

THE CASE FOR ACCEPTANCE: An Open Letter To Humanity a work of fiction by Robin Reardon

FOREWORD

The only thing wrong with being gay is how some people treat you when they find out.

On April 29, 2008, my second novel was released. *Thinking Straight* is about a gay teen whose parents send him to a summer camp designed to straighten him out. You can read more about the book, including an excerpt from Chapter One, on my [Web site](http://www.robinreardon.com) (www.robinreardon.com). What's important to note here is that the story is positive and inclusive. Not only does it respect religious belief, but also it takes a step toward creating a safe place for people of all sexual orientations within the religion called Christianity.

This open letter presents the rationale behind *Thinking Straight*. It's written from the point of view of a gay man—which I am not—so I'm labeling it as a fictional open letter to humanity, addressed to anyone who will read it and consider its points. My hope is that it will further understanding and acceptance.

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FROM ME TO YOU

I am a gay man. I am not a therapist or a scientist or a religious counselor, although I will draw on those and other disciplines and resources to prove my point, which is that the only thing wrong with being gay is how some people treat you when they find out. Presenting this conclusion is, in fact, the objective of this letter. And because my belief in this conclusion is so strong, I try to live my life expecting acceptance. I don't always get it, and I don't always have the energy to try. And I'll take tolerance over hatred when I can get that, but who wants to be tolerated?

Expect Acceptance

What does it mean to expect acceptance? For a gay person, it means having a tremendous amount of intestinal fortitude and a determination that would put a Pit Bull to shame. Here's an example.

Say I'm in a conference room at the company where I work, sitting at a long table with maybe five other people. It's a few minutes before our meeting is due to start, and there's general chit-chat going on while we wait. The fellow directly across from me, who doesn't know me, addresses the table in general.

He says, "My wife has talked me into taking our vacation in Hawai'i this year, but I can't tell one of those islands from another. Has anyone here been there, and do you have any advice?"

So this guy has put his question squarely on a personal platform, and he's mentioned his life partner. He says he's confused about something very specific, and he asks for help.

So I say, "Actually, yes. My partner and I were there a couple of years ago. He and I went to three islands. I can tell you what we discovered about each of them. What do you and your wife like to do?"

He blinks at me. "Your partner? I thought you worked *here*."

"Oh," I say, "yes, I do. He's my domestic partner, not my business partner. So, what kind of tourists are you? Do you enjoy hiking, shopping, beachcombing..."

Now, if anyone at the table has a big enough problem with my being gay that they create any kind of disturbance, they'll need to be willing to look like an intolerant bigot. But if they're willing to do that, I'll have to have a very thick skin to get through it without some nasty comeback. In fact, I'll need a thick skin just to smile at some of the faces around me, even if no one says anything. It takes guts to expect acceptance.

The hardest situations might be those in which no one says anything directly to me. I've had some heteros ask me why it is that gay men are so sarcastic, as though it's something that comes with the territory, the way female secretaries are supposed to be genetically predisposed to working copying machines. While I would never agree that "gay men are sarcastic" any more than I would agree that "heterosexuals are blind and stupid," I do have a personal theory for why sarcasm becomes the weapon of choice for many gays. If someone in my hearing, perhaps even very near me, says something about me that they consider to be uncomplimentary, but they never say it *to* me, that's an indirect assault. This is perhaps preferable to being hit about the head and kidneys with a baseball bat, but it's still very nasty treatment. It inspires either a total withdrawal or a response that can't be any more direct than the assault. I mean, how can

you respond directly when all you hear is someone saying to someone else, “Yeah, you were right. He is one of them, isn’t he? [snigger]”

Since “indirect” is part of the definition of sarcasm, it’s the nearest weapon. It takes guts to use it, but it takes perhaps even more guts to say, “I’m sorry, what was that you said?” and then wait patiently in apparent innocence. Especially since I’m never quite sure what will happen next.

Did I say this took guts? But back to expecting acceptance.

The first step is eliminating cards—those nasty, virtual flash cards that homophobic bigots will flip up at gays to prove how disgusting we are. You know the ones. You know a lot of them. I’m going to show you how I destroy them by deconstructing five of them, and then you can use the same process to destroy all the rest of them that you’re carrying around in your faggot-bag.

Faggot-bag

What’s a faggot-bag? Oh, come on; everyone has one. Every one of us grew up hearing insult after insult, smear after smear about how dreadful it is to be gay. I have one. And all the time I was growing up, all of the nineteen years before I realized I was gay, I would hear those nasty things and shrug; they didn’t apply to me, after all, or so I wanted to believe. But what was I supposed to do with them? Well, they went into my faggot-bag.

When I could no longer pretend I wasn’t gay, I knew I had to open that filthy, disgusting thing and dig around in there, review each slur and see what it was, really, because I sure as hell didn’t want to think all those pieces of crap applied to me. And I knew how nasty they were, because I’d put them in there myself. So I sidled up to it, glancing around cautiously to make sure no one saw me taking ownership of that yucky thing. Carefully, avoiding as much of the crap rubbed into the bag as possible, I opened it, looked around me once more, and reached into the slime until I could grab something and pull it out. Gritting my teeth, I shook the thing until enough muck came off it so that I could recognize it. And do you know what it was? Pedophile. It was a card that said Pedophile.

Well, this certainly didn’t apply to me! I’m gay, I said quietly to myself; I want a man, not a boy. So I threw the thing aside thinking maybe this process wouldn’t be quite as painful as I’d feared. That one wasn’t so bad; it was easy to get rid of. Feeling encouraged, I forgot to look around and see if anyone was watching as I dug in for the next bit of crap. This homophobic bigot saw me, saw the faggot-bag and recognized it, saw that I’d discarded Pedophile, walked over and picked it up and threw it in my face, sneering, “Here, faggot. This is you.”

This has happened to me many times, these nasty cards getting flung at me when I knew they weren’t who I was. And if I hadn’t taken steps to make sure I knew—I mean, really, *really* knew—that these things don’t apply to me, I might have bought into the idea that there was something wrong with being gay.

The only thing wrong with being gay...

If there’s something wrong with me—and there might be, because I’m hardly perfect—it has nothing to do with being gay. And I’m going to show you how I know that.

Some people who read this letter will find fault with my logic. I expect that, because just as I’m no scientist, I’ve never studied logic as a discipline. But what I want to do here isn’t to write a

treatise on logic; what I want to do is demonstrate that it's perfectly possible for human beings of normal intelligence and education to use their brains in logical ways on a topic most people aren't used to thinking about at all. In other words, I want them to think. So if you have a problem with some of my leaps of logic, fine; but I'd be willing to bet that infallible logic would reach the same conclusion I have: the only thing wrong with being gay is how some people treat you when they find out.

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## THE CARDS

I'm going to do only five cards for you. You can do the rest yourself. But when you see how I do them, I'm hoping you'll get the process. You'll need it, because you're going to have to go through every last thing in your faggot-bag and destroy it. That means you. Whether you're gay or not.

Here's the process: 1. Define/Dissect and reduce to smallest elements. 2. Apply provable facts and repeatable, rational tests. 3. Attempt to reconstruct (you'll fail, but don't let me spoil it for you). As you'll see, there are challenges, but that's what makes this fun. Here's how it works.

### Unnatural

You know, I've actually had homophobic bigots say this to me directly: "What you are is unnatural." Once upon a time, I wouldn't have known how to respond to that without sarcasm. But I do now.

Define "unnatural." If you look it up, you'll find something along the lines of (paraphrasing, here) not according to the laws of nature or normality. This isn't terribly helpful, because trying to get any two people to agree on what the laws of nature are—or on what's normal—is rather tricky. In fact, I had a discussion about this with an ex-boyfriend before the "ex" part applied, someone with whom I share so many opinions that talking with him was almost like talking with myself. Wonder why we broke up...

Anyway, I was making the case that plastic was unnatural, because it didn't come to us from nature as plastic. Patrick (oops... wasn't going to identify him. Oh, well...) said, "It's made from natural substances, and processes that exist in nature are used to make it."

To which I countered, "But it doesn't biodegrade!" Ha, I thought, I've got him.

But then he said, "Sure it does. It might take hundreds of years, depending on the type of plastic, but it does biodegrade. What parameter do you want to use? If it degrades in a hundred years is it natural, but five hundred—not so much? How about fifty years? Or fifteen? What's the rule?"

He sounded rather like Abraham arguing with God about how many good people there had to be in the city of Sodom before God would agree not kill off everybody there. But more on the Bible later. My point is that even two people who were, at the time anyway, agreeing on just about everything including who got which side of the bed were unable to agree on the definition of "unnatural."

The cheating way, of course, is to say it's the opposite of "natural." But that doesn't get us any farther along, really. So, how about if we just say that something that's natural is something that we haven't messed with since it came to us from nature? That would make anything we've messed with unnatural by default. You might not agree with that, but we need to start somewhere, and this is my letter, so I'm starting there.

Apply facts and/or rational tests to it. That's next. So, rhetorically speaking, is it natural to wear glasses to improve the faulty sight that some of us have, or that comes on us as we age? What about hearing aids? Is it natural to fly through the air in a metal-sheathed behemoth at heights so great that if we fell we'd be nothing but a pile of atoms when we hit whatever was under us? Is it natural to heat and cool our living environments? Is it natural to cook food? What about microwaves? Is it natural to irradiate our food so that it doesn't decay as quickly? What about

having your heart cut out of your chest and replaced with one from a dead person? And are any two people going to answer all those questions the same?

Probably not. So instead, let's apply the term only to the subject at hand. Sex.

What makes sex natural or unnatural? Let me turn to my homophobic challenger, the guy who told me that I was unnatural. In the spirit of seeking understanding, I might say to him, "Why? Seriously; why? What am I doing that's unnatural?"

I'll let you imagine his response, which is possibly going to be graphic and offensive. So I take a different tack. "So, if you think what I do is unnatural, and if you say it in that insulting tone of voice, you must think it's bad. That must mean that you think what you do is natural, and therefore good. So help me out, here. What do *you* do?"

He's probably not used to having someone respond in good faith, which I'm trying really hard to do here (as opposed to sarcasm, of course), so he sputters and maybe even tries not to answer. Let's say I get him to hang around long enough to work with me on this, since he thinks it's so important.

He might say, "You know very well what I do."

"Well, actually, I don't think so. I don't think I've ever done it. Wouldn't you like to prove your point? Tell me. Really. What do you do?"

More sputtering, and then, "All right. If you insist. I put my penis into my wife's vagina and ejaculate."

Well, the first thing that goes through my mind is, "Eeeewww." And then, "Why?" But I don't say those things. I say, "Okay, and what is it about that action that makes it more natural than what I do? I'm working with natural body parts, too."

[I'm going to ask you to imagine sputtering ahead of almost everything the guy says.] "Yeah, but you can't get pregnant."

"Ah, so reproduction is the objective of natural sex. How many kids do you and your wife have?"

"Three."

"Planning on more?"

"No way; three's more than enough."

"So I guess you aren't ever having sex again."

"What are you talking about?"

"Well..." I say, "you seem to have a pretty low opinion of unnatural sex. And you've just told me that what makes sex natural is reproduction. That means birth control is unnatural, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to do that. It would put you in the same boat as me." And while he's still sputtering I add, "By the way, you do know, don't you, that if you put it in her mouth she won't get pregnant, right?"

He doesn't much like this line of questioning, as you can imagine, so I give him a break. I ask, "Is your wife the very first biologically efficacious female who would have you?"

“What? No. Of course not.” Swaggers a little. “She was hardly my first, after all.”

I refrain from reminding him that all sex previous to his wife was almost certainly unnatural by his own definition. “So why didn’t you marry and commit yourself for life to the very first one?”

“Well... she wasn’t the one. The right one. You know.”

“Why not? Wasn’t she pretty enough? Rich enough? Submissive enough? Strong-willed enough? Practical enough? Helpless enough? What was it?”

“I didn’t love that one, okay?”

“Okay. That’s fine. You’re telling me you shouldn’t be expected to marry someone you can’t love. Guess what. Neither should I.”

Truth is, we aren’t likely to get much farther with this Neanderthal, so let’s leave him behind for now. I think you can see what I’m driving at. He hasn’t given any thought to what it means for sex to be natural. Not thinking will be a recurring theme; see if you can pick up on where else it rears its ugly head.

There’s another way to approach this “natural” concept. It’s called Biology. So let’s take a look at what we know about that (provable facts), in terms of sex.

I probably don’t need to tell you that pheromones are sex scents. There seems to be some debate in the scientific community about precisely what constitutes human pheromones and how our bodies know what they are on a biological level, but there the debate ends. Our biological response can be measured. At least in men.

[Background biological fact: the hypothalamus is the part of the brain responsible for governing sexual response.]

Researchers, including those at the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, have done some fascinating studies. And while they may not be ready to declare some kind of foolproof litmus test for homosexuality in humans, they have shown this: the hypothalamus of self-identified homosexual men initiates a sexual response when it detects male pheromones, and a particularly strong one when exposed to the pheromones of male homosexuals. And there is no biological response whatsoever in the hypothalamus of these men when exposed to female pheromones.

So here’s how it works. A straight man meets up with another guy, and his hypothalamus takes a sniff. Nothing. Okay, fine. So the first guy raises his hand up to receive a high-five from the second guy and maybe make some comment about a sports team. And if they’re really glad to see each other, there might maybe just possibly be a hug, but you’d better believe it’ll be the hips-apart-two-slaps-on-the-back kind of thing. I mean, there’s a line, here, they’re thinking; we like guy *things*, not *guys*.

But if it’s a woman instead who approaches guy number one, his hypothalamus goes, “That’s what I’m talkin’ about. Could be a little action tonight.” Now because he’s human, if this is his mother-in-law he doesn’t feel compelled to jump her bones. He can put the kibosh on that. But what he can’t do, even if he were brave enough to try, is get his hypothalamus to generate a sexual response to guy number two.

Similar thing with a straight woman. If she meets another woman, her hypothalamus goes, "Oh, hi! How are you?... Listen, we could be friends, as long as we're not after the same guy." But if she encounters a straight *man* instead, her brain goes, "Oh, my. Yes; could be a little romance in the air." Unless, of course, it's that jerk who wanted to get to third base with her and didn't even pay for dinner. Again, she can stop the process. But she can't get her hypothalamus to respond sexually in a different way from how it's programmed.

Guess what? Neither can I. So although I don't necessarily feel compelled to jump into the sack with every gay guy I meet (I can stop the process as well as anyone else), what I can't do, no matter how hard I might be foolish enough to try, is force myself to have a natural, biological, sexual response to a woman. Can't get there.

But wait; there's more. Most women responded somewhat negatively to gay male pheromones, even though they responded positively to straight male pheromones. And the gay men's response to straight men wasn't as powerful as their response to gay men. It's like gays are getting ourselves out of the way of the heteros. Why don't they appreciate this?

So when that homophobic bigot says, "What you do is unnatural," all I want him to do is qualify it a little bit. He needs to add, "For me." Then I would agree with him, because it would be unnatural for him. And that leaves the door open for me to say, "Okay, I get it. Because what *you* do is unnatural *for me*."

One place homophobic bigots like to point to when they're screaming "Unnatural!" at me is the non-human animal kingdom. They might say, "You don't see animals doing what you do!"

But they're wrong. In fact, shepherds have known since the year dot that between eight and ten rams out of every hundred are gay. They don't talk about it, because it's so much a part of their work. It wouldn't occur to them to present it as news any more than they're likely to say, "You know, only ewes can give birth to lambs." It's a given. And it makes sense for them to know; from a ram, they want pregnant ewes.

And it's not just sheep. It's giraffes, and ostriches, and zebra finches—the list goes on. In fact, it's over 1,500 species long, and growing. I was particularly amused when the U.S. political right-wing contingent tried to adopt the penguin as its mascot not too long ago. It was the same year that "March of the Penguins" was big; remember that? It was tempting; it had everything associated with "family values" (with the exception of beating gays to death and imprisoning all the liberals). Well, two things happened that quashed that propaganda effort pretty quickly. One was that someone pointed out to them—probably one of those troublesome scientists who believe in evolution—that Emperor penguins are monogamous only to a point. That point is the end of the year. Then they're on to someone new. The other thing? Gay penguins. New York, Germany, all over the place.

I got into a debate once with a guy who didn't think this pheromone thing supported my position. To quote him: "Some people have genetic and physiological predispositions towards violence and addiction."

It took me a few minutes to realize what he'd done. Can you see it? I mean, besides practically equating the gay orientation with criminals. To me, his response was so completely irrelevant that it threw me. And that's because his starting point was "Gay Equals Bad." And even though my starting point is the opposite, and even though I admit that I think his is utterly totally wrong, I wasn't trying to use "natural" as a term to support my position as much as I was trying to say "You can't use that card [unnatural] to prove yours." I'm just killing cards, here, at the moment. So even if his starting point is "Gay Equals Bad," he can't say "Gay Equals Unnatural." It just ain't true. And, as I reminded him, he follows the dictates of *his* hypothalamus, too.

And as for the animals? He said, “We see [homosexuality] in nature, yes. And animals eat their young. Animals are amoral; humans aren’t. We don’t base our morality on what animals do.” Again, huh? WTF? Like, dude, kind of not the point. All I was trying to say was that the animals are not being gay to be perverse, to annoy their parents, to rebel against their church, or any other darn fool reason. They’re gay because they’re biologically programmed that way. So homosexuality is not unnatural. That’s all I’m trying to prove. At the moment. Animals eating their young is nothing more than a red herring. Smoke screen. Some dang fool thing to try and obscure the real point: Homosexuality is a naturally occurring phenomenon. We aren’t talking about morality. Yet.

The conclusion I come to—tell me if you reach another—is that calling something “unnatural” is not only debatable, subjective, and difficult to prove, but it’s also relative. It’s not an absolute term. At least not when it comes to sex. And homosexuality, occurring as it does “in nature,” cannot reasonably be called unnatural.

One down.

### **Abnormal**

I’m going to let our homophobic bigot friend back into the conversation for just a minute. He says, “What you are is abnormal.” As with “unnatural,” he says this in a tone of voice that makes it sound like something worthy of Satan himself.

So, *you* tell me this time. What’s the definition of abnormal? I hear you saying, “The opposite of normal.” But you know I’m not going to let you get away with that. What’s normal?

If you take the insulting tone out of the word abnormal, it reverts back to its true meaning. It wasn’t coined to mean “perverted” or “sick” or “just plain wrong.” If we’re talking about the comparison of two characteristics (like—oh, I don’t know, gay and straight?), abnormal indicates the rate of occurrence of that characteristic, in a defined sampling of specimens, that is less than fifty percent. So, strictly speaking, homosexuality in the population of, say, the human race, is abnormal. But so is left-handedness. And blonde hair. And blue eyes. And being born in March as opposed to any other time of the year. So “abnormal” is not a judgment. There’s nothing pejorative about it.

I’m right-handed. Let’s say I’m a caterer, and I’m working this weekend at a convention for left-handed people. If the specimen sample is everyone in the convention center at its height, I’m abnormal. But just let me walk back out onto the street, and change the sample to everyone within several city blocks, and—presto, chango—I’m normal again.

There’s another way to apply a test for normality, too. You don’t have to confine your examination to a single point in time. So, for example, we can look at a characteristic as it appears in the human race over a period of time, and apply the findings that way.

When I was born, it was illegal to be gay just about every place in these United States. This was true when Dr. Alfred Kinsey was doing his research. It isn’t true today; at least, it’s not illegal in as many places. Today we have entire television networks dedicated to a viewership that accepts homosexuality in society. We have major gay characters in some very successful television shows. Depending on where you live, it can be viewed as edgy, as almost fashionable, to be gay. Or at least no big deal. (I did say “depending on where you live.”)

There's a lot of controversy around the findings of Dr. Kinsey's reports on sexuality, and there's a lot of debate today over what the percentage is of people who are gay. After all, there are people who answer polls in the negative incorrectly, because they haven't yet figured out that they're gay, and there are people who won't admit to themselves that they're gay, and people who know damn well that they're gay and lie about it. But one thing everyone has agreed on is that as far as anyone can tell, the percentage hasn't changed. So if roughly the same percentage of people are gay over decades, regardless of law and fashion, that percentage becomes a statistical norm.

So it's *normal* for a reliable percentage of people to be gay. And for that group of people, it's *natural* to respond sexually to people of the same sex. Therefore, there is no rational support for basing the conclusion that "Gay Equals Bad" on the topic of normality.

Another one down.

Are we having fun yet?

### **Promiscuous**

This card is almost certainly more often hurled in the faces of gay men than gay women. And the reason for that gives you a clue as to how we're going to destroy this one.

Step one: define, in terms of sex (it has other definitions, too). I've heard it said that promiscuous is a word you apply to someone who has more sex than you. This one might be as tough to define as unnatural. Is someone promiscuous if he (notice the pronoun) has sex with two different people in a month? A week? A weekend? What if he knows them, and he sees them regularly? What if he doesn't even know their names? What if it's someone who is married, has promised monogamy, and has sex once a year or so with a prostitute or with someone he encounters casually?

Tricky, defining this one. Let's just say it means having indiscriminate sex, which isn't terribly specific, and probably each of you has your own idea of what this might mean, but that's okay for now. And as long as we're calling it indiscriminate, let's agree that it would be committed by someone who had very little trouble treating sex as "just sex" when they wanted to. What's "just sex?" Read on.

Apply it. Here's a scenario: Heterosexual married couple, arguing bitterly. One of them says, "But, honey, it meant nothing to me!" The injured party replies, "Nothing? Does it mean nothing to you when you have sex with *me*?"

So, it's pretty clear what they're arguing about. One of them has been unfaithful. But which one? The husband or the wife? It could, of course, be either, but be honest. In your mind, didn't you picture the first person who spoke as the man? Let's face it: historically, it's far more common for a husband to be unfaithful than for a wife. While I'm not excusing infidelity, I'm going to propose that there are two reasons men are more likely to stray. There may be lots more, but I'm limiting myself here.

One reason has a lot to do with how a man and woman experience heterosexual intercourse differently. If you think about it, the woman, who is probably smaller and almost certainly less physically powerful than her male partner, must trust him enough to allow the insertion of an object with which she may be more or less familiar, but that she does not in fact own or control, into an extremely intimate and sensitive part of herself. Over. And over. And over. And ... you get the picture. So while there are certainly women who love sex for "just sex," there are likely to be fewer of them than there are men who can see it like that and be comfortable with it.

The seeds of another reason men might be more likely to be promiscuous are in the first reason. We know that like many other aspects of life, women are more complex than men. Maybe it's got something to do with the genes on the extra leg of that second X chromosome. And their sexual response to their partners is more complicated. It's typical (always leaving room for exceptions, of course) for a woman to start thinking about romance or intimacy on her way to thinking about sex. With many women, that's the only way they want to get there. So it starts in her head and/or heart, with emotions, and works its way down to the physical pleasure centers.

In comparison, the sexual response in men typically begins below the waist. It can work its way up to his head, and he can get just as into the emotional and spiritual aspects of the act as any woman, but for him it can begin and end all in the same place without moving much more than however many inches he can lay claim to. He's more likely than she is to get the concept of "just sex" and think that's okay. Like our husband in the scenario above, he thinks that telling his wife that an act of sex meant nothing to him will make sense to her. In most cases, it doesn't.

Not too long ago I heard a woman ask a straight man if he thought it was true that gay men are more promiscuous than straight men. His response was all male: "They're probably more successful at it." Think about it: if a straight man wants to have sex with a woman, he needs to do whatever it is that gets her in the mood. She might be easy, but chances are she's going to require more warming up than he does. But if two guys want to go at it just for the sex? Well, not only do they not need to feel mushy about each other, they don't have to wait for anybody to get in the mood, if all they both want is "just sex."

So, can we reconstruct this thing in a way that helps it support an assumption about *gay* men as a group? I'm going to say no. I don't believe your average gay man wants sex more than, or wants more sex than, your average straight man. But does he get more? Maybe; but if so, being gay is just a facilitator, not an indicator of an inherent trait. So if I happen to be a promiscuous person, it might help that I'm gay, but it's not *because* I'm gay.

Another one down.

## **Pedophile**

I love this one. Really.

Define. My definition is that a pedophile is an adult who abuses children sexually. Further, I feel the need to define the words "adult" and "child" as well, so we can be really sure what we're talking about here. So: an adult is a sexually mature individual; a child is a sexually immature individual. Further: sexually mature means physically prepared to procreate, so it also means both producing and responding to pheromones. Remember pheromones? The sex scent your hypothalamus detects and responds to according to how it's programmed? So the child is neither producing nor responding to pheromones.

Some may argue that many young children are capable of sexual expression. While this may be true in a nascent kind of way, I would counter that what most of these children are doing is picking up on behavior patterns they see in adults, especially in cases where the child can create a desired result by *acting* sexual. I don't mean to pick on girls, here, but picture the coquettish girl sweetly teasing Daddy for whatever it is she wants from him at any given moment. It could be another half hour of television viewing or a bicycle or going to a friend's sleep-over. This method can be particularly useful when Mommy has already said "No."

That little girl isn't sending pheromones to her father, and even if he gives her whatever she asks for, he's not responding to pheromones. The exchange may look and/or feel sexual to an adult, but for the child it's just a learned means to get what she wants.

Now, let's define homosexual, since it's gays who get blamed for this as a group. Gay men, usually. What? You're gay, and no one has ever called you a pedophile? Really? Fine, but just don't try to lead a group of cub scouts anyplace. And in many towns, if you had a job as a teacher and the school board found out you were gay, you'd be fired. Did they need to brand the word on your forehead for you to get the message? Oh, you're a pedophile, all right, or at least very likely to be.

So. Define homosexual. A homosexual is an adult (remember what that means) who responds sexually (pheromones again) to other *adults* of the same sex. Define heterosexual: an adult who responds sexually to other *adults* of the opposite sex. Neither orientation indicates a sexual response to individuals not producing pheromones; and psychology specialists do not see the sexual abuse of a child as a truly sexual act, any more than they consider a man's rape of a woman a truly sexual act. Both, although different in many ways, are acts of violence and are exhibitions of power.

So there's nothing that makes a man (or a woman, but that's less likely) of either orientation more likely to abuse children sexually. You might say, "But what about the gays being so promiscuous?"

No. Wait. Not only did we just say that pedophilia is not a true sexual response, but also we destroyed the Promiscuous card. If a gay man is promiscuous, it's not because he's gay. Does that mean that if a gay man is a pedophile, it's not because he's gay? What a concept. Let's explore it.

Despite my own definition offered above, defining "pedophile" is about as challenging as defining "natural." People who know more about this than I do describe pedophilia as a psychological *propensity*. According to [Dr. Gregory Herek](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/bio.html) (<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/bio.html>), pedophilia is a psychological disorder in which an adult prefers his sex partners to be children. But *propensity* means these individuals don't necessarily take action.

Child abuse involves the act itself. Again, per Dr. Herek, lots of kids are sexually abused by adults who aren't pedophiles—that is, they have some other reason for picking on a kid at some point in time, and they might not even make a habit of it.

Want more? You came to the right place. [Jim Burroway tells us about a study](http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/Articles/000,002.htm) (<http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/Articles/000,002.htm>) in which significant numbers of men who identified as straight also indicated they mostly have sex with men. And how many of these guys are sexually molesting boys? If even one of them does, then... well, you do the math. But you won't get a good answer.

But wait, there's more. In many cases, pedophiles don't actually have a sexual orientation at all. They never figured out how to relate to other adults of any sex in many ways, including sexually, and the only sexual attraction they're aware of is to children. But remember, this can't be driven by pheromones. In society, with its incredible pressures to perform sexually, these pressures can mount to a far greater degree for pedophiles than for others. They turn into a phobia: an irrational fear of something. In this case, it's fear of being with adults—and especially in intimate circumstances—who pressure him, expecting something the pedophile cannot provide.

Time to apply.

Pedophile priests.

[Disclaimer: Please note that I am *by no means* implying that Catholic priests are necessarily pedophiles, or that they are even necessarily predisposed to be. I'm going to create a hypothetical situation that might apply only to some of these men.]

How many people do you think have heard about the problem of pedophile priests and assumed, right off the bat without rubbing two gray cells together about it, that all of these men were gay? "Ah," you might say, "but after all, didn't they abuse boys?" The answer is not all of them, but here's where it gets interesting. Remember the study in which self-identified straight men had sex mostly with other men?

We've done our best to define the "pedophile" portion of this card. Now we'll turn to "priest." If you think back to all the stories you've read or heard about in the last ten years or so, how many of these priests were Catholic priests? Hmmmm? Maybe your memory is better than mine, but I don't remember hearing about a Methodist minister, or a Jewish Rabbi, or an Islamic imam, or a Buddhist sensei, or even an Episcopal priest committing these acts. Does this mean all ordained pedophiles are Catholic? Probably not, but it would seem that the vast majority of them are. There's got to be something in that. And remember that once the avalanche of accusation began, although it spread around the globe, it remained squarely within Catholicism. We didn't start to hear about this problem to any remarkable degree in any other religion.

What is it, remembering that we're talking about sex, that sets the Catholic church apart? Maybe the fact that the priests (and the nuns, by the way) must take a vow of chastity? There are two or three other religious traditions that also require this vow, but their ordained numbers are far fewer than Catholic priests.

So. Here's a scenario. Let's say we have an adult, Catholic, self-identified straight man who has a relatively high degree of this phobia that is typical of pedophiles. He's anxious about social expectations. He hasn't become a pedophile yet. Maybe he's even a pretty nice guy. And if he is, there may be more than a few nice Catholic women who would be interested in—oh dear—emotional (and, eventually, physical) intimacy with him. They're all around him, pressuring him, cornering him. His parents and friends see this and begin to express first thinly veiled expectations and then more and more pointed instructions about how to get himself married to the best possible of these candidates.

Can't you just hear it? If you're a gay man, it might sound very familiar. His friends ask what happened to that nice girl Meredith. Siblings point out that he never brings a girl to family get-togethers. Parents make plaintive noises about grandchildren. Every place he turns, there's more and more pressure, and it only gets worse as he gets older and still hasn't "settled down." He's made a few attempts, but by now all anyone has to hear is that he's gone out with someone once and they want to know when they can meet her, will she be coming with him at Thanksgiving, what's her family like.

And as for the women pressuring him? The older they get, the more likely they are to expect a relationship that progresses toward something. After all, their biological clocks are ticking louder each year, and they're expecting him to act like an adult and make one of them a wife and a mother.

The pressure mounts. Depending on the degree of our fellow's propensity, he might not get to the age of twenty-five before it gets to be too much for him. If his phobia and anxiety are extreme, he might feel overcome before the age of twenty. He backs away and backs away until he finds himself pressed against the cathedral doors.

Finally it dawns on him that if he were truly inside those doors, all of the marriage pressure would go away. In fact, not only would no one be asking him all those questions he can't even answer for himself, but everyone would—dare I say it—revere him. He would be seen as having given up something every adult man wants. Okay, so he'd have to give up sex, too, but wouldn't that be worth it, to rid himself of the panic, of the pressure and horrible anxiety? And isn't sex—at least, with adults—what he's trying to get away from? And as far as ambition goes, in the church maybe he'd also have to take a vow of poverty, but his chances of climbing high on a corporate ladder are no greater than those of climbing within the church hierarchy, and Catholic bishops and archbishops often have very luxurious living conditions, as well as power and influence and—hey, maybe this really is a good idea!

So he takes the plunge, believing himself to have heard a call. Perhaps he did, or perhaps what he heard was the sound of blessed relief on the other side of those doors. Or perhaps both. And he might be a very good priest. It will take a little time for him to be given his own parish, but it will all work out as long as he's committed and keeps his nose clean. And one day he is assigned to a parish.

Who's in his congregation? Everyone. He'll see grandparents and single elderly people. He'll see mothers and fathers and widows and widowers. He'll see college students and teenagers and children. And he'll be expected to love them all, to minister to them all, to get to know them all as well as possible. He can do this, from the safe distance of his ordained status, without having them place societal demands on him. He's now above society.

But will he ever be in the position of being alone with a group of little girls? Will church policy ever in a million years put him alone with any one of those little girls? No. And no. Because it's assumed that since he's a man, he would be tempted by females (babes though they may be), and that would be wrong—especially if he gave in to that temptation.

However, will he ever be in the position of being alone with a group of boys? Sure. Will he ever be alone with one boy at a time? Frequently. In fact, almost whenever he wants.

Remember our definition of a child? Sexual immaturity was central. So if a child of, say, seven is sexually undeveloped, what's the difference between little Grace and little George? Precious little. They both have soft, pink skin. They both have silky hair. They both smell good when they're clean and nowhere near as bad as adults when they're not. And when they're with our friend the priest, their voices are equally pure, and their eyes equally wide with innocence and reverence and trust. And they aren't demanding, like those anxiety-producing adults who were trying to pressure him to marry. They aren't like the women who expected to be treated as peers, as equals, as partners. Those women scared the bejesus out of our fellow.

No; the little boys don't threaten our priest the way his own family, friends, and—gulp—potential wives did. No pressure at all. No social anxiety.

I'm not going to paint this picture any further; you know what happens. So although it's no doubt true that many of these pedophile priests are gay, there's no way in hell (sorry, Father) that all of them are. And this witch hunt that the Pope is carrying out? He's shooting himself not in just one foot, but in both. Not only will he lose a lot of really good priests who just happen to be gay and not pedophiles (and it's no secret that the church can't afford to lose even one priest these days), but also he won't solve his problem. He's still going to have pedophile priests abusing little boys. They just won't be gay.

So that homophobic bigot who threw at me the mucky card that said "Pedophile" on it—remember him?—he was wrong. Why did he think he was right? I believe it's that he's terrified

of gays (that's what homophobe means, right?), and being male he responds to fear and threats with aggression. It makes him feel better to hurl something at me. If he harms me physically he could get arrested. Maybe. But if he can think of an insult that has to do with sex, he'll hurl that. What about "pedophile?" Yeah, he'll hurl that, out of ignorance, fear, and not rubbing two gray cells together about it.

Being homosexual brings with it no more and no less disposition to abuse children sexually than being heterosexual. Sexual orientation is not a psychological disorder. Not even if you're straight <grin>. (Check with any psychological organization in the country if you don't believe me.)

And before anyone yells, "This doesn't prove that those priests weren't gay!", let me point out that I'm not trying to prove that they weren't gay. I've proven that they don't have to be. I've demonstrated that it's quite feasible, quite credible, that any one or any one hundred of these pedophile priests could be straight. So if anyone wants to say that a gay man is more likely to be a pedophile than a straight man? Prove it. The onus is on you now. In fact, [even the Catholic Church agrees with me](http://joemygod.blogspot.com/2009/11/study-gay-priests-no-more-likely-to.html) (<http://joemygod.blogspot.com/2009/11/study-gay-priests-no-more-likely-to.html>).

Another one down.

### **There's No Need To Think; I Feel Instinctively This Is Wrong**

Yeah, I know, this one's kind of long for a card. But it covers so much ground that it will be worth it. Promise. Plus, this is the card that homophobic bigots hold up lots of times—especially when they are trying to insist that they are not acting out of fear.

How much of this do we need to define? More than you might think. In fact, let's start with that word: think. Thinking requires the use of our gray matter. Thinking is something most humans believe sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. There may be a few species we see as capable of thought on some level, but we're sure we leave them in the dust. Our cerebral cortex is without peer. At least on this planet.

Thinking also requires reason. Reasoning. Rationality. It involves the progression of logical ideas, reflection, consideration. It's necessary for analysis and synthesis. It raises the understanding of consequence above mere pattern recognition. It makes planning possible.

I could stop right here and point out that as long as we want to consider ourselves at the top of the food chain, we do need to think, and say that settles it. But there's more thinking to be done about this. So let's keep going, and let's think.

Next we examine the phrase "feel instinctively." Did you ever try to instinct? Can't do it, can you? An instinct is something you react to, because it causes you to have some sort of feeling. Instincts are unlearned, unemotional, non-verbal and non-cognitive. There is some debate among scientists and others studying this phenomenon about just how many distinct instincts exist—the number seems to be somewhere between one and five—but there's no debate at all that the most important one, the one to which all others yield, is survival.

An instinctive reaction typically causes us to feel something; that's where the emotion comes in. Fear is the most common, given the priorities of our instincts. Being non-cognitive, instincts don't live in our cerebral cortex. In fact, the seat of instinct is said to be the R-25 complex. The reptilian brain. I like to call it the lizard brain; it's easier to say and to type. Our lizard brain is essentially not different from that of other creatures in the animal kingdom, which means that

when we're not thinking, we're basically lizards. If we don't want to be lizards, I suggest we think.

But thinking takes time and energy and focus. It's a lot of trouble. It can be painful and complicated and frustrating. So much easier to be a lizard, isn't it? Besides, caution is safer. If we think there's a danger and there isn't, that's not likely to harm us. But if we think there isn't and there is—you do the math. So Lizardhood is seductive.

Let's try some application and see if we can get away with as little thinking as possible. Your lizard brain, the seat of instinct, has your survival as its prime directive; therefore, the more paranoid it is, the better it's doing its job. Let's give it a test.

Say I'm visiting London, where they drive on the wrong side of the street. I'm in the middle of a city block, and there's traffic going in both directions in front of me. Directly across from me is a sex toy store I've been hearing about. It would be a gas to bring back a certain item to a friend of mine, and all that fun stuff is in my head when I decide not to walk to the corner and press the button for a "walk" signal. I'm not thinking. Or, I'm not thinking about what I'm actually doing. So I look rather automatically to my left (not instinctively, since this is learned behavior; if I were merely following instinct, I wouldn't look only to my left) to see if anything's coming at me, and nothing is, so I step out.

Instantly there's a blaring horn and the squeal of brakes coming from the red double-decker bus hurtling toward me from my right. My lizard brain, with immediate access to my adrenaline system, responds so fast that my body is back on the sidewalk before my cerebral cortex has any idea what happened. The R-25 didn't waste time explaining to my human brain what was happening or what it was going to do about it. In fact, it had no way to do that. It just forced my body to react. It saved my life.

So now I'm back on the sidewalk, a little breathless from all the adrenaline, and my human brain scrambles to explain what just happened. I might say something like, "Holy crap. That stupid bus driver nearly hit me!"

Was the driver stupid? Maybe, maybe not. But my immediate need is to confabulate something that explains why I got into such a dangerous spot and justifies whatever I needed to do to get out of it. You might call this thinking, but it doesn't go very deep. If I jay-walk again, will my lizard brain save me? It will do its damndest, but maybe I'll be farther out into the street before the horn sounds. Maybe I'll trip before I can make it back to safety. Maybe the next bus's brakes won't be as good. Aside from never jay-walking again, which isn't likely to be a reform I'm prepared to make for the rest of my life, what can I do to help avoid death in this way?

Well, I might think. Really think. I shouldn't stop at blaming the bus driver. I need to apply my human brain, at which point I will realize that I'm in London where they drive on the wrong side of the street, and I'll make a plan that as long as I'm here, I'll take extra precautions. Maybe I won't jay-walk until I'm home again. Maybe I'll look both ways no matter what I expect from the traffic. But I need to think.

Was my lizard brain right? Absolutely. Can it do the task alone? Not as well as it can do it if I think.

Here's another scenario. Let's say I've never seen a Little Person, or LP (I'm talking about dwarves; apologies to anyone I've offended using that word). I'm half-walking, half-running along a city street in a great rush to get someplace. I round the corner of a building with no windows I can see through, and I nearly collide with an LP. My wordless lizard brain screams bloody murder and force-feeds me adrenaline, just like with the London bus—much, much more

adrenaline than if that person had looked like people I was used to seeing. The bus was about to kill me. Is the LP? If he's not carrying a knife or a gun or leading a pack of wolves, is he a threat to me?

I hope I would have the grace to apologize, make sure he was all right, maybe explain that I was in a huge rush, and go on my way. Adrenaline is still coursing through my system. I won't feel normal again for nearly an hour. I could dine out on that story for a month.

Was my lizard brain right this time? You know the answer; you have a cerebral cortex.

Here's a scenario that actually happened. A few years ago, when the Massachusetts Supreme Court was debating whether or not the state constitution prohibited legal same-sex marriage, there was a lot of bru-ha-ha about it. One enterprising journalist took a microphone out onto the street and asked people what their position was, and why. I'll never forget one answer given by an unidentified woman. She said she was against same-sex marriage, because—this is a direct quote—“If we allow men to marry men and women to marry women, pretty soon there won't be enough children in the world.”

When I heard that, I began sputtering even more helplessly than our homophobic friend when I grilled him about what made sex natural. There are so many flaws in this absurd statement that it's hard to know where to begin. I'll start with the most obvious.

Children. How many children are on the planet today? How many of them are unwanted, or starving, or neglected, or all three? How many people would have to become suddenly barren for us to be in any danger whatsoever of running out of children? Whatever the number is, you can bet your ass it's a hell of a lot higher than the number of gay people in the world.

Next, children. Even if this ridiculous person were correct about running out of children, her conclusion makes sense only if no gay people ever have children. Wrong. Very wrong.

Finally (though there are many more, I'm going to expose only three fallacies), no—not children this time. Nature. Her conclusion implies that if the law refused to recognize the union of the lesbians who brought the suit to court in Massachusetts, those women would wave wistfully at each other and go and find eligible men with whom to settle down and procreate. WRONG AGAIN! Why? Because although we could choose to live straight lives, that won't make us straight. It would be unnatural. For us. Sure, there are those who make this decision, and in my experience some succeed better than others, but for most of us it would mean a life of lying. Lying to our spouses. Lying to our birth families and our families-in-law. Lying to our friends. Lying to our co-workers. Lying to our children (and weren't children the most important thing?). Lying to ourselves.

Was that woman thinking? She thought so, but she wasn't. (Even worse, she votes.) She got about as far as “That stupid bus driver nearly hit me!” Which is to say that she reacted to what her lizard brain dictated, confabulated desperately to try and make sense out of what fear drove her to conclude, and came up with something that makes no sense whatsoever when exposed to actual thought processes. To reason.

If you don't have to make sense (and your lizard brain doesn't expect sense), you can say anything at all. And that's what she did.

You might be wondering about now what her lizard brain has to do with this particular example. After all, it's not like the bus, or even the LP.

Her lizard brain sees her as the center of the universe. Its primary job is her survival, and it's more efficient at this if it presumes that anything that's different from her is a threat until and unless it's proven otherwise.

Gay people are not forced to wear arm bands (this year). Therefore, many straight people are likely to say, "Oh, I don't know any gay people." Absurd. They just don't know who the gay people are. That is, until something happens that forces them to acknowledge it. Take the example of me in the corporate conference room, answering questions about Hawai'i. It could be that no one in that room knew I was gay, and they wouldn't have known, if I hadn't said that I had a male domestic partner. Then it's WHAM! And suddenly they have to deal with it.

What I'm saying is that very often, when someone like this woman finds out someone is gay, either it comes as a surprise, or it is suddenly something she must deal with (like having an opinion about current events), or both. To her lizard brain, because this orientation goes against what's natural *for her*, this phenomenon is a threat. It's dangerous. It's wrong.

This woman, for personal reasons I'm not privy to, evidently decided against going the religious route. She didn't say anything about God or the Bible or even morality. She based her entire response on something she obviously believed to be vitally important: children. No argument from me, in principle. But her lizard brain's profoundly negative and fear-inspiring reaction to me sends her cerebral cortex into panic mode, screaming at it to do something QUICKLY! And that's when confabulation begins. Her lizard brain forces her to react in a way that her cerebral cortex feels obliged to try and make sense out of. But it can't make sense out of it, because I'm not a threat to her. Really. So she failed to make sense; she just didn't know it.

Some of you may be demanding to know why homosexuals' lizard brains don't scream when we are surprised by heterosexuals, or when we suddenly have to deal with them. The fact is, we aren't surprised, ever; not only are there more straights than gays in the world, so we're used the encounters, but also most gay people spent some portion of our lives thinking of ourselves as straight because we weren't presented with any other option. So our cerebral cortexes have already calmed our R-25 complexes out of a knee-jerk Eeeewww reaction to heterosexuals.

But back to the lizard in Massachusetts. While all of us, at some point or points in our lives, do and say things that are foolish or that don't make sense, the worst possible times are when our foolishness has detrimental effects on others. This woman, voting as her lizard brain dictates, wanted to take away my civil rights. While I would agree that she's as entitled to her opinion as I am to mine, I would insist that she not be allowed to deny me my civil rights without a damned good reason. As a start, she could try thinking. How would she react if I told her that what she does in bed is so awful that she shouldn't be allowed to marry because the last thing I want to do is encourage that behavior, and that I was casting a vote to take that right away from her?

Once upon a time, white people reacted to black people in much the same way as many heteros react to gays today. Many white people still do. Something in their lizard brains goes berserk at this creature that is different from what is normal and natural for that particular lizard brain's host, and all hell breaks loose. Don't think it was hell? Ask a black person.

Thank God many of us white folks have done our best to quell this knee-jerk reaction to the "different" among us, and there are now laws to help us (though the work's far from over). And although I'm sure there are some bigoted whites out there who feel otherwise, it would have been a stupid, narrow-minded, horrible thing if in the 1950s we had amended the U.S. Constitution to forbid a person of color to marry a person of—well, of what? Of no color? White people aren't really white. Black people are seldom really black. What we all are is people. But it would not have been out of the question, not so long ago, to forbid a lawful marriage between, say, Isaiah Washington and Sandra Oh. Except that she—well, is she white?

Goodness, this is difficult, isn't it? My point is that it would have been a huge mistake to have passed a Federal law like that (by the way, there were several state laws; all gone now, I believe). But many fewer people would have thought so in 1955 than now. Many things seem less threatening if we just give ourselves a little time to get used to them. And when you consider that the gay rights movement didn't even get started until June of 1969 (remember the Stonewall riots?), there hasn't been a lot of time for heteros to get used to gays. But given time and frequent exposure to things that seem different from us, our cerebral cortex has a chance to influence the knee-jerk reaction of our lizard brains and calm the fear that it inspires. "It's okay," we can say to the reptile, "it's just an LP." "It's just Isaiah Washington." "It's just a gay person."

So in summary, there was the bus scenario. Would your lizard brain save you in that case? Maybe, but a second dangerous situation could be avoided if you apply enough brain power to figure out what really happened. There was the surprise encounter with the LP. Would your lizard brain save you there? From what? There was the blithering idiot in Massachusetts. If nothing else, she needs to be saved from blithering idiocy, at least in public. Her lizard brain not only didn't save her from that, but it actually caused it.

Do we need to think? I'm going to say yes. And that's the fifth one down.

### **Card Summary**

Unnatural: shredded. It would be just as unnatural for me to force my unwilling physiology to have a sexual response to a woman as it would be unnatural for my homophobic friend to force himself to respond sexually to me. Plus, there's the 1,500+ animal species with gay individuals among their populations.

Abnormal: shredded. The word is a statistical term, not a moral judgment, and it's normal for some percentage of the human race (and other animal species) to be homosexual.

Promiscuous: shredded. If I'm gay, and I'm promiscuous, it has a lot more to do with the fact that I'm male than the fact that I'm gay. Being gay just makes me more successful at it—if I want to be.

Pedophile: shredded. There's nothing about the definition of a homosexual that makes him any more likely to abuse children sexually than for a heterosexual to do so. Neither I nor my homophobic friend can have a biological, sexual response to a child. Pedophilia has no basis in sexual orientation.

No need to think when we feel instinctively about something: shredded. Shredded for so many reasons I'm not going to go over them again. If you need to, re-read that section. Trust me; it's shredded.

Now it's your turn. Here's one way to go about it, if you don't have a real live faggot-bag to work with. Take a piece of lined paper, the kind with a vertical line down the left to leave a small margin. Use a legal size—you'll need the room. Go someplace quiet with your paper and a pen, and to the right of the margin on each line write something different that you've heard about how terrible it is to be gay. All those assumptions that some people try to use to support the conclusion that gay is wrong. Want me to get you started? How about "twisted" and "sick" and "just wrong" and "perverted" and "selfish" and "deluded" and "dangerous" and and and do I need to spell them out for you? You know what they are, whether you hurled them or had them hurled at you. Write down everything you can think of. When you get to the end, go ask a homophobe, and you'll get a few more.

Now, go back to that quiet corner with your list and your pen. Start at the top with the first one—or any one, it doesn't matter—and go through our process. Define it. Break it down to the teeniest pieces you can. Apply known facts and rational tests to it. See if you can reconstruct that assumption again so that it supports the fallacy that gay equals bad.

The last thing is to examine gay people in light of this thing. For each line, ask yourself, "Does this apply to any gay people that I know of?" Maybe the piece you're examining is promiscuity. Does it apply? If not, leave the left margin on that line blank and go to the next line. If it does, ask yourself a second question: "Does it apply to them *because they're gay*?" You already know the answer to that one. Again, leave the left margin blank and go on to the next line. When you're finished, you shouldn't have any check marks in the left margin. If you do, go back. Define again. Break it down again, and be creative in how you do that. Do some research. Apply science, apply psychology, apply anything that's reasonably provable. Now try and reconstruct it again. I'll bet you can't. I'll bet you'll have to cross out that check mark.

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THE I-BEAM STRATEGY

So far I've spent a lot of time and used a lot of words to show that there are no rational reasons (is that redundant? if so, I think it was warranted, considering how much irrational, thoughtless blabber has been put forth by the homophobic world) to condemn or to fear gays or homosexuality. And, IMHO, I've accomplished a lot. But so far, only the condemnations that science, psychology, and – well, reason can destroy have been shredded. The most intractable condemnation is yet to come: religion.

I'm not against religion, per se. I'm just with The Reverend Lawrence Keene: "It's okay to have a fifth grade understanding of God, as long as you're in the fifth grade."

But we can't use reason alone to enhance a fifth grade understanding of God or religion. Religion is faith-based, not reason-based. We know this because even though a religion might insist on its absolute truth, it can't prove that. And yet people believe it.

So just to get us started, let's define.

A religion is a system of applying faith. It's not faith itself, despite the fact that many people use the two terms as though they were the same. It would be tough to support a religion without faith (unless lip service is enough for you), but you can certainly have faith without religion. A religion is also a kind of blueprint for life. It's based on identifiable doctrine, it establishes its own authority figures, and it contains rituals and, usually, dogma. The typical Judea-Christian religions all go on at great lengths about what you should and should not do to live the kind of life the God in question expects.

So a religion such as Christianity is a model for life.

I told you in the beginning that the model I'm going to show you is a kind of business model, but it's also a life model. In fact, it's an extremely useful life model. I put it together for the purposes of this discussion, but I have to say I've used it in many ways since then, to great success.

I've never seen anyone use it in the form I'm going to describe it here; I admit is simplistic, and on its own it wouldn't do a project manager much good. But it really is the foundation of all project management disciplines that work. I'm going to apply it in a very creative way, if I do say so myself.

Here it is:

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SITUATION

See? Really simple. I'll bet you understand the relationships among the three components already. But let me go through it anyway. Humor me. You might be surprised. First, let's define each component.

Objective is where you want to get to, or what you want to accomplish. It's the reason you're doing whatever it is you're doing. It's what *must not fail*. What happens if it fails? Kind of depends on what "it" is, but in all cases the goal, the dream, dies.

Situation (surprised that I didn't go directly to tactics? Bear with me...) is where you are. It can also be what resources you have. It's the place from which you're going to take action in order to achieve your objective. This is where you make your plans. In Situation, you don't take any action at all other than researching where you are or what you have to work with, and then making plans. If you don't understand your situation well enough, especially in a complex project, you're almost certainly going to fail.

Tactics are the actions you take—what you do and what you deliberately avoid doing, *based on your situation*, to accomplish your objective. The really interesting thing about Tactics is that they have to be firmly rooted in Situation. If a given tactic is not rooted, it's going to be a waste of time and resources at best, or it's going to jeopardize your objective at worst. The really puzzling thing about Tactics is how many people want to go there second. Right after Objective. Hell, a lot of people don't even bother to understand Objective very thoroughly before they start applying tactics. That is, before they start doing things.

Now, if you're normally-abled, getting out of bed in the morning as an objective will not require a whole lot of planning, and you probably won't even think about it as an objective, let alone establish your situation or examine your tactics to see if they're useful or dangerous. But what if you were quadriplegic? In that situation (that is, where you start from), achieving the objective of getting out of bed is more complex and will require some planning and some very specific tactics.

I know I told you I was going to apply this model creatively. I will, but we aren't there yet. First I have to make sure that I've been really really really clear about how to use this model, because otherwise the chapters following it will be easy to misunderstand and even dismiss.

I'll give you a couple of examples, and I'll demonstrate how this model can be applied to a project or goal as situation moves through time, and how it can be applied to a single slice of time.

Office Tower: Situation changing over time

You're going to build an office tower. You're a business person, not an architect or the owner of a construction company. You're more like Donald Trump, only not quite as wealthy. And with better hair.

What's your objective? Do I hear some people say "Build an office tower"? If you said that, you're actually describing a tactic, not a goal. Because *why* are you going to build this tower? What will you do with it when it's done? You're going to lease out office space, right? So what you really want is to spend less money on your tower than you expect to receive through these leases over some period of time that you deem a good return.

So what's your **Objective**? That's right; making money. (It might also be to win Daddy's approval at long last, or prove to your big brother that you're cleverer than he is, but those goals are beyond my capacity to help you plan for.) If you forget that your objective is making money, if you lose sight of this goal and get distracted by how pretty the thing will be or how great it will feel to see your name so near the clouds, you could easily make some very foolish decisions about how to proceed each time the situation changes. Because guess what. The situation will change. It always does. Shift happens.

We're ready to talk about **Situation** now, because we're clear on our Objective: making money. How do we know we're clear? Because trying to answer the question "Why?" isn't bringing any more clarity. You may have your own personal reasons for making money, but again they're personal and not something we'll address here. For most people, making money is enough of an objective.

So first, what's your situation today? Do you already own the real estate you want to build on? If you have to lease the land, have you figured enough expense into your financial plans to build your tower where it will bring in as much lease money as possible as quickly as possible? (Remember your objective.) Is there a building of any sort already on it? Will it need to be totally demolished, or can you use anything on the site?

Do you have storage facilities where you can keep materials for the construction, or will you need to rent space, and can you afford to do that? Or will you rely on just-in-time delivery, which can be risky? Whichever it is, plan accordingly.

Will you use union workers or hire people who will work for less but may have less experience and who may not speak English well enough for communication to be easy? Union workers (who also sometimes don't speak English as a first language) are more expensive and may strike; non-union workers present different potential risks, like having unions picket you. Whichever it is, plan accordingly.

Will your contractor have access to enough heavy equipment to replace something quickly if it breaks down? Available redundant equipment will increase your cost, but there's a risk to the lower cost; if some critical piece of equipment breaks down and takes time to fix, your entire schedule could be affected. What's the result? A negative impact on your cash flow. What's your objective?

Will you hire a known architect whose work is proven or a newby architect, partly because she'll be cheaper and partly because you want to give her an opportunity? What's the risk worth to you?

All this, and lots more, must be asked and answered and planned for before you take step one. That is, before you perform even one of your tactics. Because how will you know which tactics to do first if you don't have a solid plan?

When you've planned as well as you can, knowing the kinds of hazards a project like this could entail, you need to think about what could happen over time. Like the possibility of a union strike. Or of a weather disaster, depending on what city you're in. Earthquake? Hurricane? Tornado? Ice storm? You can't predict, but you can anticipate. Shift happens. But no matter how thorough you are, you know there will be things you can't plan for. Only when you've done all the planning and anticipating you can do will you begin the Tactics portion of your project. But keep in mind that over time, as the situation changes, you'll have to change your tactics. Shift happens. That's not an echo.

So. **Tactics**. Now's the time you hire the architect, and make arrangements for materials storage, and clear the land. Here's where you put one foot in front of the other, shift your weight, put the back foot in front of you, shift weight again, and move forward.

Time passes. You've hired union workers. There's a strike involving electricians. What changed? Situation. What might have to change next? Plan, and tactics. You might decide to wait out the strike, but that's money lost on everyone else you either have to keep paying or let

go. If the strike begins to look intractable, you could decide to hire non-union workers. Be prepared for demonstrations, possible vandalism, violence. This is a change in tactics. And what brought it about? Did the objective change? No, not unless it has failed. What brought about a change in tactics was a change in situation.

If you don't change your tactics to accommodate changes in situation, you could get into financial trouble. What will that mean for your objective? What's your objective?

Serengeti Plain: Different situations, same slice of time

We're on the Serengeti. It's a rugged place for the animal inhabitants—in some cases kill or be killed, in others run or be eaten. So the objective for all of these animals is the same: survival. It would take too long to examine the situations of all these creatures, so I'll select two with a basic difference in their respective situations.

On one hand, we have the lioness. What's her objective? Survival.

What's her situation? She lives on the Serengeti, she has access to food and water most of the time, she must sleep, she feels compelled to help maintain the pride so she'll have to submit from time to time to the attentions of that mangy thing who seldom hunts for himself, and once he's had his way she has cubs to care for, but this is necessary for the survival of her species, so she'll have to do it.

What are her tactics? She submits to the mangy thing, she bears and raises her cubs, she scouts out watering holes and moves with the water in dry times if necessary, she drinks, she eats, and she does all the other biological necessities of life that we don't need to go into in detail. The most basic thing she does is eat. She eats to survive. Survival makes all the other things possible. (Interestingly, it's also her objective.) And to get food, she hunts. That's a tactic based on her situation (a carnivore on the Serengeti Plain), and it supports her objective.

On the other hand we have a Thompson's gazelle. What's his objective? Survival. What's his situation? He actually has a lot in common with the lioness, and with a few exceptions (like submitting to the mangy thing) their tactics are also the same. However, the most important tactic, eating, is performed in a different way. If the gazelle were to chase the lioness, what would happen to his objective? In fact, in order to support his objective of survival, he has a tactic that trumps eating: running.

For both these animals, the objective is the same; the situation is the same in many places but different in a few critical ones; and wherever the situations are different, the tactics must be correspondingly different.

I want to be very clear about something before going on, so I'm going to say it again: a Tactic that is not firmly grounded in Situation will not support Objective. For any given objective, situation almost always changes (shift happens). When situation changes, the tactics that depended on the changed aspects of the situation must be revisited and, probably, changed.

Clear?

Hope so. Because we're about to apply it to the very, very touchy subject of religion.

THE BIGGEST CARD

The God Card

Remember virtual cards? Those things that homophobic bigots will flip up at me to prove how disgusting I am because I'm gay? Before anyone starts worrying that I'm going to show you how to shred a card that has "God" on it, let me tell you what the holders of this card are saying when they hold it up to me: **Damned**. That's what we'll shred.

Examining this card is going to be very difficult for some people. One reason could be that most of us never think about religion. We might think about being nice to each other, or about forgiving each other, or about going to church, or about what we'll wear to this year's Easter service, or whether perhaps we have a calling into the ministry. We might even indulge in a little textual examination of scripture. Our own apologia, our own exegesis. But—how much do we really think about what the ultimate goal is?

The more troublesome reason—that is, the one that's more likely to make some people choke on an examination of this card—is that our minds are closed. Somewhere along the line, someone convinced us (and some will say it was Jesus who did the convincing) that the Bible is not to be questioned. That it contains the sacred, inerrant, and immutable Word of God. In my experience with many of these individuals, there's nothing rational or logical that anyone can say to them that will shift them off of this position. Even this exchange doesn't help:

Me: What is the Bible?

Partisan: The sacred, inerrant, immutable and inspired Word of God.

Me: How do we know?

Partisan: The Bible says so.

To these individuals, and to anyone else who feels uncomfortable approaching religion the way I'm going to do it, I say this: If the Bible is right, then it will be right when you've heard what I have to say. If it's immutable, I'm not going to be able to change anything about it.

So open your mind, just a little. It might not be easy; it might actually be scary. But you have nothing to lose. I can't hurt you or the Bible or God. Furthermore, I'm not even going to say that anything in the Bible is wrong.

Surprised?

So. Ready? Here we go.

This is the really creative application I promised you of that very simple business model. It might look ridiculous, at first blush, to try and apply a business model to the God card. But think of it this way: the concepts of faith and religion (not the same thing, by the way, because you can have faith without religion, but religion without faith is meaningless) are not based on fact. They don't depend on reason, or proof, and one person's experiences usually don't resemble another's exactly, even if those two people belong to the same church. These factors make this particular card the most powerful one of all. We can't dissect it. We can't define it so that even two people agree on what it is.

So how are we going to deal with this card? Trying to wrap our cerebral cortex around something that isn't based on reason is rather like trying to snatch a fish out of moving water with your bare hands. Or like trying to locate a small object somewhere on a very large field. We

need a model, such as the rope grid that professional searchers would place onto that field to help them eliminate areas where the object wasn't found and move to new ones.

Fortunately, we have a model. The I-Beam Strategy.

The religion I'm going to apply the model to is Christianity, partly because it's the one I'm most familiar with, and partly because most everyone who'll read this will be able to follow along, even if you're not Christian yourself, because it's pretty much all around us in Western culture. But I want to be clear that this model could be applied to any religion. Its very simplicity allows it to move into some very unusual areas, for a business model. And in fact, it's really not just a business model. As I said earlier, it can be used as a model for life. The lioness and the Thompson's gazelle do exactly that.

So. Let's apply.

Objective

Before we start, I want to apologize to agnostics, non-theists, and atheists, because in working through this, I'm going to speak as though we all believe in God in some way. Bear with me, and I'll show you later how it can apply to you, too.

What is our objective, in terms of this entity called God? What's our goal in achieving the ideal relationship with God? What must not fail?

Some people will say "Getting to heaven." Remember when we were working out our objective in building the office tower, and I said we would know the objective was clear when the question "Why?" wasn't bringing any more clarity? When "Getting to heaven" is given as the objective for our relationship with God, I'm going to ask, "Why? Where is this place, and what makes it so wonderful?" If we explore this avenue, we'll probably decide that what makes heaven so wonderful is that God is there, and all the people we love, and we have everything that makes us happy. The next question is, "What makes us happy?" I mean, what if one of those people you love turns out to love someone you can't stand, and that third person is right here in heaven with you? Will that make you happy?

We could explore this for a considerable amount of time, but I think where we'll end up is here: the Love that is God is the be-all-and-end-all (would that be the alpha and the omega?) of heaven. If this adventure that religion would lead us on ends well, then the love God has for us, the love we have for God, the love that we have for each other because of the joy that only love can bring, will transcend any differences that would make heaven less than wonderful. So it's really about love. It's that Love that passes all understanding that we've heard so much about. It's that love that makes us feel like we belong, like we're home at last, a feeling we wouldn't give up for any number of office towers. And why do we want that love? I can't come up with a response that explains that, other than the joy it brings. All I know is that it drives most of what happens on earth. Sometimes we're driven to get it, and sometimes because of the lack of it, but always it's about love. Even the lizard brain in us is acting out of some aspect of love of self.

Some people will respond to the question of the objective with something like, "Doing what God wants." And what's the model's response? That's right: "Why? Who is this God person anyway, and why is what God wants more important than what I want?" Again, we could go round and round for a while, but I suspect we're going to end up at Love again—that surpassing Love that is God, beyond which nothing matters.

Some will respond "Glorifying God." Um—why? Oh; because God loves us so much? Because of the joy we feel when we return that love?

Imagine having that love. No, wait; I think actually it would be more like being *inside* that love. Imagine that. I'll give you a minute.

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What are your feelings toward God? Toward anyone else in that place called heaven, if that's where you see yourself? Does the love you're inside of make you feel connected with God? With those other souls? With your own soul, for that matter? Just as that Love passes understanding, this connection passes understanding. And it's love that creates and maintains that connection.

We could go through a number of these examples, and if you come up with one that doesn't end in love, I'm going to suggest that you haven't reached clarity yet. You haven't asked "why" often enough, or you've gotten distracted and aren't really talking any longer about what must not fail. So I'm going to say that our religious objective, our life objective, our objective vis à vis God, is this: loving connection. You may feel more comfortable phrasing this differently. If you're one of the folks who said "Getting to heaven," or "Glorifying God," that's fine, as long as you understand that it's a deep, unfathomable loving connection with God that makes everything so wonderful.

If we want some scriptural confirmation, let's go to Matthew 22:37. This is where Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. In other words, with everything you are, love God completely. This commandment has an interesting subtext to it. An assumption, really. In order to love God with everything you are, you must know *what* you are. You must know yourself. Know yourself, and love God with all of it. Jesus tells us this is the most important thing any of us can do, and we are commanded to do it.

The second greatest commandment, moving into verse 39, is to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. Again, there's a subtext. How much sense would it make for Jesus to tell you this, if you didn't love yourself? So the assumption is that you love yourself. And then you are to love everyone else as much.

So in summary: Know yourself, and love God with all of that; love yourself, and love everyone else the same. This sounds to me like it's getting us to loving connection. This sounds like the way to the objective. And if there's any doubt, Jesus removes it in verse 40: all other laws depend on these two commandments. So if you're trying to follow a law that prevents you from loving God with everything you are, or if you're exempting or separating part of yourself from loving God, or if what you're doing shows that in fact you don't love yourself or your neighbor, you're disobeying the two most important things Jesus told us to do. Everything we do must support these two commandments, if we're to reach our objective of loving connection.

Those of you who know your Old Testament will realize that these two commandments do not appear among the famous Ten in Deuteronomy. But if you follow these two, the Ten will fall into place like so many well-placed dominoes. I mean, if I love you as much as I love myself, how can I lie to you or steal from you, let alone kill you? But even with all these commandments, we need to remember that they are TACTICS. (We'll cover scriptural tactics later in more detail.) The Objective is still loving connection, or just Love if you prefer. So we know the commandments are tactics because—why? Well, because it isn't not stealing that's absolute; it's loving each other too much to steal that's absolute. This is the objective; not stealing is the result.

Before you read on, I encourage you to think about your own, personal relationship with God, or with Life. What is it that must not fail?

Situation

Just as it wouldn't have been productive to examine every aspect of the differences in Situation between the lioness and the Thompson's gazelle above, it wouldn't be productive to describe every aspect of our situation as we continue to apply the Strategy I-Beam to the God card. Because what we're talking about here is our lives.

Instead of going into painful detail about what our lives are like, let's compare our general situation today to the general situation of—say, two thousand years ago. This is rational, because when we're applying our model, what will be important is understanding what the situation was when the plan was made (that is, when the texts were written), and how the situation has changed between then and now, so that we can figure out which tactics need to be reassessed.

"Tactics?" you say. "Tactics?" Yes. The Bible is chock full of tactics. Remember that the definition of a tactic is something you do or don't do, based on your situation, to support your objective. Something you do or don't do. Do you hear the phrases "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" echoing through the corridors of time? Tactics. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

What was our situation when the plan was established? The answer to that kind of depends on whether you start when Jesus was wandering around Galilee or thousands of years before that, when the very first books of the Christian Old Testament were written—the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, which became the wisdom of the Jews. Remember that Jesus was called rabbi. And remember that his coming was prophesied by the Old Testament, so without it his followers would have no way to claim the title "Christ" for him. So how far back do we go?

For now, let's start in the time of Jesus, reserving the right to delve deeper into the annals when we're ready.

So what was our situation then? We'll place ourselves in a settlement outside Jerusalem, with access to the hills and with our houses in a semi-urban cluster that serves as our community. Jesus has been crucified, and our community, having accepted his message, is doing its best to follow his teachings, good Jews that we are. Remember that most of the early followers were, in fact, Jews who had accepted Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish prophecy for a messiah. A Christ.

I'm living in standard housing for the time, one or two rooms with walls of dried earth and probably tiles for a roof, or maybe some other material; I'm no historian, so bear with me. It's not these details that matter.

I live here with my wife, our three kids, and her parents. We have no electricity, no running water, no stove, no dishwasher, no microwave oven, no computer, no Internet—you get the picture. How can I be married, you ask? Aren't I gay? I know this much about history: until the last couple of centuries, the homosexual orientation wasn't recognized as anything other than an occasional aberration by certain heterosexual people. The very words "homosexual" and "heterosexual" weren't coined until the late nineteenth century; no apparent need for a distinction, so no distinction. Everyone was straight by default so there was no word for it. No one had time to sit around gazing at his navel (haven't been able to see mine for a while, but never mind) wondering what would make him happy. What would make him feel fulfilled. What his true destiny might be. Everyone was straight, because there was no other option. And two

thousand years ago, you'd better believe everyone in our little community was living hand-to-mouth and barely surviving.

So. I got married as soon as I could find a biologically efficacious female (where have I heard that phrase before? Hint: we were examining the Unnatural card) from good stock who would have me, and I was glad to have her. Not many people had the luxury of marrying for love. Mostly they married out of necessity, and they did their best—if they were followers of Jesus, or of any similar philosophy—to find love in that relationship. And they started having kids just as soon as possible. Why? Read on.

As I said, in our situation two thousand years ago I have three kids. My wife gave birth to five in the past seven years, but two died. Pretty standard for the times; I was lucky not to lose her, too. She may have more, but we'll have to wait and see; she's getting old, at twenty-five. She married late.

My in-laws live with us. Why? Well, my mother-in-law had four kids, but only my wife survived. You say that doesn't answer the question? Let's explore. Just as we don't have electricity or running water and so on, we also don't have money. I'm really lucky if I have a shekel in a purse hanging from my belt. Same for my in-laws. And because no one has any money, there are no banks, no savings accounts, no retirement funds or pension plans. The exceedingly few people who actually have money have to pay guards to keep it safe. So if my wife and I didn't take her parents in, they'd be out in the street, dying in the gutters. Not only do we not need any more flies and rats than we already have, but also this callous treatment would fly in the face of that second most important commandment. If you want a more secular reason, we need *our* kids to see that this is expected, or my wife and I will be in that gutter someday.

The parents-in-law who live with me pull their weight, as best they can. Mom cards and spins the wool from the goats I herd on those hills outside of town, and Dad knows how to make cheese with the milk and how to preserve the meat when there's a slaughter or one of the goats dies, provided we can barter some wool or some cheese for salt. But Mom, at forty-two, and Dad, at forty-three (they haven't got much longer on this earth) are way too decrepit to lug those heavy ceramic jugs to the well in the middle of town several times a day to get the water we all need, so my wife does that.

My parents were luckier than my in-laws; they had four of us who survived, and since I have to support my wife's parents, my siblings support mine.

In the house next to us lives a nice couple. True followers of Jesus, very clear on the objective and how to get there. Last year, when the youngest of my kids got sick, my wife tried very hard to save her. Stayed with her every minute. And the woman next door was a saint. She fetched water for our entire family right up until my little girl died. And her husband? Another wonderful person. Two years ago, I broke my ankle chasing after one of those damned goats. He's a shepherd, too, and he took care of my goats as well as his while my ankle healed. I have a permanent limp (no doctors), but I can manage.

Wonderful people. It's a shame God hasn't seen fit to bless them with any living children. We know they're trying; we can hear them in there doing their best. But she's had two miscarriages, and that was a while ago. So what's going to happen to them when they get to be forty-two, and their teeth are falling out, and their bones are misshapen from overwork and undernourishment? Who's going to take care of them? The answer is my kids. And the kids of everyone else in our part of this community. Why? Not just because they're so wonderful, but because if we didn't, we'd be disobeying the most important things Jesus told us to do. Will our kids resent it? Maybe a little, but they can complain only so much. It isn't the fault of these terrific people that they

don't have kids. It's God's will, as far as we can tell. Plus, we want this protocol established; it could be one of our kids who goes childless in the next generation.

Let's change the neighbor couple's situation just a tad. Let's say that not only do they not have kids, they don't want them. They're doing their level best to avoid them. The woman has said as much to my wife. "Kids. Noisy, dirty, too much trouble. Tell you what. If one of your kids gets sick, I'll help you out as much as I can. I'll even fetch your family's water for days and days. Just don't ask me to take care of any of your kids."

Who's going to take care of *them* when they get to be forty-two? You guessed it: my kids, and the kids of everyone else in our vicinity. Will they resent it? You bet your ass, they will. Because this couple deliberately, knowingly arranged their lives so that they would end up as charity cases on the backs of the next generation, without even trying to ease that burden. And our lives are hard enough as it is, thank you very much; the next generation will already be caring for their own parents, as well as the old folks who tried and failed to have living children. So who do these people think they are, that they can arrange their lives to their own convenience and everyone else's increased suffering?

The word "sin" is used a lot in scripture. Literally, it means "missing the mark." And what's the mark? Our objective is the mark. Loving connection. Following those two most important commandments in everything that we do. So if we do something that we know full well will jeopardize our own ability to follow those commandments, or if we do something that we know full well will cause others to struggle in their attempts to follow them, what are we doing? We're sinning. We're missing the mark.

That couple who decided not to have kids? They're sinning. *In that situation.*

Let's change the neighbors one more time. Now it's two men who have decided that they love each other emotionally, physically, spiritually, in every way they can. No one expects that between them they are going to produce children. So, just like the heterosexual couple who actively decided not to have kids, it doesn't matter how wonderful these guys are while they're able-bodied. At some point, they know full well that my kids are going to have to take care of them. Jesus never said the ten commandments that Moses presented were no longer in effect. In fact, the two he gave us make those other ten fall into place rather by default; if I love myself, and I love you just as much, how can I kill you? So, no adultery, which means neither of these neighbor fellows can have a few minutes alone with a woman he isn't married to, in hopes of begetting a child. And forget the old turkey baster routine as well.

Those two men are sinning. *In that Situation.* They're missing the mark.

I've heard a number of gay people say that they have no problem reconciling their homosexuality with their Christianity because Jesus never said anything about it. To these people I want to say, "So what? I'll bet if we could go back two thousand years and ask him, he'd say, 'Uh, gee, guys. No. You can't really do that. Not the way things are now.'"

Look at it this way. As you read the New Testament, how many times do you see parables and anecdotes and metaphors that have to do with fishing? Why? Because so many of Jesus's disciples had been fishermen. If he was the all-knowing, God-incarnate entity that the most devout believe, then he knew he had only a short time to get his disciples on board before they had to carry on for themselves, so he spoke in language and about situations that made sense to them.

I happen to think the Internet is a great metaphor for loving connection. I can just hear Jesus saying, "You know this Kingdom of God I've been telling you about? It's great. It's all about love.

I know you look around you and see yourselves as different from each other, but here's what you can have if you follow those two commandments I gave you. It will be a lot like the Internet. Each of you is a node on the Internet, and the bandwidth that connects all of you is made of love. There are different kinds of love, like the security layer and the http layer and all the other layers of this bandwidth, but altogether they make up the most wonderful network..." Either all the faces around him are totally blank at this point, or they're clouded with thoughts of how to capture this madman and lock him up someplace where he isn't a danger to anyone. No one would take him seriously, and his mission would fail. The moral of the story? Even if Jesus had known that someday the Internet would exist, and even if he agreed with me that it makes a great metaphor for his message, he couldn't have used it. Not then. Not in that situation. And by the same token, even if he knew that one day our situation would have changed so that we didn't all necessarily have to take our in-laws into our crowded little two-room hovels, if he knew that one day it wouldn't matter if the two guys next door never had any kids, even if he knew that, he couldn't have said it. It would have made no more sense to the people of our little first-century community than the metaphor of the Internet. So, *in that situation, at that time*, he could not have agreed to same-sex marriage. The tactic of everyone having children was essential *because of the situation*.

Need some more convincing about how situation has changed? Fine; let's go farther back.

There are lots and lots of sacred laws—or, at least they were sacred at one point, and they're still in that collection of books without which the Christ would have no leg to stand—the books most people ignore utterly and still call themselves good Christians, or observant Jews. Want me to name a few of these so-called sacred laws? How about not planting two different kinds of plants together? Never mind that today we know planting marigolds with tomato plants helps keep the bugs off the fruit. How about not wearing clothing made of mixed fibers? Will you miss your cotton/linen blend sweaters? Your silk/wool blend suits? Your rayon? If you have a child, did you know you're obliged to put that child to death if he curses you? If the child is a she, don't worry; you can sell her off as a slave, as long as you take her far enough away.

Oh, and by the way, everyone knows that all the raw material necessary to make a human is contained in male cum, and a woman's only purpose in life is that of a human oven. This means you men can essentially treat her as property, as chattel, because the male is obviously God's chosen sex. I mean, isn't God a man, after all? Need I say more? So playing with yourself, young man, is a sin! You're essentially killing people! If you're ready to be shooting off, it's time you were married; that is the stuff of human life you're wasting. Abominable! And if you think you're going to go at it with another boy, well that's tantamount to murder. Abominable again, for the same reason! It wasn't the sex that was abominable; it was that both of them were killing someone. No one ever said one word in the OT about woman-on-woman action. It was only male cum they cared about.

If we go far enough back into the Torah, we see that it was common practice for a man to have several wives. And the law states specifically that he is allowed to rape his slaves, as long as they're female. Today, this is the abomination. Today, most of us think the idea of owning another human being is abomination.

Um, what happened?

I'll tell you. Shift happened. Remember Situation? It's not absolute. It changes. Even if the objective doesn't change, it's practically a guarantee that situation will change, given enough time and enough influential factors. And what do you have to do when Situation changes, if you want to be sure you're still working toward your Objective? You have to reassess your Tactics.

So why are so many supposedly loving Christians (and others, but we're picking on Christianity right now) still condemning homosexuality? Let's examine Tactics and see if that brings some clarity.

Tactics

Do not murder. Honor your father and mother. Do not bear false witness. Do not plant different plants together. Do not eat shellfish or pork. Do not marry a divorced woman (male audience was usually presumed in the Bible; women were too inferior to trouble with). Do not lie with another man. Do not waste seed.

Do this, don't do that. Mostly "don't," actually.

Tactics, all.

And what do we know about Tactics? Right; they must be firmly rooted in Situation in order to support Objective. When shift happens, Tactics need to be reassessed based on the new Situation to determine whether or not they support or jeopardize Objective.

In our changed situation—that is, today, as opposed to two thousand years ago—does it still make sense to allow men to rape their female slaves, based on the accepted "facts" (at the time the OT was written) that slavery was a necessity of society and women were almost but not quite human and they contributed nothing to the new life so it didn't matter which oven men planted their seed in?

In our changed situation, should everyone still be desperately trying to have large families? Are we still (as when the Torah was written) desperate to enlarge and purify our Jewish race, so that God will strike dead men like Onan when he shoots his seed onto the ground rather than into the oven represented by his brother's widow? (Look it up: Genesis 38, verses 1-11.)

In our changed situation, do we still believe that the woman contributes nothing to her child, because all the essentials for a new human life are contained in male ejaculate? Can we still sell our daughters into slavery? Would Lot, today, offer his two virgin daughters, as a substitute for his two male visitors, to the rapacious crowd gathered outside his home? (Look it up: Genesis 19, 3-8.)

Would you stone to death anyone who worked on the Sabbath? Would you expect God to kill your son because he masturbated? Would you kill your own son if he cursed you?

Those who refuse to see that the Bible's tactical teachings are time-bound and situation-based are literalists. And the thing about literalists is that they can't engage in conversation. All they can do is make proclamations. They won't open their minds, and they won't let go of their blind certainty.

If you start at the beginning of the Christian Bible and work your way through, what you will see—if you're paying attention—is that the Bible contradicts itself over and over, in terms of tactics. The things that are all right to do and that are not all right to do change over time. Because even if you believe that each one of those books is the divinely inspired, immutable word of God himself, it's still true that each one was written for a specific group of people in a specific time and place in a specific political environment and with social infrastructure specific to their time and place. In other words, in a specific Situation. And as shift happened, the Bible's own tactics changed accordingly. Remember: the Bible is not a book; it is a chronological collection of books.

If a sweet young heterosexual couple moved in next door today and invited us to their wedding next month, would we curse them and stone either of them to death for living in sin?

No?

So what's the problem—today—with gay people? Why won't religion let go of the tactic, long outdated and no longer rational, of condemning me?

Three things. One has to do with shift happening. The fact is that no one alive when any book of the Bible was written had any concept of homosexuality, so it was never referred to as it exists today; there's just no comparison, and so the Bible does not—cannot—address the homosexuality of today. The second is that pesky lizard brain screaming inside the head of most heterosexuals when they encounter a sexual orientation that seems unnatural to them. The third is something we haven't talked about yet. It's an aspect of male developmental psychology.

Why focus on the male? We're talking about religion, here. Even in the religions that allow women to be ordained, the vast majority of clergy are men; also, the primary condemnatory religions were formed at a time when women were considered barely human. Christianity had a lively debate going for a while in the Middle Ages about whether women even had souls. And many religions don't ordain women at all. Think Catholicism. Think Islam. Think Fundamental Anything.

Children who are developing normally spend the first two years of their lives figuring out that they're human. They figure out a lot of other things, too, but in terms of their own personal identity, if they think they're a snake, they're insane. They're human, and they'd better get that, or they won't be able to build a viable life for themselves.

At about the age of two, the child is starting to take in the next identity differentiator: gender. And it's apparent that this is important, because the child badly needs to figure out his relationship with his parents in order to figure the world out; it's step one. So the child must understand that one parent is a girl and one is a boy, and it's critical to figure out which one to identify with. If the child makes a mistake at this identity level, it's not a question of sanity, as it was with the snake. At least, not yet. But it will be impossible for the child to build a viable life in the future. If a male child identifies with the female side of life, at some point he's got to come to terms with this discrepancy. Either he finds a way to fit into life as he is, even though that will be incredibly difficult, or he makes whatever adjustments he can, so that he will be able to build a life; also incredibly difficult. [Important note to anyone who doesn't already know this: a gay man does not necessarily identify as female. Get used to it.]

The next identity layer most children figure out is race. Is it important? You bet. But it's no more important than the next layer: sexual orientation.

Some gay kids know from a very early age that they're "different." A lot of gay kids don't figure this out until after puberty. But let's talk only about the straight boys for this discussion, because there are more of them than gay boys, and because there will be more of them in clergy everywhere.

The two-year-old boy begins to identify with the male. With Daddy, if he has one, or with some other icon of masculinity if he must. Up to now, most children of both sexes have bonded with the female, because for most kids the mother or a female mother substitute has essentially been their everyday world. But the little boy has to start severing that bond, at least in terms of identification, or he can't build a viable life. He has to start pushing away from the female identity. Hard. Very hard. Why so hard? Because for years to come, it would be possible to have

his hair grown into ringlets and to send him into the world in pink ruffles and call him Grace instead of George and have no one question it. George would have to pull down his bloomers and lift his skirt to prove he wasn't Grace after all. So at some point after two, he's going to start treating girls as though they have cooties. He won't be as willing to hold Mom's hand. His toy box will have tanks and trucks and guns, not dollies and tea sets. He'll swagger like a B-Western film star and deepen his voice whenever he thinks there's a question about who he is. He's desperate to prove his masculinity.

The human brain doesn't fully develop until around the age of twenty. So the little boy isn't conscious of what he's doing, and certainly he has no idea why. But a mantra sets up inside his head. It goes like this: I must prove I'm a man.

He's not aware of the mantra, so even once he's obviously male he doesn't do anything to stop the chant. So it's still going in his head, mostly quiet, but it gets louder and louder if something happens to threaten his masculinity, something that makes him insecure, that makes him doubt the success of this particular objective (proving he's a man). And the closer that threat gets, the louder the chant gets, until he figures out what action to take that will make it go away, what action will take away the fear that he's failed at this critical level of his own identity.

So now we'll call on our homophobic bigot again. Remember that the "I must prove I'm a man" mantra is still there, more white noise than anything else most of the time. He's actually terrified of me. Li'l ol' me. Don't believe me? Watch this.

There he is, leaning against his pickup truck doing his utmost to look manly and unassailable. Maybe his arms are crossed over his broad chest (he's forgotten about the bulge beneath them where he keeps the innumerable beers he's downed). And he's glaring at me, the gay, the unnatural, the abnormal, the pedophile. There's no need to think; he feels instinctively that everything about me is wrong. In one ear, his lizard brain is already screaming, "Eeeewww! Eeeewww! Eeeewww!" (Now, a lot of women would hear their lizard brains at this point, too; consider the idiot in Massachusetts. But the man also has another demon possessing him.)

I look at him, cock my head and throw him a flirtatious look, and then I move slowly toward him, my movements sultry. I don't touch him, but I get close enough to hear him breathe. In the other ear, his mantra "I must prove I'm a man" gets louder.

"Hey, there," I say, my voice silky and quiet. "Doing anything special tonight?" He doesn't answer; he doesn't know what to say, partly because his lizard brain is still screaming, and partly because his mantra is even louder now. I go on. "No?" A slight lift of my chin here. "I could change that."

At this point, he's totally deafened in one ear by his lizard brain and in the other by the mantra screaming, "I MUST PROVE I'M A MAN! I MUST PROVE..." He might just get the tire iron out of his car and bash me with it.

So when all the male clergy for whom homosexuality is unnatural have their lizard brains screaming in one ear and their mantra yelling in the other, they aren't likely to do a lot of thinking. They don't have to, because they believe the Bible has already done it for them. Instead of picking up a tire iron, they point to one of those five, maybe six places in the entire Bible that refer to men lying with men (the word homosexual didn't exist, remember) and beat us to death with them. Never mind that they cherry pick these spots out of all the other sacred laws that are so conveniently ignored today. Never mind that society now has many ways for the elderly to provide for themselves, and not everyone has to pop out as many kids as possible. Never mind that homosexual people can now earn money and save it for retirement ourselves,

so we'll never be the charity cases of two thousand years ago. Never mind that we pay taxes that support the health care for everyone's children (sometimes even our own). Never mind that we pay taxes that support public schools, even though most of us never have kids of our own. Never mind that instead of being drains on society, as would have been the case two thousand years ago, *society is actually better off with us in it.*

Gray matter? What's that? There's no need to think...

Prove they're men? Yeah, I want them to prove they're men. And not lizards.

As for my own tactics, while I'm not going to tell you what my religion is or even if I have one, and while all I'll say about my belief system is that I use faith to bridge the gap between what I can prove and what I believe, I will tell you that I think Jesus was spot-on in those two all-important commandments from Matthew that I talked about earlier. I believe they are the most important tactics we can apply to achieve the objective of loving connection. So I do my best to live up to them. The first one, love God with all of yourself, requires that I know myself. I know this: I'm gay. And if you've read up to this point, you know that we've proven that homosexuality is a natural, normally occurring phenomenon. So guess what? I love God with that part of me, too. As for the second commandment of those two, love each other, again I do my best. Some of you make it extremely challenging, telling me how much God hates me. And some of you make me scream in frustration when you say you love me but you hate the sin of homosexuality in me. GET THIS: I AM GAY. Love me, love my orientation.

Shred that card. The one that says "Damned."

Oh, there's still sin here. There's still a lot of missing the mark going on. Only it's not the homosexuals doing the sinning—at least, not by virtue of being gay. What's the objective? What did Jesus tell us? It's all about love; all law depends on love. Anything that doesn't create and support love is sin.

So where's the sin? It's with the people who create hatred and destroy connection. It's with the people who hold up signs that say, "God hates fags." It's with anyone, anywhere, who fosters divisiveness and separation and pain and hatred and isolation and exclusion. It's anyone who damns someone else.

And don't fall for that old saw, "Love the sinner; hate the sin." It's a lie. It's a lie because if someone insists on hating something that's a foundational part of who you are, how can they love you? How can you ever feel loved? If they keep insisting, you should print out for them the section of this letter called "There's no need to think; I feel instinctively this is wrong."

Love the human; expose the lizard.

Shred the card.

And now a word for non-theists. I heard self-proclaimed atheist Ian McEwan (author of several best-selling novels, such as *Saturday* and *Atonement*) interviewed for a PBS program that was part of their Frontline series. The program is called "Faith & Doubt at Ground Zero." While the program was one of the most thought-provoking things I've ever seen, I wasn't especially impressed with the excerpt they included on McEwan. But he's such a master with words that I felt sure he'd have had more to say. So I went to the PBS Web site, where I was able to download a complete transcript of his interview. What follows is the gist (paraphrased) of what had a tremendous impact on the atheist McEwan because of September 11th.

Historically, the only people whose last words on earth have become widely known have been people who were famous. And many times the words themselves have become politicized to serve some agenda on the part of the people who heard those words. September 11th changed that. Why? Because of Situation.

A huge number of people, non-famous people, within a very brief span of time, faced their deaths. They *knew* they were about to die. What did they do? What tactics did they take, based on this situation? They reached for their cell phone, or any phone that worked, and they called someone they loved. And they said, "I love you." They made a connection, and they expressed love, knowing it would be the last thing they did on earth. These people were Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Pagans, Deists, Sikh, Hindu, Hmong, Shinto, atheists, agnostics—it didn't matter. They reached for a device that their situation today made available, and they achieved their primary objective: they told someone "I love you." We know this, because so many of these messages were captured on voicemail, answering machines—again, because today, our situation is such that these devices are available.

But the most important thing was that regardless of situation, regardless of religion or the lack of it, regardless of everything else, these dying people wanted loving connection. Some thought of it as heaven, some as God, some as humanity, some as the cosmos. But they all reached for this universal, immortal connection at the moment of their deaths.

The God card is everyone's card—or anyone who wants it. It is not something any one of us can hold up to any other of us and yell, "Damned!" It's not a weapon or an accusation or a judgment. It's love. Use it.

And always remember that the foundation beneath those two most important tactics is this: know yourself; love yourself.

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## ACCEPTANCE: A FEW SUGGESTIONS

### Religion

Recently I read Irshad Manji's book, *The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*. It's also an open letter, and Manji makes a compelling case for worshiping strategically rather than tactically. Among many other astoundingly insightful points, she says that one of the biggest hurdles for Muslims is the tendency to apply the Qur'an as though the reader still lived centuries ago, in a desert civilization, without much of the science or social infrastructure to which we have access today. She makes her case much more academically than I do, quoting experts and researchers and providing footnotes and a bibliography. But she and I are saying the same thing when it comes to religious practice today: Shift has happened. Adjust your tactics.

Manji is a devout Muslim. She is a lesbian. And she lives behind bullet-proof glass.

### Marriage

Recently I heard someone say something like this: "It's like you're telling me that if I think marriage is something special between one man and one woman, you're calling me a bigot!"

Well, I don't need to call this man a bigot; he just did it himself. If he thinks that something as fundamental to the human condition as marriage should be reserved only for a "special" group, doesn't that kind of define bigot? He should look it up. And to anyone who yells about the sanctity of marriage, I say, "If marriage is sacred, you'd better outlaw divorce."

In the past several years, a number of changes have happened around the issue of same-sex marriage. I wish this progress could follow a rational process, but it doesn't seem to do that. Personally, I think that getting unioned, while it's not the same as getting married, is a step in the right direction. Do I mean we should give up? By no means. But trying to force reason into people who are not rational, who are still doing thoughtlessly what their lizard brains tell them to do, people who are saying totally asinine things like, "If we allow same-sex marriage we'll run out of kids," won't get us anywhere.

This doesn't mean I won't argue with them, and it doesn't mean I'm not for full rights to all citizens. As far as I've heard—and believe me, I've listened carefully to lots of arguments against my right to marry a male partner, because I was hoping to construct counter arguments—there is no, and I mean NO *rational* reason to deny me that right. I did hear one fellow call into an NPR talk show ("On Point") and declare that he didn't see why he had to allow any group of people to get more civil rights (my jaw fell at this point) than anyone else just because they chose to have sex in a certain way. Two callers later, a woman told about the horrendous treatment her lesbian sister had suffered all her life. She asked, in essence, "Why would my sister have chosen this kind of treatment?" She's right. So this guy's argument is irrational, too—especially when we remember that we're talking about an orientation, a natural and normally-occurring phenomenon.

The only argument that holds any water at all is the religious one (but only for religious people who are literalists), and that's not rational, either; it's faith-based. The last time I checked, in these United States a citizen in good standing (that is, not imprisoned for some horrid felony) did not have to follow the tenets or doctrine of any religion in order to receive full citizen's rights. And, in fact, even people in prison for committing horrid felonies are allowed to marry. So, really, no religion should have anything to say about whether I can be married in the eyes of the law.

What if two atheists want to marry? Will any church or synagogue or mosque bless that union, and would the betrothed couple want that anyway? No. Do they have another option? Sure. City Hall. And if a Justice of the Peace officiates without some ordained individual present, are they married? You bet they are. Is it sanctified? No. Does it need to be? Not in the eyes of the U.S. law.

What if two Catholics want to marry, and they go through Pre-Cana and get all the way through the entire wedding mass, are they married? Not in the eyes of the U.S. law, they aren't. Not until they get that legal license that the church can't provide.

So what is this "sanctity of marriage" crap? Marriage is "sanctified" only if it's blessed by some religious official. By some ordained representative of God whose authority is recognized by the betrothed. But that's not what we're asking for. We aren't demanding that the Catholic church, or any other religious institution, sanctify our marriages. It would be nice, and we may believe it should happen, but that's not what we're asking for.

If only this were a rational process.

I know that the logic of this approach will not make much difference to lots of people who will continue to hold up a card that reads something like this: "Don't let homosexuals destroy the sanctity of Marriage!" Just because they aren't ready to see reason doesn't make them right, however. And the card they're holding up actually has another card behind it. They can't see it, because they're too busy confabulating. It says: "There's no need to think. I feel instinctively this is wrong."

Where have we heard that before?

Mike Huckabee is famous for saying that the problem with gay marriage is that it would be redefining marriage. I want to say to him, "And your point is ...?" For one thing, I'd love for him to explain how he came by his definition, when the Bible itself tells of supposedly righteous men who had multiple wives. And for another, what inarnation is so awful about the idea of redefining marriage now? Why the hell not? What piece of sky is going to fall if we do?

No matter what you might think of Alan Dershowitz personally, no one can deny that he has one of the keenest legal minds alive today. In 2003 he wrote the article, [To Fix Gay Dilemma, Government Should Quit the Marriage Business](http://www.rossde.com/editorials/Dershowitz_marriage.html) (http://www.rossde.com/editorials/Dershowitz\_marriage.html). His solution is that the civil union would be what everyone gets, and those who then choose to have their union sanctified by their house of worship, provided that house of worship agrees, can have a marriage. The word "marriage" would become the label for a sanctified civil union.

While I see the logic—the rationality—in this approach, I kind of doubt very many hetero couples who don't choose to be married in a church or by a religious officiant would be willing to call themselves "unioned" instead of "married." Mr. D. may have a good point, but it ain't gonna happen.

So why will I personally put up—for now, let me stress—with a "civil union" instead of a "marriage?"

One is that the longer we go with few or no rights for gays, the more people will suffer. If we at least get our proverbial foot in the door, we'll be able to get domestic partnership benefits and adoption rights to people who deserve it, and we'll do that sooner than later. Also, if we have "unioned" gays all over the place, we'll be eating away at all those lies about the terrible things

that will happen to “real” marriage and “real” families. We’ll be able to PROVE that they are lies. And this will make getting to full marriage rights less of a struggle.

The other reason is that I’ll take tolerance over hatred. For now. But I don’t want to be tolerated. I tolerate tolerance, because I expect it to end. My goal is acceptance. I expect it.

Look, I’m part Irish. Maybe a quarter. Not long ago I was in bumper-to-bumper traffic behind a car on the bumper of which was a sticker that read, “God made the Irish #1!” Not only did reading this not make the one-quarter of me that’s Irish feel good, but it also made the hackles on the back of my neck rise. My fists and my jaw clenched. What’s the rest of me? Chopped liver? Why would someone put this on their car?

I’m not going to take the time to try and answer why they would do it, though you can believe I have some opinions. But I will venture an opinion about the effects. Bottom line: the extremely limited number of people who will feel good about reading that (or displaying it) is a grain of sand on a very long beach full of people who will feel insulted by it. So what purpose does it serve? Not much that’s good. It makes anyone who already sees the Irish as a bunch of ignorant, barbaric potato diggers feel validated in their opinion, and it makes many who might have stood up for Irish dignity feel embarrassed. And it might push a few in the latter category into the first.

Similar things would happen if I put a bumper sticker on my car that reads, “We’re here, we’re queer. Get used to it!” Do I believe the sentiment to be valid? You bet your ass I do. Do I think it furthers my objective to put it on my car? Depends; what’s my objective, when it comes to gay rights? My objective is in the title of this tome. Acceptance. So the answer is no, that bumper sticker actually jeopardizes my objective, because the situation is that there are still more people who don’t want to accept me fully than there are people who do. And based on that situation, the tactic of slapping the majority of people in the face is not going to convince any of them to accept me, and it might push away some who were getting close. It’s a great battle cry at a gay rally, but I don’t recommend displaying it as a public banner among the general population of lizards.

Back to marriage. We’ve all heard the red herring that if we allow same-sex marriage, all bets would be off and there would be nothing to stop a mother and a son from marrying. Or a man and his—I don’t know, lizard?

God, but I wish people would think. Even a teeny tiny bit of thought would have prevented these idiots from making fools of themselves. There’s nothing about allowing all citizens in good standing the right to marry that would negate the existing laws that apply to ALL citizens who want to marry. Depending on the state, marriage applicants must get blood tests, wait some amount of time after applying before the license is granted, and answer questions about their potential familial relationship. Why? Two reasons: to prevent the spread of STDs; and to prevent inbreeding. These laws were established at a time (dare I say in a Situation?) when it was assumed that if two people were going to get married, they were unavoidably (barring the displeasure of the Creator) going to have children. So if the law won’t even let first cousins marry, what do you think it would say to a mother and son? Or to a mother and daughter, for that matter? That’s right, the law would be patently ridiculous, in terms of its intent, in this latter case, because no children would ensue, but it’s still the law.

So what about heterosexual couples in our situation as it is today? How many couples do you know who *decided* not to have children? If they were firsts cousins, they still wouldn’t have been issued a marriage license. So allowing unrelated gay people to marry is not the same as asking for these laws to be revoked. We’re asking for our civil rights to be acknowledged. Period.

I hate it when I hear someone say that gay marriages can't produce children so they can't be marriages. Does this mean heterosexual people who can't conceive should be denied marriage? Some of them are young enough to have families and want to adopt; no marriage for them? What about the sixty-five-year-old widow, well past menopause, who wants to marry again? Should she be denied the right? Or are you just picking on gays because your lizard brain is afraid of us? Because there's no *rational* reason to support the position of denying me legal marriage rights.

And as for those who insist that gay marriage, loving gay families, will somehow jeopardize "real" marriages, "real" families... how in God's name would that happen? *We support* those families! We pay for their health care and their schooling! Talk about not thinking... Is it the lizard brain or the male mantra? It doesn't matter. It's wrong.

But the really silly thing—something these homophobic bigots aren't even focused on—is that in defining marriage as between one man and one woman, they're going to have to define man and woman. We've been talking mostly about gay vs. straight, here, but there are lots of other options. Just picking one permutation here, there are men trapped in women's bodies. So could a woman in a man's body marry a man and meet the requirement? Tricky, this bigotry business.

The only sane approach is to stop trying to limit each other's human rights, and—in the U.S.—to realize that our very own constitution prohibits any one citizen from interfering with the civil rights of another.

### **Civil Rights**

This will be quick.

I've heard a number of prominent black individuals in the civil rights arena rant against gay people calling our insistence upon full citizens' rights (such as the right to marry or not to be discriminated against in the housing or the job market) our civil rights. I have yet to hear any one of these nay-sayers make sense.

Are "black rights" civil rights? Absolutely. Are "gay rights" civil rights? Absolutely. Are "women's rights" civil rights? Absolutely. My point is that not one of these interest groups holds exclusive rights to the concept of civil rights. Not one. Not even the "black rights" group. I won't deny they have a cause; I fact, I support it whole-heartedly, and the fight ain't over. But I sure as hell won't let anyone deny mine. I want my civil rights, too. Everyone should.

Define civil rights: legal privileges and liberties granted by a given government to citizens in good standing. Withholding full citizens' rights from the citizens of any demographic—black, female, Hispanic, Asian, gay—is a violation of civil rights.

End of debate.

### **Choice**

Anyone reading this letter who still believes that homosexuality is a choice has understood nothing. One's sexuality is an orientation. It's part of who you are. And it's not something you can change.

That said, a lifestyle is a choice. Am I advocating that gays choose a straight lifestyle? Why would I do that when the only thing wrong with being gay is how some people treat you when they find out? So what am I talking about?

I mentioned earlier that, to varying degrees of success, some gay people have chosen to live a straight lifestyle. Do I recommend it? No; I don't recommend living a lie. Can I tell someone else not to do that? No. But I do recommend they think rationally before they decide to do something that will force them to lie to everyone they know for the rest of their lives, including themselves. I recommend they use my Strategy I-Beam.

What's the objective, if a gay person is trying to live straight? This isn't a question I can answer for anyone; it makes no sense to me. It could be "To live the life my parents expect of me." It could be "To live the life I've expected of myself so powerfully that I can't imagine living any other way." Or "To have the respect and admiration of society without having to work any harder for it than a heterosexual." Or "I just don't have the guts to be gay." There are lots of possibilities.

But in the most important aspect of this question, they're all in the same situation; and while many aspects of their lives will change, this one won't. They're gay. It's an orientation. And if they want to live a life that denies it, they're going to have to make a lot of plans based on dishonesty, and accept a lot of unpleasant realities. They have to plan to marry someone they might be able to love but whom they will never be able to feel fully passionate about. They have to plan to lie to their children, their families, their employers and co-workers—to everyone. They will have to deny themselves the expression of a huge, critical, foundational cornerstone of their identity.

I'm not saying this can't be done. I'm saying that from what I've seen, its success is spotty at best. Think "Ted Haggard" and you'll get it. If anyone wanted to deny his orientation, it was Evangelical pastor Ted Haggard. He was running so hard away from what he was, refusing to look back at it at all, that he was seen by *almost* everyone around him as running toward something they saw as beautiful and holy, and they followed him in droves, not realizing he was living a lie. The reality is that he was running away from something. Himself. Who's the "almost" in "almost everyone?" His male prostitute.

So what about tactics? Well, you could try becoming the pastor of a fundamentalist Christian mega-church. Or you could become the CEO of a major corporation whose board of directors wouldn't tolerate a gay man (or, most likely, any woman) in that position. Or you could become a lawyer who peruses the Web for clues leading to people who are trying desperately to deny their homosexuality by claiming to have become "ex-gay" (most of these cases are religion-based, by the way) so you can pounce on them like an ambulance chaser and wave their claim as though it were the flag of the promised land, driving away your doubts about yourself in the process. You'd sue any organization that claimed "ex-gay" couldn't be done. (I have someone in mind, by the way, who has done this.)

As for people who've "changed," they've changed their lifestyle, not their orientation. They can't reprogram their hypothalamus. They can't change the color of their eyes or the day they were born on, though they can lie about both. And if they're left-handed, they can learn to use their right hand, but they'll still be left-handed inside; their brain won't change significantly.

If you repeat anything loud enough and fast enough, your brain won't have time to perceive what's really going on. Make it a mantra: "I must lie about who I am. I must lie about who I am. I must lie..."

Please. If you're gay, choose truth, and expect acceptance. I'm not pretending it's easy, but the more of us who are out, the quicker the homophobes' lizard brains will get used to us.

And, the better it will be for everyone. And, the sooner they will see that the only thing wrong with being gay is how they used to treat us when they found out.