

DOES INCEST CAUSE HOMOSEXUALITY? ¹

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Summary.—A random sample of 5,182 adults from 6 U.S. metropolitan areas were questioned about incestuous sexual relationships during childhood. Incest was disproportionately reported by both male and female bisexuals and homosexuals. 148 gays (7.7% of the sample) reported 14 (50%) of same-sex, and 7 (22%) of opposite-sex incestuous experiences, and 20 (69%) of same-sex and 2 (3%) of opposite-sex sexual experiences with other relatives. 88 lesbians (3% of the sample) reported 2 (33%) of same-sex incest and 7 (9%) of opposite-sex incest and 1 (17%) of same-sex and 10 (13%) of opposite-sex sexual experiences with other relatives. 12% of 98 male homosexuals vs 0.8% of 1,224 male heterosexuals with a brother reported brother-brother incest. These findings are consonant with those of other studies in which disproportionately more incest by homosexuals was reported. As opposed to an evolutionary genetic hypothesis, these data support the alternative that homosexuality may be learned, since homosexuals do not produce children at sustainable levels and the incidence of homosexuality varies as a function of various social factors. Incest cannot be excluded as a significant basis for homosexuality.

Incest is seldom suggested as a cause of homosexuality. Bailey and Pillard (1993) reported that in their pairs of identical twins who were both homosexual, eight (22%) of 36 nontwin brothers were homosexual, whereas in those cases in which only one of the identical twins was homosexual only one (4%) of 24 nontwin brothers was homosexual. They stated the challenge: "Can this result be explained convincingly via twin narcissism, or indeed by any alternative to genetic transmission?" Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, and Pattatucci (1993), upon finding higher rates of homosexuality with maternal uncles or male cousins but not paternal uncles or male cousins, likewise sought explanations in heredity. And, upon reanalyzing the 1970 Kinsey Institute study in San Francisco and finding that homosexuality disproportionately appeared in families in which there was a homosexual, Bailey and Bell (1993) considered only the possibility of either genetic defect or poor interpersonal relationships with parents as leading to the homosexual result. But incest could also account for a considerable proportion of findings from all three studies.

It is known that homosexual experimentation, seduction, or rape can create an interest in homosexual activity. About a third of the homosexuals

¹Some of these data have been presented in articles and papers given at scientific conferences, but the bulk of these findings have not been reported elsewhere. Please correspond with Paul Cameron, Ph.D., Family Research Institute, POB 2091, Washington, DC 20013.

Kinsey interviewed in the 1940s attributed their involvement in homosexuality to "fell in with a homosexual group or had homosexual friends" or "early homosexual experience [with peers or adults]" (Gebhard & Johnson, 1979, p. 618). "Conversion" to homosexuality has occurred after both adult rape [e.g., "Mr. K, age 22, felt that his change in sexual preference was related to his having been raped by two men. . . . After the assault he experienced sexual identity confusion and began engaging voluntarily in homosexual activity. When he was seen for evaluation he labeled himself as openly homosexual" (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984)] and statutory rape [e.g., a "25-year-old man had had his first sexual experience when he was 13 years old. It was arranged by his lesbian mother with an older gay man. After that episode, his imagery and interpersonal sexual experience were exclusively homosexual" (Schwartz & Masters, 1984)]. Also, homosexuals make the claim that they can, through seduction, "make straight men gay" (Meijer, 1993). Homosexual incest, because it takes place in an environment sheltered from public scrutiny, would appear to be a serious candidate for causing at least some homosexuality.

METHOD

Subjects

In 1983 an extensive (over 500 items) self-administered questionnaire on sexual issues was given to 9,129 adults aged 18 or older (completed by 4,340 or 47.5%) obtained via one-wave, systematic cluster sampling in five U.S. metropolitan areas chosen for high (Los Angeles, Washington, DC), intermediate (Denver, Louisville) and low (Omaha) levels of homosexual activity as indexed by published homosexual guides to sexual opportunities (e.g., *Spartacus*). Almost all interviewers were 30- to 45-yr.-old females. Potential respondents were told we were doing a nationwide sexuality survey. One adult per family unit was asked to complete the questionnaire and return it anonymously to the interviewer sealed in a provided envelope or, if more convenient, to mail it in a preaddressed stamped envelope. More detail about the sampling was given by Cameron, Proctor, Coburn, and Forde (1985).

In 1984, 842 of an additional 1,460 adults from Dallas responded to the same questions (completion rate of 57.7%). In Dallas, the sampling frame was tilted toward homosexual areas to enlarge our sample of homosexuals for statistical comparison (the methodology is detailed by Cameron, Cameron, and Proctor, 1988). Over-all, 5,182 (51.2%) adults of 10,115 contacted from the six metropolitan areas responded. The median age of those who refused to complete the questionnaire was estimated to be 55 years and more apt to be male. Generally, we achieved about an 85% acceptance rate among those aged 35 or under and an 85% rejection rate for those aged 65

or older. Consequently, our findings from those under the age of 56, with a rejection rate of approximately 24%, are less subject to the uncertainties associated with the higher rejection rate.

The sexuality survey by Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels (1994), despite using an extensive questionnaire, avoided high rejection rates by not attempting to interview people over the age of 59 (their rejection rate was 20%). Their experience suggests that reasonable confidence can be placed in the results of one-wave surveys. After up to 15 call-backs and payment of up to \$100, they concluded that "nonreluctant and reluctant respondents are not systematically different with respect to sexual attitudes, experience, and practices" (p. 564), although there were hints that the more sexually conservative were less apt to respond, which we also noted in our survey. Their finding, in line with other studies of nonrespondents, gives us some confidence that our sample was of sufficient quality to generate useful findings. Since we guaranteed respondents no identification and that the interviewer would not know their responses, we made no attempt to call back and have respondents fill in missing answers.

Procedure

Among the more than 500 questions² were included "I am a heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual" by which respondents self-identified their sexual orientation. Respondents were also asked an extensive series of questions on sexual advances from and sexual interaction with various authority figures (e.g., teachers, religious leaders) and family members (e.g., parents, siblings): "Sometimes people in charge of us or who bear an especially powerful relationship to us have sexual desires for us. For each of the following kinds of persons, we would like to know . . . with how many you have had physical sexual relations (at their initiative or yours)." Among the choices were included "my brother, my sister, my step-brother, my foster-brother, my step-sister, my foster-sister, my mother, my father, my step-mother, my step-father, a female relative (cousin, aunt, etc.), a male relative (cousin, uncle, etc.), a foster-mother, a foster-father." For purposes of analysis, bisexuals and homosexuals were combined. Foster- and step-siblings and foster- and step-parents were also combined. Further details of the sampling are summarized in Cameron, Proctor, Coburn, Forde, Larson, and Cameron (1986).

Systematic area cluster sampling was employed in each city. Persons not at home and those who did not speak and read English were skipped. In a few instances, locations that were considered too dangerous to assure the safety of interviewers were omitted.

²The questionnaire is on file in Document NAPS-04362. Remit \$7.75 for photocopy or \$4.00 for fiche to the National Auxiliary Publications Service, c/o Microfiche Publications, POB 3513, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

RESULTS

Incest was more common among bisexuals and homosexuals of both sexes (see Table 1). Males reported 22 homosexual and 20 heterosexual relations with siblings. Although 7.7% of the male sample was bisexual or homosexual, these 148 male homosexuals accounted for 12 (55%) of the 22 who reported "physical sexual relations" with at least one brother [and three of the four who reported sex with more than one brother]; five (25%) of the 20 who reported sex with a sister [but none of the three who reported sex with more than one sister]; three of the five who reported sex with their father; three of three who reported sex with their mother, none of two who reported sex with a step-father; one of four who reported sex with a step-mother; one of one who reported sex with a step-brother, and none of six who reported sex with a step-sister.

TABLE 1
HOMOSEXUALITY AND INCEST: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONSE BY GROUP

Kind of Incest	Response	Males				Females			
		Heterosexual		Homosexual		Heterosexual		Homosexual	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
In biological family	No	1741		133		2789		84	
	Yes	23	1.3	15	10.1‡	48	1.7	4	4.5
In step-family	No	1752		146		2812		83	
	Yes	12	0.7	2	1.4	25	0.9	5	5.7†
In biological or step	No	1730		131		2765		80	
	Yes	34	1.9	17	11.5‡	72	2.5	8	9.1†
Homosexual (bio-step)	No	1750		134		2833		86	
	Yes	14	0.8	14	9.5‡	4	0.1	2	2.3*
Heterosexual (bio-step)	No	1739		141		2768		81	
	Yes	25	1.4	7	4.7†	69	2.4	7	8.0†
Male cousins, uncles	No	1755		128		2771		78	
	Yes	9	0.5	20	13.5‡	66	2.3	10	11.4‡
Female cousins, aunts	No	1689		146		2832		87	
	Yes	75	4.3	2	1.4	5	0.2	1	1.1
Any homosexual incest, including extended family members	No	1743		115		2828		85	
	Yes	21	1.2	33	22.3‡	9	0.3	3	3.4†

*Fisher's exact test $p < .05$. †Fisher's exact test $p < .01$. ‡Fisher's exact test $p < .001$.

Bisexual or homosexual men accounted for 15 (39%) of the 38 who reported incestuous relationships with immediate biological family members: 13 (52%) of the 25 with same-sex encounters and six (29%) of the 21 who reported opposite-sex encounters. When step-family members and foster parents are included, the bisexuals or homosexuals accounted for 17 (33%) of 51; 14 (50%) of 28 with same-sex and 7 (22%) of 32 opposite-sex sexual

encounters. They also accounted for 2 (3%) of the 77 who reported sex with other female relatives and 20 (69%) of the 29 who reported sex with other male relatives.

The 88 bisexual or homosexual women, comprising 3.0% of the sample, reported three (7.5%) of the 40 who had sex with a brother; none of three who had sex with a sister; one (9%) of 11 who reported sex with their father; one of two who reported sex with a step-mother; three (15%) of 20 who reported sex with their step-father, and one (11%) of nine who reported sex with a step-brother. Female bisexuals or homosexuals accounted for four (8%) of 52 who reported incestuous relationships with immediate biological family members, four (8%) of 49 with opposite-sex, and none of three with same-sex sexual encounters. When step-family members and foster parents were included, the bisexual or homosexual women accounted for eight (10%) of 80, seven (9%) of 76 with opposite-sex, and two (33%) of six with same-sex sexual encounters. They also accounted for one (17%) of six who reported sex with other female relatives and 10 (13%) of 76 who reported sex with other male relatives.

Of particular significance for the Bailey-Pillard challenge, 98 of our bisexual and homosexual men and 1,224 of our heterosexual men claimed to have any brothers. Of those homosexuals and heterosexuals with brothers, 12 (12%) homosexuals reported sex with at least one brother compared to 10 (0.8%) of the male heterosexuals.

DISCUSSION

Comparison With Other Studies

Our findings about rates of sibling incest are similar to those published by Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith (1981) from their 1970 San Francisco survey although our estimates of incest are generally lower. Their male homosexuals reported incest with 271 (15.6%) of 1,735 siblings, while their heterosexual men reported incest with 66 (9.0%) of 734 siblings. Female homosexuals reported incest with 68 (10.4%) of 654 siblings, while female heterosexuals reported incest with 21 (5.6%) of 378 siblings [Bell, *et al.*'s reporting does not permit identification of the sex of incest partner].

Johnson and Shrier (1987) reported on sexual molestation of males in New Jersey. Of all adolescent male patients seen in the clinic from 1982 to 1984, 11 cases of molestation by females and 14 cases of molestation by males were identified. This was a follow-up of an earlier report concerning 40 male adolescents seen between 1976 and 1982 who had been assaulted by other males. A comparison group was used to estimate the effects of the molestation.

Our findings with the most recent group of male-molested boys ($N=14$) confirmed our findings with the earlier group ($N=40$); approximately one-half of the boys who had been molested by

males currently identified themselves as homosexual and often linked their homosexuality to their sexual victimization experience(s). The female-molested group, in contrast, seemed no more likely to identify themselves as homosexual than the control group of unmolested adolescents. . . . We wish to emphasize the confirmation of our earlier finding that there is a high rate of self-identification as homosexual among the victims of male molesters. Approximately one-half of the current ($N=14$) and previous ($N=40$) study groups claimed to be homosexuals. These findings are further confirmed by Finkelhor's 1979 college student survey, in which nearly half of the males who reported 'a childhood sexual experience with an older man were currently involved in homosexual activity' [1984]. We would agree with Finkelhor's impression that the boy who has been molested by a man may label the experience as homosexual and misperceive himself as homosexual (p. 652).

A similar point of view has been expressed by Dimock (1988) in his study of 25 men who had been sexually abused in youth. Of these cases twenty involved abuse by a male. "The reports of the men in the current sample suggest three common characteristics. These are sexual compulsiveness, masculine identity confusion, and relationship dysfunction" (p. 207). The abusers were father (5 cases), brother (4 cases), mother (4), male stranger (3), male friend of family (2), priest (2), male peer (2), sister (2), step-father (1 case), step-sister (1), male teacher (1), uncle (1 case), i.e., at least 10 of the 25 had experienced homosexual incest. Eight (40%) of these abused men "engaged in sexual behaviors with both males and females. . . . One man described his struggle this way: 'It was always my desire to have a heterosexual orientation, so I never acted out any homosexual desires, though I almost did once. For years and years, I always hoped that I could deal with the problem myself or pray the problem away. I was afraid if I acted out a homosexual desire it would feel so good that it would fix my orientation'" (p. 209). Another noted "Homosexual behavior was the norm for me as my two older brothers introduced me to this manner of sexual orientation. Incest was a weekly, sometimes nightly, occurrence and I was the victim" (p. 218). Gilgun and Reiser (1990) detail the case histories of three men who were abused by (a) a maternal uncle and then his father, (b) his father, and (c) a junior high school teacher. Each experienced sexual identity confusion and at least one became homosexual.

A 1993 reanalysis of the 1970 Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith study (1981) provided further evidence consonant with an incest explanation for an excess of homosexuality in families with a homosexual child. Of the brothers of heterosexual males 4.2% and none of the brothers of heterosexual females were reported by respondents to be bisexual or homosexual. Likewise, 1.3% of heterosexual men's sisters and none of the sisters of heterosexual women were reported to be bisexual or homosexual (Bailey & Bell, 1993). But the rates of bisexuality and homosexuality among siblings reported by homosexuals were higher: gays reported that 9% of their brothers and 3% of their sisters were not heterosexual, and lesbians reported that

12% of their brothers and 6% of their sisters were not heterosexual. In each of the other six studies Bailey and Bell reviewed, homosexuals reported rates of bisexuality or homosexuality among their siblings at least double those in Bell, *et al.*'s random samples of male and female heterosexuals. Despite the Bailey and Bell suggestion that these data beg for a genetic explanation, since incest is more frequent in homosexuals' families, incest also could be a major reason for the large number of homosexuals in those families.

Incest as an explanation of the Bailey and Pillard (1993) results would accommodate homosexual recruitment *by* the twins toward their brothers or *toward* the twins by a relative with access to the twins. If the homosexual twins were acting out their desires while other brothers were accessible, it is possible that they might try to experiment sexually with them or, if at least one other brother (or father, uncle, or step-father) engaged in homosexual acts and had sexual access to the twins [information that cannot be gleaned from the Bailey and Pillard accounts, although Bailey, in a telephone conversation, said that their respondents were very reluctant to talk about incest], that too could account for the twin's concordance in sexual orientation, and the large number of homosexuals among their brothers. Because twins often sleep in the same room (and even the same bed) and typically share many other physical and social spaces, the opportunities for homosexual exploration would be increased. Further, because twins tend to be very close socially and psychologically, the possibility of sexual confusion, as a part of identity-confusion, might be enhanced.

Also, incest could account for the Hamer, *et al.* (1993) finding that homosexuality appeared more frequently on the mother's side than the father's side of the family, since mothers "babysit" their children considerably more frequently with their female blood relatives than with their husband's relatives (Margolin, 1994). If a mother's male relative had molested her child homosexually, that child would have a greater chance of becoming homosexual in adulthood and the relative was probably homosexual.

As noted above, incest is apparently more common in families with homosexuals. Indeed, 37% of 1,001 adult male participants in homosexual behavior who were interviewed by Doll, Joy, Bartholow, Harrison, Bolan, Douglas, Saltzman, Moss, and Delgado (1992) reported "sexual contact before the age of 19 with a partner whom they perceived as being older or more powerful than themselves." Of these partners 95% were males and 43% were family members. There is no reason to expect nor data to suggest that homosexual incest is less common in families with twins, e.g., the Bailey-Pillard study.

Given this apparent relationship between rates of reported incest and the occurrence of multiple homosexual siblings in the family, incest should be investigated as a possible alternative to genetic explanations. Incest is a

subset of the "contagion" hypothesis of how homosexuality may be propagated. In families in which both twins desired to engage in homosexual acts, other brothers would be at more risk of being either seduced or raped. But in families in which only one twin had homosexual interests (and his twin was not interested in engaging in homosexual behavior), other brothers would be at less risk of being seduced or raped. The contagion hypothesis holds that the experiencing of homosexuality through seduction or rape would "convert" a certain proportion of brothers (or other male relatives) to the fixation upon and pursuit of homosexual activity, e.g., no fewer than 21% of 13,000 readers of the gay magazine *The Advocate* reported "childhood sexual abuse" (Lever, 1994). There may be no need to unravel DNA for an explanation of homosexual concordance in either identical twins (e.g., Bailey & Pillard, 1991) or brothers (e.g., Hamer, *et al.*, 1993).

A Counter Challenge

We have a challenge for Bailey and Pillard and those who find a genetic hypothesis plausible. Using either evolutionary or husbandry genetic theory, how would they account for genetic transmission of a trait that does not appear advantageous for survival and may instead be deleterious? Further, how could such a trait be sustained in light of the low fertility rates reported by homosexuals? In our survey, we found that the proportion of parents among those self-designating as heterosexual was 60.9% for men and 71.2% for women. For those identified as bisexual the figure was 50.9% for men and 36.5% for women, and for those who were homosexual the corresponding figures were 6.3% and 26.7%. Not surprisingly, the number of children per capita for these respective groups was 1.53 for heterosexual men, 1.69 for heterosexual females, 1.1 for bisexual men, 0.73 for bisexual women, 0.07 for homosexual men, and 0.4 for homosexual women. Bell, *et al.* (1981) also reported low rates of fertility associated with homosexuality, as did Masters and Johnson (1979). While ours, like most sex surveys, overrepresented the young and thus probably underestimated the ultimate fecundity of each of these sexual orientation cohorts, it does not seem plausible that the average of 0.54 children for the bisexual and homosexual respondents combined could sustain the trait of homosexuality if the trait were "triggered" genetically. That is, even were homosexuality regarded as a "normal, healthy" variant of human sexuality, given this rate of fertility, would not evolutionary theory have predicted its demise long ago? Since homosexuality is also associated with more frequent disease (Cameron, *et al.*, 1985) as well as an abbreviated life-span (Cameron, Playfair, & Wellum, 1994)—from an evolutionary perspective, if genetically driven, the trait ought to disappear.

The alternative genetic explanation, that homosexuality is "caused" by a mutation (like hemophilia), raises serious questions as well. First, Prof.

Christopher Hewitt of the University of Maryland analyzed the Broude and Greene (1976) data-set and found that the frequency of homosexuality in society appears to be a function of its social acceptance. Specifically, in nine (60%) of the 15 societies in which homosexuality was "strongly disapproved of or punished," homosexuality was judged "absent or rare" vs "not uncommon" in six (40%); in eight (89%) of the nine in which it was "accepted or ignored" it was judged "not uncommon" vs "absent or rare" in one (11%). Second, Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata (1994) noted that not only is homosexuality more accepted in and much more common in large U.S. cities, but "people who were raised in large cities were more likely to be homosexual than people who were raised in suburbs, towns, or the countryside. This relationship also showed up in the General Social Survey, an independent national sample" (p. 182). Third, both we in 1983-84, the Kinsey team in the 1940s, and Laumann, *et al.* in 1994 found homosexuality considerably less prevalent among the religiously devout, and we found it substantially more frequently prevalent among those who reported that they were reared in an "irreligious" home as opposed to those reared in a "devout Christian" setting. Fourth, almost all investigations have reported homosexuality more prevalent in father-absent households and where divorce or family disruption occurred. Fifth, homosexuals make the claim and provide evidence to the effect that they can, through seduction, "make straight men gay" (Meijer, 1993).

It does not seem plausible that a genetic defect, in this case for homosexuality, should vary as a function of social acceptance of it, urbanization of the area in which one is raised, household attitudes, or family disturbance. On the other hand, a trait that varies in frequency in response to social sanction or acceptance or to which one can be recruited strongly implies learning.

Finally, it is not likely that a disproportionate fraction of homosexuals are "generous uncles and aunts" who, though childless themselves, somehow provide extra resources that give their kin additional survival advantage and so help to propagate the genetic strain which produced the homosexuals. Rather, homosexual individuals are disproportionately rejected by or reject their families (Gibson, 1989). As a consequence, homosexuals' intimates are disproportionately friends and lovers instead of family members (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Cameron & Ross, 1981). And, because they live abbreviated lives (Cameron, *et al.*, 1994), even if they engaged in disproportionate generosity, such generosity would tend to be short lived.

In summary, homosexual individuals produce too few children to sustain adequately replacement levels of homosexuals in future generations. The incidence of homosexuality varies directly as a function of its acceptance or condemnation both by societies and various social groups within society.

Homosexuals claim that they can and do recruit. Homosexuals tend *not* to have close contacts with their genetic lineage and therefore would have difficulty advantaging those of their relatives carrying similar genes. These facts would seem to point away from genetics and toward learning as a basis for homosexuality.

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