

Why Are Non-Heterosexual Males Attracted to Religious Celibacy? A Case for the 'Gay Shaman' Theory

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There are elevated levels of non-heterosexual orientation and pedophilia among male religious celibates, such as Catholic priests and certain shamans. Based on cross-cultural empirical studies, it is argued that the most likely explanation is that male homosexuality is associated not only with elevated religiousness, but also with pathologies which themselves predict hyper-religiosity and intense religious experiences. This is supported by evidence of elevated religiousness among homosexual males, elevated Neuroticism among Catholic priests, and evidence of schizophrenia among shamans. The discussion also observes an erotic dimension to intense religiousness, which may aid the maintenance of celibacy. Finally, it is suggested that these findings may partially explain how male homosexuality may have been an adaptive trait: a group with an associated optimum level of fervent, celibate religious devotees would have a higher average level of religiosity and be more successful in terms of group selection.

Key Words: Religion; Religious experience; Homosexuality; Pederasty; Pedophilia; Celibacy

Despite many mainstream religious denominations being hostile to homosexuality, homosexual males are relatively religious. Sherkat (2002) has found that—based on such measures as prayer frequency, a sound marker of religious belief in contrast to specific denominational adherence—Lesbians and heterosexual males were roughly comparable in their religiousness and they were both significantly less religious than homosexual males and heterosexual females. The latter two categories are also approximately similar in their levels of religiousness. This is consistent with evidence that homosexual males are

feminized males in terms of personality and even intelligence profile and that Lesbians are masculinized females in the same respects (Miller, 2000).¹ Homosexual men (hereafter simply 'homosexuals') appear to be more religious than heterosexual men.

There is substantial evidence of elevated levels of non-heterosexual orientation among celibate religious devotees. This observation suggests that male homosexuals are more likely than heterosexual men to be so religious that they are prepared to, overtly at least, renounce sexual intercourse if this is what is necessary in order to be able to live, at the community's expense, a purely religiously focused life. This seems to be the case across cultures (see Olson, 2007), and it raises the question of why many religious groups maintain a highly religiously devoted and celibate caste. As we will see, partial evidence of this association between non-heterosexuality and involvement in such a caste can be found even in some tribal societies. Therefore, it appears that men who are very strongly religious are also more likely to be homosexual. For some of them, their religiosity is so intense that they become involved even in religious institutions that overtly oppose homosexuality. These homosexual males renounce sexuality in order to be part of this religious caste, perhaps as a pledge of commitment to their religion. This begs the question of whether this process is explicable in evolutionary terms.

In this discussion, we will attempt to make sense of this apparent situation from an evolutionary perspective. We will argue that non-heterosexual orientation is associated not only with religiousness in general but also with a number of pathologies which predict hyper-religiousness and intense religious experiences; most obviously schizophrenia and anxiety. In addition, we will present evidence that, even without these conditions, homosexual men may be prone to particularly intense religious experiences. Finally, we will suggest that the association between homosexuality and religious intensity may help to partially explain why a propensity for homosexuality can persist in populations under conditions of Darwinian selection.

¹ Many studies have also shown that religiousness is positively associated with mental health in the general population (see Koenig, 2012). However, a number of studies have found that there is no association when the sample is homosexual (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Harris et al, 2008, Shilo & Savaya, 2012, cf. Gibbs, 2015). Part of the reason for this may be the documented association between conflicted identity and depression (Gibbs, 2015), homosexuals from religious families being more likely to suffer from confused identity and thus poor mental health.

Alternative sexuality among religious celibates

The religious leader in indigenous forms of human organization is commonly termed the 'shaman,' a term which derives from the religious leader in Siberian tribes (Eliade, 1964). Such societies conceive of a universe in which everything is a reflection of the spirit world which is believed to underlie it. The shaman is believed to have powers that allow him to enter this spirit world, negotiate with the spirits on behalf of his group and return successfully to the physical world, as well as to heal the sick and injured and to perform many other wonders (Lewis, 2003). In some of these societies the shaman is not always celibate. However, in order to attain the spiritual powers necessary to become a shaman, he must undergo a long period of enforced celibacy. This has been documented among certain Native American shamans, for example, as surveyed by Olson (2007). More generally, however, a survey concludes that, cross-culturally, shamans are expected to be celibate after they have been initiated into shamanism (Winkelman, 2010, p. 143). Accordingly, the presence of a celibate religious caste in the group is not a human universal but it is extremely common.

Many anthropological accounts note evidence of alternative sexuality among shamans. Among the Ojibway Indians many of the shamans are transvestites, dressing in female attire (Grim, 1987, p. 25). Indeed, Vitebsky (2001, p. 93) notes that 'Transvestism is closely associated with shamanism in many parts of the world.' It is to be found, for example, in Siberia. Male shamans 'marry' a particular spirit. Thereafter, they behave like females and even speak like them. Some shamans undergo a ceremony of giving birth, which includes putting blood between their legs. Transvestism is also very common among Native American shamans (Vitebsky, 2001). Spiro (2017) observes that traditional shamans in Burma tend to be either effete, manifestly homosexual (in some cases practicing), or transvestites. The rather subjective nature of participant observation anthropology is such that we cannot enquire into issues such as how representative these groups are. But it can be said with confidence that strikingly similar observations have been made about religious devotees in tribal societies in different parts of the world.

Moving into more complex societies, it is clear that every world religion maintains a celibate religious caste. Most obviously, in Roman Catholicism, priests, nuns, and monks take vows of celibacy, overtly in order to devote themselves entirely to the Church. Catholic nuns undergo a marriage ceremony in which they are the brides of Christ. Within the Catholic Church, the order known as Opus Dei includes so-called 'numinary' members. They pursue secular professions but live in special communities and take vows of celibacy (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 184). In Buddhism, monasticism is common, nuns are

always celibate, and though there are certain regional exceptions to the celibacy rule, monks are typically celibate (Goody, 1990, p. 146). An edited volume on the subject of religious celibacy (Olson, 2007) notes that it can be found in all major religions. There is the caste of wandering holy men in Hinduism known as the *Sadhu*. It is practiced by wandering ascetic mystics in Islam, known as the *Fakirs*. Only mainstream Judaism appears not to have developed a clearly defined celibate religious caste, although it can be found among Jewish sects on the fringes of the religion. The Jewish exception is, in many ways, actually consistent with there being an intrinsic connection between strong religiousness and celibacy, inasmuch as an informal celibate caste develops where no formal caste exists. For example, the group that wrote the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls were a celibate, *de facto* monastic religious organization (Harlow, 2003, p. 942). Indeed, celibacy was not uncommon among Anglican priests in the nineteenth century, despite the practice not being regarded as necessary (see Yates, 1999). In the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century, teaching at boys' private boarding schools, often specifically focused on educating the aristocracy, was considered a legitimate form of Anglican ministry. Many teachers at these schools — known as preparatory ('prep') or public schools — were ordained and were bachelors (see Hein, 2008). In summary, then, we can conclude that the maintenance of a caste, or organized group, of overt religious celibates seems to be almost a human universal and that non-heterosexuals appear to be attracted to this lifestyle of intense religiousness, to the extent of being prepared to be celibate.

Catholic priests and sexuality: Survey data

For various reasons, research on sexuality and being a religious celibate is most detailed with regard to Roman Catholic priests as there have been a number of reports into sexuality among Catholic clergy. According to Benes (20th April 2017) estimates of homosexuality — meaning homosexual orientation rather than practice — among Catholic clergy in the US, based on survey data, range from 15% to 50%. One poll, in the *LA Times*, found that 28% of Catholic priests in the USA aged between 46 and 55 were homosexual. A 2002 poll of 1,854 priests (Darling Richardson, 20th October 2002) found that between 35% and 50% were homosexual and that 26% believed there was a gay subculture in the Catholic priesthood. Thus, there appear to be elevated levels of homosexuality among Catholic priests, consistent with the evidence of elevated levels of religiousness among homosexual males in general.

Pedophilia refers to a predilection for individuals below the age of sexual consent, including children, though researchers tend to distinguish between

attraction to pubescent and pre-pubescent children in this regard. Studies have estimated, based on reports of abuse by the Catholic Church and by legal authorities, that roughly 4% of Catholic priests in USA are pedophiles. Of the cases examined, 27% involved oral sex and 25% involved attempted or actual penetration while the remainder involved other forms of abuse, such as sexual touching (Goldstein, 27th February 2004). A more recent study, by Australia's Sex Abuse Royal Commission, estimated that 7% of Catholic priests in Australia have sexually abused minors (Blackwell, 6th January 2017). These reports often refer to physical and sexual abuse going hand in hand (Plante, 1999), which may imply spanking fetishism or sadism. Consistent with these findings, there is at least anecdotal evidence of seemingly elevated levels of homosexuality among Buddhist monks in the Far East (Neill, 2011, p.252).

In addition, a 2011 report on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in the USA (John Jay College, 2011) presented some noteworthy findings. It found that reports of sexual abuse were representative of the extent of sexual abuse. Levels of sexual abuse at the hands of Catholic clergy reached a peak in about 1970, with the abuse committed by those who had been ordained in the 1940s. Abuse levels then went into decline and by the 1990s this was a substantial decline due to more rigorous selection of ordinands and developments in training. However, between the 1950s and the 1980s, the incidents of pedophilia — defined in the report as the victim being male or female and under the age of 10 — remained constant. In addition, the incidence of what the researchers termed 'hebephilia' — sexual abuse of males aged between 13 and 17 — also remained relatively constant, though there was a slight bell curve. This increase in abuse between the 1950s and the 1970s was, according to the report, driven by a stark increase in priests who were generalists — those prepared to abuse congregants of all ages and all genders. The researchers suggest that this may be explicable in terms of a general climate of sexual freedom beginning in the 1960s. They do not attempt to explain why generalist abuse levels then declined, but it may have been due to people beginning to trust priests less, for example. But what is clear is that pedophilia, homosexuality, and pederasty as specific priest inclinations remained relatively constant over time. Of all the abusers recorded across the period, 42% were generalists, but 48.9% were exclusively homosexual, with exclusive pedophiles not being divided according to sexual preference. In addition, the report does not break down the 'generalist' category in terms of gradations of sexual-orientation exclusivity. However, it seems rather improbable that an exclusively heterosexual predator would be especially interested in a profession that would make it relatively difficult to socialize with heterosexual

females, but easy to socialize with males and especially adolescent males in the form of choir and altar boys.

Drawing upon these data it seems that we can reasonably conclude that there are elevated levels of certain forms of sexual deviance — and in particular homosexuality and pederasty — among Catholic priests. It should be observed that the taboo nature of the subject matter within the Catholic Church could mean that, if anything, Roman Catholic priests will underreport their homosexuality or persuade themselves that they are not homosexual when in fact they are. Alternatively, it is possible that homosexual priests are more likely to respond to the surveys, some of which ask them to estimate the extent of homosexuality among their colleagues. They may over-estimate the extent of homosexuality among the clergy, assuming that most priests are like themselves. Posner (2009, p. 155) observes that homosexuals, in general, overestimate the proportion of society which is homosexual. If Catholic priests are doing so to the same extent as the general homosexual population, about 12.5% of Catholic priests, at the very least, are homosexual, which is still 4 times the proportion of the general population. Equally, we would expect that sexual and physical abuse at the hands of Catholic priests is likely to be under-reported and possibly even concealed when it is reported. Accordingly, the numbers from these surveys may well underestimate the extent of homosexuality, pederasty, and pedophilia among Catholic priests, at least when it comes to pedophilia.

Also, it should be noted with reference to the public schools and prep schools which we previously discussed, there was a strong culture of pederasty and bare bottom flagellation at these institutions. It has been argued that the latter may be regarded as a kind of sublimation of pederastic urges, especially at the hands of unmarried, effete male teachers (e.g. Woolf, 1940, p. 35; Gathorne-Hardy, 1979), or simply as a manifestation of sexual sadism combined with homosexual hebephilia (Gibson, 1978; Morris, 1969). Once more, alas, there are only historical sources to substantiate these allegations, rather than surveys, but these are the best available sources of information, so we have to employ them. Almost all of these schools were run by clergymen (Hein, 2008) and there is a clear cross-over between pederasty and homosexuality, with 40% of those attracted to adolescents or pre-pubescent children being exclusively homosexual (see Blanchard, 2000). This would also help to explain the long-running 'pedophilia scandal' among Catholic clergy in particular.

Non-heterosexuality and religious experiences

This raises the question of why non-heterosexuals would be attracted to being celibate religious devotees. There are many pop sociological answers to

this question, but all of them are question-begging. For example, it might be argued that it is a way of covering up their sexuality by cloaking themselves in religiousness. But it is unclear why this would be necessary in primitive tribes.

A simpler answer would be that those of non-heterosexual persuasion are more religious in general, meaning that a higher percentage of them will be extremely religious, to the extent that they will be prepared to renounce all sexuality if this is necessary to pursue a life devoted exclusively to religion. And, in addition, homosexuals are prone to intense religious experiences, at least at certain points in their lives. Most obviously, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder both predict intense religious experiences and hyper-religiosity (see Koenig, 2012, for literature review) while high Neuroticism is associated with periods of intense religious fervor (Hills et al., 2004). A large number of studies have also found that temporal lobe epilepsy predicts a propensity to intense religious experiences (see Schachter, 2006, for literature review). Several studies have shown an association between non-heterosexuality (homosexuality and bisexuality) and these disorders, with the exception of epilepsy (which we will explore in more detail below). Compared to heterosexual men, homosexual men have twice the rate of schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and psychotic disorders (see Bolton & Sareen, 2011 for review). There may be difficulties here regarding how these samples were ascertained. However, a detailed literature review, drawing upon different methods of ascertainment such as clinician rating, qualitative studies or self-rating, found no counterexamples to the trend, based on 27 studies (Kidd et al., 2016). This would, theoretically, make a portion of non-heterosexuals highly prone to periods of hyper-religiosity and very intense religious experiences. This being the case, we can begin to see how a life of religious devotion would be substantially more attractive to non-heterosexuals than to heterosexuals, making them more prepared to adopt celibacy if this was necessary in order to pursue such a life.

Studies have found 'neurotic tendencies' (which would be associated with depressive disorders) to be elevated among Catholic ordinands, although they do not control for confounds such as social class (see Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 2013, p. 138). This was also found by Loudon and Francis (1999), who noted elevated levels of Neuroticism among Catholic priests compared to the general population, though these studies did not control for social class. Indeed, another study (Francis, 1991) found that male Anglican ordinands had relatively feminine personalities, especially scoring high in Neuroticism, this being elevated in females compared to males of the same age (Soto et al., 2011). This would be in line with the association between male homosexuality and religiousness which we have already explored. One study found that 'pre-psychotic' women seem to

be attracted to becoming nuns and that being a nun somehow reduced their risk of presenting to a physician with a mental illness (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 2013, p. 138).

There are, of course, many anthropological studies on shamans. There is general agreement that shamans, whom we have already seen tend to be celibate but highly effeminate, exhibit many signs of what, in Western culture, would be called schizophrenia or psychosis. Such results are particularly prominent in older ethnographies in which it was not yet considered unacceptable to impose Western categories on the object of study. Social scientists regarded shamans as 'overcoming mental illness,' having 'acute schizophrenia,' as 'schizophrenic persons,' as people going through 'crisis or madness' and as undergoing 'mania' as part of 'bipolar disorder' (for review see Ingham, 1996, p. 163). So, in summary, there appears to be sound evidence that religious devotees are more likely to suffer from the kinds of pathologies that foster intense religiosity and religious experiences. They seem to have elevated levels of non-heterosexual orientation, and being of this orientation is associated with elevated levels not just of religiousness but of the very disorders that lead to hyper-religiosity and intense religious experiences. So, this model would appear to make sense of why there are relatively high numbers of non-heterosexuals among the celibate Catholic clergy; people overtly prepared to intensely dedicate themselves to religion. Further, it can be argued that it helps to make sense of evidence of such behavior among celibate religious devotees in other religions and denominations, where we merely have qualitative sources. The fact that these relationships can be found cross-culturally would imply that they are most simply explained as the pleiotropic expression of neurological traits, rather than simply a reflection of cultural factors.

Interestingly, it has been suggested that there is a sexual dimension to intense religious experiences. Newberg et al. (2002) have argued that there are plausible reasons for the two to appear connected. Mystical experiences and orgasms are induced by rhythmic activity – in the case of religious experiences this is the repetition of mantras, for example. In both cases they produce an intense sense of bliss, self-transcendence, and unity. Newberg speculates that the ability to have intense religious experiences may have in part arisen via the sexual response mechanism. Winkelman (2010) argues that sexual activity involves an increase in both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. At the 'peak of sexual excitation' the 'sympathetic system collapses exhausted' and the 'parasympathetic becomes dominant' (p. 143). He maintains that religious experience involves the same dynamics, leading to a crossover between the two processes.

A parallel explanation has been offered by psychologist Michael Persinger. He argues that there is clear evidence that sexuality is related to alternative states of consciousness and that both are impacted by activity in the temporal lobes. Persinger maintains that religious experiences begin in the amygdala and that this part of the brain is also associated with sexual phenomena. He notes that homosexual men have more connections on both the left and right side of the amygdala than do heterosexual men. Some people, for whatever reason, are so strongly prone to religious experiences, argues Persinger, that they gain all the satisfaction they need through this avenue, and are therefore not interested in sex. This is most pronounced in some sufferers from temporal lobe epilepsy, some of whom combine hyper-religiosity, intense religious experiences, and hyposexuality: a lack of interest in sex. Consistent with this, it has been found that those suffering from Klüver-Bucy Syndrome — where parts of the amygdala are destroyed — display the opposite symptom pattern from those who undergo intense religious experiences (Schjoedt, 2011, p. 93). Persinger further argues that the areas of the brain that are associated with sexuality are more likely to be recruited into seizures in women than in men (God Helmet, 2017).

Peck (2010) has explored the relationship between orgasm and mystical experience in some depth. He observes that the two experiences are qualitatively similar inasmuch as they involve a climax in which the sense of self is lost, a parallel which he observes has been noted by many thinkers. He then looks at accounts of Christian mystical experiences, such as the 'Dark Night' poem by St John of the Cross (1542-1591).

'Upon my flowering breast
Which I kept wholly for him alone
There he lay sleeping
And I caressing him
There is a breeze from the fanning cedars.

When the breeze blew from turret
As I parted his hair
It wounded my neck
With its gentle hand
Suspending all my senses.

I abandoned and forgot myself
Laying my face on my Beloved
All things ceased; I went out from myself

Leaving my cares
Forgotten among the lilies (quoted in Peck, 2010).

Peck argues that the poem's description of the 'mystical union possible between human beings and God is also as fine a description of orgasm as anything in literature.' He further suggests that the reason why successful monks and nuns are celibate is that, by being celibate, they cannot be distracted from their intense love of God. In other words, their sexual intensity is focused on God and, during the heights of religious experience, they therefore experience something akin to sexual orgasm. Caroline Walker Bynum has traced accounts of female mysticism from the twelfth century onwards and found that they involve 'sensual, erotic images, evocative of a sexual encounter' (Lux-Sterritt, 2017, p. 175). Tom Webster has shown that Medieval monks described their longing for Jesus in 'sensuous and erotic tones' (p. 175). So, it may be that these non-practicing homosexual men are attracted to the religious life, and the intensity of their religious experiences helps them to maintain their celibacy. Interestingly, Hood (2001) has found that religious experiences are more likely to have a sexual dimension among women than men. If it is the case that the homosexual male brain is, in many respects, similar to a female brain (Miller, 2000), it may be that homosexual religious experiences are also relatively sexual in nature. This remains to be explored. In addition, it is likely to be highly relevant that God is portrayed as a male.

Discussion

Our survey of the evidence indicates that homosexual men are more religious than heterosexual men. They are a conspicuous force among overtly celibate male religious devotees and we have seen hyper-religiosity and intense religious experience is associated with schizophrenia and mood disorders. These disorders are substantially elevated among non-heterosexuals, and also seemingly elevated — though the evidence is stronger for shamans — among overtly celibate religious devotees. Moreover, intense religious experiences appear to often have a sexual dimension, which may help allow those who undergo them — whatever their sexual orientation — to maintain their celibacy.

Our survey of the evidence with regard to homosexuality and religious celibacy potentially raises an important question about the persistence of non-heterosexuality. Part of the reason why non-heterosexuality remains in populations may be its association with intense religiosity. Religion is widely understood to be a selected trait: it is a human universal, it is associated with increased fertility, it is partly genetic, being around 0.4 heritable (Koenig et al.,

2005), it has clear physical manifestations (in terms of brain changes specifically associated with religious experiences, for example), and it is arguably adaptive by promoting health and health-related behaviors (Vaas, 2009). It may be selected for at the individual level because those who feel that God is watching them are likely to be more pro-social and thus less likely to be cast out by the band. It has also been shown to reduce stress, as religiousness becomes elevated at times of stress (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008). Religion is sexually selected for because of its association with pro-social behavior and the access it affords to a protective group (Blume, 2009).

Finally, it has been argued that religiousness is group selected, a point made by Wilson (2002). Wilson argues that groups sharing a system of belief will be more cooperative and bonded and will thus outcompete less unified groups, rendering religiousness an adaptive trait. Religion is associated with ethnocentric or group-centric behavior — being internally cooperative and externally hostile (Dutton et al., 2016) — and it is these groups which dominate in computer models of group behavior (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). So, we can reasonably conclude that religiousness has been favored by ‘group selection’, a concept we will explore in more detail shortly. Indeed, there is evidence that many aspects of religious behavior are little more than divinely-mandated evolutionary imperatives, such as high levels of fertility (Sela, Shackelford & Liddle, 2015). This also makes sense as only religions that prescribe evolutionary imperatives are likely to survive. So it can be argued that religiousness grows out of evolved cognitive biases or useful adaptations, such as the over-detection of agency (see Boyer, 2001), but, once it does so, only the most adaptive religions will survive and they will, accordingly, be transmitted within families, more likely to survive precisely because they adhere to them.

It should be noted that there is considerable debate over the utility of ‘group selection’ as a construct. It has been defended in detail in Dutton, Madison and Dunkel (2017), and this defense is worth presenting once more. They noted that Wilson and Sober (1994) have advocated the ‘Multi-Level Selection Theory’. Wilson and Sober argue that once cooperative groups develop within a species then selection will act to promote those groups which possess the optimum level of certain qualities which permit them to out-compete other groups. Thus, selection will still operate on individuals within a group but can also be seen to operate on groups themselves, as collections of individuals and, in some circumstances, can shift away from individual and towards group selection. This shift occurs when there is strong between-group competition. It is also elevated when there are strong between-group differences, due to such factors as endogamy, which reduce in-group competition, because all members at least

indirectly pass on their genes. This leads to more internally cooperative but more externally hostile societies and thus elevated group selection.

Congruous with this, it has been found high levels of cousin marriage are associated with positive and negative ethnocentrism (Dutton et al., 2016). Dutton et al. (2017) argue that this model helps to explain, for example, the development of altruistic tendencies. Kin selection involves making sacrifices for your kin and group selection is a logical extension of this, as ethnic groups are extended kinship groups, they observe. Dutton et al. note that group selection has been criticized in depth by Pinker (18th June 2012). His key criticisms are that: '(1) 'group selection' deviates from the 'random mutation' model inherent in evolution; (2) We are clearly not going to be selected to damage our individual interests, as group selection implies; and (3) Human altruism is self-interested and does not involve the kind of self-sacrifice engaged in by sterile bees.' Each of these points can be answered, observe Dutton and colleagues.

'Firstly, if the group selection model is building on the individual selection model then it is bound to present a slightly different metaphor. To dismiss it on these grounds seems to betoken a fervent attachment to the original idea. Secondly, the group selection model merely suggests that a group will be more successful if there is genetic diversity, meaning that an optimum percentage of its members are inclined to sacrifice themselves for their group. Thirdly, it is clearly the case that a small percentage, in many groups, is indeed prepared to sacrifice itself for the group.'

So, it seems that it is reasonable to accept multi-level selection and to regard religion as group selected, but could religious celibacy ever have been group-selected? Hamilton (1964) has explored the idea of kin selection. He notes that you can pass on your genes directly, by having children, but also indirectly, by investing in your kin, as you share an average of 25% of your genes with your nieces and nephews, 12.5% with your cousins, and so on. Salter (2007) observes that this strategy can be extended to the level of the group: you can pass on your genes indirectly via investment in your ethnic group, because ethnic groups can be understood to be extended kinship groups. Thus, a childless soldier who lays down his life for his ethnic group in battle can, in certain circumstances, be seen to be indirectly promoting his genetic interests. Woodley and Figueredo (2013) have made the point that this may be true of many geniuses: they often don't have children themselves but their ground-breaking inventions, for example, may permit their ethnic group to flourish and expand and produce more geniuses. From the perspective of group selection, we can argue that it would be good for

the group to have a small but optimum number of members who did not directly pass on their genes but who focused solely on the good of the group.

It can be proposed, following this, that this is what is happening with religious celibates. We have noted that religion is group selected. Accordingly, it can be seen as evolutionarily advantageous for a society to include a caste which is dedicated to promoting and upholding its religion, inspiring people with its religion, and creating a sense of awe and unique realism around its religion. Such a society would be more fervently religious and, in a context of genuine religious belief, would be calmed by the knowledge that a group within a society were constantly negotiating with God, through prayer, for the good of that society. It would be further advantageous if this caste were entirely focused on this religious pursuit, something from which sexual relationships — and in particular raising children — would sap energy and resources. In addition, the fact of religious celibates seemingly eschewing such a fundamental human desire as procreation to devote themselves entirely to religion would evidence the power of their religious convictions, further helping to surround the religion with a sense of awe. Their ability to be religious devotees would be aided, therefore, if they lacked the conventional desire to copulate and have children with fertile members of the opposite sex. Instead, it would be useful if their sexual desire was focused on God; human love redirected to a spiritual target, resulting in celibacy with regard to humans. In societies where homosexuality is strongly disapproved of, it may be that a homosexual is more likely than a heterosexual to trade sexual love for religious celibacy. However, it can be countered that if this were the only factor that as society, and even the Church, has become more tolerant of homosexuality then homosexuality would collapse among priests. But this has not happened, so there must be other factors involved.

Miller (2000) argues that male reproductive success can be enhanced by alleles which would lead to typically feminine traits, such as kindness, empathy and tenderness; in other words, altruism. An optimum level of these characteristics, in males, would be attractive to females, meaning that they would be selected for. But for this to happen, there must be the possibility that some males will end up with too many of these feminizing alleles and there would come a 'tipping point,' argues Miller, where even mate preferences became feminized, leading to males being sexually attracted to other males. Thus, Miller avers that homosexuality stays in the population because of the polygenic nature of the traits for which females are selecting in males. He refutes the so-called 'gay uncle theory' — that a homosexual uncle will invest in his kin, promoting their reproductive success — arguing that there is no evidence that gay uncles invest

heavily in their kin and that it would be preferable for such an uncle to be asexual rather than gay as this would leave him with more energy to invest in his kin.

Extending Miller's logic, it could be argued that a society that has an optimum number of non-heterosexuals will also, therefore, be more likely to have an optimum number of intense religious devotees, due to the association between non-heterosexuality, pathology and religious intensity for the reasons we have noted, including homosexual males being more religious than heterosexual males. The benefits of this to the group will outweigh the negative dimensions, because it will help to intensify the group's religiousness, helping them to triumph in their battles with other groups. So, it could be argued that it may be possible to salvage some version of the 'gay uncle theory' which we might call the 'gay shaman theory'. Anthropological accounts of shamans describe effeminate and transvestism but there is little evidence of actual homosexual relationships between shamans. Indeed, it has been observed that many tribal organisations do not tolerate homosexual practice, with practicing homosexuals even being put to death (see West, 2017). This would mean that homosexuals would have little choice but to be celibate, compelling them to invest their energies either in their siblings' families or in religious devotion.

It might be countered that there would be no need for them to develop homosexual inclinations in order to do this, but it may be that it is precisely the comorbidities that are associated with homosexuality that permit extreme religious devotion. This may also help to explain why homosexuals are over-represented in the Catholic Church: they are prone to religious experience and, in their community, homosexuality is unacceptable. This raises interesting questions in terms of what might happen in a non-religious society, such as the West increasingly is. It might be that homosexuals would particularly and fervently be attracted to dedicating themselves to the forms of ideology that these societies produce as substitutes for religious belief. However, this may not be the case because homosexuality is increasingly socially acceptable in Western countries.

Future research

We have already noted that there are a number of potential problems with the research on sexuality among Catholic priests, though many of these can be addressed by further empirical work, or even utilizing extant data from sources not yet identified to provide data relevant for this context. To test this hypothesis further, it would be instructive to gather data on sexuality of religious celibates other than Catholic priests, such as Buddhist monks. Equally, it would be very useful to assess whether religious experience among homosexual males differs from that among heterosexual males in the way in which we would predict. In

other words, would heterosexuals find themselves describing God in sexually neutral terms, with homosexuals more likely to describe Him in sexual terms and even in terms of being penetrated by Him. Also, would there be a difference between how homosexuals who adopt the dominant role and how those who adopt the submissive role describe their religious experiences? In addition, we only have a small number of studies on the extent and nature of mental disorders among Catholic devotees. More data on this issue would be extremely useful.

A potential problem with collecting these kinds of data — and one which has been encountered when approaching Opus Dei and the abbots of English monasteries — is that the subjects believe that they are called by God to be celibate and wish to know why data is being collected and even what the related hypothesis is. For ethical reasons, they need to be given this information and they seem to be reluctant to participate if, in their view, the research casts doubt on the belief that they are celibate simply because God has called them to be so. It could be countered that God may have potentially caused them to have elevated levels of schizophrenia to allow them to receive His call but whether this would be accepted by potential subjects remains to be seen.

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