

# CHURCH IS RIGHT ABOUT SAME SEX ATTRACTION

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*This is a slightly abbreviated version of what we posted online. The full report, "Refuting the Top 5 Gay Myths," is available online at the Ruth Institute.*

If you thought that persons who are sexually attracted to the same sex must be gay or lesbian and can only enjoy intimacy in same-sex relations, you would be mistaken. Not that thinking this would be your fault. In the onslaught of secular media and the sometimes fumbling responses of Catholic leaders, Catholic teaching on same sex attraction is about as misunderstood as it is controversial.

Scientific research strongly supports the Church's view. Studies of the human genome and of identical twins have cast serious doubt on the often-heard claim that sexual orientation is an innate immutable trait, comparable to race. Furthermore, social science research going back to the 1990s has found that people can, and often do, change their patterns of sexual attractions and behaviors. Yet, as with a lot of research that supports the Church, these studies have been vigorously suppressed by secular academics and journals. Persons who have changed sexual orientation are functionally invisible in cultural and policy debates, including the debates over so-called conversion therapy.

The Ruth Institute sought out and surveyed people who once would have called themselves "gay" or "lesbian" but no longer do. We gathered a sample of 183 men and women who filled out an extensive survey about their journeys into and out of an LGBT experience or identity. We asked questions about religion, child abuse and various types of therapy. We asked

“before and after” questions about patterns of sexual attractions and behaviors.

Fr. Paul Sullins has just published the first round of data analysis from this survey, in *Cureus*, a peerreviewed Springer Nature journal. This paper shows:

1. Same-sex attractions can often, though not always, change, more so for women than for men. Almost nine in ten women in the sample (88%) had changed sexual attraction from mostly or fully homosexual to mostly or fully heterosexual. Fewer men, but still a sizable minority (39%), had experienced this much change in attractions.
2. Regardless of how much their attractions changed, all of the individuals in this sample had almost completely eliminated their same sex behavior. 100% of men and women reported “slight” or no same sex behavior.
3. Therapy can help, but is not necessary, to change sexual orientation. General therapy, not necessarily focused on changing same sex attraction, was more helpful for some individuals in reducing same sex attraction than therapy with a distinct goal of reducing same sex attraction. And therapy with the explicit aim of changing sexual orientation sometimes reduced other psychologically troubling issues, for instance, depression for women and self-harm for men.

The studies purporting to “prove” therapy is dangerous never include people who have “left pride behind” and usually exclude women. In other words, they evaluate change therapy by looking only at people who failed to change. What kind of grade would marriage counseling get if we only asked people who subsequently divorced? This is why our study is so important, to show the many successes from sexual orientation therapy.

Our findings show that the worldwide drive to ban all forms of

sexual reorientation therapy is deeply misguided. Women who experience persistent same sex attraction are the most likely to benefit from this therapy. Denying women therapy, based on studies that only include men, is patently unfair. Therapy that does not have the explicit goal of reorienting sexual desires can sometimes result in a reordering of desire. Sweeping bans on “conversion therapy” will likely have a chilling effect on even this type of therapy.

The drive to ban Sexual Reorientation Therapy under the tendentious label of “conversion therapy,” assumes no one can change their sexual orientation, and that even the efforts to change are intrinsically harmful. Every single person in our survey is a standing rebuke to these assumptions.

This is why the entire gay lobby goes into overdrive to discredit them. “You must be lying about living a chaste life.” “You were not really gay in the first place.” And so on.

Our study does not claim to be representative of the entire relevant population. We honestly have no idea how well our sample represents the experiences of everyone who has ever been plagued with unwanted same sex attraction and has left them behind, or who has made substantial changes in their behavior. At this point we are satisfied with showing that these are real people whose stories deserve to be part of the international conversation about “conversion therapy.”

The thoughtful responses from this group of people show that people can indeed change their behavior, feelings and self-understanding. Continuing to ignore them as if they did not exist is simply not acceptable. Our culture tells someone with same-sex attraction that they are locked into a destructive identity from which there is no escape. They don't really believe this, or they wouldn't outlaw efforts to try to change. Catholic truth offers something better: a liberation from besetting sin to live a life of freedom and holiness.

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