

Four Principles of Change

Masculinity • Authenticity • Need Fulfillment • Surrender

by David Matheson, LPC

INTRODUCTION

Many men seeking to overcome homosexuality become frustrated and discouraged when they find that their feelings and attractions don't change as quickly or substantially as they had hoped. I believe that the reason these men become frustrated is because their efforts at change are not broad enough. By this I mean that their work, however intense and sincere, has not covered enough areas of life to bring about real change. For instance, a man might focus on overcoming sexual addiction but spend no time building healthy relationships with other men. Or, he may work on spiritual healing but give little attention to healing his emotional wounds.

Diminishing homosexual feelings and opening the way for heterosexuality to emerge seems to require efforts in four broad, overlapping areas. These are:

- **Masculinity** (men in the change process need to feel masculine and bond with other men)
- **Authenticity** (including getting out of the false self and facing real feelings in open relationships)
- **Need fulfillment** (having those relationships, experiences, and opportunities that strengthen, nurture, and lead to joy and personal satisfaction)
- **Surrender** (letting go of everything that prevents change from happening and letting in the things that restore growth processes)

The acronym of these four principles (MANS) makes them easy to remember. The four principles are interdependent and synergistic. They are interdependent in that, in many instances, one principle cannot be lived without another being lived at the same time. They are synergistic in that they effect and are affected by each other and it is the interactivity of all the principles that causes substantial and lasting growth to occur.

Splitting these principles out is somewhat like shining white light through a prism. Just as the prism reveals different wavelengths existing simultaneously in a whole beam of light, the four principles show us the various elements functioning together within the full change process.

My hope in splitting the change process out into these four “wavelengths” is to empower you to create a whole growth process for yourself so that you can avoid the frustration so many other men have experienced.

THE PROBLEMS

To give context to the four principles, let me first characterize my view of the problems men with same-sex attraction (SSA) face. You may not identify with all of these. Try to focus on the areas where you do see similarities. The problems seem to show up in four main areas:

1. **Insufficient Masculinity.** This refers to feeling inadequate as a man and having an insufficient connection with other men and to the masculine world. Men with SSA tend to be disconnected from the mainstream male world and from other men. And they are typically disconnected from their masculinity—from their own genderedness.
2. **Inauthenticity.** They are not just disconnected from their genderedness, but also from their most genuine feelings and impulses. As a brace against shame and deep fears of abandonment, they tend to interact with the world through a false self that has been carefully constructed so as to not arouse disapproval. They are not authentic.
3. **Unmet Needs.** With only limited access to their feelings, they tend to have difficulty perceiving their needs. They may also have beliefs about themselves and feelings of guilt that steer them directly away from meeting their needs. This means that their needs cannot be met, further weakening them emotionally and causing them to seek various means of self-nurture.
4. **Emotional Rigidity.** They tend to have difficulty making emotional shifts and being emotionally vulnerable. Their emotional and relational patterns tend to be rather rigid. Also, they often have deeply engrained thought and behavioral patterns.

A majority of the men I've known who relate to the four problem areas I just described experienced painful childhood relationships where they were shamed and placed in double binds by their parents and peers. Most damagingly, they were placed in what can be called a "gender double bind" by the overall situation of their boyhoods. The four problem areas are simply reverberations and elaborations of these painful childhood experiences.

GENDER DOUBLE BIND

A double bind is a situation where there is no good way out—where there is pain or trouble no matter what you do. You are damned if you do and damned if you don't. To quote the rock group *The Clash*: "If I go there will be trouble; If I stay it will be double."

The men dealing with same-sex attraction that I and my colleagues have known over many years typically describe a particular family dynamic marked by double binds. See if you relate to the following dynamic. It may be played out in a variety of ways, but the essence of it is that the boy is prevented from experiencing his own authentic personality, feelings, and needs.

The problem may be simply that his parents don't respond to his feelings and needs—he is never seen for who he truly is and has no one to talk to about it. Or it may be that a parent *verbally* expresses love for him but is cold, distant, and uncaring in his or her behavior. This

leaves the boy confused and in doubt—unable to feel either his love or his anger. More extremely, a boy may be abused and then beaten for crying, completely shutting down any expression of self. Parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and others can create double binds. Some are shockingly blatant. Others are subtle and difficult to detect.

A gender double bind occurs when a boy is prevented from experiencing his own authentic maleness. These boys sense from their environment that they are not okay as males or that it is not okay for them to be male. Often they come to believe that it is bad to be a boy, that they are unacceptable as a male, or that they just don't have what it takes. If they assert their masculinity, they may be humiliated, embarrassed, abused, or even punished. Often, a dislike or even anger develops toward other boys and men leaving them detached and isolated from the male world. Simply put, they are not okay with maleness.

But they are not okay without it either. They cannot abandon their maleness because it is integral to who they are. They have the body parts and the hormones of a male. Societal norms tell them what men are “supposed” to be and do. And within their own hearts there is a yearning—whether felt or deeply resisted—to connect with the males around them and to figure out their own masculinity.

But typically there is no one they can safely articulate their dilemma to. So they remain stuck in this catch 22 for years, feeling despair and hopelessness. Gender double binds are created from a profound rejection—by parents or others in the environment—of a boy's gendered self, whether by blunt force or by exquisite unconscious targeting.

It is important to note that the gender double bind experienced by any particular boy is created within the mind and emotions of the boy himself. Typically, there are real factors in the environment that contribute to his beliefs and feelings, such as hostile or abusive parents or peers. In some cases, these factors are more a matter of the boy's perception than of external forces working on him.

When boys routinely experience double binds, they become afraid of self-expression and even afraid of their own feelings. They develop defenses against feeling and create an inauthentic “false self” that doesn't arouse the disapproval of those around them. They become often passive and stuck in life. Gender double binds add to this a defensiveness against their own genderedness—against their own boyish masculinity.

RESTARTING GROWTH PROCESSES

If you experienced a gender double bind in your life, it may have slowed or stunted your growth into mature masculinity and heterosexuality. The goal of gender affirming processes (such as Gender Affirming Psychotherapy, the Journey into Manhood (JiM) experiential weekend, and MANS groups) is to unblock the developmental processes that were blocked by problems in childhood so that normal growth can resume.

But this growth needs optimal circumstances to proceed—especially when it has become blocked by powerful emotional and behavioral defenses. This requires a multifaceted approach that addresses all four of the problem areas described above. The four principles of change are a way of guiding that process. So now I'll describe these four principles. Try to imagine how they might be applied in your own life.

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES

Masculinity

The general concept of the first principle of change, masculinity, includes three more specific areas. These are internal, interpersonal, and societal concepts of masculinity. “Internal” refers essentially to gender identity—the sense of maleness and masculinity that a boy or man has of himself. “Interpersonal” is about connections and affiliation with other men. And “societal” has to do with the concepts of masculinity and male roles endorsed by the larger culture.

What are the problems?

Gender double binds impact each of these three areas. Internally, the problem I’ve noticed is that men with SSA typically feel a sense of inadequacy in their masculinity and may even doubt their maleness on less conscious levels. Despite a conscious knowledge of their given gender, they may feel feminine or weak in their maleness. One man described himself as having been “colonized” by his mother. Other men have mentioned that they can see their mother reflected in their own bodily movements or hear her voice when they speak.

Many SSA men talk about how “normal” (i.e., heterosexual) men seem to have some mysterious masculinizing quality that they lack. And most also feel disconnected from their bodies. Your body is a key piece of evidence in the establishment of your gender identity. If you are disconnected from your body it is sort of like a court case where the evidence has been hidden somewhere—it makes proving the case of your gender more difficult, thus playing into the gender double bind.

Interpersonally, the problem I’ve seen is that men with SSA have become defensively detached from other men. The sense of being fundamentally different from other males, which arises from gender double binds, puts a profound wedge between boys and their male peers, teachers, leaders, and relatives. The pain experienced in early relationships with these other males, which is typically described by men with SSA, deepens the defensiveness by adding an unconscious decision to never again attempt bonding. Defensive detachment leaves SSA men generally isolated from close, personal, non-gay relationships with other males.

Societally, I’ve noticed that men with SSA tend to feel alienated from, and resentful of, concepts of masculinity and male roles. This is essentially an extension of their internal and interpersonal detachment from masculinity and men. And the societal disconnection then interacts with the internal and interpersonal disconnection in a sort of “feedback loop,” reinforcing and exacerbating the overall sense of being out of step with the whole concept of maleness.

How is the principle of Masculinity lived?

Here are some suggestions for living the principle of masculinity. First of all, the gender double bind must be broken in order for you to develop sense of *masculine sufficiency* (having enough maleness inside you and around you in your life). And, the gender double bind is broken by

exposing the lies in it and by contradicting them experientially. Here are some ways to expose some of the most common gender double bind lies.

Lie: “If I behave in masculine ways (i.e., according to socially defined male roles) I will feel humiliated, rejected, or shamed.” This lie is exposed and contradicted through little-by-little trying on new masculine behaviors (whatever that means to you). Some will stick and others will be dropped. Gradually, the newly adopted behaviors will become integrated into your overall personality and contribute to a deepening of your sense of masculinity. Having mature male role models is important in this process.

Lie: “If I expose my true self to “normal” (i.e., heterosexual) men, they will shame me and push me away.” Creating friendships with so-called “normal” men is the only way I’ve found to contradict this lie. This needs to be done consciously, carefully, and with intention. Very often, the first step is to make deep and real friendships with other men who are also in the process of change. The JiM weekend, MANS groups, and the many other SSA ministries and support groups in existence offer opportunities for making such friendships in safe and accountable environments. The New Warrior Training Adventure, New Warrior Integration Groups, church and synagogue groups and community clubs and associations offer opportunities for making or expanding a circle of heterosexual male friends.

Lie: “If I pursue my authentic male-atypical interests (such as art, music, style, or nursing) I cannot be masculine and other men will not be able to relate to me.” The truth is that you don’t have to give up your passion in order to prove you’re a man. Rather, the challenge is to integrate that passion into an overall masculine personality and self-image.

Lie: “If I express masculine power, aggression, and anger I will be punished and abandoned.” This lie is core to the gender double bind and the contradiction of this lie often has a profoundly freeing and masculinizing effect. The root of this lie often goes all the way back to early childhood when a boy’s attempts at individuating and separating from mother went off track. Separation from mother, development of male identity, and acquisition of personal power are very closely tied together. Failure to separate from mother typically has a cascading effect, derailing the other processes as well.

Contradicting this lie requires careful processes that could lead you into sometimes terrifying emotional places. There, you might experience feelings and conflicts you may have avoided for decades. The core of this work is typically anger, which is often conflicted by feelings of love and guilt. Working through these conflicts restarts the process of individuating and developing personal power, which deeply impacts in a positive way the sense of masculinity. It also provides increased energy and drive to do the other hard work of the change process to be described below.

Authenticity

To understand the principle of authenticity, we have to break it down into two related sub-principles. The first is internal authenticity, which in essence implies being whole within your

self and accepting yourself totally, rather than splitting off, repressing, or hiding parts of yourself. This requires an understanding of who you are on a level deeper than your job description, sexual feelings, or the labels given you by family and friends. It takes the capacity to feel and tolerate the full range of your own feelings, which can sometimes seem conflicting, confusing, and painful. And it depends on an ability to integrate these feelings, along with your beliefs about yourself, others, and the world into a self that can meet the challenges of life and relationships. Internal authenticity might appropriately be termed “the technology of self.”

Interpersonal authenticity is the second sub-principle within the overall concept of authenticity. Simply put, interpersonal authenticity is the ability to be fully present and assertive in relationships to the degree appropriate and to respond out of your genuine self in those relationships. This must start with the assumption that each relationship is unique and calls for differing degrees of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is not synonymous with interpersonal authenticity. Not every relationship warrants disclosure of intimate personal information and only a few relationships are conducive of true intimacy. Nevertheless, interpersonal authenticity suggests the ability to be genuine and true to your self in a majority of relationships whether intimate or more superficial.

What are the problems?

Many men have described to me how, as boys, they experienced emotional conflicts (including, double binds) that outstripped their own internal resources and the resources of their families and peers. As a result, not only were these specific conflicts left unresolved, but the boy’s capacity to resolve internal crises was impaired. This left them unprepared to surmount conflicts over the span of their development. The pain and insecurity of unresolved conflicts caused them to shut down the feelings and split off the aspects of themselves that created the conflicts. They may have given up their anger or split off their assertiveness or needs for male friendship. They typically disconnected from their bodies in order to avoid their feelings. They developed a “self” that didn’t create conflict, but that was also false. They lost track of who they truly are.

Lacking the ability to resolve emotional conflicts, existing with important parts of the self split off, and interacting with the world through a false self prevented these men from relating authentically with others. They may be friendly, personable, and “nice,” but they typically struggle with relational essentials including intimacy, attachment, self-assertion, empathy, honesty, and forgiveness.

How is the Principle of Authenticity Lived?

The principle of Authenticity starts with risking being whole. At first, wholeness must be explored in a very safe place (perhaps a therapist’s office or a trusted friendship) where your shut down feelings and the split off aspects of your self can be expressed and explored. Integration of contradictory feelings (like love and hate, anger and guilt) creates a greater sense of inner stability and clarifies relationships of the past and the present. Open exploration of split off aspects of self (e.g., assertiveness or sexual desires) reduces the shame that has accumulated around these and allows them also to be integrated into the self as well.

This entire process requires facing fear in a profound and new way. You will need to let down your defenses in order to re-enter internal conflicts that you may have considered intolerable years ago. And you will need to venture into the feelings in your body where

illogical, uncomfortable, and unpredictable emotions exist. The process will also require you to look for self-created double binds (transferred from relationships of the past into relationships in the present).

As the therapeutic process proceeds, men naturally begin to carry their newfound assertiveness, clarity, and wholeness into the real world of relationships. They allow others to see their feelings in the here-and-now. They become able to reveal themselves to others and stay in relationship rather than defensively detaching. And they find themselves in fewer double binds.

It is important to understand that authenticity is both the catalyst and the linchpin of change. Without it there is not going to be any real progress. It must be the primary focus from the very beginning of the change process.

Need Fulfillment

First, let me define the word “need.” I define “need” as that which is required in order to maintain joy. I consider joy to be central to the purpose of human existence. By joy, I mean the experience of satisfaction, wellbeing, and completion; the sense that life is good, that it has purpose and meaning. I am speaking of joy in its mature, bigger-than-self form—not mere excitement, stimulation, or even bliss, although each of these may be part of joy.

A reverse description of “need” may add context: It is a need if *not* having it causes grief. You may experience grief as sadness, loneliness, intense yearnings, or loss of interest and creativity. Or you might experience your body’s defensive reactions to grief, such as depression, numbness, or despair. These feelings are a message to you that some of your needs are not being met. More will be said later about responding to grief and finding the unmet needs.

Need fulfillment depends on two masculine drives: to preside and to provide. Presiding implies self-governance—creating order and balance in your life, which must be maintained if needs are to be adequately met. Providing implies the actual work done to meet a need, whether that is bringing home the paycheck or spending time bonding with a male friend.

What are the problems?

The problems described earlier that block men with SSA from experiencing authenticity are also the root problems that block need fulfillment. This is true since meeting needs requires first knowing yourself, which is core to authenticity. Particularly problematic is the shutting down of feelings, splitting of self, and disconnection from the body caused by childhood double binds.

Men with SSA that I’ve known often do well at meeting some of their needs, but do poorly at fulfilling others. Typically, shame or an emotional conflict surrounds the needs they do not meet. For example, meeting the need to feel at ease in the body—to feel confident and secure in your own skin—might require exercise and dieting. But intense body shame can make it very difficult to even acknowledge the body’s needs, much less care for the body or expose it by going to the gym for a workout. Or, meeting the need to individuate from mother might require creating boundaries in the relationship. But conflicting feelings of love, anger, and guilt can undermine the setting of boundaries with her.

Childhoods characterized by double binds can also diminish a man’s ability to meet his needs by engendering a passive personality. Essentially a learned helplessness, passivity results from life situations that left the boy with no power in his own life—he was damned if he did and

damned if he didn't. To make matters worse, he likely created a false self to interface with his hostile or unpredictable double-binding world. The purpose of the false self is to perceive the needs or wants of other people and to satisfy them. Awareness of self—along with the needs of the self—is lost.

The further in life you go without knowledge of your needs, the further off track you may become. In some cases, a fundamental incompatibility develops between a man's lifestyle and obligations and the meeting of his authentic needs. Marriage, children, debt, and career sometimes lock men into lives that don't work for them. Getting back on track can then require substantial effort and sacrifice.

Grief is what naturally happens when you are thwarted in meeting your needs. If your grief is too painful or pervasive, you might defend against it through various ultimately self-sabotaging methods, including masturbation, pornography, and homosexual fantasies or behavior.

How is the principle of Need Fulfillment lived?

Authenticity (as I described it above) opens the way for need fulfillment by increasing awareness of both cognitive and physiological aspects of emotion (this means that you can feel your feelings and understand what they mean). When understood, your emotions can give you surprisingly clear information about your needs and about their fulfillment or lack of fulfillment.

Often, men first become familiar with their needs through grieving their non-fulfillment. For example, many men I've known have first realized how badly they need affection from other men by feeling the deep sadness they have about never getting male affection.

I indicated earlier that experiencing joy requires the fulfillment of needs. And I've said that grief is what happens when needs are not met. But grief is not the opposite of joy. Despair is the opposite of joy. Grief is a healing process that cleanses pain and loss and ultimately returns you to joy. Despair on the other hand is a state of hopelessness felt when the soul has given up striving for joy. Despair is a dead end place that thwarts the grief process. At times of pain, loss, and lack of fulfillment, grief itself actually becomes a need that must be met in order for you to once again feel joy.

When men first begin the change process, they often don't understand their needs. One way to help them discover their unmet needs is to follow their grieving emotions (i.e., anger and sadness) to their source. This process helps men understand and work through the painful unfulfillment of their childhood needs. And they often come face-to-face with the needs that are not being met in their present life. Feeling the painful consequences of not meeting their own needs can be extremely motivating and life changing.

But psychotherapeutic work alone may not be sufficient to help a man understand and meet his needs. Some men benefit from personality profiles, interest inventories, and aptitude tests to broaden self-awareness and shed light on their individual needs profile. Also, accessing their own conscious memory of things that have interested them in the past can help make their needs more clear.

It may be helpful for you to consider a few basic categories and types of needs. This might help you become aware of areas you have not considered before. While each person's specific needs are unique, most men working to change SSA seem to have needs in each of the following areas:

- **Relational:** love, affiliation, community, affection, trust, understanding, and intimacy from people in general
- **Male friendship:** attention, affection, and approval from men specifically
- **Physical:** touch, pleasure, rest, work, exercise, nourishment, and grooming
- **Spiritual:** connection to God, the universe, or something bigger than self; inspiration
- **Work/Vocation:** to produce, feel effective and useful; to enjoy daily activities; to have variety
- **Empowerment:** safety, freedom, self-direction, autonomy, and opportunity
- **Rest:** relaxation, sleep, diversion, and entertainment
- **Self-expression:** the opportunity to articulate to myself and the world who I am

As difficult as the processes of learning about your needs may sound, the more difficult work of need fulfillment is often the daily devotion of time, energy, and resources that is required in order for you to actually fulfill your needs. For some men, this can require substantial adjustments in their lifestyle as they begin committing time and money to meeting their needs. It can also require a high level of commitment from the people close to the man, especially if he is married and has a family. And it is possible.

Surrender

Put most simply, Surrender is *letting change happen*. Surrender is releasing from your life everything that inhibits growth and receiving into your life those things that foster it. As the previous sentence suggests, Surrender is bi-directional—it involves both letting go (releasing) and letting in (receiving).

Imagine a fortress that has been defending against an invading force for some time. The occupants of the fort are out of provisions and ammunition. They are beginning to starve and die. They are beaten and ready to surrender. Doing so requires that they first put down their weapons. This represents the “letting go” aspect of surrender. Once they have relinquished their arms, they must accept the new command of the opposing force. This represents the “letting in” aspect of surrender.

What are the problems?

Most people will resist invasion to the very death. Many of us bristle at the idea of surrender—it feels like a loss of power and will. Men with SSA seem to have particular difficulty letting change happen, especially on the deep levels of feeling and belief where change is most required. It is likely that they’ve never experienced surrender as a blessing. They’ve probably never felt the replenishment and power that comes from giving way to something greater than their own

will. But their resistance foils their growth and development—their transcendence to something greater.

I have noticed that men with SSA tend to have problems surrendering cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, and behaviorally. I believe that the problems in each of these areas result from unmet needs and unresolved painful feelings. See if you recognize some of the issues described below.

Cognitively, many men with SSA develop beliefs about themselves and the world, and about their places in the world, that are inaccurate and self-defeating. Most significantly, they have the belief that they are homosexual or “gay.” Their perspectives are often full of distortions (inaccurate negative beliefs) and illusions (inaccurate positive beliefs) that prevent them from seeing things as they truly are. Relationship interactions are often misinterpreted. Personal traits (of self and others) are often misperceived. And future possibilities are frequently misunderstood.

Additionally, some men with SSA have obsessive or ruminative thought processes that they cannot let go of. Whether or not these are directly linked to homosexuality, they tend to slow the change process down. And they often lead to compulsive behaviors, (which I’ll discuss a bit later) further slowing the process of growth.

Emotionally, men with SSA tend to be rigid and narrow in their emotional and relational patterns. They have difficulty shifting from one emotion to another. They may get stuck in anger and be unable to shift from anger into forgiveness or sadness. Or, they may get stuck in depression and be unable to descend below the depression into the anger or grief that lies beneath it. Or they may lock themselves into a defensive posture that prevents them from feeling certain or all feelings. Anxiety, numbing out, superficiality and the subterfuge of the false self are all common defenses.

Spiritually, the problems tend to involve difficulty trusting something bigger than self and fears about being controlled or being out of control. A man’s deep shame often results in a narcissistic reaction of putting his own ego at the center of his universe. He may be wary of organizations, religion, authority, and power in any form. He may also believe that God has let him down and may develop deep resentment toward the Supreme Being. From this position, he is not open to mentoring, guidance, or inspiration. And he cannot transcend himself for fear of losing control of himself.

Behaviorally, SSA men tend toward addictions and compulsions. Quite commonly, men with SSA are involved in sexual addictions, which may include fantasies, pornography, masturbation, and sex with another person whether live or by electronic means. These behaviors are repeated again and again for pleasure or for relief from pain. In homosexual relationships, engaging in very specific sexual patterns with specific types of men is often the rule.

Compulsions grow out of obsessive thought patterns and tend to be an attempt to “get it right.” Although only a percentage of SSA men also have full-blown obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), many SSA men experience obsessions (discussed above) and show tendencies toward compulsive behavior. Repetition compulsions are common, and some would argue universal, among homosexual men. In a repetition compulsion, the man sets up a situation that repeats a painful dynamic from childhood in an attempt to “get it right.” But the situation merely creates more painful—though familiar—feelings and ends up working as more of a punishment and distraction from moving on with life. He never really allows himself to “get it right.”

Gender-atypical behavior, although seemingly less serious than addictions and compulsions, can nonetheless slow a man’s change process. This is particularly true when the

behavior reinforces to the man, or to those around him, that he is unmasculine, effeminate, or gay. Another behavioral problem worthy of mention might be termed “distractive lifestyle.” This refers to a way of living that keeps a man so busy doing unimportant things that he has no time to fall into his underlying pain or grief, or to pursue healing and change. Frequent partying, overworking, and excessive television watching are signs of a “distractive lifestyle.”

How is the principle of Surrender lived?

Let’s look at ways of living the principle of surrender according to the same four areas described above: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral. Consider the suggestions below—some will apply to you while others will not.

Cognitively, it may be important for you to develop new beliefs about yourself and about others. Perhaps the most significant belief about yourself that you might need to let go of is the belief that you are “gay,” in other words, that homosexuality is who you are. I believe that same-sex attraction cannot be changed without a conscious choice to stop defining yourself as homosexual. Often, the most significant belief about others that must be released is the stereotyped perspective of heterosexual men. Close friendships with other men can help greatly in these processes, especially once trust begins to develop. Trust itself is a surrender of defensiveness and it can open you to seeing other views of life that will challenge and correct your own.

Cognitive illusions (inaccurate positive beliefs such as, “I’m superior to other men”) and distortions (inaccurate negative beliefs such as, “I’m inferior to other men”) may need to be exposed and relinquished. And obsessive or ruminative thinking needs to be diminished. Obsessive and ruminative thinking can be dealt with effectively through some self-help programs as well as through cognitive therapies. Correcting illusions and distortions usually requires the help of a trained professional who can see things with an objective view.

Emotionally, the principle of surrender begins with letting go of defenses and fully receiving and feeling your emotions. Emotions bring physical sensations and impulses in the body (e.g., anger might bring a pounding heart and an impulse to hit) and understanding to the mind (e.g., anger might bring recognition of the extent of abuse).

You may need to learn how to release your physical sensations and impulses (often called a “charge”) in ways that don’t hurt yourself or others. And you may need help making sense of your feelings and integrating this new understanding, which will create growth and expansion of your emotional capacities.

Many men in the change process also find that they must surrender emotionally in relationships with trustworthy people by releasing information about themselves, exposing their feelings, and receiving love and affirmation.

Spiritually, surrender may occur in one powerful act of faith—willingly letting go the control of your life, trusting that something bigger than you will benevolently step in. Some men can do this. Other men can only spiritually surrender a bit at a time as they gradually feel greater trust through successful experiences with powers greater than their own, whether that power is seen as the natural change process or as God.

For many religious men, the love shared between them and God creates a willingness and desire to surrender. Whether done at once or through many small decisions, spiritual surrender requires a recognition that you are a smaller force in the universe and that there is some force greater than yourself that wants your wellbeing.

Spiritual surrender also involves seeking transcendence. By this I mean, seeking to rise above where you have been, looking within yourself for more mature responses, and going to sources higher than yourself for guidance and inspiration.

Surrendering unhealthful behaviors depends on surrender in the other three areas (cognitive, emotional, and spiritual). For example, if you need to let go of sexual addiction you may need to abandon such beliefs as, “I can control this” (cognitive surrender). You may also need to work through deep feelings like anger and shame (emotional surrender). And you may need to submit your will to a higher power (spiritual surrender). Working through and surrendering these underlying issues can have a dramatic impact on the addiction or compulsion. Even so, additional behaviorally based or 12 step work is often necessary to fully overcome an addiction or compulsion.

If you are concerned about gender-atypical behavior (effeminacy or acting “gay”), consider that these behaviors may be a reflection of your self-perception. Emotional and cognitive surrender (as described above) is the pathway to deep changes in self-perception. At the same time, consciously surrendering non-masculine behaviors and adopting behaviors that you perceive to be more masculine can be quite helpful in the overall process.

Finally, surrendering a “distractive lifestyle” necessitates emotional surrender but also usually requires a behavioral intervention to help change his pattern.

CONCLUSION

The four principles of change—masculinity, authenticity, need fulfillment, and surrender—are intended as a guide to help you understand this complex process of changing your life. Many men get stuck in this process because they unknowingly neglect essential aspects of it.

To me, “change” means that growth toward mature masculinity and heterosexuality is resumed and completed. Growth needs optimal circumstances to proceed. My hope in splitting out the whole growth process into the four principles of growth is to empower you to create whole growth processes and optimal circumstances for change.