

Sexual Orientations

A Continuum of Sexual Orientations

We begin this chapter with a discussion of the continuum and characteristics of sexual orientations. Homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, and asexuality are words that identify various sexual orientations. Multidimensional components indicate a specific sexual orientation and can include whether an individual:

1. Engages in sexual **behavior** with men, women, both, or neither, This dimension could be assessed by asking for the number of sex partners and who many were same sex and opposite sex.
2. Feels sexual desire for men, women, both, or neither. This dimension could also be labeled as “**attraction**” and assessed with the question: “To what degree are you sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex? (0% to 100%) and To what degree are you sexually attracted to members of the same sex? (0 to 100%) (answers to the two questions should add to 100%).
3. **Fantasizes** about sex with men, women, both, or neither, This dimension could be assessed by asking “When imagining have a sexual interaction with another person, what percentage of the time does this involve a member of the same sex? Or opposite sex? (answer each question 0% to 100% and both questions should sum to 100%)
4. **Identifies** himself or herself with a specific sexual orientation. This dimension could be assessed by asking “How would you describe your sexual orientation – heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, or uncertain?”

The complexity and ambiguity of defining sexual orientation result from the varying combinations and degrees of these four components. For example, how much sexual attraction to and experience with the same sex can someone have and still be heterosexual? And, vice versa, how much sexual attraction to and behavior with the other sex can someone have and still be homosexual? Or, is everyone who does not consistently and completely meet these four components bisexual? Further, can someone who self-identifies as heterosexual but is sexual exclusively with same-sex partners really be heterosexual? Even scientists who do research about sexual orientation do not use consistent criteria in categorizing subjects according to sexual orientation. In some studies, subjects are included in the bisexual/homosexual category if they have had any element of same-sex attraction, behavior, or self-identity. In other studies, subjects are not considered homosexual unless their sexual behavior, attraction, and self-identity have been consistently with the same sex since puberty.

Thinking of sexual orientation as a multidimensional phenomenon likely provides the most valid conceptualization of this complex human dimension (Jordan-Young, 2010; Laumann et al., 1994). However, in the most simplistic definitions, exclusive and consistent attraction to and sexual involvement with same-sex partners is a homosexual orientation: Gay is a common term for homosexual men, as lesbian is for women. Exclusive and consistent attraction to and sexual behavior with other-sex partners is a heterosexual orientation, also referred to as straight. Bisexuality refers to degrees of attraction to both sexes. Asexuality is a lack of sexual attraction

to either sex. Because sexual orientation is only one aspect of a person's life, we use these four terms as descriptive adjectives rather than as nouns that label one's total identity.

The table below shows the seven-point continuum that Alfred Kinsey devised in his analysis of sexual orientations in American society (Kinsey et al., 1948). The Kinsey scale did not include asexuality. The scale ranges from 0 (consistent and exclusive contact with and

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Exclusively Heterosexual	Predominantly Heterosexual only incidentally homosexual	Predominantly Heterosexual but more than incidentally homosexual	Equally heterosexual and homosexual	Predominantly Homosexual but more than incidentally heterosexual	Predominantly Homosexual only incidentally Heterosexual	Exclusively Homosexual

erotic attraction to the other sex) to 6 (consistent and exclusive contact with and attraction to the same sex). Category 3 represents equal same- and other-sex attraction and experience. In between 0 and 3 and 3 and 6 are various combinations of same- and other-sex attraction. A recent research study found that almost 13% of women and over 5% of men in the United States had experienced sexual contact with both same- and other-sex partners (Chandra et al., 2011).

Self-identity with a particular sexual orientation is one of the variables of sexual orientation. Table 9.1 shows what percentages of 15- to 44-year-olds in the United States defined themselves as having a specific sexual orientation. The totals do not add up to 100% because some respondents were not certain how to define their sexual orientation.

■ **TABLE 9.1 Self-Identified Sexual Orientation**

	WOMEN	MEN
Self-identify as homosexual	1.1%	1.7%
Self-identify as bisexual	3.5%	1.1%
Self-identify as heterosexual	94%	96%

SOURCE: Chandra et al., 2011.

Sexual Fluidity

The Kinsey scale may be interpreted incorrectly to indicate that all people have a fixed, stable sexual orientation. In fact, sexual orientation is more accurately determined by patterns over time rather than at any given point in time (Baumgardner, 2007). Psychologist and researcher Lisa Diamond (2008a) uses the term sexual fluidity to describe variability in same-sex and other-sex attraction and/or involvement at various times and situations throughout the life span. Her research indicates that, for some women, sexual self-identity and the biological sex of preferred sexual partners can vary over time and experience unexpected transitions.

Lisa Diamond's research on sexual fluidity followed almost 80 women ages 18 to 25 over a 10-year period. At the beginning of the study, all the subjects were involved with other women and labeled themselves variably as lesbian, bisexual, or unlabeled. At the end of the study, about one third of the women were consistent in their self-identification as lesbian and in their attraction to and sexual involvement with women. However, the remaining women—initially self-identified as lesbian, bisexual, or unlabeled—had changed their self-identification at least once during the

10 years. Notably, these changes were variable: Lesbian changed to bisexual or unlabeled, bisexual changed to lesbian or unlabeled, unlabeled changed to bisexual or lesbian, and some previously self-identified lesbian, bisexual, and unlabeled changed to heterosexual. Some of the changes in self-labeling were due to sexual and/or romantic attraction to or involvement with men. However, the women who became involved with men continued to feel the same amount of attraction toward other women as they had at the beginning of the study 10 years earlier (Diamond, 2008b).

Conversely, women who have identified themselves as lesbians well into adulthood sometimes develop relationships with men. Feminist folksinger Holly Near and JoAnn Loulan, a longtime lesbian activist and the author of *Lesbian Sex*, were prominent in the gay community for many years prior to establishing relationships with men. This shift occurs often enough that a woman who becomes involved with a man after being known as a lesbian may be labeled a "hasbian" (Diamond, 2008a; White, 2003).

For men, unless they identify themselves as bisexual, sexual fluidity between same-sex and other-sex attraction and relationships is less common than it is for women (Mock & Eiback, 2011). Scientists tend to agree that the male–female differences in sexual fluidity may be due to variations in biological developmental pathways (Diamond, 2008a). The extent to which the greater social stigma directed toward male homosexuality than toward female homosexuality restricts sexual fluidity in men is unknown, but it may also be an even more significant variable. As stigma toward male homosexuality continues to lessen, greater sexual fluidity in men may become apparent in younger men who tend to be more accepting of homosexuality. For example, in a large study of young people ages 12 to 25, males and females who identified as a sexual minority were equally likely to change their sexual orientation identity during the 13 years of the study (Ott et al., 2011).

Let's now take a closer look at the four categories of sexual orientation—asexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality—keeping in mind the understanding that these are not static categories but are merely a way to orient ourselves when discussing the fluid and complex nature of our sexuality.

Asexuality

According to the Asexual Visibility and Education Network, "An asexual is someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which a person can choose, 'asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are" (Asexual Visibility and Education Network, 2009, p. 1). The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, founded in 2001, has 35,000 members worldwide, about 60% of whom are women in their teens through 30s. A national probability study of 18,000 people in Britain found that 1% of those surveyed said they were asexual (Bogaert, 2004).

Most asexual men and women have been asexual throughout their lives. Although they lack sexual attraction toward others, they vary in their interests in friendships, affection, romance, and partnerships, including marriage (DeLuzio, 2011; L. Harris, 2010). Another study found that the majority of the respondents did not feel distressed about their asexuality. Seventy-three percent of individuals who identified themselves as asexual had never engaged in sexual intercourse and felt no interest in partnered sexual expression. However, most respondents (80% of males and

77% of females) did masturbate (Knudson et al., 2007). Further evidence that asexuality is usually not related to a lack of sexual response was found in a small study involving women who self-identified as asexual, bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual. While watching erotic audiovisual material, the asexual women experienced subjective and physiological sexual arousal similar to that of the other groups of women (Brotto & Yule, 2011).

Bisexuality

The parameters for bisexuality can be difficult to establish. At present "no scientific or popular consensus exists on the precise cluster of experiences that qualify an individual as lesbian, gay, or bisexual [or heterosexual] instead of just curious, confused, or experimenting" (Diamond, 2008a, pp. 26-27). As seen in Table 9.1, 3.5% of women and 1.1% of men identify themselves as bisexual (Chandra et al., 2011). Even when people consider themselves bisexual, their bisexuality is often unknown to others because of the common assumption that people are either straight or gay, based on the sex of their current partner (Plato, 2008).

Research about bisexuality is quite limited, but what does the available research tell us? One study of men indicated that sexual arousal in self-identified bisexual men is associated with a unique and specific pattern. The researchers measured the subjective—how aroused they felt—and erectile responses of bisexual, homosexual, and heterosexual men while they watched various sexual videos male–male, male–female, and a man having sex with both a woman and another man. As anticipated, homosexual and heterosexual men demonstrated arousal, respectively, to male–male videos and male–female videos. Bisexual men were aroused by both gay and straight videos, but their arousal by the video of a man engaging in sex with both a man and a woman was significantly higher than gay and straight men's arousal by the same video (Cerny & Janssen, 2011).

Several research studies have found that more women than men feel sexual attraction to both sexes (Lippa, 2006). Further, women who identify themselves as straight or lesbian may actually experience a greater range of sexual attraction and arousal than they are aware of. Laboratory research examined heterosexual and homosexual men's and women's physical and subjective arousal patterns by having the subjects watch movie clips of heterosexual, gay, and lesbian sexual encounters; a man masturbating; a woman masturbating; and bonobo apes mating. While watching each clip, subjects rated their subjective arousal on a keypad. Simultaneously, researchers measured women participants' physical arousal with a tampon-sized device that monitored increases in vaginal blood flow and resultant lubrication. Men wore an apparatus that fit on the penis and measured the degree of erection. The study found that women—regardless of their self-identified sexual orientation—experienced varying degrees of genital arousal in response to all of the video clips, including the mating bonobos. However, the women said that they were aroused only while viewing sexual activity that was compatible with their self-identified sexual orientation: Heterosexual women said that they were aroused only by heterosexual clips, and lesbians only by clips of women being sexual together or masturbating. In contrast, gay and straight men were physically aroused by the clips that they said they found arousing. Further, what turned men on was consistent with their sexual orientation. Gay men were aroused only by male–male sexual interaction and straight men by male–female and female–female material (Chivers et al., 2005).

Research with people who have high sex drives suggests further variability in the way sexual orientation expresses itself. Data from more than 3,600 research subjects showed that high sex drive in women who identified themselves as heterosexual was associated with increased sexual attraction to both men and women. The higher a woman's sex drive, the more likely she was to feel sexual desire for both sexes. In contrast, high sex drive in straight men, gay men, and lesbians was associated with increased sexual attraction only to one sex or the other. These findings are consistent across age groups and have been replicated in many regions of the world, including Latin America, Australia, India, and Western Europe (Lippa, 2006).

It's Not Always Easy Being Bisexual

Both heterosexual and homosexual individuals are 'sometimes judgmental. toward those who identify themselves as bisexual and would feel more comfortable if bisexuals adhered to a single orientation (Baumgardner, 2008). In addition, gay men and lesbians sometimes view a bisexual person as someone who is really homosexual but lacks the courage to identify himself or herself as such. These views can be difficult for bisexual individuals: A bisexual woman says,

"I don't feel like I fit anywhere. I don't feel 'straight' enough in the straight world, and I don't feel 'gay' enough in the gay world. I can't be all of who I am anywhere." (Levy, 2010, p.66)

One study compared male and female heterosexuals' attitudes toward bisexuality. The researchers found that straight women equally accepted bisexual men and women, but straight men were less accepting of bisexual men than of bisexual women. Heterosexuals of both sexes doubted the validity of bisexuality. However, their beliefs about bisexual men were the opposite of their beliefs about bisexual women. They maintained that the male bisexual individuals were "really gay;" but the female bisexuals were "really heterosexual" (Yost & Thomas, 2012).

"Performative Bisexuality"

Professor Breanne Fahs, author of *Performing Sex: The Making and Unmaking of Women's Erotic Lives*, characterizes heterosexual-identified women who interact sexually with other women for the purpose of pleasing and arousing men as engaging in "performative bisexuality:" In performative bisexuality women are not being sexual with other women from feelings of inherent desire and intrinsic pleasure. Women are motivated to perform as bisexual in order to appear sexy and desirable to men and to accommodate men's fantasies of two women together. Performative bisexuality has become common enough that some men feel entitled to 'use considerable pressure to persuade their female partners to interact sexually with other women. Younger women, in particular, can feel that being sexual with other women is part of the contemporary expectation for "good femininity:' Some examples of performative bisexuality include the middle-class college women in *Girls Gone Wild* DVDs who kiss, fondle, and perform oral sex with each other as requested by the director of the DVD. Performative bisexuality also occurs publicly at fraternity parties, bars, and clubs or privately in the context of a threesome with two women and one man or during group sex (Fahs, 2011, p. 102).

Homosexuality

Numerous studies over the years have attempted to establish the percentage of men and women who are homosexual, and the percentages vary from study to study. As noted earlier in the

chapter, the 2011 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), based on in-person interviews of 13,495 individuals ages 15 to 44, found that 1.1% of women and 1.7% of men identified themselves as lesbian or gay. A greater percentage of respondents had experienced at least one same-sex contact in their lifetime-13% of women and 5.2% of men (Chandra et al., 2011).

The common synonym for homosexual is gay. The term has moved into popular use to describe homosexual men and women as well as the social and political concerns related to homosexual orientation. It has also come to be used, mainly by teens, as a negative label, as in "That is so gay!" (Caldwell, 2003). Pejorative words such as faggot, fairy, homo, queer, lezzie, and dyke have traditionally been used to demean homosexuality. However, in certain gay and lesbian subcultures, some people use these terms with each other in positive or humorous ways (Bryant & Demian, 1998).

Many men and women born after 1970 call themselves queer and refer to queer culture to defuse the negativity of the word and blur the boundaries between subgroups of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and all variations of transgendered people belonging to the "queer nation." The inclusive acronym LGBTQ—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning—is often used in discussions of civil rights for nonheterosexual people (Vary, 2006),

What Determines Sexual Orientation?

Psychosocial explanations of the development of a homosexual orientation versus a heterosexual orientation relate to life incidents, parenting patterns, or psychological attributes of the individual.

Psychosocial Theories

Bell and his colleagues (1981) conducted a comprehensive study about the development of sexual orientation. They used a sample of 979 homosexual men and women matched to a control group of 477 heterosexual people. All research subjects were asked questions about their childhood, adolescence, and sexual practices during 4-hour, face-to-face interviews. Bell then used sophisticated statistical techniques to analyze possible causal factors in the development of homosexuality or heterosexuality. We cite this research frequently throughout this section because of its excellent methodology.

The "By Default" Myth

Some people believe that unhappy heterosexual experiences cause a person to become homosexual. Statements such as "All a lesbian needs is a good lay" or "He just needs to find the right woman" reflect the notion that homosexuality -is a default choice for people who have not had satisfactory heterosexual experiences and relationships. Contrary to this myth, Bell's analysis of the data indicated that homosexual orientation reflects neither a lack of heterosexual experience nor a history of negative heterosexual experiences (Bell et al., 1981). Bell and his colleagues found that homosexual and heterosexual groups did not differ in their frequency of dating during high school, but fewer homosexual subjects reported that they enjoyed heterosexual dating.

The Seduction Myth

Some people believe that young women and men become homosexual because they have been seduced by older homosexual people or because they have been "turned" by someone else—particularly a well-liked and respected teacher who is homosexual. Contrary to these myths, research indicates that sexual orientation is most often established before school age and that most homosexual people have their first sexual experiences with someone close to their own age (Bell et al., 1981). In addition, most gays and lesbians have identified themselves as homosexual prior to their first same-sex contact (Calzo et al., 2011).

Freud's Theory

Another prevalent theory has to do with certain patterns in a person's family background. Psychoanalytic theory implicated both childhood experiences and relationships with parents. Sigmund Freud (1905/2000) maintained that one's relationship with one's father and mother was crucial. He believed that in "normal" development, we all pass through a "homoerotic" phase. Boys, he argued, could become fixated at this homosexual phase if they had a poor relationship with their father and an overly close relationship with their mother; the same thing might happen to a woman if she developed envy for the penis (Black, 1994). However, this particular family dynamic is occasionally present in the family backgrounds of both gay and straight individuals and is absent in the family life of many homosexual individuals. Bell and his colleagues (1981) concluded that no particular phenomenon of family life could be singled out as "especially consequential for either homosexual or heterosexual development" (p. 190)—a conclusion supported by subsequent research (Epstein, 2006).

In the next section we discuss the most relevant and current research that attempts to understand the biological factors that may influence sexual orientation,

Research Into Biological Factors

Although considerable research exploring biological factors contributing to homosexuality has been done over the years, many of the findings are contradictory, and not many definitive scientific answers exist. The lack of clear-cut, consistent research findings is likely due in large part to the unique physiological and environmental factors underlying each individual's development of sexual orientation. A behavior pattern as complex and variable as homosexuality is unlikely to be due to a single, simple biological cause. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, researchers do not appear to agree on what characteristics define where one sexual orientation begins and another ends.

Researchers often use twin studies to better understand the relative influences of social environment (nurture) and genetic makeup (nature). Identical twins originate from a single fertilized ovum that divides into two separate fetuses with identical genetic codes. Therefore, any differences between the twins must be due to environmental influences. In contrast, fraternal twins occur when a woman's ovaries release two ova and each ovum is fertilized by a different sperm cell. Because fraternal twins result from the fertilization of two separate eggs, their genetic makeup is no more alike than that of any other siblings. Physical and behavioral differences between fraternal twins may be due to genetic factors, environmental influences, or a combination of the two. When identical twins are more alike (concordant) than same-sex

fraternal twins in a particular trait, we can assume that the trait has a strong genetic basis. Conversely, when a trait shows a comparable degree of concordance in both types of twins, we can reasonably assume that environment is exerting the greater influence.

The most recent twin study recruited subjects from a twin registry in Australia. Over 1,500 same-sex identical and fraternal male and female twin pairs were included in this study. Each participant completed an anonymous questionnaire that addressed broad areas of sexuality, including items pertaining to sexual orientation. Using a strict criterion for determining homosexual orientation, the researchers found a concordance rate (the percentage of pairs in which both twins are homosexual) of 20% among identical male twins and 0% among pairs of male fraternal twins. The corresponding concordance rates for female identical and fraternal pairs were 24% and 10.5%, respectively (Bailey et al., 2000). The higher concordance rates for identical twin pairs than for fraternal twin pairs provide strong evidence of a genetic component to sexual orientation. Two other studies that used broader criteria for inclusion as homosexual reported much higher concordance rates for a homosexual orientation among male and female identical twins (52% and 48%, respectively) compared to same-sex male and female fraternal twin concordance rates of 22% and 16% (Bailey et al., 1991; Bailey et al., 1993).

Gender nonconformity is the extent to which an individual differs from stereotypical characteristics of masculinity or femininity during childhood. A biological predisposition toward homosexuality in some individuals is indicated by the strong link between adult homosexuality and gender nonconformity as a child (Bailey et al., 2000; Ellis et al., 2005). In a recent study, the researchers viewed home videos of children from infancy to 15 years of age. Without knowing the sexual orientation of the adults whose childhood videos they saw, the researchers rated the children on gender conforming and nonconforming characteristics. The results indicated that homosexual male and female adults exhibited significantly more gender nonconformity as children than did heterosexual adults (Rieger et al., 2008).

Research using brain scanning technology, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and positron emission tomography (PET) has typically found male—female differences in brain areas related to emotional expression and verbal skills. A 2008 Swedish study used brain scanning technology to compare these areas of the brains of homosexual and heterosexual subjects. These researchers found sex-atypical brain characteristics in the homosexual research subjects. The brain structures related to language and emotional expression were similar for gay men and heterosexual women. To a lesser extent, these areas in lesbians' brains had similarities to those in straight men's brains. These findings demonstrated differences in adult brain structure and function based on sexual orientation. The researchers concluded that "the results cannot be primarily ascribed to learned effects, and they suggest a linkage to neurobiological entities" (Savic & Lindstrom, 2008, p. 9403).

Left- or right-handedness appears to be established before birth; when observed by ultrasound, a fetus indicates right- or left-handedness by thumb-sucking choice and greater movement of one arm. In a meta-analysis of studies with a combined total of almost 25,000 subjects, homosexual participants had 39% greater odds of being left-handed than did heterosexuals (Lalumiere et al., 2000). Later research found that gay men had far greater odds of being left-handed than did lesbians (Lippa, 2003). These types of studies typically create comparison groups that are limited to individuals at the ends of the Kinsey scale in order to increase the chance of finding differences (Jordan-Young, 2010).

Patterns of finger length tend to differ in males and females. Heterosexual women's index fingers tend to be about the same length as their ring fingers, but heterosexual men's ring fingers are often considerably longer than their index fingers. Researchers have compared these finger length patterns to lesbians' and gay men's finger length ratios. The various studies have produced widely mixed findings—some reported that gay men had finger length ratios more similar to those of straight women and that lesbians had ratios more similar to those of straight men, but several studies found no differences between finger length ratios between homosexual and heterosexual subjects. On balance, research does not compellingly suggest that gay men and lesbians differ in finger length patterns from heterosexual men and women (Jordan-Young, 2010).

Variation in Research Findings Between Homosexual Men and Women

In some research, gay men are more likely than lesbians to have characteristics that are not typical of heterosexuals. This finding indicates that biological influences may affect men and women somewhat differently. The timing of the onset of puberty is one example. The onset of puberty in the general population is typically 12 months later for boys than for girls. However, numerous studies have found that gay and bisexual men begin puberty earlier than heterosexual men, but the timing of puberty for lesbians is the same as for straight women (Bogaert et al., 2002).

Some research has found a correlation between being homosexual and having older siblings for men but not for women. These studies reported that men with older brothers have a statistically significant increase in their chance of being homosexual, and each older brother increases the odds. No such relationship with older siblings of either sex has been found for lesbians. Researchers speculate that a maternal immune response to male fetuses occurs and increases with each pregnancy of a male fetus, and that this response influences prenatal sexual differentiation of the brain (Bogaert, 2005; Schagen et al., 2011).

In conclusion, research suggests that a biological predisposition to homosexuality and bisexuality may exist for some individuals.

Implications if Biology Is Destiny

The evidence for biological causation of homosexuality raises important issues: Would people be more accepting of homosexuality if a clear biological basis for it were established? Recent research indicates that people who do believe that homosexuality is biologically based—that people are born gay—have more positive feelings toward homosexuals and are more supportive of gay civil rights, including marriage, than are people who believe that homosexuality is learned or an individual choice (Jones, 2011). How common is the belief that homosexuality is innate? Approximately 40% of the population thinks a person is born gay, and 42% believe it is due to upbringing and environment (Jones, 2011).

If homosexuality were labeled as biologically "defective," would that promote medical treatments during pregnancy or after birth to eliminate factors that contribute to its development? In 2010 a controversy developed that emphasized this question. CAH (congenital adrenal hyperplasia) is a genetic disorder in girls that creates unusually high levels of exposure to androgens during prenatal development and childhood. These girls engage less in typical female gender-role

behaviors, they develop large clitorises, facial hair, and deep voices, and they are more likely to have lesbian and bisexual orientations. When the steroid desamethasone is given during pregnancy and during childhood, it counters the masculinizing effects of the genetic disorder. The controversy centered on whether the treatments were motivated too strongly by social pressure for gender-role conformity and heterosexuality (Begley, 2010; Dreger et al., 2010).

Societal Attitudes Regarding Homosexuality

Attitudes toward homosexuality vary considerably across cultures. A number of studies of other cultures, including ancient ones, have revealed widespread acceptance of homosexual behaviors. For example; over 50% of 225 Native American tribes accepted male homosexuality, and 17% accepted female homosexuality. In ancient Greece homosexual relationships between men, especially between men and boys were considered a superior intellectual and spiritual expression of love, whereas heterosexuality provided the more pragmatic benefits of children and a family unit (Pomeroy, 1965).

Some societies require their members to engage in homosexual activities. For example, all male members of the Sambia society in the mountains of New Guinea engage in exclusively homosexual behaviors from approximately 7 years of age until the late teens or early 20s, when men marry. Sambian men believe that a prepubertal boy becomes a strong warrior and hunter by drinking as much semen as possible from postpubertal boys' penises. Once a boy reaches puberty, he must no longer fellate other boys but can experience erotic pleasure from fellatio by boys who cannot yet ejaculate. From the start of their erotic lives and during the years of peak orgasmic capacity, young men engage in frequent obligatory and gratifying homoeroticism. During the same period, looking at or touching females is taboo. Yet as they approach marriage, these youths create powerful erotic daydreams about women. During the first weeks of marriage, they experience only fellatio with their wives; thereafter they make intercourse part of their heterosexual activity. After marriage they stop homosexual activity, experience great sexual desire for women, and engage exclusively in heterosexual activity for the rest of their lives (Stoller & Herdt, 1985).

We previously discussed self-identification as asexual, homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual as one component of sexual orientation. In the Pashtun tribe in Afghanistan, self-definition is almost completely unrelated to actual sexual behavior. A United States and British Forces research team recently reported on the long-standing cultural tradition of Pashtun men in which they predominantly have sex with prepubertal boys and other adult men. However, even men who have had sex only with other men do not label themselves or their partners as homosexual. Homosexuality is defined narrowly in this Muslim culture as the love of another man, not as the use of another male for sexual gratification. Homosexuality is an enormous sin in Islam, and self-definition as homosexual could be a life-and-death matter (Cardinalli, 2010).

In contrast to accepting same-sex behavior or not defining it as homosexuality, extreme violation of basic human rights for gays and lesbians is common in many places around the globe. Homosexuality is illegal in 76 countries and punishable by death in five countries—Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen—and in sections of Nigeria and Somalia (Bruce-Jones & Itaborahy, 2011).

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the government has executed 4,000 people charged with homosexual acts (Shah, 2011). Extreme abuses occur in countries without the death penalty, including 'social cleansing' death squads in Colombia, illegal clinics in Ecuador that use physical and mental abuse to attempt to "cure" homosexuality, and persecution of gay and AIDS activists in many countries (Luongo, 2007; Romo, 2012; Samuels, 2008). In the United States since 1990, the Immigration and Naturalization Service has granted political asylum to people fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation (Burr, 1996). Currently, most LGBT asylum seekers come from Jamaica, Russia, Grenada, Peru, and Uzbekistan. Few asylum seekers come from the Middle East because it is much more difficult for them to get visas to the United States.

A trend toward increased approval of homosexuality is occurring in most nations around the world (T. Smith, 2011). Events in Cuba demonstrate how a society can make rapid positive changes regarding homosexuality. During the first 35 years of the Communist revolution, lesbians and gay men were seen as deviant antirevolutionaries and were expelled from the Communist Party and from state and university jobs. Some were sent to labor camps. In 1992 Cuban leader Fidel Castro blamed the previous homophobia on ingrained attitudes of machismo. He expressed support for gay rights and described homosexuality as a natural human tendency that must be respected. Castro's niece, Mariela Castro, has been instrumental in working through a government-funded organization to promote acceptance of lesbians, gay men, and transgendered individuals. As a consequence of this and other efforts, in 2008 Cuba passed a resolution allowing transgender individuals to undergo sex-reassignment surgeries free of charge (Rowe, 2009),

In other places, equal rights have increased. Countries that are most supportive of homosexual rights tend to have high levels of economic development, advanced levels of education, and lower levels of religiousness (T. Smith, 2011). Fourteen countries, mostly European, have established national laws that protect gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals from discrimination, (The United States is not included with these countries because it has yet to pass a federal law against discrimination based on sexual orientation.) Domestic partnerships have legal status in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. Twenty countries have eliminated bans on gays in the military (Quindlen, 2009a). Notably, in 2011 the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution affirming human rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Judeo-Christian Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

According to the Judeo-Christian tradition that predominates in our own American culture, homosexuality has been viewed negatively. Many religious scholars believe that the condemnation of homosexuality increased during a Jewish reform movement beginning in the 7th century BCE, through which Jewish religious leaders wanted to develop a distinct closed community. Homosexual activities were a part of the religious practices of many peoples in that era, and rejecting such practices was one way of keeping the Jewish religion unique (Fone, 2000; Kosnik et al., 1977). The Old Testament included strong prohibitive statements: "You shall not lie with a man as one lies with a female; it is an abomination" (Lev. 18:22; Leviticus also deems the eating of shellfish [Lev. 11:10] and the cutting of men's hair [Lev. 19:27] abominations). Today Jewish people are divided over their religious stance toward homosexuality. In Israel in 2002 the first openly gay man was appointed to the Knesset, or parliament, drawing dissent from Orthodox Jews (Landsberg, 2002), Reform Judaism sanctioned same-sex marriages in 2000, and

conservative Jewish leaders are reexamining their ban on same-sex marriages and the ordination of openly gay and lesbian clergy (Friess, 2003).

Laws against homosexual behaviors, which stem from biblical injunctions against same-sex contact, have historically been exceedingly punitive. People with homosexual orientations have been tortured and put to death throughout Western history. In the American colonies homosexual people were condemned to death by drowning and burning. In the late 1770s, Thomas Jefferson was among the political leaders who suggested reducing the punishment from death to castration for men who committed homosexual acts (Fone, 2000; Katz, 1976).

Current Christian theological positions-toward homosexuality express a great range of convictions. Different denominations, and different groups within the same denomination; have taken different stances. In many mainstream denominations, groups such as Affirmation (United Methodist Church), Dignity USA (Catholic Church), and Integrity (Episcopal Church) are working to open their congregations to gay and lesbian parishioners and clergy, while fundamentalists in the same denominations oppose such inclusion. Conflicts between these two positions are likely to increase as denominations attempt to establish clear positions and policies about homosexuality, particularly as younger church members become more accepting of homosexuality. For example, one poll found that 44% of young (ages 18-29), white evangelicals support gay marriage, compared to around 20% of evangelicals ages 65 and over (Nolan, 2011).

The Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are the only Christian denominations that officially sanction the blessing of gay and lesbian unions. Although many churches' official policies do not allow church bonding ceremonies for gays and lesbians, some clergy support and perform these ceremonies for homosexual couples.

In 2003 the Right Reverend V. Gene Robinson was consecrated as a bishop in the Episcopal Church, becoming the first openly gay bishop in any mainstream denomination. Many members left the Episcopal Church to form the Anglican Church of North America in a protest against Robinson's position as bishop (Martin, 2009). In 2010 Mary Glasspool became the Episcopal Church's first openly lesbian bishop, resulting in further controversy within the church (Harmon, 2010). In 2011 the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved ordination of gay people in same-sex relationships as ministers, elders, and deacons (Goodstein, 2011),

From Sin to Sickness

In the early to mid-1900s, societal attitudes toward homosexuality shifted. The belief that homosexual people were sinners was replaced to some degree by the belief that they were mentally ill. The medical and psychological professions have used drastic treatments in attempting to cure the "illness" of homosexuality. Surgical procedures such as castration were performed in the 1800s. As late as 1951, lobotomy (surgery that severs nerve fibers in the frontal lobe of the brain) was performed as a cure for homosexuality. Psychotherapy, drugs, hormones, hypnosis, shock treatments, and aversion therapy (pairing nausea-inducing drugs or electrical shock with homosexual stimuli) have all been used to the same end (Murphy, 2008).

In 1973, after great internal conflict, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its diagnostic categories of mental disorders. In light of contemporary

research on homosexuality—and the fact that both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association no longer categorize homosexuality as a mental illness—most therapists and counselors have changed the focus of therapy. Rather than attempting to "cure" homosexual clients by changing their sexual orientation, therapists provide gay-affirmative therapy to help them overcome any internalized negative feelings about their sexual orientation and to cope with a society that harbors considerable hostility toward them (American Psychological Association, 2012; Bolton & Sareen, 2011; Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011b).

Some religious groups and mental health practitioners who believe that homosexuality is symptomatic of developmental defects or spiritual and moral failings advocate therapy to help dissatisfied homosexual individuals control, lessen, or eliminate their homosexual feelings and behavior through conversion therapy or sexual reorientation therapy. Ministry groups blend religious teachings with group counseling to focus on childhood traumas believed to have caused the homosexuality: abandonment by fathers, absent mothers, sexual abuse, or violent parents. In recent years, some of the leaders of these “pray away the gay” ministries (exodus international) have come forward to admit that after years of trying to change homosexuals, that homosexuality is not curable and have closed their conversion ministries, and to even admit personal failures to eliminate their own gay feelings and sexual involvements.

The American Psychological Association maintains that conversion therapy is, at best, ineffective (American Psychological Association, 2009). For many people who cannot make the changes they wish for, the belief that one can only "be with God or be gay" presents irreconcilable choices, and such a dilemma can contribute to depression and suicide (Crary, 2009; Reitan, 2011).

The Gay Rights Movement

Forty years before World War II, the first organization promoting education about homosexuality and the abolition of laws against homosexuality was founded in Germany. However, the Nazis' rise to power ended the homosexual rights movement in Germany, and about 50,000 gay men were sent to death camps (Schoofs, 1997).

Not until the 1950s did people in the United States find organizations for homosexual men and women, despite the conservative atmosphere of the time. The Mattachine Society had chapters in many cities and provided a national network for support and communication. The Daughters of Bilitis, an organization of lesbians, published a journal called *The Ladder*, which contained fiction, poetry, and political articles. The goals of both organizations were to educate homosexual and heterosexual people about homosexuality, increase understanding of homosexuality, and eliminate laws discriminatory to homosexual individuals (Katz, 1976).

The Stonewall Incident and Beyond

During the 1960s many people began to question traditional attitudes in American society in all areas, including the sexual. In this atmosphere, more and more homosexual people began to challenge the social problems they faced. The symbolic birth of homosexual activism occurred in 1969 in New York City when police raided a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn. Police raids on gay bars were common, but this time the bar's patrons fought back. A riot ensued and did not end until the following day. The Stonewall incident served as a catalyst for the formation of gay rights groups,

and activities such as Gay Pride Week and parades are held yearly to commemorate the Stonewall riot. In 1999 the Stonewall Inn was added to the National Register of Historic Places (Ring, 2012)

Since the early 1970s various groups and individuals have worked to promote civil rights for lesbians, gays, and bisexual and transgendered people while others have worked against these goals. Homosexual civil rights efforts fall into three general areas: decriminalization of private sexual behavior, antidiscrimination, and positive rights (Stein, 1999).

Decriminalization of Private Sexual Behavior

The United States had a long history of laws declaring sodomy illegal. Sodomy was legally defined as oral and/or anal sex between adults of any sexual orientation, but these laws were selectively enforced against homosexual individuals and couples. In 2003 the U.S. Supreme Court, basing its decision on the constitutional right to privacy, overturned a Texas sodomy law that made private same-sex sexual contact illegal. The Lawrence et al. v. Texas ruling also overturned laws in four other states that banned same-sex sex and in another nine states that banned sodomy between partners of any sexual orientation. Supporters of gay rights applauded the ruling, as did the majority of U.S. citizens, who believe that government should stay out of the bedrooms of consenting adults.

From:

- 1) Our Sexuality, Crooks & Baur (2014). (Some passages taken from Crooks & Baur (2017).
- 2) Ellis, Robb, & Burke (2005). Sexual Orientation in United States and Canadian College Students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 34(5).569-581