"When Did You Decide to Be Gay?"

Taeer Bar-Yam

June 11, 2017

For a long time I have struggled intellectually with the idea of sexual orientation. Why are some people 'straight', and some people 'gay'? Why can't we just be attracted to the people we are attracted to, and stop putting labels on it? But there was one problem with that philosophy: I was straight. Definitively straight. In a very innate way, women just *excited* me in a way men didn't; sexually, and romantically. Recently, this friction between ideology and reality started to bother me. I talked to a few friends about it, half jokingly saying how I wished I were bisexual, so that I could deny the existence of sexual orientation altogether. Then one of my friends, who knew me especially well told me "so do it". I dismissed this at first; after all, wasn't I Born This Way? Sexual orientation isn't something you can just change. But the thought stuck with me. I've found throughout my life that I have a lot easier time actively controlling my thoughts and emotions than other people seem to think is reasonable, so I thought that might work here too. And besides, I've always liked challenging these kinds of ideological narratives, so I decided I would do it; I would try to become bi.

I started by doing some research online: had anyone else tried this? Were there known successful methods? Nothing. This doesn't surprise me though, seeing as most of the effort seems to be religious groups trying to coercively make people straight, unsuccessfully.[1] So I used a home-brewed methodology, the most natural thing that came to me. When I looked at men, I made an effort to trigger in myself the response I usually have when seeing a woman.

There were a few things I started noticing. The most glaring, and the one that told me I was on the right track, was something like a voice in my head. Not literally a voice in my head, but some kind of internal voice that told me "that's not someone you are attracted to. No, no. Not

---

[1] More on this when I get to the conclusions I've drawn.

at all. You're not attracted to men." This was the narrative I told about myself, the voice of my social conditioning. I was quite literally experiencing my social conditioning telling me how to act and who to be attracted to. So I pushed against it, and the second thing I noticed was that it worked; I was able (to some extent) to have that same reaction to men that I'd had to women for years.[2] I think I found that a big part of my social conditioning lies in not trusting guys. I can't get comfortable around guys (sexually or romantically) because I don't trust them to respect my space. Obviously many men are very respectful, and often gentle and passive, but this is still an intuition I have.

Two other things were progressing at the same time. I had begun to watch some gay porn. At first, it didn't do anything for me; I was completely turned off. But as I learned to silence the voice telling me "No, that's not for you", that changed. Within a couple of weeks, I could easily get off to gay porn. I had also begun talking to a guy on a dating site. I was kind of nervous about it, but we were just chatting, nothing was happening, it was all fine. The eventful moment here was when he asked me "Are you doing okay?" I'd had an emotionally draining evening the night before that I'd told him about, and that expression of caring made me smile: a momentary romantic spark. It may have been momentary, but it proved it was possible.

I hit a plateau at this point; I wasn't getting any more attracted to men, but I wasn't really there yet. I decided the next step was to actually hook up with a guy, but that was a *really* daunting prospect. I still had all of this social conditioning yelling at me not to, so I decided it would be easier to do this first in a threesome. Having a woman there would set me more at ease (remember part of the issue was not trusting men), it would be less intense, and I could step back from it as much as I wanted if it was overwhelming.[3] There were a couple of friends of mine who were dating, and would almost certainly be amenable, but I was very nervous about doing it with them. The man in the couple was exactly what I was afraid of in men: he wasn't very good at respecting my

---

[2]I noticed something else as well, something I was not expecting at all. I started being less attracted to women. Ultimately, I didn't want to be gay (remember the point was to be bi), but I decided this would make a way better story, and if my sexuality were really that malleable, I could always change it again afterward. So I started actively pushing myself *away* from being attracted to women. This part of the experiment did not last long. I went out dancing, and there were a lot of attractive, flirtatious women and I just gave up. I wouldn't be surprised, though, if I could have managed it if I'd actually wanted to.

[3]I'd never actually had a threesome before this; this was all conjecture.

space. However, one night we were hanging out, there was an opportunity of sorts, and they spent the night.[4] So I'd hooked up with a guy.

The next day my whole view was abruptly different. It was almost as if by proving to myself that I could hook up with a guy, I'd undone a whole layer of social conditioning. I started seeing men, and genuinely wanting to cuddle with them, to have them as emotional support, to be with them. I started seeing them as potential romantic partners. This change lasted about a day before it faded back to how it had been. But a similar transition has followed every encounter with homosexuality I've had since.

Remember the guy I was talking to on the dating site? We went on a date. It went pretty well and ended in hooking up and him spending the night. It wasn't perfect—the voice of social conditioning didn't leave me alone for longer than a minute, and so I was uncomfortable throughout, but it was undeniable that I was no longer straight.

At some point I went to a friend's gay-themed birthday party, and aside from not being super used to club dancing, it was actually pretty fun. One thing I noticed though, was how utterly shocked I was to see men kissing each other. It's something I never see—not in media, not in real life. I remembered, also, that before I had explicitly looked for gay porn, I'd never seen it. It's completely segregated from all other pornography so that nobody accidentally comes accross it. Male homosexuality is completely hidden from view. Unsurprisingly, after the party it was much more natural to think of men in sexual and romantic ways for a while.

Obviously, the journey is not over. One day I hope to date a man, but in the meantime I feel that the experiment has produced enough results that they are worth reporting and analyzing.

Conclusions

First off, it might be tempting to propose that I was simply bi all along. While that is *possible* I strongly reject that conclusion, because it doesn't match up with my experience. I was straight, there was no question as to my straightness, I didn't even have a problem with being straight. I

---

[4]I also decided that since we had been pretty good friends for a couple of years, and he knew this was an issue for me, I could call him out on it if I felt uncomfortable. That worked okay.

chose to *become* bi and succeeded. My aim is not to invalidate anyone's sexual orientation (including my own) because it's "just" a product of social conditioning. Social conditioning does not make anything less real, it just makes it less *necessary*, more changeable.

The serious implications of this experiment come about when you consider that I am almost certainly not alone. If this has been my experience, how many other people have sexual orientations determined by social conditioning? A naive assumption would be that everyone is like me; everyone has their sexual orientation due to social conditioning. This seems very unlikely though. What social conditioning makes gay people gay? Often times they must *overcome* social conditioning to accept their sexuality. Furthermore, they often try very hard to become straight with no success. So it seems natural to think that most, if not all, gay people are not like me—their sexuality is in some sense innate and unchangeable. I suspect, however, that for many if not most straight people, their sexuality is like mine, socially conditioned.

My reasoning is as follows [5] [6]: other societies throughout history have had very different concepts and practices of sexuality. For instance in ancient Greece, homosexuality was commonly practiced between mentors and pupils. I can see three possible explanations of this:

1. That some ridiculous percentage of the population of Ancient Greece were suppressing their straight sexuality. This seems absurd; why would those norms have developed in the first place?

2. That biologically, innately, significantly more of the population was gay or bi in ancient Greece than in today's society, due to either species change or environmental factors. While this is possible, it seems pretty far fetched.

3. That most people's sexuality is determined by social conditioning, and in Ancient Greece, that involved men having sex with both men and women.

---

[5]It is worth noting that I am not a historical scholar. My understanding of historical societies is definitely questionable.

[6]There is also an aesthetic appeal to my theory, in that we can assume that there are the same number of truly gay and truly straight people, and that the majority of people just accept the dominant societal paradigm. One could maybe turn this aesthetic argument into an Occam's razor argument, but there are also good reasons to think that heterosexuality and homosexuality are treated different biologically.

Of course, if some people are just innately gay or bi, it makes sense to assume that some people are just innately straight as well, but that most of the population has a much more fluid sexual orientation, that is simply determined by the society they're in.

This sheds some light on another mystery too. It is said that women tend to have more fluid sexualities than men—that they are turned on by women even if they are straight, that they are more likely to be bi, etc. Could that simply be a product of how women are socialized differently from men? People have proposed evolutionary arguments, but social conditioning is another possible explanation.[7]

There is some amount of fear coming from more traditional voices that accepting homosexuality in our society, having gay parents, and so on will increase the prevalence of homosexuality and so to speak "turn our children gay". The response from the left has mostly been that this is ridiculous, and that people are born with their sexualities and societal acceptance doesn't change that. My findings seem to suggest otherwise. It's possible that by accepting homosexuality as normal, we will see more children socialized to be gay or bi.[8] I'm not suggesting that this is a bad thing, but if you are someone who thinks it is, there may indeed be reason for concern. This doesn't resolve the question of gay acceptance though, since as I've said I suspect that many people are intrinsically gay, and it is important for them to have safe and nurturing childhoods and lives.

I'd like to note that this experiment has also helped me to see some of the ways in which I subconsciously treat men and women differently. That I trusted women more inherently than I trusted men, that I thought of men as more threatening, that I never objectified men, whereas I did women. It is still hard to get away from these assumptions, but becoming aware of them is a good first step.

---

[7]Socialization isn't actually mutually exclusive with the evolutionary arguments, the argument could just be that this is why our societies evolved to socialize men and women in these ways.

[8]In particular, being in gay spaces and seeing gay people and acts in media have made it a lot easier for me to become bi.