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Best Practices Discipleship Model for Ministering to Christians Experiencing Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction

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Christians experiencing conflict between their faith and unwanted same-sex sexual desires need a safe place within the church to find the help they are looking for. Despite changing views in society and some churches regarding homosexuality, there are still Christians who adhere to a conservative biblical sexual ethic, reject identifying as a gay Christian, and believe in the possibility of complete transformation. This study affirmed that change is possible for those seeking help from ministries for unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA). The first author compiled existing knowledge provided by 85 survey respondents and 60 interview subjects. These subjects have either sought help for their unwanted same-sex attraction, or facilitated support groups for individuals seeking help to create a framework to apply to a new Christian discipleship model derived from the best practices reported by study participants. The study population comes from ministries affiliated with Restored Hope Network, a coalition of ministries across the United States that serve individuals seeking to overcome relational and sexual issues, particularly homosexuality. The five target ministries that participated in this study have more than 190 years of collective experience, ranging from 1976 to 2025, in helping people overcome same-sex attraction. Descriptive and statistical analyses indicated that perceptions of significant change in unwanted same-sex attractions are often reported by participants in these ministries, as reflected in large effect sizes. However, men with dominant homosexual orientations were more resistant to change than women who reported bisexual orientations. What emerged from the research is a best-practices discipleship model framework that addresses ministry intake, operations, and recommended curriculum. Churches and nonprofit organizations can use this framework to meet the spiritual, emotional, and relational needs of individuals seeking a change in their sexual attractions.

Keywords: sexuality, homosexuality, ex-gay, same-sex attraction, sexual orientation change, recovery support groups

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Researchers have investigated whether sexual orientation change is possible through therapy and ministry interventions for more than forty years (Seiler, 2020, pp. 125-127). The data indicate that change is possible; however, in recent years, societal views about sexual orientation have shifted, affecting not only the secular world but also the church (Neumann, 2022, p. 131; Pew Research Center, 2012). Some Christians are changing their interpretation of Scripture or belief in biblical transformation to accommodate these societal changes regarding homosexuality. Some who hold to a biblical sexual ethic do not believe transformation is possible, accommodating those desires by adopting a "gay-Christian" identity; others renounce a gay identity yet fall short of embracing biblical transformation; and still, there remain those who believe in the possibility of complete transformation (Seiler, 2020, pp. 178, 215-217).

While some people seek and experience sexual orientation change (SOC) and persist in a new identity and way of life, others return to their former way of life and renounce the effectiveness of SOC ministry (Brydum, 2013; Peebles, 2004; Bailey, 2013). In 2014, nine ministry leaders who once proclaimed that change was possible for those experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA) renounced the effectiveness of SOC efforts and instead asserted the harmfulness of those efforts (Born Perfect, n.d.). Others embrace Christianity yet hold onto an identity as a gay Christian (Revoice, n.d.; Spiritual Friendship, n.d.). Still others surrender their SSA to God and focus on holiness, yet do not confess having experienced SOC (Yuan, 2018, p. 138; Allberry, 2017).

Exodus International was founded in 1976, incorporating a large consortium of ministries supporting individuals seeking to change their sexual orientation. On the annual conference's opening night in June 2013, then-president Alan Chambers announced that the organization would disband (Lovett, 2013). Chambers renounced the effectiveness of efforts to help people with SOC, and some of Exodus's most visible leaders, who had represented changed lives, returned to their LGBT identities and affiliations (Bailey, 2013, p. 14; Brydum, 2013). Restored Hope Network (RHN), a new consortium of Christian ministries, therapists, and pastors, was launched in 2012, just before the impending demise of Exodus International, and has continued to serve people seeking support (Restored Hope Network, n.d.).

Researchers have focused on whether SOC is possible through religiously informed psychotherapy, whether SOC efforts are mentally and emotionally harmful, what factors contribute to SOC, and how the church can provide a nurturing environment for those seeking transformation (Andreatta, 2024; Flentje, 2012; Jones & Yarhouse, 2011; Seiler, 2020). The primary gap in the research is identifying practical ministry components to build a Christian discipleship model that will address the spiritual, emotional, and relational needs of those seeking change in their sexual attractions and desires for fundamental life transformation. This best-practices-applied-research-study gathered existing knowledge provided by individuals who sought help for their unwanted same-sex attraction or facilitated support groups within Restored Hope Network to inform awareness of the most effective elements for moving away from same-sex attraction. The research question was, "What best practices and focus areas should be incorporated in a biblically based discipleship model for ministering to Christians experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction?"

Ministries Supporting Those with Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction

Ministries supporting people experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction, starting in the mid-1970s and later, have operated inside and outside the church. Some

are nonprofit organizations, and others are ministries that are not legally incorporated as stand-alone tax-exempt organizations but operate under a church's umbrella. Five ministries currently associated with Restored Hope Network are highlighted in this research study and described in this section, including their missions, support group structures, and, if applicable, curricula.

Desert Stream Ministries

Desert Stream Ministries is a nonprofit organization that provides support for Christians struggling with sexual and relational issues. Its approach is grounded in a biblical foundation of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God (Desert Stream Welcome, n.d.). Influencing the ministry were "Kenn Gulliksen and John Wimber (the founders of the Vineyard Movement), Leanne Payne, Frank Worthen, and John Paul II" (Desert Stream FAQ, n.d.). The ministry supports adults who experience same-sex attraction, but that is not the sole focus of the ministry; approximately 60% of the participants have no SSA (Desert Stream FAQ, n.d.). As of October 2024, Living Waters groups, facilitated by trained leaders under the umbrella of local churches, are available in 27 locations in the United States and 11 internationally (Desert Stream FAQ, n.d.; Desert Stream Find a Group, n.d.).

Andrew Comiskey wrote the Living Waters curriculum, making a workbook for individual or small group use publicly available for the first time with the publication of the third edition (Comiskey, 2020, vii). The workbook contains the following twenty lessons:

1. Introduction to Living Waters
2. Acknowledging Our Need
3. Becoming Responsive to the Father's Love
4. The Fighting Father
5. Revealing Christ through the Gift of Our Bodies
6. Cross and Confession: Restoring the True Image of God in Humanity
7. Renouncing Idols
8. Overcoming Addiction through the Real Meal
9. How Wounds Can Make Us More Whole
10. Identifying Brokenness, Resuming the Journey
11. Restoring Broken Boundaries
12. The True Self Forgives
13. The True Self Aspires to Wholeness, Refuses Despair
14. The True Self Unites with God in Weakness, Overcomes Narcissism
15. The True Self Embraces Same-Gender Friendship
16. Offering the Gift
17. Restoring Women's Honor
18. Restoring Man's Honor
19. For the Bride
20. Hope and Wholeness

(Comiskey, 2020)

More than forty years of continuous ministry informed the development of this material (Comiskey, 2020, p. vii). Each lesson requires completing assigned readings from other books published by the author and answering homework questions before participating in the group meetings (Comiskey, 2020, p. 6).

Portland Fellowship

Portland Fellowship is a nonprofit, interdenominational organization whose purpose is to glorify Jesus Christ by proclaiming His incredible power to free people from the control of their desires (Portland Fellowship About Us, n.d.). Their methodology includes "biblical instruction, Christ-centered accountability groups, personal testimonies, trained peer-to-peer support, and professional counseling referrals to assist individuals who desire to embrace their true identity in Christ. We promote a message of transformation where individuals need not be controlled by unwanted same-sex sexual/relational desires" (Portland Fellowship About Us, n.d.). In addition to providing a discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions, either online

or on-site, they also offer an immersive nine-month live-in residential program called the Upper Room Community for people in their 20s and 30s desiring to submit this area of their lives to Christ by immersing themselves in a community of others who are walking the same road" (Portland Fellowship Programs, n.d.; Portland Fellowship Upper Room Community, n.d.).

The published discipleship program, Taking Back Ground: A Journey to Sexual and Relational Wholeness, was initially created and compiled by Phillip Hobizal and Rebecca Wade (Thompson and Silvis, 2017, 2018). It is a two-year program comprised of two workbooks with the following content:

Volume 1
Section 1: Understanding Homosexuality
- A Call to Leave: The Journey Begins
- The Roots of Homosexuality: Part I
- The Roots of Homosexuality: Part 2
- Our Relational Nature
- Defensiveness and Detachment
- The Scriptures and Homosexuality
- Transformation: From the Inside Out

Section 2: Knowing God in Our Struggle
- Redemption: God's Message of Hope
- Imitating Christ
- The Marred Image of the Father
- Idolatry
- Developing an Intimacy with Christ
- Empowering the Will
- New Life in Christ

Section 3: Walking Out: The Process
- The Battle for Our Souls
- The Root of Rejection
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation
- Temptation
- Walking in Victory
- Accountability

(Thompson and Silvis, 2017)

Volume 2
Section I: Developing a Healthy Identity
- The Healing Process
- Masculinity
- Femininity
- Boundaries
- Same-Sex Relationships
- Emotional dependency
- Levels of relationship

Section 2: Breaking Free
- Addiction
- Pornography and Masturbation
- Deception: The Power of Unbelief
- Self-Centeredness
- Our Identity in Christ
- Envy
- Repentance

Section 3: Growing in Christian Maturity
- The Healing Plateau
- Disclosure
- Marriage or Singleness
- Ambivalence & Procrastination
- Dealing with Failure
- A Call to Servanthood
- Safeguarding our Souls

(Thompson and Silvis, 2018)

Phil Hobizal described the purpose of the ministry and the development of the curriculum:

> Portland Fellowship was established to provide a safe environment for women and men struggling with same-sex attractions who found those desires in conflict with their faith in God. It was never our intent to try to persuade people to become straight. Instead, we've had an open-handed approach of allowing individuals to be led by their biblical convictions… Taking Back Ground was developed to provide a vehicle for God to bring change in the lives of like-mind[ed] Christ followers who want to be free of unwanted sexual desires and behaviors. (Hobizal, n.d., p. 1)

Portland Fellowship facilitates weekly

in-person groups, lasting two and a half hours, in October/November, January/February, and April/May via Zoom or one-on-one with a mentor at your own pace (Portland Fellowship Taking Back Ground, n.d.). The curriculum includes completing five days of homework, culminating in daily reflection and journaling on the lesson's content and the associated Scriptures.

Outpost Ministries

Outpost Ministries, in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, was formed to meet the needs of men and women, following their convictions and seeking freedom from unwanted erotic same-sex attractions (Outpost Ministries, Who We Are, n.d.). The ministry website elaborates on transformation as follows:

> Transformation is the power of God's Spirit at work in us, making us more like Christ, to the glory of the Father.
>
> Note: Please don't hear 'transformation' and think we are talking about merely a change in erotic and/or romantic desire (e.g., exclusively heterosexual desire). Someone can experience true transformation and have remaining temptation. Yet they may also be able to live beyond that temptation in a renewed sense of identity.
>
> We are about the transformation of beliefs about God, self, and others. Transformation of beliefs will change our sense of identity, which then can change our behavior, both what we do and even what we desire to do/not do. (Outpost Ministries Who We Are, n.d.)

According to the one-page ministry information sheet, Outpost emphasizes the process of discipleship through obedience to God's Word, beginning the healing process. People are growing in their submission to Jesus Christ and are healed and transformed through their relationship with Him (Outpost Ministries, n.d.).

Outpost Ministries facilitates two support groups for men struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions or other sexual and relational brokenness: Joshua Fellowship, for men ages 18-35, and Caleb Spirit, for men 36 and up (Outpost Ministries, n.d.). These groups have no standardized curriculum; they have utilized various curricula and book studies over the years (Puumula, 2024). Outpost Ministries also offers a support group for men and women that meets from fall to spring, utilizing the Living Waters curriculum published by Desert Stream Ministries (Outpost Ministries Classes, n.d.).

Exchange Ministries

Exchange Ministries' mission is to provide inspiration, hope, and refuge to those seeking to realign their sexual identity with their identity in Christ through equipping and supporting the church, individuals, and families of LGBTQ+ identified loved ones (Exchange Ministries, n.d.). It is a nonprofit parachurch ministry with support groups meeting at churches throughout central Florida (Exchange Ministries Support Groups, and Who, What, and Why, n.d.). They support men and women who desire to be defined by their identity in Christ, live according to God's Word in the stewardship of their sexuality, and move forward in a transformational relationship with God (Exchange Ministries Support Groups, n.d.). A former ministry director states that Exchange Ministries has not utilized a standard curriculum; however, they have experimented with various curricula, including Living Free Ministries' discipleship workbooks, and facilitated other book studies and topical discussions (Nistri, 2024).

All Things New Ministry

All Things New Ministry is a discipleship program for healing and helping people overcome unwanted same-sex attraction, founded by the first author of this article. It has been used in ministry at First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Maryland, every year since 2012.

The All Things New Ministry

> was born out of Debora's transition out of nearly two decades of homosexuality through the love and support of a women's ministry Bible study group and the leadership of a church that was not willing to compromise its convictions while continuing to welcome and embrace her … Once Debora fully surrendered her life to Jesus Christ, she began to regularly read the Bible and pray that God would reveal areas of sin in her life that needed to repent of and turn away from. Through this study of the Word of God, Debora realized that many areas of her life did not align with His Word. As God revealed areas of sin, she repented and asked for his forgiveness, and He began to change her from the inside out…This Bible Study/ Discipleship Ministry is modeled after Debora's transition out of years of homosexuality and the healing she received along the way. It has been proven to help both men and women who want to break free from life choices that are not pleasing to God. (Barr 2022b, p. 339)

When the author published the first edition of this discipleship program, she was becoming increasingly aware of Exodus International and other ministries, similar to All Things New. Still, she had not interacted with any other ministry or seen any discipleship content they used in ministry.

The second edition of the All Things New Discipleship program consolidated an original 37 lessons, decreasing the overall length of the program, and consists of the following lessons published in a facilitator's guide and participant workbook:

1. The Word is Life
2. The Enemy's Lies vs. God's Truth
3. Freedom in Truth
4. Hearing God's Voice
5. Prayer – Communing with God
6. Fall of Man – Root Causes of a False LBGTQ Identity
7. Forgiveness – Part I
8. What the Bible Says About Homosexuality
9. Gay Theology
10. Sexual Integrity
11. Spiritual Warfare
12. The Heart
13. Our Authority in Christ to Rout Demons
14. Forgiveness – Part II
15. Removing Hindrances to Effective Prayer
16. Holy Spirit's Power for Inner Healing and Sanctification
17. Listening and Inner Healing Prayer
18. The Power of Sharing Your Testimony and Glorifying God
19. Tailoring Your Message for the Listener
20. Spiritual Gifts and Calling
21. Witnessing – The Great Commission
22. Your Life's Purpose
23. Testimony Development and Sharing
24. Personal Plan to Continue Daily Devotional

(Barr, 2022a, p. 3).

Each in-class lesson is preceded by a week of homework required of each participant (and ministry leader) before the group meeting. Each homework assignment consists of five days' worth of individual Bible study, plus a Scripture related to the week's lesson that each person will memorize (Barr, 2022a, p. 8). The ministry pairs participants with an accountability partner to serve as a Christian mentor and friend for the journey (Barr, 2022b, p. 7; Barr, 2022a, p. 8). All Things New Ministry leaders facilitate weekly lessons of one and a half to two hours for six to seven months. After completing an initial discipleship cycle, participants can continue their involvement with the ministry by attending alumni meetings. The leaders also invite individuals who have completed the discipleship cycle to help facilitate discipleship for new members entering the ministry.

Method

Participants

The adult research subjects originated from the aforementioned five different ministries within the Restored Hope Network located throughout the United States: 1) Desert Stream Ministries, based in Grandview, Missouri; 2) Portland Fellowship, based in Portland, Oregon; 3) Outpost Ministries, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota; 4) Exchange Ministries based in Central Florida; and 5) All Things New, based in Landover, Maryland. These ministries used different models and curricula to minister to people with same-sex attraction who were seeking help to overcome unwanted same-sex attraction. They included ministries affiliated with churches (All Things New and Exchange) as well as some that are not (Portland Fellowship, Desert Stream, and Outpost). Additionally, these ministries have been in existence to support the target population, ranging from 12 years (All Things New) to 48 years (Outpost), encompassing a broad range of ministry experience and more than 190 years of combined experience.

Measures

Some of the questions gathered responses via a Likert scale, using a modified version of the Kinsey scale to report on the level of homosexual desire and levels of motivation for seeking change. The Kinsey scale rates the degree of sexual attraction and behavior from exclusively heterosexual to bisexual to exclusively homosexual on a scale from 0-6 (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948, p. 638). The modified scale used in this study follows the format of other modern studies with responses coded a-g or 1-7 for self-reporting the degree of "heterosexual," "almost entirely heterosexual," "more heterosexual than homosexual," "bi-sexual," "more homosexual than heterosexual," "almost entirely homosexual," and "homosexual" (Andreatta, 2024, p. 66; Seiler, 2020, p. 323; Sullins and Rosik, 2025, p. 4) The final question in each survey invited the respondent to a follow-up interview.

Procedure

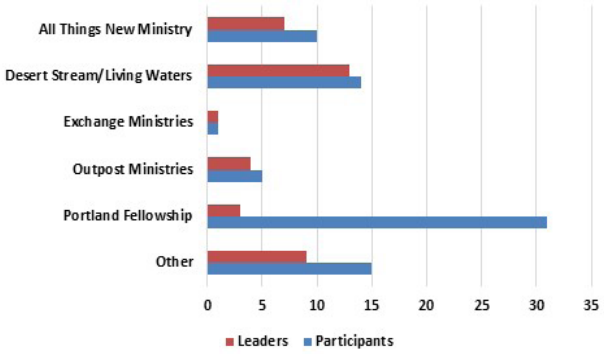
The criteria for study subject participation were: being 18 years or older, and having participated in a ministry or support group affiliated with Restored Hope Network. Insight from ministry participants who sought help for themselves, as well as from leaders who facilitated ministry for others, was included in the research to gain perspectives from both populations. An initial anonymous survey collected data on demographics, ministry participation, motivation factors regarding ministry participation, and religious matters.

The researcher conducted private virtual interviews with respondents who opted to continue participating in the research study. Following the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data to identify recurring themes of effective ministry aspects that were most effective in helping study subjects move away from same-sex attraction. The researcher then incorporated these components into a new discipleship model for ministering to Christians experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction. The nature of this research and the study's timeframe did not permit testing and long-term monitoring of the proposed discipleship model's effectiveness.

Invitations to participate sent to prospective research subjects were by email, two ministry newsletters, a Facebook post in the Friends of Restored Hope Network private group, and direct referrals from leaders in the Restored Hope Network. These methods invited people to participate in the research study between January 6, 2025, and February 21, 2025. 94 individuals initiated the survey (62 ministry participants and 32 ministry leaders), 85 completed surveys (55 participants and 30 leaders), and 60 completed interviews by March 15, 2025 (33 participants and 27 leaders). Ministry participants are those who sought help for their unwanted same-sex attraction from a ministry and did not continue in a leadership role. Ministry leaders are individuals who have either transitioned from ministry participants to leadership roles, experienced healing from SSA outside of a ministry setting, or serve those who have experienced same-sex attraction without having experienced it themselves.

Figure 1

Ministry Affiliation



Ministry	Participants	Leaders	Total
All Things New Ministry	10	7	17
Desert Stream/Living Waters	14	13	27
Exchange Ministries	1	1	2
Outpost Ministries	5	4	9
Portland Fellowship	31	3	34
Other	15	9	24
Total	**76**	**37**	**113**

Respondents were permitted to select multiple options

Analysis Plan

The first author compiled the quantitative data from the SurveyMonkey survey questions and analyzed it using the platform's embedded data analysis tools. (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). Question summaries record every response both graphically and as a percentage where multiple responses were available. At the beginning of the data analysis, the first author excluded incomplete surveys (from seven participants and two leaders) from the final review. The first author initially planned to report on the percentage of responses to the invitations to participate in the research; however, this proved infeasible. There was no way of knowing how many people received multiple forms of communication about the study, or how many read the emails, newsletters, or social media posts inviting them to participate.

Statistical analyses were conducted by the second author using SPSS 31.0. Ten hypotheses were tested and are presented in Table 1. Paired samples *t*-tests were utilized for hypotheses 1-6, repeated measures ANOVA for hypotheses 7, and chi-square tests for hypotheses 8-10. Cohen's d = 0.20, 0.50, and 0.80 were used to interpret observed effect sizes as small, medium, or large, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

The first author identified themes by qualitatively analyzing the interview data using NVivo 15 (Lumivero, n.d.). The first author then reviewed every interview transcript and summary document, manually coding portions into categories based on the pre-determined semi-structured interview questions and Fathom AI-generated summaries. Next, the records were analyzed using NVivo's AI tool to generate duplicate and additional codes. The codes were then grouped into themes based on the data. Using Lumivero software helped to mitigate researcher bias in analyzing interview data and identifying recurring themes. The first author then drafted a discipleship model comprising the prominent themes.

Results

Respondent Characteristics and Experiences

Quantitative Survey Data

Two surveys, one for ministry participants and the other for ministry leaders, collected quantitative data. Forty-sex men (34 participants and 12 leaders) and 39 women (21 participants and 18 leaders) participated in the survey. Respondents listed the ministry or ministries they participated in, with multiple responses permitted (Figure 1).

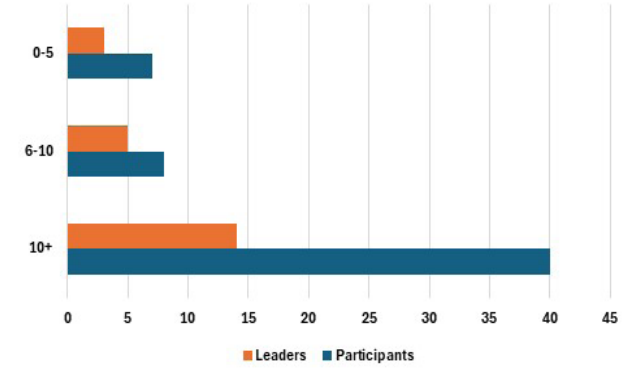
Table 1

Study Hypotheses Related to Change

Hypothesis 1.	For the entire sample (n = 77), scores for nonheterosexual sexual orientation will be lower at posttest than pretest.
Hypothesis 2.	For men in the sample (n = 45), scores for nonheterosexual orientation will be lower at posttest than pretest.
Hypothesis 3.	For women in the sample (n = 32), scores for nonheterosexual sexual orientation will be lower at posttest than pretest.
Hypothesis 4.	Reported nonheterosexual orientation will not differ between men and women at pretest or posttest.
Hypothesis 5.	Reported nonheterosexual orientation will be lower at posttest than pretest for both men (n = 11) and women (n = 11) leaders.
Hypothesis 6.	Reported nonheterosexual orientation will be lower at posttest than pretest for both men (n = 34) and women (n = 22) participants.
Hypothesis 7.	Differences between pretest and posttest in nonheterosexual orientation will vary as a function of sex and/or leader vs. participant status.
Hypothesis 8.	At pretest, for women, a greater percentage of women will be bisexually oriented than mostly or entirely homosexually oriented. At pretest, for men, a greater percentage of men will be mostly or entirely homosexually oriented than bisexually oriented.
Hypothesis 9.	At posttest, for women, a greater percentage of women will be bisexually oriented than mostly or entirely homosexually oriented. At posttest, for men, a greater percentage of men will be mostly or entirely homosexually oriented than bisexually oriented.
Hypothesis 10.	Overall differences will exist across participants between pretest and posttest scores on nonheterosexual orientation.

Figure 2

Years Experiencing Same-Sex Attraction Before Seeking Help



Years	Participants	Leaders	Total
0-5	7	3	10
6-10	8	5	13
10+	40	14	54
Total	**55**	**22**	**77**

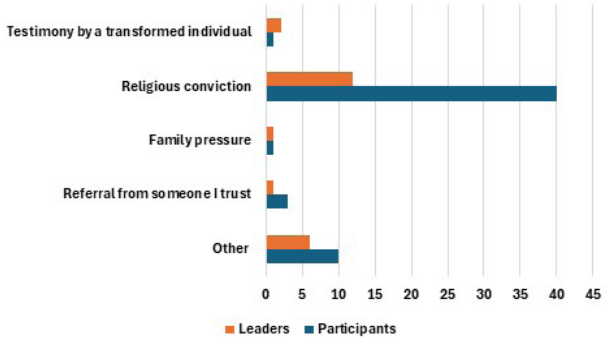
This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

The majority of respondents (69%) experienced same-sex attraction for more than ten years before seeking help (Figure 2).

Survey results show that religious conviction was the primary reason that respondents sought help for their unwanted same-sex attraction (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Primary Reason for Seeking Help



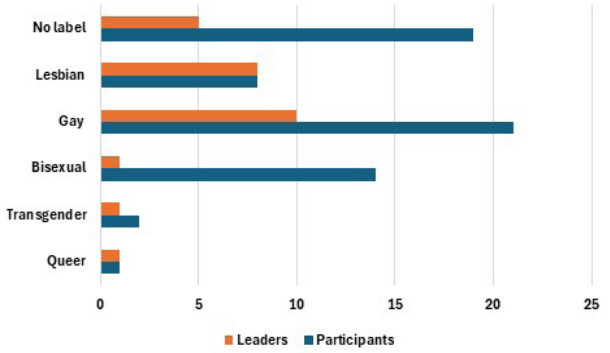
Consolidated (Other)
Encounter with God
Seeking peace with God
Personal crisis

This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

Primary Reason	Participants	Leaders	Total
Testimony by a transformed individual	1	2	3
Religious conviction	40	12	52
Family pressure	1	1	2
Referral from someone I trust	3	1	4
Other	10	6	16
Total			**77**

Figure 4

Self-Identity Labels



	Participants	Leaders	Total
No label	19	5	24
Lesbian	8	8	16
Gay	21	10	31
Bisexual	14	1	15
Transgender	2	1	3
Queer	1	1	2
Total			**91**

This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

Respondents could select more than one label.
Two participants indicated "Other" and said they did not identify with any labels so thy were added to "no label"

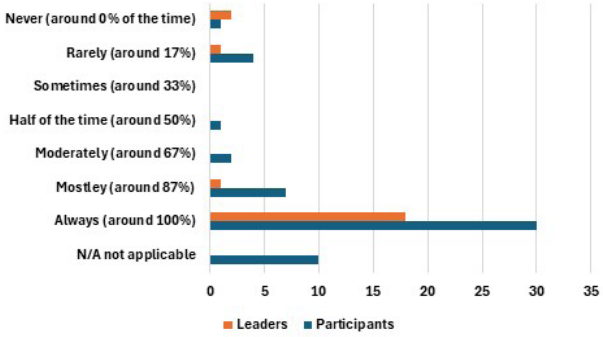
Additional reasons respondents provided include personal crises, encounters with God, and a desire to seek peace with God.

Most respondents reported that at some time in their lives, they self-identified with one or more labels associated with same-sex attraction (Figure 4).

Most survey respondents reported that they are now clear about rejecting LGBTQ self-identity labels (Figure 5)

Figure 5

Level of Rejection of LGBTQ Self-Identity Labels



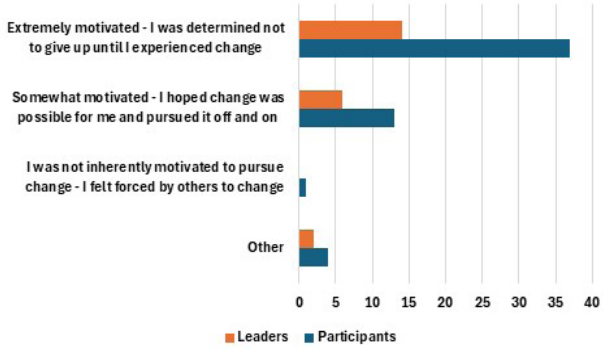
	Participants	Leaders	Total
Never (around 0% of the time)	1	2	3
Rarely (around 17%)	4	1	5
Sometimes (around 33%)	0	0	0
Half of the time (around 50%)	1	0	1
Moderately (around 67%)	2	0	2
Mostley (around 87%)	7	1	8
Always (around 100%)	30	18	48
N/A not applicable	10	0	10
Total			**77**

This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

Respondents were instructed to mark N/A if they identify as lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer.

Figure 6

Motivation Level for Change



Consolidation of "other" responses
All or nothing (change or embrace)
Pursued closer relationship with God more than change
Wanted to understand attractions and not pursue same-sex relationships in the future

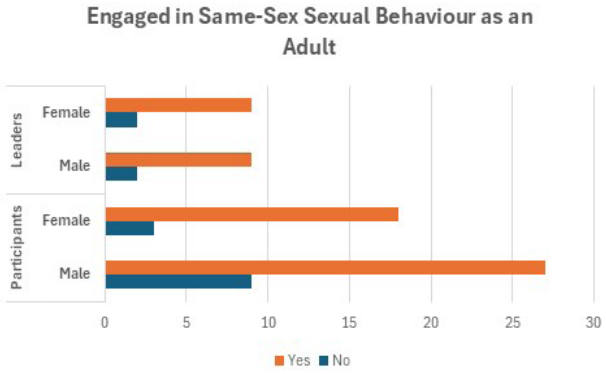
This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

	Participants	Leaders	Total
Extremely motivated - I was determined not to give up until I experienced change	37	14	51
Somewhat motivated - I hoped change was possible for me and pursued it off and on	13	6	19
I was not inherently motivated to pursue change - I felt forced by others to change	1	0	1
Other	4	2	6
Total			**77**

Most survey respondents (65%) were highly motivated to experience transformation for their unwanted same-sex attraction (Figure 6). Regarding behavior, a combined percentage of participants and leaders shows that 79% of respondents have engaged, as adults, in same-gender sexual behavior (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Engaged in Same-Sex Sexual Behavior as an Adult

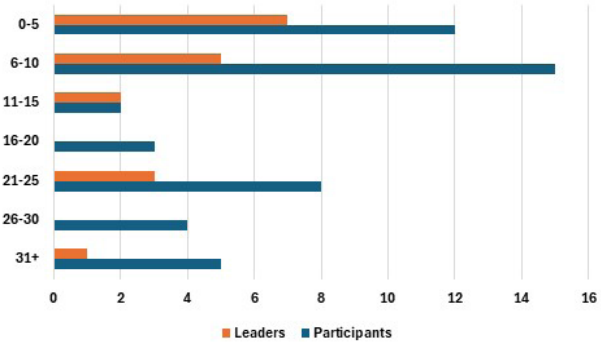


	Participants		Leaders		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
No	9	3	2	2	16
Yes	27	18	9	9	62
Total					78

This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

Figure 8

Number of Years Pursuing Change



Years	Participants	Leaders	Total
0-5	12	7	19
6-10	15	5	20
11-15	2	2	4
16-20	3	0	3
21-25	8	3	11
26-30	4	0	4
31+	5	1	6
Total	**49**	**18**	**67**

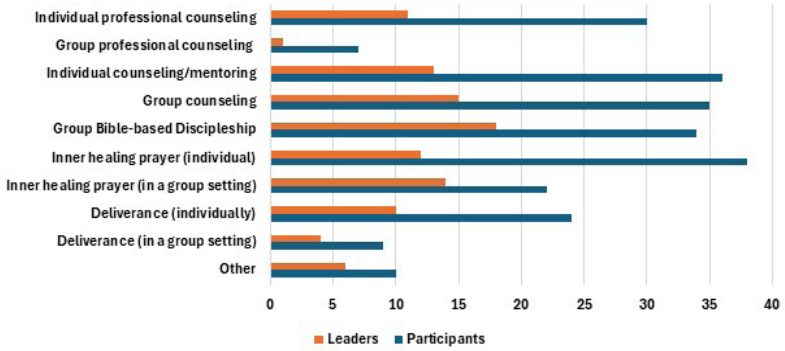
This data excludes leaders who never experienced same-sex attraction.

Numerical data provided by respondents is included.

Most respondents (59%) pursued transformation or change for up to ten years (Figure 8). Respondents indicated that they pursued a variety of change methods for their unwanted same-sex attraction in addition to participating in the ministries represented in this study (Figure 9).

Figure 9

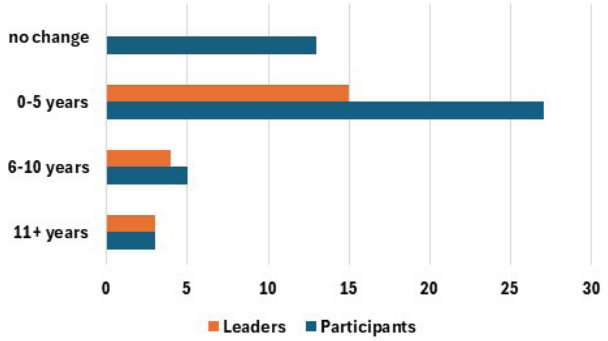
Change Methods Pursued



Change Method	Participants	Leaders	Percentage	Total
Individual professional counseling (i.e., a licensed therapist whom I paid)	30	11	12%	41
Group professional counseling (i.e., a licensed therapist whom I paid)	7	1	2%	8
Individual counseling/mentoring (i.e., through a church, ministry program, or friend)	36	13	14%	49
Group counseling (through a church or ministry program)	35	15	14%	50
Group Bible-based Discipleship	34	18	15%	52
Inner healing prayer (individual)	38	12	14%	50
Inner healing prayer (in a group setting)	22	14	10%	36
Deliverance (individually)	24	10	10%	34
Deliverance (in a group setting)	9	4	4%	13
Other	10	6	5%	16
Total				**349**

Figure 10

Years to Discern Tangible Change

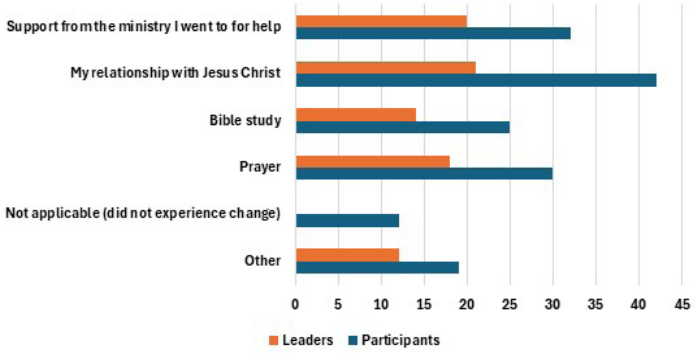


Years	Participants	Leaders	Total
no change	13	0	13
0-5	27	15	42
6-10	5	4	9
11+	3	3	6
Total	**48**	**22**	**70**

Most respondents (71%) reported discerning a tangible change in their attractions within the first five years of participating in ministry to address their unwanted desires (Figure 10). Respondents who experienced a transformation or change in their sexual attractions indicated what they attributed the change to, and were permitted to select multiple responses or to select "other" and explain (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Change in Attraction Attribution



Summary of "other" responses
Support from Christians (healthy relationships)
Inner Healing/Deliverance
Counseling
Mentoring and Accountability

Respondents were permitted to select multiple responses.

	Participants	Leaders	Total
Support from the ministry I went to for help	32	20	52
My relationship with Jesus Christ	42	21	63
Bible study	25	14	39
Prayer	30	18	48
Not applicable (did not experience change)	12	0	12
Other	19	12	31
Total			**245**

Figure 12

Interviews by Ministry Percentages



Ministry	Percent	Total	Male (Leader)	Male (Participant)	Female (Leader)	Female (Participant)
All Things New Ministry	26%	16	0	2	7	7
Desert Stream Living Waters	23%	14	5	2	5	2
Exchange Ministries	7%	4	1	1	2	0
Outpost Ministries	11%	7	3	3	1	0
Portland Fellowship	26%	16	2	6	0	8
Other (RHN Affiliates)	5%	3	1	1	0	1
Total		**60**	**12**	**15**	**15**	**18**

Quantitative Interview Data

The first author conducted 60 semi-structured interviews to gather information on participants' and leaders' experiences interacting with ministries affiliated with the Restored Hope Network (Figure 12). Of the 60 interview subjects, 27 were men (14 participants and 13 leaders), and 33 were women (18 participants and 15 leaders). These interview subjects were well-balanced in terms of leaders and participants, as well as men and women.

The primary focus of the interviews was to gather detailed information on each ministry's best practices and learn from any mistakes or adjustments they had made over the years. A secondary focus was to distill what transformation or change looks like for someone experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction in the opinion of these respondents, and how best to encourage perseverance in those who are seeking transformation that feels elusive to them.

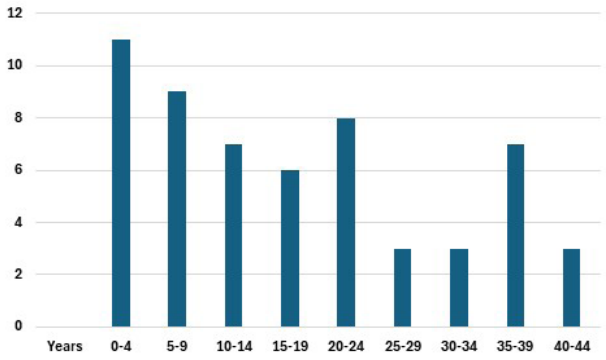
To protect the research subject's anonymity, respondents who participated in interviews are not correlated with survey respondents by design. The first author invited anonymous feedback from individuals who believed their participation in a ministry had benefited them, as well as those who did not. A few people who initially did not experience positive outcomes responded to the invitation, asking whether their viewpoints would be welcome. Despite reassurances that their input would be invaluable, they decided not to participate in the interview. The first author is not aware of any of them completing an anonymous survey.

Ministry participants reported that the main reasons they sought help for their same-sex attractions were their degree of struggle (20 respondents), conflict with their faith (7 respondents), and wanting to find answers and healing (5 respondents). Half of the leaders who had never experienced same-sex attraction (4 respondents) chose to serve in a ministry because they had a loved one experiencing same-sex attraction and sought a better understanding.

Fifty-seven interview subjects reported their years of exposure to ministries for Christians experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction. Some respondents completed multiple cycles of the ministry curriculum, participated in more than one ministry, served as leaders, or remained connected to the ministries by receiving communications and attending conferences (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Years Exposed to Ministry for Unwanted SSA



Fifty-seven interview subjects responded to this question

Qualitative Interview Data

When asked what a successful outcome looks like for participants seeking help for their unwanted same-sex attractions, the number one answer was developing a deeper relationship with God, who transforms lives (21 respondents), followed by learning how to refrain from acting on sinful temptations (13 respondents) and understanding their true identity (13 respondents). When asked why some Christians experience lasting change from unwanted same-sex attractions, and others do not, the most common answer was a lack of veracity in desiring the change (15 respondents), followed by not cutting all ties to their former life (13 respondents).

The first author asked respondents what they would say to encourage someone who attempted SOC but still experiences same-sex attraction. The most common answer was don't give up (23 respondents). The second and third most prevalent answers were to continue to trust God (19 respondents), and your same-sex attraction may never go away completely but continue to persevere with God (16 respondents).

Respondents were then asked about aspects of their affiliated ministry's structure and curriculum that they believed were effective. The most effective ministry structure components identified across several ministries were 1) prayer, including inner healing prayer (26 respondents), 2) creating a safe environment for participants (24 respondents), 3) incorporation of testimonies (23 respondents), 4) worship at the beginning of support group meetings to focus on God (11 respondents), 5) gender-specific small group time (10 respondents), and 5) helping participants transition out of the support group and connect with accountability in a local church (32 respondents).

The most effective aspect of the curriculum for the ministries was ensuring the material was biblically based (20 respondents) and helping participants reflect on issues through short homework assignments (13 respondents). The most impactful lesson topics dealt with 1) understanding some of the root causes for their SSA (18 respondents), 2) forgiveness (16 respondents), 3) understanding their identity in Christ (11 respondents), 4) coping with temptation (10 respondents), 5) learning to communicate with God through prayer (10 respondents), and 6) basic discipleship principles (8 respondents). The first author asked respondents about aspects of their affiliated ministry's structure and curriculum that they believed were less effective or problematic. Thirty-one individuals responded to this question. The most notable issue raised was that virtual meetings are less effective than in-person meetings (16 respondents).

The first author asked respondents to describe their ideal model program to help Christians who experience unwanted same-

Table 2

Change in Attractions as a Result of Participating in Ministry for Overcoming Same-Sex Attraction

	Mean Score Before Ministry	Mean Score After Ministry	Change	Standard Deviation	Population Size
Participants					
Women	5.24	2.10	3.14	1.71	21
Men	6.15	4.38	1.77	1.79	34
All Participants	5.80	3.51	2.29	1.87	55
Leaders					
Women	5.00	1.45	3.55	1.86	11
Men	6.55	2.09	4.46	1.37	11
All Leaders	5.77	1.77	4.00	1.66	22
Combined Survey Population					
Women	5.16	1.88	3.28	1.75	32
Men	6.24	3.10	3.14	2.05	45
Total	5.79	2.59	3.20	1.87	77

Score	Modified Kinsey Scale
1	Exclusively heterosexual
2	Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
3	Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
4	Equally heterosexual and homosexual
5	Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
6	Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
7	Exclusively homosexual

sex attraction. Some emerging themes that diverged from the already-identified best practices include 1) providing an option for one-on-one discipleship facilitated by a leader (15 respondents), 2) having solid ministry leadership standards and accountability (14 respondents), 3) providing counseling resources for ministry participants (13 respondents), 4) creating adequate alum support (13 respondents) and 5) helping the church embrace and disciple men and women healing from unwanted SSA (9 respondents). Additionally, an area where divergent views emerged across ministries was that of boundaries. Some ministries established firm boundaries, expressly limiting interaction between participants and leaders, as well as between participants, outside of regularly scheduled meetings. Other ministries encourage and facilitate interaction between ministry members outside of support group meetings.

Perceived Change in Same-Sex Attractions

Descriptive Analyses

This study affirms what prior research has shown: self-perceived change is a possibility for those who seek help for their unwanted same-sex attraction (Table 2).

Table 3 further depicts the degree of change as reported by individual research respondents. Of the female ministry participants, three women who scored “7” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “4” (1 woman) or “1” (2 women); six women who scored “6” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “5” (1), “4” (2), “2” (1), or “1” (2)); nine women who scored “5” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “4” (1), “2” (3), or “1” (5) ; two women who scored “3” at the time they joined a ministry

Table 3

Self-Reported Kinsey Scale Data by Respondent

From-To	Score Before Joining a Ministry							Score After Ministry Exposure							Total Change
	Female Participants														
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
6-1		x												x	5
6-2		x											x		4
5-1			x											x	4
6-1		x												x	5
7-4	x										x				3
6-4		x									x				2
5-4			x								x				1
3-2					x								x		1
7-1	x													x	6
5-1			x											x	4
5-1			x											x	4
6-5		x								x					1
5-2			x										x		3
5-1			x											x	4
5-2			x										x		3
2-2						x							x		0
5-1			x											x	4
6-4		x									x				2
5-2			x										x		3
7-1	x													x	6
3-2					x								x		1
From-To	Female Leaders														
2-1						x								x	1
7-2	x												x		5
5-1			x											x	4
3-1					x									x	2
5-2			x										x		3
7-1	x													x	6
4-2				x									x		2
5-1			x											x	4
7-2	x												x		5
7-1	x													x	6
3-2					x								x		1
	Male Participants														
From-To	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
6-3		x										x			3
6-2		x											x		4
7-7	x							x							0
7-7	x							x							0
4-1				x										x	3
6-5		x								x					1
5-1			x											x	4
7-5	x									x					2
5-2			x										x		3
7-7	x							x							0
4-2				x									x		2
7-2	x												x		5
6-2		x											x		4
7-6	x								x						1
6-5		x								x					1
7-7	x							x							0
6-4		x									x				2
6-6		x							x						0
7-7	x							x							0
6-6		x							x						0
6-2		x											x		4
6-6		x							x						0
6-4		x									x				2
7-2	x												x		5
5-6			x						x						-1
7-2	x												x		5
6-2		x											x		4
7-6	x								x						1
7-7	x							x							0
6-6		x							x						0
7-5	x									x					2
6-5		x								x					1
7-7	x							x							0
4-2				x									x		2
From-To	Male Leaders														
7-2	x												x		5
7-2	x												x		5
6-2		x											x		4
6-2		x											x		4
7-2	x												x		5
7-1	x													x	6
6-2		x											x		4
7-1	x													x	6
7-3	x											x			4
5-4			x								x		x		1
7-2	x														5

Standard deviation Females: 1.71 (participants); 1.86 (leaders); and 1.75 (combined)
Standard deviation Males: 1.79 (participants); 1.37 (leaders); and 2.05 (combined)

changed to "2"; and one woman who scored "2" at the time they joined a ministry reported no change. Of the female ministry leaders, four women who scored "7" at the time they joined a ministry changed to "2" (2) or "1" (2); three women who scored "5" at the time they joined a ministry changed to "2" (1) or "1" (2); one woman who scored "4" at the time they joined a ministry changed to "2"; two women who scored "3" at the time they

joined a ministry changed to “2” (1) or “1” (1); and one woman who scored “2” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “1”. Of the male ministry participants, 14 men who scored “7” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “6” (2 men), “5” (2 men), “2” (3 men), and seven reported no change; 14 men who scored “6” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “5” (3), “4” (2), “3” (1), “2” (4) , and four reported no change; three men who scored “5” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “6” (1), “2” (1) or “1” (1); and three men who scored “4” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “2” (2) or “1” (1). Of the male ministry leaders, seven men who scored “7” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “3” (1), “2” (4), or “1” (2); three men who scored “6” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “2”; and one man who scored “5” at the time they joined a ministry changed to “4”.

Statistical Analyses

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. The mean scores for participants’ nonheterosexual orientation declined from 5.79 (*SD* = 1.28) to 3.01 (*SD* = 2.02) and were correlated $r = .362$ ($p < .001$, two-sided). A paired samples t-test with 76 degrees of freedom was 12.41 ($p < .001$, two-sided) with Cohen’s $d = 1.42$ (95% CI, 1.10 to 1.73).

Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed. The mean scores for the male participants’ nonheterosxual orientation declined from 6.24 (*SD* = 0.88) to 3.82 (*SD* = 2.14) and were correlated $r = .301$ ($p < .05$, two-sided). A paired samples *t*-test with 44 degrees of freedom was 7.93 ($p < .001$, two-sided) with Cohen’s $d = 1.18$ (95% CI, 0.80 to 1.56).

Hypothesis 3 was supported. The mean scores female participants’ nonheterosexual orientation declined from 5.16 (*SD* = 1.48) to 1.88 (*SD* = 1.13) and were correlated $r = .128$ (n.s.). A paired samples *t*-test with 31 degrees of freedom was 10.63 ($p < .001$, two-sided) with Cohen’s $d = 1.88$ (95% CI, 1.29 to 2.45).

Hypothesis 4 was not confirmed. Levene’s test for equality of variances was violated for both pretest ($p < .02$) and posttest ($p < .001$). Pretest scores differed by sex, with $t(46.5) = 3.71$ ($p < .001$, two-sided), as did posttest scores, with $t(70.0) = 5.18$ ($p < .001$, two-sided). Because the sample sizes differed, Hedges’ correction was used for effect size, that being 0.92 (95% CI, 0.45 to 1.39) at pretest and 1.08 (95% CI, 0.59 to 1.56) at posttest. Men scored significantly higher than women on nonheterosexual orientation at both pretest and posttest, leading to a rejection of the null hypothesis for Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 was supported. For male leaders, scores at posttest (2.09, *SD* = 0.83) were lower than at pretest (6.55, *SD* = 0.69), with a correlation of -.62 ($p < .05$, two-sided), and $t(10) = 10.80$ ($p < .001$, two-sided) and Cohen’s $d = 3.26$ (95% CI, 1.72 to 4.77).

Hypothesis 6 was also confirmed. For male participants, scores at posttest (4.38, *SD* = 2.13) were lower than at pretest (6.15, *SD* = 0.93), with a correlation of .554 ($p < .001$, two-sided), and $t(33) = 5.74$ ($p < .001$, two-sided) and Cohen’s $d = 0.98$ (95% CI, 0.57 to 1.39). For female participants, scores at posttest (1.77, *SD* = 0.75) were lower than at pretest (5.77, *SD* = 1.57), with a correlation of .115 (n.s.), and $t(21) = 11.29$ ($p < .001$, two-sided) and Cohen’s $d = 2.41$ (95% CI, 1.57 to 3.23).

Hypothesis 7 was partially supported. This hypothesis was tested using a repeated measures analysis of variance over time with between subjects’ factors of sex and leader vs. participant status. The statistical tests were for TIME, TIME x SEX, TIME x LEADER, and TIME x SEX x LEADER. The results for TIME were $F(1, 73) = 215.39$ ($p < .001$), indicating that scores at posttest were lower than at pretest. The results for TIME x SEX were not significant, indicating that differences between pretest and posttest scores did not vary as a function of the sex of the members of the total sample. The results for TIME x LEADER were $F(1, 73) = 12.36$ ($p < .001$), indicating that differences for leaders between pretest and posttest were larger than for participants. The results for TIME x SEX x LEADER were $F(1, 73) = 6.76$ ($p < .02$), reflecting that pretest/posttest differences were lower for male participants than for the other combinations of SEX and LEADER. In other words, the slope for the difference between pretest and posttest was less for male participants than for male leaders, female leaders, or female participants.

In terms of between subjects effects,

SEX yielded $F(1, 73) = 22.02$ ($p < .001$), reflecting that women's scores (3.45, $SE = 0.210$) were lower on average than men's scores (4.79, $SE = 0.195$) on nonheterosexual orientation (combining scores for pretest and posttest across TIME). LEADER yielded $F(1, 73) = 5.85$ ($p < .02$), reflecting that leader's scores (3.77, $SE = 0.240$) were lower on average than participants' (4.47, $SE = 0.156$) scores (combining scores for pretest and posttest across TIME). However, the results for SEX x LEADER were not significant. Also performed was a repeated measures analysis using only TIME, SEX, and TIME x SEX for only the male and female participants (not the leaders). With this subsample, TIME was significant, $F(1, 52) = 108.85$ ($p < .001$) and TIME x SEX was also significant, $F(1, 52) = 10.00$ ($p = .003$), indicating that differences between pretest and posttest were larger for women than for men. SEX was significant, $F(1, 52) = 19.05$ ($p < .001$) with women reporting lower scores than men across both times.

Hypotheses 8 was confirmed. Men and women were compared on the two categories of bisexual vs. mostly or entirely homosexual, combining scores of 3 to 5 as bisexual and 6 and 7 as mostly or entirely homosexual, using a chi-square test. Of the 30 women, 56.7% were bisexual compared to the 45 men of whom 84.4% were mostly homosexual, yielding a chi-square value ($df = 1$) of 13.98 ($p < .001$) and a Pearson zero-order correlation of $r = -.432$ ($p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.96$), a result supportive of Hypotheses 8.

Hypothesis 9 was also supported. At post-test, the same pattern was found (41.7% of 24 men were bisexual, compared to 100% of 5 women) as in the pre-test findings, but the pattern was weaker, with a chi-square value ($df = 1$) of 5.64 ($p < .02$), although the correlation was -.441 ($p < .02$, Cohen's $d = 0.98$). Schumm and Crawford (2026) found similar patterns among men and women in a survey of nearly 3,000 adult respondents conducted in 2011.

Hypothesis 10 was partially supported. This hypothesis was designed to detect overall patterns in differences between pretest and posttest scores on nonheterosexual orientation. The levels of orientation were collapsed as noted for Hypotheses 8 and 9. The heterosexual category for the pretest was omitted in the analysis since there were only two cases (that also were in that same category at posttest). For those members ($n = 24$) who were bisexual at pretest, 21 (87.5%) were in the heterosexual category at posttest, with two (8.3%) remaining bisexual and one (4.2%) reporting a homosexual orientation. For members reporting a homosexual orientation at pretest, 25 (49.0%) reported a heterosexual orientation at posttest, with 13 (25.5%) reporting a bisexual orientation and 13 (25.5%) unchanged in their pretest report. The overall chi-square ($df = 2$) was 10.2 ($p = .006$) with $r = .355$ ($p = .002$, Cohen's $d = 0.759$) and Spearman rho = .368 ($p = .001$). The difference between 87.5% and 49.0% was significant ($p < .05$) as was the difference between 25.5% and 4.2%. Overall, those who reported a bisexual orientation at pretest very often reported a heterosexual orientation at posttest; in contrast, among those initially reporting a homosexual orientation, just under half reported a heterosexual orientation later with another quarter reporting a change to a bisexual orientation, with the remaining quarter reporting no change.

Thus, across all efforts at sexual orientation change, change seemed more likely for those initially reporting a bisexual orientation (women contributed the most to this phenomenon, with 16/17 (94.1%) reporting a change from bisexuality to heterosexuality) but less likely, though still frequent, for those initially reporting a homosexual orientation where only 42.1 % (16/38) appeared to change to a heterosexual orientation, with 23.7% reporting a bisexual orientation at posttest. Unlike women, for whom none reported a homosexual orientation at posttest, 14/38 (36.8%) of the men reported a homosexual orientation at posttest. Broken down by sex, the chi-square tests were not significant, though nearly so ($p < .10$) for women. Another way to look at the results was that of four women who reported a score of 7 at pretest, four reported a score of 1 at posttest, with none remaining at a 7. However, for the men, eleven started at 7 with two making a slight change but of the remaining nine men, seven remained at 7 at posttest while only two reported scores of 1 at posttest; in other words, women were more likely to become entirely heterosexual than were men. Of the 13 persons who started at a

score of 7 and either stayed there or changed to a score of 1, the corresponding chi-square test ($df = 1$) was 6.74 ($p < .01$), with $r = 0.72$ ($p = .006$, Cohen's $d = 2.07$) with a two-sided Fisher's Exact test being significant at $p = .021$, with women being significantly more likely to change from a 7 to a 1 than were men but less likely to remain a 7 over time.

Discussion

Participant Experiences and Motivations

Eighty-five research subjects affiliated with ministries assisting Christians with unwanted same-sex attraction completed surveys. Respondents were reasonably balanced between men and women: 46 and 39, respectively. They ranged in age from 25 to over 65, with the majority between 35 and 64. Seventy-two percent are Caucasian and 20% are African American. Ninety-five percent are college-educated.

Fifty-five participants were involved in one or more ministries, both within and outside the RHN target ministries. Thirty leaders also participated; 22 initially participated in a ministry for their unwanted same-sex attraction, and eight never experienced same-sex attraction but served in one of the research target ministries. Fifteen participants and nine leaders also reported participating in other ministries outside the five research focus ministries. As the study progressed, three respondents who experienced SSA and were involved in a ministry to help them overcome SSA joined the study and were interviewed. They had not participated in the five RHN focus ministries (two participants and one leader) and are included in the totals above. RHN leaders familiar with the research invited them to participate in the study. These individuals were permitted to join the study because they were affiliated with RHN and had valuable experience to contribute to the study.

Fifty-two survey respondents reported that religious conviction was the primary reason that they sought help for their unwanted same-sex attraction. Seventy-one percent of respondents reported attending church regularly as children, with 44% having an authentic salvation experience and serving Jesus faithfully. Ninety percent of respondents attend church at least once a week, and 71% state they maintain an intimate relationship with Jesus. Christianity is an integral part of the lives of the majority of the study subjects.

Seventy percent struggled with their unwanted same-sex attraction for more than ten years before seeking help. Sixty-six percent reported being highly motivated to experience transformation; 58% sought help for up to 10 years, with the remaining respondents seeking help for more than 10 years. Unwanted same-sex attraction was persistent for a large percentage of these respondents. After they reached out for help, they were highly motivated to continue pursuing change until they achieved the desired results.

Respondents overwhelmingly reported seeking other types of assistance besides participating in a ministry. These included professional counseling, mentoring, inner healing prayer, and deliverance. Most respondents (82% of participants and 82% of leaders) reported their attractions as exclusively or predominantly homosexual when they initially sought help, and (55% of participants and 91% of leaders) reported their attractions as being predominantly or solely heterosexual now. Survey respondents reported changes in their attractions as a result of participating in ministry, augmented by other types of support that they pursued.

Reports of Change

Efforts to change sexual orientation are by no means easy. In this sample, most of the individuals had experienced same-sex attraction for over five years, as well as having engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, before seeking help. As noted, 70% had struggled with their unwanted same-sex attraction for more than ten years before seeking help. Many of them had experienced childhood trauma, often including sexual abuse in terms of behavior. Habits formed from childhood trauma and later years of adult sexual experiences may resist change. Most were motivated for religious reasons for change. While some, especially men, experienced no major change in sexual orientation, even after years of change efforts, some reported experiencing a

decrease in same-sex sexual attraction within five years of obtaining help. This sample was highly educated and very religious, so committed to change that many spent decades seeking it, many with favorable results as indicated in generally large effect sizes, some with less favorable outcomes.

We observed distinct gender patterns. Most women began change efforts as bisexuals, meaning that they already had some opposite-sex attractions and/or behavior and ultimately were more likely to change to heterosexual orientations. In contrast, most men began change efforts as homosexuals, with mixed results; while half eventually reported a change to a heterosexual orientation, a quarter reported only change to a bisexual orientation, and the rest remained homosexuals. In sum, male homosexual orientation seemed more resistant to change than female bisexual orientation. It has long been argued that female sexuality is more fluid and our results parallel that idea.

Best Practices Structure

Interviews revealed that the most effective ministry structure components were 1) prayer; including inner healing prayer, 2) creating a safe environment for participants, 3) incorporation of testimonies, 4) worship at the beginning of support group meetings, 5) gender-specific small group time, and 6) helping participants transition out of the support group and connect with accountability in a local church. Several respondents also identified best practices for conducting ministry meetings.

Prayer was deemed an essential component of ministry to support individuals experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA). Participants and leaders highlighted the various forms of prayer incorporated into the ministry structure, including individual listening and inner-healing prayer, times for confession and repentance, both corporately and in small groups, and listening prayer facilitated by leaders for participants. Prayer acknowledges that healing and help come from God, helping participants develop a deeper intimacy with Jesus.

Another essential structural component of ministry is creating a safe environment for participants. A secure environment is established in several ways, from the ministry intake process to the facilitation of small groups. When a prospective participant contacts a ministry for help with their unwanted same-sex attraction, they generally meet with ministry leaders to learn more about the ministry and determine whether participating in the ministry would be a good option for them. Some ministries have well-established intake and onboarding criteria, along with paperwork that prospective participants complete before joining the group. These criteria include leaders learning more about the person seeking to join to determine what they have tried in the past regarding their unwanted same-sex attraction, their church affiliation, and current support structures in place. In addition, determining whether they can commit to the participation and attendance policy is crucial. The leaders also provide clarity regarding realistic expectations and ministry rules and boundaries. Some ministries have formal pre-entry classes that prospective participants must complete before joining. The intake process clarifies expectations for those seeking help, screens out individuals who cannot commit fully, and protects others in the ministry from disruptions to their established small groups.

Testimonies are an integral part of the ministry for individuals seeking help for unwanted same-sex attraction, letting participants know that they are not alone and that others have achieved success before them. Participants must hear the testimonies of leaders and others who have overcome their unwanted same-sex attraction. One leader said, “Testimonies make a journey tangible. Plus, it gives them not just hope, but also access to people who can answer their questions.” Additionally, testimonies encourage people to be transparent about their struggles, letting them know they are not alone in their experiences. Some ministries present testimonies near the beginning of group meetings. In contrast, others incorporate them into small group time or hold a special testimony-sharing event at the end of the ministry cycle.

Worship at the beginning of ministry meetings was another ministry component highlighted by interview respondents as necessary in helping participants and

leaders focus on God before discussing the meeting topic. One participant remarked, "It's a centering, it's a grounding, and it's a reminder of why we're there—to honor God and to put God at the center of it." For those ministries that begin their meetings with worship, many remarked that this was a time when the men and women of the ministry were together before breaking out into gender-specific small groups. Coed time at the beginning of ministry meetings also helps men and women interact with each other in a nurturing environment, which, according to one of the leaders, is essential as "men and women learn to interact with each other, treat each other respectfully, and to embrace having a masculine or feminine disposition."

Sex-specific small group time is another structural component that is a best practice for ministries to address unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA). For the ministries that currently operate this way and those that do not, respondents emphasized the importance of creating a safe environment where men can share with men and women can share with women. Sharing intimate details that require vulnerability is crucial to their healing. Most agreed that it is also essential for the ministry to be coed for worship and teaching at the beginning of ministry meetings before breaking out into small groups for discussion. One of the ministries does not currently operate in this manner due to volunteer staffing shortages; however, according to interview subjects, it is an area that needs change.

Respondents reported that another essential aspect of small groups is that they are closed rather than open. Some ministries do not permit new members to join a small group after the initial couple of weeks in a ministry cycle, closing access to new members. Some leaders offer flexibility for the first two to three weeks, allowing new members to join before group members begin to share more deeply with each other as trust develops. These small groups provide accountability for the members as they interact, challenge each other to apply what they learn to their lives, and pray for one another. Small groups are a place to know others and be known by them in safety as participants process their unwanted same-sex attractions.

One drawback of closed groups is that prospective ministry participants who discover the ministry and seek help may have to wait a significant amount of time before they can connect fully, as the next cycle does not begin until the current one concludes. Ministries that adhere to the closed group policy should find alternative ways to support these prospective participants by providing one-on-one discipleship or other resources until the new cycle begins.

Helping ministry participants transition out of the support group and connect with accountability within their local church is another best practice in recovery ministry. According to interview respondents, transitioning out of the support group environment and connecting with Christians in a local church where ministry participants can continue to grow spiritually, be held accountable, and develop lasting, healthy friendships is also essential to their healing journey. Some ministries inquire about the support structures already in place for prospective participants during the intake process. Others make it part of the discipleship process to openly discuss with participants how to develop healthy Christian friendships and accountability outside the support group through people in their churches and communities who do not struggle with same-sex attraction for ongoing support.

Connecting with people outside of the support group for unwanted same-sex attraction helps integrate ministry members into the world after receiving targeted support for a crisis point in their lives. One leader said, "You still have the task of going into your community and building relationships and practicing what you have been taught and equipped to do." Another leader said to help people step out of the support group: "You do that by being clear that you need to be known outside of the group in your church community, even while you're doing a group. " One of the participants said, "My struggle does not define me and confine me to only certain kinds of friendships. When I experienced true acceptance, love, and kindness from other men I respect, that was extremely powerful and healing."

Interview respondents discussed best practices for running ministry meetings, which, for some ministries, have evolved to enhance effectiveness. The first author

distilled these comments into the following model for the ministry meeting. Start with coed worship (10-20 minutes), followed by coed teaching or testimony sharing on the topic of discussion for that meeting (20 minutes). Then, break out into same-gender small groups to dive deeper into the discussion topic and pray (one hour).

Key Curriculum Components

Interviews revealed that the most effective aspects of the curriculum for the ministries were ensuring that any material used was biblically based and helping participants reflect on issues through short homework assignments. One participant said the homework was an essential aspect of the ministry because the Bible-based lessons allowed participants to digest the material before meeting with the group. Another participant mentioned that they rarely read the Word before joining the ministry, but the homework motivated them to read it daily. They went on to say that falling in love with the Word led them to fall in love with the Lord, which changed everything for them.

The most impactful lesson topics dealt with 1) understanding some of the root causes for their SSA, 2) forgiveness, 3) understanding their identity in Christ, 4) coping with temptation, 5) learning to communicate with God through prayer, and 6) basic discipleship principles. Understanding some of the root causes of SSA was deemed essential and tied into other areas of the ministry to help participants along the path to healing. For example, listening and inner-healing prayer could focus on aspects of the root causes identified by the participants. Some respondents identified areas of trauma or sexual exposure they experienced in childhood that they believe led to their same-sex attraction, and for which they needed to address. For many, this aspect of the ministry was the first time they looked back over their lives and helped them to understand how they became same-sex attracted. One participant remarked, "When you understand a thing, it loses its power." Another participant said it helped them to go back to the root of the time of their life when sexual brokenness came in, what happened, and that God was there; reminding them of that fact helped with the healing.

Forgiveness is another topic deemed necessary to cover in the curriculum. One participant said, "it's essential to learn how to forgive those who have offended, which is a harder thing to do, but it's vital because we're not there to dwell on people who have hurt us; we're there to grow closer to Christ, and unforgiveness is a roadblock in getting anywhere." One of the leaders emphasized the importance of forgiveness and its profound impact on the recipient. They went on to say that people in the ministry need hope, and that comes from understanding the concept of forgiveness. Another central aspect of one of the ministries is understanding the gospel and what Jesus did on the cross to forgive sin and set people free.

Understanding their identity in Christ was another critical topic that respondents raised. One of the leaders raised the question of how to navigate these struggles in light of their identity in Christ and develop a healthy understanding of that identity. A participant talked about the importance of reorienting lives from sexual struggles to pursuing Christ and finding their identity and security in Christ so that these issues and struggles become less significant and less life-defining, resulting in much greater freedom.

Coping with temptation is another area that the interview respondents identified as needing to be addressed in the ministry curriculum. One participant remarked on the importance of having the tools to stay connected to the community. In addition, they emphasized the importance of walking away from temptation or recognizing when you need extra accountability. Having the resources, community, and discipline, along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is crucial. This enables you to reach out for help, read the Word, and, even if you fall, get back up. One of the leaders said that temptation is worth dealing with, not just the behavior itself, but also what gives it power. These are the things that produce change, not just managing behavior.

Learning to communicate with God through prayer is a crucial component of ministry for participants pursuing transformation. In addition to receiving prayer from ministry leaders, participants must have their relationship with God,

through which they learn to listen as well as talk to Him. One of the ministry leaders stated that listening and inner healing prayer are a very significant part of the curriculum. In this process, people peel back the onion and delve deeper into their hurt, what they're dealing with, and what they're hearing, while praying for deliverance and transformation. One of the participants spoke about the importance of learning the art and skill of prayer and how it has benefited them.

Finally, respondents emphasized the importance of basic discipleship principles as a crucial component of the ministry curriculum. One of the participants spoke of the importance of going back to the basics of discipleship: teaching people how to grow in their relationship with God, renew their minds, the basics of the faith, the character and nature of God, hearing God's voice, how to renew our mind, spiritual warfare, how do we take thoughts captive, prayer, etc. Another participant emphasized the importance of helping people deepen their relationship with Christ through involvement in the church, where they can regularly experience worship and prayer. Additional aspects included hearing the Word with other believers, participating in the sacraments, and practicing the disciplines of the Christian life, such as prayer, daily Bible reading and memorization, and regular fellowship—just the ordinary things of the Christian life.

Promoting Resiliency

Other important topics for a best practices model curriculum focus on recovery resilience and address the responses to the questions posed by the first author regarding what a successful outcome looks like and why some people are successful in overcoming same-sex attraction while others are not. Developing intimacy with God and learning to surrender fully to Him are important topics to include in the curriculum. Additionally, helping ministry participants learn to develop and maintain healthy same-sex friendships and to maintain Christian accountability outside the support group was deemed crucial for ongoing support and for strengthening resilience in the healing process.

Interviews revealed areas where ministries would benefit from creating or increasing resiliency. In response to the first author asking respondents to describe their ideal model program for Christians experiencing unwanted SSA, these emerging themes arose: 1) providing an option for one-on-one discipleship facilitated by a leader, 2) enhancing leadership standards and accountability, 3) providing counseling resources for ministry participants, 4) creating adequate alum support and 5) helping the church embrace and disciple men and women healing from unwanted SSA.

Additional interview respondents found it helpful or desirable for ministries to provide an option for one-on-one discipleship facilitated by a ministry leader. One participant said they enjoyed the one-on-one sessions offered by ministry leaders and took full advantage of them. One of the leaders stated that one-on-one discipleship from a healthy leader is beneficial and should be incorporated into the ministry for those who are ready. Another leader discussed how they support prospective ministry participants during the waiting period between the start of ministry cycles that adhere to closed groups. They offer one-on-one biblical discipleship, where individuals can meet with a leader to explore topics.

Problem Areas

Interviews revealed two notable aspects of the respondents' affiliated ministry structure and curriculum that they believed were less effective or problematic. Other problematic areas highlighted by interview subjects will be addressed in the next section, which focuses on developing an ideal discipleship program. The two notable areas addressed here are virtual meetings and Catholic doctrine.

Virtual meetings are less effective than in-person meetings, according to 16 respondents in the interviews. Several of them acknowledged the value of making virtual ministry meetings accessible to people who do not live close enough to attend in-person sessions. However, most respondents preferred in-person meetings over virtual ones, citing the importance of being in the same room for deeper engagement. Finally, 43% of respondents in the Desert Stream

Living Waters program commented on the updated curriculum's heavy emphasis on Catholic doctrine. Those of Protestant church affiliation found this somewhat challenging, but noted they could still receive valuable information from the materials.

Enhancing ministry leadership standards and accountability was another area highlighted by interview subjects. Several interview subjects recounted leadership problems they witnessed or learned about in past years within their respective ministries. One of the leaders stated that standards must be clear, including criteria that require potential leaders to be free from sexual, emotional, and relational sinful behaviors for a specified minimum period before facilitating ministry for others**.** A participant noted that the vetting process should include high accountability for leaders, who must demonstrate a tangible, measurable level of success in their walk with God regarding this issue. Leaders must also be held accountable to someone who checks in with them regularly to ensure they remain healthy and maintain appropriate boundaries, thereby safeguarding ministry participants. Other respondents commented about leaders in the ministry who had never personally experienced same-sex attraction. Respondents thought that these individuals could facilitate meetings as long as they partnered with a co-leader who had experienced and overcome same-sex attraction.

Counseling and Support

Providing counseling resources for ministry participants was another suggested best practice offered by interview subjects. Lay leaders primarily facilitate the ministry meetings, and some ministry members need additional help to process past trauma and deal with any mental health issues that arise. Several interview subjects reported that they benefited from professional counseling during their ministry participation. They could process some things one-on-one with a therapist that they were uncomfortable sharing in a group setting.

Providing adequate alum support is reportedly a challenge for ministries and should be considered in a best-practices model. Ministries have tried different things to support those who have completed the ministry cycle. However, the ministries that created alum support group meetings found that attendance fell dramatically after the first few meetings. Some ministries keep members connected through regular communications, including emails and newsletters, which feature encouraging testimonies and information about conferences and other resources. Some participants revisit the program one or more times to remain connected and continue their healing journey. Others return to the ministry to serve in a leadership role, which keeps them connected to what worked for them and fosters community and accountability with other ministry leaders.

Helping the church to embrace and disciple men and women who are healing from unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA) was raised by several interview respondents as an essential component of a best-practices ministry model. Respondents discussed the importance of ministries providing training for local churches to embrace and disciple men and women who are healing from unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA) and not avoid them. It requires pastors and church members to be willing to learn about this struggle, not be afraid to discuss it openly, and walk alongside Christians seeking help and an authentic Christian community. Some respondents mentioned how genuine relationships with people in their church who did not struggle with same-sex attraction but were willing to walk alongside them as they journeyed toward wholeness were invaluable to their healing.

Ministry Boundaries

An area where divergent views emerged across ministries was that of boundaries. Several ministries have issued guidelines, signed by ministry participants, that expressly restrict their interactions with other ministry participants outside support group meetings. This restriction is reportedly in place to prevent ministry members from developing unhealthy relationships with one another and to encourage them to form friendships outside the support group ministry. Likewise, some ministries have guidelines to establish boundaries

between ministry leaders and participants for interactions outside ministry meetings. One participant stated, "There cannot be any semblance of favoritism or connection where there is a camaraderie that they would have with one or more of the participants. " At least one of the ministries also requires participants to agree not to develop friendships with other participants or staff for a full year after completing the program.

By contrast, one of the ministries pairs each participant with an accountability partner or spiritual mentor who has not experienced same-sex attraction, providing support outside the weekly meetings. That ministry also plans social gatherings for participants and leaders to meet outside of the weekly meetings, such as attending church services or eating together at a restaurant. Respondents appreciated the additional contact with other ministry members and leaders who know them.

Another ministry leader from a different ministry discussed the boundaries in place, which, in the past, had restricted contact between members, even during ministry meetings, and prohibited members from hugging or touching one another. The leader lifted that policy, and members learned to set and communicate personal boundaries related to intimacy as part of their healing process. Today, this ministry also regularly organizes gatherings for participants and leaders to connect outside of the support group meetings.

Based on discussions with ministry leaders who adopt a less restrictive boundary approach and on experience ministering to Christians with unwanted SSA for over 13 years, the first author recommends a more stringent boundary approach. When boundaries are less restrictive, participants may rely too heavily on ministry leaders and fellow participants, rather than building healthy relationships outside of the ministry for continued healing and transformation. Additionally, as subsequent participant groups enter the ministry for healing, it becomes too burdensome for the leaders to continue providing a high level of support to those who have completed the ministry cycle while focusing on the new group entering the ministry.

Another notable outcome of the study revealed that many of the research subjects continue to experience some level of same-sex attraction; however, for most, it no longer dominates their lives. They have learned ways to cope with temptations and not identify themselves with disordered and sinful desires. Instead, they continue to pursue holiness, even if their same-sex attraction never goes away. The first author also acknowledges that the majority of the research subjects experienced positive outcomes from the ministries that they went to for help with their unwanted same-sex attraction. People who did not have a positive experience decided not to participate in the interviews. Therefore, their input could not be documented in the results of this study.

Best Practices Discipleship Model

More than 190 years of collective experience are incorporated in the five research target ministries, as they have been helping people in crisis with unwanted same-sex attraction between 1976 and 2025. A best-practices discipleship model framework emerged that incorporates the current best practices of these ministries, addresses respondents' ideas for a model ministry program, and targets resilience for lasting transformation. The model is presented below in a graphic form to allow flexibility in the details for contextualized application (Figure 14).

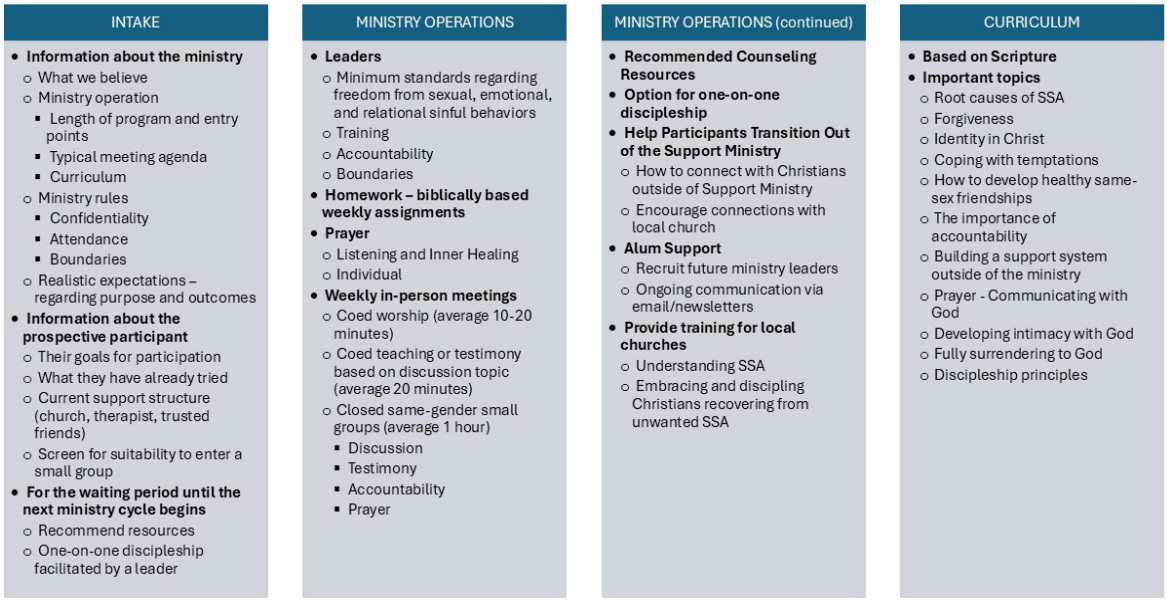
Suggestions For Further Research

This study analyzed data from 85 surveys and 60 interviews with individuals experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction affiliated with the Restored Hope Network. Additional research could examine data from a similar population connected to more ministries, both within and outside the Restored Hope Network, to determine if other best practices might emerge. Additionally, future researchers could evaluate the effectiveness of the best practices discipleship model after implementing the recommendations and completing several cycles of the new ministry model.

Study Limitations

Figure 14

Best Practices Discipleship Model Framework



The nature of this research and the study's timeframe do not permit testing and long-term monitoring of the effectiveness of the proposed discipleship structure and curriculum. Another limitation emerged: the first author invited anonymous feedback from individuals who believed their participation in a ministry had benefited them, as well as from those who did not. A few people who initially did not experience positive outcomes responded to the invitation, asking whether their viewpoints would be welcome. Despite reassurances that their input would be invaluable, they decided not to participate in the interview. There is no indication that any of them completed an anonymous survey. Finally, the self-report nature of participants' perceptions of change at one point in time do not allow for causal attributions and may be subject to recall biases.

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