

## Sexual Organization Of The City

Book Review by Frank York

(By Laumann, Edward O., Stephen Ellingson, Jenna Mahay, Anthony Paik, and Yoosik Youm, editors. University of Chicago Press, 2004, 424 pages.)

University of Chicago sociologist Edward Laumann and his co-authors have written a voluminous study of how sexual behaviors are shaped in large cities by gender, neighborhoods, ethnicity, and by personal networks of friends. *Sexual Organization Of The City*, published in February, 2004, details the sexual behavior patterns of homosexual and heterosexual singles in Chicago.

In his study of homosexual dating patterns, Laumann discovered that most homosexuals spend their lives in "transactional" relationships (short-term commitments that last less than six months on average.)

Laumann observes: "On average, half your life is going to be in this single and dating state, and this is a big change from the 1950s. The gay scene is a fairly volatile scene without much nominal guidance from family and long-term friends, which tend to help with bumps in the road. When you're in that single scene, these partnerships aren't one-night stands, but they usually have a life of about six months."

Laumann distinguishes between transactional versus relational interactions among single people in large cities. He and his researchers found that male homosexuals typically engaged in transactional relationships. They were seeking short-term relationships rather than long-term commitments.

Lesbians, on the other hand, were more likely to seek relational commitments. The author notes in Chapter 1, "Same-sex markets for women, regardless of racial/ethnic identity, tend to be relational. The sexual cultures of the female same-sex markets in the neighborhoods define monogamous, committed relationships as the ideal, and market space is constructed to facilitate the building of relationships and community rather than finding of casual sex partners."

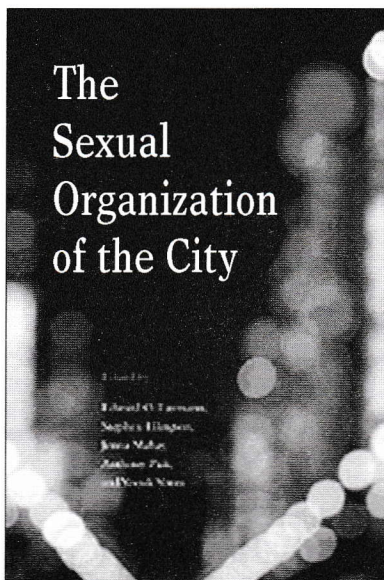
Homosexual males, however, were far less interested in committed relationships. That finding affirms other studies on male homosexual promiscuity, including an AIDS study conducted by researchers in Amsterdam in 2003. Headed by Dr. Maria Xiridou with the Amsterdam Municipal Health Service, a team of researchers conducted a survey of male homosexuals and how these networks of

individuals were involved in the spread of HIV infection in that city. The researchers discovered that homosexuals in casual sexual relationships averaged between 16-28 sexual partners each year. Those in "steady" relationships averaged between 6-10 sexual partners yearly. In these somewhat longer-term relationships, there was a tacit understanding between sex partners that outside sexual activities were to be expected. In short, consensual infidelity was the norm. The average relationship lasted 1.5 years.

In addition, Dr. Xiridou discovered that HIV was spread more widely among those in stable relationships than those who engaged in one-night stands; Xiridou noted that "risky behavior" was more likely

among steady partners than among those engaging in casual encounters. She noted that 86% of new HIV infections in Amsterdam occurred among those in steady relationships.

Professor Laumann's research provides additional evidence that male homosexuals, in particular, experience pervasive loneliness and many short-lived relationships. However, he told the homosexual newspaper, the Washington Blade that his research does not confirm that homosexuals cannot form lasting (even if non-monogamous) relationships. "Just like anyone else, if they [homosexuals] want a commitment, they'll form one," said Laumann.



### Web Resource

#### Cites Research on Sexual Orientation Change

The New Direction for Life Ministries of Canada (<http://newdirection.ca>) has published a summary of the published research available on the possibility of change for individuals wishing to be free of same-sex attractions.

The site, "Homosexuality and the Possibility of Change" provides 31 research summaries of studies. Among the studies cited is NARTH's "Survey of Sexual-Orientation Change."