

## Culturally Invariable Properties of Male Homosexuality: Tentative Conclusions from Cross-Cultural Research

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*While the behavior of homosexuals in some aspects is subject to cultural variability, this analysis explores the equally important question of cultural invariability. Based on several years of field work in homosexual communities in the United States, Guatemala, Brazil, and the Philippines, six tentative conclusions about cultural invariability are offered: (1) homosexual persons appear in all societies; (2) the percentage of homosexuals in all societies seems to be about the same and remains stable over time; (3) social norms do not impede or facilitate the emergence of homosexual orientation; (4) homosexual subcultures appear in all societies, given sufficient aggregates of people; (5) homosexuals in different societies tend to resemble each other with respect to certain behavioral interests and occupational choices; and (6) all societies produce similar continua from overtly masculine to overtly feminine homosexuals. Implications for this interpretation of homosexuality include the notion that homosexuality is not created by social structural arrangements but is rather a fundamental form of human sexuality acted out in different cultural settings.*

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**KEY WORDS:** homosexuality; cross-cultural; sexual orientation; cultural invariability.

### INTRODUCTION

Most analyses of cross-cultural aspects of human sexuality emphasize the infinite variability of human sexuality. Gagnon and Simon (1973, p. 261) have written that sexuality "is subject to the socio-cultural moulding to

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a degree surpassed by few other forms of behavior.” A recent major study by Bell and Weinberg emphasizes the diversity of homosexuals: “A primary focus of this investigation is upon diversity—the ways in which homosexual persons differ from each other” (1978, p. 24). While there are important cultural influences and considerable individual variation in the expression of human sexuality, an equally important but neglected problem in the social science of sex is the delineation of those aspects of human sexuality that are universal in human societies. Whether homosexuality as a sexual orientation appears only under certain social conditions, for example, is a question relevant not only for an adequate understanding of homosexuality but for a general theory of human sexuality as well.

This paper, based on field research observation and questionnaire data from four societies (the United States, Guatemala, Brazil, and the Philippines), examination of the cross-cultural literature, and published sources from homosexual communities, delineates those aspects of male homosexuality which appear to be culturally invariable, that is, which may be found in all societies. I began interviewing in and field observation of homosexual communities in Phoenix, Arizona, and New York City in 1974. In 1975 and 1976, I taught for two years in Guatemala City, where I interviewed in and observed the homosexual community in that country. The summers of 1975 and 1976 were spent in supervising anthropological field research in two Indian towns, San Andres Semetabaj and San Pedro Soloma in Guatemala’s highlands. I spent the summer of 1977 working in the homosexual community of São Paulo, Brazil, the summer and fall of 1979 in Hawaii interviewing native-born Hawaiians, and the winter of 1979 working in the homosexual community of Cebu City, Philippines.

Despite the general tendency of social scientists to disregard the universal elements of human sexual experience—Gagnon and Simon have written for example that “psychosexual development, while a universal component in the human experience, certainly does not occur with universal modalities” (1973, p. 171)—field observation of homosexual communities does suggest, filtered through respective cultural frameworks, certain universal components of homosexuality as a sexual orientation. The term homosexual is used here to refer to all persons who are exclusively or nearly exclusively attracted to persons of the same sex. In terms of the Kinsey scale of heterosexuality-homosexuality, these are Kinsey fives and sixes (Kinsey *et al.*, 1948). While some conclusions about female homosexuality have been formulated during the course of this investigation, the present analysis will be limited to males, with whom most of the work has been done and for whom comparative interview and questionnaire data are available. Unless otherwise stated, homosexuality refers to male homosexuality. The same questionnaire-interview schedule was administered to groups of homosexuals and heterosexuals of similar social background in the four

societies so that comparable data covering sexual behavior, early childhood behavior, family background, occupational interests, and other relevant aspects of respondents' lives are available. The present report is an attempt to generalize and synthesize in a largely qualitative way an extensive body of data and 5 years of field work.

Six tentative conclusions touching on culturally invariable aspects of homosexuality are offered:

- (1) Homosexuals appear in all societies.
- (2) The percentage of homosexuals in all societies seems to be the same and remains stable over time.
- (3) Social norms do not impede or facilitate the emergence of homosexual orientation.
- (4) Homosexual subcultures appear in all societies, given sufficient aggregates of people.
- (5) Homosexuals in different societies tend to resemble each other with respect to certain behavioral interests and occupational choices.
- (6) All societies produce similar continua from overtly masculine to overtly feminine homosexuals.

This analysis does not hold that cultural considerations are irrelevant to homosexuality. There are important cultural considerations which impinge on the acting out of homosexual behavior. Cultural considerations are especially important in the formation of attitudes, norms, and laws dealing with the treatment of homosexuals. Cultural considerations are important in the relationships between homosexuals and heterosexuals and in the relationships, even the sexual relationships, which homosexuals maintain among themselves. Several cultural considerations are touched upon here but have been deliberately downplayed in an effort to focus attention on culturally invariable effects of homosexuality. It does seem clear from the cross-cultural perspective that societies do not create homosexuals. Their emergence appears to be beyond the power of any society to control.

### TENTATIVE CONCLUSION 1

*Homosexuality as a sexual orientation is universal, appearing in all societies.* All societies produce groups of persons whose primary sexual orientation is homosexual. While adequate data on this point will never be available for all societies, especially those which have already disappeared, cross-cultural materials bearing on this point are compelling. In addition to field research and standard sources such as those of Ford and Beach (1951), W. Karlen (1971), Bullough (1976), and Katz (1976), examination of such sources as homosexual guides and current homosexual publications suggests

the presence of persons of homosexual orientation in virtually all contemporary societies. *The Spartacus International Gay Guide* (1979), published in Amsterdam and intended for the use of homosexuals traveling abroad, lists gay bars and meeting places in 115 countries, practically every country in the world (see Table I). Omission of countries does not mean that homosexuals do not exist there but that the editors do not have sufficient information, usually because of limited access. The United States and Canada have been omitted by the Spartacus guide because these countries are well covered by other guides, the best known of which is *Bob Damron's Address Book* (1979).

The Spartacus guide, it should be noted, does not limit its observations to Western European countries, where the guide is published, but gives information on gay life in countries as different culturally as Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Surinam. This evidence strongly suggests that homosexuals, that is, people who are exclusively or near-exclusively homosexual in their orientation, appear in every country of the world. In addition to the listing of homosexual meeting places, the guide presents a summary of what is known of laws and local attitudes toward homosexuality. Not only does this guide suggest that homosexuals exist everywhere, but it constitutes what is probably the most important single resource bearing on international aspects of homosexuality. It is astonishing that sociologists have up to now made so little use of such resources produced by the gay community itself. There is an unfortunate tendency among sociologists to reject out-of-hand the observations of gay people themselves. Schur, for example, claimed that estimates by individual homosexuals are not likely to be accurate, because many homosexuals "have a psychological stake in exaggerating their number" (1965, p. 75). Clinard and Meier in a recent revision of a textbook on deviant behavior repeat such arguments against using material from the gay community: "To date, estimates as to the incidence, prevalence, and increase of homosexuality, have been based on inadequate and unrepresentative data, often accompanied by fallacious reasoning" (1979, p. 430). Clinard and Meier conclude that one of the main problems has to do with the unreliability of reports by homosexuals themselves. The fact of the matter is that most gay organizations base their estimates on data derived from Kinsey and associates. While random samples and comprehensive standardized studies of the sex life of every society in the world would be of enormous help to sex researchers, unfortunately they do not exist. In their absence, we make do with the best evidence available derived from various sources, including gay sources.

**Table I.** Number of Homosexual Places in Countries of the World<sup>a</sup>

Country or place	Number of homosexual places
Aden	3
Afghanistan	1
Algeria	18
Antigua	7
Angola	5
Argentina	96
Australia	166
Austria	75
Bahamas	14
Bahrain	3
Barbados	13
Belgium	176
Bermuda	6
Brazil	187
Bulgaria	34
Burma	3
Cambodia	5
Canary Islands	15
Chile	57
China	3
Colombia	60
Costa Rica	10
Cuba	7
Curaçao	4
Cyprus	9
Czechoslovakia	51
Denmark	51
Dominican Republic	13
Ecuador	12
Egypt	18
Ereland	25
Fiji Islands	5
Finland	21
France	521
French Guyana	3
East Germany	67
West Germany	790
Gibraltar	16
Greece	97
Grenada	3
Guatemala	16
Guyana	8
Holland	239
Honduras	16
Hong Kong	24
Hungary	18
Iceland	3
India	25
Indonesia	17
Iran	3
Iraq	2

Table I. Continued

Country or place	Number of homosexual places
Israel	17
Italy	403
Ivory Coast	6
Jamaica	9
Japan	128
Kenya	24
Laos	4
Lebanon	19
Libya	10
Luxembourg	8
Madeira Islands	5
Malaysia	18
Malta	15
Mexico	90
Monaco	6
Morocco	59
Mozambique	14
Nepal	2
New Caledonia	4
New Guinea-Papua	13
New Zealand	58
Nicaragua	12
Nigeria	10
Norway	27
Pakistan	6
Panama	25
Paraguay	4
Peru	15
Philippines	31
Poland	41
Portugal	66
Portuguese Timor	1
Puerto Rico	74
Rhodesia	4
Rumania	12
Spanish Sahara	2
El Salvador	3
Santa Lucia Islands	8
Senegal	3
Singapore	18
Somalia	2
South Africa	106
South Korea	4
Spain	244
Sri Lanka	7
Surinam	5
Sweden	112
Switzerland	160
Syria	1
Tahiti	7
Tanzania	8

Table I. Continued

Country or place	Number of homosexual places
Thailand	29
Taiwan	4
Trinidad/Tobago	15
Tunisia	20
Turkey	28
United Arab Emirates	2
United Kingdom	926
U.S.S.R.	28
Uruguay	5
Venezuela	14
Vietnam (South)	7
Virgin Islands	23
Yugoslavia	38

<sup>a</sup>Based on *Spartacus International Gay Guide* (1979). The United States and Canada are not included in this guide because these countries are covered in other guides. For several reasons—legal status of homosexuality, cultural differences in homosexual social organizations, access—it is difficult to infer incidence from the number of homosexual places.

## TENTATIVE CONCLUSION 2

*Rates of persons with homosexual orientations appear to be similar in all societies and remain stable over time.* It is important to distinguish between homosexual acts and homosexual orientation, two aspects of homosexuality which are often confused in the social scientific literature. Homosexual acts may be performed by persons who have homosexual orientations or by persons who are primarily heterosexual or bisexual. Heterosexuals or bisexuals may perform homosexual acts in a wide variety of settings: ritualistic, where opposite-sex partners are not available, for economic gain, or for ancillary sexual pleasure. This point has been discussed at some length by Carrier (1976, 1977, 1980). The sexual relationships that exist between heterosexual and homosexual men seem to be subject to significant cultural variability. Men who are predominantly heterosexual in many societies use homosexuals for secondary sexual outlet in culturally prescribed ways. This is common in many countries of Southern Europe, North Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The Anglo-Saxon erotic tradition generally disapproves the sexual use of homosexuals by heterosexual men, and the actual incidence of such activity in Anglo-Saxon countries is probably minimal. The widespread impression that some

societies have much larger homosexual populations than others derives largely from confusion about this point. Because most writers on sex come from the Anglo-Saxon tradition, they do not fully appreciate the extent to which heterosexual men in many parts of the world use homosexuals for sexual contact. Tripp (1975, pp. 67-100), for example, through a failure to distinguish properly between homosexual acts and homosexual orientation, gives the impression in his influential work that rates of homosexual persons vary greatly from society to society. The extent to which heterosexual males use homosexuals for sexual purposes varies greatly according to cultural traditions, economic conditions, and the availability of females. This variability, however, does not seem to affect the percentage of persons in a given population who are exclusively or nearly exclusively homosexual in orientation, and the rates for these persons seem to be similar in all societies. Similarly, the social relationships between heterosexuals and homosexuals appear to be culturally variable. For example, heterosexuals in the United States tend to relate to homosexuals both sexually and socially in quite different ways than do heterosexuals in Latin American countries or in the Philippines. A common reaction in the United States is fear of and violence toward homosexuals; in Latin America and the Philippines, amusement and toleration are more likely reactions. The Philippines is probably the major contemporary society most tolerant of homosexuals. Homosexuality as a sexual orientation, then, appears to be independent of other manifestations of homosexual activity, and the incidence of males of homosexual orientation does not appear to exceed 5%. Moreover, this figure appears to remain stable over time.

It is difficult to estimate rates of homosexuality before the emergence of modern social scientific research on sexuality, though there have been some attempts to do so. Bloch, for example, found reason to believe that the percentage of homosexuals in Cologne in the fifteenth century was nearly as high as estimates by Hirschfeld at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Ellis, 1941, p. 61). While many social scientists assume that Kinsey's data produced the first scientifically respectable estimates of the incidence of sexual preferences in the general population, the first such estimates were actually produced by von Romer and Hirschfeld (Leser, 1973). Hirschfeld's achievements in research on variant sexuality, though widely ignored, are considerable (Whitam, 1980d). Hirschfeld's investigations were conducted after a study by von Romer in Amsterdam in 1901 had undertaken an investigation of university students and concluded that 1.9% were homosexual. Hirschfeld, desiring a larger sample, sent a letter enclosing an anonymous postcard questionnaire with the question "Is your sex instinct directed to women (W), men (M), or women and men (WM)?" The students were instructed to underline the appropriate response.

There were 1,756 responses, nearly 60%, a rather remarkable response rate given the novelty of the undertaking. The results showed 94% heterosexual, 1.5% homosexual, and 4.5% bisexual. In 1904 a similar letter was sent to 5,721 Berlin metalworkers, with the addition of an instruction in the case of bisexuality to indicate which urge was stronger, toward men or toward women. This questionnaire, yielding a 41.6% return rate, also resulted in an early version of the now famous seven-point Kinsey continuum: 94.25% heterosexual; 1.15% homosexual; 0.73% W and M; 1.88% W plus M; 0.58% W plus M; 1.41% questionable. Thus, three investigations in the early part of the century produced similar results; in both Amsterdam and Berlin the rate of exclusive or nearly exclusive male homosexuality was about 2%. It is interesting to note that the Berlin studies utilize working-class and middle-class groups, and in both the rate is the same.

Gebhard (1972), in reviewing the literature on the incidence of homosexuality and reassessing Kinsey's data, estimates that about 4% of white, college-educated, adult males are predominantly homosexual. He concludes that this "crude estimate coincides rather well with some European [meaning Hirschfeld's] calculations and with Havelock Ellis' guess" (1972, pp. 27-28). Ellis in *Sexual Inversion*, first published in 1896, wrote, "Among the professional and most cultured element of the middle class in England, there must be a distinct percentage of inverters which may be sometimes as much as 5 percent, though estimates must always be hazardous" (1941, p. 64). Late nineteenth century estimates of the proportion of Japanese homosexuals were similar to French and German estimates (Ellis, 1941, p. 62).

Thus, for some European and North American societies, the incidence of homosexuality appears to be similar and to have remained stable over a rather long period of time. Karlen notes that the stable incidence of homosexuality has "provoked odd silence rather than more research" (1978, p. 227). The implication of a finding that the incidence of homosexuality is similar in all societies and that it remains stable over time is, of course, of considerable theoretical importance. In short, we are led away from social-structural interpretations toward the view that homosexuality is, for whatever reasons, a constant element in the spectrum of human sexuality.

In contemporary societies it is, of course, very difficult to estimate homosexual populations. However, the homosexual populations of cities of similar size, unless there are special reasons why this should not be the case, tend to be of similar size. While the particular social-organizational forms of homosexual communities in Guatemala and the United States differ, the homosexual population of Guatemala City, a city of a million people, appears to be similar to that of Phoenix, Arizona, a community of similar size. In turn, the homosexual population in Cebu, Philippines, also a city of

one million, appears to be about the same as in Phoenix or Guatemala City. There are cultural differences in the ways in which the homosexual communities in these three cities are organized; yet the homosexual populations do not appear to exceed 5% in any of the three cities.

The homosexual population of São Paulo is much larger—the city has some 7 million inhabitants—about that of New York City. In the Large Do Arouche area of São Paulo, homosexual males are to be seen promenading in much the same way and in similar numbers as on Christopher Street in New York City. San Francisco, whose homosexual population is one-fourth of the city's total (*Arizona Gay News*, p. 2), has long drawn homosexuals from all over the United States. Unless special circumstances prevail, as in the case of San Francisco, there tends to be a general correlation between city size and size of the gay population.

Everywhere in the world homosexual populations appear to comprise no more than 5% of the total population. There are no countries that appear to have an inordinate percentage of homosexuals in comparison with heterosexuals. All societies are predominantly heterosexual. This is true despite reports of a primitive society in the jungles of Peru where everyone is homosexual. This report refers to a work by Tobias Schneebaum titled *Keep the River on Your Right* (1969), which was introduced into the sex research literature by Tripp (1975, p. 70) as a serious work in the anthropology of sex. Since the publication of Tripp's work, Schneebaum's "homosexual tribe" has captured the imagination of many undergraduates and even appears to be making its way into the serious social science literature. Mehan and Wood, for example, make use of Schneebaum in a recent work in ethnomethodology (1975, pp. 27-30). Schneebaum, a painter, went to Peru on a Fulbright fellowship in 1955 and described his alleged experiences some 15 years later. While in Peru, he went into the jungles near the point where the borders of Bolivia and Brazil join that of Peru. He reached a very remote mission, the name of which has been changed by the author; he also changed the names of the tribes themselves and the "names of a few places that would pinpoint the mission" (1969, author's note, n.p.). These names have been changed presumably to protect these indigenous people from any further "corruption" by Westerners. At this point-furthest-out mission, which serves the "Puerangas," themselves quite primitive, the narrator heard of an even more remote, primitive, and dangerous tribe never visited by a white man called the "Akaramas." Schneebaum reports that he traveled along through the jungle, "keeping the river on his right," and after a week found the "Akaramas," not knowing whether they would kill him or celebrate him. They followed the latter course, greeting him gleefully, stripping him naked, and treating him as one of themselves. He participated fully in their existence, became fluent in their language immediately, and even practiced cannibalism without flinching. After 7 months, he returned to the mission.

The book, dedicated to Carlos Castaneda and written in a mystical, poetic style suggestive of Castaneda's works, is not regarded by anthropologists as authentic field work but rather as the same genre as that of Castaneda. Murray (1979) has criticized Schneebaum's work from an anthropological point of view.

### TENTATIVE CONCLUSION 3

*Social norms do not appear to impede or facilitate the emergence of homosexuality as a sexual orientation.* Homosexuals appear with equal frequency in societies that are repressive of homosexuality and in societies that are permissive. Social norms may serve to reduce the overall incidence of homosexual outlet. In the Soviet Union and Cuba, for example, where conscious attempts have been made to eliminate homosexuality as a symptom of bourgeois decadence, the total incidence of homosexual outlet is probably reduced, yet reports from these countries suggest that homosexuals continue to exist, though their social organization is greatly attenuated. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, debate existed among sexologists as to whether Paris or London had more homosexuals. It was generally concluded that the homosexual populations were about the same, despite the fact that from the late eighteenth century on, France decriminalized homosexuality, while England retained severe penalties until 1967. Well-to-do English homosexuals in the nineteenth century frequently fled to France to live when threatened with criminal prosecution.

The aspect of homosexuality that appears most variable is that of attitudes and normative-legal systems. In all societies a small population of homosexuals emerges in the midst of a predominantly heterosexual population, which controls the normative-legal structure. All societies formulate policies toward homosexuals, ranging from very repressive to quite tolerant. Among the most repressive major societies in the world at present are the Soviet Union, Cuba, Iran, and Argentina. Relatively little is known about homosexuals in the Soviet Union since they do not officially exist. Yet several articles written by Russian homosexuals or Western observers have recently appeared in the gay press in the United States and Australia (Schuvaloff, 1976; "G," 1980; Phillip, 1980). These articles attest to the existence of homosexuals in all parts of the Soviet Union despite official repression, surveillance, and elimination of social organizational forms of homosexual life such as bars, restaurants, and clubs. The anonymous writer "G," for example, states that "there are gays in every city, in every small town. They were in my village in Siberia. They always find each other" (1980, p. 16).

After some communist countries, the English-speaking countries can be considered next most repressive. While Americans, the British, Canadians,

and Australians are accustomed to thinking of their countries as exemplary democracies, their treatment of homosexuals tends to be repressive. There is remarkable similarity among the Anglo-Saxon societies with respect to treatment of homosexuals. Homosexuals are allowed to develop their bars, clubs, and organizations, but they are subject to police surveillance and are treated as a subversive and criminal class. It should be remembered that in the United States only 24 out of the 50 American states have decriminalized consenting homosexual relations. It is true that the "Wolfenden" reforms in Great Britain in 1967 signified the liberalization of laws having to do with decriminalization of consenting homosexual relations; yet these reforms applied only to England and Wales. Only very recently, in 1980, were such relations decriminalized in Scotland, and they still remain criminalized in Ireland. Furthermore, these reforms came a century and a half after similar reforms in France.

Latin American countries are often thought to be repressive of homosexuality because these countries are Catholic, "machistic," and frequently ruled by military dictatorships. Yet most Latin American countries have never criminalized homosexuality and, except for Cuba and Argentina, tend for different reasons to be rather tolerant of homosexuals. There is in Latin America little violence directed toward homosexuals as there is in Anglo-Saxon countries. Brazil, long regarded by other Latin Americans as the most sexually tolerant country in Latin America, is also probably the most sexually tolerant in the Western hemisphere, with little prosecution, surveillance, or criminalization of homosexuals. What constitutes a "subversive" group is socially defined and culturally variable, and homosexuals in Latin America traditionally have not been regarded as subversive or dangerous even by military dictatorships.

The most permissive societies in the world tend to be those of Polynesia and Southeast Asia—Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia—where there appear to be long cultural traditions of tolerance of homosexuals. In these countries homosexuals tend to be regarded as a natural part of the social fabric, not as aberrations. It may be true, as Hart (1968) has suggested, that societies which regard homosexuality as natural and inborn are most tolerant. Despite wide variation in the treatment of homosexuals, there is no evidence that repression or tolerance in any way affect the *emergence* of predictable percentages of homosexual persons.

#### TENTATIVE CONCLUSION 4

*Homosexual subcultures appear in all societies, given sufficient aggregates of people.* Isolated persons of homosexual orientation

frequently exist in small primitive or traditional societies. Such cases have been observed in traditional Guatemalan Indian societies. One such individual, living in a village outside the Indian town of San Juan Chemelco, a Kechki-speaking area in the Guatemalan highlands, is described as follows by one of my students:

“Ishquicuink” in Kechki language signifies a man who sometimes acts like a man and sometimes like a woman. Such a man was pointed out to me by various persons in the village as being “Ishquicuink.” He was a man of about 40 years of age whose job was assistant to a folk healer (curandero). He invited me to visit his house. He lives with his mother, a sister, and a niece. Upon arriving at his house, he offered me a glass of lemonade that he himself made. As we arrived at lunchtime he set the table, served the food, cleaned off the table and washed the dishes. I asked him if he was married or had been. To both questions his answer was no. He also added that he did not want to marry because women are such a problem. (Mejia de Rodas, 1976)

Estimates of homosexuality in the Havasupai tribe of about 300 persons living in the bottom of the Grand Canyon in Arizona are that there are three, including a highly transvestic homosexual or transsexual who dresses as a woman and reportedly weaves the best baskets in the village. Because the number of persons with homosexual orientation tends to vary with the size of the society, a very small society of a few hundred is unlikely to produce a homosexual subculture. In isolated villages in traditional societies, homosexuals sometimes live out their lives without knowing that there are other homosexuals in the world. With larger aggregates of persons, however, rudimentary homosexual subcultures begin to emerge.

Even where there are small numbers of homosexuals in traditional societies, rudimentary elements of a homosexual subculture may appear. In the predominantly Indian town of Chimaltenango, Guatemala, two Indian men lived together as lovers, wearing traditional Indian clothing and living in an outwardly typical adobe house. Inside, however, the house was decorated in a manner strikingly different from those of other Indians. It was meticulously kept and elaborately decorated, and the owners paid a great deal of attention to their house, a characteristic discussed by Warren in her study of the American male homosexual subculture (1974, pp. 24-32). The occupation of the men was to string pine needles in decorative strands, traditionally used in Guatemala for holidays, and to supply flowers for weddings. In essence, these men were involved in the arts of embellishment, which appear to be universally associated with homosexual subcultures.

Hart (1968) has reported on a rather complex social organization among homosexuals in a small town in a relatively isolated rural area of the island of Cebu in the Philippines. The most prominent activity of this group was a drag “beauty contest,” a form of entertainment common in the Philippines, usually presented to the general public.

With larger populations come larger numbers of homosexuals. With larger numbers of homosexuals, the emergence of homosexual social organization is enhanced. Urbanization obviously plays an important role in the social organization of homosexuals. However, it should be emphasized that urbanization does not create homosexuality. Rather, it is through the larger numbers of homosexuals brought together by urbanization that homosexual subcultures emerge.

The problem of the *berdache* has given rise to considerable confusion in the sex literature. It has been widely assumed that the *berdache* represents an unusual form of sexual orientation or gender behavior invented by primitive societies and that the behavior is quite different from that in modern Western societies. It has sometimes been assumed that the *berdache* refers to a single pattern of behavior unique to certain preliterate societies. Tripp, for example, makes this assumption and moreover goes so far as to say that societies invented the *berdache* because effeminate males were in great demand:

it often turned out the effeminate males were far too rare to satisfy the market, with the result that in many of these societies the *berdache* were chosen in considerable numbers at birth—boys to be raised in the style of women, yet interestingly enough with some care to preserve various male qualities. (Tripp, 1975, p. 71)

The term *berdache*, however, appears to have been used in the anthropological literature, as pointed out by Angelino and Shedd (1955, p. 122), to refer to several types of sexual variation all of which are quite familiar to contemporary sex researchers. They write, for example, after reviewing numerous studies of the *berdache* in North American Indian groups, that some *berdaches* are

male sexual inverters who are practicing prostitutes but who retain all external masculine characteristics—dress, privileges, and the like—[masculine homosexuals or male homosexual prostitutes] coincidental with individuals who assume the dress, habits, and privileges of women, but who are not sexually inverted, maintaining, on the contrary, a heterosexual relationship [heterosexual transvestites]. Some *berdaches* are males who assume the attributes of women but who marry men (feminine or transvestic homosexuals or transsexuals).<sup>2</sup>

The mysterious *berdache*, upon closer examination, does not appear to be a single cultural form of sexual variation peculiar to preliterate societies but rather a name given to any one of several types of variant sexuality well known in contemporary societies. While cultures that have *berdaches* undoubtedly treat sexual variance in ways which differ from some Western societies, and in ways which differ from each other, it appears likely that the *berdache* is not created by these societies but rather represents ways in which traditional soci-

<sup>2</sup>Brackets mine.

eties came to terms with the several types of variant sexuality that emerged in their societies in much the same form as in modern societies.

### TENTATIVE CONCLUSION 5

*Homosexuals in different societies tend to resemble each other with respect to certain interests and occupational choices.* While homosexuals in all societies occupy a wide range of interests and occupations, there are certain interests and occupational choices which appear with predictability in the homosexual subcultures of all societies.

Most notably, there appears to be a universally strong interest in entertainment and the arts in all homosexual communities. While in the United States, especially in social scientific circles, there tends to be a disavowal of this connection, it is one which is openly recognized and discussed by homosexuals themselves. The connection is also widely acknowledged by the general public as well as homosexuals themselves in Guatemala, Brazil, and the Philippines. The American public is generally ignorant of the roles homosexuals play in their everyday lives.

In Guatemala, for example, a semiprofessional acting company with which I had contact consisted of 36 males, 32 of whom were homosexual. In Brazil a few years ago, homosexuals were so visible in the television industry that a public scandal erupted and the Ministry of Communications forbade the appearance of open homosexuals on television. A strong homosexual presence in the Filipino movie industry is widely acknowledged in that country. In the United States, despite reluctance in some quarters to discuss this issue, there is a very strong homosexual presence in the entertainment industry. Suggestive quantitative data are available for three of the societies. In Brazil, the United States, and the Philippines, nearly 50% of the respondents name the entertainment industry or arts as their ideal occupations,<sup>3</sup> in contrast to significantly different patterns of responses by heterosexuals in those societies. More importantly, perhaps, these interests appear to emerge quite early, preceding contact with the homosexual subculture (Green and Money, 1966; Whitam and Dizon, 1979).

Transvestic or effeminate homosexuals everywhere seem to be very much involved in occupations which in the United States are regarded as "stereotypic" occupations, such as fashion design, hairdressing, or interior design. Some 90% of the hairdressers and dressmakers in Cebu are homosexual, and these occupations are regarded by the general public and homosexuals themselves as *bayot* occupations. Philippine President and Mrs. Marcos frequently appear at homosexual organizations to make

<sup>3</sup>Comparable data for Guatemala are not available.

awards to hairdressers and fashion designers for their contributions to the Philippine economy. Homosexuals in all societies occupy a wide range of occupations, yet the tendency of American social scientists to dismiss any connection between sexual orientation and occupational interests as stereotypic obscures social reality and denies homosexuals credit for functions which they perform in society as a result of their sexual orientation.

While American social scientists have been reluctant to examine the relevance of sexual orientation for nonsexual behavior, the consistent linkage of nonsexual behavior such as activity in the arts and entertainment with sexual orientation in widely disparate societies, frequently appearing *before* contact with the homosexual subculture, presents an interesting theoretical problem not easily resolved by reference to cultural transmission. It is probable that sexual orientation, which generally has been dismissed as sociologically unimportant, is actually as potent a determinant of human behavior as social class or even culture.

#### TENTATIVE CONCLUSION 6

*All societies appear to produce similar continua from overtly masculine to overtly feminine homosexuals.* Some cross-gender behavior—that is, preference for behavior more typical of the opposite sex—is manifested in all homosexual populations. Homosexual groups in all four societies manifest similar patterns of early childhood cross-gender behavior—playing with toys of the opposite sex, cross-dressing, being regarded as sissies, preference for female playmates, and preference for the company of older female relatives. Statistically significant differences between heterosexual and homosexual respondents in all four societies were found with respect to these patterns of behavior (Whitam, 1980b, 1980c). These findings are consistent with a rather large body of literature reported by researchers of various theoretical persuasions and differing methodologies (Bieber, 1962; Green, 1974, 1976; Zucker et al., 1979a, 1979b; Zuger, 1966). While interpretations differ as to the origins and meaning of cross-gender behavior, there can be little doubt that this behavior is linked to adult sexual orientation (Whitam, 1980c).

While it is difficult to say with any precision what these proportions might be, all societies produce, in addition to a large group of masculine homosexuals, a significant group of feminine homosexuals, including, in American homosexual terminology, *queen*, *drag queen*, *female impersonator*, and *transvestite*. I refer to this group, perhaps 20% of all homosexuals, as “transvestic homosexuals” (Whitam, 1980a). While current

literature tends to draw very rigid distinctions among these groups, the lines of demarcation in homosexual communities are actually blurred. It is probable that at least a significant proportion of transsexuals, even, come out of the transvestic end of the homosexual continuum. Some highly cross-gendered persons do not know whether they are drag queens, transvestites, or transsexuals. The argot used in different homosexual communities tends to be similar, reflecting common features. For example *ambiente* in Guatemala, *entendido* in Brazil, and *sward* in Cebu are equivalent to *gay* in the United States. *Loca* in Spanish, *louca* in Portuguese, and *bayot* in Cebuano are equivalent to *queen* or effeminate homosexual. Moreover, there tend to be rather complex relationships between masculine homosexuals and the transvestic homosexuals. In the United States, for example, masculine homosexuals tend to dominate homosexual organizations, politics, bars, and baths and sometimes even discriminate against transvestic homosexuals. In Brazil, masculine homosexuals typically have rather harmonious and complementary relations with the transvestic homosexuals, who often provide entertainment for the more masculine homosexuals in even the most elegant homosexual clubs. In the Philippines, the transvestic homosexuals dominate the social organizational aspects of homosexual life, while masculine homosexuals keep a low profile.

The term *transvestite* is somewhat confusing. While Hirschfeld (1944, p. 197) originally used the term to refer to both heterosexual and homosexual transvestites, recent literature on the topic has given the general public the impression that persons who have needs to cross-dress are all heterosexual. Pomeroy (1968, p. 378), for example, has written, "Males who cross-dress are usually heterosexual; in fact, transvestites, as a group, are more heterosexual than the general population." It should be remembered that there are actually two distinct categories of transvestites, heterosexual transvestites and homosexual transvestites; these groups have only superficial connections with each other. Both groups engage in cross-gender activities, especially cross-dressing, in different ways. In the very recent past there has been an unfortunate tendency for sex researchers to regard heterosexual transvestites as the *real* transvestites and homosexual transvestites as people who are dressing just for fun or for other superficial reasons. It is the latter—homosexual transvestites or transvestic homosexuals—who are part of the homosexual world, not the heterosexual transvestite. There are important elements of cross-gendering in all homosexual communities. This behavior frequently begins very early— as early as age 3 or 4 (Green, 1976)—and for some homosexuals, especially the more effeminate, manifests itself throughout the life cycle (Whitam, 1980a). The Cebuano homosexuals assume the cross-gender connection so implicitly that they do not have a special terminology to designate

*transvestic homosexual*. A certain amount of cross-dressing is assumed to be a normal part of the world of the *bayot*.

### SUMMARY

In conclusion, then, homosexuality as a sexual orientation, accompanied by certain predictable behavioral features, appears to be a universal manifestation of human sexuality. Societies do not create homosexuality any more than they create heterosexuality; they simply react to the ubiquitous emergence of homosexuality. Cross-cultural examination of homosexuality leads us to the notion that homosexuality as a sexual orientation is not a pathological and incidental manifestation of particular social structural arrangements. It is rather a natural, fundamental form of human sexuality enacted in varying cultural settings. If the tentative conclusions offered here are correct, social scientists who are seriously interested in understanding homosexuality and its significance for human behavior need to reexamine many of the prevailing social scientific descriptions and explanations of homosexuality.

While this analysis is largely descriptive, it should be obvious that if these six tentative conclusions are correct, they also have profound implications for existing theories and explanations of homosexuality. The most obvious implication is that behavior which up to now has been regarded as highly variable culturally, and thus socially determined, is less variable than presently conceived by most social scientists and at least in some important respects probably has a biological basis. Those interested in the political dimensions of homosexuality might well be led from a mere toleration of homosexuals toward a serious examination of the unique contributions that homosexuals make to the larger society because of, not despite, their sexual orientation.

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