

Mandate or Bias?

8/24/11

I turned 41 years on the 21st of August and it would have been another perfectly normal day without incident, except for being told I was biased against Gays and homophobic. This assertion was based on the fact that I had mentioned the sexual orientation of a person on several occasions (9 times) during conversations over a period of weeks. This person who made the assertion stated in his opinion my behavior was an indication of a bias and my homophobia.

After carefully listening, I replied that I did not believe my remarks were homophobic and that I was very tolerant of Gays in general and I am always respectful, courteous and friendly to them as well as to others. In fact, I considered him my friend despite his being gay and I told him the reason I mentioned his sexual orientation was because it was relevant with regard to the vast number of people within our community (prison) with unstable identities (personal and/or sexual) and how his sexual identity was not confused with his masculinity. I now understand "despite" was a poor choice of words because he stated he never refers to me as his heterosexual friend and because I have repeatedly made reference to his sexual orientation, it was clear that I view gays within a box. Furthermore, he stated that my position was similar to common racial views, specifically; white people do not often understand a black person's definition and perception of racism or bias.

In an attempt to clearly articulate my tolerance, I restated my friendliness and willingness to interact and he replied, "Speaking of which we all think you are gay, but just don't know it." Although I remained calm, inside I was shocked, uncomfortable, and confused. How, what, why? I do not know if it was his intent to simply solicit a reaction or if it was a statement of fact, but none the less, I was bothered. I reacted by stating I was okay with my bias and would alter the way I interacted with them in the future to avoid any potential misunderstandings and thanked him for the feedback and ended the conversation. However, I will concede that I was offended by his remark because I do not want to be perceived as belonging to the group I will discuss later.

During my run on the hamster wheel, I processed this conversation and gave it quite a bit of thought. I have come to the following conclusion:

I do have a position, which is based on a personal mandate and value, but not an unreasoned judgment, regarding the choice to engage in specific behaviors (substance use and or high risk sex). Outside of prison this mandate would apply to both heterosexuals as well as homosexuals with regard to sex. However, within my community (prison) it appears to be a gay bias because the sexual behavior is only preformed by men (male only institution).

This conclusion was reached because I have personal knowledge of and experience with high risk ~~behaviors~~ specifically substance abuse and high risk heterosexual sex. Thankfully I have not suffered any long term mental and or physical effects, such as cognitive impairments or sexual disease. Unfortunately, as I progressed within my recovery, I mistakenly believed my choice to not engage in high risk behavior while in prison made me mentally and morally superior to those who do choose to engage in those behaviors. However, the more I educated myself, the more I understood these issues are very complicated and when you consider the psychosexual issues of most men and the unique circumstances of the prison setting it becomes even more complex. As I began to define myself as an independent system, I understood that what enabled me to finally make responsible choices was information, skill development, and the willingness to practice those skills.

In my years in prison, I have never seen such a shift in the engagement of homosexual relationships. Homosexuality is a fact of prison, but there seems to be an increase in behavior from a demographic that traditionally did not participate. Commonly, in the past homosexual lifestyles were the providence of inmates serving long terms, in liaisons with openly gay inmates (usually Queens). There has been a shift in the demographic of the

imate, they are young (20-25) and serving relatively short terms of imprisonment. This emerging group has a tendency to deny their bi-sexuality because for them it is not an issue of sexual identity confusion, as they are firm in their belief regarding their heterosexual orientation, despite their sexual behavior which is usually unprotected and high risk. I like call them Sexual Entrepreneurs because they appear to be unwilling to out-think their penises at great personal risk. In addition, it is quite common for the Sexual Entrepreneurs to have wives or girlfriends who frequently visit them and have no knowledge of the behavior their significant other is engaging. This removes their (girlfriends/wives) ability to make an informed choice regarding the sustaining of these relationships.

Oftentimes these motivations become compulsive and are similar to other process addictions and this is where my position becomes salient. I also have a strong disdain for those who exploit the emotionally and physically vulnerable for the purposes of sex. The reality is there is always a group of high functioning and emotionally sophisticated Queens who make it their business to turn out the young, and or emotionally/physically vulnerable. When I say emotionally/physically vulnerable, I mean those who have not been able to separate the need for intimacy from their physical drives. So fundamentally, my issue is with the high risk behavior that accompanies homosexuality within prison, not homosexuals, and that issue rests on the same bias I have for high risk and destructive addictive behavior in general.

One aspect of living productively within prison is learning adaptive ways to deal with the emotional, sexual, and social isolation. This means developing strategic behavior skills which enable a person to not succumb to the temptation of soothing one's self with high risk destructive behaviors. This skill *development* requires a complete examination of a person's psychosocial development, including their psychosexual development in the initial stages. Sexual acting out can be and is often times a symptom of some greater issue, as is substance abuse. In his book, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*, Dr. D. Nathanson, MD, states, "Do you own an automobile? It can be used equally well to take a child to the hospital, to assist a bank robbery, or as an instrument of attack. It is merely a vehicle; only as we use it does it become defined as an ambulance, a getaway car or a murder weapon. So it is for sexual arousal. All other applications of the apparatus are to be considered either as some form of rehearsal for the procreative event or as recreational uses. The system is there for us to enjoy to the extent that we are able to integrate all of its power within the self. Adult sexuality is learned behavior that makes use of preexisting biological mechanism in wherever fashion suits one's mood of the moment."

A central aspect of my recovery involved exploring my psychosocial issues which forced me to ask myself, "Who am I psychosexually?" I initially discounted the impact of my psychosexual issues on my overall development, but what I determined was quite insightful.

My sexual development was predicated on the objectification of the female image and as an adolescent I was completely enthralled with the promise of using the female form to meet my needs and define my masculinity. But, fulfillment of that promise always looked bleak as a result of the self-esteem issues which developed in part from being bullied from the ages of 6 - 13. I entered adolescence with a fear of rejection despite a great need for emotional intimacy, the *feedback* between these two factors was further intensified due to a feeling of maternal abandonment resulting from the marriage of my mother to a step parent I hated. From the age of 12 - 15 I coped with these feelings by soothing myself with fantasy, pornography and masturbation. My ability and dependence on arousing and satisfying myself created an internal script that encouraged, sustained and reinforced the emotional and social isolation begun by the bullying.

A critical moment as a teen (15) occurred when my girlfriend broke up with me because I was associating with a group that dealt and used drugs. I saw this as a fulfillment of prophecy regarding my worth to others and not a rejection of my behavior. This rejection was traumatic because I had constructed a belief that I was now acceptable since I was dealing drugs and not the wimpy picked on kid from my past. Not long after this my dealing became using and I quickly became addicted. As fate would have it, I would often see her with her new boyfriend, who was an acquaintance from school and the shame of rejection was amplified by my now being an addict.

Now the previous script, which was already hardwired, was infused with the pharmacological power of cocaine and this was to be my driving orientation. I was completely self-contained sexually, but powered by the cocaine, not traditional relational fuels of our species, such as attraction and love. In the future, this would support and reinforce my willingness to abandon and flee every subsequent relationship. Since that time I have had six committed sexual relationships (Two between the ages of 18 & 19, married at 23, one long term affair during that marriage, and one post divorce girlfriend) and the common factor in every one of these relationships was that I fled them to pursue my drug use. I never entered a relationship honestly and consequently, the women in my life met and loved the image I projected and did not meet the authentic me (emotionally retarded and drug addicted) until after they were heavily emotionally invested. Although I sought out (lust) and focused on (attraction) these women, I was unable to form secure attachments with them due to my maladaptive emotional development and in each of these relationships I quickly became bored with the sexual aspect and cheated and or returned to drugs. I realize the sex was insignificant and without meaning because that was not what I wanted. Although I could not articulate it at the time, what I wanted and longed for was attention, affection, validation, and emotional intimacy, but I had no idea how to give it so I did not know how to recognize it or receive it. Every relationship involved a woman who loved me more than I loved myself and because of my dishonesty, I knew in the core of my being "once they discovered who I really was" they would reject me. The pattern of "flee before rejection" continued. Ironically, unlike many who used drugs to fulfill their unmet sexual needs, I used drugs to suppress my unmet emotional needs. Addicts are not concerned with affection, validation, and emotional intimacy and although there were many women willing to trade sex for drugs, they were not capable of providing me with the previous and I often found myself alone, cloistered in a dark motel room with what I knew would never fail, fantasy, pornography and masturbation. I now understand that my desire for attention, affection, validation, and emotional intimacy will always be present, but meeting these needs is dependent on my interpersonal skills, emotional maturity and ability to be authentic.

I discuss the following only to demonstrate the complexity of the psychosexual development and to give credence to my previously stated position. Although I am not in a position to judge a person's behavior, I am an expert on what is personally and socially destructive.

My point being, people should not use substitutes (drugs, sex, or the genders of sexual partners) in lieu of learning, developing, and practicing the skills necessary to function as productive and positive human beings. Secondly, with regard to my peers within my community, considering all the educational and rehabilitative opportunities, in addition to the appropriate models of behavior (peers in recovery) available to them, there is no excuse to continue to engage in the unproductive and destructive.

In conclusion, I am discovering that these moments when life demands I assemble the jumble of experience and learning into something coherent are very interesting and novel. It was a good birthday week.

Post Script

I am not homophobic!