

*Senior Editor:* Jeff Lasser  
*Editorial Assistant:* Andrea Christie  
*Marketing Manager:* Krista Groshong  
*Editorial-Production Service:* Omegatype Typography, Inc.  
*Manufacturing Buyer:* JoAnne Sweeney  
*Composition and Prepress Buyer:* Linda Cox  
*Cover Administrator:* Joel Gendon  
*Electronic Composition:* Omegatype Typography, Inc.

For related titles and support materials, visit our online catalog at [www.ablongman.com](http://www.ablongman.com).

Copyright © 2004 Pearson Education, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of the material protected by this copyright notice may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission of the copyright owner.

To obtain permission(s) to use material from this work, please submit a written request to Allyn and Bacon, Permissions Department, 75 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116 or fax your request to 617-848-7320.

Between the time Website information is gathered and then published, some sites may have closed. Also, the transcription of URLs can result in typographical errors. The publisher would appreciate notification where these errors occur so that they may be corrected in subsequent editions.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sex matters : the sexuality and society reader / [edited by] Mindy Stomblor ... [et al.].  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-205-35974-4 (alk. paper)

1. Sex—Social aspects. 2. Sex—Social aspects—United States. 3. Sex in popular culture—United States. 4. Sex customs—United States. I. Stomblor, Mindy.

HQ16.S46 2004  
306.7—dc21

2003048044

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 08 07 06 05 04

Photo Credits: Page 1, Irene Fertik; Page 34, Tyagan Miller; Page 70, Deborah Stinnett; Page 122, Charles Harrington, Cornell University Photography; Page 292, Michelle Litvin.

## Reading 4

*Gay No More?*

Barry Yeoman

It's a Sunday morning in Lecanto, Florida, and Faith Chapel is filled with the Holy Spirit. Tambourines shaking, guitar jamming, the storefront church is awash in praise. "Dance with all your might," sing Pentecostal Christians in khakis and lightweight dresses. "The time's drawing near." Church members filter down the aisles, and knots of people form, hands touching shoulders, hands touching faces. A woman faints and is covered by a white blanket. Another lifts her arms as her fellow worshippers crowd around her, encouraging her ecstasy until she, too, faints. "Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus," people intone, while the pianist plays a running melody.

Steve Simmons is in his element. A pale-eyed 38-year-old with cowboy boots and a goatee, he runs here and there, his long curly hair slicked back and cascading past his collar. He sings in the ensemble, prays with people, lays on hands. His wife Shawn is never far away.

Simmons' old life, by contrast, seems very far away. Earlier in his marriage, he was a closeted homosexual, sneaking off on lunch breaks to find quick release with other men at a lakefront park. "Any chance I could get to get away from the house, I was out," he says. He eventually settled into a relationship with a co-worker, and the two men planned to move in together as soon as Simmons could ditch Shawn and their two-year-old daughter.

It took him most of an evening to break the news to Shawn. He brought her to a restaurant but couldn't tell her there; at home, he fumbled

for a half-hour before blurting out that he was gay. "What can I do to help?" Shawn asked her husband. Taken aback by his wife's good will and dogged by his religious beliefs, Simmons realized he couldn't leave his marriage. "I know about this ministry," he told her. "I'm willing to go through it if you're willing to stick it out."

She was. So Simmons split up with his male partner and started attending the Orlando-based Eleutheros, one of more than 100 Christian organizations in the United States dedicated to helping people forego gay sex.

There, at a ministry that believes homosexuality stems from family dysfunction, Simmons talked about growing up with a father who was a military medic and would disappear for six-month tours aboard a Coast Guard cutter. He discussed his "domineering and controlling" mother. And he recalled the male teenage cousin who lured him, at nine years old, into unreciprocated sexual service. "I remember feeling that I had made him happy," Simmons now recalls. "I could please a guy, and maybe in some respects, I was trying to please my father." With the help of Eleutheros, Simmons came to believe that his same-sex urges were an unhealthy mutation of a natural desire to receive the affirmation of other men.

At the same time, he started learning how to avoid temptation. The key was an "accountability group," six to eight men to whom he was required to report every homosexual contact, every same-sex fantasy, every trip to a gay bar. "All of a sudden, it was like, 'Do I really want to do this?' To be honest with these guys, that means I've got to stop. And it's not easy."

Though Simmons no longer was sexually intimate with men, he remained attracted to them. "There were times when driving down the road

and just looking at a guy in the next car was enough to keep my fantasy life going," he says. "And I could keep myself going on fantasy for a long time."

Other would-be converts dropped out of the ministry, but Simmons persisted, attending meetings up to three times a week. Eventually, he began thinking of homosexuality as an addiction, something he could never get rid of but could keep in check. "The accountability groups give you a chance to sober up," he says. "They give you the time to get away from the sex long enough to start thinking a little more clearly. That was a big part of the recovery process for me, because I finally had a chance to stop and see exactly what my actions were doing, who I was hurting."

Now, four years after leaving Eleutheros, Simmons considers himself one of the ministry's successes. He and his wife have worked on their relationship, and he feels more physically engaged with her. "She still probably wants more sex than we have," he says. "But it's nothing like it was before. Before, we'd have sex maybe once a month. Now it's six to eight times a month. We've come a long way in that respect." Simmons occasionally finds other women attractive, too. "I work outside delivering mail, and I see women, and I think, 'Wow, that looks good.' But I wouldn't say I'm all the way there."

"I don't feel like a stereotypical straight guy, the beer-drinking 'Hey buddy, let's shoot some deer,'" Simmons adds. But neither does he feel consumed by his same-sex desires. "There's still some attraction to men. But it doesn't set off the same bells and whistles it used to. Now I'm a little freer; I can say, 'Wow, that's a very attractive-looking man' and leave it at that. If a guy looked at me and winked, there might be a little sexual flush. But if he's just sitting there, and I look over and he's very handsome—it's not a big deal."

Simmons' is one of the real-life stories behind the "ex-gay" movement, a loose alliance of secular counselors, renegade psychoanalysts and Christian ministries that believe homosexuality is a pathology that can be overcome. Though no

statistics exist on the number of men and women who have tried to change their orientations, Exodus International, the Christian ex-gay umbrella-organization, estimates it has fielded 200,000 inquiries from homosexuals and their families since the 1970s, according to director Bob Davies. Exodus and its member ministries now draw more than 400 inquiries a month.

Operating quietly for many years, the movement suddenly burst into notoriety last summer, when 15 conservative organizations began a \$400,000 advertising blitz in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today* and other major newspapers. The ads feature photos of men and women who have struggled with same-sex attraction and have a text that reads, "Thousands of ex-gays like these have walked away from their homosexual identities. While the paths each took into homosexuality may vary, their stories of hope and healing through the transforming love of Jesus Christ are the same."

The ads have sparked a firestorm of controversy, with lesbian and gay activists accusing the sponsors, including the Christian Coalition, of exploiting sexually confused individuals to promote an ideological agenda. It has been a made-for-media issue, and the press has focused on the political debate.

Lost among the coverage have been the more personal issues: What is the nature of sexual orientation, and is it mutable? Who are the thousands of people seeking to change their sexualities? What life experiences drive someone to seek a "conversion" to heterosexuality? And what does it mean to convert? Are homosexuals truly shedding their same-sex attractions? Or do they continue to struggle against their natural impulses, accepting celibacy or marriage as a socially sanctioned substitute? In other words, can one really "learn" to be straight?

Moreover, is it healthy to try? For people within the ex-gay movement, this last is an easy question to answer. They believe that homosexuality is sick or immoral, and anything that frees someone from having gay sex is inherently

healthful. "We're not free from the opportunity, but we're free from the power of sin," says Greg Wallace, an ex-gay who now runs the Living Waters ministry in Beech Grove, Indiana. "The word 'recovery' means the ability to live a productive and enjoyable life, beyond the control of life-dominating sexual behavior and impulse."

The vast majority of mental-health professionals, however, view reorientation programs with skepticism and alarm. In December, the American Psychiatric Association's board voted unanimously to oppose conversion therapy, saying that it could "reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient." Even the American Psychoanalytic Association, once in favor of attempts to "cure" homosexuality, has moved away from endorsing such efforts. Marvin Margolis, M.D., Ph.D., past president of the association, calls same-sex attraction "a variant of normal sexuality."

Most psychologists say that conversion ministries and therapists are trying to force lesbians and gay men into a mold that doesn't really fit, and the results could lead to depression, addiction, even suicide. "When people repress their orientation, in order to make all that work, they hide under layers and layers of incredibly destructive behavior," says Terry Norman, D. Min., a professional counselor in Kansas City. "Ultimately, it kills."

Sexual orientation is one of the great mysteries of the human mind. For decades, researchers have tried to figure out what makes someone attracted to a particular sex, and the question is far from settled. Most scientists now believe that there isn't a single cause; rather, our desires spring from the complex interplay of biology and environment.

"Our understanding of why people have the sexual orientation they do is still very poor," says Stephen John Clark, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychology at Vassar College. "There is growing evidence that events that happen very early in life, genetic influences, the environment in the womb and experiences in the first years of life play a large role in determining one's sexual orientation. The evidence is not conclusive, how-

ever, and workers in the field are far from a consensus." It's not even clear, he adds, whether everyone's sexuality is shaped by the same forces. "People are diverse. They fall in love with all sorts of different people. Should it surprise us if it turns out that who they fall in love with is determined by a variety of factors?"

In recent years, scientists have intensified the search for biological causes of homosexuality. Best known is the controversial work of molecular geneticist Dean Hamer, Ph.D., of the National Cancer Institute, who is focusing on finding a so-called "gay gene." Looking at families with more than one gay member, Hamer and his colleagues have used inheritance patterns to theorize that the X chromosome contains a gene that predisposes some men toward homosexuality. In one study, Hamer examined 40 pairs of gay brothers and found that 33 of the pairs had five identical strips of DNA on their X chromosomes. Hamer and his colleagues are now searching for a specific gene within these DNA strips, and are also looking for other chromosomes that might have a connection to sexual orientation.

Researchers have also been examining whether brain structure correlates with sexual orientation. At San Diego's Salk Institute, Simon LeVay, Ph.D., a neuroscientist, has noted in autopsy studies that a certain nucleus—or cell cluster—in the hypothalamus is between two and three times larger in straight men than in gay men. He has also observed that this nucleus is generally smaller in deceased women, leading him to hypothesize that smaller structures are somehow correlated with sexual attraction toward men. (LeVay did not know the orientation of the deceased women whose brains he was studying.) LeVay's findings are open to challenge; for example, some critics note that the "gay brains" belonged to men who died of AIDS, whose nuclei might have been shrunk by their medications.

While many psychologists today are convinced that biological factors will ultimately prove to play a strong role in determining sexual orientation, a

break-away group of therapists believe that this entire body of science is off the mark. Known as "reparative therapists," they hew to an alternative theory of homosexuality, which has been adopted by both the secular and religious arms of the ex-gay movement. Their theory harks back to old notions of homosexuality as a mental disorder— notions repudiated by the American Psychiatric Association a quarter-century ago.

The current leader of this movement is Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D., director of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. A lifelong heterosexual, Nicolosi makes no pretense of hiding his biases. "Nature made man complementary to woman, and to cling to the sameness of one's own sex is to look at the world with one eye," he writes in his book *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* (Jason Aronson, 1991). "I do not believe that any man can ever be truly at peace in living out a homosexual orientation."

To Nicolosi and his followers, gay male sexuality stems directly from a poor relationship between a boy and his father. If a father isn't a strong influence on the family, and if he doesn't provide emotional support and physical affection, then the child won't learn to identify with adult men. As he grows older, the boy will start looking for the maleness he never acquired, and his search will take on sexual overtones.

"People are gendered. We are naturally gendered into male and female. So the male homosexual is trying to find his unfulfilled masculinity," Nicolosi declares. "His homosexual attractions are a symptom of his desire to find his masculine identification and same-sex emotional needs."

Critics consider this a deeply flawed argument. Andrew Sullivan, former editor of *The New Republic* and a gay man, notes that if distant fathers were the cause, "then most of the generations born between 1930 and 1980 would be homosexual. There might also, perhaps, be a startling rise in homosexuality among African-Americans in the last 20 years, when absent fathers have become the norm, rather than the exception."

But Nicolosi presses on, maintaining that homosexuals can never be truly happy. He describes gay sex as "isolated and narcissistic," because partners experience orgasm separately and must negotiate their sexual roles in the acts they perform. And he claims "sexual sameness" causes partners to lose interest and look for other contacts. Nicolosi ignores the fact that lesbians are famously monogamous and dismisses two respected studies saying the majority of gay men have 20 or fewer partners in their lifetimes. "I just don't believe it," he says.

In Nicolosi's therapy, clients discuss their relationship with their parents, their sense of maleness, and new ways to interpret their sexual attractions. They're encouraged to form platonic friendships with handsome straight men in order to demystify and desexualize those men. And they are prevailed on to reclaim their masculinity by playing sports, getting angry and expressing their relationship needs directly.

The result is not instant heterosexuality. A successful client "doesn't immediately walk down a street and get a sexual charge from looking at a woman," Nicolosi says. "But he will begin to notice women. He will begin to feel a desire to get married and have a family." He will still be attracted to men, Nicolosi says, "but that sexual desire is greatly diminished. If the attraction is intense, it becomes a signal to him that there's something amiss in his life. 'Wow, what is going on that I'm having a feeling like this? Have I been honestly connected to my wife? Have I been keeping connections with my friends?'"

Using such techniques, Christian ministries and reparative therapists claim to successfully convert about 30% of homosexuals in their programs. But are those really successes?

Nicolosi and his adherents don't track former clients, and mainstream psychologists have their doubts that these transformations are long-lasting. "I have yet to see a conversion hold," says Michael Picucci, Ph.D., a psychologist in New York City. More troubling, however, is the fact that these programs do not, as Nicolosi acknowledges, change basic sexual orientation. "The dan-

... is that some individuals are going to end up feeling that in some important way their life is a lie and a sham," observes Christopher Wallis, M.D., a member of the American Psychoanalytic Association's committee on issues of homosexuality.

The consequences can be devastating. Terry Norman, the St. Louis counselor, says "orientational repression" sometimes leads to drug and alcohol abuse, workaholicism and compulsive sex. There also have been reports of people killing themselves, or attempting to, after failing to convert. "After hearing the categorical promises that these programs work, what do people conclude when they do these things and it doesn't work for them?" asks Norman. "That God doesn't bless them, that they really are pieces of trash that pollute the Earth."

Just who tries to change? Not the average gay man or woman. Would-be converts, say psychologists, typically come from deeply authoritarian backgrounds where homosexuality is branded immoral or a sin, while others are married and cannot reconcile their family commitments with their erotic desires.

Many also are facing tremendous problems, including alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse and parental violence or rejection. Mike Jones, 44, remembers that his first sexual contact in adolescence involved mutual masturbation with his father. "That was the first time that my reaching out to my father was received by him," says Jones, who runs the Corduroy Stone ministry in Lansing, Michigan. Through his involvement in Exodus International, says Jones, he has learned how to live a celibate life, though he continues to fantasize about men when he masturbates. He finds himself attracted to about a quarter of the men who pass through his ministry. (When those feelings surface, he says, he channels them into platonic friendship.)

Dena Westcott of Orlando, an Eleutherios graduate who grappled with suicidal tendencies and her own explosive temper, voices a similar experience. The ministry has helped her confront childhood sexual abuse and her relationship with

a hateful mother. It also taught her to cultivate close platonic friendships with other women, particularly when she feels her lesbian attractions intensifying.

It should come as no surprise, then, when ex-gays express satisfaction about getting their homosexuality "under control." Faced with a panoply of problems, many have acted out sexually, seeking encounters to ease their pain. By dealing with core issues, conversion programs put the brakes on destructive sexual and social behavior. But, as psychologists point out, this has nothing inherently to do with homosexuality.

For every person who claims a conversion to heterosexuality, there are several others who fail in their efforts. Two of the founders of Exodus International, Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper, left the organization after falling in love, and more than a dozen Christian ministries have closed down after their leaders reverted back to homosexuality. There is now an informal network of "ex-ex-gays," people who tried unsuccessfully to change their orientations, and instead have learned to live as gay men and lesbians. "Sexuality is an incredible part of life. But its not *the* aspect, and I needed to get on with living," says Jallen Rix, a Christian music singer.

The product of a strict Southern Baptist upbringing, Rix wanted badly to be accepted by his family and community, but found that men excited him sexually. There were "doctor" games with male cousins, encounters with strangers in the woods near his home, and at the Christian college he attended, a physical friendship with a male student. To ward off suspicions, Rix became a "semi-compulsive liar," adept at deflecting any query that would reveal his homosexuality.

When the dissonance became too great, Rix began attending the California-based ministry Desert Stream where worship and pep talks were allied with "dives into our past," he recalls. "They'd have all this outdated therapy that because of an absent or passive father, I have identified more with my mother and I'm attracted to men." Rix became suspicious of the ministry's

techniques. Young men and older male mentors, who were supposed to serve as surrogate fathers, sometimes began living together in relationships that were essentially gay, except that there was no sex.

More important, the program didn't work for Rix. "I went home and I was still horny for men." After a year and half and still desperate for help, Rix drove to another charismatic church where a woman promised to exorcise his homosexuality. She laid hands on his head, anointed his forehead with oil and started praying. "I wanted this to work so bad," he recalls. "I grunted and squeezed and tried to shove this homosexuality out of me. I remember afterwards, going out for fast food and trying to coach myself, 'It's gone. Yeah, it's gone.' But it wasn't."

Disillusioned, Rix started coming to tea with being gay. He continued to perform Christian music for conservative churches and private schools, but by his early 30s realized he could hide his sexual orientation. Now 35, he still performs, but generally for liberal and gay churches. Rix doesn't regret his time in the ministry. But he worries that others are being pressured into conformity and denial, rather than learning how to lead authentic lives. "When people say they're happy being married, they're really saying, 'I'm not happy being married, but it's the only way to be acceptable to myself and to the people around me.' I don't think they'll feel that way in the long run."

## Reading 5

### *Becoming Bisexual*

Martin S. Weinberg, Colin J. Williams, and Douglas W. Pryor

**B**ecoming bisexual involves the rejection of not one but two recognized categories of sexual identity: heterosexual and homosexual. Most people settle into the status of heterosexual without any struggle over the identity. There is not much concern with explaining how this occurs; that people are heterosexual is simply taken for granted. For those who find heterosexuality unfulfilling, however, developing a sexual identity is more difficult.

How is it then that some people come to identify themselves as “bisexual”? As a point of departure we take the process through which people come to identify themselves as “homosexual.” A number of models have been formulated that chart the development of a homosexual identity through a series of stages.<sup>1</sup> While each model involves a different number of stages, the models all share three elements. The process begins with the person in a state of identity confusion—feeling different from others, struggling with the acknowledgment of same-sex attractions. Then there is a period of thinking about possibly being homosexual—involving associating with self-identified homosexuals, sexual experimentation, forays into the homosexual subculture. Last is the attempt to integrate one’s self-concept and social identity as homosexual—acceptance of the label, disclosure about being homosexual, acculturation to a homosexual way of life, and the development of love relationships.

---

From: *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality* by Martin S. Weinberg, Colin J. Williams, and Douglas W. Pryor. Copyright © 1994 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.

Not every person follows through each stage. Some remain locked in at a certain point. Others move back and forth between stages.

To our knowledge, no previous model of *bisexual* identity formation exists.... [W]e present such a model based on the following questions: To what extent is there overlap with the process involved in becoming homosexual? How far is the label “bisexual” clearly recognized, understood, and available to people as an identity? Does the absence of a bisexual subculture in most locales affect the information and support needed for sustaining a commitment to the identity? For our subjects, then, what are the problems in finding the “bisexual” label, understanding what the label means, dealing with social disapproval from two directions, and continuing to use the label once it is adopted? From our fieldwork and interviews, we found that four stages captured our respondents’ most common experiences when dealing with questions of identity: initial confusion, finding and applying the label, settling into the identity, and continued uncertainty.

#### The Stages

##### Initial Confusion

Many of the people interviewed said that they had experienced a period of considerable confusion, doubt, and struggle regarding their sexual identity before defining themselves as bisexual. This was ordinarily the first step in the process of becoming bisexual.

They described a number of major sources of early confusion about their sexual identity. For some, it was the experience of having strong sexual feelings for both sexes that was unsettling, disorienting, and sometimes frightening. Often



these were sexual feelings that they said they did not know how to easily handle or resolve.

*In the past, I couldn't reconcile different desires I had. I didn't understand them. I didn't know what I was. And I ended up feeling really mixed up, unsure, and kind of frightened. (F)*

*I thought I was gay, and yet I was having these intense fantasies and feelings about fucking women. I went through a long period of confusion. (M)*

Others were confused because they thought strong sexual feelings for, or sexual behavior with, the same sex meant an end to their long-standing heterosexuality.

*I was afraid of my sexual feelings for men and...that if I acted on them, that would negate my sexual feelings for women. I knew absolutely no one else who had...sexual feelings for both men and women, and didn't realize that was an option. (M)*

*When I first had sexual feelings for females, I had the sense I should give up my feelings for men. I think it would have been easier to give up men. (F)*

A third source of confusion in this initial stage stemmed from attempts by respondents trying to categorize their feelings for, and/or behaviors with, both sexes, yet not being able to do so. Unaware of the term "bisexual," some tried to organize their sexuality by using the readily available labels of "heterosexual" or "homosexual"—but these did not seem to fit. No sense of sexual identity jelled; an aspect of themselves remained unclassifiable.

*When I was young, I didn't know what I was. I knew there were people like Mom and Dad—heterosexual and married—and that there were "queens." I knew I wasn't like either one. (M)*

*I thought I had to be either gay or straight. That was the big lie. It was confusing.... That all began to change in the late 60s. It was a long and slow process.... (F)*

Finally, others suggested they experienced a great deal of confusion because of their "homophobia"—their difficulty in facing up to the same-sex component of their sexuality. The

consequence was often long-term denial. This was more common among the men than the women, but not exclusively so.

*At age seventeen, I became close to a woman who was gay. She had sexual feelings for me. I had some...for her but I didn't respond. Between the ages of seventeen and twenty-six I met another gay woman. She also had sexual feelings towards me. I had the same for her but I didn't act on...or acknowledge them.... I was scared.... I was also attracted to men at the same time.... I denied that I was sexually attracted to women. I was afraid that if they knew the feelings were mutual they would act on them...and put pressure on me. (F)*

*I thought I might be able to get rid of my homosexual tendencies through religious means—prayer, belief, counseling—before I came to accept it as part of me. (M)*

The intensity of the confusion and the extent to which it existed in the lives of the people we met at the Bisexual Center, whatever its particular source, was summed up by two men who spoke with us informally. As paraphrased in our field notes:

*The identity issue for him was a very confusing one. At one point, he almost had a nervous breakdown, and when he finally entered college, he sought psychiatric help.*

*Bill said he thinks this sort of thing happens a lot at the Bi Center. People come in "very confused" and experience some really painful stress.*

### Finding and Applying the Label

Following this initial period of confusion, which often spanned years, was the experience of finding and applying the label. We asked the people we interviewed for specific factors or events in their lives that led them to define themselves as bisexual. There were a number of common experiences.

For many who were unfamiliar with the term bisexual, the discovery that the category in fact existed was a turning point. This happened by simply hearing the word, reading about it somewhere, or learning of a place called the Bisexual

The discovery provided a means of making sense of long-standing feelings for both sexes.

*Early on I thought I was just gay, because I was not aware there was another category, bisexual. I always knew I was interested in men and women. But I did not realize there was a name for these feelings and behaviors until I took Psychology 101 and read about it, heard about it there. That was in college. (F)*

*The first time I heard the word, which was not until I was twenty-six, I realized that was what fit for me. What it fit was that I had sexual feelings for both men and women. Up until that point, the only way that I could define my sexual feelings was that I was either a latent homosexual or a confused heterosexual. (M)*

*Going to a party at someone's house, and finding out there that the party was to benefit the Bisexual Center. I guess at that point I began to define myself as bisexual. I never knew there was such a word. If I had heard the word earlier on, for example as a kid, I might have been bisexual then. My feelings had always been bisexual. I just did not know how to define them. (F)*

*Reading The Bisexual Option... I realized then that bisexuality really existed and that's what I was. (M)*

In the case of others the turning point was their first homosexual or heterosexual experience coupled with the recognition that sex was pleasurable with both sexes. These were people who already seemed to have knowledge of the label "bisexual," yet without experiences with both men and women, could not label themselves accordingly.

*The first time I had actual intercourse, an orgasm with a woman, it led me to realize I was bisexual; because I enjoyed it as much as I did with a man, although the former occurred much later on in my sexual experiences.... I didn't have an orgasm with a woman until twenty-two, while with males, that had been going on since the age of thirteen. (M)*

*Having homosexual fantasies and acting those out.... I would not identify as bi if I only had fantasies and they were mild. But since my fantasies*

*were intensely erotic, and I acted them out, these two things led me to believe I was really bisexual.... (M)*

*After my first involved sexual affair with a woman, I also had feelings for a man, and I knew I did not fit the category dyke. I was also dating gay-identified males. So I began looking at gay/lesbian and heterosexual labels as not fitting my situation. (F)*

Still others reported not so much a specific experience as a turning point, but emphasized the recognition that their sexual feelings for both sexes were simply too strong to deny. They eventually came to the conclusion that it was unnecessary to choose between them.

*I found myself with men but couldn't completely ignore my feelings for women. When involved with a man I always had a close female relationship. When one or the other didn't exist at any given time, I felt I was really lacking something. I seem to like both. (F)*

The last factor that was instrumental in leading people to initially adopt the label bisexual was the encouragement and support of others. Encouragement sometimes came from a partner who already defined himself or herself as bisexual.

*Encouragement from a man I was in a relationship with. We had been together two or three years at the time—he began to define as bisexual.... (He) encouraged me to do so as well. He engineered a couple of threesomes with another woman. Seeing one other person who had bisexuality as an identity that fit them seemed to be a real encouragement. (F)*

Encouragement from a partner seemed to matter more for women. Occasionally the "encouragement" bordered on coercion as the men in their lives wanted to engage in a *ménage à trois* or group sex.

*I had a male lover for a year and a half who was familiar with bisexuality and pushed me towards it. My relationship with him brought it up in me. He wanted me to be bisexual because he wanted to be in a threesome. He was also insanely jealous of my attractions to men, and did everything in his power*

*to suppress my opposite-sex attractions. He showed me a lot of pictures of naked women and played on my reactions. He could tell that I was aroused by pictures of women and would talk about my attractions while we were having sex.... He was twenty years older than me. He was very manipulative in a way. My feelings for females were there and [he was] almost forcing me to act on my attractions.... (F)*

Encouragement also came from sex-positive organizations, primarily the Bisexual Center, but also places like San Francisco Sex Information (SFSI),<sup>2</sup> the Pacific Center, and the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality....

*At the gay pride parade I had seen the brochures for the Bisexual Center. Two years later I went to a Tuesday night meeting. I immediately felt that I belonged and that if I had to define myself that this was what I would use. (M)*

*Through SFSI and the Bi Center, I found a community of people...[who] were more comfortable for me than were the exclusive gay or heterosexual communities.... [It was] beneficial for myself to be...in a sex-positive community. I got more strokes and came to understand myself better.... I felt it was necessary to express my feelings for males and females without having to censor them, which is what the gay and straight communities pressured me to do. (F)*

Thus our respondents became familiar with and came to the point of adopting the label bisexual in a variety of ways: through reading about it on their own, being in therapy, talking to friends, having experiences with sex partners, learning about the Bi Center, visiting SFSI or the Pacific Center, and coming to accept their sexual feelings.

### Settling into the Identity

Usually it took years from the time of first sexual attractions to, or behaviors with, both sexes before people came to think of themselves as bisexual. The next stage then was one of settling into the identity, which was characterized by a more complete transition in self-labeling.

Most reported that this settling-in stage was the consequence of becoming more self-accepting. They became less concerned with the negative attitudes of others about their sexual preference.

*I realized that the problem of bisexuality isn't mine. It's society's. They are having problems dealing with my bisexuality. So I was then thinking if they had a problem dealing with it, so should I. But I don't. (F)*

*I learned to accept the fact that there are a lot of people out there who aren't accepting. They can be intolerant, selfish, shortsighted and so on. Finally, in growing up, I learned to say "So what, I don't care what others think." (M)*

*I just decided I was bi. I trusted my own sense of self. I stopped listening to others tell me what I could or couldn't be. (F)*

The increase in self-acceptance was often attributed to the continuing support from friends, counselors, and the Bi Center, through reading, and just being in San Francisco.

*Fred Klein's The Bisexual Option book and meeting more and more bisexual people...helped me feel more normal.... There were other human beings who felt like I did on a consistent basis. (M)*

*I think going to the Bi Center really helped a lot. I think going to the gay baths and realizing there were a lot of men who sought the same outlet I did really helped. Talking about it with friends has been helpful and being validated by female lovers that approve of my bisexuality. Also the reaction of people who I've told, many of whom weren't even surprised. (M)*

*The most important thing was counseling. Having the support of a bisexual counselor. Someone who acted as somewhat of a mentor. [He] validated my frustration..., helped me do problem solving, and guide[d] me to other supportive experiences like SFSI. Just engaging myself in a supportive social community. (M)*

The majority of the people we came to know through the interviews seemed settled in their sexual identity. We tapped this through a variety

questions.... Ninety percent said that they did not think they were currently in transition from being homosexual to being heterosexual or from being heterosexual to being homosexual. However, when we probed further by asking this group "Is it possible, though, that someday you could define yourself as either lesbian/gay or heterosexual?" about 40 percent answered yes. About two-thirds of these indicated that the change could be in either direction, though almost 70 percent said that such a change was not probable.

We asked those who thought a change was possible what it might take to bring it about. The most common response referred to becoming involved in a meaningful relationship that was monogamous or very intense. Often the sex of the hypothetical partner was not specified, underscoring that the overall quality of the relationship was what really mattered.

*Love. I think if I feel insanely in love with some person, it could possibly happen. (M)*

*If I should meet a woman and want to get married, and if she was not open to my relating to men, I might become heterosexual again. (M)*

*Getting involved in a long-term relationship like marriage where I wouldn't need a sexual involvement with anyone else. The sex of the...partner wouldn't matter. It would have to be someone who I could commit my whole life to exclusively, a life-long relationship. (F)*

A few mentioned the breaking up of a relationship and how this would incline them to look toward the other sex.

*Steve is one of the few men I feel completely comfortable with. If anything happened to him, I don't know if I'd want to try and build up a similar relationship with another man. I'd be more inclined to look towards women for support. (F)*

Changes in sexual behavior seemed more likely, for the people we interviewed...than changes in how they defined themselves. We asked "Is it possible that someday you could behave either exclusively homosexual or exclu-

sively heterosexual?" Over 80 percent answered yes. This is over twice as many as those who saw a possible change in how they defined themselves, again showing that a wide range of behaviors can be subsumed under the same label. Of this particular group, the majority (almost 60 percent) felt that there was nothing inevitable about how they might change, indicating that it could be in either a homosexual or a heterosexual direction. Around a quarter, though, said the change would be to exclusive heterosexual behavior and 15 percent to exclusive homosexual behavior. (Twice as many women noted the homosexual direction, while many more men than women said the heterosexual direction.) Just over 40 percent responded that a change to exclusive heterosexuality or homosexuality was not very probable, about a third somewhat probable, and about a quarter very probable.

Again, we asked what it would take to bring about such a change in behavior. Once more the answers centered on achieving a long-term monogamous and involved relationship, often with no reference to a specific sex.

*For me to behave exclusively heterosexual or homosexual would require that I find a lifetime commitment from another person with a damn good argument of why I should not go to bed with somebody else. (F)*

*I am a romantic. If I fell in love with a man, and our relationship was developing that way, I might become strictly homosexual. The same possibility exists with a woman. (M)*

Thus "settling into the identity" must be seen in relative terms. Some of the people we interviewed did seem to accept the identity completely. When we compared our subjects' experiences with those characteristic of homosexuals, however, we were struck by the absence of closure that characterized our bisexual respondents—even those who appeared most committed to the identity. This led us to posit a final stage in the formation of sexual identity, one that seems unique to bisexuals.

### Continued Uncertainty

The belief that bisexuals are confused about their sexual identity is quite common. This conception has been promoted especially by those lesbians and gays who see bisexuality as being in and of itself a pathological state. From their point of view, "confusion" is literally a built-in feature of "being" bisexual. As expressed in one study:

*While appearing to encompass a wider choice of love objects...[the bisexual] actually becomes a product of abject confusion; his self-image is that of an overgrown young adolescent whose ability to differentiate one form of sexuality from another has never developed. He lacks above all a sense of identity...[He] cannot answer the question: What am I?<sup>3</sup>*

One evening a facilitator at a Bisexual Center rap group put this belief in a slightly different and more contemporary form:

*One of the myths about bisexuality is that you can't be bisexual without somehow being "schizoid." The lesbian and gay communities do not see being bisexual as a crystallized or complete sexual identity. The homosexual community believes there is no such thing as bisexuality. They think that bisexuals are people who are in transition [to becoming homosexual] or that they are people afraid of being stigmatized [as homosexual] by the heterosexual majority.*

We addressed the issue directly in the interviews with two questions: "Do you *presently* feel confused about your bisexuality?" and "Have you *ever* felt confused...?"...For the men, a quarter and 84 percent answered "yes," respectively. For the women, it was about a quarter and 56 percent.

When asked to provide details about this uncertainty, the primary response was that *even after having discovered and applied the label "bisexual" to themselves, and having come to the point of apparent self-acceptance, they still experienced continued intermittent periods of doubt and uncertainty regarding their sexual identity.* One reason was the lack of social validation and support

that came with being a self-identified bisexual. The social reaction people received made it difficult to sustain the identity over the long haul.

While the heterosexual world was said to be completely intolerant of any degree of homosexuality, the reaction of the homosexual world mattered more. Many bisexuals referred to the persistent pressures they experienced to relabel themselves as "gay" or "lesbian" and to engage in sexual activity exclusively with the same sex. It was asserted that no one was *really* bisexual, and that calling oneself "bisexual" was a politically incorrect and inauthentic identity. Given that our respondents were living in San Francisco (which has such a large homosexual population) and that they frequently moved in and out of the homosexual world (to whom they often looked for support) this could be particularly distressing.

*Sometimes the repeated denial the gay community directs at us, their negation of the concept and the term bisexual has sometimes made me wonder whether I was just imagining the whole thing. (M)*

*My involvement with the gay community. There was extreme political pressure. The lesbians said bisexuals didn't exist. To them, I had to make up my mind and identify as lesbian.... I was really questioning my identity, that is, about defining myself as bisexual.... (F)*

For the women, the invalidation carved over to their feminist identity (which most had). They sometimes felt that being with men meant they were selling out the world of women.

*I was involved with a woman for several years. She was straight when I met her but became a lesbian. She tried to "win me back" to lesbianism. She tried to tell me that if I really loved her, I would leave Bill. I did love her, but I could not deny how I felt about him either. So she left me and that hurt. I wondered if I was selling out my woman identity and if it [being bisexual] was worth it. (F)*

A few wondered whether they were lying to themselves about their heterosexual side. One woman questioned whether her heterosexual desires were a result of "acculturation" rather than

on her own choice. Another woman suggested a similar social dimension to her homosexual component:

*There was one period when I was trying to be gay because of the political thing of being totally woman-identified rather than being with men. The Women's Culture Center in college had a women's studies minor, so I was totally immersed in women's culture.... (F)*

Lack of support also came from the absence of bisexual role models, no real bisexual community aside from the Bisexual Center, and nothing in the way of public recognition of bisexuality, which bred uncertainty and confusion.

*I went through a period of dissociation, of being very alone and isolated. That was due to my bisexuality. People would ask, well, what was I? I wasn't gay and I wasn't straight. So I didn't fit. (F)*

*I don't feel like I belong in a lot of situations because society is so polarized as heterosexual or homosexual. There are not enough bi organizations or public places to go to like bars, restaurants, clubs.... (F)*

For some, continuing uncertainty about their sexual identity was related to their inability to translate their sexual feelings into sexual behaviors. (Some of the women had never engaged in homosexual sex.)

*Should I try to have a sexual relationship with a woman?... Should I just back off and keep my distance, just try to maintain a friendship? I question whether I am really bisexual because I don't know if I will ever act on my physical attractions for females. (F)*

*I know I have strong sexual feelings towards men, but then I don't know how to get close to or be sexual with a man. I guess that what happens is I start wondering how genuine my feelings are.... (M)*

For the men, confusion stemmed more from the practical concerns of implementing and managing multiple partners or from questions about how to find an involved homosexual relationship

and what that might mean on a social and personal level.

*I felt very confused about how I was going to manage my life in terms of developing relationships with both men and women. I still see it as a difficult lifestyle to create for myself because it involves a lot of hard work and understanding on my part and that of the men and women I'm involved with. (M)*

*I've thought about trying to have an actual relationship with a man. Some of my confusion revolves around how to find a satisfactory sexual relationship. I do not particularly like gay bars. I have stopped having anonymous sex.... (M)*

Many men and women felt doubts about their bisexual identity because of being in an exclusive sexual relationship. After being exclusively involved with an opposite-sex partner for a period of time, some of the respondents questioned the homosexual side of their sexuality. Conversely, after being exclusively involved with a partner of the same sex, other respondents called into question the heterosexual component of their sexuality.

*When I'm with a man or a woman sexually for a period of time, then I begin to wonder how attracted I really am to the other sex. (M)*

*In the last relationship I had with a woman, my heterosexual feelings were very diminished. Being involved in a lesbian lifestyle put stress on my self-identification as a bisexual. It seems confusing to me because I am monogamous for the most part, monogamy determines my lifestyle to the extremes of being heterosexual or homosexual. (F)*

Others made reference to a lack of sexual activity with weaker sexual feelings and affections for one sex. Such learning did not fit with the perception that bisexuals should have "balanced" desires and behaviors. The consequence was doubt about "really" being bisexual.

*On the level of sexual arousal and deep romantic feelings, I feel them much more strongly for women than for men. I've gone so far as questioning myself when this is involved. (M)*

*I definitely am attracted to and it is much easier to deal with males. Also, guilt for my attraction to females has led me to wonder if I am just really toying with the idea. Is the sexual attraction I have for females something I constructed to pass time or what? (F)*

Just as "settling into the identity" is a relative phenomenon, so too is "continued uncertainty," which can involve a lack of closure as part and parcel of what it means to be bisexual.

We do not wish to claim too much for our model of bisexual identity formation. There are limits to its general application. The people we interviewed were unique in that not only did *all* the respondents define themselves as bisexual (a consequence of our selection criteria), but they were also all members of a bisexual social organization in a city that perhaps more than any other in the United States could be said to provide a bisexual subculture of some sort. Bisexuals in places other than San Francisco surely must move through the early phases of the identity process with a great deal more difficulty. Many probably never reach the later stages.

Finally, the phases of the model we present are very broad and somewhat simplified. While the particular problems we detail within different phases may be restricted to the type of bisexuals in this study, the broader phases can form the basis for the development of more sophisticated models of bisexual identity formation.

Still, not all bisexuals will follow these patterns. Indeed, given the relative weakness of the

bisexual subculture compared with the social pressures toward conformity exhibited in the gay subculture, there may be more varied ways of acquiring a bisexual identity. Also, the involvement of bisexuals in the heterosexual world means that various changes in heterosexual lifestyles (e.g., decrease in open marriages or swinging) will be continuing, and as yet unexplored, influence on bisexual identity. Finally, wider societal changes notably the existence of AIDS, may make for changes in the overall identity process. Being used to choice and being open to both sexes can give bisexuals a range of adaptations in their sexual life that are not available to others.

#### NOTES

1. Vivien C. Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation: Testing a Theoretical Model." *Journal of Sex Research* 20 (1984), pp. 143-167; Eli Coleman, "Developmental Stages of the Coming Out Process." *Journal of Homosexuality* 7 (1981/2), pp. 31-43; Barbara Ponse, *Identities in the Lesbian World: The Social Construction of Self* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978).
2. Martin S. Weinberg, Colin J. Williams, and Douglas Pryor, "Telling the Facts of Life: A Study of a Sex Information Switchboard." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 17 (1988), pp. 131-163.
3. Donald Webster Cory and John P. Leroy, *The Homosexual and His Society* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963), p. 61.

## chapter 2

# Researching Sexuality



### Spotlight on Research

An interview with

John Bancroft

John Bancroft, M.D., is the director of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. His research interests include the relationships between reproductive hormones, fertility control and sexual behavior, the menstrual cycle and menopause, sexual psychophysiology, sexual dysfunction in men and women, high-risk sexual behavior, and the relationship between mood and sexuality. Dr. Bancroft has published more than 200 papers related to sex research. He is also the author of *Human Sexuality and Its Problems* (Churchill Livingstone, 1989), and various other books on sexuality.

#### What led you to begin studying sexuality?

*Three things in my particular case. First of all, my research career started at a time when behaviorism was just getting under way. One of the areas being looked at as a subject for behavior modification was sexual behavior, and some of my first experiences as a sex researcher were attempts to modify people's sexual behavior. Second, I'm something of a maverick who likes doing unconventional things. While sex research is clearly important, most people shy away from doing it. And thirdly, the need for a very broad cross-disciplinary*



*approach has a strong intellectual appeal. And then of course, many people get into sex research because they want to understand their own sexuality.*

**Which of your projects have you found most stimulating?**

*I've undoubtedly been most excited by what we've been doing here at the Kinsey Institute. For the 20 years prior to arriving at the institute, I was working as a researcher with a fairly conventional, positivist approach to science. By coming here, I in some way escaped from that more positivist scientific culture, and that had a liberating effect on me intellectually. I came to realize that theory was the only way to deal with what had been becoming increasingly apparent as my career progressed—the incredible complexity of human sexuality. The more we uncovered, the more complicated it seemed to get. We've developed a theoretical model that we call the Dual Control Model, which guides much of our research program at the Kinsey Institute. This model postulates that there are two conceptual systems in the brain, the excitatory system and the inhibitory system. The balance between these two systems determines sexual response and the resulting sexual behavior. Crucial to this model is the assumption that people vary in their propensity for both excitation and inhibition. We have established a good method for measuring this individual variability, and this has opened up a whole new research agenda for studying the extraordinary variability of human sexuality.*

**Why is it important to do sex research?**

*Issues relating to sex and sexuality are associated with many of the most crucial problems that the human species faces at this point in history. At one end of the spectrum there is population growth and population control; at the other end are epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases. In between, there are numerous personal and societal problems linked to sexuality and its relationship to gender and reproduction. At the same time, there is considerable reluctance to engage with these issues academically because of their taboo nature. As a result, they have been seriously under-researched and under-studied and are crying out for more concerted scholarly attention.*

**What ethical dilemmas have you faced in studying sexuality? How did you resolve them?**

*The biggest ethical dilemma I have personally faced was early in my career when I was doing behavior modification. For a short time I investigated a number of behavioral methods in an attempt to modify people's sexual orientations. Although this involved issues such as fetishism and transvestism, the ethical issue came with trying to modify homosexual preferences. I like to*