Chapter 9  Sexual Orientations

♦ Definitions

sexual orientation
-the type of sexual attraction that a person has towards other people

- 3 major types:
  ● heterosexuality
  -sexual attraction towards members of the opposite sex

  ● homosexuality
  -sexual attraction towards members of the same sex
  -The terms homosexual and gay are synonymous.
  -However, a female who is gay is often referred to as a lesbian.

  ● bisexuality
  -sexual attraction towards members of both sexes

♦ A Continuum of Sexual Orientations
- Most people believe that sexual orientation is clear-cut: either you are heterosexual or homosexual.
- This is not the case; sexual orientation occurs in gradations across a broad continuum.
- In addition, sexual orientation is best evaluated by observing a person’s sexual behavioral patterns over a life span rather than any particular sexual encounter at a given time.

-Figure 9.1 (Crooks) shows a 7-point continuum that Alfred Kinsey developed as a result of his analysis of sexual orientations in American Society.

Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956)
-an American biologist who studied human sexual behavior
-In 1942 while at Indiana University at Bloomington, he became the director of the Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, which was renamed the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction in 1982.
-Kinsey’s research on human sexuality profoundly influenced social and cultural values in the United States.
-The Steps of the Kinsey Scale

■ 0 (Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual)
   -This means that all of your sexual experiences during your lifetime so far have been with people of the opposite sex.

■ 1 (Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual)
   -This means that you are heterosexual but you have had a homosexual encounter at some point in your life, usually by chance.
   -Many Americans experience such an encounter (often with a friend of the same sex) during their teenage years or during early adulthood.

■ 2 (Predominantly heterosexual but more than incidentally homosexual)
   -This means that you are heterosexual, but you have had a few homosexual encounters (on purpose) during your life.
   -This is often due to repeated sexual experimentation (i.e. you are curious about homosexuality), but overall your sexual experiences have been mainly with people of the opposite sex.

■ 3 (Equally homosexual and heterosexual)
   -This means that during your lifetime so far, about half of your sexual experiences have been with people of the same sex and the other half of your sexual experiences have been with people of the opposite sex.

■ 4 (Predominantly homosexual but more than incidentally heterosexual)
   -This means that you are homosexual, but you have had a few heterosexual encounters (on purpose) during your life.
   -This is often due to repeated sexual experimentation (i.e. you are curious about heterosexuality), but overall your sexual experiences have been mainly with people of the same sex.

■ 5 (Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual)
   -This means that you are homosexual but you have had a heterosexual encounter at some point in your life, usually by chance.

■ 6 (Exclusively homosexual with no heterosexual)
   -This means that all of your sexual experiences during your lifetime so far have been with people of the same sex.

⇒ Note that a bisexual man or woman is rated as a Kinsey 2, 3, or 4.
Who is Straight, Gay, or Bisexual in the United States?

According to a recent survey of men and women throughout the country…
• About 93.4 % identified as heterosexual.
• About 3.1 % identified as bisexual.
• About 2.5 % identified as homosexual.
• About 1% identified as other or did not respond.

Bisexuality
-There are several types of bisexuality:

• **Bisexuality as a real orientation**
  -This refers to those people who have an attraction to both sexes that begins early in life and continues into adulthood.

• **Bisexuality as a transitory (temporary) orientation**
  -The person is either heterosexual or homosexual, but becomes bisexual because of the current circumstances (prison, single-sex boarding schools, prison, ship out at sea for several months).
  -Once the circumstance no longer exists, the person returns to being heterosexual or homosexual.

• **Bisexuality as a transitional orientation**
  -The person is changing orientation gradually from heterosexuality to homosexuality or vice versa.

• **Bisexuality as homosexual denial**
  -The person has homosexual relationships or desires (usually in private) and heterosexual relationships (in public) in order to avoid being perceived as homosexual.
  -For example, a gay man marries a woman for show but has homosexual relationships with and desires for other men.
Causes of Homosexuality: Myth vs. Reality

- No single explanation for homosexuality has been definitively proven at this point.
- However, many explanations as to the causes of homosexuality have been suggested; some are myths, while others are potentially valid.

- **Homosexuality is caused “by default.”**
  - This idea suggests that a person becomes homosexual because of unhappy heterosexual experiences or the inability to attract partners of the other sex.
  - Research has proven this idea to be INVALID.

  - Studies have shown that many homosexuals at some point have had enjoyable sexual relationships with heterosexuals but still desire members of the same sex.
    - Thus, this means that lesbianism does not stem from hatred of men, nor does male homosexuality stem from hatred of women.
    - In addition, research has indicated that homosexuality has nothing to do with the ability to attract heterosexuals.
    - In fact, many homosexuals are able to attract heterosexuals in addition to other homosexuals.

- **Homosexuality is caused by seduction.**
  - This idea suggests that men and women become homosexual because they have been seduced by older homosexuals.
  - Research has also proven this idea to be INVALID.

  - Studies have shown that most homosexuals have their first homosexual encounter with someone close to their own age.
    - Hence, homosexuality cannot be “caught” and is often established even before school age; however, you may not realize your sexual orientation until later in life.

- **Homosexuality is caused by a domineering mother and an emotionally detached (or absent) father.**
  - This idea was proposed by Freud.
  - Research has also proven this idea to be INVALID.

  - Although this type of family pattern has been shown to exist in some cases of homosexuality, many homosexual individuals do not fit this mold—that is, their mothers are not dominant nor are their fathers emotionally detached.
  - Furthermore, many heterosexuals have been reared in families in which this type of family pattern prevailed.
Homosexuality is caused by lower blood levels of sex hormones in adults.
- This idea suggests that homosexual men have less testosterone than heterosexual men and lesbians have less estrogen than heterosexual women.
- Research has also proven this idea to be INVALID.
  - No well-controlled research study has found a difference in the circulating levels of sex hormones in adult homosexuals vs. adult heterosexuals.

Homosexuality is caused by anatomical differences in the brain.
- Research suggests that this idea is POTENTIALLY VALID.
- The most publicized research on anatomical brain differences came from the work of a scientist named Simon LeVay, who dissected the brains of cadavers of gay men and compared them to the dissected brains of cadavers of heterosexual men.
  - LeVay found that a region of the hypothalamus in the brains of gay men was less than half the size of the same region of heterosexual men (Figure 9.1, Derrickson).
  - Note that the hypothalamus is a component of the brain that is known to be involved in causing sexual behaviors.
- Additional studies from live subjects obtained using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) have also revealed anatomical differences between homosexual and heterosexual men.
- More research needs to be performed to determine if these findings are truly accurate.

Homosexuality is caused by genetic factors.
- Research suggests that this idea is POTENTIALLY VALID.
  - For example, scientists have studied different types of male sibling (identical twins, fraternal twins, and adoptive brothers) to find a possible genetic cause to homosexuality.
  - They found that when one brother was homosexual, so were 52% of the identical twins, 22% of fraternal twins, and 11% of the adoptive brothers.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>adoptive brothers</th>
<th>fraternal twins</th>
<th>identical twins</th>
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(increasing frequency of homosexuality when one brother is homosexual)

- A similar study of women found the same pattern: when one sister was homosexual, so were 48% of the identical twins, 16% of fraternal twins, and 6% of adoptive sisters.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>adoptive sisters</th>
<th>fraternal twins</th>
<th>identical twins</th>
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(increasing frequency of homosexuality when one sister is homosexual)

- Although environmental factors may influence homosexuality, these studies
suggests a genetic link to homosexuality.

-More support for a genetic component for homosexuality has been provided by researchers who have reported that they have found evidence of “gay genes” that might predispose men to develop a homosexual orientation.

-These genes are not found altogether on one chromosome; instead, they are found on different chromosomes, including the X chromosome, chromosome 8, chromosome 13, and chromosome 14.

-Researchers found these genes by looking for genetic markers (unique sequences of DNA) that were shared only by gay individuals.

-In other words, researchers looked for genetic sequences that were found in the same genetic locations in the DNA of the entire group of gay individuals being studied.

-The quest to understand how these genes actually influence sexual orientation is still ongoing.

-Implications For Biological Causation of Homosexuality

- The evidence for biological causation of homosexuality (anatomical differences and genetic factors) suggests that homosexuality is an innate behavior (i.e. the person is born that way) and is not a chosen behavior.

- If homosexuality is found to be biologically based, then those who assume that homosexuality is unnatural or immoral might have to reevaluate their beliefs and society might become more accepting of homosexuality.

-Surveys find that people who believe that homosexuals are “born that way” have more positive, accepting attitudes about gay issues and gay rights than do people who believe that homosexuals choose or learn to be homosexual.

♦ The Gay Lifestyle

-Homosexual lifestyles are just as varied as heterosexual lifestyles: all social classes, occupations, races, religions, and political persuasions are represented among homosexual people.

-Despite their many similarities to heterosexual people and the wide variety of their lifestyles, stereotypes about homosexual people exist; many of these stereotypes concern physical appearance.

-It is true that some homosexual individuals dress and act according to commonly held stereotypes; but there are also many homosexuals who do not fit these stereotypes.

gay male stereotypes

- All gay men make exaggerated “feminine” gestures.
- All gay men wear flamboyant (flashy) clothing.

lesbian stereotypes

- All lesbians have short hair.
- All lesbians wear masculine clothing.
- All lesbians make “masculine” gestures.
-Since stereotypes are not a good indicator of sexual orientation, you never know who is gay, straight, or bisexual.
  -There are some “masculine” men who are gay and some “feminine” men who are straight.
  -There are also some “feminine” women who are lesbian and some “masculine” women who are straight.

♦ Coming Out
-Homosexuals who are secretive about their sexual orientation are said to be in the closet.

-When homosexual individuals come out of the closet, they decide to be open about their sexual orientation.

coming out
-the process of becoming aware of and disclosing one’s homosexuality

-Although coming-out decisions are unique to each individual and situation, there are often 3 major steps to the process of coming out:

1. self-acknowledgment
   -The initial step in coming out is usually a person’s realization that he or she feels different than the heterosexual model.
   -Some people report knowing that they were homosexual when they were small children.
   -Many realize during adolescence that something is missing in their heterosexual involvements and that they find same-sex peers sexually attractive.

2. self-acceptance
   -Accepting one’s homosexuality is the next important step after acknowledging it.
   -Self-acceptance is often difficult, because it involves overcoming the internalized negative and homophobic societal view of homosexuality.

3. disclosure
   -Following acknowledgment and self-acceptance is the decision to be open or secretive about one’s homosexuality.
   -Disclosing one’s homosexuality to family can be more difficult than disclosing it to friends.
     -However, most (but not all) homosexual individuals report that once they told their parents about their homosexuality, their parents took the news well.
   -There are some homosexual individuals who accept their homosexuality but prefer not to disclose it and may even pretend to be
heterosexual in front of certain family members of friends.

**passing**
- The term *passing* is used to describe a homosexual individual who presents a false image of being heterosexual to certain individuals.

- Also note that there are some homosexual individuals who are forced to disclose their sexual orientation because of the actions of other individuals.

**outing**
- The term *outing* is used when an individual or group publicizes the homosexual orientation of someone who would otherwise not be open about it.

♦ The Double Minority: Homosexuality and Ethnicity
- Gay ethnic minority individuals have to learn to live in three different communities—ethnic, gay, and the larger society.

- To a greater extent than white homosexuals, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from ethnic groups with traditional values are more likely to stay in the closet and suffer from depression and anxiety because of their sexual orientation than to be open and face alienation from their families and cultural heritage.

- In general, the African-American community has stronger negative views of homosexuals than does white society; the influence of strong fundamentalist Christian beliefs contributes to the higher degree of intolerance in the general black community.

- The Latino cultural emphasis on *machismo* often results in gay Hispanics maintaining secrecy about their sexual orientation.

- The Asian cultural influence on loyalty and conformity to one’s family often prevents many Asian homosexuals from coming out.

- Gay ethnic self-help, social, and political organizations have been developed to manage these dilemmas and to enhance the sense of belonging.

♦ Aspects of Gay and Lesbian Relationships
- One study that compared characteristics of homosexual and heterosexual relationships found major differences: Heterosexual couples were likely to adhere more closely to traditional gender-role expectations than were homosexual couples.

- Most of the homosexual relationships studied were egalitarian and resembled “best friendships” combined with romantic and erotic attraction.
The hypothalamus has a variety of functions:

There are anatomical differences in the size of a portion of the hypothalamus in brains of homosexuals compared to brains of heterosexuals.

The area of the hypothalamus that differs in size is specifically called the third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH3). This area may function as the sexual orientation center of the brain.