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Homosexual

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Synonyms

Homosexual ideology; Homosexuality; Homosexuals

Other Terms

► Homosexual behaviors

Definitions

Homosexual *orientation* refers to a set of traits and preferences whereby an organism is exclusively sexually attracted to and interested in same-sex individuals. Homosexual *behaviors* refer to sexual behaviors with same-sex individuals.

Introduction

Homosexual *behaviors* occur in most sexually reproducing species, whereas homosexual *orientation* (exclusive sexual interest in and preference for same-sex individuals) may be unique to humans (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Kirkpatrick 2000). Individuals of many species display homosexual behaviors to gain acceptance, solidify a social bond, or experience pleasure. Males that display homosexual behaviors may participate in anal sex, oral sex, or mutual masturbation with males, and females that display homosexual behaviors may participate in mounting, oral sex, and mutual masturbation with females (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Sommer and Vasey 2006; Vasey 2004). In many species, males do not engage in homosexual behaviors after reaching reproductive age. Homosexual behaviors may be displayed by heterosexually, bisexually, and homosexually oriented individuals.

How Homosexual Orientation Persists in the Population

There is evidence that homosexual orientation is heritable such that homosexual males and females carry genes that contribute to the development of homosexual orientation (Apostolou 2013; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Blanchard and Bogaert 1996; Iemmola and Ciani 2009; Kirkpatrick 2000). Bisexual individuals also may carry genes that contribute to the development of homosexual orientation. Thus, individuals that copulate with a homosexual or bisexual individual may transmit genes to offspring that contribute to the development of homosexual orientation.

J. Vonk, T. K. Shackelford (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Animal Cognition and Behavior*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47829-6_336-1

Birth order accounts for some of the variation in male homosexuality in humans. Men with a greater number of older brothers are more likely to be homosexual (Apostolou 2013; Blanchard and Bogaert 1996; Ellis and Blachard 2001; Iemmola and Ciani 2009; Kirkpatrick 2000). The maternal immune hypothesis suggests that mothers produce higher rates of antibodies to testosterone during each subsequent male pregnancy. Later-born sons are more likely to become homosexual when the mother passes antibodies to testosterone to the fetus during pregnancy, which reduces the hormone's biological activity of the fetus (Ellis and Blachard 2001; Iemmola and Ciani 2009).

Homosexual Evolved Psychology

Homosexual and heterosexual humans share an evolved psychology for sexual preferences, although they differ in the target of these preferences. Like heterosexual men, homosexual men prefer sexual variety, physical attractiveness, and youth (Ha et al. 2012; Valentova et al. 2017). Male preference for physical attractiveness evolved because attractive females are more likely to produce healthy offspring (Apostolou 2013; Ha et al. 2012). Male preference for youth evolved because younger women have greater reproductive value – they are able to birth more children in their remaining reproductive lifespan (Apostolou 2013; Ha et al. 2012). The preference for sexual variety motivates heterosexual men to pursue copulation with multiple partners. Although homosexual men do not produce offspring by copulating with other men, homosexual men value traits in the target of their sexual desire that indicate higher reproductive value when displayed in women. Homosexual men likely have similar mate preferences to heterosexual men because they have sex-typical evolved psychology.

Homosexual women also have sex-typical preferences including the desire for higher status, resources, and investment (Ha et al. 2012; Valentova et al. 2017). These preferences evolved because women and their offspring benefit by securing resources and investment from a long-term partner. Higher status is associated with access to resources (Valentova et al. 2017). The similarities between heterosexual and homosexual mate preferences may reflect an evolutionary mismatch – the mate preferences that are advantageous for heterosexuals do not solve the same adaptive problems for homosexuals.

In humans, a long-term partner's real or suspected infidelity is the primary cause of jealousy. Men are more upset by a partner's sexual infidelity because paternity is threatened when his partner copulates with another man. Women are more upset by a partner's emotional infidelity because her partner may invest time, attention, and resources into another woman and her children. Jealousy among homosexual individuals is less clearly sex differentiated (Ha et al. 2012; Valentova et al. 2017).

Costs and Benefits of Homosexual Behaviors

Homosexual behaviors are not uncommon in many species; they occur with greater prevalence compared to exclusive homosexual orientations and may be associated with social and reproductive benefits. Individuals of many species engage in homosexual behaviors to secure social acceptance and to achieve higher ranking within a group. For instance, female bonobos display mounting, genital licking, and mutual masturbation with higher-status females (Sommer and Vasey 2006; Vasey 2004). Females of several primate species may provide sexual favors to higher-status females as displays of kindness or cooperation and thereby secure social support and acceptance from female troop members.

Some mammals, vertebrates, reptiles, and birds may engage in pre-reproductive homosexual behaviors to gain experience in courtship (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Sommer and Vasey 2006; Vasey 2004). Males that engage in anal intercourse with other males may improve their mounting skills and learn how to interact sexually with a partner, including practicing submissive and dominant roles. Such practice may improve

a male's mating success with females. Males that are accommodating to the female during copulation are more likely to stimulate female orgasms, which may facilitate sperm retention (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995). Females that engage in pre-reproductive homosexual behaviors benefit by improving their sexual skills, practicing sexual receptivity, and experiencing orgasms. In humans, females may experience orgasms more frequently or more reliably during sex with females than with males. Thus, females may learn to control and achieve orgasm with males as a consequence of practicing sexual acts with females (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995).

Exclusive homosexuality may be associated with benefits to genetically related individuals, in the form of kin care. One theory suggests that homosexual individuals can invest resources in kin members, given that they do not incur the costs of rearing their own children (Apostolou 2013; Kirkpatrick 2000). Investing resources in kin may contribute to inclusive fitness. However, the siblings of last-born homosexual sons may have attained more resources from their parents, thereby increasing their reproductive success without the help from the youngest brother. Also, homosexual individuals may allocate resources to same-sex partners, which decreases the amount of resources distributed to kin.

Conclusion

Homosexual behaviors are more common than is exclusive homosexual orientation. The persistence of homosexual orientation in populations is influenced by genes and birth order. Pre-reproductive homosexual interactions may prepare both sexes for copulation with individuals of the opposite sex and may improve mating success. Homosexual humans have sex-typical preferences. In humans and other primates, homosexual behaviors may facilitate social acceptance and bonding with same-sex group members.

Cross-References

- ▶ Affiliative Bond
- ▶ Bisexual
- ▶ Female Preference Hypothesis
- ▶ Fraternal Birth Order Effect
- ▶ Heterosexual
- ▶ Overdominance Hypothesis for Male Homosexuality
- ▶ Pair Bond
- ▶ Primate Mating Systems
- ▶ Reproductive Fitness
- ▶ Reproductive Strategy
- ▶ Sex Differences
- ▶ Sexual Attraction
- ▶ Sexual Identification
- ▶ Sexual Selection
- ▶ Sociosexual Behavior

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