

YOU'LL NEED

- VCR or DVD player
- TV or video projection unit
- *Good Sex* video, cued to "Sex ID" [7:20]
- copies of **Sex ID** (page 50) one per student
- pencils

“It can never be satisfied, the mind, never.” Wallace Stevens wrote that, and in the long run he was right. The mind wants to live forever, or to learn a very good reason why not. The mind wants the world to return, its love, or its awareness; the mind wants to know all the world and all eternity, and God. The mind's sidekick, however, will settle for two eggs over easy.

The dear stupid body is as easily satisfied as a spaniel. And, incredibly, the simple spaniel can lure the brawling mind to its dish. It is everlastingly funny that the proud, metaphysically ambitious, clamoring mind will hush if you give it an egg.

—Annie Dillard

in *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (HarperCollins)

“Sex Reassignment at Birth: A Long Term Review and Clinical Implications,” Milton Diamond, Ph.D., and H. Keith Sigmundson, M.D. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, March 1997.

In our own words

video discussion starter

SEX ID

VIDEO

How our sexual identity is formed. Introduce and show the video clip.

- Q: What stands out the most for you in this video? Why do you think that's important?
- Q: Do you identify with the people in the video? Talk about that.
- Q: With what did you most strongly agree or disagree in the video? Why?
- Q: Do you think the girl is finished with her sexual experimentation? Why?
 - If you were a close friend, what would you have said to her when she said she was getting married? Why?
 - What challenges do you think she'll face in the future? Why?
- Q: Do these stories shed any light on how sexual identity is formed? Talk about that.

Although all sorts of forces are involved in forming our sexual identity, it seems that four of the major shaping forces are our genetic makeup, our experiences past and present, our families, and God. We're going to look at all four of these forces to try to figure out how they've molded us, and what we can do about it.

case studies

NATURE, NURTURE, OR BOTH

Is it because of my parents' DNA or the way they raised me?

For years, scientists have been debating the question of nature or nurture in human identity in general and sexual identity specifically. The debate seems to swirl around this key question: Am I the way I am because of the genes that I inherited from my parents, or because of the environment I grew up in, or some combination of the two? I'm going to read two true stories; hopefully, they'll illustrate some of the complex issues involved in this debate.

There was once an infant boy who, while being circumcised, was involved in a tragic accident that destroyed his penis. According to common medical practice, "in instances of extensive penile damage to infants it is standard to recommend rearing the male as a female."

This meant that this little boy's doctors built him a vagina because it's easier to do this than to rebuild a penis. His parents raised him as a female and never told him that he was actually born male. However, when he reached his teenage years, he knew something was wrong and subsequently switched to living as a male. According to the latest reports he is married to a woman, is raising three stepchildren, and is quite happy being male.

- Q: Do you think the doctors were justified in making these changes after the accident?
- Q: Be serious now. If you males among us were involved in an accident like the one above, would you rather live as a male with no penis or as a female with a fake vagina? Why?

- Q: Why do you think this sex reassignment did not work?
- What does this suggest about the way our biology, specifically whether we're genetically male or female, influences us?

- Q: This is an example of someone whose environment tried to change him but failed. Can you think of any other instances where a person's environment tried to change him but failed?

Aaron was an 11-year-old boy who had normal feelings for pretty girls his age. He grew up in a middle-class house with two parents who loved each other a lot. From as far back as he could remember he had been going to church with his family and, even at this young age, knew he was a strong believer in Jesus. That is, until one day he accidentally walked into his mother's bedroom closet while she was naked.

As a reflex action, Aaron's mother slammed the closet door shut, and in the process jammed Aaron's fingers in the door. This was the first time he had seen a female naked, and the association between his mother's panic and his crushed fingers scarred him for life. He says that from that moment on he could never look at a female body without feeling pain. Aaron now lives as a homosexual who struggles with his relationship with Jesus.

- Q: Do you think Aaron was genetically born or environmentally made a homosexual?
- Q: Do you think it's possible that Aaron would have ended up as a gay man without this incident? Why or why not?
- Q: Aaron's sexual identity was drastically altered by something that happened in the course of his life. Do you know anyone whose sexual identity has been shaped by incidents in their life?
- Q: Aaron's story focuses on environmental influences. Other stories we hear are from people who say they never remember a time when they weren't more attracted to people of the same gender. They believe that's because they are somehow biologically gay. What do you think of that?
- Some Christians respond to the argument that homosexuality couldn't be biologically determined because God would not make someone that way. What do you think of this response?

Let's compare these two stories. The first was the story of someone who was born a certain way and his environment tried to change him, but it seems that his genetics won out. The second was a story of a man who was a born a certain way and an emotional trauma in his environment did change him.

discussion starter

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Perhaps more than any other factor, our families shape our sexual identity.

- Q: Kids learn from their families the things that establish, reinforce, or challenge their sexual identity (for example, boys are tough). What are some things the following relationships teach us about our sexual identity? (You don't have to go through all of them, you can select what you consider the most applicable.)

- father to son
- father to daughter
- mother to daughter
- mother to son

As we just admitted, there are a host of forces involved in forming sexual identity. However, we've chosen to focus on only four: biology, environment, family, and God. We wish we could narrow it down further, but given the wide assortment of social science and natural science research, we felt would be intellectually dishonest to reduce it even further. If you would rather focus on just a few of these forces, by all means, please do. But we do hope that you'll join with us in presenting God as the ultimate potter who shapes us, the clay.

This discussion just scratches the surface of the issue of homosexuality. If you want—or if your students want—more on the topic, see **The "H" Word** (page 45).

As many as 125,000 teenagers each year say they are homeless—kicked out of their homes—because they are gay. About one-third of adolescent suicide attempts are by gay and lesbian teenagers. Ten percent of gay teens report being physically abused by family members.

—"20/20," ABC newsmagazine (September 13, 1999)

If your students are using *What (Almost) Nobody Will Tell You about Sex*, you can direct them to **Like Father, Like Son** (page 23).

YOU'LL NEED

- copies of **Like Father, Like Son** (page 50), one per student
- pencils

- brother to brother or sister to sister
- brother to sister or sister to brother
- cousins
- aunts and uncles
- step-parents

- Q:** What are the most helpful messages about sexual identity you've gotten from your family?
- Q:** What are the least helpful messages about sexual identity you've gotten from your family?
- Q:** What are some things you've learned about sexual identity from your family that you intend to pass on to your children?
- Q:** What have you learned about sexual identity from your family that you would rather not pass on to your children? Talk about that.

For even more provocative reflection or discussion, use the questions from **Like Father, Like Son** (page 57 in this book) in a large group, small group, or individual setting.

It's true that our genes, our environment, and our families impact our understanding of sexuality. But could it also be true that God wants to have the most say in the way we develop as sexual beings?

word from God

Bible study

GOD: THE BEFORE AND THE AFTER

Who we were before a relationship with God and who we are after we have a relationship with him can—or maybe even should—be pretty different.

In order to figure out God's influence on our sexual identity, we also must check out the effect a relationship with him has in our lives overall.

Read Romans 1:18-32 aloud.

- Q:** Given the people you know who don't have a relationship with God yet, how do you feel about Paul's label of them as wicked, evil, greedy, and depraved?
- Do you think it fits them or not?
 - Would they agree with you or not? Talk about that.
- Q:** What do you believe about Paul's connection between following the sinful desires of the heart in verse 24 and the resulting shameful lusts that he describes in verses 26-28?
- Q:** In verse 21, Paul mentions that "they knew God," and yet here he goes on and on talking about all of their sin. Many biblical scholars believe Paul means they knew God in the sense of seeing his hand in creation (verse 20) but did not have a personal relationship with him. Do you think it's possible to get a glimpse of God from his creation?
- If so, why would someone continue to rebel against God?

Paul isn't mincing words here. He's saying that before we know Jesus, we're really messed up. Thank God (literally) that's not the end of the story.

If your students are using *What (Almost) Nobody Will Tell You about Sex*, you can direct them to **God: The Before and the After** (page 25).

I'm going to read a handful of issues that are part of our sexual identity. As I read each one, I'm going to ask three questions:

- Q:** Would you recommend that this person try to change this issue, or is it okay as it's described?
- Q:** If you'd recommend some sort of change, how do you think God might want to be involved in that?
- Q:** If you'd recommend some sort of change, and this person was a friend of yours, how do you think you might want to be involved in that?
- **A girl who is a tomboy and yet feels like maybe she should act a little more feminine at times**
 - **A guy who feels a bit like a sissy and would like to be a bit more like one of the guys**
 - **A girl who's afraid of being abandoned by guys so she doesn't date at all**
 - **Someone who's ashamed of her body**
 - **Someone who uses his body as a tool to get what he wants**
 - **A girl who can't stop thinking about the guy who sits next to her in math**
 - **A guy who can't stop thinking about the guy who sits next to him in that same math class**

Let's get even more personal. How about you? What issues are you dealing with? If you'd like to change how you're handling these issues, how would you like God to help you change?

As you ask the questions described below, invite students to write down how they were before they accepted Jesus' rescue from their sin, the difference in their life after that point, and finally, the struggles or questions they still are working through. If most of your students are not already Christians, or if you're not sure, this might be a great chance to invite them to consider who they are without him, who he is, and what it would take for them to have eternal life with him—plus a way better life in the present.

If you have a pretty even mix between Christians and non-Christians, you might want to challenge them to face off in a rousing match of tug-of-war. Just kidding. Instead, it might be more appropriate to ask the following questions in an environment conducive to personal reflection, with plenty of time for students to really think and be still before God.

- Q:** If you have already asked Jesus to rescue you from your sins and be your Savior and Lord, how has that made a difference in your sexual identity?
- What sexual struggles and questions do you still need Jesus' help with?
 - It's been said that sin is often a result of pride or laziness. How might either of these be keeping you from fully experiencing what it means to be a new creation with a healthy sexual identity?
- Q:** If you haven't asked Jesus to rescue you from your sins and be your Savior and Lord, what questions or unresolved issues do you have that keep you from doing so?
- How do you think allowing him to rescue you would impact your view of yourself and your sexual identity?

“...complete lie that you should do what's in your heart. If we all did what was in our hearts, the world would grind to a halt.”

—Claire Danes, as Angela, on the TV program “My So-Called Life” (September 9, 1994)

In other words

video discussion starter

BOYS WILL BE _____ AND GIRLS WILL BE _____

VIDEO

What do girls think of guys? What do guys think of girls? Wouldn't you like to know?

After playing the “**Boys Will Be _____ and Girls Will Be _____**” video clip, ask questions like the following.

Q: How confusing do you find the opposite gender?

- Not confusing at all
- Pretty perplexing
- Absolutely mind-blowing

Q: How different do you think the two genders are?

- No different
- A bit different
- Fairly different
- Way different

Q: Several differences were mentioned in the video. Let's see whether or not you agree with what was highlighted.

- Is it really true that girls are more emotional?
- How about that girls are more serious about their relationships?
- Do you think guys are really less mature?

Q: One guy on the video mentions a double standard for girls and guys. Do you agree that this double standard exists? If so, what are some examples?

Q: Is it true that guys evaluate girls primarily by their physical appearance while girls focus more on guys' internal qualities?

Q: Girls, what other words or phrases would you use to describe guys not mentioned on the video?

- Guys, what other words or phrases would you use to describe girls not mentioned on the video?

Q: Girls, how do the words from the video—as well as what the guys just shared—affect your sexual identity?

- Guys, how do the words from the video—as well as what the girls just shared—affect your sexual identity?

discussion starter

THAT'S GOTTA HURT

Tragic circumstances can affect our sexual identity.

Q: It's amazing how powerful spoken words are. When Tiger Woods was growing up, his father instilled in him the vision that one day he would be not just the greatest African-American golfer, but the greatest golfer ever. He is well on his way to becoming that very person. On the other hand, there are many people who grow up with negative verbal abuse that scars them forever. Without naming names, do you know anyone who has suffered from negative verbal abuse? Can you tell that person's story?

YOU'LL NEED

- TV or video projection unit
- VCR or DVD player
- *Good Sex* video cued to “**Boys Will Be _____ and Girls Will Be _____**” [0:35]

If your students are using *What (Almost) Nobody Will Tell You about Sex*, you can direct them to **That's Gotta Hurt** (page 24).

YOU'LL NEED

- copies of **That's Gotta Hurt** (page 52), one per student
- pencils

YOU'LL NEED

- list-making materials. Some combination of the following: a whiteboard, markers, different colored index cards, or sheets of butcher paper hung on the wall. You get the idea. (Or, if you wish, just let this one be a mental exercise.)
- copies of **Talking Dirty** (page 53), one per student
- pencils

Don't do this exercise if you can't do it in good conscience. And please don't get mad at us for including it. It's just, when you ask your group to think of or write down the words used to describe sex in their culture, they're going to think of some words we all wish weren't as common as they are these days. If we take language seriously—and we do—those words affect the way people understand and feel about sex—even if that understanding and those feelings are unexamined. We think it's a good idea to examine them. But if your conscience—or your boss—won't allow you to go there, please let yourself and us off the hook and just skip this page.

- Q: With this in mind, what effect do you think verbal and emotional abuse might have on a person's sexual identity? Talk about that.
- Q: What effect do you think physical disability might have on a person's sexual identity? Talk about that.
- Q: What effect do you think sexual molestation might have on a person's sexual identity?
- Q: What effect do you think rape might have on a person's sexual identity? Talk about that.
- Q: What effect do you think incest might have on a person's sexual identity?
- Q: Can you think of any other circumstances that might have a real effect on our sexual identity?
- Q: Do you have any close friends or family who have suffered in any of these ways? How do you think they cope, if at all, with the effects?

To help students further understand the way their sexual identity has been affected by painful experiences, use the questions included in **That's Gotta Hurt** (page 52 in this book) for large or small group discussions, as well as for individual, personal reflection.

list-making game **TALKING DIRTY**

How we talk about sex impacts how we view it (caution—this discussion is best for mature groups).

Ask your students to think about or write the terms people in their culture use to talk about sex, and if you'd like, write them on the whiteboard or index cards. Then ask them the following questions.

- Q: Are the majority of these words common or uncommon in the places where you hang out?
- Q: Which of these terms are offensive to you? Why?
- Q: Do you think the language a person uses affects his or her sexual identity? Why or why not?

To help your students more fully consider the impact of words and actions on their sexual identity, use the questions from **Talking Dirty** (page 53 in this book) for large group discussion, smaller group processing, or individual reflection.

THE "H" WORD

What we believe and feel about homosexuality. (Buckle up!)

Q: Which statement best describes your opinion?

- I believe homosexuals are born, not made—it runs in the family genes.
- I believe homosexuals are made by their environments, not born.
- I believe homosexuals are homosexual for many reasons, not just one.
- I believe homosexuals have perverted thinking.
- I believe homosexuality is a birth defect, like spina bifida or cystic fibrosis.
- I don't think I know why some people are homosexual.
- The reason I believe some people are homosexuals is _____.

Choose three students that replied to each of these responses who are willing to complete one of these statements:

- I agreed that homosexuals are born, not made, because...
- I agreed that homosexuals are made, not born, because...
- I agreed that I don't know why some people are homosexual because...

Q: How many of you actually know someone who describes himself or herself as homosexual?

Q: For those of you who responded in the affirmative, how does that person feel about his or her sexuality?

Q: Are you well acquainted with someone who doesn't describe himself or herself as homosexual but you think probably is?

- If so, what makes you think that person is a homosexual?

Q: Homosexual relationships seem to be getting an increasing amount of attention in today's culture. Do you think that sometimes in our society—and maybe even among some of your friends—it has become kinda cool to be gay?

- If you agree, why do you think it is this way?

Q: What do you believe about homosexual relationships being more acceptable today than they used to be?

- How do you think Scripture speaks to this issue? Do you know any passages offhand that relate to homosexuality?

If your students need some hints on biblical passages, try pointing them to Genesis 19:1-17, Leviticus 18:1-30, Romans 1:18-2:15, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Q: How do those Scripture verses affect your view of homosexuality?

Q: It's been said that, given the other sins described in many of these passages, homosexuality is no worse than any other sin, including heterosexual lust. What do you think of that argument?

Q: Do you think there's a difference between homosexual curiosity and homosexual identity? Talk about that.

- How about between homosexual tendencies and acting on those tendencies?

“What started as an entertainment magazine quickly became a handbook for men, and the message was that you could live a moral and ethical life that is not simply defined as being a husband and a father.”

—Hugh Hefner, Playboy founder, describing the early days of his magazine (Details, April 1997)

If your students are using *What (Almost) Nobody Will Tell You about Sex*, you can direct them to **The “H” Word** (page 34).

YOU'LL NEED

- copies of **The “H” Word** (page 54) or **The Grass Is Browner** (page 54/55), one per student
- pencils

We bring up the question of homosexuality because we know your students wonder about it. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we hope this discussion will be helpful to you, and more importantly, to your students. Since not all denominations agree on this issue, nor do all churches within a denomination, nor do all people within a single church, it seems likely that your group of students will be somewhat fractured in their opinions also.

At the time of this writing, the research regarding the influence of biological forces in the development of sexual identity (especially homosexual identity) is conflicting.