
Not A One-Sided Being

A Jungian Perspective On Therapy With Gay Men

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Abstract

This paper examines ideas on therapy with gay men drawn from the essay *Not A One-Sided Sexual Being: Clinical Work with Gay Men from a Jungian Perspective* by Scott Wirth¹, a Jungian analyst who works in San Francisco.

Introduction

My aim in presenting this paper is to highlight the main ideas of Wirth's essay, to encourage discussion of these ideas, and to find how they fit with our experience of working with gay men. I write as a gay man and hence acknowledge the bias this introduces. For me sexual attraction between members of the same gender is normal for an appreciable percentage of the human race. I am interested in a Jungian perspective because I find comfort and inspiration in the works and ideas of Jung. I mention ideas from Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Scott Wirth and others.

Difference and Integration, the title chosen for the 1997 conference to celebrate the first fifty years of the Association's life, is particularly apt. Each of my gay clients has without exception described growing up feeling different, (although they are not alone in this). Integration of these feelings into their psyches, and integration of themselves into society or into some subset of it, is a common goal which many seek.

I use the word "gay" rather than "homosexual" because the latter has strong clinical connotations and has been largely rejected by the people to whom it applies. Both words are to a degree unisexual, unlike the phrase "men who have

1 In Hopcke, Carrington and Wirth, (1993).

sex with men” which is sometimes used today. You might wonder why, after the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill in 1986, gay men need help from counsellors and psychotherapists. Ingrained societal attitudes do not instantly change when a law changes. Prejudice and homophobia still exist in New Zealand and still harmfully influence the lives of young gay people. Prejudice and homophobia explain why there are men under forty in our society who, as teenagers, were placed in mental hospitals and sedated because they were gay².

My awareness of being different and my integration of this difference took longer than it takes many young gay people in today’s society. As a teenager my sources of information about different sexualities were encyclopaedias and newspaper reports of the trials of paedophiles. The latter suggested homosexuality and paedophilia were identical; the former, perhaps biased by interpretations of Freud, seemed to suggest I had suffered arrested development based on some abnormality in relationship with one or other of my parents. When I eventually read *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, the biography of Carl Jung, I discovered that psychology had something other than suggestions of arrested development, behaviour modification and aversion therapy to offer the gay man.

George Weinberg, in *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* suggests that Freud believed there were four ways a person could become a homosexual³:

1. Fixation resulting from the failure to develop along the natural course.
2. Castration fear based on a man’s fear of putting his penis into a vagina.
3. Narcissism which results in moving the love of one’s own body to another man.
4. Too close an identification with a member of the opposite sex, usually a parent.

Freud, believing homosexuality to be a pathological condition with causes as above, contributed to the idea that homosexuality can be cured. Yet, late in his life he wrote to the mother of a homosexual boy saying she should not expect analysis to eliminate his homosexuality. “What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency,

2 Stansfield, Gavin. (1995).

3 Weinberg, G. p 24 26

whether he remains a homosexual or gets changed.”⁴

Jung has approximately a dozen references to homosexuality in his entire collected works. Hopcke⁵ summarises Jung’s attitude as follows.

1. Homosexuality ought not to be the concern of legal authorities.
2. Homosexuality is best understood when put into an historical and cultural context.
3. An individual’s homosexuality needs to be distinguished from other personality and behavioural traits.
4. An individual’s homosexuality has a meaning peculiar to the individual in question; psychological growth involves the person becoming aware of this meaning.
5. Homosexuality being a result of psychological immaturity is abnormal and disturbed.

The belief that heterosexuality represents psychological maturity, while homosexuality represents psychological immaturity, has been fostered by the Judeo-Christian religion, and is still held by some Christian sects today. This belief would almost certainly be behind the thinking which resulted in gay teenagers being hospitalised and medicated in New Zealand up until the 1970s.

Jung⁶ had three theories about the cause of homosexuality.

1. Homosexuality is nearly always a result of a particular relationship with the feminine, usually an unresolved dependence on the personal mother.
2. Homosexuality may result from an incomplete detachment from the original archetype of the Hermaphrodite, the unbroken state of non-differentiation that comes, psychologically and mythically, before all else.
3. Homosexual orientation is determined by genetic or biological factors.

The first of these links with Jung’s view of homosexuality being a result of psychological immaturity, while the second involves the concept of archetype. What is an archetype? Jung observed basic psychological patterns emerging in people irrespective of their culture. He believed these patterns were similar because all people have deep psychological imprints which he chose to call archetypes. Archetypes are not directly observable, we can only see the

4 Weinberg, G. p. 39

5 Hopcke, R. (1991).

6 Hopcke, (1991).

patterns which develop because of them. Jung always maintained his psychology was scientific and, as with all science, a theory cannot be easily proven but can be held as true until a result occurs which contradicts it. Jung postulated the existence of archetypes and in particular the existence of a hermaphroditic archetype. What did he mean by the hermaphroditic archetype? I suspect this is a primordial psychological unity in which male and female are unconsciously conjoined before differentiating into masculine and feminine. The hermaphroditic or androgynous self is one which can respond to men or women at any level, emotionally, spiritually, or sexually without threat or damage.

Jung's third theory is close to the modern view. As a consequence, if homosexuality is innate and determined genetically, its cause is psychologically irrelevant. This view was given a boost in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association stopped calling homosexuality a mental disorder. Now, even if someone finds it disturbing to be homosexual, we do not classify homosexuality as the illness.

Wirth prefaces his paper with this quotation from Jung:

"In view of the recognised frequency of this phenomenon [homosexuality] its interpretation as a pathological perversion is very dubious. The psychological findings show that it is a matter of incomplete detachment from the hermaphroditic archetype, coupled with a distinct resistance to identify with the role of a one-sided sexual being. Such a disposition should not be adjudged negative in all circumstances, in so far as it preserves the archetype of the Original Man⁷, which a one-sided sexual being has, up to a point, lost."⁸

Jung accepted the existence of homosexuality and because of its frequency chose not to call it a pathological perversion. The existence of archetypal bases for this pattern of human loving is borne out by observable similarities, such as attraction to members of the same gender as oneself, which exist in the erotic, emotional and psychic lives of gay men.

7 Hopcke (1991) p.37 "Jung links homosexuality with the archetype of the Hermaphrodite or the "Original Man", an archetype of psychological wholeness - indeed the Self. If homosexuality results from resistance to a "one-sided" sexuality, if it is connected to the hermaphroditic wholeness of the Self, it can scarcely be condemned."

8 Jung, C.G. CW 9/1 para 146

Gay Male Subculture

Freud's notion of universal human bisexuality, Jung's notion of contrasexuality and Kinsey's notion of the homosexual-heterosexual spectrum⁹, all suggest we can talk of the "gay aspect" of a person rather than a "gay person". We could avoid labelling and be content to describe a particular behaviour. For brevity, I will continue to use the term "gay man", where the psychological/cultural identity called a "gay man" is the blending of inner archetypes with outer sociological realities.

Wirth's clients know he is a gay man and assume they will not encounter significant unexamined homophobia. He discloses little about himself and endeavours to remain neutral. My own gay male clients come to me assuming I am gay because I advertise in the gay press. Those who ask about my sexual orientation do so in the first session, when I am prepared to discuss such issues, but in fact few ask. While psychotherapy with a gay man follows the same general pattern as with any other person, Wirth lists some characteristic syndromes and problems presented by gay men, which reflect qualitative cultural and intrapsychic differences between gay and non-gay men. This is his list of characteristic symptoms:

- a. Splitting of different gender-associated personality components one away from the other.
- b. Gay stylised "anima possession" e.g. the diva, the bitch, the smothering mother, the sexual toy.
- c. An inflated, grandiose, narcissistic sense of self as "everything" – this may be exhibitionistically shown off in various bold gay liberationist stances or perhaps kept as a fairly private fantasy of quasi-shamanistic healing powers, artistic grandeur and the like.
- d. Intimate relationship problems, especially involving
 - (i) the disappearance of desire
 - (ii) the separation of desire from emotional closeness
 - (iii) the inability to stay in a committed monogamous relationship
 - (iv) age disparity or racial difference in a relationship.

⁹ Freud used the term bisexual to mean equal sexual attraction to either sex. Jung viewed many things in pairs of opposites, hence contrasexuality contrasts the opposites of masculine and feminine. Kinsey postulated a seven point scale from zero to six with heterosexuality at one end and homosexuality at the other.

- e. Puer problems of
 - (i) overridealizing
 - (ii) compulsive rebellion against authority figures
 - (iii) superficiality or flightiness.
- f. Sexual promiscuity or compulsive sexuality.
- g. Social isolation and loneliness.
- h. Grief and feelings of being overwhelmed by the HIV epidemic.
- i. Gay ghettoization and social “ethnocentrism”¹⁰.
- j. Chemical dependencies and/or eating disorders.
- k. Inability in adult life to leave behind the position of child vis-a-vis mother and/or father.
- l. Masochistic allowing of the gay or some other aspect of the self to be exploited by others.
- m. Psychotic delusions of belonging to another (gay) “species”.
- n. Gay stylised forms of paranoia, hysteria, depression and anxiety.
- o. Post-traumatic stress syndrome stemming from abuse.
- p. Getting stuck in various gay roles, personae, stereotypes.
- q. Spiritual malaise or an overspiritual, disembodied religiosity or “goodness”.
- r. A tawdry depersonalised, self-destructive underworld sexual slinking around (sometimes including unsafe sexual practices).
- s. An overpreciousness, oversensitivity, or delicateness, including hypochondriasis.
- t. Fetishization of certain body parts and surfaces, especially the penis, testicles, anus, chest, body hair.
- u. Hatred of men, keeping only the company of women; or hatred of women, keeping only the company of men.
- v. Heterophobia, including envious hostility toward procreativity, marriage, and nuclear family life.
- w. Homophobia, internalized and/or externalized.
- x. Destructive sadomasochistic sexual rituals and fixations.
- y. Fixation on youth and beauty; untoward fear of ageing.
- z. An overstudied, false masculine posing and posturing.

¹⁰ Ethnocentrism: belief in the intrinsic superiority of the nature, culture or group to which one belongs.

Much on the list is also commonly found in non-gay clients. Wirth states that knowing these characteristic problems of a gay man's psychology may help get psychotherapy started, but to get further it is necessary to have some understanding of the intrapsychic structures and archetypes of a gay man's psyche.

Male and Female Elements in Gay Men

Winnicott¹¹ postulated the existence within each human of pure and distinct male and female elements which could be described by Jungians as archetypal masculine and feminine principles. How any particular man defines his own personal sense of "feminine" and "masculine" depends on environmental factors and on innate endowments of male and female elements. Edward Carpenter¹² wrote that inner psychical affections may not always be related to outer bodily form. Both Winnicott and Carpenter suggest the strength of intrapsychic male and female elements may vary from individual to individual and may not necessarily correlate with biological gender. This view, which depends on the acceptance of the original postulate that within each person there are pure and distinct female elements, is supported by others.

Jung postulated the ideas of anima and animus, anima being the feminine component in a man's personality and animus the masculine component in a woman's personality. Recent Jungian thinking seems to fit more closely to Winnicott's idea by saying that each human may have both anima and animus.

Nearly all boys who become gay men have an inner feminine aptitude called by Winnicott a "pure-female-element potential". The gay boy may not have language or symbols to honour and express his feminine True Self and almost always his caregivers and peers empathically fail to nurture and stimulate his feminine self. Joseph Henderson believes that in a gay man the anima often develops before masculine identity, leading to imprisonment in the anima, leaving the man with no way of finding his masculine identity.¹³ In a gay male the anima develops precociously. Healthy gay male development of masculinity usually needs periods of separation from the feminine. Erich Neumann wrote "Even today we almost always find in cases of male homosexuality, a matriarchal psychology where the Great Mother is unconsciously in the

11 Winnicott, D.W. (1989), pp. 168-92

12 Carpenter, E. (1984), p. 186

13 Hopcke (1993), pp. 231

ascendent.”¹⁴ Wirth takes issue with this, believing ego development in gay males follows both feminine and masculine lines. A gay male feels, perhaps unconsciously, both masculine and feminine as his own; separation of the two is alien and unfavourable for him.

While in heterosexual males maturation and wisdom are accompanied by a late-stage deep integration of femininity, for gay men maturation and wisdom has more to do with what Jung¹⁵ called “a detachment from the hermaphroditic archetype.”

Wirth discusses the Oedipus complex as a prologue to the relationship between gay men and parent figures. Freud believed the “complete” form of the Oedipus complex to be two-fold, positive and negative, involving both an “ambivalent attitude towards the father and an affectionate object-choice towards the mother. At the same time the boy also behaves like a girl, displaying an affectionate feminine attitude to his father with corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother.”¹⁶ Later Freudians claim it is even more complicated.

Gay Men and the Mother

Many psychoanalytic writers suggest close mother-son relations are somehow related to homosexuality and it seems true most gay men have closer relationships with mothers than with fathers. Wirth asks why the link need be seen as causal and suggests as another possibility that a gay boy, with precocious anima development, finds in his mother a much needed source of mirroring for his inner feminine qualities. As he develops, these feminine images and ideas become clustered round his anima archetype and form a strong feminine complex¹⁷ which is thus produced from inside the gay male psyche rather than from outside through too much mothering.

Jung extended the idea of the mother complex beyond the psychopathological idea of involvement with injury and illness to its positive effects. “A man with a mother complex may have a finely differentiated Eros ... [with] a great capacity for friendship ... have good taste and an aesthetic streak which are fostered by the presence of a feminine streak ... he may be supremely gifted as

14 Neumann, E. (1954), p. 50

15 Jung, CW 9/1, p.71.

16 Sigmund Freud (1961), Vol 19, p.33

17 A complex is a collection of images and ideas, clustered round a core derived from one or more archetypes, and characterised by a common emotional tone. Samuels et al. (1986)

a teacher ... endowed with a wealth of religious feelings...¹⁸ Many gay men use and have used these qualities to advantage in careers, although their gay aspect is often ignored, exploited or degraded.

The positive mother complex shows up in many positive feminine ways – a love of home; a flowing movement; a patient or caring gesture; a passionate defence of vulnerability; acceptingness of the “other”. The negative mother complex may also show - too nice; too sweet; too self-effacing; inhibiting his aggression; masochistically sacrificing himself to serve others and so undermining his full vitality; fearing conflict or competition; arranging his world to avoid encounters with his shadow; well liked but not intimately known; his overall personality lacks roundness; his sexuality may shrivel or project into the “other” man.

In extreme cases the negative feminine complex may inundate the psyche of a gay man and hysterically dominate his personality. He may become “anima possessed” in a gay male False-feminine Self syndrome. Winnicott believed the function of the False Self is to protect and defend the True Self. In a gay male, whose femininity takes refuge in effeminacy, the False Self may thus expose him to outer abuse and humiliation. Wirth observes that “the greater the neglect and abuse his True-feminine Self has sustained the “queenier” the false and hysterical presentation a gay man makes.” When a gay man’s False-feminine Self fails, he may suicide showing that his true feminine soul never found safe conditions in which to thrive.

Gay Men and the Father

Wirth talks of Freudians showing a homophobic bias with homosexuality regarded as pathological. Nicolosi¹⁹ writes, “I do not believe that the gay lifestyle can ever be healthy, nor that the homosexual identity can ever be completely ego syntonic.” Regarding those men seeking his reparative therapy he says: “They refuse to relinquish their heterosexual social identity.” The patriarchal “father knows best” tenor of some psychoanalytic literature aggravates a problematic relationship of gay men to the Father. Any heterosexist bias in psychiatry constitutes abusive “soul murder”²⁰ of gay men who, seeking healing and self-discovery, meet with manipulation, deception and assault.

If Freudian psychoanalysis has abused gay people then Jungian analysis has

18 Jung, CW 9/1 p.71

19 Nicolosi, J. (1991), p. 13.

20 Shengold (1989). “the deliberate attempt to eradicate or compromise the separate identity of another person.”

neglected their souls. Wirth claims most gay men have had poor relationships with their fathers often with grief, hatred, bitterness, fear and intimidation. He postulates the father problem of gay sons is a problem of misfit between the two. Male elements predominate in the father's psyche with the feminine side perhaps only developing in later life, long after the gay son is grown up. The gay son, during childhood and adolescence, needs a father figure with well developed femininity, something a heterosexual father is least likely to give him. We can paraphrase Jung and say gay sons resist identifying with their one-sidedly masculine fathers. The son may critically and angrily write his father off. He may unconsciously take up the task of living out his father's anima. The son's door may be closed to the father despite powerful unconscious longings for intimacy with him.

Wirth says the father-son transference in therapy may be particularly volatile and sensitive, requiring qualities of equanimity, fortitude and clarity in the therapist. Both the negative transference and the positive transference need careful handling. The feminine aspects need a haven in the father's accepting and holding. The therapist as father must handle erotic longings for the son as client with particular care, neither rejecting nor stimulating these desires. The feminine elements of a gay male may have developed earlier than masculine ones, which may have become split off to remain of one age. Such parts may mature slowly, or not at all, and a therapist working with gay men needs to be adept at recognising and holding fixated or split off part-objects.

Gay Men and Detachment from the Archetype of the Hermaphrodite

In-depth analytical psychology involves working with archetypes. For gay men this particularly refers to working on detachment from the archetype of the hermaphrodite. The idea of the hermaphrodite came through Freud from the androgyny of the Egyptian deities and many of the Greek gods. Freud says, "Only a combination of male and female elements can give a worthy representation of divine perfection."²¹ Wirth quotes Jung discussing the hermaphroditic psychic condition.

Jung said:

"the underlying idea of the psyche proves it to be a half bodily, half spiritual substance, ... an hermaphroditic being capable of uniting the opposites, but

21 Freud, S. 1961 v 11, p 94.

who is never complete in the individual unless related to another individual. The unrelated human being lacks wholeness, for he can achieve wholeness only through the soul, and the soul cannot exist without its other side, which is always found in a "You". Wholeness is a combination of I and You, and these show themselves to be part of a transcendent unity... "22

Applying this to gay men, with body and spirit two parts of the same being, Wirth argues that a gay man may experience his body as masculine and his spirit as feminine, or vice versa. Gay men commonly enter states in which they experience psychological unions of masculine and feminine, unions which may bring ecstatic or transcendent qualities but which may also bring narcissistic or mesmerising conditions. Masculine and feminine opposites can become merged or too close, forming a kind of hermaphroditic union. Did Jung mean this when he referred to "an incomplete detachment from the hermaphroditic archetype" in male homosexuality?

Perhaps a gay man cannot detach from the hermaphroditic archetype while remaining unconscious of the proportions and intentions of his constituent male and female elements. To enter a close relationship with another man he may need to become conscious of these proportions and detach from the hermaphroditic archetype. Such consciousness involves much work on one's Oedipus complex, one's childhood drama, one's love and hate of mother and father. He will need to be touched by the archetype of initiation. Meanwhile there will be constant alternation back and forth between the masculine and feminine strands of his make up, so he can separate them to differentiate and individuate out of the hermaphroditic blur into which many gay men lapse. As Joseph Henderson says:

"If the homosexual patient in analysis successfully meets the conflict of opposites and works with them by separating them so that he or she feels the tension between them, acknowledging both sides, and experiences that as a kind of initiation, then the person becomes mature."²³

22 Jung, CW 16, pp. 244-245 (In a section on alchemy.)

23 In Hopcke "Same-Sex Love" (1993).

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