

The Science of Sexual Orientation: A Reformed (and Reforming) Perspective

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Social conservatives affirm covenant marriage and the goodness of sexuality within marriage. And so do I. I have written two marriage-supporting books. I have explained the benefits of marriage and the toxicity of pornography in psychology textbooks. And my family foundation has been a major donor to the marriage-supporting National Marriage Project.

At a younger age, I further agreed that same-sex activity—even between long-term, faithful partners—was immoral. But a closer reading of science and Scripture changed my mind, and led me to instead affirm an inclusive marriage-supporting view: *The world would be a happier and healthier place if, for all people, love, sex, and marriage routinely went together*—for the following reasons (explained at tinyurl.com/MyersSexOrient): .

1. *Sexual orientation is a natural, enduring disposition.* Multiple lines of research—from prenatal hormonal influences, genetics, and neuroscience—converge in indicating that our sexual orientation is something we do not choose. Considerable evidence also indicates that, especially for men, sexual orientation endures. Telling people otherwise has been the source of much anguish and suicide—and many failed heterosexual marriages. Small wonder that so many of yesterday’s “ex-gay” ministry leaders are now “ex-ex-gays.”
2. *All humans have a “need to belong.”* We are social animals. We—all of us, whether gay or straight—flourish when deeply connected with others in close, enduring, mutually supportive relationships. We were not made to be alone. Covenant partnership is healthy.
3. *“There’s a wideness in God’s mercy.”* Among the Bible’s 31,103 verses, only seven explicitly mention same-sex behaviors (and none of those discuss same-sex covenant partnerships). That leaves scholars to exegete those seven “clobber passages” and to interpret Scripture’s moral wisdom, based also on biblical teachings about marriage and human relationships. A growing Reformed-evangelical perspective argues that the church has misread the Bible, which actually supports a consistent sexual ethic for gay and straight people. A half-dozen recent books (including from within our RCA community—James Brownson’s *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*) have persuaded many of us that our former anti-gay views were not honoring biblical moral wisdom about covenant relationships.
4. *Anti-gay views drive teens and young adults away from the church.* In seeking to explain the dramatic rise in religious “nones,” researchers Robert Putnam and David Campbell report that “intolerance of homosexuality” is “the single strongest factor” in alienating today’s youth and young adults from the church. In a PRRI survey, 39 percent of 18 to 29-year olds said “negative religious teachings about and treatment of the gay and lesbian community was a primary reason for leaving their childhood faith.” Two-thirds of Americans now support same-sex marriage (even more among young Americans). Thus, David Brooks advises the church: “Put aside an effort that has been a communications disaster, reducing a rich, complex and beautiful faith into a public obsession with sex.”

We biblically-rooted Reformed folk can appreciate the affirmation of marriage. But we can also, in the spirit of our ever-reforming tradition, appreciate the emerging scientific and biblical understandings of sexual orientation and covenant sexual ethics. . . . and without fueling the damaging public perception that the church is anti-gay and obsessed with sex.