

AFTER LOLLY AND JOSH WEED: COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET ON MIXED-ORIENTATION MARRIAGES

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SESSION DESCRIPTION

- Josh and Lolly Weed, parents of 4 daughters and members of the LDS, “came out” in 2014 about the status of their marriage as being one of “mixed-orientation.”
- Josh identifies as having same-sex attraction while Lolly does not.
- They asserted their commitment to stay married because of, among other things, religious beliefs.
- 4 years later, they announced the ending of their marriage and made an apology to the LGBTQ community.
 - What can we learn from Josh and Lolly?
 - What presenting issues and needs are particular to these couples?
 - How does a therapist provide space for a MOM in whatever way the couple is choosing to navigate their relationship?
 - What role does spirituality and spiritual development play in this process?
- This session will explore this delicate and complex topic, the coming out process for these couples, and specific interventions for this work.
 - Participant discussion and involvement will be encouraged.

PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- ...identify unique issues and needs for mixed-orientation couples presenting for therapy.
- ...describe the “coming out” process for a mixed-orientation marriage.
- ...name ways clinicians can intentionally provide space for the personal, relational, and spiritual work that will take place on the journey for these couples.
- ...specify interventions for working with mixed-orientation marriages presenting for support in therapy.

ENTER-ACTION

DEFINING TERMS

- Mixed-Orientation Marriage
 - MOM, MORelationship, MOCouple
- Straight Spouse
- Queer
- Coming Out

STATISTICS

- Around 2 million gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals in the United States are or have been heterosexually married (2004).
 - Probably more now
- Between 80-85% of mixed-orientation marriages end in divorce. But divorce is not necessarily inevitable.
- Data from marriages starting as same-sex marriages isn't yet robust.
 - *Obergefell v. Hodges* in June of 2015

HOW DOES THIS EVEN HAPPEN?

- Why would a person who is gay end up in a heterosexual marriage?
- “I was always one of Josh’s sounding boards as he processed his sexual orientation and change efforts. That year, in the process of acting like a straight person, we both agreed it was probably a good idea for him to start dating girls to see if he could like them. So, he dated my roommate and best friend. When he did that, I started viewing him as a straight person, because that is how he was acting...like a straight person, which was attractive to me because *I am straight*. I was romantically and physically attracted to “straight-acting Josh.” So, I allowed myself to fall in love with him. And Josh, having grown up in the church, had no idea what love or infatuation even were. So he believed in this version of “straight-acting Josh” too. I know that sounds messed up and it really is messed up. But, hindsight is 20/20. This was how I let myself fall in love with a gay man.”
- “The friendship was real. The romance was the illusion.”

TRANSITION INTO “NEW” MARRIAGE OR OUT OF MARRIAGE

- Society is changing:
 - This is attributable to the lessening of the power in the institution of marriage,
 - the increased awareness in the fluidity of sexual orientation and preference,
 - the increased recognition of the seasonality of partnered relationships, and
 - the increased social openness toward diversity and inclusivity.
- Shame and Judgment are Decreasing and Increasing (reactive non-majoritized polarization)
- What does success look like for each person in the system (including you)?

MOMS UNIQUE CHALLENGES

- responding to and managing the disclosure process
- navigating their sexual identity
- negotiating their sexual relationship
- possible extramarital sexual activity
- dealing with negative pressure from family and outside communities

- Kays, Yarmouth, Ripley, 2014

TYPICAL COMING OUT STAGES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Cass Model (1979, 1984, 1996)

- Prestage: Hetero-assumption
- 1. Identity confusion
- 2. Identity comparison
- 3. Identity tolerance
- 4. Identity acceptance
- 5. Identity pride
- 6. Identity synthesis

Other “Coming Out “ Stage Models

- Defense strategies to allow an individual to block same-sex attraction.
- A gradual recognition and tentative acceptance of same-sex attraction occurs.
- An identity crisis occurs often after first same-sex relationship.
- Individual begins to accept same-sex feelings and becomes internally integrated.

THE COUPLE “COMING OUT” PROCESS

- The mixed-orientation couple has a “coming out” process of their own as a couple. It is incredibly hard and traumatic for both of them.
- When a gay spouse steps out of the closet, the straight partner usually goes immediately in.
- Each partner has a "coming-out" process to undergo, but they can negotiate this process together, as a couple.
- When the disclosure occurs affects the process (generally still divorce), also affecting the new relationship.
- Remember to assess for depression, suicidality, and homicidality with any “coming out” process.

NON-LINEAR COUPLE PHASES OF COMING OUT



-William Wedin, director of Bisexual Psychological Services in NYC

Within these phases you will see:

- shock/denial
- feelings of betrayal
- grief
- forgiveness (of each other and of themselves)
- meaning making

WHY STAY MARRIED?

- Ages
- Personalities
- Their level of sexual openness
- The degree to which they are invested in each other financially, emotionally, and psychologically
- Children
- Their belief systems or religious views
- Being “hetero-emotional” (romantically oriented toward the opposite sex)
- Enjoyment of the domestic pleasures of married life and the partnerships they have formed with their spouses
- Loss of companionship and nurturance of their partners

RESILIENCE/PROTECTIVE FACTORS – KAYS ET AL.

- Strong communication – communication that is open, honest, empathetic, and frequent has been identified by several studies as an important relationship characteristic that may facilitate relationship quality and help MOCs *maintain their relationship*
- The couple's ability to be flexible and renegotiate the rules, meanings, and expectations of their relationship
- Commitment – “the degree to which an individual experiences long-term orientation toward a relationship, including the desire to maintain the relationship for better or worse” (Impett, Beals, and Peplau, 2002, p. 312)
- Forgiveness
- Marital values (contractual vs. coventental)

NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY

- Discussion of possibilities
 - closed loop marriage
 - open marriage
 - separation
 - divorce
- Unique concerns
 - living arrangements
 - parenting
 - communities, friends, and events

THE MARRIAGE THAT NEVER REALLY ENDS

- Statistics show that most of these marriages will “end.”
- However, with support they can avoid bitterness and enjoy a lifelong relationship in other ways.
- What will influence our ability to create a space where that kind of relationship can develop?

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Our role as a therapist (Guide, Advocate, Coach)
- Knowledge of stages of “Coming Out” ...as an individual and as a couple.
- Recognizing our own biases on what we think “should” happen and when.
- Tolerating discomfort...the individual, the couple, and our own.
- Attending to religious beliefs and faith development stages.

**“IN THE WEED FAMILY,
NOBODY GETS KICKED OUT
AND EVERYONE BELONGS”**

<http://joshweed.com/2018/01/turning-unicorn-bat-post-announce-end-marriage/>

<http://joshweed.com/2018/06/dear-family-and-friends-a-letter-about-my-divorce-written-on-my-16th-wedding-anniversary-by-lolly/>

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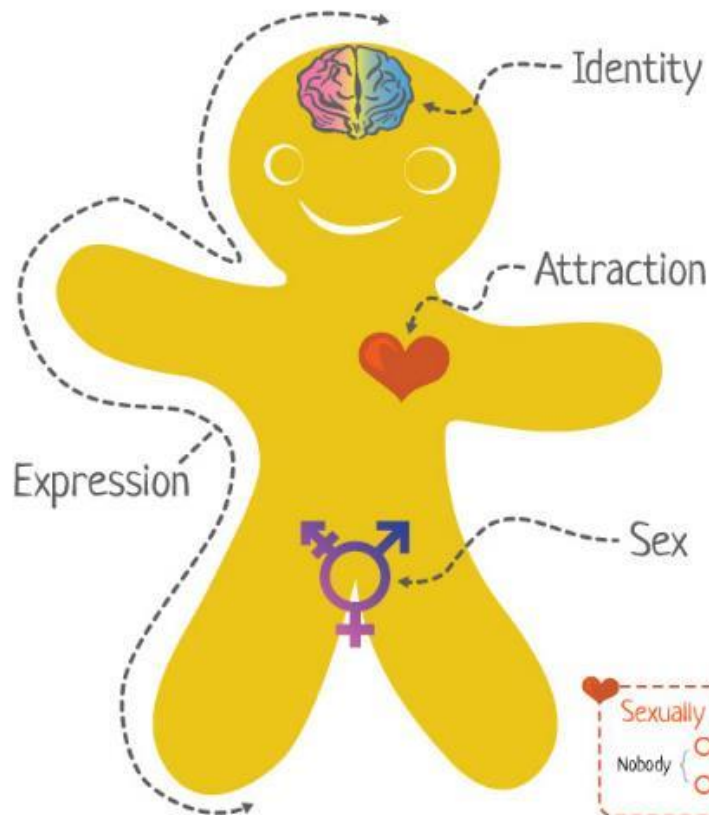
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THANK YOU!

The Genderbread Person v3.3

by its pronounced **METROsexual.com**

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more. In fact, that's the idea.



Plot a point on both continua in each category to represent your identity; combine all ingredients to form your Genderbread. 4 (of infinite) possible plot and label combos

Gender Identity

Indicates a lack of what's on the right:

Woman-ness

Man-ness

How you, in your head, define your gender; based on how much you align (or don't align) with what you understand to be the options for gender.

Labels: "woman", "man", "two-spirit", "gender-queer"

Gender Expression

Feminine

Masculine

The ways you present gender; through your actions, dress, and demeanor; and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

Labels: "butch", "femme", "androgynous", "gender neutral"

Biological Sex

Female-ness

Male-ness

The physical sex characteristics you're born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair; hormones, chromosomes, etc.

Labels: "trans", "trans*", "transsexual", "MTF Female"

Sexually Attracted to

Nobody

(Women/Females/Femininity)

(Men/Males/Masculinity)

Romantically Attracted to

Nobody

(Women/Females/Femininity)

(Men/Males/Masculinity)

ORIENTATION

	F6	F5	F4	F3	F2	F1	F0
ATTRACTION TYPE	E6	E5	E4	E3	E2	E1	E0
	D6	D5	D4	D3	D2	D1	D0
	C6	C5	C4	C3	C2	C1	C0
	B6	B5	B4	B3	B2	B1	B0
	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

PURPLE-RED SCALE OF SEXUAL ATTRACTION

ATTRACTION TYPES

- **A (Aromantic Asexuality):** Experiences no attraction, besides friendship and/or aesthetic attraction.
- **B (Romantic Asexuality):** Not interested in sexual relations whatsoever, but open to romance, touch or bonds stronger than friendship/
- **C (Tertiary Sexuality):** Experiences no sexual attraction, but willing to do it for other reasons, such as children, pleasing their partners, etc.
- **D (Secondary Sexuality):** May develop lustful feelings over the course of a relationship, but not at first.
- **E (Primary Sexuality):** Sexual desire is established from the get-go, even if it is not acted upon. However, other components (such as companionship) are essential to these individuals.
- **F (Hyper Sexuality):** Sex is the be-all-end-all purpose of any relationship. Everything else is just a consolation prize or means to an end.

ORIENTATIONS

- **0:** Exclusively attracted to opposite sex.
- **1:** Mostly attracted to the opposite sex.
- **2:** Prefers the opposite sex, but is also attracted to the same sex
- **3:** Equal Attraction (Bisexual or biromantic)
- **4:** Prefers the same sex, but is also attracted to the opposite sex.
- **5:** Mostly attracted to the same sex.
- **6:** Exclusively attracted to the same sex.

- **STAGE 1: Identity Confusion** - Characterized by feelings of turmoil, in which one questions previously held assumptions about one's sexual orientation.
 - Task: Who am I? - Accept, Deny, Reject.
 - Possible Responses: Will avoid information about lesbians and gays; inhibit behavior; deny homosexuality ("experimenting," "an accident," "just drunk"). Males: May keep emotional involvement separate from sexual contact; Females: May have deep relationships that are nonsexual, though strongly emotional.
 - Possible Needs: May explore internal positive and negative judgments. Will be permitted to be uncertain regarding sexual identity. May find support in knowing that sexual behavior occurs along a spectrum. May receive permission and encouragement to explore sexual identity as a normal experience (like career identity, and social identity).
- **STAGE 2: Identity Comparison** - Characterized by feelings of alienation in which one accepts that possibility of being gay or lesbian and becomes isolated from non-gay others.
 - Task: Deal with social alienation.
 - Possible Responses: May begin to grieve for losses and the things she or he will give up by embracing their sexual orientation. May compartmentalize their own sexuality. Accepts lesbian, gay definition of behavior but maintains "heterosexual" identity of self. Tells oneself, "It's only temporary"; "I'm just in love with this particular woman/man"; etc.
 - Possible Needs: Will be very important that the person develops own definitions. Will need information about sexual identity, lesbian, gay community resources, encouragement to talk about loss of heterosexual life expectations. May be permitted to keep some "heterosexual" identity (it is not an all or none issue).
- **STAGE 3: Identity Tolerance** - Characterized by feelings of ambivalence in which one seeks out other gays and lesbians but maintains separate public and private images.
 - Task: Decrease social alienation by seeking out lesbians and gays.
 - Possible Responses: Beginning to have language to talk and think about the issue. Recognition that being lesbian or gay does not preclude other options. Accentuates difference between self and heterosexuals. Seeks out lesbian and gay culture (positive contact leads to more positive sense of self, negative contact leads to devaluation of the culture, stops growth). May try out variety of stereotypical roles.
 - Possible Needs: Be supported in exploring own shame feelings derived from both internal and external heterosexism. Receive support in finding positive lesbian, gay community connections. It is particularly important for the person to know community resources.
- **STAGE 4: Identity Acceptance** - Characterized by selective disclosure in which one begins the legitimization (publicly as well as privately) of one's sexual orientation.
 - Task: Deal with inner tension of no longer subscribing to society's norm, attempt to bring congruence between private and public view of self.
 - Possible Responses: Accepts gay or lesbian self-identification. May compartmentalize "gay life". Maintains less and less contact with heterosexual community. Attempts to "fit in" and "not make waves" within the gay and lesbian community. Begins some selective disclosures of sexual identity. More social coming out; more comfortable being seen with groups of men or women that are identified as "gay". More realistic evaluation of situation.
 - Possible Needs: Continue exploring grief and loss of heterosexual life expectations. Continue exploring internalized "homophobia". Find support in making decisions about where, when, and to whom he or she self-discloses.
- **STAGE 5: Identity Pride** - Characterized by anger, pride, and activism in which one becomes immersed in the gay subculture and rejects non-gay people, institutions, and values.
 - Task: Deal with incongruent views of heterosexuals.
 - Possible Responses: Splits world into "gay" (good) and "straight" (bad). Experiences disclosure crises with heterosexuals, as he or she is less willing to blend in. Identifies gay culture as sole source of support; all gay friends, business connections, social connections.
 - Possible Needs: Receive support for exploring anger issues. Find support for exploring issues of heterosexism. Develop skills for coping with reactions and responses to disclosure of sexual identity. Resist being defensive!
- **STAGE 6: Identity Synthesis** - Characterized by clarity and acceptance in which one moves beyond the dichotomized worldview to an incorporation of one's sexual orientation as one aspect of a more integrated identity.
 - Task: Integrate gay and lesbian identity so that instead of being the identity, it is on aspect of self.
 - Possible Responses: Continues to be angry at heterosexism, but with decreased intensity. Allows trust of others to increase and build. Gay and lesbian identity is integrated with all aspects of "self." Feels all right to move out into the community and not simply define space according to sexual orientation.
 - Possible Needs: Allows trust of others to increase and build. Gay and lesbian identity is integrated with all aspects of "self." Feels alright to move out into the community and not simply define space according to sexual orientation.

*Source: Adapted from Cass, V. Homosexual Identity Development, 1979.

https://www.wcupa.edu/_services/stu.lgb/documents/identityModule.pdf