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SEXUALITY ORIENTATION: OUR LIVES, OUR STORIES

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Sexuality Orientation: Our Lives, Our Stories

Why do we present this program?
A speakers bureau presentation can be a meaningful and empowering experience for you in addition to being a useful form of community service. It is designed to provide a personal perspective on what it means to be a gay, lesbian or bisexual person in contemporary American society. The continued prevalence of media stereotypes and the fact that many heterosexuals still may not know, or know that they know, a GLB person results in a continuation of misinformation and confusion regarding GLB people. Perhaps our most important task is to demystify gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. You do this by telling your own story.

You are not expected to be an expert on GLB marriage or other rights, HIV, lesbian fashion, gay cuisine or current laws. Many heterosexuals are often amazed that GLB people lead "normal" lives, with values and beliefs that are strikingly similar to their own. They are also able to begin to comprehend the complex range of personal strength as well as struggle that, for many GLB people, is directly related to having a romantic and sexual attraction disapproved of by many in contemporary society.

Goals of the program: Although greatly increasing numbers of GLB people are choosing to be open and honest about their sexual orientation, many are still closeted and consequently invisible. This invisibility contributes to the flourishing of myths, stereotypes, misinformation, fear and confusion about GLB people. Fear, homophobia and resulting discrimination and even violence are often products of ignorance. Therefore, "Sexual Orientation: Our Lives, Our Stories" will attempt:

- To provide real-life examples to contradict myths and stereotypes;
- To look at similarities and differences in people’s lives, including heterosexuals, when it comes to sexuality;
- To answer questions from each volunteer’s perspective, thereby representing the diversity of the GLB population;
- To raise awareness about and increase sensitivity to GLB issues;
- To inform students about campus and community resources relevant to GLB students, faculty and staff.

What is the Speakers Bureau?
The Speakers Bureau consists of volunteers from the IU community as well as the larger Bloomington community who are willing to speak about their lives and experiences. A panel may range in number from two to five, representing all sexualities whenever possible. Heterosexual volunteers may also be present on panels. This may depend on the specific focus or request of an instructor or professor.
What is the Role of Heterosexual Volunteers?
Occasionally, gay and non-gay volunteers have questioned why heterosexuals are occasionally on the panels. This is a decision that was made many years ago when these panels were first planned and implemented. It was deemed important to have these sexuality panels rather than GLB panels. Therefore, the entire range of sexualities, including heterosexuality, may be included. Even so, you might question how a heterosexual’s participation can be of value, especially when few, if any, questions are directed to those volunteers. One way you could look at it is by way of comparison. When questions are asked, each person has the opportunity to answer from their perspective. Students are curious about choices people make in their lives. It might be particularly interesting if they hear a heterosexual person give an opinion similar to a GLB person.

The following are questions that heterosexual volunteers should think about and be prepared to answer since they are asked at nearly every panel discussion. Naturally they are asked with some variation in wording.

Some of these are:

• "How did you know you were gay? Why are you gay? Were you born gay?" These questions can be turned into questions about anyone coming to an understanding about their sexuality, no matter what it is. This forces the issue that it’s not simply a question that GLB people should think about. 2. "What attracts you to people of the same sex?" Again, this would be a question that could be broadened to ask about attractions in general.
• "Are you religious?" or variations of this question.
• "How do you feel about gay marriage?" You could express your opinion about this issue for GLB people as well as your opinion about marriage for yourself.
• "Do you want to have children?" or variations on this question. Again, express your opinion on this issue for GLB people as well as for yourself.
• "How do you feel about public displays of affection?"

The following are questions that would be more difficult for you to answer but if you have relevant, helpful responses, by all means let me know that you would like to respond.

• "How did you tell your family? How did they react? Did you lose any friends when you told them about your orientation?" One way to answer this would be if you know of people in your own family or experiences of friends that would be relevant to share.
• "Who was the first person you told and what was their reaction?"

Finally, there will be some panel situations where you will find yourself just sitting there feeling as though you don’t have anything to offer. However, you should understand that your presence on the panel is a statement of your openness, acceptance, and your willingness to be a part of this educational process to move others closer to where you are on this issue.
Where do the presentations take place?
The majority of our panels take place in academic classes, including small to large lecture halls. They may occasionally take place in residence halls, either individual floor lounges or formal lounges, and in Greek houses. Occasionally we go to other locations, such as campus organizations or places in the community. We will attempt to go wherever we are asked, including locations out of town, e.g. other college campuses.

What are some possible outcomes from the presentations?
• Research has shown that one of the best ways to reduce someone’s homophobia is for them to have direct contact with GLB people. Heterosexual allies also provide those attending a panel with the opportunity to better understand how homophobia and heterosexism diminish the quality of life for all people; they can also be role models.
• There has been success in providing many of those attending with an entirely new perspective of GLB people.
• It may be inspiring to GLB people in the audience, particularly those struggling with their sexual orientation.
• There will be evidence of the diversity of experiences and viewpoints within the GLB population.

What are the responsibilities of volunteers?
• Respond, as soon as possible, to those panel requests in which you want to participate.
• Arrive 10 minutes before the event; you will be told where to meet, usually the lobby of a residence hall or outside of a particular classroom.
• Please keep your commitments to a panel; notify Duncan or Kathryn if you cannot attend. If you do not show up when you have been scheduled and confirmed, one of us will contact you.
• Exchange feedback with fellow volunteers and moderator at the end of each panel.
• Relax and have fun! Your participation not only helps others, but also can be a growing and enriching experience for you.

Feedback:
All of us need to receive feedback to become more effective panelists. With so many volunteers, different styles of presentation are evident. Clashes of these styles are obvious. You may disagree with another’s comments. Be patient and think about how you would want to be told if you had made incorrect or offensive statements. Communicate with another diplomatically, not angrily. Feedback is difficult for all of us. However, it is necessary in order to grow into a more effective panelist. Also remember that you may be doing something irritating to others, i.e. interrupting someone. This happens because we tend to make similar mistakes, feeding off each other. If one person is talking too much, another may begin to do so, in order to make his or her voice heard. Ask yourself questions, "Am I talking too much? Am I cutting anyone off?"

We are in this together, striving for similar, positive outcomes. Give each other positive feedback and constructive criticism and take it well when it is provided to you.
The Format:
Introduction to audience by moderator
• Welcome, title of program, goals/purpose of program.
• Explain format
• Explain importance of knowing that volunteers on the panel are speaking only for themselves, and representing only their individual experiences.
• Explain that we do not make assumptions about the audience members’ sexual orientation and that most likely all sexualities are represented.
• Acknowledge the controversial nature of this program and that many will not agree with everything that is said.
• Acknowledge the attempt to include the range of sexualities but our volunteer participation depends on who is available.

Personal Introductions from Panelists
• The length of these introductions by each panel volunteer may vary depending on two factors: the duration of the class or residence hall program and the number of people on the panel. You may have the opportunity to elaborate with more time or fewer panelists.

Please try to include the following information:
• Name, what you do in Bloomington, where you are from
• Your sexual orientation; when and how you became aware and/or figured it out
• Why you chose to volunteer for speakers bureau (optional)
• Other issues you would like to mention that may elicit questions later on, i.e. religion, marriage, children, relationships, harassment, workplace issues. This is an opportunity for the audience to get a brief glimpse at your lives. There may be some commonalities established and potential topics brought up for further discussion.

Q&A: Moderator will direct the flow of questions from the audience.
• This is usually conducted verbally, but may be augmented with written questions. The instructor, or person who has requested the panel, will be asked to have one or two questions ready to ask in case the first audience questions are slow coming in. Audience is told that they may ask any question but that panelists can choose not to answer a question, although that rarely happens. We would like to answer as many questions as possible, moving around to all the topics that people want to ask about. Therefore, a few suggestions about this section are helpful:
  • If the question is directed to you, or you are the first one to answer a question, repeat it so that everyone can hear it; this is especially important in large lecture classes (Occasionally we are provided with “traveling” microphones; the recommendation is to use the mike if it is available.)
  • Be succinct in your answers and remember, not all volunteers need to answer every question.
  • Emphasize that your perspective or opinion is yours by using "I" statements.
• Try not to dominate a discussion by answering two or more questions in a row; this is especially important when the panel is large. Attempts will be made to balance the discussion by moving around to all the panelists.
• You have the option of choosing not to answer any question and you do not need to explain your reasons; you can simply say: "I would rather not answer that question" or, "I have nothing to add."
• Try to give the moderator an indication of your desire to provide an answer, by looking at the moderator or a slight raise of your hand; this will save time so that every volunteer doesn’t need to be asked if they want to answer each question.
• When answering questions, give examples wherever possible.
• If you use language or words that may have unfamiliar definitions or connotations, please explain to the audience.
• Be careful not to answer questions for which you do not know the answers; it is not necessary to be up to date on all the current issues. It is fine to say you do not know something.

Categories and sample questions as written by audience members:

Awareness/Realization of Sexuality

• When did you realize you were gay?
• At what age did you know or have you always known?
• Did you fully understand what those feelings meant?
• How did you discover it?
• How does a person know that they are gay?
• When did you decide you were a homosexual?
• What were the signs that you were a homosexual, if any?

"Causes" of homosexuality (the "choice" or "born that way" issue)

• Do you think homosexuality is genetically determined?
• Do you believe that your choice was biological?
• What made you the way you are?
• Do you think you were born gay or lesbian?
• What kind of experiments led you to becoming homosexual or bisexual?
• Is it psychologically based, physically based, or a combination?
• Is there a specific incident that causes it?
• What changes a person from heterosexual to homosexual?
• How can one be bisexual?
• Do you feel being gay is from your parents or from society?

Coming Out

• Who was the first person you told and what was the reaction?
• Do you have any regrets about coming out or being gay?
• Did you come out in high school?
• What was the hardest part of coming out?
• Who was the hardest person for you to face and tell you were gay?
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- When and what made you decide to come out?
- Since you have come out, how has it changed your life, if at all?
- What was the experience of coming out and how did you handle people's reactions?

Harassment/discrimination
- Could you give examples of times that you have been discriminated against because of your homosexuality?
- Has anyone ever harassed you?
- What are some obstacles you have encountered because of your sexual orientation?
- Are GLBs treated fairly in our society?
- What are different reactions of people in public?
- How do you feel when people stare?
- What is your reaction to homophobic people?
- Do you feel gays and lesbians have made significant progress in the way of lessening discrimination and gaining acceptance/rights?
- Are you treated better, worse or the same by members of the opposite sex, employers, or coworkers?
- Do you feel that the university/campus is very open or receptive to GLBs? What personal hardships have you encountered?
- What types of everyday pressures do you deal with because of your sexual preference?

Family/Friends
- Do your parents know?
- Did your parents try to change your sexual orientation?
- How does your family feel about your homosexuality?
- Do your family and colleagues accept you?
- Have there been any conflicts with family/parents?
- What is your relationship with your family?
- Do your parents treat you differently?
- How did you tell your family?
- What about extended family members?
- What do your friends think?
- Have you had to disregard your friends or could they come to terms with your choices?
- Do you find it difficult making friends of the same sex after they find out you are gay?

Having Children
- Do you want children? Will you adopt? Should GLBs be allowed to adopt? How will you influence your children?
- How will you raise them? How will you explain to your children that they have two moms/dads?
- When do you think they will be old enough to understand?
• Do you have any children of your own?
• Do you feel it is fair for a child to be raised in a homosexual environment? Will you give your children the opportunity to be heterosexual if they want? How do you feel about artificial insemination in the case of lesbians?

**Religion**
- Are you religious? What religion are you?
- Do others of your religion accept you?
- What do you think of people who say homosexuals are going to hell?
- If you are a Christian, how do you feel about your homosexuality in relation to that?
- Do you think your sexual orientation is a sin?
- How do you feel about what is written in Romans in the Old Testament?
- Do you believe that AIDS is God’s punishment for being homosexual? I believe it is.

**Bisexuality**
- Which sex do you prefer? What do you do, flip a coin in the morning to decide if you want a guy or a girl that day?
- Do you reveal to your lovers that you are bisexual and how do they react? Do you find discrimination in both heterosexual and homosexual communities?
- Do your gay friends think you are not completely out of the closet?
- Do you feel the same types of attraction for both sexes or are there different feelings involved?
- Do you feel that you could have an equally satisfying relationship with both sexes simultaneously?

**Public Displays of Affection/Kiss In (PDAs)**
- How do you feel about PDAs? Do you show affection in public?
- Why do you feel that it is important to advertise the fact that you are gay? I do not tell people my sexual orientation and I wonder why it has to be made public?

**Education Classes**
We have been doing panels in education classes for many years, especially in Teaching in Pluralistic Society as well as in Communication in the Classroom. We have also been invited in to Educational Psychology classes, potentially reaching students who may become school counselors. These classes usually have a different focus than other classes or residence hall presentations. If you are scheduled for one of these classes, you will be told that ahead of time. You will also be told, if we know it, whether the class is for elementary or secondary teachers.

Please be thinking about how you could:
- Suggest ways that teachers can be supportive of and sensitive to their GLB students, GLB parents of their students and GLB faculty and staff; what concrete things can they do?
- Discuss ways to address issues of diversity, sexual orientation, and GLB topics in the classroom;
• Help teachers deal with harassment situations of their students, i.e. name calling on the playground or in the hallways;
• Discuss ways to answer questions from students especially now that GLB people and topics are widely seen in the media and everyday society;
• Discuss the importance of relevant resources such as IYG, PFLAG, and GLSEN;
• Discuss what would be important to you if you were in a counseling situation.

Here are some sample questions from education students:
• How do we present such information in an academic setting?
• How can teachers help give students an appreciation of homosexuality and how can they help homosexual students?
• If you could redo your high school experience, what would you like to see your teachers do differently?
• If we suspect that one of our students is gay (not openly), do you think that we should approach the student or should we let the student come to us?
• What if a student asked you for advice about coming out?
• Can you provide a bibliography of high school young adult books that address the issue?
• Is homophobia learned through educators?
• Is it okay for you, the teacher, to support homosexual lifestyles and rights for homosexuals?
• If a student asks a 30ish year old teacher why she’s not married, is it okay for her to state why she does not wish to marry or must she avoid the question?
• How would you handle a situation in which a student made a homophobic remark?
• What issue should teachers know about dealing with GLB issues?

Guess: What’s My Orientation?
We also present this different format of sexuality panels mostly in residence hall settings. Following is a brief description of the purpose and format. Purpose: to educate on sexual orientation with a focus on stereotypes. It’s a fun, "game show" type format. Because of the way the activity proceeds, there is less time for in-depth discussion. There tends to be discussion on why people voted the way they did, which in turn leads to discussion of common stereotypes and myths that people still have surrounding this issue. Ideally the discussion will proceed with the acknowledgement that everyone holds stereotypes and how that impacts on our daily interactions with people.

Volunteers need to be careful during the Q&A so as not to reveal their orientation by using designated pronouns. Try to be vague when referring to another person. Use 'they' rather than 'he’ or ‘she.’

Format:
• Introduction from moderator including purpose for panels, acknowledging that the panel may not include people of all sexual orientations, especially of each gender.
• Introductions from panelists, just name, what you do and where you’re from.
Q&A: Moderator may make suggestions as to what type of questions to ask. Questions continue for about 15-20 minutes.

• Audience votes by raising their hands, with their eyes closed. Panelists either leave or close their eyes. Votes are recorded on a large flip chart in each orientation category for each panelist.

• Panelists return and reveal their orientation.

• Reactions from panelists and audience, especially related to their own stereotypes, why votes were cast for particular people.

• Discussion could continue on topic of stereotypes and proceed to discussions of other topics of interest to the audience. Panelists should be prepared to confront their own, personal stereotypes.

Here is a sample list of the types of questions that might be asked at a GUESS panel:

• What sports do you play?
• What is your favorite political cause?
• What do you do in your spare time?
• Do you collect anything?
• What is your dream vacation?
• What do you look for in a romantic partner?
• What do you like to do on a date?
• What type of music do you like?
• How and where do you meet people to date?
• Describe what your life will be like in 5 years.
• What is your favorite store?
• Do you plan to have children?

Finally...
Please remember that you are a volunteer for Speakers Bureau and you need only sign up for those panels that you want to do. There are volunteers who definitely prefer one type of panel to the other. The majority of our panels will continue to be the traditional format, especially for academic classes. When the requests for panels are sent to you, you will be told which type is being scheduled. Speakers Bureau panels help audiences begin to see gay men, lesbians and bisexuals as people instead of as an abstract. This is an opportunity to show humanity, intelligence, humor, compassion, vulnerability and strength. You all have a story to tell, one that most people have never heard. We appreciate your participation!
Occasionally, panel discussions deal with issues of one’s minority status. Some people have assumed that there is an attempt to compare experiences or to say that one minority’s experiences are more difficult than another’s. This article is written as a way to address the concerns expressed by audience members.

"Are There Enough Equal Rights to go around?" by Duncan Mitchel

No two minorities are alike. The experiences of African-Americans have been different from that of American Jews, of Asian-Americans, of Hispanic-Americans, and so on. Women’s experiences have overlapped and transcended these other groups, since women have been members of all of them, yet a separate group within each. The same is true of gay men and lesbians, who have emerged within other minorities, yet often been lumped together as a separate category altogether. The differences should not be overlooked, of course. Some ethnic minorities, or their children, have been able to pass as members of the majority: By changing their names and losing accents, Jews, Irish, and others have been able to infiltrate the majority in a way that people of color, or women, have not. Gay men and lesbians have depended on our relative invisibility for survival, since until recently we did not have communities for mutual support. Yet there are also similarities in the experiences of all these groups; we acknowledge this fact simply in referring to them all as “minorities” — even women, sometimes, though they are in fact a majority of the population, because they have been treated as though they were a minority. The similarities are not exact, yet there is a sort of family resemblance that enables us to lump them roughly together.

Awareness of these similarities has often led movements that work for social justice for one minority to borrow tactics and rhetoric from each other. Black slaves in the old South identified with the Biblical story of Israel’s Egyptian captivity and the Exodus. The women’s rights movement in the 19th century often overlapped with the Abolition movement; many people of both sexes and all colors worked in both. Martin Luther King, Jr. borrowed methods Gandhi had developed for the struggles of “colored” in South Africa, then for the independence of India. The antiwar movement of the 60’s borrowed from the Civil Rights movement, in which many antiwar activists had worked. The Women’s and Gay movements borrowed from both, since many activists were veterans of both. Still, when members of one minority compare their experiences to those of another, if they are being thoughtful they are not equating their group and the other group. What is the same is bigotry, not its targets. It’s remarkable how bigots say very much the same things about different minorities: either 1) they are dirty, lazy stupid, animalistic, sex-crazed, they want to rape our daughters and spread venereal disease, they don’t want to work even though good jobs are going begging; or 2) they are sinister, sneaky, diabolically clever, sex-crazed, they want to rape our daughters and spread venereal disease, they are taking over, and they are stealing work from honest people when there aren’t enough good jobs to go around. In the controversy over gays in the military, there is an uncanny repetition of the same excuses that were used forty years ago to try to forestall racial integration of the armed forces: the armed forces aren’t a social laboratory, if it ain’t broke don’t fix it, Our Boys don’t want to share foxholes with these creatures, and decent people won’t let their sons serve next to ‘em.

None of this means that gay men and lesbians are “just like” African-Americans, any more than African-Americans are “just like” Jews. The most important difference between gay people and any other minority I know of is that we are not raised by gay and lesbian parents, but grow up (like cuckoos?) in the nests of others. Instead of being raised with an awareness of our identity, we find it ourselves, haltingly and comparatively late in our lives. This is crucial, and probably more than any other condition it uniquely shapes the LGB experience.
The Kinsey Continuum: Fact and Opinion on Speakers Bureau Panels

The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Speakers Bureau exists so that our audiences can hear from lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals about our lives and experiences. Our audiences can read books or listen to lectures by experts in various disciplines, but we offer the immediacy of our own voices, valuing the personal over the impersonal.

People do ask us factual questions, however, and it's important that we answer them as accurately as we can. Speakers Bureau requires no qualifications or preparation of its panel members except a willingness to appear before audiences and answer their questions patiently and honestly. Our list of suggested readings is just that -- suggested -- but we do hope that speakers who wish to talk about abstract or factual issues of gay life will take the trouble to inform themselves about those issues. We claim the authority to speak personally about our own lives, but merely being gay, lesbian or bisexual doesn't automatically make us experts on all aspects of gay life.

People are tempted in matters sexual to assume that what is true for us is (or should be) true for everyone else. As overwhelming to gay people as it is to straight people, it's a temptation Speakers Bureau exists to try to work against. The factual issues which panel members most often address are the "cause" of homosexuality, and Alfred Kinsey's homosexual / heterosexual continuum. No one knows why some people are attracted to members of their own sex while others are not, so any statements we make on that subject will of course be personal opinion.

Kinsey's work, though it is often a subject of controversy, is not a matter of opinion. It exists as two large volumes, _Sexual Behavior in the Human Male_ and _Sexual Behavior in the Human Female_. Since most of us will probably have occasion to refer to Kinsey during a panel, I can't urge you too strongly to take a look at the chapters on homosexuality in both volumes. While these books are full of tables, graphs, and diagrams, Kinsey was one of those rare scientists who prove that scientific prose doesn't have to be unreadable. Kinsey's figures on homosexual behavior seem to have become oral tradition among many gay people, and oral tradition is not very reliable. I have heard other panel members say more than once that Kinsey showed that most people are bisexual, which is simply not true.

**KINSEY AND MALE HOMOSEXUALITY** Let's look at males first. Kinsey found that 6.3 percent of all orgasms among white men -- Kinsey was unable to get enough histories from black men for a usable sample -- derived from homosexual contacts. (In case you're curious: 24 percent occurred in solitude [masturbation and nocturnal emissions], 69.4 percent in heterosexual petting and coitus, and 0.3 percent in relations with animals of other species.) He developed a rating scale from 0 to 6 to show how people combine varying amounts of homosexual and heterosexual experience in their lives: at one end of the scale, a person with _no_ homosexual experience was labeled 0; at the other end, a person with _only_ homosexual experience was labeled 6. People who were rated between 0 and 6 had varying degrees of homosexual and heterosexual experience.

Kinsey found that 50 percent of white males rated as 0s; they had "neither overt nor psychic experience in the homosexual after the onset of puberty." (Notice the words 'after puberty': about 60 percent of preadolescent boys engaged in homosexual play.) But 50 percent rated above 0: they had been consciously sexually attracted to another male at least once in their lives. It might help to imagine the following figures as a series of concentric circles, each figure containing the next, dwindling in size as we go:

- Thirty-seven percent had "at least some overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm" between the ages of 16 and 55.
- Thirty percent rated between 1 and 6 on the scale: they had "at least incidental homosexual experience or reactions over at least a three-year-period between the ages of 16 and 55."
- Twenty-five percent had "more than incidental homosexual experience over least a three-year period for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55", rating 2 to 6.
- Eighteen percent had "at least as much of the homosexual as the heterosexual in their histories" during the same age range, rating 3 to 6.
Thirteen percent had more homosexual than homosexual experience during the same age range, rating 4 to 6.

Ten percent had more or less exclusively homosexual experience (rating 5 to 6) for at least three years between the ages of 16 to 55.

Eight percent had exclusively homosexual experience, rating 6 for at least three years between the ages of 16 to 55.

And four percent had exclusively homosexual experience, rating 6, throughout their lives.

**KINSEY AND LESBIANISM** The figures for women are much harder to cite, for they are scattered through the chapter on homosexual outlet rather than neatly summarized as they are for males. In the _Female_ volume, the section "Percentage with Each Rating", which in the _Male_ volume was the source for most of the figures quoted above, each rating is broken down by marital status -- never-married, married, or previously-married -- which makes it nearly impossible to provide neat percentages. Nor was I able to find a breakdown of sources of orgasms for all females, as I was for males. Here is what I was able to find:

- By the age of 30, twenty-eight percent of Kinsey's white female sample "had recognized erotic responses to other females."
- By age 40, nineteen percent had had sexual contact with another female.
- By "the middle forties", 13 percent had experienced orgasm with another woman.

In the summary at the end of the chapter, the percentage of women who had had "at least some homosexual" experience, rated 1 to 6 on the scale, is given as "11-20%":

- 6-14 percent of women had "more than incidental homosexual" experience, rated 2 to 6;
- 4-11 percent had as much homosexual as heterosexual experience, rated 3 to 6;
- 3-8 percent had "mostly homosexual" experience, rated 4 to 6;
- 2-6 percent rated 5 or 6, more or less exclusively homosexual;
- 1-3 percent rated 6, exclusively homosexual.

**Implications**

What does all this mean? First, we can see that Kinsey showed that most people are not bisexual. Among males, fifty percent were never consciously sexually aroused by another male, while four percent were never attracted to a female, which leaves forty-six percent who could be called bisexual in a very narrow sense. That's a large minority, but it's still a minority. Among females, seventy-two percent were never consciously attracted to another woman, and at most three percent were never attracted to a man; that leaves twenty-five to twenty-seven percent who were somewhat bisexual. Someone who has only one overt homosexual experience in his or her life, however, is hardly what most people mean by bisexual. Men and women who rate around 3 -- attracted about equally to both men and women -- make up about 8 to 10 percent of males, and 3 to 8 percent of females.

Second, please look again at all those qualifications in the categories, particularly the refrain "for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55." Often when people are casting aspersions on biblical attitudes toward homosexuality, they say loftily that St. Paul didn't know our modern scientific concept of sexual orientation, by which they mean the notion that some people have some sort of homosexual nature. Sometimes they even mention Kinsey in this connection. But whatever may be said for this idea, it isn't scientific at all.

Kinsey showed that sexual experience is fluid and changeable over time -- another reason his work infuriated so many people. True, most people are exclusively homosexual or heterosexual throughout their lives -- but most people with homosexual histories also have heterosexual histories. This may be an artifact of our antihomosexual culture pressuring basically homosexual people into acting heterosexual, but that raises an important question: Should we say that most people are 'really' bisexual when what we mean is that, under enough pressure, people will have sex with people they wouldn't be interested in otherwise?

No doubt in a society which mandated bisexuality as ours mandates heterosexuality, most people would manage to conform; but would that be a good society? How many of those who show up as technically bisexual in Kinsey would, if left to their own inclinations, have remained exclusively homosexual or heterosexual?
Society and Sexuality

If we take Kinsey at face value, most women are not very sexual at all. His data showed women having later first sexual experiences, later first orgasms, fewer orgasms during their lives, and fewer partners than men. Kinsey himself probably knew better than any other human being the range of cultural differences in human sexuality, yet he inconsistently was inclined to discount cultural influence and suppose that his data revealed the true nature of female sexuality.

Masters and Johnson showed that women have the physiological potential to be far more sexual than men: how did a sex which is wired for multiple orgasms turn out to be 14% asexual, by Kinsey's figures? Given such a difference between biological potential and actual behavior, how can we say for certain what human beings "really" are sexually? It would be one thing to live in a society which allowed people to be homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, or asexual, as they wished; and quite another to live in a society which held that only bisexuality is healthy, indeed that only a "perfect Kinsey 3" is healthy.

The notion of the "perfect Kinsey 3", which I heard fairly often in the 90s, is particularly misleading and even harmful. In the first place, Kinsey made no moral evaluations of different sexual tastes or behavior patterns. A man who molested equal numbers of male and female children would show up on the homosexual/heterosexual continuum as a 3, but not many people would care to call him 'perfect'. In the second place, recall Kinsey's recurrent phrase, "for at least three years of their lives": a person might show up as a 3 over many years of varying experience (in prison and out, for example), or might be having very different kinds -- but equal amounts -- of sexual experience with both sexes up till the time he or she was interviewed by the Kinsey team. To repeat: A person's position on the Kinsey scale is not a definition of his or her sexual essence, but an abstraction based on his or her feelings and behavior in a particular society at a particular time.

Kinsey has been criticized for telling us only about the sexuality of those people who were willing to talk about it, and for neglecting the emotional side of sex. This sneer has come both from people who wish his figures for sexual activity were higher, and from those who wish they were lower. Both prudes and libertines claim that they know the silent masses' secrets, without ever explaining how they know. I think that gay people who talk like this are wildly ungrateful: they forget that Kinsey showed there were far more of us than anyone had dared to suggest before. They also forget that the rightness of being gay does not depend on our numbers.

Kinsey's figures may be inaccurate, but if we are going to report them, we should report them accurately. Panel members may choose to disagree with Kinsey, of course; only please, don't misrepresent him. You may believe that most people are really bisexual, but don't say that _Kinsey showed_ that most people are really bisexual -- he didn't. It isn't the job of Speakers Bureau to spread misinformation about gay people; we can leave that to the bigots.

In Our Genes? GLBT People and Biology

Just over a hundred years ago, a few gay men (as we would call them today) collaborated with some forward-looking doctors to declare that men who wanted to have sex with other men were a "third sex," with the soul of a woman in the body of a man. This, they claimed, was an inborn condition, and the doctors published case histories of "inverts": men with narrow shoulders and broad hips, hairless bodies, high voices, and artistic temperaments. In time they also developed a model of the female invert: flat-chested, narrow-hipped, addicted to tailored suits and cigars, and resistant to male authority. This model was made famous by the lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall in The Well of Loneliness, which still gives some lesbians nightmares and others a role model.

The psychiatric model of homosexuality never completely replaced the biological model in Europe or America: the two have coexisted down to the present. At the moment, the biological model reigns even among psychiatrists, as shown by American Psychiatric Association committee head Nada Stotland's claim in 1999 that "All the evidence would indicate this is the way people are born. We treat disease, not the way people are." It is also widely held by gay people, from the "gaydar" which usually looks for hints of sex-role nonconformity, to Chastity Bono's equation of being a tomboy with being lesbian in her ghostwritten autobiography. This is true even though there is not, and never has been, good scientific evidence that homosexuality is inborn.

In 1991 Simon LeVay, a gay neuroscientist, published a paper describing his research on a small area of the human brain called INAH-3. By dissecting the brains of 19 “homosexual” men, 16 “presumed heterosexual” men, and 6 “presumed heterosexual” women, and measuring their INAH-3 regions, LeVay found that on the average, women had a smaller INAH-3 than straight men, and that gay men had the INAH-3 of a woman in the body of a man! Such is scientific progress.
The story was taken up by the commercial media, which are always ready to report breakthroughs in biological determinism, and made LeVay a star. Many of his fellow scientists were less impressed. They pointed out that the difference he had found was statistical, that some women and some gay men had a bigger INAH-3 than some straight men; that some of his subjects had died of AIDS, which is known to affect brain structures (LeVay told the news media he was confident that the size difference could only be genetic, though in his published study he was much more cautious); that it was not clear what, if anything, his results meant. LeVay went on to write several books, including a science-fiction novel about an evil mad scientist trying to harm gay people. Gay people continue to cite his work as proof that gay people are born gay, though at most it suggests possibilities that have not, so far, been confirmed.

Soon after, Richard Pillard and Michael Bailey compared homosexuality in identical twin pairs, fraternal twins, nontwin brothers, and adoptive brothers. Among the identical twins, 52 percent were gay; among the fraternal twins, 22 percent were gay; and among the adoptive and nontwin brothers, 10 percent were gay. Bailey and two colleagues published research on women the following year, reporting similar (but lower) rates of lesbianism among twins and non-twin sisters. Pillard and Bailey told Science News, "Our research shows that male sexual orientation is substantially genetic." However, it would be just as true to say that male sexual orientation is substantially environmental, especially since fraternal twins are simply brothers, biologically speaking, yet Pillard and Bailey found a higher rate of homosexuality among fraternal twins than among nontwin brothers. This study too was widely cited as proof that homosexuality is inborn.

In 1993, gay molecular biologist Dean Hamer announced the results of his long-publicized research on gay men and their families, which found a shared region of the X chromosome in pairs of gay brothers. The media and many gay people celebrated this as the discovery of a "gay gene", though Hamer denied it, on a BBC radio talk show for example: "We have not found the gene, which we don't think exists, for sexual orientation. We know there are some gay men that don't carry this, and there may be heterosexual men that do carry it. So we have found something that influences sexual orientation without necessarily determining it." His study remains controversial among scientists, who have not been able to confirm even his tentative claims; but many gay people still claim that Hamer discovered the gay gene.

With Peter Copeland, in 1998 Hamer published Living with Our Genes: Why They Matter More than You Think, in which he continued to argue that gay men's sexuality is "hard-wired", but lesbians are the product of socialization. This news didn't get nearly the media hype that Hamer's previous work received, and most gay people seem to be unaware of it.

And so matters stand today. In the 1999 edition of his book, Is It A Choice?, Eric Marcus assures his readers (on the authority of gay journalist Chandler Burr, citing the research we've already seen) that homosexuality has a "genetic and biological basis" and is "neither changeable nor a matter of choice." This is an odd claim, since Burr declares in his book A Separate Creation that someday soon, genetic surgery will be able to change sexual orientation -- as well as race -- and has written that he would willingly submit to such surgery in order to conform to society's values.

But the important point is that Burr, and Marcus, are wrong: the evidence does not point to a biological "basis" for homosexuality. No one has found good evidence to show whether our genes play a role in the formation of sexual orientation, nor begun to explain what that role might be.

**Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Reading List**

This is only a suggested reading list. We certainly don't expect you to read all of the works listed here, but we do hope you'll read some of them if you haven't already.

**General Reference Works**


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GENERAL GLB WORKS


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