

The Evolution of Human Homosexual Behavior¹

by R. C. Kirkpatrick

Homosexuality presents a paradox for evolutionists who explore the adaptedness of human behavior. If adaptedness is measured by reproductive success and if homosexual behavior is nonreproductive, how has it come about? Three adaptationist hypotheses are reviewed here and compared with the anthropological literature. There is little evidence that lineages gain reproductive advantage through offspring care provided by homosexual members. Therefore, there is little support for the hypothesis that homosexuality evolved by kin selection. Parents at times control children's reproductive decisions and at times encourage children on homosexual behavior. There is therefore more support for the hypothesis of parental manipulation. Support is strongest, however, for the hypothesis that homosexual behavior comes from individual selection for reciprocal altruism. Same-sex alliances have reproductive advantages, and sexual behavior at times maintains these alliances. Nonhuman primates, including the apes, use homosexual behavior in same-sex alliances, and such alliances appear to have been key in the expanded distribution of human ancestors during the Pleistocene. Homosexual emotion and behavior are, in part, emergent qualities of the human propensity for same-sex affiliation. Adaptationist explanations do not fully explain sexual behavior in humans, however; social and historical factors also play strong roles.

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And if there were only some way of contriving that a state or an army should be made up of lovers and their loves, they would be the very best governors of their own city . . . and when fighting at one another's side, although merely a handful, they would overcome all men.

PLATO, *The Symposium*

The brother-in-law is ally, collaborator, and friend. . . . In the same band, the potential brother-in-law, i.e., the cross-cousin, is the one with whom, as an adolescent, one indulges in homosexual activities which will always leave their mark in the mutually affectionate behaviour of the adults.

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*

Homosexual behavior has existed throughout human history and in most, perhaps all, human cultures (e.g., Blackwood 1986a, Greenberg 1988, Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey 1989). Cross-cultural and historical studies qualify the breadth of homosexual experience, while medical studies, primarily from the contemporary West, quantify its depth. The Melanesian example of homosexual behavior is well known, with 10 to 20% of Melanesian societies requiring all men to participate in homosexual as well as heterosexual sex (reviewed in Herdt 1984a). In southern China at the turn of the last century, 100,000 women joined a marriage resistance movement that included, for many, lifelong homosexual partnerships (Sankar 1986). And Mpondo miners of South Africa in the first half of the 20th century commonly entered into "mine marriages," forgoing sexual liaisons with nearby township women (Moodie, Ndatshe, and Sibuyi 1989).

Homosexual behavior is much more systemic than the above isolated examples might suggest (table 1). In Pacific Island societies other than in Melanesia, such as Tahiti and Hawaii, homosexual behavior was common prior to Western influence (Gunson 1964, Morris 1990). In native North America, at least 137 societies had institutional roles for transgenders (berdache) commonly associated with homosexual behavior (Callender and Kochens 1983, Williams 1986, Roscoe 1987, Lang 1998). Homosexual behavior has also been common in societies of native South America (reviewed in Greenberg 1988, Murray 1995a, b), Asia (e.g., Hirsch 1990, Leupp 1995), precolonial Africa (reviewed in Sweet 1996), and pre-modern Europe (e.g., Dover 1989, Roelke 1996). In Ford and Beach's (1951) world sample, homosexual behavior is normative in 64% of the societies with available data ($n = 76$), at least for certain classes of individuals.

Studies over the past 70 years in contemporary soci-

had their origin in a seminar on human mating led by S. Hrdy many years ago. I am grateful for her continuing encouragement and the encouragement of P. S. Rodman to develop these ideas.

Anthropology And Homosexual Behavior

Guillaume Favre



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