

reinforced the bishop's comments. These are good developments which, in my view, move us in the right direction.

Unfortunately, an anonymous article in the September 2004 *Ensign* does not reveal the same level of understanding, suggesting both that, although difficult, SSA can be "overcome" and that marriage may be an option with "the Lord's help." The article does, fortunately, point out that these feelings are "seldom chosen," but does not say anything about the role bisexuality may have in making possible straight/gay marriages.¹⁷

Equally unfortunate is the fact that Evergreen has a role in training Church leaders, and its literature stresses that therapy can result in a "transition" out of homosexuality. Evergreen also fails to clarify the difference between homosexuality and bisexuality.

If Latter-day Saint couples considering marriage were getting better information from their bishops and if they understood clearly whether the partner in question were gay or bisexual, they would be in a better position to evaluate whether marriage is a possibility. I hope that good guidance can be given to the fine young men and women of the Church, gay and straight, who face the prospect of marriage when one partner is bisexual or homosexual. I also hope that, when such couples decide to marry, they can find the best path through this dilemma and that, if divorce ever becomes necessary, they can also find compassionate support during that difficult process.

Thoughts of a Therapist

Marybeth Raynes

I FREQUENTLY SEE MORMONS who are gay or gays who are Mormon. Which comes first matters immensely to many. I consult with individuals,

17. Name withheld, "Compassion for Those Who Struggle," *Ensign*, September 2004, 58-62.

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lesbian and gay couples, and couples in which one partner is gay, bisexual, or aware of attractions to the same gender but who doesn't identify with the "gay" tag. Moreover, I have seen many who are gay but who yearn to reclaim or rename the spiritual experiences they continue to receive or who want to find places of spiritual service that have as sweet a taste as those within the Church. Others urgently want to come to terms with God, grieve deeply the loss of access to the Church's callings and blessings, or want to find ways to mitigate the shunning they receive from their families.

I also sit with both women and men who want to change their orientation or those who accept that they will always feel a split between their heart and their libido, but who want to be actively Mormon. They voice a clear wish to choose spirituality over sexuality as the only option in the forced-choice structure of today's Church.

The many facets of being homosexual and Mormon named above carry with them enormous suffering, endless questions, and, yes, many times of joy and fulfillment. I am delighted that Ben has brought to the fore the invisible choice that many live with—happily and unhappily. His voice—as well as the voices of other men and women who are married and bisexual or gay—needs to be heard, particularly with the sensitivity and hard-won insights he has gained through growing up being gay and Mormon, then marrying with his and Jessie's eyes as open as possible.

I am aware of more essays by men (but very few by women) about their journey in and out of marriages like this. I can count on both hands the couples I have worked with who have chosen to stay married with the goal of managing the difficulties and enriching their experience with each other and their children. From a wider list of contacts, I have talked in depth with at least a dozen more. I am sharing this information to simply indicate my frame of reference and my level of experience with these couples.

Some of these couples end up leaving the marriage, but I would guess that, for most married bisexual lesbian and gay people, choosing to leave may well be choosing life—literally and emotionally. As a side note, the high rates of suicidal ideation, attempts, and completed suicides do not end in young adulthood or upon being married. Suicide rates in general increase throughout adulthood, and I am guessing that the same trend applies for those with same-sex orientation. While I support leaving a marriage if one must, I am equally concerned about limiting the damage that spouses and children experience.

I am impressed with Ben's conscientiousness about entering his marriage. He employed a number of important strategies that every couple should use when embarking on marriage but particularly with the extra dangers and difficulties a gay/straight marriage entails.

First, he developed a close friendship over a fairly long period of time and then came to feel that he loved his friend before considering marriage. For gay persons, the choice between a deep love and erotic attraction plus love is an excruciating one. I recommend giving yourself plenty of time and contemplation to really feel the direction you most deeply want to go before choosing either path. Consult with trusted others who will support you whatever your choice. Rely on the spiritual practices that work for you. Research the practical implications. Study marriage as well as the nature of your prospective spouse's sexuality. (That is, if you are a man, become well acquainted with the nature of women's sexuality.) Fortunately, a decision-making model for these spiritual-sexual conflicts has been researched and developed by Lee Beckstead and others.¹ Even with last-minute doubts, you will be better prepared by cementing the relationship in caring first.

Second, I recommend disclosing your same-gender attraction before the marriage takes place, as Ben did. Telling someone, or worse, having the spouse find out years later, and after possible affairs and/or one-night stands have already taken place, produces the most damage. I give Ben extra credit for telling his wife early enough in their relationship that she could make a choice before becoming engaged or telling everyone else that a marriage was forthcoming, then later feeling the burden of social opinion regarding her decision to leave or stay in the relationship. Even though it is difficult, even impossible, to count the costs of being married to a gay person beforehand, the imagined choices must be laid before the other person.

It is important to recognize that not all persons are absolutely cer-

1. A. Lee Beckstead and T. Israel, "Affirmative Counseling and Psychotherapy Focused on Issues Related to Conflicts with Sexual Orientation," in *Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clients*, edited by K. Bieschke, R. Perez, and K. DeBord, 2d. ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, in press). See also A. Lee Beckstead and S. L. Morrow, "Mormon Clients' Experiences of Conversion Therapy: The Need for a New Treatment Approach," *The Counseling Psychologist* 32 (2004): 651-90.

tain before marrying that they are, in fact, attracted to the same sex. They may not understand that their orientation is difficult to change, or, worse yet, be able to project the toll that years of inner and outer conflict may cost both partners. Some women who identify as heterosexual may, years or even decades later, become aware of their erotic or romantic attraction to women. For many men, hopes and promises of change seem so compelling because spiritual directives in other areas of their lives have worked. Others, who are not as compelled by their sexual natures, may have only limited awareness of its eventual power. The nature of our sexuality continues to unfold during the decades of adulthood, just as our other capacities do. How someone knows or comes to know about his or her sexual attractions and patterns is so varied that we should refrain from judging.

Ben also engaged his beloved in an ongoing conversation before the marriage about both his doubts and the possible effect his homosexuality might have on her. I have talked to many women—and several men—who felt left out of discussions of future ramifications, even if they knew about the same-sex attraction prior to the marriage. Amity Buxton, author of *The Other Side of the Closet*, discusses the trauma, silence, and loss of integrity that occur as one spouse comes out of the closet. Effectively, when the gay partner comes out of the closet, the straight one often goes in.² The feeling of invisibility and of not being loved or cherished increases for most spouses unless they pay consistent attention to working together on their relationship. (Of course, this is true of straight marriages also.)

Indeed, this concern about “not being loved” in a gay/straight marriage has led me to more pondering than any other in the area of homosexual married people. I am deeply concerned about what happens to both partners when there is very little or no sexual interest toward the other by at least one spouse. When this is the case, there often may not be a sustained emotional and mental wish to really discover who one’s partner is on many levels. Much like the quip, “Money doesn’t buy happiness, but it sure makes a good down payment,” sexual interest alone does not create a loving marriage, but it certainly is an important feature. In their book, *The Good Marriage*, a study of three types of healthy marriages, Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee conclude that at least warm, if

2. Amity Buxton, *The Other Side of the Closet: The Coming Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Families*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), xiii–xx, 175–77.

not deeply passionate, sex is a necessary feature in all types of good marriages.³

Even when good intentions and deep commitments are present at the beginning of a union, marriages of all types need a steady motivational base to survive and thrive. After the initial high, people in most marriages experience a decline in interest toward the other as they enter into the predictable everyday phases of marriage before the deeper skills of really loving another take hold and grow. A gay person may lose that initial motivation to really love and deeply join with his or her spouse on many levels to a greater degree than straight spouses because it was difficult to do so in the first place. If this occurs, the frustration and alienation can be profound for both partners. Additionally, if either or both spouses are engaged in a core-level internal conflict, they often have few resources to reach beyond the self in a heart-felt, collaborative way. In my observation, gay/straight marriages do really well only when the partners are very good friends—indeed, best friends—and do not wish to be with anyone else despite the obstacles.

What I am pointing to is the need to be emotionally, mentally, and spiritually mature beyond the usual expectation of those entering marriage. Of course, we want people to be mature when beginning any marriage; but since a majority of Latter-day Saints marry at young ages, this is not always the case. Given that marriage is one of the chief institutions to help most people grow up—if you chose to let it—most people are quite immature at the point of embarkation. No matter the conditions, growing up takes a long time and a lot of work.

If I could wave a magic wand, I would hope that premarital and marital therapy services would be easily available for gay, lesbian, or bisexual people considering heterosexual marriage. (An additional wand would grant these same services to couples who are already married.) However, these choices remain invisible for the most part because any disclosure is likely to attract unfriendly cross-fire from several sources. It seems that people take sides too easily, even when they want to be supportive. Ongoing support is crucial. Heterosexual marriages, much less other types of unions, generally don't survive without family and community support.

I praise Ben also for clearly taking a stand, spiritually, emotionally,

3. Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 183.

and behaviorally. He presents a cogent argument for his choice. He claims his right to do something hard. If his story is honest on all counts, he has internally worked through the obstacles he has faced so far through spiritual seeking and contemplation and externally by talking with Jessie and keeping the conversation open. He employs an important coping strategy by learning to pay less attention to his urges. Just taking a stand and claiming a right often helps to change one's sense of self (though not one's impulses or orientation) and can create increased motivation. Would that most people had this much foresight and planning!

However, I think it is possible that there are difficult struggles that Ben didn't name. Even if his list is complete, others would have more to add or may not be able to do what he is doing. Additionally, he is just starting out. The years can wear on us unless we renew ourselves with episodic or continual growth. Ben hasn't included much information about Jessie. I wish her well over the years and hope that her voice also finds a place in writing for a larger audience.

Those of you reading this article who are homosexual and married and who have not disclosed your orientation to a spouse, please review your situation and name the ways in which you were doing the best that you could at the time of your engagement and marriage. Then, find someone to talk to so you can, as wisely as possible, remedy the situation, or come to some deep peacefulness about your choices in the future.

To all who are challenged by this issue, and perhaps are engaged in a troubled or problematic relationship, please remember that, given your circumstances, you are undoubtedly doing the best you can and should treat each other with great patience and understanding.

Staying In

Ben Christensen

I WROTE "GETTING OUT" as a somewhat naive twenty-four-year-old. Now I return, in theory a wise and mature twenty-five-year-old. Inevitably, I'll find whatever I write here equally naive a year from now. I don't know