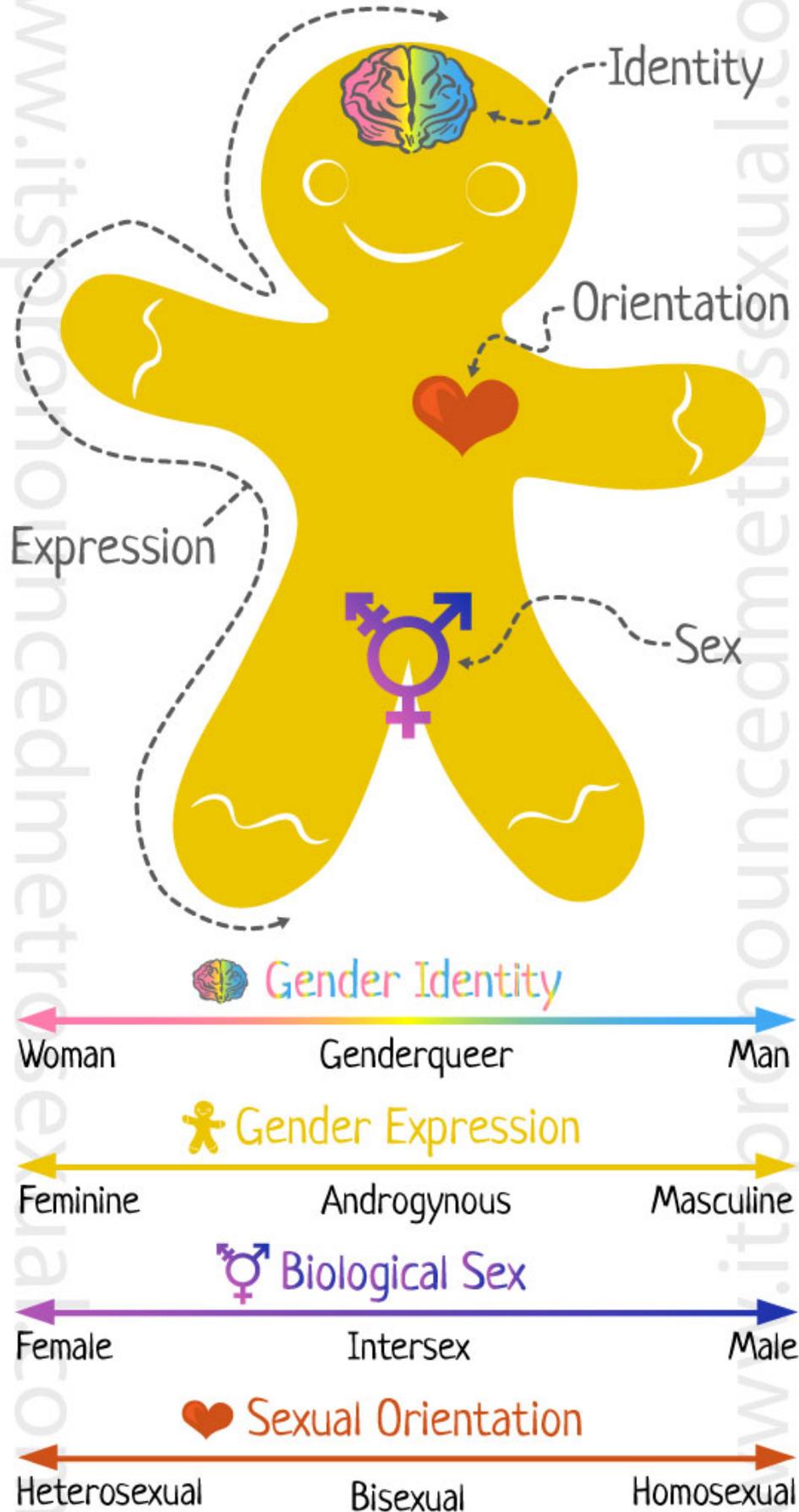
Sexuality defines our physical attractions, romantic and erotic desires - what attracts us and turns us on, through to that deep emotional connection that only “love” can define.

Gender is the part of us that is masculine or feminine – the part of us that is described by the generic male or female psyche and expression.

These are two very distinct aspects of who we are and are often expressed very differently. And just to confuse the issue, we often refer to a person’s gender as their “sex”. What complicates this is that in reality, these attributes are expressed not as either/or, but on sliding scales. Everyone is somewhere on the continuum.

The following diagram is quite helpful in picturing how it all works. However, it is very simplistic and really only gives you the general idea. There are more “sciencey” ones out there if you want to dig around.

Genderbread Person



As you can see, there is the possibility of being at any point on any of the continua, and for many, that can be a very disturbing concept!

This can then be exacerbated by nurture or our environment, which often clouds our understanding to the point where LGBT people simply can't process what they feel, often leading to depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness.

Fundamentalist and traditional religions force all understanding of the issues into black and white in an effort to determine what is sin and what isn't. For them, it's either "gay" or "not gay". The issues of gender identity are also usually forced into the same labels, despite being very different.

Let's dissect this a little more.

The most obvious understanding, and the most often projected stereotype, is being "gay" – meaning you are attracted to a person of the same gender. This is often termed "same sex attraction" (SSA) by religious groups to try and keep it simple, although the semantics of the phrase purposely exclude any of the other complexities of the nature of sexuality and gender.

First up, let's look at the simple issue of who turns us on. Who are we OK about having sexual contact with? Is it exclusively the opposite sex? Is the thought of sexual contact with the same sex sort of OK, maybe interesting? Could you go there without being repulsed? Perhaps you are OK with either and have no particular preference?

But this isn't just about "sex", it's about romance and love. It's about that "spark" that only lovers know. And that spark, for many people, can be with either gender. It's that feeling when your eyes meet and your heart leaps. Or it can be a slower process of feeling drawn to someone. "Bromances" are a real thing!

For a typical "gay" person, the thought of having sex with the opposite gender is as repulsive as a straight person would experience having sex with the same gender. It's not a conscious decision, or even something defined by upbringing, abuse or trauma. It's far deeper; its smell, touch, sight (all the senses), and has often been part of that person for as long as they can remember.

But again, it's not black and white, and some can find themselves shocked when they find themselves attracted to a different gender. This can apply to apparently gay or straight people and they can suddenly find themselves falling in love with someone of the "wrong" gender. This can be extremely disturbing and wreak havoc on relationships and families.

Our cultural norms simply aren't set up to understand the depth of diversity in human sexuality, so anything that expresses itself outside of the status quo, is immediately regarded as an abnormality that needs to be somehow fixed.

There are other cultures that accept some levels of diversity, but even then, most have a religious backdrop that restricts it in some way. Many more ancient cultures, including the now homophobic African nations, actually had a very rich culture of acceptance for LGBT people that was "demonised" by the influence of western religion.

As we learn about all this, we have to start asking much bigger questions, including for example, the obvious "one mother, one father family" that traditionally provides the backdrop for procreation. No

matter what our paradigms may tell us, there are alternatives that work, and ultimately our only excuse for ignoring those alternatives is fear.

Let's now briefly look at some of the standard categories or labels that are used.

Gay: technically this is guys attracted to guys, but it's also used for Lesbians and as a generic label for everything LGBT

Lesbian: girls attracted to girls

Bisexual: someone attracted to either gender. It's also a continuum, so could be mostly attracted to one gender, but open to either.

Trans*: short for transgender (the asterisk includes those who identify as Non-binary, Gender fluid or Genderqueer). This is primarily to do with gender identity, not sexuality. Basically it's a person who identifies differently from their physical body. They know that they are, at the most fundamental level, the opposite physical gender, or neither, or both to varying degrees. Trans people usually know from very young that something is "wrong", and of all people in the LGBT spectrum, have the greatest difficulties. They have the highest suicide and mental illness stats of any minority simply because they cannot reconcile who they are when there is no understanding or support from their family, religion or society in any way.

Trans people can be Male to Female (M2F) or Female to Male (F2M) or anywhere in between. Some feel the need to completely transition to the opposite sex, others are happy to partially transition. Everyone is different!

Intersex: this used to be called hermaphrodite. Some people (roughly one in 1800 depending on various factors and what stats you read) are born with gender "ambiguous" bodies. They could have anything from complete genitals of both genders, to male genitals and ovaries, or any combination of internal and external organs. These people face a different set of issues again, and many have had to face the trauma of doctors deciding their gender identity as infants, only to discover that it was the wrong one as they grew. It's a very complex issue and worth studying the growing area of research into the XY chromosome configurations that determine male or female bodies. This also isn't a simple two choice option as was once thought.

Asexual: this covers people who really have no particular sexual attraction to either gender. They still experience great platonic love for people, but there is no sexual/romantic nature to the love. There are more people like this than we may realise.

Pansexual: Although similar in some ways to bisexual, pansexual people aren't limited to the gender binaries, and can find themselves attracted to people at any point on any of the four scales (as per the above diagram).

Demisexual: Again, similar to bisexual, but with the important difference that physical attraction isn't "triggered" until there is a strong emotional attraction. They can often identify as asexual until they find the right emotional connection irrespective of gender.

There are many more "labels" for different points on the spectrum, including many culturally specific terms, especially amongst indigenous people. As you can see, the idea of simply "gay or straight" is a

complete misunderstanding.

One of the most damaging preconceptions is that all gay people are effeminate, love dressing up and hanging out in gay bars. This couldn't be further from the truth! There is a small number of gay guys who are flamboyant and effeminate, extrovert and bubbly, and these are the ones the public easily recognises and stereotypes the rest with. They tend to be the vocal activists, and the ones the media just loves to promote.

There is also the very butch lesbian stereotype with the short hair, check shirt and jeans. Again, this is just a minority that's easily recognisable, so is used as the lesbian stereotype.

Here's the truth – most gay/lesbian people are just like everyone else. They have ordinary jobs, live in ordinary houses and even look like everyone else. In fact, you'd probably never know unless you saw them with their partner. They don't live outrageous perverted lives wanting sex with everything that moves. They aren't paedophiles, and most gay people are still trying to figure out exactly what the "gay lifestyle" is!

All LGBT people are just that – PEOPLE. Every one a unique human being who experiences exactly the same daily humdrum and dramas as the rest of humanity, whoever and wherever they are.

So here's the "crunch". Every single person on the planet is somewhere on the "LGBT" spectrum. Sure, many are definitely at one end or the other of the various lines in the spectrum, but many are actually a little further along one of the scales than they would care to admit.

A lot of tough macho guys have a few feminine traits they try to hide, and there are many extremely masculine guys who are exclusively attracted to the same sex, and many extremely feminine women only attracted to other women. There's butch ones and femme ones and everything in between. There's drag queens and cross dressers, guys who are totally "straight" but love to express themselves sometimes as feminine. The sky's the limit!

Once you step back from the stereotypes you can see a vast spectrum of gender and sexual variety. There simply isn't the "gay/straight" binary – it doesn't exist in the real world!

4. The science

There's a heck of a lot of "science" going on about this stuff these days. There is no one thing that we can claim is categorically conclusive, but there are many fields of research finding significant biological reasons for diversity.

Wikipedia actually has a pretty good page covering all the latest major research and theories, although by no means exhaustive:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biology_and_sexual_orientation

Suffice to say there are many areas with obvious and undeniable biological links. The only grey area is fully understanding those links.

Currently the most promising area is epigenetics – “the study, in the field of genetics, of cellular and physiological phenotypic trait variations that are caused by external or environmental factors that switch genes on and off and affect how cells read genes instead of being caused by changes in the DNA sequence” (Wikipedia) – simply put, in context, it's about biological chemical triggering of the genes in different ways, rather than any altering or aberrations of the genes themselves (if that makes any sense!). Well worth researching if you can get your brain around it!

Of course, the problem is also compounded by the true level of diversity as I described in the previous chapter.

Many conservative Christians will say that there is no science to support people being “born gay”. This couldn't be further from the truth. The only real questions are in trying to sort through the vast amount of scientific research.

Facts are facts, and religion must reconcile this. Historically the church has had to face “facts” about many things, many times, especially, for example, the problem of the earth being a sphere that orbits the sun. This fact that we now take for granted, was the source of years of intense conflict with accusations of heresy. Other areas such as evolution have also presented facts that simply can't (or shouldn't) be denied by religion any longer.

Our sexuality and gender is also too far down the track of scientific credibility to be denied, and the evidence is constantly mounting. I haven't gone into detail in this area simply because so much is happening and would be out of date by the time you read this. I strongly recommend you research this yourself as objectively as possible.

5. Reparative (conversion) therapy “Pray Away the Gay”

In many ways Anna Freud (daughter of Sigmund) is the founder of reparative therapy and published papers in 1951 that became the foundation of the psychology of homosexuality. Her ideas were based on Sigmund's primitive concepts that have long since been completely debunked but, never the less, triggered an almost pseudo-science about sexuality and gender.

Before 1973 it was regarded as a disease so anything was up for grabs in terms of treatment, including lobotomy, ECT, and many other horrific methods that amounted to torture.

Homosexuality is no longer classified as a mental illness, and the United States Surgeon General, David Satcher, in 2001 issued a report stating that "there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed".

The only study of any value to be used to support the success of reparative therapy was by Robert Spitzer in the same year, but in 2012 he said it was completely flawed and demanded its retraction by all ex-gay organisations calling it his “only professional regret”.

The teachings of Leanne Payne starting in the 80s and, probably most dominantly, those of Joseph Nicolosi, set the modern foundation for all Christian reparative therapy.

Although “ex-gay ministries” are declining as their ineffectiveness becomes apparent, much of Christendom (and related cults) hold on to the principles and methods used by these organisations.

The core principles state that all sexual and gender deviations from the heterosexual norm are caused by

- An incomplete bond and resultant lack of identification with the same-sex parent
- Childhood sexual abuse or trauma
- Lack of strong or correct gender role modelling

Nicolosi's style of therapy involves conditioning a man to a traditional masculine gender role where he should:

- participate in sports activities
- avoid activities considered of interest to homosexuals, such [as] art museums, opera, symphonies
- avoid women unless it is for romantic contact
- increase time spent with heterosexual men in order to learn to mimic heterosexual male ways of walking, talking, and interacting with other heterosexual men
- attend church and join a men's church group
- attend reparative therapy group to discuss progress, or slips back into homosexuality
- become more assertive with women through flirting and dating
- begin heterosexual dating

- engage in heterosexual intercourse
- enter into heterosexual marriage
- father children

These techniques also completely ignore the complexities of gender and sexual diversity as discussed earlier.

Other groups, such as Living Waters, styled on the ideas of Leanne Payne and Andy Comisky, work on much more religious processes. They like to use the term “sexual and relational brokenness” to include anything that doesn’t fit into the image of gender/sex relationships as (apparently) decreed by God in scripture. This means they also include heterosexual people with “lust” problems, sexual addiction, and anything outside of the strict biblical binary (although we won’t mention all the bizarre marital arrangements of the Old Testament). This makes it easier to slot LGBT issues into the general category of sexual sin and therefore treated in the same manner.

The main technique is to introduce people to their apparently inherent and utter brokenness which can only be restored by the work of Jesus on the cross. It involves a lot of teaching about “biblical based” gender roles and relationships, and how Jesus takes our brokenness onto himself on the cross, making us free from the addictions to “broken” behaviours.

It’s highly introspective and involves a lot of reflective prayer in small groups, looking for keys to allow the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to all that was broken and see God’s father heart in the midst of all that.

These types of groups are perhaps the most dangerous because they appeal to the deep spiritual longing of those who are passionate in their faith. They provide what appears to be very solid biblical and doctrinal teachings and values in a way that promises life and approval by God. In reality, they actually feed the “broken image” (Leanne Payne’s term) that the organisation creates in the first place, causing far deeper guilt and shame, resulting in increased cognitive dissonance and far greater suppression/repression of core identity and, more often than not, an overpowering religious obsession often involving various rituals. This doesn’t mean rituals are bad as such, as they can be very helpful metaphors in our spiritual journey. But when driven by obsession, they can be a strong indicator of mental illness. This obsession is justified by the need to “renew” the mind by “the Word” (bible) and to stay completely focused on Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

Many extreme fundamentalists claim all sexual/gender issues are caused by demons and will instigate “deliverance” (aka exorcism) sessions (in whatever guise they can) to cast them out (or “off”). A lot of groups use deliverance as part of their overall approach, mixed with various types of healing prayer and therapy.

Deliverance is probably the most damaging “ministry” ever devised. It is outright abuse on a very deep psychological level, and sometimes even physical. It’s effects on the mental health of any participant are devastating, and if you have ever been involved with it, please get professional help. I can’t stress this enough!

Another problem we are faced with is the myriads of churches who practice their particular mix of

these methods, completely under the radar of professional and ethical observation.

This means that although the numbers of people attending “official” reparative therapies is declining, the number of discrete or secretive church ministries is still just as bad, or possibly worse than ever. So many churches have their “prophetic prayer warriors” and “spiritual counsellors” who will try to heal a vulnerable LGBT victim in whatever way they deem effective, to rid the credulous of their sexual perversion. And they usually gather a small group of like-minded people with the blessing of the ignorant leadership.

Many churches more openly offer “help” for “unwanted same sex attraction”, incorporating any number of these unethical and extremely damaging procedures. The end result is countless numbers of people taking part in cult like rituals and/or completely unfounded, unscientific and unethical counselling methods.

In the end, the fruit of these ministries is increased depression, mental illness and suicidal ideation. The incidence of suicide amongst gay Christian men, in particular, is one of the highest – a very sad indictment.

The church has a massive dilemma in how it deals with LGBT people. They claim it is sin and yet they are completely incapable of offering a real solution to this so called “sin”. They offer false hope and administer dangerous psychological practices, usually resulting in emotional repression, increased guilt and shame (often crippling) and more often than not, severe depression.

There is a growing movement that seeks to reach a compromise, saying that it’s ok to be LGBT as long as you don’t act on it. They then say that the only solution for LGBT people is celibacy.

In terms of adherence to fundamentalist Christian values and traditional interpretations of scripture, this can seem like a viable alternative. There are many support groups that embrace this idea.

However, there are some very deep issues to be reckoned with, the most important being the aspect of religious obsession. As I mentioned, this obsession can become overpowering and lead to mental illness, delusions, and isolation from reality. Celibacy requires a similar route, in that to maintain the disciplines necessary to suppress sexual attraction, a high degree of religious obsession must be purposely nurtured, along with constant repression and diversion techniques. Ultimately, celibates deny themselves one of the most core aspects of our humanity – the need to share ourselves physically and intimately on every level with another human. To take on this burden as part of a religious belief system is to deny our intrinsic humanity.

Is anyone really “changed”?

This is the million-dollar question, and we have to be very clear on the parameters of the question.

Simply stated – NO. No one has ever or will ever change their core sexual/gender identity. That’s a very straightforward fact. However, the complications set in when we refer to the complex nature of sexuality and gender.

If we assume that everyone is either gay or not gay, then many have apparently changed orientation. What is completely overlooked by ex-gay proponents is the simple fact of diversity – we can be anywhere on any of the sex/gender spectrums. This means that someone who is bisexual can

easily claim healing because they are capable of treating attraction to one particular sex as lust and then focusing on the “correct” gender. This is the most damaging testimony that people can give. It utterly negates and disempowers anyone who is too close to one end of the spectrum to be able to simply put aside attraction to the same sex and shuts down the whole notion of bisexuality.

Then there is the issue of gender confusion. Some people (such as in the early teachings of Sy Rogers), have made all sorts of claims, and yet their entire premise is built around gender identity, not sexual attraction. They then interpret ALL sexuality issues through their own paradigm of being transgender, creating complete confusion for those who don’t understand their sexuality, and just as bad, convincing the church at large that their views are biblical and correct.

There is another aspect that also confuses the subject. Women and men are very different! Now before you get all feminist/sexist on me, let me explain.

The “feminine” and the “masculine” are traits that have been defined for millennia (or longer probably) and despite our protestations, are basic concepts that govern human nature.

We have made the mistake of assigning those traits to particular sets of physical anatomy, and yet we have to look no further than the creation myth to see that God is genderless, and Adam himself was genderless until Eve was “taken out of his side”.

It’s generally regarded that the female “psyche” tends to be more vulnerable to emotional trauma and abuse (and remember that we all can have different blends of the male/female psyche). This means that if a female is abused by a male in some way, fear and repulsion can be triggered, causing a rejection of the masculine, and subsequently seeking comfort, identity and security in the feminine. Simply put, women can get abused by men and turn to another woman for emotional support which can then become sexualised. This is not to be confused with women who are simply attracted to other women (because that’s just the way they are).

This particular type of emotional/physical abuse can sometimes be “healed” and attraction to men restored to some degree, but it’s the exception, not the rule. Reparative therapy groups jump on this to claim that all sexual/gender issues are caused by these types of issues and can be treated successfully. The facts in this area are, again, quietly ignored. There is absolutely no correlation between childhood trauma/abuse and parenting with sexual attraction or gender identification. Millions of guys, for example, suffered all forms of abuse and bad parenting and still remained “straight”, although probably affected in other areas. Once again, it’s an old psychological model that has long been disproved.

But all this begs a far bigger question! Let’s say that a woman IS abused by a man and is not attracted to or feels safe with men in any way, and as a result finds the relationship she needs with another woman – what’s the problem? Seriously, why do we think it’s a problem? If she is functioning as a healthy human, receiving and giving love, then who are we to say she needs “fixing” in the first place?

And here is where we start to question the legacy of fundamentalist Christianity and its impact on culture and sociology.

6. The impact of religion

Our western culture (I don't know enough about others to speak with much authority) is built on a Christian heritage. Sure, it's a shaky, seedy, ambiguous and sometimes horrific one, but it's our heritage none the less.

This heritage has defined our morals, ethics and foundational beliefs for a long time. So much so that we are convinced of its efficacy and the need for the rest of the world to adopt our views (generalisation of course).

We are taught from our parents, society, peers and politics that our particular world views (paradigms) are the best and the only way decent civilised people live. We are taught that one particular interpretation of our Christian heritage is the truth (forgetting, of course, the thousands of different Christian denominations and cults also claiming exclusive truth). We now assume that our traditional attitudes concerning LGBT people are part of the untouchable foundations of civilisation.

Our belief system is intrinsically intertwined with our cultural bias. To question one is to question the other. In simple terms, this means that we assume our sexual and gender morality is ordained by God as described by traditional views.

This means that our societal views on sexuality are based on whatever doctrines were prevalent during times of growth. The largest sexual shift towards prudery and clear cut sexual norms in the west, began with things like Puritanism and became established during the Victorian era, especially as Pentecostalism, fundamentalism and literalism found a firm footing among the working and middle class (again, a very broad generalisation).

There was a push to interpret the bible in very literal ways, but at the same time biblical exegesis was very limited, so the translations and interpretations of scripture were very poor indeed!

Suffice to say, it ended up that the bible apparently said homosexuality was a sin and even an abomination, and there began the extreme downhill run for LGBT people.

The impact of all this has been to elevate religion and doctrine above all else, forcing people to choose between their community, family members and relationships and even their eternal destiny, or choosing personal integrity – a tragic choice to have to make!

History has painted a different picture over the centuries however. The Catholic church used to have same sex marriage liturgy, and there is even a couple of same sex saints. King James (who authorised his own version of the bible) was as gay as they come, but we don't talk about that one!

Issues of sexuality and gender never had the same stigma as they do now. Sure there was the usual mockery and persecution, and pockets of rejection and abuse because they were "different", but there wasn't the extreme attitudes of today.

There is hope! Things are changing and in another generation or two perhaps full diversity will be a normal part of life and people will wonder what all the fuss was about!

But until then we have a huge job ahead of us facing the paradigms that have created this mess. We must deal with the tragedies of rejection, persecution and bigotry that brings depression, mental illness and suicide.

The hardest part is unravelling the religious mindsets that have created these views. The “secular” world are streets ahead in all this, but the fundamentalist mind-set is protected by a complex system of doctrines, meaning that any attempt to expose its flaws only enforce the belief that contradiction, in any form, no matter how loving or logical, is an indicator of “Christian” persecution, implying they are standing up for God and righteousness. This is truly one of the most damaging paradigms humanity must face.

The bible only contains six references that have been used to vilify LGBT people – often referred to as the “clobber” verses. All six have been misinterpreted and mistranslated. There is a vast amount of excellent scholarly discussion on this, and for many Christians it’s a necessary process to unravel this mess.

The impact of having our core sexual and gender identity apparently vilified by God himself leaves very deep scars that affect huge parts of our life, and understanding what scripture really says is often the first step to freedom.

This information is freely available on the internet and doesn’t take much effort to sort through.

It’s not just Christianity of course. The Muslim world for example, is subject to the same hideous dogma, as well as many other religions. Even Buddhism has “denominations” that claim homosexuality is karma for sexual sin in your previous life!

It’s a long road to freedom, but there is a huge groundswell of compassion, empathy and love, forcing its way into society.

7. Stepping out of the silence

The road out of the silent hell that so many LGBT people live in is not exactly a nice smooth highway. When religion is involved it usually becomes an almost impassable jungle track, requiring the machetes and four wheel drives of brutal honesty and a determination for truth that isn't afraid of where that might lead.

For those of us who have survived that journey, we still have the scars to show for it, some very deep that may never totally heal.

My advice is to take the time to process it all, take a step back from the emotional intensity, if possible, and try to break it down into the processes I've outlined:

- Examine your paradigms
- Who are you really?
- What makes you think the way you do?
- What influence has your upbringing made to how you relate to yourself, others and "God"?
- Learn about sexual and gender diversity
- Carefully work through the different gender and sexuality continua
- Find a niche that you feel comfortable with, even if its "fluid"
- Research the science
- Get to know what is going on in your body and mind
- Counter the myths and assumptions with facts
- Examine your faith with brutal honesty
- Use your understanding of all the above and apply factual and rational information to assess your faith
- Be prepared to challenge every assumption
- And find others going through the same battles – they are out there, literally in their millions!

Of course, these are only my suggestions. In the end its totally up to the individual to find their unique path to life and love.

Perhaps you have already worked through heaps and are just trying to get the courage to speak up. Perhaps you are terrified at loosing family and friends, or being bullied. There are so many factors at play.

The most important thing is being able to live your life with integrity. I mean that in two ways. Firstly, it means "integrated" in the sense that all the fragmented parts of yourself/identity etc are fully integrated into a harmonious life. Secondly, it means a sense of honesty that brings a deep peace.

We are all completely unique, and only we ourselves know what works for us. But there is one underlying thing that links and guides us all in every single thing we think and do. It's the essence of all we are and the foundation of life. We cannot exist without it.

It's love - unconditional love - love that accepts without question, imposes no judgement or condemnation, asks for nothing in return, accepts us completely as we are in every respect, right this second. Love that does not say "you are OK, but..."

It's only when we realise the depth of unconditional love for ourselves that we can have true life. It's only in a state of unconditional love that we have the power to grow, find peace and joy, and spread that to the rest of humanity.

Many LGBT Christians have managed to reconcile their faith with their sexuality. But many haven't, and that's okay. One of the problems we face in terms of religion is that when we have the strength and confidence to question the paradigms surrounding LGBT issues from a biblical view, it opens the door to question everything else! The mere fact that we can misinterpret scripture about this issue so dramatically, means that we could equally be misinterpreting a lot of other stuff.

Many people draw the line where they are comfortable, and the foundations of their belief system can remain intact. But for many others, they can no longer accept the status quo, simply on the basis that if we got the gay thing so wrong, what else did we get wrong?

Most importantly, there are millions of people in the same situation. You are not alone!

Silent Gays (www.silentgays.com) is focussed on the aspect of religious abuse and deconstructing of our religious paradigms, but there are many support groups out there that cover just about every angle you could need. So don't be afraid to research, explore and find what works for you. God (whatever you perceive that to be) is far, far bigger and better than you ever imagined, and far bigger and better than could possibly be contained in the confines of fundamentalist Christianity. Be brave, and explore, in the knowledge that this "God" will never, ever let you down!

Love wins!!

Live loved!!

8. About the Author

Jim Marjoram was born in Australia in 1956 and moved to New Zealand in 1989, returning for a brief stint in the late 90s.

He spent over 40 years too afraid to speak his heart and share who he is. He turned to Christianity as a teenager to find a “solution” for his homosexuality. He explored every avenue available to change and become straight, and lived a life of lies and deception, self-hatred, depression and suicidality. He married twice thinking it would cure him somehow. He became involved with Living Waters reparative therapy organisation for around 15 years with his second wife, extolling the virtues of the organisation and the power of God to change your orientation.

But he was living a deceptive and damaging lie. He’s still as gay as the day he was born (although, that in itself is a statement that many Christians will argue till they are blue in the face).

So after his life completely caved in following the death of his wife in 2011, he began to unravel his faith, sexuality and life in general, resulting in establishing the Silent Gays project to provide resources, compassion, unconditional love and safe places for those silently suffering in and from religion.

Jim is the author of “**It’s Life Jim..**” (www.itslifejim.pub) – the story of his journey through religion and out the other side as a gay man.