chapter 10

Sexual Orientation

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  Recite
  Review

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Which of the following statements are the truth, and which are fiction? Look for the Truth-or-Fiction icons on the pages that follow to find the answers.

1. Gay males and lesbians would prefer to be members of the other sex.  
   T  F

2. Members of ethnic minority groups in the United States are more tolerant of homosexuals than are European Americans.  
   T  F

3. Gay males unconsciously fear women’s genitals because they associate them with castration.  
   T  F

4. Most Americans would prefer that gay people be allowed to get married to one another.  
   T  F

5. Most Americans believe that gay people are born gay.  
   T  F

6. The American Psychiatric Association considers homosexuality to be a mental disorder.  
   T  F
The movie *Brokeback Mountain*, with Heath Ledger as Ennis Del Mar and Jake Gyllenhaal as Jack Twist, won four Golden Globe awards, including the coveted award for best drama. What made the movie remarkable? Not the fact that it was about a love affair between gay men. *Entertainment Weekly* counted nine movies debuting in the same year, including *Capote* and *Rent*, which had gay characters in major roles.

Nor was it the fact that some lovemaking appeared on the screen. There are many more sexually explicit movies with gay males, including those produced by the pornography factories.

Nor was it remarkable that the movie’s characters got married to women and had children. Many gay people do just that.

Nor was it notable that the film was set in the past. There have been many movies about gay characters in ancient Greece and Rome.

But perhaps there has been no movie about gay sheepherders in the mountains of Wyoming in 1963. *Brokeback Mountain* took place in a time and a setting in which gay people had few words—or no words—to describe their emotions or who they were. As columnist Frank Rich noted, the heroes of *Brokeback Mountain* are “neither midnight cowboys, drugstore cowboys nor Village People cowboys.” Instead, they’re high school dropouts in the country, brought up to work hard for little reward.

This chapter is about sexual orientation. Sexual orientation concerns the direction of one’s romantic interests and erotic attractions—toward members of the same sex, the other sex, or both. We will see that homosexual people, like heterosexual people, struggle to incorporate their sexuality within their personal identity, to find lovers, and to establish satisfying lifestyles. In fact, gay marriages are now permitted in a number of states. Unlike heterosexual people, gay people in our culture face a backdrop of social intolerance, even if they commit themselves to long-term relationships.

**Sexual orientation** The directionality of one’s sexual interests—toward members of the same sex, the other sex, or both.

**Heterosexual orientation** Erotic attraction to, and preference for, developing romantic relationships with, members of the other sex.

**Homosexual orientation** Erotic attraction to, and preference for, developing romantic relationships with, members of the same sex. (From the Greek *homos*, meaning “same,” not the Latin *homo*, which means “man”).

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** Refers to one’s erotic attractions toward, and interests in developing romantic relationships with, members of one’s own or the other sex. A heterosexual orientation refers to an erotic attraction to, and preference for developing romantic relationships with, members of the other sex. (Many homosexual people refer to heterosexual people as being *straight*, or as *straights*.)

A homosexual orientation refers to an erotic attraction to, and interest in forming romantic relationships with, members of one’s own sex. The term *homosexuality*...
denotes sexual interest in members of one’s own anatomic sex and applies to both men and women. Homosexual men are often referred to as gay males. Homosexual women are often called lesbians. Gay males and lesbians may also be referred to collectively as “gays” or “gay people.” The term bisexuality describes an orientation in which one is sexually attracted to, and interested in forming romantic relationships with, both males and females.

**Coming to Terms with Terms**

Now that we have defined homosexuality, let us note that the term is somewhat controversial. Some gay people object to it because they feel that it draws attention to sexual behavior. Moreover, the term bears a social stigma. It has also been historically associated with concepts of deviance and mental illness. Also, the term is often used to refer to men only. It thus renders lesbians “invisible.” Thus, many people would prefer terms such as gay male or lesbian sexual orientation. Then, too, the word homosexual is ambiguous in meaning (Savin-Williams, 2006). Does it refer to sexual behavior or to sexual orientation? In this book, your authors speak of male–female sexual behavior (not heterosexual behavior), male–male sexual behavior, and female–female sexual behavior to help distinguish sexual behavior from sexual orientation.

**Real Students, Real Questions**

Q Are some people so unsuccessful with the opposite sex they become gay?

A No. Sexual orientation has nothing to do with success or failure with one sex or the other.

**Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Since gay people are attracted to members of their own sex, some people assume that they would prefer to be members of the other sex. **Truth or Fiction Revisited:** Like heterosexuals, most gay people have a gender identity that is consistent with their anatomic sex. J. Michael Bailey (2003b) writes that some “extremely gay” people become transsexuals—that is, adopt the lifestyle of people of the other sex within our culture. But feeling “trapped” in the body of the other sex is not part of the definition of homosexuality.

When heterosexuals think about homosexuals, they tend to focus almost exclusively on sexual aspects of male–male and female–female relationships. But the relationships of homosexuals, like those of heterosexuals, involve more than sex. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, spend only a small amount of time in sexual activity. More basic to a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation is the formation of romantic attachments with members of one’s own sex. These attachments, like male–female attachments, provide a framework for love and intimacy. Sexual orientations are not defined by sexual activity per se, but rather by the direction of one’s romantic interests and erotic attractions (Mosher et al., 2005).
Classification of Sexual Orientation: Is Yes or No Enough?

Determining a person’s sexual orientation might seem to be a clear-cut task. Some people are exclusively gay and limit their sexual activities to partners of their own sex. Others are strictly heterosexual and limit their sexual activities to partners of the other sex. Some people fall in between.

Many heterosexual people have had sexual experiences with people of their own sex (Mosher et al., 2005; Savin-Williams, 2006). In the absence of heterosexual outlets, adolescents and isolated populations such as prison inmates may have sexual experiences with people of their own sex while they maintain their heterosexual identities.

Gay males and lesbians, too, may engage in male–female sexual activity while maintaining a gay sexual orientation. Some gay males and lesbians marry members of the other sex but harbor unfulfilled desires for members of their own sex. Then, too, some people are bisexual but may not act on their attraction to members of their own sex (Edser & Shea, 2002).

Sexual orientation is not necessarily expressed in sexual behavior. Many people see themselves as gay or heterosexual long before they ever have sex with members of their own sex (Thompson & Morgan, 2008; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Some people, gay and heterosexual alike, adopt a celibate lifestyle for religious or ascetic reasons.

People’s erotic interests and fantasies may also shift over time. Gay males and lesbians may experience sporadic heteroerotic interests. Heterosexual people may have occasional homoerotic interests. To some extent, women’s sexual orientations are more flexible or plastic than men’s, with women being somewhat more dependent on social experience (Diamond, 2003a; Thompson & Morgan, 2008). A classic survey of homosexuals found that about 50% of lesbians sampled reported that they are sometimes attracted to men (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Lisa M. Diamond (2003b) conducted a survey of lesbian and bisexual women that involved three interviews over a five-year period. She found that more than 25% of the women relinquished their lesbian or bisexual orientation as time went on. Half of these relabeled themselves as heterosexual, and the other half renounced any effort at self-labeling. Some heterosexual people report fantasies about sexual activity with people of their own sex.

Attraction to people of the other sex and people of one’s own sex may therefore not always be mutually exclusive. People may have various degrees of sexual interest in, and sexual experience with, people of either sex (Hammack & Cohler, 2009; Thompson & Morgan, 2008). Kinsey and his colleagues recognized that the boundaries between gay male and lesbian sexual orientations, on the one hand, and a heterosexual orientation, on the other, are sometimes blurry. As Kinsey and his colleagues noted,

The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. . . . Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeonholes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. (1948, p. 639)

Kinsey and his colleagues (1948, 1953) found evidence of a continuum of sexual orientation among the people they surveyed, with bisexuality representing a midpoint between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual sexual orientations (see Figure 10.1). People are located on the continuum according to their

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**Heteroerotic**  Of an erotic nature and involving members of the other sex.

**Homoerotic**  Of an erotic nature and involving members of one’s own sex.
patterns of sexual attraction and behavior. People in category 0 are considered exclusively heterosexual. People in category 6 are considered exclusively gay.

Kinsey and his colleagues reported that about 4% of men and 1 to 3% of women in their samples were exclusively gay (category 6 on their scale). A larger percentage of people were considered predominantly gay (4 or 5 on their scale) or predominantly heterosexual (1 or 2 on their scale). All in all, Kinsey’s data suggested that close to 10% of the U.S. population was gay or predominantly gay, a number that dramatically exceeds current estimates. Some were classified as equally gay and heterosexual in orientation and could be labeled bisexual (scale point 3). Most people were classified as exclusively heterosexual (scale point 0).

Statistics concerning past sexual activity with a member of one’s own sex can be misleading. They may represent a single episode or a brief period of adolescent experimentation. Half of the men who reported male–male sexual activity in Kinsey’s sample limited it to the ages of 12 to 14. Another third had male–male sexual experience by the age of 18, but not again.

Kinsey’s research also showed that sexual behavior patterns can change, sometimes dramatically so. Sexual experiences or feelings involving people of one’s own sex are common, especially in adolescence, and do not necessarily mean that one will engage in sexual activity exclusively with people of one’s own sex in adulthood (Diamond, 2003a, 2003b).

The controversy over how many people are gay continues. Research in the United States, Britain, France, and Denmark finds that about 3% of men surveyed identify themselves as gay (Mosher et al., 2005; Savin-Williams, 2006). About 1% to 2% of the U.S. women surveyed identify themselves as lesbians (Mosher et al., 2005; Savin-Williams, 2006).

As noted in Chapter 1, about 6% of the males and 11% of the females in the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) said they had engaged in sexual activity with a member of their own sex (Mosher et al., 2005). Yet, as shown in Table 10.1 on page 284, only 2.3% of the males and 1.3% of the females said they think of themselves as being homosexuals. The same table shows that most respondents considered themselves heterosexual. Some respondents thought of themselves as being bisexual, and a few thought of themselves as “something else.” And then some had no response, which is difficult to interpret. However, 90% of the males and the females labeled themselves heterosexual. Overall, it is estimated that anywhere from 2% to 10% of the population is gay male or lesbian (Martins et al., 2005).

Keep in mind that the following factors affect survey results:

- The ways in which the questions are phrased (for example, do they look into sexual identity, sexual behavior, or sexual attraction—and over what period of time?)
- The social desirability of the professed behavior
- The sex of the interviewer
- The manner in which the questions were administered, such as by face-to-face interviews, by phone calls, or in written form
- Possible biases of respondents, such as volunteer bias
### Table 10.1
Self-Labeling of Sexual Orientation by Respondents Age 18 to 44 to the National Survey of Family Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Homosexual</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>“Something Else”</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male, %</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, %</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### CHALLENGES TO THE KINSEY CONTINUUM

Alfred Kinsey believed that exclusive heterosexual and gay sexual orientations lay at opposite poles of one continuum. Therefore, the more heterosexual a person is, the less gay that person is, and vice versa. Viewing gay and heterosexual orientations as opposite poles of one continuum is akin to the traditional view of masculinity and femininity as opposite poles of one continuum, such that the more masculine one is, the less feminine, and vice versa.

We may also regard masculinity and femininity as independent personality dimensions. But it may be that these sexual orientations are in fact separate dimensions, rather than polar opposites, at least for women (Bogaert, 2006; Storms, 1980). There are apparently separate dimensions of responsiveness to male–female sexual stimulation (heteroeroticism) and sexual stimulation that involves someone of the same sex (homoeroticism), as shown in Figure 10.2. According to this model, bisexuals are high in both dimensions, whereas people who are low in both are essentially asexual (Bogaert, 2006). According to Kinsey, bisexual individuals would be less responsive to stimulation by people of the other sex than heterosexual people are, but more responsive to stimulation by people of their own sex. However, the two-dimensional model allows for people to be as responsive to stimulation by people of the other sex as heterosexual people are, and as responsive to stimulation by people of their own sex as gay people are.

Researchers find that the two-dimensional model may hold only for women, if it is valid at all. For example, Lippa and Arad (1997) administered tests of personality to 148 male and 246 female college undergraduates with a median age of 18. The tests assessed “masculine” instrumentality, “feminine” emotional expressiveness, and other personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to new experience. Students also completed a sexual behavior and attitude questionnaire that asked them about their sexual attraction to men and women, their emotional commitment in sexual relationships, their sex drive, and their interest in sexual fantasies and erotic stimuli. A statistical grouping technique called factor analysis found four factors that characterized men’s sexual behaviors and attitudes and four that characterized women’s (see Table 10.2). They differed in important ways. Perhaps the most telling is that men seemed to largely fit the Kinsey model in that they showed a “bipolar” sexual orientation. That is, the more aroused they were by women, the less they were aroused by men, and vice versa. Women, by contrast, showed factors both for homosexuality and heterosexuality. That is, whether or not they were aroused by men could be independent of whether or not they were aroused by other women, and vice versa. But sexual behaviors and attitudes had little to do with the other personality measures.
Chivers and Bailey (2005) took another approach but their results support those of Lippa and Arad. Chivers and Bailey exposed men and women to visual male and female sexual stimuli. They measured the subjects’ genital responses as well as their self-reports of sexual arousal. Male heterosexuals responded genitally only to the female stimuli, and gay males showed the reverse pattern. Their genital responses bore out their verbal reports. The women, both heterosexual and lesbian, were more likely to be aroused by both male and female sexual stimuli.

Lippa and Arad’s and Chivers and Bailey’s findings are consistent with research showing that women’s sexual orientations are more flexible than men’s and apparently more intertwined with their social experience (Bailey, 2003a; Diamond, 2000, 2002, 2003a). When we discuss homophobia, or hatred of homosexuals, we will see that men tend to be more homophobic than women. Homophobia is connected with traditional “tough” masculine attitudes (Davies, 2004). However, it may also be that part of the reason for this sex difference in homophobia is that heterosexual men have a more difficult time than heterosexual women understanding how any man could be attracted to a person of the same sex.

Table 10.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in Males’ and Females’ Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar sexual orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex drive</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Bisexuality

To me, I never felt like I had a stronger attraction to men or women. I didn't have a problem identifying myself as gay, but I knew that wasn't the whole picture.

(—A 29-year-old social worker from North Carolina who fell in love with a woman and then had a sexual relationship with his male roommate)*

I don't limit myself to a guy or a girl. Whoever comes into my life, if we hit it off, great. That's happened with a lot of people I know. They'll say, “Guess what happened last night.” It's very accepted.

(—A 22-year-old political science major)*

She finally came out of the closet and said, “Mom, there’s this girl and she’s the most gorgeous girl you’ve ever seen.” I said, “You’re only for girls?” She said, “No, it’s not just the girls. I can see a really good-looking guy, too.”

(—The mother of a 19-year-old woman who uses a computer bulletin board to meet other bisexuals)*

Bisexual people are sexually attracted to both males and females. They are sometimes said to “swing both ways,” or to be “A/C–D/C” (as in “alternating current” and “direct current”). Yet, many have a somewhat stronger attraction to people of one sex than the other. In fact, Weinrich and Klein (2002) speak of bisexuals as being “bi-gay,” “bi-straight,” or “bi-bi,” meaning that some have a stronger leaning toward people of their own sex (bi-gays), some toward people of the other sex (bi-straights), and still others appears to be equally attracted to people of their own sex and the other sex (bi-bi’s). Depending on how one defines bisexuality, perhaps 1% to 4% of the population is bisexual. About 1% of the people (0.8% of the men and 0.9% of the women) surveyed in the NHSLS study (Laumann et al., 1994) reported having a bisexual identity. However, about 4% said they were sexually attracted to both women and men.

Some gay people (and some heterosexual people) believe that claims to bisexuality are a “cop-out” that people use to deny being gay. Perhaps they fear leaving their spouses or “coming out” (declaring their gay male or lesbian sexual orientation publicly). Others view bisexuality as a form of sexual experimentation with people of one’s own sex by people who are mostly heterosexual. Surveys of more than 600 college undergraduates confirm that biphobia, or hatred of bisexuals, can be found in both the heterosexual and homosexual populations (Mulick & Wright, 2002).

But many avowed bisexuals and researchers assert that bisexuals can maintain erotic interests in, and romantic relationships with, members of both sexes. They insist that bisexuality is an authentic sexual orientation with its own developmental patterns, and not just a “cover” for a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation (Brown, 2002; Weinrich & Klein, 2002).

Some bisexual people follow lifestyles that permit them to satisfy their dual inclinations. Others feel pressured by heterosexual and gay people alike to commit themselves one way or the other (Edser & Shea, 2002). Some gay people also mask their sexual orientation by adopting a bisexual lifestyle. That is, they get married but also enter into clandestine sexual liaisons with members of their own sex.

*Biphobia* Negative attitudes and feelings toward bisexual people, including intolerance, hatred, and fear.

*The three quotes are extracted from Gabriel (1995).*
Still, it appears that many bisexual men remain reasonably comfortable in committed heterosexual relationships, such as marriages. An in-depth study of 20 married men who scored as bisexual on the Kinsey Scale found that they encountered some anxiety, some feelings of guilt, and some sense of loss, but not to the point where they experienced high levels of stress (Edser & Shea, 2002). By and large, the men were psychologically stable and most of their marriages were in what the authors call “relatively good condition.” The authors conclude that long-term committed relationships with women are a “viable option” for bisexual men. The authors were not moralistic; that is, they were not suggesting that bisexual men should seek committed relationships with women. They merely pointed out that such relationships can work.

**Perspectives on Gay Male and Lesbian Sexual Orientations**

**GAY MALE AND LESBIAN SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS** have existed throughout history. Attitudes toward them have varied widely. They have been tolerated in some societies, openly encouraged in others, but condemned in most. In this section we review historical and other perspectives on gay male and lesbian sexual orientations.

**Historical Perspectives**

In Western culture, few sexual practices have met with such widespread censure as sexual activities with members of one’s own sex. But it was not always that way. In ancient Greece, for example, established men frequently formed sexual relationships with adolescent males at about the age of first growing a beard. The main sexual activity depicted on Greek vases is of the older male inserting his penis between the boy’s thighs (not in the anus) and thrusting until he ejaculates.

A few centuries later, the Romans described highly feminine gay men who dressed flamboyantly, had showy hair styles and mannerisms, and cruised certain neighborhoods, searching for partners. The Apostle Paul commented on this behavior as the key sign of the decadence of Rome, and the Christian Church assumed a strongly negative attitude toward homosexuality.

In the fifteenth century, Florence, a Christian city, was reputed to house numerous “sodomites.” (Jews and Christians have traditionally referred to male–male sexual activity as the sin of Sodom—hence the origins of the term *sodomy*, which generally alludes to anal intercourse, and sometimes to oral–genital contact. According to the book of Genesis, the city of Sodom was destroyed by God. Yet it is unclear what behavior incurred God’s wrath. Pope Gregory III was not ambiguous, however, in his eighth-century account of the city’s obliteration as a punishment for sexual activity with members of the same sex.) Sodomy was so common in Florence, and (theoretically) so disturbing to the city’s governors, that they created the “Office of the Night” in 1432, which enabled the populace to anonymously accuse individuals of sodomy. During the 70 years that the office was in operation, some 17,000 men were investigated as possible sodomites, nearly half of the male population of Florence throughout that period! Fewer than 3,000 were actually convicted, however, and those who were convicted were required to pay a fine rather than tossed into prison (Bailey, 2003b).
Lesbians and gay males frequently suffer the slings and arrows of an outraged society. Because of societal prejudices, it is difficult for many young people to come to terms with an emerging lesbian or gay male sexual orientation. You might assume that people who have been subjected to prejudice and discrimination—members of ethnic minority groups in the United States—would be more tolerant of a lesbian or gay male sexual orientation. However, members of ethnic minority groups in the United States tend to be less tolerant of homosexuals than European Americans are (Chisholm & Greene, 2008; Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006).

Greene (2005) addresses the experiences of lesbians and gay men from ethnic minority groups. She notes that it is difficult to generalize about ethnic groups in the United States. For example, African Americans may find their cultural origins in the tribes of West Africa, but they have also been influenced by Christianity and the local subcultures of their North American towns and cities. Native Americans represent hundreds of tribal groups, languages, and cultures. By and large, however, a lesbian or gay male sexual orientation is rejected by ethnic minority groups in the United States. Lesbians and gay males are pressured to keep their sexual orientations a secret or to move to communities where they can live openly without sanction.

Within traditional Latino and Latina American culture, the family is the primary social unit. Men are expected to support and defend the family, and women are expected to be submissive, respectable, and deferential to men. Because women are expected to remain virgins until marriage, men sometimes engage in male–male sexual behavior without considering themselves gay (Barrett et al., 2005). Latino and Latina American culture frequently denies the sexuality of women. Thus, women who label themselves lesbians are doubly condemned—because they are lesbians and because they are confronting others with their sexuality. Because lesbians are independent of men, most Latino and Latina American heterosexual people view Latina American lesbians as threats to the tradition of male dominance (Barrett et al., 2005).

Asian American cultures emphasize respect for elders, obedience to parents, and sharp distinctions in gender roles (Kumashiro, 2004). The topic of sex is generally taboo within the family. Asian Americans, like Latino and Latina Americans, tend to assume that sex is unimportant to women. Women are also considered less important than men. Open admission of a lesbian or gay male sexual orientation is seen as rejection of traditional cultural roles and a threat to the continuity of the family line (Collins, 2004). For all these reasons, it is not surprising that Asian American college

The book of Leviticus was also clear in its condemnation:

If a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

Sexual activity with members of one’s own sex was not the only sexual act considered sinful by the early Christians. Any nonprocreative sexual act was considered sinful, even within marriage. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the influence of Christianity spread across Western Europe. Christian beliefs were eventually encoded into secular law. By the late Middle Ages, most civil statutes throughout Western Europe contained penalties for nonprocreative sexual acts involving the discharge of semen, including oral or anal sex, masturbation, male–male sexual behavior, and bestiality. Male–male and female–female sexual practices continue to be condemned by most Christian and Jewish denominations, and by Islam.
students report being more homophobic than their European American counterparts. Because many African American men have had difficulty finding jobs, gender roles among African Americans have been more flexible than those found among European Americans and most other ethnic minority groups (Chisholm & Greene, 2008). Nevertheless, the African American community appears to strongly reject gay men and lesbians, pressuring them to remain secretive about their sexual orientations. Greene (2000) hypothesizes a number of factors that influence African Americans to be hostile toward lesbians and gay men. One is allegiance to Christianity and Biblical scripture. Another is internalization of the dominant culture’s stereotyping of African Americans as highly sexual beings. That is, many African Americans may wish to assert their sexual “normalcy.”

Prior to European colonization, sex may not have been discussed openly by Native Americans, but sex was generally seen as a natural part of life. Individuals who incorporated both traditional feminine and masculine styles were generally accepted and even admired. The influence of the religions of colonists led to greater rejection of lesbians and gay men, and pressure to move off the reservation to the big city (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Balsam et al., 2004). Native American lesbians and gay men, like Asian American lesbians and gay men, feel doubly removed from their families. If any generalization is possible, it may be that lesbians and gay men find more of a sense of belonging in the gay community than in their ethnic communities.

Our legal system, grounded in this religious tradition, maintains criminal penalties for sexual practices commonly associated with male–male and female–female sex, such as anal and oral sex. But much of the criminalization of male–male and female–female sex has been directed against men.

Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation. The experiences of lesbians and gay men can differ according to their ethnicity. For example, traditional Latino and Latina American culture supports strong differences in gender roles. Men are expected to support and defend the family. Women are expected to be submissive, respectable, and deferential to men. Latino and Latina American culture also often denies the sexuality of women. Thus, Latina American lesbians are multiply condemned—because they are lesbians, because they confront others with their sexuality, and because their independence from men is perceived as a threat to the tradition of male dominance.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Male–male sexual behavior has been practiced in many preliterate societies. In their review of the literature on 76 preliterate societies, Ford and Beach (1951) found that in 49 societies (64%), male–male sexual interactions were viewed as normal and deemed socially acceptable for some members of the group. The other 27 societies (36%) had sanctions against male–male sexual behavior. Nevertheless, male–male sexual activity persisted. In another cross-cultural analysis, Broude and Greene (1976) found that male–male sexual behavior was present but uncommon in 41% of a sample of 70 of the world’s non-European societies. It was rare or absent in 59%
of these societies. Broude and Greene also found evidence of societal disapproval and punishment of male–male sexual activity in 41% of a sample of 42 societies for which information was available.

Sexual activities between males are sometimes limited to rites that mark the young male’s initiation into manhood. In some preliterate societies, semen is believed to boost strength and virility. Older males thus transmit semen to younger males through oral or anal sexual activities. Among the Sambian people of New Guinea, a tribe of warlike headhunters, 7- to 10-year-old males leave their parents’ households and live in a “clubhouse” with other prepubertal and adolescent males. There they undergo sexual rites of passage. To acquire the fierce manhood of the headhunter, they fellate older males and drink semen (Bailey, 2003b). They are encouraged to take in as much semen as they can, as if it were mother’s milk. Ingestion of semen is believed to give rise to puberty. Following puberty, adolescents are fellated by younger males. In their late teens or early twenties, however, young men are expected to take brides and enter into exclusively male–female sexual relationships.

These practices of Sambian culture might seem to suggest that the sexual orientations of males are fluid and malleable. But the practices involve behavior and not sexual orientation. Male–male sexual behavior among Sambians takes place within a cultural context that bears little resemblance to consensual male–male sexual activity in Western society. The prepubertal Sambian male does not seek sexual liaisons with other males. He is removed from his home and thrust into male–male sexual encounters by older males.

Little is known about female–female sexual activity in non-Western cultures. Evidence of female–female sexual behavior was found by Ford and Beach in only 17 of the 76 societies they studied. Perhaps female sexual behavior in general, not just sexual activity with other females, was more likely to be repressed. Perhaps women are less likely than men to develop sexual interests in, or romantic relationships with, members of their own sex. Whatever the reasons, this cross-cultural evidence is consistent with data from our own culture. Here, too, males are more likely than females to develop sexual interests in, or romantic relationships with, members of their own sex.

Cross-Species Perspectives

Biologists have observed male–male and female–female sexual behavior in at least 450 different animal species in every part of the world (Hird, 2006). Rare it’s not.

On the other hand, what you see isn’t always what you get. A male baboon may present his rear and allow himself to be mounted by another male. This behavior may resemble anal intercourse among gay men. Is the behavior sexually motivated, however? Mounting behavior among male baboons may represent a type of dominance ritual in which lower-ranking males adopt a submissive (feminine) posture to ward off attack from dominant males. (Some male–male acts among people also involve themes of dominance, as in the case of a dominant male prisoner forcing a less dominant one to submit to anal intercourse.) In other cases, male baboons may be seeking favors or protection from more dominant males. Among juvenile animals, male–male behaviors may also be a form of play. Females may also attempt to mount other females, but here too, the motives may not be the same as those of humans.

Sexual motivation appears to play a role in some, but not all, male–male and female–female sexual interactions among animals. Fellatio and anal intercourse to ejaculation among juvenile male orangutans may be a case in point, as may be thrusting by one adult female gorilla against another.
Biological Perspectives

Biological perspectives focus on the possible roles of evolution, genetics, and hormonal influences in shaping sexual orientation.

THE EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE  It might seem odd that evolutionary theorists have endeavored to explain gay male and lesbian sexual orientations. After all, gay males and lesbians are not motivated to engage in sexual activity with members of the other sex. How, then, can gay and lesbian sexual orientations confer any evolutionary advantage?

To answer the question, we must look to the group or the species rather than the individual. Kirkpatrick (2000) suggests that male–male and female–female sexual behavior derive from individual selection for reciprocal altruism. That is, strong male–male and female–female alliances have advantages for group survival in that they bind group members together emotionally. This hypothesis remains quite speculative.

However, researchers have also compared the family trees of homosexuals with those of heterosexuals and found that there is a significant increase in fecundity in the women related to the homosexuals in the maternal line but not in women in the paternal line (Iemmola & Ciani, 2009). These findings suggest the possibility that genetic factors that are linked to the X sex chromosome and might influence homosexual orientation in males are not eliminated by natural selection because they also increase fecundity in women carriers. That is, the women related to gay males apparently bear more children, compensating for the lesser likelihood that homosexuals will reproduce.

GENETICS, THE BRAIN, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION  Considerable evidence exists that gay male and lesbian sexual orientations run in families (Dawood et al., 2009). Twin studies shed light on the possible role of heredity (Bailey, 2003b). Monzygotic (MZ) twins, or identical twins, develop from a single fertilized ovum and share 100% of their heredity. Dizygotic (DZ) twins, or fraternal twins, develop from two fertilized ova. Like other brothers and sisters, DZ twins share only 50% of their heredity. Thus, if a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation were transmitted genetically, it should be found about twice as often among identical twins of gay people as among fraternal twins. Since MZ and DZ twins who are reared together share similar environmental influences, differences in the degree of concordance for a given trait between the types of twin pairs are further indicative of genetic origins. Several studies have identified gay men who had either identical (MZ) or fraternal (DZ) twin brothers in order to examine the prevalence of a gay male sexual orientation in their twin brothers. In one of the most carefully conducted twin studies, about 52% of identical (MZ) twin pairs were found to be “concordant” (in agreement) for a gay male sexual orientation, as compared with 22% of fraternal (DZ) twins and only 11% of adoptive brothers (Bailey, 2003a; Bailey & Pillard, 1991). Bear in mind that MZ twins are more likely to be dressed alike and treated alike than DZ twins. Thus, their greater concordance for a gay sexual orientation may at least in part reflect environmental factors (Kendler et al., 2000).

Researchers have found evidence linking a region on the X sex chromosome to a gay male sexual orientation (Bailey et al., 1999). One group of researchers (Hamer et al., 1993) found that gay males in a sample of 114 gay men were more likely to have gay male relatives on their mothers’ side of the family than would be expected, based on the prevalence of a gay male sexual orientation in the general population. However, they did not have a greater than expected number of gay male relatives on...
the paternal side of the family. This pattern of inheritance is consistent with genetic traits, such as hemophilia, that are linked to the X sex chromosome, which men receive from their mothers.

The researchers then examined the X sex chromosome in 40 pairs of gay male, non-twin brothers. In 33 of the pairs, the brothers had identical DNA markers on the end tip of the X chromosome. For brothers overall in the general population, about half would be expected to have inherited this chromosomal structure. It is suspected, therefore, that this chromosomal region may hold a gene that predisposes men to a gay male sexual orientation.

The researchers cautioned that they had not found a particular gene linked to sexual orientation, just a general location of where the gene may be found. Nor do scientists know how such a gene, or combination of genes, might account for sexual orientation. Perhaps a particular gene or gene combination governs the development of proteins that sculpt parts of the brain in ways that favor the development of a gay male sexual orientation. On the other hand, a number of the gay brothers, 7 of the 40 pairs, did not share the chromosomal marker.

In a search for possible differences in the brain among heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians, Swedish researchers (Savic & Lindstrom, 2008) conducted MRI scans of the brains of 90 subjects—25 heterosexual men (HeM) and women (HeW), and 20 gay men (HoM) and lesbians (HoW). They found that the brains of the heterosexual men and the lesbians were slightly asymmetrical; the right hemisphere was slightly larger than the left hemisphere. This difference was not found among the brains of gay men and heterosexual women. The researchers also measured the blood flow to the amygdala, an area of the brain involved in the emotional response to threats, and they found that it was wired similarly in gay men and heterosexual women, and also in lesbians and heterosexual men (see Figure 10.3). The researchers admitted that their methodology cannot show whether the differences in brain shape and interconnectivity are inherited or due to environmental factors such as exposure to testosterone in the womb. Nor can they conclude that the differences in the brain are responsible for sexual orientation. But even at this stage in the research, it would appear that the brains of heterosexuals and homosexuals might be different in ways that are consistent with their sexual orientations.

HORMONAL INFLUENCES AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION  Sex hormones strongly influence the mating behavior of other species (Crews, 1994). Researchers have thus looked into possible hormonal factors in determining sexual orientation in humans.

Testosterone is essential to male sexual differentiation. Thus, levels of testosterone and its by-products in the blood and urine have been studied as possible influences on sexual orientation. Research has failed to connect sexual orientation in either sex with differences in the levels of either male or female sex hormones in adulthood (Friedman & Downey, 2001, 2008). In adulthood, testosterone appears to have activating effects. That is, it affects the intensity of sexual desire, but not the preference for partners of the same or the other sex (Aarts & van Honk, 2009; Yeh et al., 2009).
What of the possible prenatal effects of sex hormones? Pregnant rats in experiments were given anti-androgen drugs that block the effects of testosterone. When the drugs were given during critical periods in which the fetuses’ brains were becoming sexually differentiated, male offspring were likely to show feminine mating patterns as adults (Ellis & Ames, 1987). The adult males became receptive to mounting attempts by other males and failed to mount females.

Do prenatal sex hormones play a similar role in determining sexual orientation in people? There is suggestive evidence. For example, Meyer-Bahlburg and his colleagues (1995) interviewed groups of women exposed prenatally to DES, a synthetic estrogen. They found that these women were more likely to be rated as lesbian or bisexual than women who were not exposed to DES. The genitals of gay people differentiate prenatally in accord with their chromosomal sex. However, it remains possible that imbalances in prenatal sex hormones may cause brain tissue to be sexually differentiated in one direction even though the genitals are differentiated in the other (Collaer & Hines, 1995). Moreover, as we will see later, butch lesbians may differ somewhat biologically from femme lesbians.

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE BRAIN** Evidence suggests that there may be structural differences between the brains of heterosexual and gay men. In 1991, Simon LeVay, a neurobiologist at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, carried out autopsies on the brains of 35 AIDS victims—19 gay men and 16 (presumably) heterosexual men. He found that a segment of the hypothalamus (specifically, the third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus) in the brains of the gay men was less than half the size of the same segment in the heterosexual men. The same brain segment was larger in the brain tissues of heterosexual men than in brain tissues obtained from a comparison group of 6 presumably heterosexual women. No significant differences in size were found between the brain tissues of the gay men and the women, however.

LeVay’s findings are intriguing but preliminary. We do not know, for example, whether the structural differences found by LeVay are innate. Nor do the findings prove that biology is destiny.

The belief that sexual orientation is innate or inborn has many adherents—both in the scientific and general communities. Support for the possible influences of prenatal hormonal factors in “sculpting” the brain in a masculine or feminine direction is based largely on animal studies, however. Direct evidence with people is lacking. We must also be careful in generalizing results from other species to our own.

**Psychological Perspectives**

Psychoanalytic theory and learning theory provide two of the major psychological approaches to understanding the origins of sexual orientation.

**PSYCHOANALYTIC VIEWS** Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychoanalytic theory, believed that children are naturally open to all forms of sexual stimulation. However, through proper resolution of the Oedipus complex, a boy will forsake his incestuous desires for his mother and come to identify with his father. As a result, his erotic attraction to his mother will eventually be transferred to more appropriate female partners. A girl, through proper resolution of her Electra complex, will identify with her mother and seek erotic stimulation from men when she becomes sexually mature.
In the film *Scent of a Woman*, Al Pacino played a blind man who was drawn to women by their odor. Are there odors that are characteristic of the other sex? If so, does one’s response to these odors play a role in one’s sexual orientation?

Some answers are suggested by a study by Swedish researchers (Savic et al., 2005) who used PET scans to show that gay and heterosexual men respond differently to smelling chemicals that may affect sexual arousal, and that the gay men respond similarly to heterosexual women (see Figure 10.4). The Swedish study investigated the effects of two chemicals: a testosterone derivative produced in men’s sweat and an estrogenlike compound found in women’s urine. Most odors activate neurons in specific regions of the brain, increasing the blood flow to these regions and causing them to “light up” when imaged by the PET scan. The estrogenlike compound activated the usual smell-related areas in women, but it lit up the hypothalamus—a structure involved in sexual behavior—in heterosexual men. The chemical extracted from male sweat, in contrast, did the opposite; it activated the hypothalamus in women and the usual smell-related areas in men. Each chemical seemed to be just another odor with one sex but a pheromone with the other. However, gay men in the study responded to the chemicals as women did. That is, their hypothalamus was lit up by the chemical drawn from male sweat.

It must be noted that the Swedish study does not reveal cause and effect. A “snapshot” was taken of brain functioning at a point in time. The snapshot did not show how the brain’s responses develop. Were the activity patterns in heterosexual and gay men a cause of their sexual orientation or an effect of their sexual orientation? If sexual orientation has a genetic basis, or is influenced by hormones in the womb or at puberty, it might be that the neurons in the hypothalamus become hard-wired in a way that shapes sexual orientation. Conversely, the findings could mean that experience leads straight and gay men to respond in different ways. In any event, the study does suggest a role for pheromones in human sexual response and lays the groundwork for further research.

**Figure 10.4 ● Who Lights Up Your Hypothalamus?** Certain areas of the hypothalamus “light up” when heterosexual males smell an estrogenlike compound (“estratetraenol”) found in women’s urine, when heterosexual women smell an androgenlike compound (“androstadienone”), and when gay males smell the androstadienone. The hypothalamus of gay males responds similarly to that of heterosexual women when the person is presented with the odor of androstadienone.

In Freud’s view, a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation results from failure to successfully resolve the Oedipus complex by identifying with the parent of the same sex. In men, faulty resolution of the Oedipus complex is most likely to result from the so-called classic pattern of an emotionally “close-binding” mother and a “detached–hostile” father. A boy reared in such a family may come to identify with his mother and even to “transform himself into her” (Freud, 1922/1959, p. 40). He may thus become effeminate and develop sexual interests in men.

Freud believed that unresolved castration anxiety plays a role in a gay male sexual orientation. By the time the Oedipus complex takes effect, the boy will have learned from self-stimulation that he can obtain sexual pleasure from his penis. In his youthful fantasies, he associates this pleasure with mental images of his mother. Similarly, he is likely to have learned that females do not possess a penis. Somewhere along the line, the psychoanalyst theorizes that the boy may also have been warned that his penis will be removed if he plays with himself. From all this, the boy may surmise that females—including his mother—once had penises, but that they were removed.

During the throes of the Oedipus complex, the boy unconsciously comes to fear that his father, his rival in love for the mother, will retaliate by removing the organ that the boy has come to associate with sexual pleasure. His fear causes him to repress his sexual desire for his mother and to identify with the potential aggressor—his father. The boy thus overcomes his castration anxiety and is headed along the path of adult heterosexuality.

If the Oedipus complex is not successfully resolved, castration anxiety may persist. When sexually mature, the man will not be able to tolerate sex with women. Their lack of a penis will arouse unconscious castration anxiety within himself.

The Electra complex in little girls follows a somewhat different course. Freud believed that little girls become envious of boys’ penises, since they lack their own. Jealousy leads little girls to resent their mothers, whom they blame for their anatomic “deficiency,” and to turn from their mothers to their fathers as sexual objects. They now desire to possess the father, because the father’s penis provides what they lack. But incestuous desires bring the girl into competition with her mother. Motivated by fear that her mother will withdraw her love if the desires persist, the girl normally represses them and identifies with her mother. She supplants her childhood desire for a penis with a desire to marry a man and bear children. The baby, emitted from between her legs, serves as the ultimate penis substitute.

A nagging problem for Freudian theory is that many of its concepts, such as castration anxiety and penis envy, are believed to operate at an unconscious level. As such, they lie beyond the scope of scientific observation and measurement. Moreover, viewing childhood sexuality from the vantage point of adulthood, as happens in psychoanalysis, can provide a distorted view of what really took place—especially when the analyst is motivated to find support for his or her theory (Friedman & Downey, 2001).

Truth or Fiction Revisited: Therefore, the idea that “castration anxiety” in gay males is aroused by knowledge of male–female intercourse has not been scientifically demonstrated. Moreover, gender nonconformity and sex preferences in gays all occur earlier than Freudian theory would suggest.

Learning Theories Learning theorists agree with Freud that early experiences play an important role in the development of sexual orientation. But they focus on the role of reinforcement of early patterns of sexual behavior, rather than...
on the resolution of unconscious conflicts. People generally repeat pleasurable activities and discontinue painful ones. Thus, people may learn to engage in sexual activity with people of their own sex if childhood sexual experimentation with them is connected with sexual pleasure.

If sexual motivation is high, as it tends to be during adolescence, and the only outlets are with others of one’s own sex, adolescents may experiment sexually with them. If these encounters are pleasurable, and heterosexual experiences are unpleasant, a firmer gay male or lesbian sexual orientation may develop (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Conversely, pain, anxiety, or social disapproval may be connected with early contacts with people of one’s own sex. In such cases, the child may learn to inhibit feelings of attraction to people of one’s own sex and develop a firmer heterosexual orientation.

Although learning may play a role in the development of a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation, learning theorists have not identified specific learning experiences that would lead to these orientations. Moreover, most adolescent encounters with people of the same sex, even if pleasurable, do not lead to an adult gay male or lesbian sexual orientation. Many heterosexual people have had adolescent encounters with members of their own sex without swaying their adult orientations. This is true even of people whose early sexual interactions with the other sex were fumbling and frustrating. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of gay males and lesbians were aware of sexual interest in people of their own sex before they had sexual encounters with them, pleasurable or otherwise (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

**Gender Nonconformity**

*Gender nonconformity* means not behaving in a way that is consistent with the gender-role stereotype associated with one’s anatomic sex in a given culture. On average, gay males tend to be somewhat feminine and lesbians to be somewhat masculine, but there is a good deal of variation within each group (Dawood et al., 2009; Rieger et al., 2008). Gender nonconformity begins in childhood. Gay males and lesbians are more likely than heterosexuals to report childhood behavior stereotypical of the other sex (Green, 2008; Lippa, 2008). Many gay males and lesbians recall acting and feeling “different” from their childhood peers. Many gay males from a variety of groups, such as college students, prisoners, psychiatric patients, and activists, report that they avoided participating in competitive sports as children, were more fearful of physical injury, and were more likely to avoid getting into fights, than heterosexual males (Dawood et al., 2009; Green, 2008). Some gay males recall feeling different as early as the age 3 or 4, a feeling that was related to behavior that is stereotypical of the other sex.

Gay males are also more likely to recall feeling more sensitive than their heterosexual peers during childhood (Green, 2008; Lippa, 2008). They cried more easily. Their feelings were more readily hurt. They had more artistic interests. They had fewer male buddies and more female playmates (Bos et al., 2008). Gay males were more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have preferred “girls’ toys.” They preferred playing with girls to playing with trucks or guns, or engaging in rough-and-tumble play (Dawood et al., 2009). Their preferences often led to their being called “sissies.” Gay men also recall more cross-dressing during childhood. They preferred the company of older women to older men and engaged in childhood sex play with other boys rather than with girls.
GENDER NONCONFORMITY AND THE BUTCH–FEMME DIMENSION
There is also evidence of masculine-typed behavior among lesbians as children (Lippa, 2008). Lesbians as a group were more likely than heterosexual women to perceive themselves as having been “tomboys.” They were more likely to prefer rough-and-tumble games to playing with dolls, and they enjoyed wearing boys’ clothing rather than “cutesy” dresses.

A study by Devendra Singh and colleagues (1999) relates gender nonconformity in lesbians to the butch–femme dimension and biological factors. The investigators compared self-identified butch and femme lesbians on various personality, behavioral, and biological measures. They found that butch lesbians were significantly more likely than femme lesbians to recall gender-atypical behavioral preferences in childhood. Butch lesbians also had higher waist-to-hip ratios and higher testosterone levels in their saliva, both of which are more typical of males. The Singh group suggests that their findings support the validity of the butch–femme distinction and that the distinction may be caused by differences in exposure to prenatal androgens (male sex hormones).

CHILDHOOD EFFEMINACY AND A GAY MALE SEXUAL ORIENTATION
How might extreme childhood effeminacy lead to a gay male sexual orientation? Those who support an environmental view speculate that the social detachment of these boys from male peers and role models (especially fathers) creates strong, unfulfilled cravings for male affection. This craving then leads them to seek males as partners in sex and love relationships in adolescence and adulthood (Green, 2008).

Of course, there is another possibility (Green, 2008; Dawood et al., 2009): Gender nonconformity appears to be somewhat inheritable. Moreover, if a tendency toward homosexuality is inherited, gender nonconformity could also be an expression of that tendency.

All in all, the origins of a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation remain mysterious and complex. In reviewing theories and research, we are left with the impression that sexual orientation appears to spring from multiple origins, including biological and psychosocial factors. Genetic and biochemical factors (such as hormone levels) may affect the prenatal organization of the brain. These factors may predispose people to a certain sexual orientation. But it may be that early socialization experiences also play a role. The precise influences and interactions of these factors have so far eluded researchers.

Real Students, Real Questions

Q Can parents know if their child will be homosexual by a certain age? Are there attributes they should look for?

A Children who become gay or lesbian often but not always show gender nonconformity. That is, the boy may not be very interested in sports. The girl may not want to play with dolls. A word to the wise parent: Pushing sports and dolls on a child will not affect his or her sexual orientation. It might make him or her miserable if he or she wants something else.

Butch A lesbian who assumes a traditional masculine gender role.

Femme A lesbian who assumes a traditional feminine gender role.
Sexual Orientation in Contemporary Society

The General Social Survey (National Science Foundation, 2007) found that the percentage of people saying intercourse between people of the same sex is “always wrong” had dropped by 21 points over the 10 years between studies, from 77% to 56%. Although opposition remains high, the director of the study said the decline “is as large a social change as any ever.” Much survey data suggest that greater acceptance has come from more people knowing someone who is gay.

“It’s the same as racial equality,” the director said. “The point is to think of them as individuals, who are also co-workers, neighbors, someone who supports the local charity drive—to see people as people, except in this one little way they’re different” (National Science Foundation, 2007).

Gay “civil unions” have been with us for several years now, and as this book goes to press, many states allow gay marriage (see Figure 10.5). Table 10.3 on page 300 reports the results of a nationally representative 2009 New York Times/CBS News poll and compares them to those of polls since 2004. In 2004, only a little over one-fifth of respondents (22%) supported gay marriage; 33% supported civil unions, but two people in five (40%) wanted no legal recognition of gay relationships. Five years later, in 2009, the percentage of people supporting gay marriage almost doubled to 42%; a smaller percentage (25%) supported civil unions because of the increased number in favor of permitting marriage. And only 28%, down from 40% in 2004, favored no legal recognition of gay marriage.

Truth or Fiction Revisited: The majority of Americans apparently continue to oppose gay marriage, according to the poll; however, when we combine support for gay marriage with support for gay civil unions, we find a solid majority of two people in three (67%) supporting legal recognition of gay relationships.

Real Students, Real Questions

Q I don’t understand why people can be supportive of gays/lesbians, but not supportive of marriage for gays/lesbians. Can you explain?

A Marriage seems to be the trip-word. Many people who are otherwise tolerant see marriage as something defined by scripture to apply only to a man and a woman. We’ll toss a question back at you: Can one be truly tolerant of gays and lesbians if one restricts marriage to males and females? We imagine that the answer is a case-by-case thing, but we do know of otherwise tolerant people who would grant gays and lesbians all the civil benefits of marriage but want to reserve marriage per se as a religious contract for males and females. One comedian came out in favor of gay marriage: “Why,” he asked, “shouldn’t gay people have the right to be as miserable as the rest of us?”
Gay Marriage in the United States

- **California:** In May of 2008, California’s Supreme Court ruled that banning same-sex marriage was discriminatory. However, in November of 2009, voters passed Proposition 8, effectively striking down the court ruling. Marriage in California is now defined as between one man and one woman. On May 26, 2009, the California Supreme Court upheld Proposition 8 but nevertheless ordered that the marriages of the nearly 18,000 couples who were married prior to the ban be recognized.

- **Connecticut:** On October 10, 2008, the Connecticut Supreme Court overturned the state’s ban on same-sex marriage in a 4 to 3 decision, making it the second state to allow legal gay marriage.

- **Iowa:** On April 3, 2009, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of gay marriage, making Iowa the third state to allow gay marriages.

- **New Hampshire:** On June 3, 2009, New Hampshire became the sixth U.S. state to legalize same-sex marriage. The legislation includes a provision that churches, their employees, and religious groups may decline to officiate at same-sex marriages.

- **New York:** On May 13, 2009, the New York State Assembly passed a bill in favor of gay marriage with a vote of 82 to 52. The bill must also pass the Senate, which as of this writing is delaying a vote on the measure.

- **Massachusetts:** On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to legalize same-sex marriage.

- **Maine:** On May 5, 2009, the Maine House of Representatives and the Senate voted to legalize gay marriage. But in a November 2009 referendum, the legislation was overturned.

- **Vermont:** On April 7, 2009, the state legislature overrode Governor Jim Douglas’s veto of a bill allowing same-sex couples to marry, making Vermont the first state to allow gay marriage through legislative action. With House and Senate votes of 100 to 49 and 25 to 5, Vermont became the fourth state to allow gay marriage.

Gay Marriage around the World

- **Belgium:** On January 30, 2003, Belgium became the second nation in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.

- **Canada:** On July 20, 2005, Canada became the fourth country to legalize same-sex marriage.

- **The Netherlands:** On April 1, 2001, The Netherlands became the first nation to legalize same-sex marriage.

- **Norway:** On January 1, 2009, gay marriage became legal in Norway.

- **South Africa:** On November 30, 2006, South Africa became the fifth country, and the first in Africa, to legalize same-sex marriage.

- **Spain:** On July 3, 2005, Spain legalized same-sex marriage, becoming the third nation to do so.

- **Sweden:** On April 1, 2009, a parliamentary vote of 261 to 22 eliminated the legal distinction between gay/lesbian and straight couples by making marriage laws gender neutral. Sweden became the seventh country to legalize gay marriage.

There is further evidence of a trend toward support of gay marriage. Whereas only 31% of the respondents older than age 40 said they supported gay marriage, 57% of those younger than 40 said they favored it—a 26 percentage-point difference (Nagourney, 2009). Thirty-five percent of the respondents older than age 40 disapproved of any legal recognition of same-sex relationships, whether marriage or civil
unions. However, among those younger than 40, only about one in five (19%) disapproved of any legal recognition for same-sex couples. Although African Americans have generally been considered to be more conservative on social issues such as gay marriage, the 2009 poll found rather negligible racial differences: 68% of African Americans supported either gay marriage or civil unions, as compared with 66% of European Americans (see Table 10.3).

**Truth or Fiction Revisited:** Most Americans assume that gay people choose to be gay, despite the accumulation of research evidence that inborn biological factors play a strong role in the development of sexual orientation. For example, a nationwide poll conducted in 1977 found that only 13% of Americans believed that gay people were “born with” their sexual orientation, compared to 56% who favored environmental causes. An Associated Press poll, conducted in 2000, found that 30% of Americans believe that gay people are born that way, as compared to 46% who say they “choose” to be gay. More people are coming to look on sexual orientation as something that one is born with. And so, fewer people are likely to believe that young people can be “seduced” into one sexual orientation or another.

**Table 10.3**


<table>
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*Don’t Know or No Answer

N = 973.


Mexican American Attitudes toward Gay Males and Lesbians

A survey by Herek and Gonzalez-Rivera (2006) examined attitudes toward gay males and lesbians among a sample of California residents of Mexican origin. It was found that men’s attitudes toward homosexual men were significantly more negative than women’s. Women expressed relatively more negative attitudes toward lesbians. When compared with respondents reporting positive attitudes, respondents reporting negative attitudes

- endorsed more traditional gender attitudes
- tended to be older and less educated
- had more children
- were more likely to belong to a fundamentalist religious denomination and to attend religious services religiously
- were more conservative politically
- were less likely to have personal contact with gay people

Sexual Orientation and the Law

During the past generation, gay people have organized effective political groups to fight discrimination and to overturn the sodomy laws that have traditionally targeted them. Despite their success, sodomy laws are still on the books in many states. Sodomy laws prohibit “unnatural” sexual acts, even between consenting adults. Certain sexual acts that many gay people (and heterosexual people) practice, such as anal intercourse and oral–genital contact, fall under the legal definition of sodomy in many states. Although sodomy laws are usually written to apply equally to all adults, the vast majority of prosecutions have been directed against gay people.

A 1986 Supreme Court decision (Hardwick v. Bowers) let stand a Georgia sodomy law that makes oral–genital or anal–genital sexual contact crimes punishable by up to 20 years in prison, even when engaged in by consenting adults. The decision was a blow to gay rights organizations, which had looked to the Supreme Court to overturn state sodomy laws.

However, in 2003, by a vote of 6 to 3, the Supreme Court reversed that decision by striking down a Texas law against “deviant sexual intercourse with another individual of the same sex.” The Texas law “demeans the lives of homosexual persons,” wrote Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, explaining the majority vote. Over the years, the Constitution’s right to privacy has been in conflict with laws against same-sex sexual behavior. Gay people “are entitled to respect for their private lives,” Kennedy wrote further. In an interview, he added that “the state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.”

Gay Activism

Like many other young people in the 1960s, Frank Rich was involved in the civil rights movement. He was shocked by the violent confrontation between protesters and police in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 and in Chicago in 1968. But he had never heard about the days of rioting that rocked Greenwich Village when the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar, in the wee hours of the morning. Looking back, Rich (2009) realizes that in the 1960s he did not know one gay friend, student, or teacher
What Is the Sexual Orientation of These Soldiers? During Bill Clinton’s presidency, a “Don’t Ask–Don’t Tell” policy was adopted toward gay people in the military. If they divulge their sexual orientation, they may be removed from the military, but superiors are not allowed to ask them about it.

After the Stonewall incident, all of that changed. Gay activism is now front and center in the nation’s civil rights movement. Nowhere in the United States have gay people been more politically effective than in San Francisco. They are well represented on the city police force and in other public agencies. The coming out of many gay people, and their flocking to more tolerant urban centers, has rendered them formidable political forces in these locales and throughout the nation.

During the 1980s and 1990s, HIV/AIDS was a key topic for gays. Gay rights organizations worked to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic on several fronts:

- To increase funding for HIV/AIDS research and treatment
- To educate the gay and wider communities of the dangers of high-risk sexual behavior
- To encourage gay men and others to adopt safer sex practices, including use of condoms
- To protect the civil rights of people with HIV/AIDS with respect to employment, housing, and medical and dental treatment
- To provide counseling and support services for people with HIV/AIDS

Gay activism has also focused on ending discrimination against gays on all fronts. Notable among these are obtaining partner job benefits (health plan, retirement, and so on), serving openly in the military, and having governments permit gays to get married. Three of the largest issues gays face today are:

- Gay marriage
- Replacement of the Don’t Ask–Don’t Tell order in the military— instituted by President Bill Clinton in 1993 and considered a “cop-out” by most gays—with the right to serve openly
Repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), also passed during the Clinton presidency, which defines marriage as taking place between a man and a woman.

As this book goes to press, Don’t Ask–Don’t Tell and the DOMA are in the hands of the Obama administration.

**Stereotypes and Sexual Behavior**

Among heterosexuals, sexual aggressiveness is linked to the masculine gender role. Sexual passivity is linked to the feminine role. Some heterosexual people assume (often erroneously) that in gay male and lesbian relationships, one partner consistently assumes the masculine role in sexual relations, and the other, the feminine.

Many gay couples vary the active and passive roles, however. Among gay male couples, for example, roles in anal intercourse (insertor versus insertee) and in fellatio are often reversed. Contrary to popular assumptions, sexual behavior between lesbians seldom reflects distinct butch–femme gender roles. Most lesbians report providing and receiving oral-genital stimulation, alternating roles or simultaneously. Many gay people claim that the labels of masculine and feminine only represent the “straight community’s” efforts to pigeonhole them in terms “straights” can understand.

**Adjustment of Gay Males and Lesbians**

**ARE HOMOSEXUALS MORE LIKELY THAN HETEROSEXUALS to suffer from mental disorders?** Michael King and his colleagues (2008) identified 13,706 research articles on the mental health of gay males, lesbians, and bisexuals. Of these, 476 were selected for analysis. The researchers ultimately compared the mental health of 214,344 heterosexuals and 11,971 nonheterosexuals. A sophisticated statistical averaging technique found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people were more than twice as likely as heterosexuals to attempt suicide. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people were 1.5 times as likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and dependence on alcohol and other substances.

Many observers believe that societal oppression might cause the greater incidence of these mental disorders we find among gay males, lesbians, and bisexuals. “Surely,” writes psychologist J. Michal Bailey (1999), “it must be difficult for young people to come to grips with their homosexuality in a world where homosexual people are often scorned, mocked, mourned, and feared.”

There are also connections between lifestyle and health—physical and psychological—among gay males and lesbians, and among heterosexual people. Gay men and lesbians occupy all socioeconomic and vocational levels and follow a variety of lifestyles. In their classic research, Bell and Weinberg (1978) found variations in adjustment in the gay community that seem to mirror the variations in the heterosexual community. Gay people who lived with partners in stable, intimate relationships—so-called close couples—were about as well adjusted as married heterosexual couples. Older gay people who lived alone and had few sexual contacts were more poorly adjusted. So, too, are many heterosexual people who have similar lifestyles. All in all, Bell and Weinberg found that differences in adjustment were more likely to reflect the lifestyle of the individual than his or her sexual orientation.

Most gay males and lesbians who share close relationships with their partners are satisfied with the overall quality of their relationships. Researchers find that
heterosexual and gay couples report similar levels of satisfaction with their relationships (Henderson et al., 2009; Kurdek, 2005). Moreover, gay males and lesbians in enduring relationships generally report high levels of love, attachment, closeness, caring, and intimacy.

As with heterosexual people, not all the relationships of gay people are satisfying. Among both groups, satisfaction is higher when both partners feel that the benefits they receive from the relationship outweigh the costs (Henderson et al., 2009). Like heterosexual people, gay men and lesbians are happier in relationships in which they share power and make joint decisions.

**Homophobia**

Jacob Robida, age 18, entered the Puzzles Lounge, a gay bar in New Bedford, Massachusetts, with a hatchet and a handgun beneath his clothing. He would soon be charged with three counts of assault with intent to murder, assault with a dangerous weapon, and hate crimes.

Robida ordered a shot of liquor. Then he asked the bartender whether the lounge was intended for gay or straight patrons. The bartender told Robida it was usually patronized by gays. Robida had another shot of liquor and then pulled out the hatchet and struck a patron in the head. He then struck a man who tried to help the first victim. Robida also pulled out his gun and shot the man who tried to assist the first hatchet victim. Before fleeing, he shot another patron.

Robida had also aimed the gun at the bartender, but it failed to fire. “I heard a click, and his eyes were just squinted,” the bartender told a reporter (Zezima, 2006).

Before it was all over, Robida would shoot a police officer to death at a traffic stop. He is also believed to have killed a woman in West Virginia. He was finally felled during a shootout with Arkansas police officers (Belluck, 2006).

Robida’s hatred of gay males was an extreme example of homophobia, but certainly not the only one. Clearly the greatest challenge to the adjustment of gay males and lesbians, homophobia takes many forms, including:

- Use of derogatory names (such as queer, faggot, and dyke)
- Telling disparaging “queer jokes”
- Barring gay people from housing, employment, or social opportunities
- Taunting (verbal abuse)
- Gay bashing (physical, sometimes lethal, abuse)

*Homophobia* derives from root words meaning “fear of homosexuals.” Although some psychologists link homophobia to fears of a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation within oneself, homophobic attitudes may also be embedded within a cluster of stereotypical gender-role attitudes toward family life (Rosky, 2009; Lewis & White, 2009). These attitudes support male dominance and the belief that it is natural and appropriate for women to sacrifice for their husbands and children. People who have a strong stake in maintaining stereotypical gender roles may feel more readily threatened by homosexuals, since gay people appear to confuse or reverse these roles. Men have more at stake in maintaining the tradition of male dominance, so perhaps it is not surprising that college men are more intolerant of gay males than college women (Rosky, 2009; Lewis & White, 2009).

Homophobic attitudes are more common among males who identify with a traditional male gender role, a conservative political orientation (Rosky, 2009; Lewis & White, 2009), those who hold a fundamentalist religious orientation (Davies,
Adjustment of Gay Males and Lesbians

...and those who identify with Nazi beliefs and regalia (Zezima, 2006). But those who actually engage in violence against gay males, and especially those who kill, tend to be criminal psychopaths (Parrot et al., 2006). That is, they are in frequent conflict with the law and do not feel guilt or shame when they inflict pain (Parrott et al., 2006).

Some homophobic men may have homoerotic impulses of which they are unaware. Denial of these impulses may be connected with their fear and disapproval of gay males. Henry Adams and his colleagues (1996) showed men sexually explicit videotapes of male–female, female–female, and male–male sexual activity and measured their sexual response by means of the penile plethysmograph. The plethysmograph measures the size of an erection. Subjects were also asked to report how sexually aroused they felt in response to the videos. The men were also evaluated for their attitudes toward gay males. Men who were not homophobic were sexually aroused, according to their penile circumference, only by videos of male–female and female–female sexual activity. The homophobic viewers were also aroused in terms of penile circumference by the video of male–male sexual activity. However, the homophobic men also reported that they did not feel aroused by the male–male sexual activity. Were they out of touch with their biological response, or was their biological response misleading?

Although strides toward social acceptance of gay people have been made since Kinsey’s day, the advent of HIV/AIDS has added fuel to the fires of homophobia (Herek et al., 2005). When HIV/AIDS first appeared, it primarily struck the gay male community. Some homophobes in the larger society believed that the epidemic was a God-sent plague intended to punish gay people for sinful behavior. Perhaps the epidemic serves as a pretext for some people to attack gay males, whom they blame for spreading the disease.

“Treatment” of Gay Male and Lesbian Sexual Orientations

Some gay males and lesbians express an interest in changing their orientations, for such reasons as religious beliefs or the desire to create a typical family life (Halderman, 2002; Rosik, 2003). But many helping professionals believe that gay males and
lesbians would not wish to change their sexual orientation if it were not for social pressure and prejudice. Green (2003) adds that most gay people who seek to change their sexual orientations are ambivalent. Haldeman (2002) notes that the very existence of “conversion therapy” contributes to the social devaluation of homosexuals and bisexuals. The controversy continues.

Nonetheless, a few therapists have reported changing the sexual orientations of some individuals. Among the best known of these, Masters and Johnson (1979) employed methods used to treat sexual dysfunctions (see Chapter 15) to “reverse” clients’ gay male or lesbian sexual orientations. For example, they involved gay males in a graded series of pleasurable activities with women, such as massage and genital stimulation. Masters and Johnson reported a failure rate of 20% for the gay men and 23% for the lesbians they treated in their therapy program. However, these patients do not represent the general gay population:

- Most of the patients were bisexuals. Only about one in five engaged exclusively in male–male or female–female sexual activities.
- More than half were married.
- All were highly motivated to switch their sexual orientations.

Also remember that sexual behavior is not the equivalent of sexual orientation (Bhugra, 2004). There is no evidence that Masters and Johnson changed their clients’ sexual orientation.

**Coming Out: Coming to Terms with Being Gay**

**BECAUSE OF THE BACKDROP OF SOCIAL CONDEMNATION** and discrimination, gay males and lesbians in our culture often struggle to come to terms with their sexual orientation (Hammack & Cohler, 2009). Homosexuals usually speak of the process of accepting their sexual orientation as “coming out” or as “coming out of the closet.” Coming out is a two-pronged process: coming out to oneself (recognizing one’s sexual orientation) and coming out to others (declaring one’s orientation to the world). Coming out can create a sense of pride in one’s sexual orientation and foster the ability to form emotionally and sexually satisfying relationships with gay male or lesbian partners (Grov et al., 2006).

**Coming Out to Oneself**

Many gay people have a difficult time coming to recognize, let alone accept, their sexual orientation:

Youths with emerging identities that are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, living in generally hostile climates, face particular dilemmas. They are well aware that in many secondary schools the words “fag” and “dyke” are terms of denigration and that anyone who is openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual is open to social exclusion and psychological and physical persecution. Some of their families too will express negative feelings about people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual; youths in such families may be victimized if they disclose that they are not heterosexual. (Bagley & D’Augelli, 2000)
According to Ritch Savin-Williams and Lisa Diamond (2000), the development of sexual identity in gay males and lesbians involves four steps or features:

- Attraction to members of the same sex
- Self-labeling as gay or lesbian
- Sexual contact with members of the same sex
- Disclosure of one’s sexual orientation to other people

The researchers by and large found a 10-year gap between initial attraction to members of one’s own sex, which tended to occur at about the age of 8 or 9, and disclosure of one’s orientation to other people, which usually occurred at about age 18. In keeping with sex differences noted in Chapter 4, females were more likely to focus on the emotional or romantic aspects of their budding feelings. Males were more likely to focus on the sexual aspects. Males—who are generally more open than females to sexual experimentation—were likely to become involved in sexual activity with other males before they labeled themselves as being gay. Females, on the other hand, were more likely to label themselves as lesbians before pursuing relationships with other females. Males also tend to form their sexual identity and come out about two years earlier than females (Grov et al., 2006).

Younger cohorts (people ages 18 to 24) in New York and Los Angeles also came out earlier than older cohorts (Grov et al., 2006). Factors such as the current greater acceptance of gay males and lesbians and also the more-common portrayal of gay males and lesbians in the media contribute to greater willingness to come out.

For some people, coming to recognize and accept a gay male or lesbian sexual orientation involves gradually stripping away layers of denial. For others, it may be a sudden awakening. Longstanding sexual interests in members of one’s own sex may rush into focus on a particular person, as happened with a graduate student named David:

In college [David’s] closest friend was gay. Although this friend had wanted to have sex with David and the attraction was mutual, David still could not associate this attraction with a sexuality that was not acceptable to him. In his first year of graduate school, when he was about 23, he fell in love and then suddenly and with a great sense of relief recognized and acknowledged to himself that he was homosexual. He then had sex for the first time and has subsequently been . . . open about his sexuality. (Isay, 1990, p. 295)

**Coming Out to Others**

There are different patterns of coming out to others. Coming out occasionally means an open declaration to the world. More often, a person may inform only one or a few select people. For example, the person might tell friends but not family members.

Many gay men and lesbians remain reluctant to declare their sexual orientation, even to friends and family. Disclosure is fraught with the risk of loss of jobs, friendships, and social standing (Bagley & D’Augelli, 2000; Rosario et al., 2009). On the other hand, if the organization at which the individual works is generally supportive of gays, coming out can be related to greater job satisfaction and less anxiety (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Also, “butch” lesbians are more comfortable with coming out to others than “femme” lesbians (Rosario et al., 2009).
Gay men and lesbians often anticipate negative reactions from informing family members, including denial, anger, and rejection (Bagley & D’Augelli, 2000). Family members and loved ones may refuse to hear or be unwilling to accept reality, as noted in Invisible Lives, which chronicles the lives of a sample of lesbians in the United States:

Parents, children, neighbors, and friends of lesbians deny, or compartmentalize, or struggle with their knowledge in the same way the women themselves do. “My parents know I’ve lived with my partner for six years. She goes home with me. We sleep in the same bed there. The word lesbian has never been mentioned.” “I told my mother and she said, ‘Well, now that’s over with. We don’t need to mention it again.’ She never has, and that was ten years ago. I don’t know if she ever told my father.” (Barrett, 1990, p. 52)

Some families are more accepting. They may have had suspicions and prepared themselves for such news (Aveline, 2006). Other families are initially rejecting but eventually come to a grudging acceptance that a family member is gay.

Christian Grov and his colleagues (2006) found no racial differences in the ages at which European Americans and African Americans came out to themselves and others. However, African Americans were less likely than European Americans to come out to their parents, which is consistent with findings that African American families tend to have more conservative views than European American families.

**Gay Lifestyles**

There is a tendency to treat gay people as if they were all the same. According to Bell and Weinberg (1978), gay people do not adopt a single, stereotypical lifestyle. Variations in sexual expression exist within and across sexual orientations.

Gay men and lesbians in larger U.S. urban centers can usually look to gay communal structures to provide services and support. These include gay rights organizations and gay-oriented newspapers, magazines, bookstores, housing cooperatives, medical services, and other support services. The gay community provides a sense of acceptance and belonging that gay people usually do not find in society at large.

Gay rights organizations fight for rights for gay people to participate fully in society—to teach in public schools, to adopt children, to live together in sanctioned relationships, and to serve openly and proudly in the military. Cafés and social clubs provide places where gay men and lesbians can socialize and be open about their sexual orientations.

Not all gay people feel a part of the gay community or participate in gay rights organizations, however. For many, their sexual orientation is a part of their identity, but not a dominant theme that governs their social and political activities.

**Lifestyle Differences between Gay Males and Lesbians**

Researchers have consistently found that gay males are more likely than lesbians to engage in casual sex with many partners. Lesbians more often confine their sex-
Gay Lifestyles

A Lesbian Couple and Their Child. Many gay couples, such as this one, have children. Sometimes the children derive from earlier marriages. Sometimes they are adopted. Some lesbians are artificially inseminated or else engage in sexual intercourse for the purpose of becoming pregnant. And then again . . . in 2004, as reported in the journal Nature (vol. 428, pp. 860–864), Japanese researcher Tomohiro Kono and his colleagues actually created mice from the genetic material of two mothers. The name of the article is a bit bland, considering the subject matter: “Birth of parthenogenetic mice that can develop to adulthood.” The article leads to speculations regarding whether a day may come when two dads or two moms can actually have children who share their genetic material.

CRITICAL THINKING

How do you account for the sex differences in the lifestyle preferences of gay males and lesbians?

Real Students, Real Questions

Q Are there studies that show the effects of being raised by homosexual parents?

A Loads of them, and they do not show that having one or two gay parents affects a child’s sexual orientation. Children of gay parents do develop more egalitarian attitudes; that is, they are less fixated on the tunnel vision of traditional gender-role stereotypes.
Many Couples Must Negotiate Terms of “Brokeback” Marriages

One hour into Brokeback Mountain, Amy Jo Remmele began to cry, and not just for the woman on-screen, standing in a doorway in Riverton, Wyo., watching her husband embrace a man. “When I saw that look in her eyes, I thought, ‘Oh, yeah.’ Even though I never saw my husband with another man, I knew exactly how that woman would have felt,” said Mrs. Remmele, a respiratory therapist in rural Minnesota.

Mrs. Remmele had discovered her husband’s profile on the Web site gay.com. The couple stayed up all that night weeping and talking. Soon afterward, 10 days before she gave birth to her second child, Mrs. Remmele’s husband went off to spend a couple of nights with his new boyfriend. “I tried to talk him out of it, and he left anyway,” Mrs. Remmele said. “I was devastated.” Three months later the couple divorced.

Mrs. Remmele—now married to a farmer who raises cattle, corn and soybeans—is one of an estimated 1.7 million to 3.4 million American women who once were or are now married to men who have sex with men. The estimate derives from “The Social Organization of Sexuality,” a 1990 study that found that 3.9 percent of American men who had ever been married had had sex with men in the previous five years. The lead author, Edward O. Laumann, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, estimated that 2 to 4 percent of ever-married American women had knowingly or un-knowingly been in what are now called mixed-orientation marriages.

Such marriages are not just artifacts of the closeted 1950s. In the 16th century, Queen Anne of Denmark had eight children with King James I of England, known not only for the King James Bible, but also for his devotion to male favorites, one of whom he called “my sweet child and wife.”

Other women include Constance Wilde, Phyllis Gates, Linda Porter, Renata Blauel and Dina Matos McGreevey, wed respectively to Oscar Wilde, Rock Hudson, Cole Porter, Elton John and James E. McGreevey, the former governor of New Jersey. Although precise numbers are impossible to come by, 10,000 to 20,000 such wives have contacted online support groups, and increasing numbers of them are women in their 20’s or 30’s.

On the whole these are not marriages of convenience or cynical efforts to create cover. Gay and bisexual men continue to marry for complex reasons, many impelled not only by discrimination, but also by wishful thinking, the layered ambiguities of sexual love and authentic affection. “These men genuinely love their wives,” said Joe Kort, a clinical social worker in Royal Oak, Mich., who has counseled hundreds of gay married men, including a minority who stay in their marriages. Many, he said, considered themselves heterosexual men with homosexual urges that they hoped to confine to private fantasy life. “They fall in love with their wives, they have children, they’re on a chemical, romantic high, and then after about seven years, the high falls away and their gay identity starts emerging,” Mr. Kort said. “They don’t mean any harm.”

Helen Fisher, a research anthropologist at Rutgers University, said in an interview that human partnerships are shaped by three independent neurochemical brain-body systems, responsible respectively for sexual attraction, romantic yearning and long-term attachment. “The three systems are very fickle. They can act together, or they can act separately,” Dr. Fisher said. This, she said, helps explain why people can be wildly sexually attracted to those they have no romantic interest in, and romantically drawn to—or permanently attached to—people who hold no sexual interest.

“One the system is triggered, it’s so chemically powerful that you can easily overlook everything about that person that doesn’t work for you,” Dr. Fisher said. “Even straight people have fallen in love with people they could never make a life with,” she said.

This is cold comfort to women who lose not only the men they love, but also their faith in how to parse reality. “A lot of women feel that they were just used as covers, but I know in my heart of hearts he loved me,” Mrs. Remmele said. “You can’t fake the way he used to look at me. I had no suspicions whatsoever. He’s very masculine looking. It’s not like he had Barbra Streisand or show tunes on.”

In the months after the discovery, Mrs. Remmele said, her husband left her alone with the baby on many evenings as he explored desires he had never dared to acknowledge. “So many of the gay spouses, they’ve denied themselves for so long, and it’s like they’re going through teenage-hood,” Mrs. Remmele said. “I don’t know if they really realize how much they’re hurting their spouse.”

At first, Mrs. Remmele told nobody. “We live in a small rural community, and people just aren’t openly gay here,” she said. “I didn’t want people making fun of him.”
About two-thirds of the women who contact the International Straight Spouse Network in El Cerrito, Calif., eventually divorce, said Amity Pierce Buxton, 77, a retired school administrator who founded the group. Despite their shock and their anger, many women, especially those criticized by gay husbands for being too sexually demanding, are relieved to understand what was wrong. The remaining third of those she has studied try to preserve their marriages, Dr. Buxton said. Half of those stay married for three years or more. More than 600 such couples belong to online support groups.

In a 2001 study, published in *The Journal of Bisexuality*, of 137 still-married gay and bisexual men and their wives, Dr. Buxton found that most lived in suburbs and medium-size cities and had been married for 11 to 30 years. Only tiny percentages lived in rural areas, where family privacy may be harder to maintain. The survival of even a small minority of these marriages calls into question the conceptual shoe boxes into which human partnerships, affection, commitment and sexuality are often jammed. Describing their permutations and combinations turns out to be much more complicated than checking a box on a form labeled “gay,” “bisexual” or “straight.”

One woman in her 50’s, who asked to be identified only as Trillian, out of concern for her husband’s privacy, said that she and her husband formally divorced after she discovered his secret sexual life seven years ago, but they quickly decided to stay together. She has a satisfying monogamous sexual relationship with him, while he also has sex with men. “He tried to go back in the closet, but the more research I did on the subject, the more I realized this is an integral part of the person,” she said. “You can’t just turn it off like a light switch. My husband is the man of my dreams, and I could not face the rest of my life with the man of my dreams being miserable and guilt ridden over being gay.”

Paulette Cormack, a teacher who lives in Napa, Calif., has been married to her husband, Jerry, a retired city planner, for 36 years. For 34 years, Mrs. Cormack said in an interview, she has known that although she and her husband are sexually active together, his erotic desires otherwise focus almost exclusively on men. “It’s not easy, but I truly do love him,” Mrs. Cormack said. Mr. Cormack is now involved with another married gay man, and Mrs. Cormack has had extramarital relationships. Neither has explicitly discussed this with their son, who is 25.

They remain intensely committed to each other. Last year Mr. Cormack nursed Mrs. Cormack through four months of treatments for cancer of the fallopian tubes. She eventually made a full recovery. “What is intimacy?” pondered Mr. Cormack, as the couple sat in a coffeehouse in Berkeley, Calif., after watching *Brokeback Mountain* with others in similar situations. He added: “I am totally committed on all levels to Paulette. I felt so intimate with her when I was caring for her during her cancer treatments—to me, that’s a stronger expression of love than whether I’m having anonymous sex with a man.”

Sexual Orientation

The 3 R’s: Reflect, Recite, and Review

Your text uses the PQ4R method. Congratulations on completing the first R—reading the chapter. The remaining 3 R’s—reflect, recite, and review—will help you understand and recall the material in the chapter, as well as test your mastery.

Reflect

- Do you try to identify people around you who are gay? Why or why not?
- How many people in your life are gay males or lesbians? Do you feel comfortable in their company? Explain.
- Have you wondered about your own sexual orientation? Has this chapter clarified any of your thinking about the issue?
- **CRITICAL THINKING:** What are the attitudes of most people from your background toward gay males and lesbians? Do you share these attitudes? Explain.
- Do you know anyone who “came out”? Was it a surprise? How did people react? Did you learn anything about people from observing the process?
- **CRITICAL THINKING:** What did you learn about gay males and lesbians from this chapter? What misinformation was corrected? What was completely new to you? Have your ideas about the origins of sexual orientation changed? How?

Recite

1. **What kinds of sexual orientation are there?**
   - Heterosexuals are attracted to members of the other sex. Homosexuals are attracted to members of the same sex. Bisexuals are attracted to both males and females. Most homosexuals are content with their anatomic sex. Researchers find that men tend to be bipolar in their erotic interests, but for women, heterosexuality and homosexuality may be independent dimensions. The best evidence we have suggests that about 3% of American males are exclusively gay, and about 2% of American women are exclusively lesbian.

2. **How has homosexuality been viewed historically and scientifically?**
   - The Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions frown on homosexuality and other forms of nonprocreative sex. Ancient Greek men often had sexual relationships with adolescent males.
     
     Research with MZ and DZ twins suggests a role for genetic factors in the development of sexual orientation. Prenatal sex hormones are also believed to play a role; female embryos exposed to androgens tend to develop more masculine behavior patterns. Early experience with parents and early sexual experience do not appear to sway sexual orientation. Many homosexuals showed gender nonconformity in childhood.

3. **What are contemporary American attitudes toward homosexuals?**
   - Most Americans are growing more tolerant of homosexuals. A majority would now support either gay marriage or civil unions. Most would grant gay people equal rights to jobs and housing. Men are more likely than women to be homophobic. Sodomy laws have been enforced against gay males more often than against male–female couples.

4. **What do we know about the adjustment of homosexuals?**
   - Homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to encounter anxiety and depression and to have suicidal thoughts, probably because of social prejudice. Most professionals agree that homosexuals who seek to change their sexual orientation are influenced by social prejudice.

5. **What is “coming out”?**
   - Coming out to oneself is a gradual process in which the individual eventually comes to accept his or her homosexual orientation. Coming out to others is for many an anxiety-evoking process characterized by fear of social disapproval, loss of a job, and the like.
6. **What kinds of lifestyles are adopted by gay people?**

- Gay people adopt a variety of lifestyles. Lesbians tend to form deep romantic attachments and committed relationships; gay males are relatively more likely to seek multiple partners. “Close couples” of either sex form committed, exclusive relationships.

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### Review

1. In ancient _____, men often had sexual relationships with adolescent males.
   - (a) Egypt
   - (b) Greece
   - (c) Rome
   - (d) Macedonia

2. _____ are most likely to share a homosexual orientation.
   - (a) Monozygotic twins
   - (b) Dizygotic twins
   - (c) Parents and their biological children
   - (d) Adoptive parents and their adopted children

3. Psychoanalytic theory ties male homosexuality to faulty resolution of the _____ complex.
   - (a) inferiority
   - (b) Electra
   - (c) whore–Madonna
   - (d) Oedipus

4. The hypothalamus of gay males responds similarly to that of _____ when gay males are presented with the odor of a testosterone derivative.
   - (a) heterosexual men
   - (b) heterosexual women
   - (c) lesbians
   - (d) bisexuals

5. Homosexuals differ from transsexuals in that homosexuals
   - (a) are satisfied with their anatomic sex.
   - (b) are dissatisfied with their anatomic sex.
   - (c) are confused about their gender identity.
   - (d) seek therapy to change their sexual orientation.

6. Which of the following is true about the lifestyles of gay males and lesbians?
   - (a) Gay males are more likely to want children.
   - (b) Gay males are more likely to form deep, romantic attachments.
   - (c) Only lesbians show gender nonconformity in childhood.
   - (d) Gay males are more likely to have multiple sex partners.

7. According to Savin-Williams and Diamond, the first step in the development of sexual identity in homosexuals is
   - (a) sex with members of the same sex.
   - (b) attraction to members of the same sex.
   - (c) acceptance of one’s sexual orientation.
   - (d) self-labeling as gay or lesbian.

8. _____ tried to develop methods to “reverse” a homosexual orientation.
   - (a) Masters and Johnson
   - (b) Laumann
   - (c) Freud
   - (d) Kinsey

9. Bell and Weinberg found that the adjustment of gay people was related to their
   - (a) medical coverage.
   - (b) lifestyles.
   - (c) income.
   - (d) relationships with their parents.

10. The behavior of adolescent Sambian males provides evidence that
    - (a) some cultures are superior to others.
    - (b) sexual orientation is genetic.
    - (c) homosexuality is normal.
    - (d) culture influences sexual practices.