

How can we change our sexual orientation?

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We have been analyzing human sexuality in recent meetings, we will continue the topic at this meeting.

In this context, *sexuality* refers to the means for creating and satisfying sexual arousal. Sexual arousal, in turn, is a well-defined physiological process. Satisfying sexual arousal is similar to satisfying hunger since both are hormonally based.

Here are the topics of the last two meetings:

Where do we get our sexual preferences?

Is sexual promiscuity genetically endowed?

In this meeting, we'll continue analyzing sexuality by asking the following question:

How can we change our sexual orientation?

There are three main insights that enable us to understand our sexuality:

- ◆ The nature of our mind
- ◆ The nature of our biological endowment
- ◆ The nature of our experiences

The following summarizes these insights.

Our sexual preferences are learned just as our food preferences are learned. Sexual preferences, like food preferences, are learned by the automatic unit of our mind, and such learning will be influenced by biologically endowed personality propensities interacting with life experiences.

More specifically, a person is genetically endowed with the physiological functioning of sexual organs and sexual hormones, and a person's sexual behavior beyond these basic physiological functions is the result of learning and personal choice. Thus, just as humans are biologically endowed to feel pleasure in a sweet taste and feel displeasure in a bitter taste, so humans are biologically endowed to feel pleasure in genital stimulation. Our preferences beyond such basic physiological functions are the result of learning and personal choice.

As a result, human sexuality — the means for creating and satisfying sexual arousal — is not inherently relational. A person must learn to make their sexuality relational, and doing so usually confers a sexual orientation on the person. If human sexuality were inherently relational, due to natural selection it would necessarily be heterosexual in order to propagate the species. But since human sexuality is not inherently relational, it is not necessarily heterosexual, and this makes it possible for humans to learn homosexuality, as well as any other means imaginable for creating and satisfying sexual arousal.

Sexual preferences — and, hence, sexual orientation — can be changed, just as food preferences can be changed, with a qualification, as follows. We can't erase our prior preferences, but with concentrated effort we can override them. Yet, to do so we will need adequate motivation and adequate social support. Furthermore, retraining our automatic unit may require concentrated effort over a period of time. The same applies to longstanding, highly automated food preferences.

The reason that longstanding sexual preferences seem biologically endowed is that they have become highly automated in the automatic unit of our mind. And the same applies to longstanding food preferences. It takes concentrated effort over a period of time to change highly automated preferences and highly automated behavioral patterns. As we all know, it can be quite challenging to change a longstanding habit! So it is with longstanding, highly automated food preferences and sexual preferences.

Meeting format

To continue our analysis of sexuality, we will interactively reason through the problem of how we can change our sexual orientation.

Such a change will require adequate motivation, so we can think of hypothetical situations that could establish motives for such a change. Such motivation must be integrated with our high-level goals in life and our complementary values.

We will also consider the fact that we can't erase our prior preferences, but with concentrated effort we can override them. And we will consider differences among people in this regard.

For some people, preferences are more strongly held than for other people, and for a given person, some preferences are more strongly held than are others.

Furthermore, some people can override strong preferences more readily than other people can, as in changing a bad habit or in overcoming an addiction, such as smoking. More specifically, some people have greater control in disapproving the urges of their automatic unit than other people do. However, such control depends on a person's goals and on their complementary values. For example, a man who realizes superlative discipline in developing his professional skills may not exhibit such discipline in his sexual relations with women.