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## Boston University School of Medicine

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# NEWS

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### THREE-YEAR STUDY OF GAY MEN INDICATES GENETICS INFLUENCES SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Boston, Mass.--An in-depth study by a Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) psychiatrist and a Northwestern University psychologist to determine the basis for sexual orientation indicates that genetics plays a strong role in determining homosexuality.

The study was conducted by Richard C. Pillard, M.D., of the Family Studies Laboratory, a division of Psychiatry at BUSM, and senior investigator J. Michael Bailey, Ph.D., of the Department of Psychology at Northwestern University. It was published in the December issue of The Archives of General Psychiatry.

During the study, from 1988 to 1991, the investigators recruited gay men raised with identical twins, fraternal twins or adoptive brothers to determine the prevalence of homosexuality among siblings with identical, similar and dissimilar genes. An analysis of information gathered from interviews and questionnaires indicated that the twin brothers of gay identical twins had the greatest percentage of homosexuals among the three groups of siblings studied.

Initially 55 identical twins, 54 fraternal twins and 45 men with adoptive brothers responded to an ad about the study. The investigators found that 52 percent of the 56 identical twin brothers, two of which were actually members of a triplet, were gay. Twenty-two percent of the 54 fraternal twin brothers and 11 percent of 57 adoptive brothers were gay.

"Up until the last 10 or 15 years gay people were so much in the closet, it was hard to get people to interview for studies like this,"

says Pillard. "I think the results of this study should be a signal to parents that having a child who's gay isn't the result of being an inadequate parent. Also, I hope it sends a message that being gay isn't abnormal in any way. It's just another way of being."

In a previous study, Pillard found evidence that homosexuality runs in families. In that study, published in The Archives of General Psychiatry in 1986, brothers of gay men were found to be about four times more likely to be homosexual than were brothers of heterosexual controls.

This latest study shows that from 30 percent to more than 70 percent of sexual orientation in men is genetic. That range was arrived at by varying assumptions regarding the frequency of male homosexuality in the general population and the likelihood that the sample was representative.

"The study simply shows there is some genetic influence," Pillard says. "The next step is to conduct genetic studies based on genetic material in the cells. Only by doing that can you get a more concrete measurement."

#### Other Findings

Data gathered during the study was used for the Kinsey rating, a measurement of the degree of an individual's homosexual or heterosexual orientation. It was also used for the Physical Aggressive Scale, the Sports Subscale of the Childhood Play Activities Checklist, and the Recalled Childhood Gender Behavior Questionnaire, all behavioral ratings.

Although the study tried to determine if a genetic contributor to homosexuality was more prevalent in men who exhibited atypical gender behavior during childhood than in those who conformed to typical sexual roles, no such evidence was found among the study's subjects.

Bailey said, "That finding suggests there may be biological processes that result in complete orientation toward men or toward women."

The researchers were able to contact about 74 percent of the living relatives of the men involved in the study and found answers to similar questions from the two groups matched about 98 percent of the time.