

Principles Corroborating SA's Interpretation of Sexual Sobriety

by
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Recently, SA completed what turned out to be a very extensive survey of the fellowship's interpretation of sexual sobriety. (See March, 1991 issue of *Essay*.) Requirements for the survey were thrust upon us in a series of events dating from early 1990. Results of this 12 December survey confirm that SA interprets "marriage" to mean traditional, legal, heterosexual marriage, and that "spouse" does not include "committed relationships" with either the same or opposite sex.

Such an interpretation of sexual sobriety is bound to create questions in the minds of some regarding those in SA whose acting out was or is with the same sex. Several comments accompanying the sobriety survey attest to this. Typical of this type of comment is the assumption that unless committed relationship sexualizing between homosexuals can be considered sober in SA, those persons are denied the right to ever have sex. On the surface, this would seem to be an appealing argument for broadening SA's definition to include sex in same-sex, and therefore any, "committed relationship."

We need to look carefully at such arguments and at this whole issue because the very essence and validity of SA are at stake. The issue strikes at the very heart of SA. Now that the matter has been forced upon us and resolved, we cannot hide our heads in the sand, hoping the issue will go away. It won't. We must face it head-on now.

Ever since attending the April 1986 and 1987 NYC Marathons, I have been examining my own assumptions in the same-sex area. That year I wrote a letter to a same-sex member sharing my thoughts; it now has the title "Recovery Reveals Our False Assumptions." That paper, which follows, gives reasons from within our common recovery experience why I believe we in SA should not endorse or validate, even indirectly, same-sex or "committed relationship" sexualizing in SA. Following that paper, I have added a condensed summary of some of the more specific reasons for such a rationale.

In presenting this material, I also want to open the door and encourage individuals and groups holding to non-SA sobriety to stop calling themselves SA and affiliate with sex addiction fellowships compatible with their own principles or start their own, instead of compromising SA's. This paper will also serve as my response to a number of comments accompanying the sobriety survey and caution us against holding any easy but invalid assumptions we may harbor on this most important and controversial subject. Let's beware lest under the guise of defending someone's "rights," we unwittingly shoot them—or SA—in the foot.

I pray you will read the following with an open mind and heart. Facing this issue honestly will call forth our very best.

Recovery Reveals Our False Assumptions

Often I have occasion to share at length with members coming from the same-sex lifestyle, and they with me. What I take away from these sessions helps me put some thoughts together. Let me share them with you now. By the way, I hesitate using the terms “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” or “straight” in talking about our sexaholism. The terms are too confining and skew thinking with a prior mind-set that limits inquiry and affects experience. The terms are too polarizing and, I feel, inoperative. They miss the mark in the new context of my recovery. Words shape ideas, and ideas shape behavior. Such simplistic labels may affect us more than we realize.

When I once shared with a recovering SA member from the same-sex lifestyle about the sexual identity crisis in my own life, he replied that, “The sex addict in recovery, be he homosexual or heterosexual, faces the fact that he must let go of his sexual identity, which has been his personal identity.” Think about it. What we are discovering in SA is that lust creates a false sexual identity that is neither heterosexual nor homosexual. As sexaholics, we might better look into a term such as *pseudo-sexual* to suit our condition.

I share about the “anatomy” of my own lust for the opposite sex. For example, I've gone through a slow-motion replay of what went on in my mind and heart in the typical masturbation experience. Comparing that with lust as it expressed itself in sex in affairs, relationships, prostitutes, and wives, I see how the basic “mechanism” is identical: *Lust is a conscious decision of my ego in rebellion to distort reality to suit my sick demand and keep me from seeing the truth about myself.* Seen in another light, lust is also a form of idolatry. I identify with what those from the same-sex lifestyle say they experience in lust and draw the same conclusion: my lust and theirs is identical. We truly have a common problem, whether it's in the area of lust or of misconnection, the essence of our illness. At heart, we talk the same language.

This helps me see what has been transpiring in my so-called “heterosexual” recovery in SA. (And this is another reason why we should all meet together in mixed meetings; it *helps* us to hear and see recovery in its various aspects.) I'm discovering that my “heterosexual” identity is changing—that mine was a perversion of sexual reality which transcended gender issues. What I see in a lust or relationship object really isn't there; I see a false reality that I myself create inside of me. (See “Anatomy of a Look” in *Recovery Continues*.) The difference between the object “out there” and what I use in my mind when lust takes over is like what Alice in Wonderland sees in the real world compared with what she experiences after going through the looking glass into her make-believe world. This reality transformation is a crucial aspect of our malady, involving not only lust but resentment and just about every other aspect of our lives that interfaces with others.

The only way I can describe what's happening in recovery is that I seem to be entering a larger dimension of life where the very need and place for sex are changing. This is an amazing journey we're on!

I could never have begun to see these things before recovery; I had to experience them. And it's taken time—years—to even begin to see. When I came in, *no one* could have told me that my so-called heterosexual addiction was not hetero at all! That it was a perversion of my sex instinct into something against nature. That every conquest was, instead of validating my manhood, as promised, reducing me to genital slavery,

damaging my sexuality, and making me *less sexual, less of a man, and less human!* Not only was I sinning against myself, I was vitiating the truth and reality of women. How self-obsessed I was. How blind to myself, how dense and stupid and unbelieving! But my affliction, plus what I've had to go through in recovery, is making a believer out of me, as it is with others in SA. Believers in the principles of our program—which is actually working! Then, believers in the truth about ourselves.

Thus, as I surrender and stay with SA as it is, my identity *as a human*, including my sexual identity, is inevitably affected. How could it be otherwise? In my addiction, my sexual identity *was* me: “You can't take *this* away from me!!” That was the delusion—that there was no higher identity than the sexual! Now I begin faintly to see what it means to simply be human, created in the image of God for union with God and other *persons*, not bodies. What a difference! The magnitude and effects of my sexual delusion are staggering! It is this very awakening to reality I'm experiencing in recovery that slowly reveals the lie inherent in all those easy assumptions I lived under and helped create and propagate:

- Sex is an appetite like eating or drinking; without it one suffers, is deprived, and is abnormal.
- Masturbation is okay and can't be harmful.
- Anything goes; more is better.
- There's nothing wrong with resorting to pictures or pornography. The human body is God's creation; how could it possibly be harmful to look at pictures of it?
- There's nothing harmful with lust; it's enjoyable and desirable.
- Sex is a necessary ingredient in a relationship.
- Sex creates true union.
- Sex is lust. Sex is love. Therefore, lust is love.
- “I need a sexual relationship; without one I suffer, am deprived, and am abnormal.”
- “*They* did it to me; I'm a victim.”
- “I prayed God would fix me but He never did, so it must be all right.”
- “I was born this way; I simply have a unique sexual preference.”
- “No one tells me what I am or what I should or should not do.”

Sound familiar? I, the addict, still in my illness, am able to label and diagnose myself and tell you what I am and what I need. Aren't these some of the underlying assumptions of sexaholics of whatever identification? The point is, if all this, after many years, is becoming apparent in “hetero” recovery, may not similar or identical false assumptions be revealed in same-sex recovery?

Typically, we seem to be coming slowly to our own independent assessment of the issues in these false assumptions. But it comes in “through the back door.” The pain of our recovery is forcing us to see the truth about ourselves and these assumptions. Slowly. After some dozen years sober, I'm just beginning to realize for the first time that my own recovery has given them the lie. Those “old ideas” have taken a long time dying, and I'm not sure they're all dead yet! They have this ghoulish way of turning over in their grave every once in awhile.

I would think it will take a considerable body of recovery to begin to see these things clearly; and we don't have that yet. I think we're just at the beginnings of any recovery in

SA (Remember, “sober is not well.”). It is reported that Bill W. thought alcoholic recovery did not really get under way until after the third year of sobriety. If you ask me, six years will prove to be more like it in SA, and even that is premature! I was in the program over seven years before I wrote my story, and I wish I would have waited longer. I knew almost nothing about the true nature of either the problem or recovery then.

Also, I wonder whether clear judgments can be made on these issues before we've gained victory not only over sex and lust, but also over anger, resentment, fear, and ego. And especially over codependency, what I like to call the *mis-connection*, or mis-dependency. It took me over ten years to begin to appreciate some of the romance and relationship components of my own addiction. As one of the pioneers in relationship addiction says, “Any kind of attraction can be fatal,” stressing that the sexual addiction is so often more than simply sexual and is combined with relationship addiction. We all have a long way to go.

Let me be utterly frank. I think the way we will come into the truth about ourselves—all of us, whatever our sexual experience—is to be utterly and completely honest about our own experiences and the thoughts and intents of our hearts. As we meet together, week after week, month after month, year after year, we must expose all our hidden secrets, doubts, and fears, casting a wary eye on all these easy assumptions we have unwittingly embraced. Let's bring it all to the light. (And we aren't able to do this without prior sobriety!) We're the ones who can't afford to be uncritical of ourselves; our very lives are at stake. We've got to honestly plumb the depths of our souls more than any others out there. *We've* got to be the pioneers in honesty concerning this whole area of “sexual orientation.” No one can do it for us; it's got to be an inside job.

Recovery is slowly revealing some deadly assumptions we have carried as part of our sexaholism. Dare any of us continue defining ourselves in terms of those “old ideas”?

Let us patiently look to God for increased understanding of ourselves and each other—”for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Reasons Why I Believe SA Should Not Endorse or Validate Same-Sex or “Committed Relationship” Sexualizing in SA

At the outset, we should note that there's a world of difference between welcoming sexaholics into SA—and we do welcome *all* who want to stop lusting and become sexually sober—and calling those who are currently sexualizing in “committed relationships” sober. SA is a fellowship in which we have chosen to define sexual sobriety rather than to leave it up to the individual sexaholic. SA follows the lead and example of AA here. In this sense, *SA is a closed society*. (That's why I believe our meetings and conventions should also be closed to sexaholics only.) “I'm sober if I say so” doesn't hold for us.

This issue has recently been thrust upon us and is gaining increasing visibility. I feel it more important to express the truth of what I feel regarding our Traditions of non-endorsement and not taking sides in public controversy (Six and Ten) than to protect some persons' feelings, even if it means possible alienation or attack on me personally. If I don't put principles above personality, how can I expect anyone else to? (Tradition Twelve)

A word about my choice of terms. In the body of media journalism on this subject since the appearance of AIDS, I've witnessed a cautious tendency to avoid terminology that might be categorical. My use of the term “same-sex” follows this example. It is a more neutral term. The rest of the paper should help explain this.

In What Ways Are We Endorsing or Validating Non-SA Sobriety?

If SA or an SA group has a sobriety requirement for persons holding office or being asked to speak, for example, and persons in same-sex or “committed relationship” sexualizing are placed knowingly in those positions, then SA has taken an action *endorsing* same-sex or committed relationship sexualizing as normative for sobriety in SA. (It has also unwittingly taken a position on a controversial political issue.)

Another way we endorse or validate non-SA sobriety is when we call or recognize people as “sober” in SA who are not SA sober.

SA and SA groups do have sobriety requirements for office and speaking. My point is that I feel SA should not validate same-sex and “committed relationship” sexualizing in any way, including the above examples. I even question whether using terms such as “homosexual,” “lesbian,” or “gay” in SA meeting lists or flyers does not also give implied endorsement. When we say that this meeting is for persons who are “gay,” for example, are we not making a judgment on a controversial political and biological issue?

The Great Same-Sex Controversy

What the issue seems to resolve to, after all the highly-charged emotions are filtered out, is whether same-sex persons are born or made that way—the biological issue. Is a person constitutionally different in his or her biology, or does a person become that way through experience?

Intense controversies rage about this issue in every area of modern life in highly polarized and publicized passion. It is one of the most explosive *political* issues of the day. Congress is divided. Religions and churches are divided. The Twelve Step program is divided. The same-sex culture itself is divided. The “experts” are divided.

The point here is this: For SA to validate same-sex sexualizing in SA, even indirectly, would have us endorsing a highly controversial biological theory and political movement against our Tenth Tradition. If we validate same-sex sexualizing *as normative for the sexaholic in recovery*, and it turns out not to be normative, SA will have been promoting an untruth and doing a devilish disservice, supporting the problem instead of recovery. That's an awesome responsibility we're dealing with here—*human lives!*

Recovery Experience

Persons coming into SA from same-sex acting out testify to progressive change in behavior and attitude. Some no longer call themselves “gay.” I have personally witnessed this transformation outside SA also, in very powerful ways. Even if only one such person, member or not, testifies to such change, it should give us pause before validating same-sex sexualizing as normative in recovery for the sexaholic. But there are many such persons, in and out of the program.

For example, Homosexuals Anonymous and scores of religious organizations testify to “recovery from homosexuality.” Many professionals in the therapeutic community testify to the same aim and recovery results. This should give us pause before SA goes on record as validating same-sex sexualizing as normative.

Certainly, some persons claim recovery while still engaging in same-sex or “committed relationship” sexualizing. The fact that persons attending Twelve Step programs “get better” is not grounds for saying that their kind of sexualizing is normative for recovery for sexaholics.

Sex is Optional

In the process of getting sober, many of us in SA have discovered a great fallacy in our thinking, that sex is just like eating; without it we cannot be normal, healthy, nurtured human beings. The great fear was that without sex we'd die! Our experience is revealing an amazing fact: Sex is not a requirement for living a happy, joyous, fulfilled and meaningful life. Sex is indeed optional. For both married and single alike.

In her 1989 book, *The New Celibacy*, Dr. Gabrielle Brown documents a recent aspect of American life—a growing trend toward celibacy, not only among singles, but with marrieds as well. Her research reveals that far from being unhealthy, sexual abstinence (and she includes abstinence from masturbation) with the right motives can be beneficial to individuals. She makes quite a case for celibacy. Here again, we neither endorse nor oppose her viewpoints, but the evidence she compiles gets one's attention. Her research is in line with SA's experience. We see in today's media increasing advocacy of sexual abstinence for a wide variety of reasons.

The point here is that if sex is truly optional for married and single alike, the deprivation argument that would have SA validate same-sex or committed-relationship sexualizing doesn't hold. Such an argument turns out to be pseudo-compassion. Sober, recovering members in SA—single and married alike—bear witness to joyously opting for celibacy. And should the aim of having a relationship be based on the desire to have sex?

Cultural Relativism

In my adult life I have witnessed the emergence and rapid rise of the “committed relationship” revolution. It is a recent phenomenon, and, I would guess, post-Korean War, starting in the Sixties. The “girlie” magazine revolution took off after 1953, the close of the Korean War, with the *Playboy* legal victory. Affairs and “shacking up” were news back then. Not today, in the aftermath of the sexual revolution. (Both the Pill and Playboy came on the scene at the same time, in the early Fifties.)

Today, we have “relationships.” And Relationships Anonymous! The rise in “relationships” has been exponential; that is, the rate of acceleration is accelerating. If we were to plot a family of curves for pornography, masturbation, promiscuity, divorce, “relationships,” and various addictions, the evidence I see tells me that they would all be exponential, taking off spectacularly about the same time, and pretty much grouped together and interactive. From personal observation, I would say that the rise of same-sex sexualizing follows this same family of curves and is also exponential and interactive with the other curves. Sociologically speaking, how could it be otherwise?

Within the last hundred years—one long lifetime—western civilization has experienced and is increasingly *experiencing the most dramatic, sudden, and cataclysmic change in human ecology in the entire history of the human race*. No wonder all the curves are taking off!

My point here is that with civilization and cultural mores in such a state of rapid and violent flux, for SA to validate committed relationship sexualizing of any sort—same- or opposite-sex—would be unconscionable and foolhardy. When you're adrift on a tossing sea of relativism, you don't go around making knee-jerk judgments on the true nature of reality, declaring this or that trend to be normative for human experience, much less normative for recovering sex and relationship addicts! What you need in such a case is an anchor, some stability and external reference points so you can get your bearings. And that is precisely what SA offers.

The Rediscovery of Marriage in Recovery

Eye has not seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

Today, we live in a world where the very air we breathe is promiscuous and anti-marriage. Does that mean we should validate “committed relationship” sexualizing in SA? This atmosphere is but another indicator of the extreme pathology of our times. I feel we have lost the true meaning of marriage. I certainly did. I never had it. Neither did my family. Alcoholism destroys families; *sexaholism destroys the very concept of family*.

What if SA is pointing toward and giving hope for a rediscovery of what marriage can be for us, under God? Who would have thought that healing was possible in our relational interface, even in that place where damage was the greatest, that sacred union with wife or husband? But it is happening! “Marriage is our last best chance of growing up.” I believe that now, and SA's experience is saying Yes to that. Of course, some of us are choosing celibacy, as God's will for us in recovery. Marriage may not be for everyone, and some of us choose celibacy in marriage.

Let's make haste slowly before we put SA in the position of validating non-married sexualizing in SA.

Homophobia

Definition: *“Unreasoning fear of or antipathy toward homosexuals and homosexuality”* (Random House II). (It's interesting that the term came into usage in the late Fifties, just as the Sexual Revolution was getting underway.) Granted, there's unreasoning fear and antipathy regarding the same-sex experience in the world. However, I'm hard pressed to detect any of this in SA meetings. To the contrary, I see and hear a lot of tolerance, identification, and compassion. I do confess to having been afraid of *lust* in any form. You could call me lustophobic. Now there's a term most of us could hang our hats on! I've been struck by both forms of the rattlesnake and don't want any part of any of lust. And one of my great joys today is increasingly surrendering fear of lust. It's all right to be tempted; I have a Way out today. There's victory over lust and all its fear, thank God.

Listen to how one member put this recently:

“My addiction can't accept same-sex sexualizing in SA because of what I experienced in my acting out. It's toxic for me. . . . I just can't be around it any more.”

How To Treat Same-Sex and “Committed Relationship” Persons in SA

With understanding and compassion, just like we would want to be treated. Most of us know some very dear people from these experiences. In some meetings, they may even make up a considerable percentage of members. However, this doesn't mean we have to accommodate or validate same-sex or “committed relationship” sexualizing or call ourselves or other members sober when we are not. We support recovery in anyone of any experience. But I feel our big problem in SA today is that we are supporting the illness of lust in many forms, in marrieds and singles alike. That's what could kill SA.

Putting Personality Before Principle. If persons say they are sexual in a long-term “committed relationship” with a partner whom they call “spouse,” that is their privilege. However, when it is said that SA sobriety should embrace that sexualizing and call it sober, this is another matter. What this really says is that we should change SA's principle of sobriety to suit one's personal experience or preference. This is doing the very opposite of our Twelfth Tradition; it is deriving principle from personality. We must not do that.

Summary

There's great political pressure in our world today to validate or endorse same-sex and “committed-relationship” sexualizing. At least two other fellowships have gone on record as validating such sexualizing as normative for recovery for sex addicts. They have (unwittingly, perhaps) come down on one side of a great public controversy and are thus endorsing a political movement against their own Tenth and Sixth Traditions. Let us make haste slowly before we do the same. No one's going to be left out in the cold if they leave SA, thank God. Let's allow this great historical experiment to run its course. Let's

be true to our own special SA calling and principle, and let's trust God that He has a purpose in and through SA. Time will tell.

In the meantime, dare we validate, even silently or indirectly, what might appear to be a good but may prove to be the enemy of the best?

Conclusion: We *Are* Responsible

In its recent sobriety survey, SA has spoken unambiguously and in unanimity on its interpretation of sexual sobriety. This paper has presented a brief rationale for this position and several reasons why I feel very strongly that SA should not validate or endorse, even silently or indirectly, same-sex or "committed relationship" sexualizing in SA.

I do not want to debate or try to change anyone's mind. People believe what they want to believe, and they have a right to their beliefs. However, I personally can and do encourage people to affiliate according to their preferences instead of remaining in SA and compromising SA or trying to change SA.

If individuals or groups truly believe in some interpretation of sobriety other than what has been recently revalidated in the sobriety survey, or if that is not what they want for themselves, I urge them to have the courage to be true to their personal convictions and affiliate with an organization whose views are compatible with their own. There are other national organizations from which to choose, including Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous and Sex Addicts Anonymous. I feel changing affiliation in accordance with one's own principles is the right and conscionable thing to do. Right for individuals and groups and right for SA. Some groups have already done this. I honor their decision and wish them well.

No individual, group, or intergroup need be *mis*-dependent on SA. Often, I suspect, the only reason persons or groups stay with SA is because that's the fellowship with which they started. I remember my first two years in AA; I knew there were other groups about, but I never dared set foot outside my home group until I got the courage to do so, even though I was dying with cigarette smoke. Change is fearful for us addicts, but change is part of life and growing up.

Our situation in SA seems to mirror the national dilemma of the United States during the Civil War, when it became apparent that the U.S. could no longer survive both slave and free. Any hope of union could only succeed on the basis of *union in fundamental principle*. Likewise, SA cannot survive and provide a safe haven of recovery today while we remain divided on our most basic principle—the interpretation of what constitutes sobriety for the sexaholic. In our case, the ready solution is already before us—choosing an affiliation according to our own principles. We don't need a Civil War. Why otherwise were there provided these sex addiction organizations holding to different concepts of sobriety, all coming into being about the same time?

May God grant us all the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. His will, not ours be done.