

Why Homosexual Behavior Is More like Consensual Incest and Polyamory than Race or Gender

A Reasoned and Reasonable Case for Secular Society

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May 22, 2009

Part 1: The Initial Case

On Apr. 29 the U.S. House of Representatives passed the so-called “[Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#)” which places “sexual orientation” and “gender identity,” “real or perceived,” alongside of “race,” “national origin,” “gender,” and “disability” as benign conditions for which society should provide special protections in federal law. Those who oppose homosexual practice are, by analogy, implicitly identified in law as discriminatory bigots, akin to racists and misogynists.

The problem is that the analogy to race and gender doesn't work well. Race and gender are 100% heritable, absolutely immutable, and primarily non-behavioral conditions of life, and therefore, intrinsically benign. Homosexuality and transsexuality are none of these things. While there probably are some biological risk factors for some homosexual development and even transgenderism, science has failed to establish that homosexuality and transsexuality develop deterministically like race and gender. Even the Kinsey Institute has acknowledged that at least one shift in the Kinsey spectrum of 0 to 6 is the norm over the course of life for those who identify as homosexual (75%). Most importantly, unlike race and gender, homosexuality and transsexuality are in the first instance impulses to engage in behavior that is structurally discordant with embodied existence (as male and female). They are therefore *not* intrinsically benign conditions.

I contend that a better analogy (i.e., with more points of substantive correspondence) can be made between homosexuality and transsexuality on the one hand and polysexuality (an orientation toward multiple sexual partners) and incest (here I am thinking of an adult-committed sort) on the other hand. The latter are, after all, two other sexual behaviors that are incongruent with embodied existence that, despite such incongruence, can still be conducted as committed, caring relationships between adults. Polyamory has the added similarity of being connected to a sexual orientation (polysexuality, from *polu* meaning “much,” pl. “many,” here an innate orientation to multiple concurrent sexual partners). If incest and polyamory are indeed better analogues to homosexuality and transgenderism, then it is clear that placing the latter alongside race and gender as conditions worthy of special protections and benefits becomes, well, misplaced.

In making these remarks, I trust that people of faith know that it is just as wrong to hate and commit violence against persons who engage in adult-consensual relationships with close kin or with multiple partners as it is to hate persons who engage in same-sex intercourse or who otherwise attempt to override their sex or gender given at birth. It is not right to hate anyone or commit violence against anyone.

As regards a logical connection to polyamory, the limitation of the number of persons in a valid sexual union to two persons at any one time is predicated on the natural “twoness” of the sexes, “male and female” or “man and woman.” This was certainly Jesus’ view in Mark 10 and Matthew 19, where he cited “God made them male and female” (Genesis 1:27) and “For this reason a man ... sticks to his woman and the two become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) as the reasons for overthrowing concurrent and serial polygamy. (Note that the Jewish community at Qumran made a similar point about how “male and female” in Genesis 1:27 implicitly ruled out polygamy.) Polyamorous behavior and homosexual behavior alike violate the natural pair constituted by the existence of two primary, complementary sexes, even when they are conducted in the context of consensual, adult-committed relationships. The very sex act itself, which accommodates only one act of penetration at a time, illustrates the essential sexual twoness of a sexual bond predicated on two (and only two) complementary sexes.

As regards a logical connection to incest, incestuous behavior and homosexual behavior alike violate a requisite principle of embodied otherness within embodied sameness, even when such sexual behaviors are conducted consensually between committed adults. Incest is sex between persons who are too much structurally or formally alike as regards kinship. The high risk of birth defects that attend incestuous births is merely the symptom of the root problem: too much identity on the level of kinship between the sexual partners. That is why society rejects incestuous sexual relationships even when it occurs between consenting adults who either cannot procreate (whether because one partner is infertile or because both partners are of the same sex) or take active birth-control precautions. The structural impossibility of births arising from homosexual intercourse is likewise not so much the problem as the symptom of the root problem: namely, too much formal or structural identity between the participants and not enough complementary otherness, here as regards sex or gender.

II. What Disproportionately High Rates of Harm Mean

I noted above that homosexual intercourse, like incest, is problematic because of the excessive embodied (formal, structural) sameness of the participants; moreover, that problems with procreation for both incest and homosexual behavior are merely symptoms of this root problem of excessive structural identity.

We need to go further; for problems with homosexual activity are not limited to a *structural* inability to procreate. Homosexual relationships also exhibit a *disproportionately high* rate of *scientifically measurable* harms. These measurable harms cannot be explained away as merely a product of societal “homophobia” but are instead

largely attributable to the lack of true sexual compatibility (or complementary symmetry) between persons of the same sex.

If the disproportionately high rates of measurable harm manifested by homosexual relationships were attributable exclusively or even primarily to societal “homophobia,” then we would expect male-homosexual relationships and female-homosexual relationships to exhibit the same high rates for the same types of measurable harm. However, this is exactly what we do not find.

Homosexual males experience disproportionately high numbers of sex partners over the course of life and of sexually transmitted infections, not only in relation to heterosexual males but also in relation to homosexual females. The reason for this is not difficult to imagine. On average men have 7 to 8 times the main sex hormone, testosterone, than do women. That has an obvious impact on male sexuality, relative to female sexuality, such that bringing together two men in a sexual union is not exactly a recipe for monogamy. Incidentally, the polysexual character of male sexuality has been shown scientifically to be not only a cross-cultural phenomenon but also, to a large extent, a cross-species phenomenon.

As regards lesbian relationships, the limited studies that we have to date suggest that homosexual females experience on average disproportionately high rates of measurable harm as regards shorter-term sexual relationships and higher instances of mental health problems, relative not only to heterosexual females but even to homosexual males.

The issues around lesbian mental health are not surprising in view of the fact that on average women have, relative to men, higher rates of mental health issues and higher expectations of sexual relationships for meeting needs of self-esteem and intimacy. Simply put, failed sexual relationships place greater stress on women’s mental health than on men’s. I trust that most people recognize that women on average have much higher intimacy expectations for sexual relationships than do men. This is why, almost invariably, in a marriage between a man and a woman it is the wife who complains that her spouse doesn’t share his innermost feelings often enough. “Men are from Mars, women are from Venus,” as one marital counselor has famously put it.

The matter of shorter-term unions on average at first seems counterintuitive since women generally do better in being monogamous than do men (this is true also of lesbian women in relation to homosexual men). However, the fact that women have higher expectations for sexual relationships as regards meeting personal needs for security, affirmation, and intimacy places greater stresses on such relationships. When two women are put together in a sexual union, each making great demands of the other, stress is heightened and the likelihood of relational failure increases.

In short, the disproportionately high rates of measurable harm attending homosexual relationships strike homosexual males and homosexual females differently and do so in ways that correspond to basic sexual differences between men and women. When two persons of the same sex are brought together in a sexual union, *the extremes of a given sex are not moderated and the gaps in a given sex are not filled*. On the level of anatomy, physiology, and psychology a man’s appropriate sexual complement is a woman and a woman’s true sexual complement is a man.

Like homosexual practice, both incest and polyamory exhibit disproportionately high rates of scientifically measurable harm, *not intrinsic, measurable harm*. Because of close family structures incest often occurs between an adult and child, though it does not always, and need not, manifest itself in this form. In addition, *if* procreation arises from an incestuous bond, there is the additional problem of a higher risk of birth defects. Neither problem constitutes an *intrinsic* harm stemming from incestuous bonds but each involves increased risks attending societal affirmation of close-kin sexual relationships.

Polyamory increases the risks of promiscuity (if by promiscuity one means something like “one-night stands” rather than long-term relationships), domestic jealousy and discord owing to multiple spouses, and (in traditional polygamous relationships where only the man is allowed multiple spouses) overbearing patriarchy. As with incest, we are dealing with increased risks, not inherent harms. There undoubtedly are some polygamous relationships that “work” better than some monogamous relationships. As with homosexual relationships, the disproportionately high rates of measurable harm are not the problem per se (as if the absence of measurable harm would justify the relationship’s existence) but rather symptoms of the root problem.

III. The Illogic of Homosexual Unions

In II above I dealt with how the disproportionately high rates of measurable harms attending homosexual activity point to the structural discordance of homoerotic unions. Can this problem of structural discordance be alleviated if one of the same-sex partners tries to play the role of the other sex through gender nonconforming behavior? Not likely. A man cannot fake being a true sexual complement to another man and a woman cannot fake being a true sexual complement to another woman. The symptoms of higher incidences of sex partners over life, of sexually transmitted infections, of sexual unions of shorter duration, and of mental health complications are just that: symptoms of a root problem. The root problem is too much embodied identity between the participants, similar to the root problem for incest of even an adult-committed sort.

Even when homosexual unions “beat the odds” and don’t exhibit most of the normal harms associated with homosexual activity, they—like occasional adult-incestuous or adult-polyamorous unions that “beat the odds” by exhibiting loving commitment with few scientifically-measurable negative side-effects—still suffer from the root problem of too much formal or structural identity between the participants.

Since there are two and only two primary sexes—even the existence of “intersexuality” among a miniscule percentage of the population merely draws on features of the two primary sexes—it is axiomatic that each sex, male and female, is only half of an integrated sexual whole. The beauty of a committed male-female sexual union is that it brings together in harmony the two complementary sexes, thereby moderating sexual extremes, filling in sexual gaps, and honoring the individual integrity of one partner’s maleness and the other partner’s femaleness. In a heterosexual union what a man brings to the table, so to speak, is his essential maleness. What he does not bring is essential femaleness; that is supplied by the woman. Likewise, the woman brings to the sexual

table her essential femaleness; what she lacks in essential maleness is supplied by man. Two sexual halves unite to form a complete sexual whole.

Incidentally, that is why Genesis 2:18-20 refers to woman with the expression “as his counterpart” or “complement,” Hebrew *kěnegdô*, where the component word *neged* denotes both similarity *corresponding to* (i.e. similarity on the human level) and difference *opposite* (i.e. difference as regards a distinct sex extracted from him). That is why the story of Genesis 2:21-24 presents the image of two sexes emerging from one flesh (illustrating the point of sexual complements) as the basis for the two sexes, man and woman, reuniting into “one flesh.” By its very nature sexual intercourse was designed for sexual complements or counterparts.

If in a heterosexual union two sexual halves unite to constitute a sexual whole, the logic of a homosexual union, by analogy, is that two half-males unite to form a single whole male; or two half-female unite to form a single whole female. A half unites sexually with its complementary half. To regard one’s self, if male, as completed sexually by another male is to make an implicit statement that one does not regard one’s particular gender as being intact apart from such a union. The same goes for a female-female sexual union. This is both *sexual self-deception* (one’s maleness or femaleness is already intact) and *sexual narcissism* (one is erotically aroused by one’s own essential sex).

That is why the apostle Paul in Romans 1:24-27 refers to homosexual acts as intrinsically “dishonoring” for the participants, even when the relationship is conducted in the context of care and commitment. Similarly, most would acknowledge the dishonoring character of an adult-committed incestuous bond, which tries to make of “one flesh” two persons who in terms of kinship are already of the same flesh.

IV. Responses to Counterarguments

I believe that the arguments presented in I, II, and III above make a strong positive case for seeing closer correspondences between homosexuality and incest or polyamory than between homosexuality and race or gender. However, there are at least three main counterarguments that must be addressed. None of them are convincing, in my view.

First, supporters of homosexual unions will sometimes argue that there are no significant sexual differences between men and women, often appealing to a strict social-constructionist philosophy. The problem is that most people don’t live in accordance with such a perspective, including most persons who identify as “gay” or “lesbian.” Why is it the case, for example, that the vast majority of homosexual men would not (or claim not to) be fully satisfied with a sexual relationship involving a woman, even a particularly gender-nonconforming, masculinized woman? Why do they regard themselves as a “category 6” on the Kinsey spectrum? Could it be that they tacitly recognize that there is an essential maleness to men that not even a gender-nonconforming woman can successfully reproduce?

If there were nothing essential or significant to male-female differences then we should expect nearly the whole American population to be bisexual rather than

“unisexual.” Yet, as it is, over 98% of the population (possibly over 99%) is strongly disposed to sex only with members of one sex, whether the other sex (*heterosexuals*) or the same sex (*homosexual*). There must then be a fundamental difference between maleness and femaleness that, in turn, constitutes a radical difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The former is sexual arousal for the sex that one is not but which complements one’s own sexuality. The latter is sexual arousal for what one already is as a sexual being and does not truly complement one’s sexuality. They are not simply two different sexual orientations that are otherwise of equal developmental naturalness and soundness. One is intrinsically disordered and it’s not heterosexuality.

The second potential argument against my thesis is that congenital causation factors for some homosexual development (which factors, in any case, are neither total nor deterministic) make homosexual desire and behavior “natural.” This argument misunderstands the elementary point that persons can have innate or involuntary desires for behaviors that remain unnatural on other grounds. Pedophiles, for example, don’t “choose” to be pedophiles in the normal meaning of the term “choice.” Even so, the absence of choice does not make sexual intercourse with children “natural” in the truest sense of the word because children are structurally or formally incompatible for sexual intercourse with an adult. My point here is not to claim that in all respects homosexual practice is as bad as pedophilia but rather to make the singular point that the innateness of a sexual orientation does not make the behavior arising from the desire “natural.”

Moreover, we all know that innate urges are unreliable guides for moral behavior. An argument for homosexuality based on biological causation is not an effective *moral* argument because, as even admitted by two scientists who have studied extensively biological causation factors for homosexuality and who support homosexual causes: “No clear conclusions about the morality of a behavior can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behavior is biologically caused” (so J. Michael Bailey of Northwestern University and Brian Mustanski of Indiana University).

The third argument is that homosexual practice cannot be compared to incest or polyamory because the latter two intrinsically produce harm while any harm arising out of the former is attributable primarily to societal “homophobia.” Such an argument is based on false premises and inaccurate information.

First, as we have noted above, male homosexuality and female homosexuality both produce higher rates of measurable harm but do so differently and in a manner that corresponds to male-female differences. It is thus not possible, in my view, to blame the lion’s share of problems on so-called “homophobia.” Incidentally, what would “incest-phobia” or “polyphobia” be and to what extent does societal disgust for these behaviors trigger higher incidences of measurable harms?

Second, there are no scientific studies demonstrating *intrinsic, scientifically measurable* harm for adult-committed incestuous unions, much less traditional polygamous unions. Oprah Winfrey, an American cultural guru, had on one of her television programs a year or two ago a group of intelligent, attractive, wealthy women in polygamous relationships in Arizona. By the end of the program Oprah was telling viewers that society might be painting with too broad a negative brush the phenomenon of polygamy. Even as regards pedophilia, two APA studies have indicated (one argued,

the other conceded) that a child who has sex with an adult often grows up exhibiting no measurable harm. If that is true of pedophilia, how much more of adult-committed incestuous and polyamorous bonds?

After hearing a reasoned case for why homosexual practice of an adult-committed sort is more like adult-committed incest or polyamory than the conditions of race or gender, most avid supporters of homosexual unions will express great outrage. However, outrage is not a substitute for reasoned argumentation, though the former is often practiced with great effectiveness by those promoting a homosexualist cause. It might be time for those who have good arguments for believing that homosexual practice not be endorsed by society to become equally outraged.

Nor is it “hateful” to make such an analogy, unless one wants to argue that it is acceptable to hate and do physical harm to persons who engage in adult-consensual polyamorous or incestuous relationships. Love can only be exercised rightly when based on correct knowledge. If indeed incest and polyamory are closer analogues to homosexual practice and transgenderism than are race and gender, then it can hardly be loving for society to provide incentives for such behavior through “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” laws.

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