

DHBC Summer Core Class: on Homosexuality
What does Scientific Research Say About Homosexuality?
Delivered by Roger Ong at DHBC on September 20th, 2009

Introduction

1. *“What Christians believe about their Bible is fine for them. I’m not a Christian, so why should I care? It’s not their fault anyway; they’re born this way, and there are so many of them. We should just leave them alone.”*
2. Four questions to think about in formulating a response:
 - a. How prevalent is homosexuality?
 - b. What causes homosexuality?
 - c. Can homosexuality be changed?
 - d. Why should one be concerned?

How prevalent is homosexuality?

1. Often-cited estimate – 10% of the adult population is homosexual

“To accept the widely-quoted estimate that 10% of the American population is gay is to conclude that on every college campus, there may be many faculty, students, and staff who might benefit from a range of health services sensitively tailored to the special needs of gay men and women.”¹

“Given that lesbians and gay men comprise 10 – 15 percent of the general population, today’s psychotherapist cannot afford to be ignorant of the mental needs specific to these groups.”²

“If the best scientific data ... seems to put the figure of gay and lesbian people in the world at about 10% of the population ... then you and I need to realise that 10% is such a larger percentage that it could hardly be accidental.”³

“Research from several sectors indicates that at least 10 percent of the American population or approximately 22 million persons are predominantly gay or lesbian.”⁴

2. Kinsey studies – 1948

Interviewed people about their sexual behaviour
Never reported that 10% of the population is homosexual

“Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.

¹ Carolyn Dillon, “Preparing College Health Professionals to Deliver Gay-Affirmative Services,” *Journal of American College Health* 35 (1986): 36.

² Kris S. Morgan and Rebecca M. Nerison, “Homosexuality and Psychopolitics: An Historical Overview,” *Psychotherapy* 30 (1993): 133.

³ Debate between the Rev. John Spong and the Rt Rev. John Howe at Virginia Protestant Episcopal Seminary, February 1992.

⁴ The 203rd General Assembly Response to the Report of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality, *Presbyterians and Human Sexuality* (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church USA, 1991), 49.

While emphasizing the continuity of the gradations between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual histories, it has seemed desirable to develop some sort of classification which could be based on the relative amounts of heterosexual and homosexual experience or response in each history... An individual may be assigned a position on this scale, for each period in his life... A seven-point scale comes nearer to showing the many gradations that actually exist".⁵

Kinsey Rating
0 – exclusively heterosexual
1 – almost entirely heterosexual
2 – more heterosexual than homosexual
3 – equally heterosexual and homosexual
4 – more homosexual than heterosexual
5 – almost entirely homosexual
6 – exclusively homosexual
X – asexual, non-sexual

Some findings⁶:

- 4% of white males were exclusively homosexual throughout their lives after adolescence
- 10% of white males were “more or less” exclusively homosexual during at least a three-year period between the ages of 16 and 55
- 37% of males experience at least some homosexual behaviour to the point of orgasm between adolescence and adulthood
- 50% of males have neither attraction to nor the experience of homosexual behaviour

Female homosexuality appeared to occur at half the rate of male homosexuality⁷

Criticism of Kinsey studies

- Sample bias: more college students, more Protestants; but in particular oversampled prison inmates and gay-affirming organizations

3. Other recent studies

Who counts as a homosexual?

- by identifying as sexual orientation
- by experiencing same-sex attraction
- by engaging same-sex behaviour

⁵ Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948), 639, 656.
⁶ *Ibid.*, 650-651.

⁷ Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin and Paul H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953).

Prevalence based on self-identification of sexual orientation and attraction

- Edward Laumann⁸
 - National survey of 5,000 respondents
 - 2.0% of men and 0.9% of women identify themselves as homosexual
 - an additional 0.8% of men and 0.5% of women identify themselves as bisexual
 - 6.2% of men and 4.4% of women reported feeling attracted to members of the same sex (independent of whether they experienced heterosexual attraction)
- Joseph Harry⁹
 - 2.4% of men identify themselves as homosexual

Prevalence based on behaviour

Study	Exclusive Same-Gender Sex in the Last _ Years	Occurrence of Same-Gender Sex in the Last Year	Occurrence in the Last _ Years	Occurrence Since Adulthood (Age _)	Occurrence Since Puberty (or Lifetime)
Billy et al. (1993) Males only	1.1% in last 10 years		2.3% in last 10 years		
Fay et al. (1989) Males only		1.6%-2.0%		6.7% since age 19 (3.3% occasionally or fairly often)	20.3%
Laumann et al. (1994) Males		2.7%	4.1% in last 5 years	4.9% since age 18	9.1%
Laumann et al. (1994) Female		1.3%	2.2% in last 5 years	4.1% since age 18	4.3%
Roger & Turner (1991) Males only		Study 1: 1.9% Study 2: 1.2% Study 3: 2.4% Study 4: 2.0%		All since age 18 Study 1: 4.8% Study 2: 4.9% Study 3: n/a% Study 4: 6.7%	
Sell et al. (1995) Males	Last 5 years: US - 0.82% UK - 1.15% Fr. - 0.72%		Last 5 years: US - 5.42% UK - 3.51% Fr. - 9.94%		
Sell et al. (1995) Females	Last 5 years: US - 0.27% UK - 0.54% Fr. - 0.14%		Last 5 years: US - 2.96% UK - 1.54% Fr. - 3.02%		
Spira et al. (1993) Male only (France)		1.1%			4.1%
Stall et al. (1993) Males only	0.8% in last 5 years	1.4% in last 5 years			
Wellings et al. (1994) Males (Britain)		1.1%			6.1%
Wellings et al. (1994) Females (Britain)		0.4%			3.4%

Table 1: Frequency reports of same-gender sexual behaviour over various time periods from major national probability survey studies¹⁰

4. Conclusion

- a. The rate of homosexuality as a stable life orientation is certainly not 10%
- b. Certainly less than 3% of men are homosexually active in a given year
- c. Probably less than 5% of men engage in sustained homosexual practice over a significant period of adulthood
- d. Certainly less than 3% of men engage in sustained and exclusive commitment to homosexual practice
- e. Certainly less than 2% of women engage in sustained and exclusive commitment to homosexual practice

⁸ Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organisation of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chap 8.

⁹ Joseph Harry, "A Probability Sample of Gay Males," *Journal of Homosexuality* 19 (1990): 89-104.

¹⁰ Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic), 42-43.

5. Implications

“Even by American standards of interest-group celebrity, gay men have loomed large in the nation’s consciousness, surfacing at Roseanne’s side on prime time television, as superheroes in DC Comics and on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers fuss over showering habits in the barracks Here they were, about to sit down face to face with the President in the Oval Office, when a major national survey abruptly shrank their population to a tenth of what it was once touted to be.”¹¹

“Bill Clinton and Jesse Helms worry about 10% of the population. They don’t worry about 1%. This will give Bill Clinton a chance to welch on promises.”¹²

“... the 10% figure ... became part of our vocabulary. Democracy is all about proving you have the numbers. The more numbers you can prove you have, the more likely you’ll get your due.”¹³

What causes homosexuality?

1. The search for a biological cause:

- To justify that if *caused* rather than *chosen*, then homosexuals cannot be blamed and homosexuality cannot be immoral
- To caricature traditionalists and weaken their positions

“... gays and lesbians welcome [research on genetics] because it supports what most of them have long felt: that homosexuality is an innate characteristic, like skin colour, rather than a perverse life-style choice, as conservative moralists contend. And if true, then gays deserve legal protection similar to the laws that prohibit racial discrimination.”¹⁴

Some churches, in the face of psychological evidence that sexual orientation is not freely chosen, have begun to distinguish between homosexual orientation – which they agree, is not morally culpable – and homosexual activity, which is always morally wrong insofar as it is freely chosen. This compromise is intrinsically unstable Only a sadistic God would create hundreds of thousands of humans to be inherently homosexual and then deny them the right to sexual intimacy.”¹⁵

¹¹ Priscilla Painton, “The Shrinking Ten Percent”, *Time*, April 26, 1993 referring to a major national survey where 1% of 3,321 men surveyed consider themselves exclusively homosexual.

¹² Priscilla Painton quoting Larry Kramer, founder of the pro-gay group ACT UP in “The Shrinking Ten Percent”, p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Larry Thompson, “Search for a Gay Gene,” *Time*, June 12, 1995, p. 61.

¹⁵ John J. McNeil, “Homosexuality: Challenging the Church to Grow,” in *Homosexuality in the Church*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 53.

2. Nature versus Nurture

General agreement that childhood gender non-conformity predisposes boys to adult homosexuality.

*"... by late adolescence or adulthood, about three-quarters of boys who had a childhood history of Gender Identity Disorder report a homosexual or bisexual orientation."*¹⁶

3. Nature

Three key studies

- Simon LeVay (1991)
- Michael Bailey (1991)
- Dean Hamer (1993)

4. Simon LeVay (1991)

Homosexual orientation caused by intrauterine hormonal influences on foetal brain development

Homosexual neurobiologist who left Salk Institute to found Institute of Gay and Lesbian Education

Studied an area of the hypothalamus known as interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH3)¹⁷

Categories	Size (mm ³)
16 heterosexual males	0.12
19 homosexual males	0.051
6 females	0.056

Table 2: Size of INAH3

Concluded that because the INAH3 of heterosexual men is almost twice the size for homosexual men, homosexuality is caused by immutable brain differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Criticisms of LeVay studies:

- Small sample size of 35
- 16 men presumed heterosexuals because their sexual orientations not indicated in their charts; of these, 6 died of AIDS. If these were included, there would be no significant differences

¹⁶ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 536.

¹⁷ Simon LeVay, "A Difference in the Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men," *Science* 253 (1991): 1034-1037.

- Not all homosexuals had smaller INAH3; and not all heterosexuals had larger INAH3
- Results not replicated in another study
- Could be due to post-natal factors such as early childhood trauma, intravenous drug use, stress, diet, emotional health etc.

5. Michael Bailey (1991)

In 1991, together with Richard Pillard, Bailey did a study of 110 identical and non-identical twins containing at least one homosexual member each.

In 1993, they did a study of 71 identical and 37 non-identical female twins.

In 1993, F. Whitam and others did a study of 34 identical twin pairs and 23 non-identical twin pairs.

In 1992, King and McDonald did a study on 46 twin pairs in Britain.

	Concordance Rate			
	Bailey 1991	Bailey 1993	Whitam 1993	King 1992
Identical Twins	52%	48%	65%	25%
Non-Identical Twins	22%	16%	30%	12%

Table 3: Concordance rates for Twin studies

Major criticism of sample bias: volunteers were not randomly obtained by recruited through advertisements in gay publications.

To address sample bias, Bailey used Australian Twin Register, sent out surveys to 9,112 of roughly 25,000 twins in Australia and received 4,901 responses.

- Of 27 pairs of male identical twins of which at least one twin of each pair was non-heterosexual, only 3 pairs consisted of two non-heterosexual (11.0%)
- Of 22 pairs of female identical twins of which at least one twin of each pair was non-heterosexual, only 3 pairs consisted of two non-heterosexual (13.6%)
- Of 16 pairs of male non-identical twins of which at least one twin of each pair was non-heterosexual, none consisted of two non-heterosexual (0%)
- Of 18 pairs of female non-identical twins of which at least one twin of each pair was non-heterosexual, only 1 consisted of two non-heterosexual (5.6%)

"This suggests that concordances from previous studies were inflated because of concordance-dependent ascertainment bias. In those studies, twins deciding whether to participate in a study clearly related to homosexuality probably considered the sexual orientation of their co-twins before agreeing to participate."¹⁸

¹⁸ Michael Bailey, Michael Dunne and Nicholas Martin, "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation and Its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000), 533. Note that Bailey's concordance rates are higher than those reported here because in cases where both twins are homosexuals, he counts each twin separately as a match. His inflated concordance rates become 20% for male identical twins, 24% for female identical twins, 0% for male on-identical twins and 10.5% for female non-identical twins. His way of computing means that for a sample size of one pair of identical twins if both twins were

This means that genetic contribution to homosexual behaviour is less than 15%. In fact, this number should be reduced further to take into consideration the common prenatal intrauterine environment as well as the common nurturing environment as all twins cited above were raised in the same household.

Bailey's 1991 studies also reported concordance rate for non-identical twins at 22%, for non-twin brothers at 9.2% and non-twin adoptive brothers at 11%. This argues strongly for factors other than genes causing homosexuality.

Eckert did a study in 1986 with a small sample size of four pairs of female identical twins raised in separate households where at least one twin in each pair is self-identified as lesbian. In all four cases, none of the co-twin was also a lesbian.

6. Dean Hamer (1993)

Recruited 76 men out of an AIDS treatment programme all of whom reported a strong pattern of homosexual orientation among the maternal relatives, but not paternal relatives, and who had a homosexual brother. Among the 40 pairs of homosexual brothers used in the study, 33 pairs (83%) shared a particular genetic sequence in the region of the X chromosomes known as Xq28. This is significantly higher than the usual 50% expected.

Hamer's team concluded "*one form of male homosexuality is preferentially transmitted through the maternal side and is genetically linked to chromosomal region Xq28.*"¹⁹

A second study was done in 1995. This time, 22 out of 32 brothers (67%) shared the same genetic sequence.

Criticisms of Hamer's studies:

- The study is confined to a very small segment of the exclusively homosexual population
- A significant percentage of the test group did not carry the Xq28 marker while many of the heterosexual brothers of test group carried the marker
- There is no proof that the marker has any direct bearing on sexual orientation; it is possible that the marker is for some traits (such as a penchant for the exotic and novel) that may increase the chances of becoming homosexual

7. Nurture

Some of the theories for nurture are as follow:

a. Parenting patterns

The classic psychoanalytic theory of male homosexuality due to the distant and rejecting father and a close-binding mother.

Studies by Irvin Bieber and colleagues in 1962 of 106 male homosexuals and 100 male heterosexuals showed that mothers of homosexuals were reported to have close-binding relationships with their sons while the fathers were distant.²⁰

homosexual the concordance rate would be 200%! See Robert Gagnon "The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 405.

¹⁹ Dean Hamer, et al., "A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," *Science* 261 (1993), 321-27.

A further study in 1969 by Evans of 42 homosexual males and 142 heterosexual males replicated the Bieber study.²¹

b. Childhood sexual experience

Childhood sexual trauma has been considered as a factor in the origin of homosexuality for some. A national survey of nearly 3,500 Americans showed that of those who were sexually abused as children, 7.4% of men and 3.1% of women reported homosexual orientation while for those not sexually abused as children, the numbers were 2.0% for men and 0.8% for women.²²

c. Cultural norms

Cultural reactions to homosexual behaviour can affect its prevalence. In ancient Greek society, pederasty is common among the male population especially in the upper class, while in ancient Israelite society, all forms of homosexual behaviour were virtually unknown.

In contemporary context:

- Etoro tribe of New Guinea: boy of age 10 enters into homosexual relationship with brother-in-law until he grows a beard. He then serves as older partner for his wife's younger brother.
- Akan tribe of Ghana: women who participate almost universally in lesbian affairs until marriage

d. Urbanisation

National Health and Social Life Survey (1992) combined with General Social Survey (1988) totalling 8,744 adults showed:

	General	Urban	Rural
Men	2.8%	9.2%	1.3%
Women	1.4%	2.6%	<1.0%

Table 4: Self-identified homosexuals in Urban and Rural areas

The authors concluded that *“an environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behaviour.”*²³

e. Education

Adults with higher education appear to be more likely to identify themselves as homosexual. Results from the National Health and Social Life Survey (1992) combined with General Social Survey (1988) are as follow:

Educational Level	Men	Women
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²⁰ Irving Bieber, Harvey J. Dain, Paul R. Dince, Marvin G. Drellich, Henry G. Grand Ralph H. Gundlach, Malvina W. Kremer, Alfred H. Rifkin, Cornelia B. Wilbur and Toby B. Bieber, *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1962).
²¹ Ray B. Evans, “Childhood Parental Relationships of Homosexual Men,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 33 (1969): 129-135.
²² See Laumann et al., *Social Organisation*, 344.
²³ See Laumann et al., *Social Organisation*, 308.

High school and below	1.8%	0.4%
College	3.3%	3.6%

Table 5: Self-identified homosexuals based on Educational levels

The authors attribute the significant increase in rates of female homosexuality either to “greater social and sexual liberalism ... and ... greater sexual experimentation” or to “a higher level of resources” that can allow women to please themselves rather than men.²⁴

Can homosexuality be changed?

1. Statements by the American Psychological Association

Can therapy change sexual orientation? No ...[H]omosexuality is not changeable.

American Psychological Association

The American Psychological Association is concerned about such therapies [ie. therapies and other interventions directed at changing sexual orientation] and their potential harm to patients.

American Psychological Association

The potential risks of “reparative therapy” are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behaviours.

American Psychiatric Association

2. At the outset, avoid the two opposing universal claims:

a. Homosexuals can never change; and

b. Every homosexual can change

A better approach is to say that “some homosexuals can change”

3. What is a positive outcome of change? Or change to what?

- reduced preoccupation with homosexual thoughts
- reduced homosexual activity
- reduced anxiety about heterosexual functioning
- increased heterosexual activity
- increased heterosexual fantasy
- celibacy
- heterosexual marriage
- changed sexual orientation to heterosexual

²⁴ Ibid., 310.

4. Jones and Yarhouse listed the results of treating homosexual patients from 14 individual therapists and 16 group treatments. Positive outcome was recorded for 623 of 2161 patients (28.8%).²⁵

5. National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) surveyed 882 clients in 1997.²⁶ The pre- and post-therapy self ratings are as follow:

Kinsey Rating	Before	After
0 – exclusively heterosexual	0%	15%
1 – almost entirely heterosexual	0%	18%
2 – more heterosexual than homosexual	0%	20%
3 – equally heterosexual and homosexual	9%	11%
4 – more homosexual than heterosexual	22%	23%
5 – almost entirely homosexual	31%	8%
6 – exclusively homosexual	36%	5%

Table 6: Self-rating of clients pre- and post-therapy

Of the 36% in the exclusively homosexual pre-therapy group, 18% rated themselves as exclusively heterosexual after therapy, 17% as almost entirely heterosexual, and 12% as more heterosexual than homosexual.

6. Homosexuality is not a preference that can be switched on and off. Change is possible, although to a modest degree similar to that for those suffering from alcoholism and paedophilia; and there may be relapses, but that is not to say that none can change. Change is most likely when there is high motivation, a history of heterosexual functioning, where there is no gender identity issues involved, and actual homosexual practice has been minimal.

Why should one be concerned?

1. Some reasons why we should be concerned.
 - a. A study comparing 6,737 obituaries/death notices from eighteen U.S. homosexual journals with obituaries from two conventional newspapers yield the results in the table below.²⁷

²⁵ Jones, *Homosexuality*, p. 123 and 131.

²⁶ "The Results of the 1997 NARTH Survey on Change," self published and distributed by NARTH.

²⁷ Paul Cameron, William L. Playfair, and Stephen Wellum, "The Longevity of Homosexuals: Before and After the AIDS Epidemic," *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying* 29, no. 3/1994.

Population	Median Age of Death	% Living Past 65 yrs old
Married Men	75	80%
Single or Divorced Men	57	32%
Homosexual Men Without AIDS	42	9%
Homosexual Men Without AIDS With a Long Term Sexual Partner	41	7%
Homosexual Men With AIDS	39	< 2%
Homosexual Men With AIDS With a Long Term Sexual Partner	39	< 2%

Table 7: Study comparing obituaries of 6,737 homosexuals to a sample of obituaries of heterosexuals

- b. Apart from early death, the other medical downsides include:
 - chronic, potentially fatal, liver disease – infectious hepatitis which increases risk of liver cancer
 - inevitably fatal immune disease, including associated cancer
 - frequently fatal rectal cancer
 - multiple bowel and other infectious disease
 - higher incidence of suicide
 - less than 3% of population accounts for about 60% of all adult and adolescence AIDS cases and 84% of those due to sexual activity
- c. The enormous health care cost as a result of homosexual activity
- d. People engaging in homosexual behaviour often come into sexual contact with heterosexuals as well, or through sharing of intravenous needles; hence passing on the diseases
- e. Societal acceptance of homosexual behaviour will increase the number of homosexuals and the incidence of same-gender sex; thus exposing more to the numerous health risk
- f. Affirming homosexuality is likely to increase paedophilic activity. Although majority of homosexuals are not paedophiles, incidence of same-sex paedophilic behaviour is disproportionately high. NHSLS study that 21% of all instances of adult-child touching was same-sex. A fifth to a third of paedophiles convicted practised homosexuality.²⁸
- g. Affirming homosexuality is likely to lead to greater permissiveness with regard sexual promiscuity. Its expression is harmful to sexual mores and maintenance of stable families in heterosexual society. In 1994, *The Advocate* published results of 2,500 of its adult male homosexual readers. In their relatively short lifespan of 38 years, only 2% had sex with one man; 57% had sex with more than 30 partners, 35% had more than 100 partners.

²⁸ See Laumann et al., *Social Organisation*.

Conclusion

1. There have been efforts to use scientific research to change the church's traditional moral view about homosexuality. We need to resist this pressure, especially the misuse of science to divide the church over this issue.
2. Prevalence of a condition is not a key factor in determining our behaviour and ethics. There are many sinful conditions that are very common (eg. pride and heterosexual lust) and many which are very rare (eg. bestiality). Both types require repentance.
3. It has not been proven that homosexuality is totally a result of biological or genetic factors. In fact, it is likely that its cause is both biological and environmental; both nature and nurture. But even if a gene is found to be directly the cause of homosexuality, this is irrelevant for Christians. It is not our orientation per se, but what we do with it that matters. The only way homosexuals can be exempted from the demands of God is to show they are totally incapable of making a responsible choice regarding their actions; ie. they are like subhuman robots acting without choice because of their condition. This is clearly not the case.
4. If complete change to a heterosexual orientation is not possible for some homosexuals, then the requirement is abstinence. This is no greater demand than that placed on heterosexuals called to be single. In fact, in absolute numbers, there are more heterosexual singles requiring sexual abstinence than homosexuals.
5. *"Only a sadistic God would create hundreds of thousands of humans to be inherently homosexual and then deny them the right to sexual intimacy."* (John J. McNeil)

Is sexual intimacy a right? Or a gift to be used only in the context of marriage between two people of different genders?

Homosexuals can have all forms of intimacy that sustain and nourish, except erotic sexual intimacy. Sexual orientation and practice should not become one's identity.