

## Chapter 9: Sexual Orientation

- Sexual Orientation
  - Sexual Orientation- A distinct preference for sexual partners of a particular sex in the presence of clear alternatives
  - Heterosexuality- attraction to members of the opposite sex
  - Homosexuality- attraction to members of the same sex
  - Bisexuality- attraction to people of either sex
  - Sexual orientation is viewed as a continuum
- Prevalence of Homosexuality
  - About 3% to 7% of American men and about 1.5% to 4.5% of American women are homosexual or bisexual
  - More have same-sex sexual experiences or attraction on occasion
- Defining Sexual Orientation: Another Look
  - Must look at more than behavior when characterizing people as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual
  - Sexual orientation definition- distinct preferences consistently made after adolescence in the presence of clear alternatives
  - The developmental pathway to homosexuality and bisexuality is much more diverse for women than men
  - More common for men to become aware of their sexual orientation at a young age before having the same-sex experience
  - It is common for women not to recognize their orientation until later
    - Women are more likely to move back and forth between heterosexual and homosexual relationships
  - Bisexual identities tend to be less stable overtime
- Asexuality
  - Asexuality- lifelong lack of sexual attraction to men or women
    - Not on Kinsey's scale
  - Asexual individuals do experience sexual arousal to erotic stimuli and masturbate; they just lack sexual attraction to other people
- Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Roles
  - Gender identity- One's subjective sense of being a man or a woman. This sense is usually acquired by age of 3
  - Homosexuality and bisexuality are not the result of gender dysphoria
  - For most people masculinity and femininity are basic assumptions of heterosexuality
  - Whether a person conforms or does not conform to gender stereotypes does not always predict sexual orientation
  - Gender role nonconformity during childhood is often, but NOT ALWAYS, associated later with a homosexual orientation

## The Origins of Sexual Orientation

- Psychoanalytic Explanations: Do Parents Play a Role?
  - Sigmund Freud

- Believed that male homosexuality resulted when a boy had a domineering, rejecting mother and turned to his father for love, and later to men in general.
- Female homosexuality developed when a girl loved her mother and identified with her father and became fixated at this stage
- There is no evidence that sexual orientation results from children identifying with a particular parent
- Psychoanalytic explanations have not proven very useful in explaining the origins of sexual orientation.
- The Effects of Environment
  - If sexual orientation were a learned behavior, homosexuals would be expected to have a good or rewarding experiences with same-sex individuals and bad experiences with member of the opposite sex in their early social experiences
    - Data does not support this
  - Children raised by homosexual parents are equally as likely to grow up with a heterosexual orientation as children raised by heterosexual parents
- Biological Explanations
  - Genetic Factors
    - In identical twins the children are likely to have the same sexual orientation
    - Gay men are much more likely to have a close relative who is gay. Same is true for Lesbians
  - Brain Anatomy
    - It was found that part of the hypothalamus (known to influence sexual behavior) was more than twice as large in heterosexuals
    - It was also found that the Suprachiasmatic nucleus had twice as many cells in homosexual men as in heterosexual men
    - A major fiber bundle that connects two halves of the brain was 34% larger in homosexual men than in heterosexual men
    - There is a biological component of sexual orientation
  - Birth Order ( and the Prenatal Environment)
    - Each additional older biological brother (but not sister) increases the probability that the younger brother will be homosexual by about 33%
    - No birth order effect is observed in homosexual women
    - Birth order effects are observed for many personality characteristics, but not in families where children are adopted
    - Birth order effects in men are the result of the biological influences; a reaction of the mother's immune system triggered by the previous male fetuses
      - It affects the sexual differentiation of the brain
  - Hormones ( and the Prenatal Environment)

- It is likely that hormones are the differences between the brain anatomy between heterosexual and homosexual men
- Same-sex sexual behavior is observed in almost all species
- The levels of testosterone in adult men is the same in heterosexuals and homosexuals
- Giving hormones to adult homosexual men does not change their sexual orientation
- o Conclusion
  - One's sexual orientation is not destined by biology alone
  - The twin study shows a strong biological component but since all of them did not have the same sexual orientation it leaves room to believe that there is an environmental factor as well
  - Biological and social influences both contribute to the development of sexual orientation

### **Being Homosexual**

- Being Homosexual
  - o The term homosexual was first used by a Hungarian physician in Germany
  - o Most homosexuals prefer the term gay
  - o Gay- the term generally used to refer to male homosexuals, although in some places it is used to refer to homosexuals of either sex
  - o Lesbian- a female homosexual
  - o Straights- a term used to describe heterosexual
  - o The term queer was once regarded as derogatory but now has been used more in the homosexual community
    - Seen as an umbrella term to refer to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals
- History of Attitudes About Homosexuality
  - o Pederasty- same-sex sexual behavior between adult men and boys. It was widely accepted as an alternative to heterosexuality in ancient Greece
  - o Plato praised homosexual relationships in his Symposium
  - o Same-sex marriage was legal among the upper-class during the time of the Roman empire
  - o Freud referred to homosexuals as perverts in his teaching
  - o Homosexuals were viewed as people with a mental illness
  - o Gay rights Movement- began in 1969 with a series of riots protesting against the raid by the NYC police on the Stonewall Inn
  - o In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association decided that homosexuality should not be considered a Mental Illness
- Sexual Prejudice Today
  - o Sexual Prejudice is often institutionalized