

# FOUR PRINCIPLES OF GROWTH

Masculinity • Authenticity • Need Fulfillment • Surrender



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We live in a lawful universe. Everything around us on this planet and everything we observe out in the cosmos works according to laws. And these laws are very strict. Think about the law of gravity. It is a very strict law—if you break it you could die. You can overcome gravity through adherence to other laws, such as the laws of aerodynamics. But if the jet’s engines fail, gravity takes over and the plane falls to the earth. Natural laws cannot be cheated.

Many men seeking to overcome same–sex attraction (SSA) 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 these men are getting stuck because they aren’t following the laws, or principles, that allow growth out of SSA to happen. These men may be very sincere and even committed to the idea of change, but if they don’t follow the right principles, change won’t happen.

To experience growth, we have to follow all of the pertinent laws. To make this clearer, let’s go back to the laws related to aerodynamics. If we want to make an airplane leave the ground, we have to overcome the law of gravity by adherence to several other laws, such as the laws regulating motion, lift, propulsion, and so forth. What do you think happens if you obey some of these laws and ignore others? The law of gravity wins.

The same is true in the process of overcoming unwanted same–sex attraction. We have to follow all of the pertinent principles. If we fail to do so, gravity wins. The laws that seem to govern growth out of same–sex attraction can be grouped into four essential principles:

- **Masculinity**—seeing ourselves as masculine and distinct from females and feeling connected with other men.
- **Authenticity**—knowing and understanding ourselves and being fully genuine in our relationships with others.
- **Need Fulfillment**—having those relationships, experiences, and opportunities that enable joy and personal satisfaction.
- **Surrender**—releasing from our lives everything that prevents growth from happening and bringing into our lives the things that foster growth.

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 the growth process into these four principles is somewhat like splitting white light into its various colors by shining it through a prism. Just as the prism reveals the secret wavelengths contained within the whole beam of light, the four principles illuminate for us the secret elements contained within the whole growth process.

My hope in splitting the process out into its four “wavelengths” is to empower men to create whole growth processes so they can avoid the frustration so many others have experienced.

## **EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES**

In order to understand the significance of these four principles, it is helpful to first have a clear picture of the problems that the principles help to solve. And in order to understand those problems, it may be useful to have a clear perception of the backgrounds of men with same–sex attraction.

As I’ve observed men with SSA over the past 20 years—including myself—I’ve noticed certain painful childhood situations that are common in our backgrounds. These include having grown up in families where we were pulled into unhealthy dynamics in the relationship with our parents, experiencing certain problems in relationships with both males and females, feeling shame about our gender, being trapped in double binds related to our gender, and being sexually abused. Let’s spend some time reviewing each of these situations. Then we will discuss the ways in which these experiences may have disrupted our experience of our gender, which can lead to SSA. As you read the sections below, keep in mind that not every man with SSA has necessarily experienced all of the issues I discuss. Some will have experienced many while others may have experienced only one or two. Each man’s journey is unique.

## **TRIADIC–NARCISSISTIC FAMILIES**

In his book, *Shame and Attachment Loss*, Dr. Joseph Nicolosi describes a “triadic–narcissistic” pattern in the families of many homosexual men. Let’s break this term down so we can understand it. First, let’s discuss the term “triadic,” which refers to a group of three. In normal families, parents form a bond with each other that is separate from their bonds with the children. They keep good boundaries around themselves as a pair, handling family and relational issues between themselves. In triadic families, a child gets pulled into the parental relationship, which then becomes a triad—a relationship of three.

In the families of many of us with same–sex attraction, we somehow became involved in our parent’s relationship. This probably came as a result of discord or dissatisfaction in the relationship between mom

and dad. Our mothers might have looked to us for solace or companionship. She might have complained to us about our dad or other men, creating an alliance between us against them. Or maybe we simply observed our mother suffering in some way at the hands of our father, and in our own hearts we took up her cause.

The essential effect of these triadic relationships is that we teamed up with mom—consciously or unconsciously—against our father and against masculinity in general. Because of this, we became separated from our own maleness and identified with a female perspective.

It is important to note that these dynamics may have happened whether or not our father was actually present in the home. The critical factor is what we came to believe and feel about our dad, about males in general, and about ourselves as males. Our mothers could have shaped these beliefs and feelings even in the absence of our father.

“Narcissistic” parenting means that the parent–child relationship serves the parents’ needs rather than the needs of the children. Instead of mom and dad being there to take care of us, to help us grow up and become capable and independent, we were expected to take care of one or both of them. We may have been pulled into this dynamic because our mother was sick, fragile, abused, or needy in some other way. Or maybe she lived off our success or became hurt when we asserted our independence. Many of us became tied to our mothers by guilt.

Our fathers may have contributed to this dynamic through their self–absorption, abandonment of our mothers, authoritarianism, cold distancing, weakness of character, or general self–centeredness. If that was true for us, we probably sensed that dad wasn’t really there to take care of us. Rather, we were caught in patterns of either avoiding him or making up for his inadequacies. Many of us became tied to our fathers by our unfulfilled longings for his love and attention. At the same time, we may have been distanced from him by hurt and anger.

Narcissistic families can really mess up our ability to live our own lives. They taught us that we existed to take care of mom or dad. This may have taken many forms. It might have meant pleasing, satisfying, impressing, or living up to their high expectations—stroking their egos while having no needs of our own. Or it could have meant walking on eggshells around them, staying off their radar, and remaining small and quiet. Maybe it demanded that we became the strong and capable “parent” in the home while we were still in childhood. Or it might have required us to remain weak, needy, and forever dependent on their superior power and intelligence. It could have entailed a continual unconscious apologizing for the inadequacy, vulgarity, or brutishness of our fathers. Or it might have demanded idealizing, adoring, and serving our mothers.

In essence, narcissistic parenting is backward parenting—we took care of the adults. This means that we didn’t learn how to allow ourselves to be taken care of or see to our own needs. As we grew up and went out into the world, we first internalized our parents and then recreated the same dynamic in our relationships

with other people and institutions. So now in adulthood, we may be taking care of everyone else's feelings and sensitivities instead of living a life of our own.

Triadic–narcissistic families are hard on boys. They likely left us over–involved and perhaps even identified with our mothers and, by extension, with females in general. And they probably distanced us from our primary role model—our fathers—and from the male world that dads represent. And that probably disconnected us from our own maleness and from the male world in general.

## **PROBLEMS IN MALE RELATIONSHIPS**

Most of us with SSA have experienced relationships with other males during childhood and adolescence that lie on a spectrum somewhere between unsatisfying and horrifying. We've already discussed some of these problems in the previous section on triadic–narcissistic families, most notably our fathers' poor example of masculinity and his making the relationship all about him rather than about our needs. In addition, our fathers may have wounded us through criticism, dis–tance and neglect, emotional or verbal abuse, physical violence, betrayal, or rejection. Wounds like these may have broken the father–son attachment or prevented that bond from ever developing in the first place.

Some of us were not directly wounded by our fathers, but were damaged by that relationship in other ways. If our dad's personality was very opposite from our own, we may not have resonated with him, we might not have attached to him, and therefore we might have failed to ever feel his approval or affirmation. These “mismatched relationships” are very common among men with SSA. They create wounds of a less obvious nature.

Just like with our fathers, the relationship we had with our brothers may have wounded us through direct traumatic abuse or damaged us through a mismatch. Many of us viewed our brothers as extensions of our father. So our brothers just amplified whatever difficulties we were having with dad. Some of us thought that our brothers were more connected to or aligned with our dad—that they had a lot more in common. Many thought that our brother was dad's kid and we were mom's. For some of us, it might even have felt like our brother was stealing dad's attention or energy, leaving us with nothing.

Problems with peers are not always a prerequisite for same–sex attraction—some of us developed SSA although we had good male friendships. More typically though, we had problematic interactions with our peers growing up. A few of us actually had good relationships with our fathers and consider painful peer relationships to be the main factor leading to our SSA.

Verbal abuse in the form of taunting, teasing, and name–calling was probably the most common form of peer abuse most of us received. Physical abuse was also common, whether that meant being tripped or shoved in the hallway or being beaten up after school. And far too many of us received sexual abuse in various forms from other boys.

## **PROBLEMS IN FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS**

Many of us with SSA also had problems in our relationships with females during childhood and adolescence. If we grew up in a triadic–narcissistic family, we probably experienced an overly close attachment with our mothers that left us feeling drained, used, manipulated, or responsible for her needs.

In addition to these problems, mothers and other females—including sisters, aunts, cousins, teachers, babysitters, and friends—may have wounded us in a frightening variety of ways. Females may have controlled, dominated, or overprotected us, leaving us feeling emasculated and incapable. They may have over–connected with us and used us as confidants, sharing problems and intimate details with us about their relationships with other boys or men.

Females may have relied on us emotionally or even physically, requiring us to take care of them. They may have feminized us by using us in their make–believe play as another girl—sometimes dressing us up as a girl or even telling us we were girls. They may have failed to observe standards of modesty by leaving bedroom or bathroom doors open while they were changing, bathing, or using the toilet, or by walking around the house in their underwear or even naked. And they may have sexualized us by commenting on our bodies or by talking to us about their sex lives. Some of us were also sexually abused by a female.

Some of us grew up in situations that might best be described as female dominated. This means that—whether or not there were males in the household—the females were more prevalent in terms of number, influence, control, or personality. It could be that our mother was a strong parental force and our father was passive, weak, or completely absent. Maybe the household was predominantly female. Or maybe some of the females were overpowering, controlling, or demeaning. Or perhaps they teased and humiliated us for our male traits.

Some of us lived in neighborhoods that were dominated by females. There may have been few or no boys but several girls. Or there may have been boys of a different age group or boys with whom we didn’t get along, but several girls with whom we resonated or felt safe. Many of us spent most our time playing with girls

## **GENDER SHAME**

Shame is the experience of having your weakness hurtfully exposed in public. Nearly all of us with SSA have experienced shame from one source or another: boys ridiculing us on the sports field, at scout camp, or in the locker room; children taunting us in the classroom; or family members criticizing or humiliating us at home. Such moments were very painful for us. But the long–term damage came not from the pain we felt at the time. Rather it came from the way these experiences shaped our self–image and taught us to disconnect from our emotions in order to survive the pain. We often experienced this disconnection as numbness or as feeling like we are outside of our own bodies.

We learned to disconnect like that because we were emotionally and socially unprepared and overwhelmed by what was happening. We felt like we were in a weaker position, so we couldn't just laugh it off. And we couldn't fight back either. But our disconnection didn't make the emotional pain go away. It was just repressed and forced underground. Then, for many of us, those emotions were unconsciously channeled into destructive thoughts or behavior.

For most of us with SSA, shame became attached specifically to our gender because we internalized messages like: "males are bad," "it is bad to be male," "it is bad for me to be male," or "I am bad at being male." Over many years of having such messages reinforced, we began seeing our own maleness and the masculinity of other boys and men through the perspective of this shame. Many of us now feel deeply and chronically disconnected from ourselves as males. And we may view ourselves as bad, inadequate, defective, or unworthy as males. This can impact all of our relationships and our expectations of ourselves and others.

## **GENDER DOUBLE BINDS**

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 1980s punk group, The Clash: "If I go there will be trouble / If I stay it will be double." In its most pure form, a double bind occurs when a person is given two messages or commands that contradict or conflict with each other in such a way that responding appropriately to one prevents an appropriate response to the other—and there is no way to address or resolve the contradiction either because it cannot be understood or because it cannot be discussed.

Many of us with SSA experienced double binds related to our gender. These were caused by conflicting or contradictory messages we received about males and about being male, which we had no way to resolve. One of the messages was usually "anti-masculine" and the other was "pro-masculine."

The anti-masculine messages were shame messages like we discussed above, and they usually came from the outside—from our parents, siblings, peers, or bullies. We learned from these messages that we were not okay as males, that it was not okay for us to be male, or that we didn't fit in with the society of males. We came to believe that it's bad to be a boy, that we were unacceptable as boys, or that we just didn't have what it takes. Those messages made us believe that something would go very wrong if we connected to other males or displayed our own masculinity. If we asserted our masculinity, we may have been humiliated, embarrassed, abused, or even punished. Many of us developed a dislike or even anger toward other boys and men, which left us detached and isolated from the male world. Simply put, we were not okay with maleness.

But we weren't okay without maleness either. The anti-masculine messages conflicted with some very different pro-masculine messages we were getting from other external sources or from our own intuition. These messages told us that we were male, that we had to be male, that we should act like boys, or that we

needed other boys and men in our lives. We couldn't just ignore our maleness or the male world around us. We couldn't abandon our maleness because it is integral to who we are. We knew we had the body parts of a boy and we felt the masculine call of our male hormones. Societal norms told us what men were supposed to be and do. And within our own hearts there was a yearning—whether felt or deeply resisted—to connect with the males around us and to figure out our own masculinity.

The irreconcilability of these anti- and pro-masculine messages was torturous enough, but what cinched these conflicts into double binds was that we had no way to deal with the contradictions. Most of us couldn't even put our finger on exactly what was wrong. We felt caught, but didn't know why. And even if we could verbalize our dilemma, we probably didn't have anyone we felt safe enough to tell our troubles to. So we remained stuck in this catch-22 for years, feeling despair and hopelessness, alienated and defensive against our own masculinity, and isolated from the males around us.

There is another piece of fallout that many of us received from the double binds we experienced, whether or not they were related to our gender. We became afraid of self-expression and of our own feelings. We developed defenses against feeling and created an inauthentic "false self" that didn't arouse the disapproval of those around us. Many of us became passive and stuck in life.

As you can see, the set up for our gender double binds came from a combination of external and internal sources. Main contributors included rejection, disrespect, and disregard for our gendered self by parents and others in the environment—whether by blunt force or by exquisite unconscious targeting. Societal norms and expectations also played key roles. And our own awareness, perceptions, and interpretations of these outside messages and of our male traits were essential factors. But ultimately, our gender double binds were created in our own minds and emotions as our internal logic made meaning of our experiences and thereby constructed our own reality.

## **SEXUAL ABUSE**

Child sexual abuse can be defined as any childhood sexual activity other than masturbation and consensual peer sexual exploration. Most significantly, this includes all sexual activity that is instigated by an older or more powerful person.

Many of us with SSA were sexually abused. This was an exploitation of our vulnerability and a violation of our boundaries. It often led to confusion, feelings of powerlessness, and fear or distrust of others. For many of us, it created problems with intimacy and boundaries as well as feelings of shame, anger, grief, and guilt.

Sexual abuse introduced us to sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that were beyond our maturity level. We weren't old enough to make sense of what was happening or to handle the feelings that were created in our bodies. Some of us became preoccupied with sex, which left us vulnerable to developing sexual addictions. Others became afraid or anxious about sex, which may have caused us to avoid intimacy. If

another male committed the abuse, it may have caused confusion about our sexual orientation. It may have even caused us to question our sex. We might have developed sexual feelings toward other boys or men. And for some of us, this was the first seed of the belief that we were “gay.”

Some of the most devastating effects of sexual abuse came from keeping secrets. Secrets deepen guilt and shame and cause splitting. Perhaps we made everything look fine on the outside, but inside we were keeping dark, shameful secrets. For some of us, this turned into a full-scale double life with an upstanding public persona masking a sex addict.

## **GENDER DISRUPTION**

There are more ways to wound a boy in relation to his gender than I could possibly describe here. What I’ve outlined above are just the most common in the backgrounds of those who develop SSA. But these experiences alone don’t cause SSA. Many boys experience such things and grow to become heterosexual men. My two decades of experience with this issue have led me to believe that SSA is actually caused by something that I call gender disruption. The life experiences we’ve been exploring put boys at risk for gender disruption, but don’t always cause gender disruption. And it’s not entirely clear why some boys develop it while others don’t.

I chose the term gender disruption very carefully. “Disruption” refers to breaking something apart, throwing it into disorder or turmoil, destroying unity or wholeness, and stopping or preventing something from continuing. This perfectly describes the situation I have observed in the lives of so many men I’ve known over the years. Our sense of our own maleness, our relationships with other males, and our relationships with the opposite sex are disrupted in quite a variety of ways. Let’s explore the most typical of those.

## **GENDER INCONGRUITY**

Each of us has a concept or belief about what those of our own given sex are supposed to be like. This is called a “gender concept.” If you were to complete the phrase, “Men are . . .,” you would be revealing a piece of your gender concept. We also have beliefs about what we are like. This is called “self-concept.” Your self-concept would be revealed by completing the phrase, “I am . . .”

When our gender concept is substantially at odds with our self-concept, we will likely experience a sense of being strange, out of sync, or not like other guys. I have created the term gender incongruity to describe this state, which can be quite uncomfortable or even painful.

Those of us in this situation are often fixated or obsessed with certain male traits that we consider necessary in order to be truly masculine or to be seen as attractive, desirable, good, valuable, lovable, or complete as a man. I have come to call such traits “gender imperatives.” These traits can become core to our gender incongruity if we see them as necessary but consider ourselves to be lacking in them. We end up thinking,

“I am not what a man is supposed to be.” Obsessive thinking can make matters worse by fixating our minds on these differences, causing them to take on extreme significance.

To illustrate these concepts, let me provide an example from my own life. One day when I was a sophomore in high school I was walking toward the playing fields for gym class. Another young man was leaving the playing field at the same time, walking toward me. This young man was one of the athletic, cool, and intimidating guys in my school. He was wearing shoes and red gym shorts—and nothing else.

I saw him as physically perfect and absolutely confident—in my mind his physique and athleticism made him superior and more worthy than I. My view of myself was tall, gangly, uncoordinated, and unattractive—in my mind I was inferior, unworthy, and less than masculine.

I envied everything about the boy in the red shorts—his body, his athleticism, and perhaps most of all the confidence he had about his body that allowed him to walk around in public nearly naked. His image contributed to an already developing gender imperative, which had me convinced that a man had to be like him in order to be truly masculine or to be attractive, desirable, good, valuable, lovable, or complete as a man. This gender imperative was central to my concept of what a boy was supposed to be.

I experienced tremendous gender incongruity during this time in my life—especially at that moment on the field when I faced the guy with red shorts. In my eyes, he was what a young man must be. My self-concept was quite the opposite of my gender concept—completely incongruent. And my tendency to think obsessively about such things helped to fix that image and the meaning I placed on it in my mind for many years.

## **SAME-SEX DISAFFILIATION**

Gender incongruity causes many of us to feel different from the men around us, encouraging us to shy away or isolate ourselves. Sexual abuse from males and the kinds of problems in male relationships that I discussed earlier can also cause us to detach from other males. This interpersonal distancing—which may be either conscious or unconscious—creates a condition I refer to as “same-sex disaffiliation.” In case the word “disaffiliation” is unfamiliar to you, it means to end a connection or association with a person or group. Some of us only pull away from certain types of males while others distance ourselves from all males. And some of us never formed any kind of male–male connection to begin with.

Many of us also feel alienated from, and resentful of, societal concepts of masculinity and male roles. This is essentially an extension of our same-sex disaffiliation, and it interacts with our gender incongruity, creating a sort of “feedback loop” that reinforces and intensifies an overall sense of being out of step with the whole concept of maleness.

It is natural and normal for people to want to relate to others of their own gender and to feel like they fit in with their same-sex peers. Boys “hang out” together through much of childhood and adolescence, learning

the lingo and behaviors of the “male club.” Grown men often seek each other’s company for recreation and masculine support. Often their conversations and activities revolve around socially sanctioned male interests, such as sports and business. These relationships play an essential role in fulfilling the basic human need for attachment, resonance, approval, affirmation, support, and affection from others of our own sex. Each man is unique in terms of how much of this connection he needs. But on some level, all males need it.

But for many of us who developed SSA, our actual relationship experiences were very different from what we needed. We more likely grew up experiencing abuse, neglect or abandonment; rejection and isolation; or a sense of mismatch between ourselves and the males around us. Our needs for same–sex affiliation were not met.

When this normal need is left unmet, we experience longings for male closeness and connection that can be quite distressing. The greater the disparity between a particular man’s level of need and the actual degree to which his need is met, the more intense that man’s sense of same–sex disaffiliation is likely to be. The diagram on the next page illustrates both gender incongruity and same–sex disaffiliation.

## **MISOGYNY, IDEALIZATION, AND IDENTIFICATION WITH FEMALES**

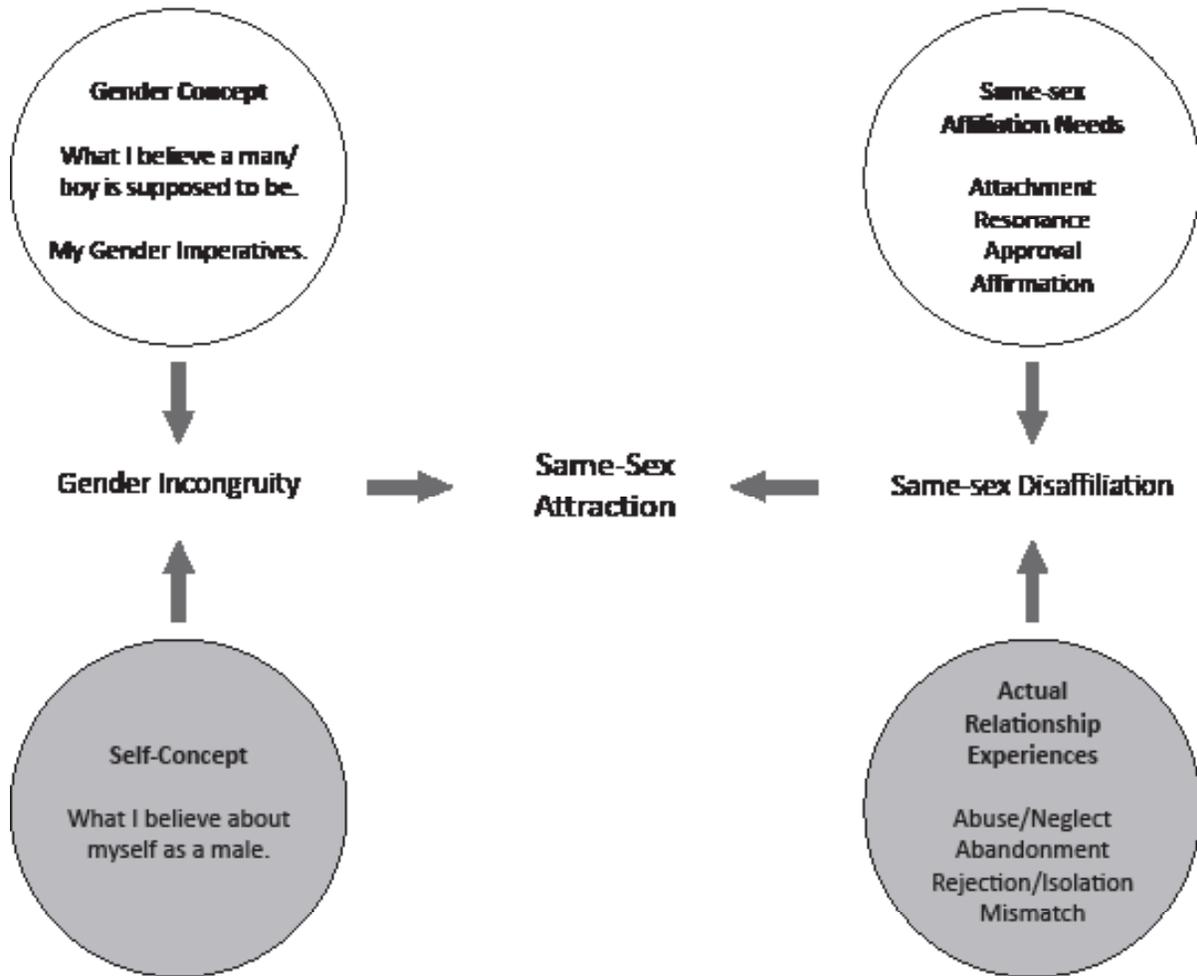
The term misogyny means simply “hatred of women.” For our use, I will broaden the term slightly to include also disgust, distrust, and fear—essentially covering any and all negative associations and feelings toward females and femininity. Some of us experience these feelings in strong and blatant ways, perhaps even as a seething resentment and rage. For others, negative feelings toward women may show up only in subtle behaviors and thoughts of which we are barely aware.

The kinds of experiences with females that I described earlier in this paper can create misogyny. Some of us experience females as overwhelming and smothering. We may feel drained and used by women or threatened and endangered by them. We might feel an inappropriate level of responsibility for our mothers or for other female relatives. This can create a guilt bond with them that we feel unable to break. If we try to free ourselves from the entanglement, our guilt seems to overwhelm us.

Those of us who have experienced such things may develop beliefs about women that are not accurate for women as a whole, even if they may be true about the females we knew growing up. For example, we may view women as dangerous or downright evil—as cruel, vindictive abusers. We may see them as needy and engulfing, manipulative, and cajoling. On the other hand we may see them as being stupid and weak or as just more trouble than they’re worth—moody, complaining, and whining.

Problems in female relationships can also distort our perceptions of ourselves. We may view ourselves as needy and weak in our relationships with women or as undesirable, vulnerable, and inferior to women. Many of us describe ourselves in ways that reveal a self–concept that is small and incapable of handling

## Gender Disruption



the demands of an intimate, opposite-sex relationship. On the other extreme, some of us see ourselves as superior to females—as far better or somehow right.

Often we may react to our experiences with females by becoming oppositional toward women. This opposition is a manifestation of underlying hatred, rejection, and disgust. Some of us may be merely avoidant of the opposite sex, covering up our fear with an air of indifference and apathy.

Some of us respond to our experiences with females in quite an opposite way. Rather than falling into the shadow of misogyny, we idealize women, viewing them as representative of all good in the world, or perhaps seeing them as our protector or provider. When this is the case, we likely grew up in situations where women were our main or only source of safety or stability. And the men in our lives probably were at best unimpressive, if not downright scoundrels or abusers. So we looked to women for support, security, and nurture. If this is true for us, we may remain overly connected to, or enmeshed with women in adulthood. We may continue the needy and dependent relationships from childhood where we were treated

like little boys—cared for, but also controlled. Or we may remain in familiar, resonant, and comfortable relationships with females where the concept of gender is ignored.

Yet another way in which we might respond to our early life experiences with females is to become identified with them. Gender shame and gender double binds may have disrupted our connection with our own masculine identity or turned us off to the idea of being male. At the same time, females may have been the predominant influence in our lives, providing us with role modeling and friendship. Some of us in this situation have a clear recognition of our sex but feel a much stronger sense of resonance and connection with the opposite sex. For some of us, this cross–gender identity is not noticeable in our personalities. For others, it creates a noticeable effeminacy. These experiences caused a few of us to decide that it would be highly preferable to be female. We may have even developed such strong repugnance toward masculinity and such a strong desire to be female that we have truly come to believe we are women stuck in men’s bodies.

## **CROSSING THE THRESHOLD**

We did not develop feelings of same–sex attraction overnight or from a single event. Rather, it was a gradual process of experiences and perceptions compounding upon one another, shaping our self–concept and gender concept, our relationships with other males, our perspectives of females, and our relationships with females.

Then at some point we began to cross a threshold into same–sex attraction. This experience was unique for each of us. But in general, the process included three steps. First, other males became the focus of intense interest. This could include curiosity or fixation, feelings of inferiority or wonder, or needs for comfort, connection, and protection. Often other boys or men were seen as exotic, mysterious, or foreign. Second, strong emotions accompanied these perceptions, such as envy, longing, loss, anxiety, fear, anger, hatred, and even love. This then was the set up: the combination of intense interest in, and strong emotions about, others of our own sex. That combination may have been created by any or all of the kinds of life experiences and problems I’ve described above.

The third step was actually quite simple: we had some experiences that connected our emotion–laden interest in other males with feelings or impulses that we interpreted as sexual, or more precisely, homosexual. This is referred to as “sexualization.” For some of us, this connection happened through sexual experimentation or sexual abuse involving other males. This is probably the most direct way in which sexualization can occur. But there are many less direct ways as well.

Consider that for most of us, sexualization happened during puberty, which is generally a time of high testosterone and low insight. We were feeling lots of things we didn’t understand. Emotional experiences and physical arousal were easily misunderstood. Plus, we were naturally curious about our own and other boys’ bodies during those years. Gender incongruity, which is often focused on physical traits, may have

turned that curiosity into a total fixation. At the same time, same-sex disaffiliation may have created intense desires for closeness and intimacy. And of course, all of this happened at a time when sexual urges were at their very height. With all of this in mind, it is easy to imagine how our sexual wires could get crossed.

This crossing of wires was unintentional or accidental. For many of us, it was so gradual or subtle that we weren't even conscious it was happening. Once it did happen, we reacted to it in a variety of ways from horror to bliss. Regardless of our response, most of us found it hard to ignore because of the intense feelings it brought up. If we let ourselves feel it, it was pleasurable, and it provided a temporary respite from gender disruption. If we got involved in homosexual behavior, that probably made us feel masculine or connected to other men. It may have provided a sense of escape from the demands of women. And it probably soothed our painful or disturbing emotions. It was like the perfect drug for gender disruption.

## **NOW WHAT?**

Let's review what we've covered so far. The childhood histories of those of us with SSA typically included triadic-narcissistic families, problematic relationships with males and often with females, gender shame, gender double binds, and sexual abuse. Not all of us experienced all of these factors, but nearly all have experienced one or more of them. These experiences led to a disruption in our experience of gender. Most of us experience either gender incongruity, same-sex disaffiliation, or both. And many of us are either misogynistic or, on the other extreme, idealize or are identified with women.

Same-sex attraction with its many perplexing perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and impulses is really nothing more than mental programming. The experiences I described in our childhoods created particular ways of perceiving, believing, and feeling that colored our views of ourselves and other people. That process is somewhat like programming a computer, although the human mind is infinitely more complex than any computer. Nevertheless, our experiences do create mental programs, including sexualized gender disruption, which subsequently influence our behavior.

Our mental programming can have a greater or lesser impact on us, depending on many factors including its original intensity, how conscious we are of it, how often it has been triggered, and the ways we have responded to it in the past. Ignoring our programming can make it seem to diminish and in fact it may have less influence over us for a time. But it is still in our minds, available to be triggered by life events. Being lonely, bored, or sick; losing a job or wishing we would lose it; having a fight with our wife or being ignored by a friend; being nagged by our mother or criticized by our father—these are the sorts of things that can trigger our programming.

Such events can tap into our feelings of inadequacy, bringing up our gender incongruity. They can cause us to disconnect from other males, activating our same-sex disaffiliation. Or they can trigger our anger or disgust about women, raising our misogyny. If homosexual behavior has been used as a response to these

situations in the past, our minds will follow that same programming again in the present, over and over again.

So rather than trying to ignore the programming, it is better to get involved in things that shift or revise the programming. Counseling or psychotherapy, experiential weekends, healthy relationships with other men, and activities that challenge and stretch us are all beneficial in this process. But the four principles of growth are the core of the process.

## **THE FOUR PRINCIPLES**

### **MASCULINITY**

This first principle of growth is essentially aimed at reversing gender disruption. So it is a quest to experience similarity and familiarity with our own sex and to experience the opposite sex as different and beneficial to us. This can be broken down into three parts: gender congruity, same-sex affiliation, and genderedness and complementarity. When this principle is lived well enough, it creates what I call “gender wholeness.”

#### **Gender Congruity**

The word “congruity” means being in a state of harmony or conformity with something else—to match or be comparable. Gender congruity is an inner sense that our self-concept adequately matches our gender concept. In other words, our gender traits substantially and adequately match the traits that are common among others of our own sex. This might also be described as a conviction that who and what we are as men corresponds with what we believe men should be.

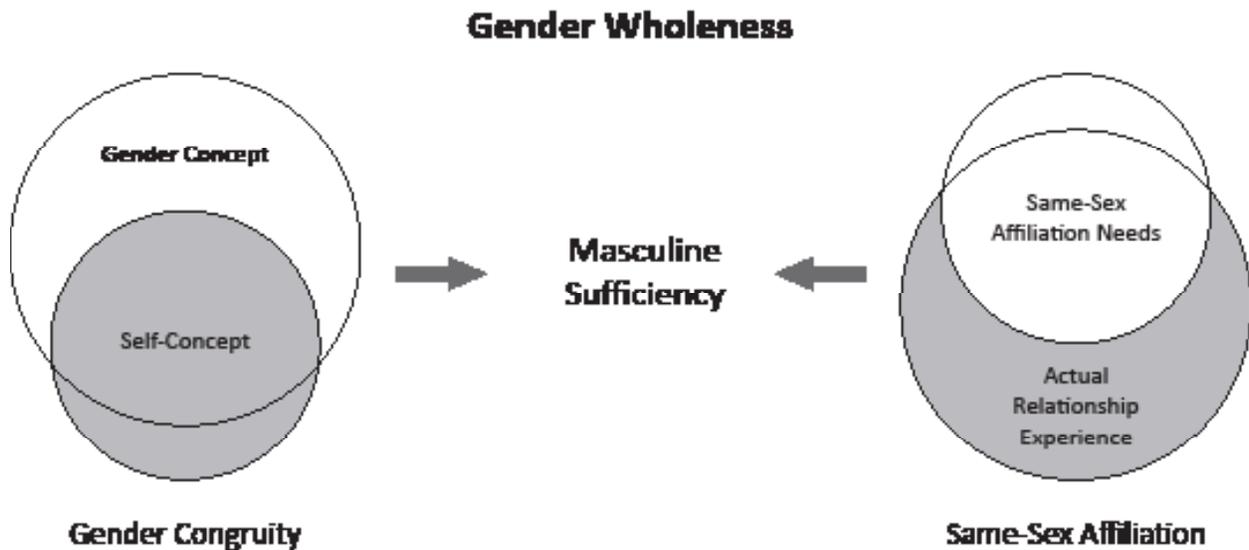
When we feel congruent with our gender, we have a secure sense of being men and being masculine, and we don’t question our masculinity in any significant way. We see similarity between ourselves and other males. We look at the men around us and think, “I am like them, and they are like me.” This doesn’t mean we think we are exactly like every other man, but in all the ways that really matter to us, we are close enough.

#### **Same-sex Affiliation**

The word “affiliation” means relationship, connection, or association. It implies close contact, including cooperation and companionship, bonding, and love. Affiliation is about being united with or adopted into a relationship or community.

As I pointed out above, connection and community with others of our own sex is natural and normal. All males need it to one degree or another. I believe men have five essential same-sex affiliation needs. The first is attachment, which implies a strong bond. The second is resonance, which means being in harmony or feeling in sync with each other. Approval is the third need, and it implies that others have a favorable attitude toward us, which validates us. The fourth need is for support, which includes receiving help and care. And the fifth need is for affection, which includes kindness, warmth, and love.

When we experience same–sex affiliation as well as gender congruity, we live in a state that I call “masculine sufficiency,” which means that we feel sufficiently masculine within and we enjoy sufficient masculinity around us through our male friendships. This provides a sense of being whole as men, in other words, a sense of gender wholeness. This is depicted in the graphic below.



### **Genderedness and Complementarity**

*Genderedness* is the natural state of having two sexes that are distinct and different from one another. Genderedness requires masculine sufficiency, but that is only the foundation. Beyond that, we must also be aware of the factors that distinguish our own sex from the other, including the obvious physical differences as well as the differences in personality traits, such as interests, motivations, emotionality, and relational tendencies. When men experience masculine sufficiency in the presence of a woman whom we experience as different from us, we tend to feel gendered.

The term *complementarity* refers to a favorable relationship between the two sexes where each completes, fulfills, balances, and perfects the other. It implies that we see the opposite sex as desirable and as having something valuable to contribute to us. For men, it means seeing women as something that can complete and fulfill us—as our other half. And it means seeing ourselves as having something valuable to contribute to women as well and as being strong enough to make our contribution to them without being drained by their needs. We are not meant to be without our opposite. We are built to complement and complete each other.

### **Gender Wholeness**

Masculine sufficiency combined with genderedness and complementarity creates the most expansive and complete gender wholeness we can experience. We not only feel congruent and connected with our own

gender, but we also experience a healthy sense of completion with the opposite sex. Gender wholeness tends to diminish homosexual feelings and impulses. And for some of us, gender wholeness creates or increases opposite-sex attraction. There is no way to tell how long this will take or even if it will work for each of us, but in my experience gender wholeness gives us the best opportunity for change. And of course, the deeper and more intense the sense of gender wholeness, the greater the change is likely to be. These changes tend to become more constant and consistent over time as gender wholeness deepens.

## **AUTHENTICITY**

The principle of authenticity can be summarized as three abilities: knowing ourselves, living true to who we are, and seeing others for who they truly are. As with the principle of masculinity, wholeness is central to the principle of authenticity. Knowing ourselves, and living true to who we are, means that *all* of our truth is known and lived. Seeing others for who they truly are includes accepting *all* of who they are.

This principle tends to be difficult for many of us with SSA, probably because the same life experiences that created gender disruption also disconnected us from other aspects of our authentic selves and caused us to see others in fragmented ways. Triadic-narcissistic families might have taught us to be who mom and dad wanted us to be and to split off parts of ourselves that weren't wanted or useful within that family dynamic. Similarly, shame may have caused us to hide or disavow the parts that others didn't like and to create false selves we thought others would accept. Shame may have also alienated us from those around us. Double binds may have left us feeling helpless, confused, and insecure, leading again to disowning or splitting off parts of ourselves and to disconnecting from others. And sexual abuse may have left us very disconnected from ourselves and confused about our gender. Keep in mind that we may have split off weaknesses as well as strengths.

Triadic-narcissistic families, gender double binds, gender shame, and sexual abuse may have led to overwhelming emotional conflicts as we grappled with the contradictory feelings they created. Feelings of dependency, love, longing, and intimacy may have been contradicted by fear, anger, resentment, guilt, and shame. Lacking internal emotional resources and support from others, we probably repressed or cut off these emotional conflicts. Some of us became unable to feel any of our emotions because it was too painful or threatening.

The result of all of this in our present lives is that we tend not to experience ourselves authentically, and we struggle to relate authentically with others. We fragment ourselves and experience others in fragmented ways as well. What makes all of this much more complex is that our minds play tricks on us with our split off parts and with fragmented others. The two main tricks our minds play come in the form of some common psychological mechanisms known as “projections” and “transferences.”

The parts of us that we split off don't go away. Because they are aspects of our personalities and psyches, if we repress them they just show up in unexpected ways. Often, they show up as reflections on other people

as though we are *projecting* our traits onto them in the same way a movie is projected onto a movie screen. These projections keep us from seeing ourselves fully, and they confuse us about others as well. We don't see who they really are—we see who we really are, or want to be, through them.

Similarly, the painful relationships from our childhoods often don't go away either. Until we work through and resolve them, they can be *transferred* onto our relationships in the present. This may lead us to respond to those around us in adulthood in the same way we responded to significant people in childhood. Once again, we aren't seeing who they really are. We are just seeing ghosts from our past.

If we are to learn to live authentically, we may have to make changes both internally and interpersonally. Internally, we may need to become whole within ourselves and accept ourselves totally, rather than splitting off, repressing, or hiding parts of ourselves. This requires an understanding of who we are on a level deeper than our job description, sexual feelings, or the labels given us by family, friends, and society. It requires the capacity to feel and tolerate the full range of our own feelings, which can sometimes seem conflicting, confusing, and painful. And it depends on an ability to integrate these feelings, along with our beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world into a personality that can meet the challenges of life and relationships.

Interpersonally, we may need to develop the ability to be fully present and assertive in relationships to the degree appropriate and to respond out of our genuine selves 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 to true intimacy. Nevertheless, interpersonal authenticity suggests the ability to be genuine and true to ourselves in a majority of relationships whether intimate or more superficial.

At first, authenticity is best attempted in safe places, such as a therapist's office or a trusted friendship, where our shut down feelings and split-off parts can be expressed and explored. Integration of contradictory feelings creates a greater sense of inner stability and clarifies relationships of the past and the present. Open exploration of split-off parts reduces the shame that has accumulated around them and allows them to be integrated into the self as well.

This entire process requires facing fear in a profound and new way. We have to let down our defenses in order to re-enter internal conflicts that we may have previously considered too painful to touch. And we need to venture into the feelings in our bodies where illogical, uncomfortable, and unpredictable emotions exist.

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

It is important to understand that authenticity is both the catalyst and the linchpin of change—authenticity is where it starts and it is what keeps it all together and moving forward. 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**

The word “need” could be defined 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, despair, or attractions to other men. These feelings are a message to you that some of your needs are not being met.

Those of us with SSA often do well at meeting some of our needs, but do poorly at fulfilling others. Typically, shame or emotional conflict surround the needs we don’t allow ourselves to meet. For example, meeting the need to feel at ease in the body—to feel confident and secure in our 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 to 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 our resolve to set boundaries with her.

Childhoods characterized by double binds can also diminish our ability to meet our needs by engendering a passive personality. Essentially a form of learned helplessness, passivity often results from life situations that left us with no power in our own lives. Learned helplessness can be made even worse if we also created false selves to interface with our hostile or unpredictable double-binding world. False selves cause us to lose awareness of our true selves and our true needs.

The further in life we go without knowledge of our needs, the further off track we may become. For some of us, a fundamental incompatibility develops between our lifestyle and obligations and the meeting of our authentic needs. Marriage, children, debt, and career can lock us into lives that don’t work for us. Getting back on track can then require substantial effort and sacrifice.

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

Authenticity opens the way for need fulfillment by increasing awareness of both cognitive and physiological aspects of emotion. This means that we can feel our feelings and understand what they mean. When understood, our emotions can give us surprisingly clear information about our needs and whether or not we are fulfilling them.

As difficult as the processes of learning about our 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 us to actually fulfill our needs. For some of us, this can require substantial adjustments in our lifestyle as we begin committing time and other resources to meeting our needs. It can also require a high level of commitment from the people close to us, especially if we are married and have a family. And it is possible.

I believe men have six general needs. The first is the need for a mission, which can be described as some kind of productive activity that allows us to feel effective and useful. In *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge says, “A man must have a battle to fight, a great mission to his life that involves and yet transcends even home and family. He must have a cause to which he is devoted even unto death, for this is written into the fabric of his being.”

Men also need adventure. We need the intense energy that adventure generates to prevent us from becoming lifeless, dull, depressed, and false. Adventure spurs creativity and feelings of power. It creates an energy of confidence, courage, discipline, generosity, aliveness, and self-expression.

A third general masculine need is for genderedness and complementarity, which we discussed earlier. Women are our opposite—together the two sexes make a complete unit. Only by bringing together the gifts of the two genders can we experience wholeness in life.

We’ve also already discussed the fourth general need, which is to have other men in our lives. Simply and truly, men need men. We need to be seen, understood, and accepted by each other. We need the mentoring, support, and challenges we give each other. As the writer of *Proverbs* chapter twenty-seven advises, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (KJV). In pursuing our mission and our adventure, we need comrades.

The fifth general need men have is for spiritual connection. Spirituality brings a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves and provides a sense of comfort that we are not alone in the universe. It gives meaning and a sense of purpose by assuring us that life and creation are going somewhere. It offers ways to understand the suffering we see in this life. And it gives a hopeful context for what otherwise might seem meaningless and vain.

Finally, the sixth general masculine need is to care for our bodies. We must have a positive emotional connection to our bodies because this will determine how well we will take care of them. Physical fitness

through diet and exercise is part of meeting this need. Rest and relaxation are also vital. And touch is an important part of meeting this need as well.

## **SURRENDER**

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

Let me explain this with a metaphor. 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. But if they are to surrender, they must 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.

Three traits tend to make the principle of surrender difficult for those of us with SSA to live. First, we tend to have difficulty making emotional shifts and being emotionally open. Second, we tend to have some counter-productive thought patterns. And third, we tend to get stuck in certain destructive behavioral patterns. Let’s discuss each of these traits in more detail.

Our difficulty making emotional shifts likely comes from having grown up with shame, double-binds, and other relational problems, which may have impaired our ability to process and move past the emotional conflicts and traumas that are a normal part of life. This makes it difficult for us to shift from negative and defensive feeling states to positive and relational ones—for example, from sadness to relief, anger to forgiveness, or fear to confidence. Without this ability, we have difficulty making and maintaining relationships with other males, which are necessary for masculine sufficiency. The inability to shift emotionally can compound our difficulties by interacting with our engrained thought patterns and our compulsive or addictive behaviors, which I will describe below.

Our thought patterns tend to be toxic or obsessive—or both. Toxic thinking, also referred to as thinking errors, could be described as seeing yourself, your situation, your relationships, and the world in ways that are inaccurate and overly negative. Obsessive thinking often shows up among us as a tendency to become fixated or stuck on certain thoughts, thinking about them over and over again. It may also show up as perfectionistic beliefs and expectations of ourselves or others. And it can manifest as rigid and stubborn thinking. Very often, this trait seems to have been worse in childhood than it is now. Whether or not our toxic and obsessive thoughts are directly linked to homosexuality, they tend to slow the change process down. And they often lead to compulsive behaviors, further slowing the process of growth.

Behaviorally, we tend toward compulsions, addictions, gender-atypical behavior, and distractive ways of living. Compulsions result from obsessive thought patterns and can show up in two different ways.

First, compulsions can be part of obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD), in which case the compulsive behavior is an attempt to stop the anxiety that comes from the obsessive thought. Although performing the compulsive behavior does seem to reduce the anxiety, it does so only temporarily.

Second, compulsions can be part of a behavioral pattern in which we unconsciously set up a situation that repeats a painful or disturbing dynamic from childhood in an attempt to “get it right.” These “repetition compulsions” are common among men with SSA. For example, men will often engage in sexual patterns that play out unresolved childhood issues, such as a desire to be admired, an insatiable curiosity about men’s bodies, or a sense that they deserve to be punished. Men who have been abused will often act out in ways that resemble their abuse. And men who were introduced to sex through sexual play with another boy will sometimes repeat that situation again and again in their adult lives. These repetition compulsions merely create more painful—though familiar—feelings and end up working as more of a punishment and distraction from moving on with life. We never really do “get it right.”

Sexual addiction is quite common among men with SSA. It may include fantasies, pornography, masturbation, and sex with other people whether live or by electronic means. These behaviors are repeated again and again for pleasure or for relief from pain. Some men lose control of the frequency and intensity of the behavior, engaging in it even though it presents ever–increasing risks. At its most extreme, sexual addiction can be extremely destructive and even life threatening.

Gender–atypical behavior, although less serious than compulsions or addictions, can nonetheless slow our change process. This includes acting in a flamboyant or effeminate manner and any other behavior that comes across to others as immature or that makes us feel less masculine or more feminine. Gender–atypical behavior can maintain gender incongruity by reinforcing a non–masculine self–concept. And it can worsen same–sex disaffiliation when it makes other men uncomfortable interacting with us, effectively putting a wall between them and us.

A final behavioral problem that deserves mention might be termed the “distractive lifestyle.” This refers to ways of living that keep us so busy doing other things that we never have time to pursue healing and change. Excessive television watching and frequent partying or leisure activities are easily identifiable as distractions from the more important healing process. But the three main distractions I’ve noticed are overworking, frequent travel, and heavy study loads among students. These are also the most difficult to change because they often seem to be necessary and unchangeable.

Now let’s consider ways of living the principle of surrender by looking at it from four perspectives: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral. Cognitively, it is often necessary for us to develop new beliefs about ourselves and about others. Perhaps the most significant belief about ourselves that we might need to let go of is the belief that we are “gay,” in other words, that homosexuality is who we are. I believe that same–sex attraction cannot be changed without a conscious choice to stop defining ourselves as gay or homosexual.

Often the most significant belief about others that we have to release is the stereotyped perspectives of heterosexual men, whether positive or negative. Close friendships with men can help greatly in this process, especially once trust begins to develop. Trust itself is a surrender of defensiveness, and it can open us to seeing other views on life that will challenge and correct our own.

If toxic or obsessive thinking is part of the equation, it needs to be diminished. A number of self-help books and programs can be found online to help with this. Certain cognitive therapies can also be very helpful in diminishing this problem. In very serious cases, medication may be necessary to bring OCD under control.

Emotionally, the principle of surrender begins with letting go of defenses and fully receiving and feeling our emotions. Emotions bring physical sensations and impulses in the body. For example, anger might bring a pounding heart and an impulse to hit. Emotions also bring understanding to the mind. For example, anger might bring recognition of the extent of the abuse we suffered.

Sometimes we need to learn how to release the impulses or “charges” that come with our emotions in ways that don’t hurt ourselves or others. And we may need help making sense of our feelings and integrating this new understanding, which will create growth and expansion of our emotional capacities.

Many of us also find that we must surrender emotionally in relationships with trustworthy people by releasing information about ourselves, exposing our feelings, and opening ourselves to receiving love and affirmation from them.

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

For many of us who are religious, the love shared between us and God creates willingness and a desire to surrender. Whether done at once or through many small decisions, spiritual surrender requires a recognition that we are a smaller force in the universe and that there is some force greater than ourselves that wants our wellbeing.

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

Behavioral surrender depends on the other three kinds of surrender (cognitive, emotional, and spiritual). For example, if we need to let go of sexual addiction, we may need to abandon such rigid beliefs as, “I can control this” (cognitive surrender). We may also need to work through deep feelings like anger and shame (emotional surrender). And we may need to submit our will to a Higher Power (spiritual surrender).

Working through and surrendering these underlying issues can have a dramatic impact on an addiction. Additional 12–step work and addiction counseling is often necessary to fully overcome an addiction.

Those of us who are concerned about gender–atypical behavior (effeminacy or “acting gay”) might need to consider that these behaviors may be a reflection of our self–perception. Emotional and cognitive surrender is the pathway to deep changes in self–perception. At the same time, choosing to surrender non–masculine behaviors and to adopt behaviors that we perceive to be more masculine can be quite helpful in the overall process.

Finally, surrendering a “distractive lifestyle” necessitates emotional surrender of our fear of the change process. It may also require a behavioral intervention to help change this pattern.

## **CONCLUSION**

The four principles of growth—masculinity, authenticity, need fulfillment, and surrender—can be a guide to help us understand the complex process of changing our lives. Many of us get stuck in this process because we unknowingly neglect essential aspects of it. By understanding the laws that govern growth out of SSA, we are empowered to move forward more quickly and more reliably.

As helpful as the principles are, we all still need outside support. Key to that support for many of us is the assistance of someone trained and experienced in counseling men through the healing and growth process. Names of qualified individuals can be obtained by visiting [www.genderwholeness.com](http://www.genderwholeness.com) or [www.peoplecanchange.com](http://www.peoplecanchange.com).

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