

The Implications of Homosexual Identity Formation for The Kinsey Model and Scale of Sexual Preference

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The study of homosexual identity formation, the process whereby someone comes to adopt a lesbian/gay/homosexual identity, is a relatively new field. Since the early 1970s, when homosexual identity first began to be discussed in the literature, numerous articles have been written outlining theories and research results.

This interest is indicative of a significant change in community thinking about homosexuals, a change as evident in gay/lesbian people themselves as in heterosexuals. In simple terms, there has been a shift away from viewing the gay person as a psychiatric aberration and toward seeing him or her as a member of a minority group. In scientific circles this shift is reflected in the increasing emphasis being placed on asking questions such as "How did she/he come to adopt a gay/lesbian identity?" and "What is it like to live as a gay person?" rather than "What factors caused this person to become homosexual?"

This change can best be understood as an outcome of the development and increasing refinement of the social category or social type of the "homosexual" in Western societies.

Social categories or types are a way in which society summarizes and makes sense of the immense array of information available about its members. On the basis of some social attribute such as race, education level, age, individuals are given a label (e.g., black, professional, youth) that is commonly understood by all. The people fitting such a label may then apply this to themselves as well as have others apply it to them. In time, those labeled may come actually to develop an inner sense of themselves

as *being* members of the groups to which they have been assigned. This "inner sense" or *identity* (see Cass, 1985, for a full definition of *typological identity*) will hold psychological importance in a person's overall sense of "who I am."

"Homosexual/gay/lesbian," "bisexual," and "heterosexual" have been designated as labels of sexual preference or sexual orientation. The historical process by which this took place began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Boswell, 1980; Foucault, 1978; Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982; Katz, 1983; Weeks, 1977, 1981) and continues in various forms into our present time. Within the scientific literature the changes are apparent in the lessening interest in specific sexual *behaviors* and greater concern for describing characteristics of a *person* having a particular sexual preference (Cass, 1985).

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the notion of homosexual identity began to be documented in the homosexual literature. Until that time, the label "homosexual" had been used primarily by members of those professions (e.g., medical, legal) concerned with the social control and medical documentation of individuals practicing "unacceptable" sexual behaviors. By the mid-1970s, homosexuals themselves had taken the label and transformed it into an expression of identification with the gay minority group.

Thus the changes to Western conceptions of sexual preference from the beginning of the last century until the present time have been quite remarkable. In a short space of time (historically speaking) acts of "sodomy" have become reclassified as "perversion," "perversity," and "homosexual," and the influence of the church replaced by that of the medical and legal professions as the groups within which society vests the powers of social control.

In this century we have seen the proposals of Freud and his followers draw interest away from the *activities* and onto the *personality* of the homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual. We have seen the influence of the medical and psychiatric professions decline, while the 1960s ideologies of individual rights, tolerance of differences, and the importance of self-fulfillment gain acceptance. Groups such as homosexuals could now claim to be minorities having the same right to self-expression as other minorities. There was concern to present the homosexual's *own* view of the world and self. The label "homosexual/lesbian" and later "gay/dyke" came to be used by homosexuals themselves as a means of identifying membership in a group rather than as an indication of pathology. In essence, the homosexual became viewed as a *person* rather than as a clinical condition.

The homosexual's own self-perceptions were seen to be an important component of the expression of sexual preference and their documentation a significant way of recording the inner lives of this particular minor-

ity group. The homosexual *identity* became the means for referring to all those personal aspects of identification with the societal group known as "homosexuals." Everything that related to *belonging* to the gay group was seen to be relevant to holding a gay identity.

As these changes have become incorporated into the scientific literature of recent years, we are now beginning to see a further development—greater focus on the bisexual person and the bisexual identity. Interest in the heterosexual person and heterosexual identity, however, remains peripheral since by virtue of their majority and "normal" status heterosexuals have been largely ignored.

Having briefly sketched one of the significant themes of change in attitudes toward sexual preference during the last century and a half, I am now in a position to examine Kinsey's part in those changes.

Quite clearly, Kinsey and his colleagues (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953) began their work on the documentation of sexual behaviors in the United States at a time when these attitudinal changes were well under way. Nonheterosexual sexuality was still viewed as an abnormal condition by clinicians and as immoral by church groups, the heavy weight of the law menaced anyone not conforming to the heterosexual example, and present-day conceptions of the homosexual were not in sight. Against this setting, Kinsey presented ideas radical for their rejection of the moralistic foundation upon which sexual behavior had been based so long.

There can be no question of the impact of the Kinsey volumes upon the scientific and general communities. The mammoth task undertaken by Kinsey and his associates resulted in findings and theoretical proposals that, decades later, still retain the attention of sexuality researchers.

This is as evident in the area of sexual preference as in other areas. The Kinsey publications provided a new perspective on homosexuality and bisexuality, one that differed significantly from the prevailing medical and moralistic view. Following soon after Kinsey were other researchers such as Hooker (1957) and Ford and Beach (1951), who through their research were also instrumental in undermining the established psychiatric view of homosexuality, as well as in promoting the notion of the sociological and psychological "normality" of homosexuals.

So significant and impactful were the Kinsey publications on sexual preference that it was not until the middle of the 1970s that the theoretical assumptions upon which they were based began to be examined seriously or questioned. Even then, however, there was little evidence that the attention given to the Kinsey scale or model of sexual preference was diminished to any significant degree.

Nevertheless, the changes mentioned earlier, whereby the focus has moved to seeing the homosexual as a *person*, someone who belongs to a stigmatized minority group, have taken place, as documented in both the

popular and the scientific literature. The impact such developments have had on our view of the homosexual cannot fail to have implications for Kinsey's ideas.

These implications need to be addressed if we are to assess Kinsey's work on sexual preference in the light of its relevance for today. Specifically, this chapter examines the area of gay/lesbian identity and its development and the way that it points to modifications to the model of sexual preference proposed by Kinsey. It will be argued that the theoretical assumptions and perspectives underlying the identity literature raise many questions about the nature and characterization of sexual preference as portrayed during the first half of this century.

Interestingly, few researchers and theorists of homosexual identity have explicitly examined this issue. Indeed, when developing my own theory of gay identity formation, I believed that this process could be conceptualized as separate from that of sexual preference development, which I defined in the traditional way to mean the development of a relatively permanent sexual and emotional attraction for someone of the same and/or opposite sex. I saw the identity formation process as one that occurred *after* sexual preference had evolved.

It was only over time that I came to believe that the two processes are intricately interwoven in the development of the modern-day homosexual, that the formation of identity can be influential in the development of sexual and emotional preference, and vice versa. Some theorists have hinted at the relationship between the two processes (e.g., Coleman, 1981–1982; Minton & McDonald, 1983–1984) but appear to have little awareness of the implications that these ideas have for their conceptualizations of either gay identity or sexual preference.

Curiously, these implications have been implicitly present from the moment I first became interested in the issue of homosexual identity. As a clinician, I was originally drawn to the area because of difficulties in helping those who were extremely distressed about becoming homosexual. At the same time I was fascinated by those who openly acted in a homosexual way without labeling themselves or their behavior as homosexual/lesbian. I concluded that understanding sexual behavior or attraction alone gave a very limited picture of what was happening in these people's lives. In finding existing ideas on sexual preference to be so unhelpful, I then chose to develop a model that incorporates the element of homosexual functioning that I consider to be crucial—the individuals' own perceptions of themselves and their social world. As other theorists began to publish similar ideas, I became convinced of the need to attend to the person's self-perceptions in order to understand the experience of the modern homosexual. It has taken nearly a decade for me to realize that I was also questioning existing beliefs about the nature of sexual preference (epitomized by Kinsey in his sections on *homosexual outlet* in Kinsey et al., 1948, and Kinsey et al., 1953).

So although the area of homosexual identity and identity formation remains a legitimate one for study in its own right, it also raises important questions about the nature, development, and expression of sexual preference, questions that need to be addressed if we are fully to understand the usefulness of Kinsey's model of sexual preference for the present time.

Kinsey's Model of Sexual Preference

Although Kinsey did not explicitly outline a theoretical framework for sexual preference, his chapters on homosexual outlet in both Kinsey et al., 1948, and Kinsey et al., 1953 provide enough information for us to draw conclusions about his beliefs. Frequently, this information is in the form of what he did *not* agree with, leaving the reader to infer what ideas Kinsey did hold.

Kinsey et al. distinguished between the *expression* of sexual preference and the *development* of sexual preference.

Expression of Sexual Preference

Kinsey proposed that sexual preference could be assessed by monitoring the two ways in which it was expressed: (1) "psychic reactions," reactions to being erotically stimulated by a particular type of person (such as someone of the same or opposite sex), and (2) sociosexual contacts.

Kinsey stated clearly that his scale was based on both these factors but gave little information as to how "psychic reactions" were measured. Sociosexual contacts, on the other hand, were precisely defined as engagement in sexual activity to the point of orgasm with someone of the same or opposite sex.

Frequency or intensity of behavior resulting from psychic reactions and sociosexual contacts was not the important factor. Rather, it was the *balance* between the homosexual and the heterosexual that decided preference.

Kinsey's scale clearly indicates that a person may express his or her sexual preference via one of three preference patterns: exclusive homosexuality, exclusive heterosexuality, or bisexuality (responsivity to both the same and opposite sexes *in some degree*, either concurrently or serially). It is a mutual exclusivity model. That is, someone can show *high preference* for choosing a partner of the same *or* opposite sex but not both at the same time. The term *bisexuality* is used when this choice is neither exclusive nor nearly exclusive, to either the same sex or the opposite sex.

Kinsey deplored the use of the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* as nouns representative of discrete and independent groups. His data did not fit this conception. Rather than focus on types of people, Kinsey maintained that it was more correct to examine degrees of homosexual and heterosexual behaviors.

While Kinsey proposed that both psychic reactions and sexual contacts must be taken into account in the measurement of the expression of sexual preference, he suggested that the former is more truly indicative of preference than the latter since social opportunity can influence the level of activity engaged in. Some people, he noted, may engage in sexual contacts simply because circumstances make them available and not from any strong preference. Similarly, those with a strong homosexual preference may choose not to express themselves overtly because of fears about behaving in such a manner. Thus, psychic responses and sociosexual activity represent independent but related dimensions of behavior. The more specific the psychic reactions, the more they direct the person toward one of the sexes for sexual contact.

Further, an individual can be erotically aroused by others of the same sex without engaging in homosexual sexual activity and, likewise, can engage in sexual activity with others of the same sex without experiencing any sexual arousal.

Significantly, Kinsey was aware that the meaning a person gives this behavior may not coincide with the definition accorded it by virtue of the gender of the sexual partner. "The homosexuality of certain relationships between individuals of the same sex may be denied by some persons, because the situation does not fulfill other criteria that they think should be attached to the definition" (Kinsey et al., 1948, p.616). Kinsey did not, however, consider it necessary to incorporate the individual's interpretation of his or her own behavior, or the difference between this meaning and his or her behavior into his ideas on the expression of sexual preference. It is sexual response, not the individual's perceptions of that response, that is important.

Kinsey had other things to say about sexual preference. Frequently, his views were illustrated by reference to what it is *not*.

1. He argued for the differentiation of sexual preference from *inversion*, a state in which individuals express characteristics of the opposite sex. While inversion and homosexuality *may* coincide, they are essentially two different types of behavior.
2. He also pointed out that sexual preference is not designated by a personality or body type or by certain mental attributes.
3. Sexual preference is not made up of discrete categories and therefore should not be used to classify people into separate groups of homosexuals, heterosexuals, and bisexuals. Rather, there are people who show a preference *in some degree* for partners of the same and/or opposite sex.
4. The balance between homosexual and heterosexual behavior, he emphasized, is not fixed and may vary during a person's lifetime.

Although not referred to specifically, it may be inferred that the dimensions on which sexual preference is expressed were believed to be similar for women and men.

The Development of Sexual Preference

Kinsey strongly advocated the idea that *all* forms of preference in sexual response are learned. Although people are considered to be born with the capacity to respond sexually, the direction in which this capacity comes to be expressed is learned. He rejected, therefore, the notion that people are innately heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

He proposed that sexual response is learned through the processes of conditioning and suggested three ways in which this can occur:

1. through *vicarious learning*, whereby a person becomes sexually stimulated by sharing another's sexual experience and, via conditioning, becomes in turn stimulated by elements of those shared experiences without the presence of the other person; thus preference can be acquired without a person's engaging in any actual sexual activity;
2. through *associated learning*, in which sexual activities and response become linked, through learning processes, with other factors (such as body type, sounds, etc.); and
3. through *sympathetic responses*, whereby people react to sexual responses or to material depicting sexual activity and response with a sexual response of their own and through conditioning processes acquire certain preferences in accordance with the stimulating experiences or material.

The development of sexual response, and therefore of sexual preference, is, according to Kinsey, the result of both childhood *and* adult experiences, not just childhood experiences as some early theorists had stated.

The first sexual experience, as well as the most intense sexual experience with the same sex exerts a significant conditioning effect on the individual's sexual preference. The opinions of others and social codes can, indirectly, also have a significant effect on conditioning by influencing the decision to reject or accept sexual contacts.

Women, Kinsey noted, are less susceptible to conditioning in this way, but he did not offer alternative routes of development.

As noted earlier, the work of Kinsey and his colleagues had an enormous impact on the way others thought about sexual preference. His model was used as an example for the next two decades. However, his scale of heterosexuality/homosexuality was soon adapted to define someone as *a* homosexual/heterosexual/bisexual. It would seem that the idea of sexual preference *types* was too heavily built into psychiatric and sociologi-

cal theory to overturn prevailing thought. In addition, encouragement for this viewpoint came from the modern development that differentiated the homosexual *group* from the heterosexual group and characterized members of such groups as being distinguishable on the basis of separate homosexual and heterosexual *identities*.

It was not until the late 1970s that researchers began to question the theoretical assumptions upon which Kinsey's model and scale were based (e.g., De Cecco, 1977; Shively & De Cecco, 1977; Storms, 1979, 1980), in particular examining the proposal that homosexuality and heterosexuality represent opposite ends of a unipolar continuum. Later, other researchers (e.g., Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985; Suppe, 1984) added voice to De Cecco's claim that components other than sexual behavior are also significant to the expression of sexual preference. The factors of emotional response, relationships, life-style, self-identification (with regard to sexual preference), and self-concept were all mentioned as relevant. For those theorists interested in the *components* of sexual preference, the focus has been on identifying which variables may be important to understanding the expression of that preference. Little attempt has been made to hypothesize the way these variables interrelate with each other.

It is important to note the emphasis on the psychological components of self-concept and self-identification, areas of human functioning that Kinsey did not include in his documentation of sexual preference expression.

Most researchers have skirted the difficult task of examining Kinsey's proposals on the development of sexual preference. Storms (1979, 1980), however, expanded Kinsey's theories to formulate a theory of erotic development. Significantly, no attempt has been made to examine comprehensively the influence of variables such as self-identification and self-concept on the development of preference. With increasing weight being given to the concept of gay/lesbian identity, it would now seem time to examine the implications of homosexual identity formation for our understanding of both the expression and development of sexual preference.

Defining Homosexual Identity and Homosexual Identity Formation

Homosexual Identity

Gay or lesbian identity is the sense that a person has of *being* a homosexual/gay man/lesbian. It is a very personal sensation, experienced as a recognition of "who I am." The experience of identity is frequently described by the individual as "I know who I am," "I feel like a homosexual/gay man/lesbian," "I am a homosexual," "This is me." Two aspects of identity are of interest to the psychologist: an objective aspect and a subjective aspect.

The objective side to identity is the image or cognitive picture that someone has of himself or herself as "a homosexual." As human beings,

we have the capacity to look objectively at ourselves and identify our own characteristics, using labels prescribed by society. Based on societal and personal definitions of what constitutes a homosexual, individuals can come to label their own behavior as "homosexual." This label, in reality, is simply a term used to cover a multitude of different characteristics that when grouped together are defined by the individual as related to homosexuality. Individuals will vary in which characteristics make up their particular definition of "homosexual." They will also differ on other factors, such as the importance given to each characteristic, the clarity in which each is seen, and the degree to which each is positively evaluated.

The subjective side of identity is less easily described. It is the feeling or sensation a person has of *being* a homosexual. It is a *knowing* and experiencing of the self at any moment as opposed to the objective aspect of identity, which refers to *thinking about* the self. People may differ in the strength with which they feel themselves to be a homosexual/gay man/lesbian.

Homosexual Identity Formation

Both the objective and subjective aspects of identity are developed through a complex process called homosexual identity formation (Cass, 1979, 1983/1984, 1985). I have described this process as comprising six stages of development. Within each stage different paths may be taken toward the formation of a gay/lesbian identity.

The process of homosexual identity formation begins when people are able to acknowledge that there is something about their behavior that they define as "homosexual." This awareness can act as a trigger for a complex process of change that sees a person develop an increasingly unambiguous and accepted image of self as "a homosexual." This image is gradually disclosed to others, and acceptance (validation) by them encourages the individual to develop a deepening sense of self as a homosexual. The process of identity formation ends with the development of a gay/lesbian identity that is accepted as a significant and positive part of the self.

Individual differences are apparent in the rate of progression through the stages, the final stage of development reached, the paths of development taken within each stage, and strategies adopted to cope with the tasks of each stage. At each stage the individual can foreclose development, in which case he or she will remain at the point of identity formation achieved prior to foreclosure. Thus, it is possible for someone to move through the process until any particular stage and then carry out strategies aimed at preventing further development.

During the identity formation process, changes are evident within the individual in the areas of cognition (thoughts, fantasies, hopes), emotions, and actions. Development in one of these can bring about changes in the other two areas. Similarly, changes within the individual can pro-

mote new ways of interacting outwardly with the social environment, which in turn may influence internal factors. For example, individuals who come to perceive that they "probably are homosexual" (Stage 3) are likely to become aware of social, sexual, and emotional needs that remain unsatisfied. This awareness may lead to first moves to make contact with gay people. If acceptable and fulfilling, these actions may then lead to a greater sense of positiveness about being "a homosexual."

Two motivational systems are considered to provide the impetus for movement from one stage to the next: the self-consistency motive and the self-esteem motive. The former, applicable to cognitive changes in identity formation, works on the principle that people strive to maintain a consistent image of self that is related to sexual preference. The latter, applicable to the emotional changes of identity formation, states that people have a need to develop positive feelings about the self relevant to sexual preference while avoiding negative ones.

STAGE 1: IDENTITY CONFUSION

Stage 1 begins when the individual recognizes "there is something about my behavior [this can include actions, feelings, and/or thoughts] that could be called homosexual/gay/lesbian," and ends when he or she proclaims, "I may be a homosexual."

With the realization that the behavior can be defined as "homosexual," emotional tension is experienced in the form of confusion, bewilderment, anxiety, and so forth. Previous sexual preference identities (e.g., heterosexual) are questioned. This results from being forced to consider the question "If my behavior may be called homosexual, does that mean that I am a homosexual?" Three paths of resolution of this crisis are described, the first where the homosexual meaning is rejected, the second where it is accepted as correct but seen as undesirable, and the third where it is accepted as correct and also evaluated as desirable.

STAGE 2: IDENTITY COMPARISON

Stage 2 begins with the tentative acceptance of a potential homosexual identity ("I may be a homosexual") and finishes with the acknowledgment that such an identity is likely to be applicable to self ("I probably am a homosexual"). This stage marks the first step toward a commitment to a homosexual self-image. Now the wider implications of that tentative commitment can be contemplated (e.g., loss of family support, feeling different from others, loss of future plans, etc.) and this provokes feelings of social alienation.

In order to deal with these feelings four paths of development are proposed. Selection of path will depend on whether the individual perceives the image of himself or herself as a homosexual to be a desirable one or not and to what extent the adoption of such an identity is considered to entail greater costs or rewards. Strategies such as inhibiting sexual

behavior and rejecting stereotypes of homosexuals may be used. Final outcomes at this stage will include either identity foreclosure, a self-image of self as "probably homosexual/not heterosexual" viewed positively or negatively, or a self-image of "bisexual," "temporarily homosexual," or "a special case."

STAGE 3: IDENTITY TOLERANCE

In Stage 3 the changes range from "I probably am a homosexual," the end point of Stage 2, through to the acknowledgment of a homosexual identity ("I am a homosexual"), although as the name suggests, this identity is not fully accepted. The individual begins to experience the minority status of a gay person while giving validity to the majority (heterosexual) perspective. This leads to a toleration of the homosexual identity rather than an acceptance of it.

With the greater commitment to a homosexual identity and the greater clarity with which it is perceived, the individual begins to focus on those social, emotional, and sexual needs that remain. In order to fulfill these needs, attempts are made to seek out other gay people. Where such contacts are seen as rewarding, this generates further identification with homosexuals, raises self-esteem, and encourages further contact with gay people. A negative experience may encourage the devaluation of homosexuals, the minimization or cessation of contacts with homosexuals, and lowered self-esteem. Socialization with homosexuals, at whatever level, allows for the rehearsal of the homosexual role, which then encourages others to identify the individual as a homosexual.

As consistency between one's own views and others' views of self increases, the individual experiences a deepening commitment to a homosexual identity.

STAGE 4: IDENTITY ACCEPTANCE

Stage 4 is characterized by a clearer and more positive image of self as a homosexual and greater security in carrying out the homosexual role. There is increasing contact with the gay subculture and the development of a network of homosexual friends. The world is clearly divided into homosexuals (likely to be supportive) and nonhomosexuals (likely to be hostile), although selective disclosure about one's identity to the latter group may blur the division a little. Attempts are made to fit in with the surrounding environment and to avoid confrontation with regard to homosexuality, and to this end passing as heterosexual is commonly played out.

Where this is acceptable, the developmental path will lead to foreclosure at a stage that is relatively peaceful and fulfilling. For those unable to accept the secrecy and negative status of homosexuals tolerated at this stage, the developmental path will be different. The inconsistency between one's own positive feelings about being gay and the negative feel-

ings attributed to nonhomosexuals leads the individual out of Stage 4 and into the next stage of development.

STAGE 5: IDENTITY PRIDE

Those entering Stage 5 do so with a strong sense of the incongruency between their own positive attitudes toward their homosexuality and society's disapproval of such an identity.

In response to the alienation arising from this situation, feelings of pride and anger are generated. Pride is felt toward oneself and other homosexuals. Gay people are valued positively and heterosexuals negatively. Anger is felt about the negative status assigned to homosexuals. This leads to confrontation and disclosure. The world is clearly divided into gays and nongays, with a preference for mixing with the former. When confrontation and disclosure evoke negative responses, this reinforces beliefs about the nongay world and foreclosure takes place. When positive reactions occur this creates an inconsistency, the resolution of which leads the individual into Stage 6.

STAGE 6: IDENTITY SYNTHESIS

In Stage 6, the individual develops a full sense of self as a homosexual and integrates this with all other aspects of the self—the homosexual identity is seen as an important part of self but is not the only identity. The rigid "them and us" attitude adopted in Stage 5 is dropped, and the feelings of anger and pride are less overwhelming. Attacks on homosexuals are perceived not as personal vendettas but rather as reactions to a minority group.

Disclosure becomes almost automatic in Stage 6 as greater security is felt in the identity, and interaction in the heterosexual world is experienced as generally rewarding. Nonhomosexuals come to be considered a significant reference group. There is less need to adhere to the gay community as a defense maneuver. As the public and private aspects of self become synthesized into one, the person gains a sense of well-being and peace. Greater self-actualization is possible now than previously.

As is apparent from the foregoing description, homosexual identity is seen to develop by degrees, arising out of the interplay between individual (interpersonal *and* intrapersonal) and social factors within the immediate and broader social contexts. In order to measure the degree of identity formation attained, it is necessary to examine a range of variables that make up each of these factors. No one variable will describe either the overt expression of identity or the developmental process that is being undergone.

It is worth noting that whether the concept of homosexual identity has been constructed by social scientists, by the times in which we live, or

both, as was discussed earlier, is irrelevant at this point. The fact remains that individuals develop a sense of themselves as "a homosexual" and that this sense and process can be documented as a phenomenon of our present time.

Implications of the Study of Homosexual Identity Formation for Kinsey's Views of Sexual Preference

We are now in a position to examine the relevance of gay identity to the study of sexual preference. Can we use some of the principles of homosexual identity formation to extend our understanding of sexual preference as we know it today? Does identity formation suggest *new* directions, questions, or issues for our consideration?

Simply contemplating the possibility of a connection between identity formation and sexual preference prompts us to ask new questions. What type of relationship might exist between these two concepts? Can, for example, different stages of homosexual identity formation (i.e., the degree of identity development) influence the direction or strength of sexual preference and vice versa? If these two are mutually influential, then we are faced with additional questions.

What might be lost in our understanding of sexual preference if we ignore individuals' own perceptions of themselves as well as the complex interactions that take place between people and their environments?

What effects might there be on the expression and/or the development of sexual preference if the self-images comprising someone's gay identity emphasize emotional, social, role, political factors, or physical characteristics? For example, if someone believes that a gay person is someone who is involved in fighting for gay rights, where such a picture is unacceptable to him or her, will this influence the taking on, strength, or direction of a homosexual preference?

What effects might there be on the expression and/or development of sexual preference if a person holds a negatively valued homosexual identity as opposed to a positively valued identity? Where a person encounters positive sexual/emotional contacts with someone of the same sex at a time when his or her homosexual identity is evaluated negatively, will this encourage, for example, a stronger attraction to the same sex or a lesser attraction, or will it have no impact at all? Can it influence the direction of sexual preference?

- To what extent can self-identity as homosexual be influential in the development of sexual preference when such an identity differs from the presented identity (image of self presented to the world) or perceived identity (image of self that other people hold)? Is it easier to develop preference when all of these identities are in accord with each other?

What are the ways in which individuals might *actively* attempt to alter sexual preference through the manipulation of their self-identity?

Can the attribution of permanency by individuals to their self-identity influence the development/expression of sexual preference?

Can having to cope with different societal reactions in the process of developing a gay identity influence the strength or direction of sexual preference?

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the presentation of some of the more pertinent issues that arise from the identity literature and can be seen as relevant to our understanding of modern-day sexual preference. In outlining these issues two fundamental questions present themselves for consideration. (1) Does the area of gay identity and its development illustrate a fundamental change in the notion of sexual preference? (2) If so, is Kinsey's rating scale based on factors broad enough to cover all those aspects of human behavior relevant to the measurement of modern-day Western sexual preference?

Interrelationship of Identity Development and Sexual Preference

In order for homosexual identity formation to begin, it is essential that the individual experience some type of behavior that indicates, to him or her, attraction to someone of the same sex. This behavior may be an infrequent occurrence, a regular and fixed aspect of the individual's sexual preference, or something in between these two. Essentially, some form of behavior occurs *first* (whether as activity, cognitions, or feelings), and identity formation may follow.

In the gay identity literature, little, if any, attention has been paid to the *quality* of the behavior that prompts identity formation. Specifically, the distinction between behavior that reflects a regular, stable, or fixed characteristic of the person (which in Western societies would be referred to as a sexual preference) and behavior that does not has not been addressed.

What might be the effect of the identity formation process on each of these modes of behavior? We could hypothesize that both the *direction* and the *strength/intensity* of the behaviors could be influenced by the identity formation process. It would seem logical to suggest that the less "set" the behavior leading to identity formation, the more likely it is to be influenced by any process of change and development. In particular, the direction of preference is less likely to be affected where the initiating behaviors are given psychological significance (that is, where they are already a "set" part of a person's functioning). There is no reason to assume, however, that in such circumstances the strength or intensity of the preference cannot be further increased by identity formation processes. Where initiating behaviors are not fixed characteristics, we would expect that identity formation could influence both direction and strength of preference development. Some of the ways in which identity formation could influence sexual preference development are narrowing opportunities for sexual/social/emotional expression, building attitudes that attach a fixed quality to identity and preference, reinforcing behaviors that are

consistent with identity, and providing a system of rewards that encourages commitment to a particular mode of behavior.

As described earlier, homosexual identity formation brings about, and is brought about by, changes in self-attitudes, actions, and feelings. With increasing development, there is a greater acceptance of homosexuality and a homosexual life-style. Stereotypes of gay men and lesbians are discarded, and the opportunities for expressing sexual, emotional, and social needs with others of the same sex are increased. These and the other changes mentioned earlier may provide circumstances in which sexual and emotional responsiveness to someone of the same sex is more readily acceptable.

These points can be illustrated by using the example of the woman who perceives herself as bisexual and demonstrates a sexual history of attraction to both sexes, emotionally and sexually. What might happen if such a person were to become very attracted to another woman, fall in love, and eventually come to share living arrangements with that other woman? First, we might expect her to close off options for expressing attraction for the opposite sex (assuming the relationship is a positive experience). Second, we might see the integration of the two women within a social group from the larger gay subculture that encouraged a lesbian identity as consistent with the (perceived) lesbian life-style. Third, we could also hypothesize that with time and the continuation of a rewarding relationship, sexual and emotional responsiveness toward her partner would become enhanced, leading to a more generalized conditioning to females rather than males.

Before continuing our discussion, it must be noted that the argument presented here rests on several assumptions. First, it is accepted that sexual preference is not something so rigidly developed that it cannot be modified. Second, it is assumed that change and development of sexual preference can occur in the adult years and are not necessarily simply a childhood development. Third, any changes that occur do not necessarily reflect the concept of latency, that is, the idea that later development is really an uncovering of development that has taken place at an earlier time. Fourth, learning processes are perceived to play a part in the development of preference. Fifth, something called "sexual preference" can be identified and distinguished from experiences of sexual attraction. And sixth, it is assumed that individuals can consciously alter their behavior.

Although sexual preference is frequently depicted as something that happens without direct control from the individual concerned, there are in fact many examples seen in a clinical setting of people who for various reasons *do* alter, withhold, diminish, or replace one form of response with another. For example, the refusal by some people to entertain the idea of being a homosexual can bring about a cessation of activities considered indicative of such an identity and increased involvement in heterosexual

activities. For some, this may encourage greater interest in and eventually greater responsiveness to heterosexual experiences.

Gay identity formation may also provide the circumstances whereby different components of sexual preference may be redirected and/or strengthened. Recalling the proposals of De Cecco (1977), Klein et al. (1985), and Suppe (1984), who have advocated several components of sexual preference, it is important to keep in mind that at the time identity formation begins, different components may be directed toward different genders and experienced with different strengths. For example, the erotic component of De Cecco's model may be strongly felt toward those of the same gender while the emotional component may be weakly felt toward same-sex individuals but intensely felt toward someone of the opposite sex.

It is hypothesized that during homosexual identity formation any component of sexual preference may be affected either in direction or strength. Again, we can suggest that components that have a fixed quality will be less likely to be altered than those that do not.

Let us take the example of a man who after several chance sexual encounters with other men decides that on the basis of these experiences he may be a homosexual, at least at the present time. His emotional attachments for men are limited, and he believes that eventually he will fall in love with a woman. If such a person is to move through the identity formation process to Stage 3, he may find himself beginning to mix in social situations where emotional involvements in the form of relationships with men may be expected of him. His contacts with aspects of the gay subculture may also encourage him to drop any interest he has for women since this may be seen as a cop-out from accepting a gay identity.

Each of these factors may then provide the stimulus and conditions for such an individual to become interested in forming emotional ties and increased sexual contacts with men. This interest could lead, in turn, through learning factors, to a strengthening of his sexual preference for the same sex.

Another example can be cited using the woman who, through involvement in the women's movement, in which close emotional ties with other women are accepted, becomes involved in a sexual/emotional relationship with another woman. She has had no such previous contact and does not recall being sexually attracted to women at an earlier time in her life. Her emotional attraction is considerably stronger than her sexual attraction largely because of the circumstances in which she entered into the relationship. If she were to sever the emotional ties with the other woman, she would be unlikely to experience strong sexual urges toward other women at this time.

What effect might identity formation have on this woman? It could be hypothesized that with an acceptance of the label of "lesbian" as applicable to herself and where such a label includes the characteristic of "being

sexual with another woman," this may lead to a greater focus and interest in the sexual aspects of relating with her partner. If seen positively, this could then pave the way for a strengthening of both the intensity and frequency of her sexuality to the extent that she considers this a preference.

The preceding discussion does not mean that *all* those who move through the process of gay/lesbian identity formation will be influenced to alter either the direction or strength of their sexual preference. Rather, it is suggested that this may be *one* way in which sexual preference is developed. If this proposal is true, then it would seem more accurate, in the formulation of a model of sexual preference, to acknowledge the influence of identity formation processes.

HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY IS DEVELOPED SEPARATELY FROM OTHER SEXUAL PREFERENCE IDENTITIES

People may develop identities that relate to any of the three broad sexual preference types promoted by Western society: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual. Preference identities need not be limited to these types, however. If "asexual" or "celibate" or any other concept is seen by members of society to constitute a social type related to sexual preference, it too can feature as an identity to be developed.

The development of a homosexual identity is a separate process from that engaged in by those who develop other sexual preference identities (although the nature of that process may contain similar elements). Thus, the identities "bisexual," "heterosexual," and "homosexual" are perceived as separate entities, having separate developmental processes, the components of which may be similar or different.

Given present conceptions of sexual preference in Western society (in which preference focuses on gender of partner), it is probably difficult if not impossible for someone to entertain the idea of developing more than one sexual preference identity. People invariably develop one identity only, although this identity may be replaced with another in serial fashion. For example, a person may move through the homosexual identity formation process with the result that a gay/lesbian identity is formed. If, however, this same person engages in particular behaviors that are seen as indicative of a *different* preference (e.g., strong sexual interest in someone of the opposite sex), this may lead to a questioning of self that initiates movement through a *bisexual* identity formation process.

In other words, it is theoretically possible for someone to begin to develop an alternative identity that (because of present ideas about sexual preference) replaces an existing one. Whenever new meaning is attributed to behavior seen as relevant to sexual preference, this may initiate the identity formation process leading to the development of the alternative identity.

If we make the assumption that identity formation can influence sexual

preference development, then it may be hypothesized that as a particular identity is being formed, this will heavily influence the development and maintenance of sexual preference in a direction congruent with that identity. For someone who dislikes inconsistency, to give one example, any behavior that does not fit current sexual preference identity may be discounted, denied, or invalidated in some way. Attempts may even be made to avoid situations in which such behavior might arise again.

HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY IS NOT FIXED BUT MAY BE LONG-LASTING

Kinsey and his associates found that sexual preference is not necessarily a fixed aspect of a person's life, although there are some people for whom little variation is seen in sexual preference during their adult years. From the preceding discussion it may be stated that *one* of the factors leading to the variability/rigidity of preference may well be identity formation.

However, while sexual preference identity may not necessarily be a fixed entity, it can be characterized by long-lasting and intense qualities. Sexual preference identities may be treated as permanent, fixed, and irreversible structures by those holding them, as well as by their friends, acquaintances, and so on. These attitudes are generally perpetuated by a number of sources.

1. Present societal beliefs stress that identity is fixed and each person must eventually choose one identity only.
2. This philosophy is also held by most segments of the gay community, which promote the ideas of "once a gay, always a gay" and "the truly gay person."
3. The social structures of people's environments promote consistency in the way people behave and present themselves. Inconsistency is punished in social ways.
4. Individuals, themselves, have a preference for congruency and wish to avoid conflicting and ambiguous behaviors that give rise to unpleasant psychological states.
5. With increased commitment to a homosexual identity, more social and psychological structures are included in the maintenance of that identity. To give up such an identity means giving up something that the person experiences as an integrated aspect of self. There may be anticipation of a sense of loss.
6. There is a human propensity for changing the focus from the act to the actor, that is, from the behavior to the identity, when that behavior is considered to be an indication of something about self as opposed to a consequence of the situation (Matza, 1969). Identities are usually given a fixed status.

It is therefore important to recognize both the potentially flexible nature of homosexual identity and other sexual preference identities as well as

the inflexible characteristics attributed to such identities. As noted previously, the attribution of a fixed state may work to solidify and narrow sexual preference into one direction only.

ALL DIMENSIONS OF HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCE ARE RELEVANT

Although Kinsey noted that individuals' interpretations of their own behavior may differ from the meaning given to it by someone else (i.e., a researcher), he chose to include only overt behavior as the dimension relevant to sexual preference expression and development.

The study of gay/lesbian identity suggests, however, that many other dimensions of behavior are involved in the experience of being a homosexual. These include both overt and covert components of behavior, of which cognitions, affect (emotional), and/or activity components may be involved. Under the heading of cognitions we may find reference to fantasies, ideal images of self, knowledge about the homosexual stereotype, and thoughts about being a homosexual. Affect may include hopes and fears, evaluation of self or behavior, a feeling of love for someone, and anxiety about mixing with gay people. Activity may cover participating in gay-pride marches, avoiding gay meeting places, reading about homosexuality, acting sexually, and acting "in love."

The relationship between these areas of functioning is interactive, with each being able to influence the others during identity formation. In the description of the stages of identity formation, the example was offered of those who upon admitting that they could possibly be "a homosexual," then feel alienated from other people. This in turn may motivate them to seek out gay people on a social basis in order to deal with that alienation. This contact may prove a rewarding experience and encourage participation in sexual/emotional activities.

Equal significance is attributed to internal and external aspects of functioning. Overt behavior is considered no more significant overall than cognitive or emotional factors. However, for different people, different combinations of factors may be important to identity. For example, someone who puts great emphasis on thinking problems out may ignore many of the emotional components of identity. Moreover, at various stages of identity development, different factors may play a central role in development as noted earlier.

Thus, two points stand out for us here. First, it is apparent that a variety of factors may be involved in varying degrees in both the development and expression of homosexual identity and therefore of sexual preference. Sexual responsiveness, traditionally seen to be *the* most significant factor in preference, is given a less central place. Second, significant individual differences may be documented among those at similar stages of gay/lesbian development. Even sexual response is not the simple variable that it has frequently been portrayed as but can be broken down into a number of different factors that may be experienced in varying ways by different people.

In understanding homosexual identity and sexual preference, it is considered necessary to examine all such variables and to note the relative influence of each. It is simply too narrow to attempt to cover the entire complexity of sexual preference by reference to one or two variables. It is also irresponsible to suggest that it is more effective to focus only on those aspects that are easily measured or classified.

THE MEANING OF BEHAVIOR IS IMPORTANT

Homosexual identity cannot be understood without recognizing the particular importance of the *meaning* that a person places on his or her actual behavior. Identity theorists recognize that the individuals' own interpretation of his or her behavior can influence the direction of development.

As Kinsey found, human beings have the capacity for interpreting their actions in any way that feels comfortable to them, and because of this, homosexual behavior may not necessarily be classified as homosexual. From a modern viewpoint, there are people for whom homosexual expression may be perceived as, for example, "making a political statement," "an outlet," "a spiritual expression," or "something I had no control over."

Can we fully understand sexual preference without recognizing and documenting such meanings? I believe not. It seems no longer to be acceptable or realistic to use only the researcher's interpretation of what is happening. It is necessary to include people's *own* accounts of their sexual preference in order to develop an understanding of preference that is relevant to the present.

Some writers claim, however, that such meanings should not be taken seriously in our attempts to understand sexual preference. They would argue that since the social type of "homosexual" has been socially constructed and therefore is relevant only to the present-day homosexual, we give validity to a picture of the homosexual that is neither universal nor a concrete entity.

Indeed, the homosexual type as we characterize it today *has* evolved out of social developments, as described earlier in this chapter. Some of these developments may have involved the promotion of a particular image of the homosexual by social scientists, as some critics claim. However, the experience of holding a homosexual identity is a very real and significant one *to the individual concerned* and is an important part of his or her sexual preference. (See Cass, 1983/1984, for an outline of this debate.) Should we ignore this experience on the grounds that the homosexual of the twenty-first century may be entirely different, or may not exist at all, or because identity is an illusive concept?

If we assume a model of sexual preference that cuts across all time and cultural barriers and considers preference to be some common and invariable human experience, it might be argued that meaning of behavior is irrelevant. The study of gay/lesbian identity does not claim to fit this

model. To a large extent it is reactive. Researchers and theorists aim to document what they see happening around them *at the present time*. The sense of being a homosexual is seen to be a complex human experience accounted for by reference to a number of different dimensions of human functioning. Identity formation and the interrelationship between identity and sexual preference development and expression are recognized as pertinent self-experiences for the individual and as such must be given due respect by theorists and researchers.

THE PERSON PLAYS AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE ACQUISITION OF HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY

Within the gay/lesbian identity formation process, the individual is seen to play an active role. This proposal contrasts markedly with the traditional view of sexual preference that sees the development and expression of preference as largely unconscious or at least out of awareness. According to this view, the individual is simply a passive vehicle upon which change processes take place and through which behaviors are expressed.

For those theorists, researchers, and clinicians working with personal development, this concept of passivity does not fit what is known about change and development in human beings. Although much human development can occur out of awareness, people also have the capacity to carry out change at a conscious level, making decisions and taking actions designed to bring about change.

These dynamic qualities of personal development also include the capacity to choose from a range of alternatives, the capacity to motivate oneself, the ability to recognize consequences and implications, the ability to select from a range of strategies aimed at self-enhancement and self-fulfillment, and the capacity to engage in decision-making processes, to name a few.

In the homosexual identity formation process it is recognized that the individual has the capacity to promote or prevent further change. To give an example, a man having an awareness that he likes fantasizing about other males may consciously decide to let this continue, or he may choose to switch his fantasies to females. Of course, choosing to engage in these strategies does not necessarily mean that he will be successful in achieving his intention since this will depend on any number of personal and social factors. To the extent that he is successful, however, it could be suggested that this may contribute to the reinforcement of sexual responsivity in the direction nominated.

Because of this possible link between the dynamic qualities of homosexual identity formation and sexual preference development and expression, it would seem important to reconsider existing models of sexual preference based on a passive view of personal development.

The study of gay/lesbian identity formation suggests that the traditional view of sexual preference as being largely unconscious with the individ-

ual simply a passive recipient does not fit what is known about change and development in human beings.

IDENTITY FORMATION CAN OCCUR AT ANY AGE

To a large extent Kinsey was radical for his time in stating that although childhood factors are important in the acquisition of sexual preference, adult learning factors can also contribute significantly. He inferred that adult experiences, which can provide important learning conditions, may account for variations in adult sexual preference behavior. Not all subsequent theorists have taken up his ideas about adult experiences.

Interestingly, the study of homosexual identity also promotes the idea of development that can take place during later childhood and/or adulthood. The development of gay/lesbian identity may begin and end at any age provided that two prerequisites are met. First, the ability to place meaning onto one's own behavior must be present. Thus, a young child or someone who is severely intellectually handicapped will not have the ability to objectively classify his or her own actions, feelings, or thoughts. Second, there must exist a cognitive schema or template about homosexuality and homosexuals. A cognitive schema is like a blueprint of what "a homosexual" or "homosexuality" is. Individuals can apply this blueprint to their own behavior or the behavior of others in order to decide whether their actions, thoughts, or feelings can be assigned the meaning "homosexual." The majority of people in Western societies develop such a template through childhood and into adulthood. Some social groups (e.g., young children, members of religious groups that repress information about sexuality) may not have had the opportunity to formulate a cognitive schema of "homosexual."

Of interest to identity theorists is the fact that there may be a significant time gap between the first expression of sexual response to someone of the same sex and the attribution of homosexual meaning. This may result from several factors. Some individuals, for example, deny the homosexual meaning of their behavior because of the negative attitudes attached to it in Western societies. This will cause them to foreclose on a homosexual identity. Others may be unable to assign homosexual meaning because the behavior being expressed is not included in their cognitive schema of "homosexual." Women, for example, frequently classify feelings of love for another woman as a "special friendship," while men may perceive sex with other men as "fooling around—nothing serious."

It is not uncommon for someone to have childhood experiences with another person of the same sex without attributing homosexual meaning (which results in the formation of a homosexual identity) until well into adulthood. What is of interest to us here is to what extent the delay in the attribution of meaning may influence the development of sexual preference. In other words, what is the effect of early or late identity formation in relation to the expression of sexual preference behavior?

This issue adds weight to the argument put forward earlier that homosexual identity formation should be seen as part of the overall process in which sexual preference is developed in Western societies at this point in time. At the very least, consideration of the identity factor can provide one explanation as to why people move from one preference to another at different times in their lives.

Interestingly, the study of homosexual identity formation essentially reinforces Kinsey's notion of sexual preference as not being specific to any particular age-group.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE DIFFERS FROM MEN'S

Although Kinsey suggested that different learning factors may enter into the sexual preference development of men and women, he seemed clearer as to the factors responsible for male development than he was for the factors responsible for female development. With regard to the *expression* of preference, he applied the heterosexuality/homosexuality scale to both sexes.

In the acquisition of gay/lesbian identity it is recognized that different factors operate as a result of different socialization patterns for men and women and different societal expectations for gay men and lesbians. These different variables may result in different paths of development being taken within each stage of identity formation, in different images forming the content of homosexual identity, and in different ways of expressing identity and sexual preference.

For example, because of the emphasis on the relationship of emotional factors to sexual expression evident in the socialization of women, lesbians are less likely to have used sexual stimulation as a stimulus to identity formation than to have used emotional or social events. In other words, falling in love with another person of the same gender is more likely to initiate the identity formation process for woman than for men.

It is not uncommon to see a woman who in mid-life "falls in love" with another woman for the first time in her life. This experience may not necessarily include sexual responses, although the quality of the emotional experience is similar to other love relationships she may have had with men. Where a sexual component does become present, this may occur after a period of time or after the emotional responses have been reciprocated. Some women choose not to share their feelings with the other woman. Many repeat the "in love" experience several times at various points in life, while others simply have the single experience.

Women are also more likely to reject the female sex role of women as passive and nurturing of others as an early step in their acceptance of a lesbian identity. This is probably because the image of a lesbian, or the societal expectation for lesbians, is of someone who is focused on her own needs without reference to a male standard.

In addition, women are more likely to perceive the rejection of the

female sex role, as well as the need for female support, as also being an indicator of homosexual meaning, and they can give greater weight to these factors in the assignment of meaning to their behavior than to sexual response.

Males are more likely to enter the identity formation process on the basis of sexual stimulation and to *adjust* to the male stereotype by dressing or acting in appropriate ways. Given the status and power differential between the male and female sex roles, there is probably less incentive for the gay male to reject the male sex role with its focus on independence, power, and intellect than there is for the lesbian to reject the female sex role.

Another major difference between women and men lies in the tendency of the former to develop a homosexual identity later than men. It is not uncommon for women to begin the identity formation process as adults, with few if any prior sexual preference experiences of a sexual or emotional nature other than the immediate behavior that has triggered the developmental process.

An example of this, which does not have a replica in the male situation, is that of women coming to adopt a lesbian identity as a result of their association with feminist groups and philosophies. This association helps to develop attitudes that give emotional and sexual associations with other women high and positive status. This acceptance of women-women relationships, as well as the readier access of information about lesbianism within the women's community than can be seen in the general community, provides an environment in which previous views can be reexamined. Out of this, some women choose to become involved in an emotional and/or sexual encounter with someone of the same sex. Some even identify as a lesbian prior to having any such experiences. Where lesbian contacts prove to be rewarding (for a number of reasons such as emotional fulfillment, sexual excitement, political satisfaction, reduction of philosophical conflict that may arise in an encounter with a male), this in turn may contribute to the development of a lesbian sexual preference.

It is clear that the experiences of the modern lesbian simply do not fit the Kinsey model with its emphasis on the measurement of *sexual* response. Since it is hard to believe that lesbians in Kinsey's day were radically more sexual and less emotional than they are now, we can only conclude that first, the Kinsey scale has been modeled solely on the male example and, second, his model of sexual preference, again based on male experiences, did not recognize emotional responses as components of sexual preference.

It is important that acknowledgment be made of the way in which women's experience of sexual preference can differ from men's. The example from the homosexual identity literature suggests that a more accurate account of sexual preference is one that covers patterns of emotional responsiveness, as well as interaction between the sexual and emotional,

with recognition given to the complex social and political factors linked with gender role.

PRESENTING HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY TO OTHERS

Another example of the impact of identity formation on sexual preference may be cited by drawing upon the capacity, recognized in identity formation, of people to present a picture of themselves (presented identity) that is quite different from the one they actually apply to themselves (self-identity)—and in addition, to recognize that these two pictures may differ from the identity attributed to them by others (perceived identity). For example, an individual may believe that he or she is a homosexual but present an image to others of being asexual. Other people, on the other hand, may assume this person to be heterosexual.

What might be the effect of these different images on the individual's sexual preference? It could be hypothesized that where they are related to different sexual preference types, there may be less inducement for the individual to become further involved in the preference related to the self-identity. For example, when someone leads others to believe that she or he is heterosexual, while personally identifying as homosexual, the result may well be restricted opportunities for the expression of a homosexual sexual preference, which in turn may effect the development of such a preference. This effect would be strongest when the homosexual identity was evaluated negatively.

INITIATION OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT REQUIRE OVERT BEHAVIORAL EXPRESSION

Identity formation theory proposes that the initial step toward developing a gay identity does not require the actual presence of others or engagement in any overt sexual or emotional contact with others of the same sex. The development of a homosexual identity may be initiated and continued on the basis of *symbolic* representation (that is, mental images) of interactions with others such as occurs in fantasies, daydreams, and so on.

In other words, a person can label fantasies, daydreams, and inner feelings as "homosexual" in the same way they identify actual sexual encounters as homosexual. Thus, celibate people having had no overt emotional or sexual contacts with others may come to see themselves as homosexual (e.g., some lesbian nuns).

It should be noted that in my theory of gay/lesbian identity formation, such a self-image could not be classified as a fully developed homosexual identity. The stages of development represent *degrees* of identity formation. A fully developed identity is one in which self-identity, presented identity, and perceived identity are congruent in describing a positive homosexual image. That is, the individual's picture of self is confirmed by others with a resulting positive sense of self being achieved. In order to

obtain this situation, the person concerned is required to overtly express his or her homosexual self-image. Therefore, it is the *early* stages of identity formation that can be achieved through symbolic functioning rather than later ones.

It is significant to note that a person who begins identity development in a symbolic manner cannot be classified on Kinsey's scale. Once again, this points to the limited ability of this instrument to encapsulate sexual preference as we know it today.

It is interesting, too, if we accept the premise put forward in this chapter that identity formation can influence the development of sexual preference, to speculate about what effect the process of forming a homosexual self-image without overt expression of sexual preference may have on the development of preference. It might be, for example, that this image will act to direct the individual's attention to a homosexual sexual preference. This, in turn, might lead to attempts to express the homosexual self-image overtly, resulting perhaps in a conditioning to these patterns of behavior.

Conclusions

Kinsey's scale of heterosexuality/homosexuality is intended to measure current sexual preference. No allowance is made for variations in the strength of preference between individuals at a particular point on the scale or in the factors leading a person to a particular point in sexual preference development. Someone who registers as a 4 on the scale is not necessarily similar to another 4 in anything other than the balance between heterosexual and homosexual sexual behaviors.

We now have to ask ourselves whether having the information that someone measures 4 is useful and whether it is adequate as a description of the individual's sexual preference. Indeed, is there any difference between classifying someone as a Stage 5 or a Kinsey 4? From the stage descriptions presented earlier in the chapter, it should be apparent that there *is* a difference. Knowing which stage of development has been achieved can be useful to clinicians in their work with people having identity problems. The stages themselves represent a composite picture summarizing the involvement of a large number of variables responsible for identity development to that particular point. To describe people as being at a certain stage of development is to say many things about them on the basis of whichever factors are involved at that point of identity formation.

To designate someone as a 4 on Kinsey's scale, however, is to describe only the most overt of characteristics, the balance between sexual responses to men and to women. Because of this, the usefulness of the scale in describing a person's sexual preference is quite limited. Even the suggested amendments of Shively & De Cecco (1977), Storms (1979, 1980),

and De Cecco (1977) to make the heterosexual and homosexual scales orthogonal still paint a two-dimensional picture of sexual preference. What is needed is a three-dimensional representation that includes reference to the complexity of factors involved in the expression of sexual preference.

The reader who takes the time to examine Kinsey's work cannot be filled with anything but admiration for the innovative way in which he tackled areas long entrenched in the rigid sexual perspectives and morals of the nineteenth century.

Yet admiration notwithstanding, it must be concluded from the review of homosexual identity formation presented in this chapter that the approach taken by Kinsey in his model and scale of sexual preference is now too narrow to be applicable to the experiences of the present-day lesbian or gay man.

Indeed, the issues we have pursued suggest much more than a simple revision of Kinsey's scale. For in claiming that the Kinsey view of sexual preference is obsolete, we are also stating that an *alternative* perspective can be described. In other words, any reassessment of Kinsey's rating scale along the lines suggested by the literature on homosexual identity formation leads us to examine the very dimensions upon which sexual preference is both expressed and developed.

We are left, therefore, with a task far greater than might have been predicted—that of examining the very nature of sexual preference. The question before us now is "What is the nature of sexual preference as we know it today?" It has been suggested in this chapter that this question can be partially answered by examining the concept of homosexual identity and the way in which it develops.

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