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## Homosexuality in Ghana: Perspectives of Science, Social Learning Theory and Religion

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### Abstract

The study discusses homosexuality in Ghana. It has analyzed the interdisciplinary views of science, the social learning theory and religion on the phenomenon. The approach is mainly qualitative involving both individual and group interviews. Individual and group informants were respectively selected using purposeful and availability sampling designs in institutions, towns/cities, and secret homosexual parties. The findings were that homosexuality in Ghana portrays a learnt behavior; it is not genetically caused as some claim. Religiously, the phenomenon is seen as a sinful act. The study suggests ways that homosexuals can be helped to overcome their situation. The study is important because it highlights the state of homosexuality in Ghana and suggests helpful ways of dealing with it. It also contributes to existing local and global debates on the phenomenon.

### Keywords:

Homosexuality, Perspectives, Religion, Science, Learned behavior

## Introduction

One of the topical issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has gained substantial academic and popular attention and debates in the fields of religion and development is homosexuality. The concept in the context of this study, is the “sexual interest in and attraction” to persons of one’s own sex<sup>1</sup> leading to unnatural sexual relationship. Another word, *gay*, used in certain sections of the study is synonymous with the term, homosexuality. This definition includes sexual activities of lesbians. Whilst some claim the phenomenon is inborn or genetic, others insist that it is a learnt behavior<sup>2</sup>. The latter understanding as we shall see, conceives the phenomenon as a psychological functioning that can best be understood in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavior and its controlling conditions<sup>3</sup>.

Homosexuality seems to topple and reconfigures the traditional Christian and Islamic notions of sexual relationship and the family since the practice appears to upset God’s blessing and command to the first man and woman in Genesis 1:27-28 to procreate or multiply for the sustainability of the human race. The Bible in Matthew 19:4-5 and the Quran 7:80-81 stress marriage and therefore sexual relationship as natural and between a man and a woman.

In spite of this understanding, homosexuality has become a global issue. Judeo-Christian and Muslim cultures have generally seen this sexual behavior as deviant and sinful. Many Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders, on the other hand, proscribe the acts, but not the “inclination” or “orientation”, and the people involved in this practice<sup>4</sup>. It is interesting to note that while many Western societies appear tolerant and have condescended to the phenomenon, African societies like Ghana frown on it. The global debate, including that of Ghana is whether this practice should be accepted or censored. As an ongoing debate, this study is faced with the following questions: What is the situation of homosexuality in Ghana? Is there any scientific basis of the practice and how does social learning theory conceive of this? What are the Christian and the Islamic responses to the practice? This study is important because it has not only exposed the situation of homosexuality in Ghana and suggested practical intervention for it, but also contributed to both local and international theories on the understanding of this sexual behavior.

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica Online, (2017), p. 1. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/homosexuality>.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Knight, “Born or Bred? Science does not Support the Claim that Homosexuality is Genetic”. (2004), p. 1. <http://concernedwomen.org/born-or-bredscience-does-not-support-the-claim-that-homosexuality-is-genetic/>.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*. New York: General Learning Press, (1971).

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online, (2017).

It is a common perception in Ghana that homosexuality is an alien practice that has been imported into Ghana by tourists and other foreigners. According to this perception, tourists, international workers and even missionaries introduced the homosexual practice into Ghana in the 1970s. Preceding the arrest of John Macleod, a British national in 2007 for homosexual act with a 19-year-old Ghanaian boy, there had been similar reports in the 1990s by newspapers on foreign nationals “sodomizing” Ghanaian boys. During the 1990s, students began to confess when a Peace Corp volunteer was deported from Ghana for wounding the anal cavity of a young student. Since then homosexuals have been under severe social pressure because the practice is seen as culturally a taboo in Ghana. From 2004, the practice took a new dimension when the media started reporting new incidents on it<sup>5</sup>.

The debate on homosexuality, as indicated, shows two main school of thoughts, namely whether the phenomenon is inborn or something learnt. Those who supported the latter perspective argue that tourists and foreigners, on one hand, introduced the phenomenon; and that Ghanaians who travelled abroad, on the other, also learnt the homosexual act and returned to Ghana to practice it. Some also claim that convicts indulged in homosexual sex and developed addiction to the practice before coming out of prison<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the main objective of the study is to find out the state of homosexuality in Ghana using interdisciplinary perspectives of science, the social learning theory, and religion as its assessment criteria.

## Methodology

The approach of the study was mainly qualitative involving both individual and group interviews with key informants who were either homosexuals or working with them. The interviews took place in July 2015, August 2016, July 2017, and updated in August and December 2018. The reason for this research strategy was to validate the individual interviews with the group ones. The key informants comprised 7 male and 3 female homosexuals in Accra; 12 male and 7 female homosexuals in Kumasi; and 1 male homosexual (undergoing counseling) at Atebubu. In addition, 3 Senior High School female and 2 male homosexuals; and a tutor (counselor for

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<sup>5</sup>William Yao Owusu, “Homosexuality in Ghana: A right or an aberration?” (1 August 2011). Available at: <http://www.dailyguideghana.com>.

<sup>6</sup>I. Karikari, “Homosexuality in Ghana: Senior High Schools - The Real Hotspots?” (2011). [Online]. Available at <http://ghanaweb.com>.

homosexuals); 3 care-givers working for an NGO on health awareness for homosexuals, 1 homosexual peer educator as well as 3 medical practitioners who were attending to some homosexuals facing health complications, were all interviewed. Accesses to informants were arranged by a Bishop who is a homosexual. The selection was purposive.

The structured group interviews, on the other hand, involved 200 respondents who attended separate homosexual secret parties. The 200 respondents were divided into 5 groups with each group comprising 40 informants. The parties, which rotate from region to region were strictly programmed for only homosexuals and in some cases protected by the police to prevent entrance of non-homosexuals. The respondents, as indicated, were personally involved in the homosexual practice making them key informants. Eighty (80) of the respondents were selected from Kumasi, 50 from Teshie, 40 from James Town; and 30 from Atebubu respectively located within the Ashanti, Greater Accra, and the Brong Ahafo regions of Ghana. The figures were determined through availability sampling procedure. These respondents whose names were held in anonymity answered questions in the presence of some research assistants.

The qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed free interaction between the researcher and the respondents. It also helped in dealing with the sensitive and emotional issues at stake where respondents poured out their feelings about their homosexual behavior. The researcher and assistants were issued special clearance and a card to be able to conduct the face-to-face interviews.

The primary data was supplemented by relevant secondary materials on the subject matter. In addition, the social learning theory and the Letter to the Romans 1:26-27 in the original Greek text, and the Quran 7:80-81 and 26:167 were used as the assessment criteria on the homosexual practice. The study decided to use these particular texts because they are the most frequently used by churches and mosques in their appraisal of the phenomenon. The combination of the different methods, techniques and sources of data, provided a holistic picture of the research object. Finally, citations in the study came via the fieldwork.

## **Results and Discussion**

## **Interdisciplinary Views of Science, Social Learning Theory and Religion on Homosexuality**

The analytical strategy adopted in this section is to find out about the interdisciplinary views or perspectives of science, the social learning theory and religion on the phenomenon of homosexuality in Ghana.

### **Homosexuality**

As indicated, homosexuality is the “sexual interest in and attraction” to persons of the same sex<sup>7</sup>culminating in unnatural sexual relationship. As such, it is a religious as well as a development issue. It is a religious issue because many different faiths condemn the practice while others appear to condone with it. It is also developmental because some homosexuals lose their jobs and status in life, especially in countries where the abhorrence is pretty high and there is no legal legitimacy of the practice. In spite of the intolerance, the contemporary time is witnessing the reality of homosexuality, which has become, more or less a rising global challenge.

In Ghana, fieldwork among so-called homosexual-prone areas, including educational institutions has shown incidents of rapid spread of homosexuality. The research has shown that all the three levels of education in Ghana are hot-beds of homosexuality; where many people learn the act for the first time. The Herald Newspaper in a month long investigation about homosexuality in educational institutions, corroborated the finding. The Newspaper, among other things, indicated that many girls in single sex boarding schools were indulging in homosexuality and that the practice is also prevalent among boys in boys’ boarding schools<sup>8</sup>. The study has shown that many student girls and boys practice the act either because they are afraid of getting pregnant or have no access to the opposite sex. The main mode of spreading the practice is through socialization (overt orientations) of fresh students. Continuing homosexual students assume “fatherhood” or “motherhood” status to fresh students by showing love and care that wins over the unsuspecting new-comers.

The fieldwork also indicated homosexual rape cases. However, in addressing such cases, school authorities often resort to domestic rather than criminal processes. A lot of young people get

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<sup>7</sup>Refer to the Encyclopedia Britannica, footnote 1.

<sup>8</sup>D. Littauer, “Two Ghana schools expel 53 students for being gay.” (19 April 2013). [Online].

<http://www.GaystarNews.com>; LGBTI global news 24-7/.

propositioned, and in some cases coerced into these acts, but find it difficult informing school authorities and their parents. If their sexuality is called into question during tenure at school, homosexual students face expulsion<sup>9</sup>. An instance was when 53 students (19 boys and 34 girls) were expelled from two leading Senior High Schools, but were quickly reinstated through the intervention of a powerful traditional ruler whose relative was one of those involved in the homosexual act. The fieldwork also identified how more teenage boys in the country's Junior High Schools were becoming victims of homosexual abuse. Similarly, the group interviews indicated that the practice is found in tertiary institutions. Reports of such incidents in educational institutions are considered something temporary and private and so do not attract serious public discussion. But some homosexuals, in an interview, admitted learning the homosexual act during their school days.

Furthermore, the study discovered that other institutions were involved in the homosexual practice. Some liberated *trokosiwo* (virgin girls and women kept in spiritual bondage in traditional religious shrines), also indicated how they satisfied themselves sexually when they needed men and shrine priests showed no interest<sup>10</sup>. There were also incidents of "sodomy cases" in prisons<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, in an interview, a Ghanaian homosexual veteran army officer narrated how his "lover" (a senior army officer) initiated him into homosexuality. The key informant was then introduced to other members of the group and had to go through a "welcoming rite". He indicated how he was encouraged after seeing many senior officers in the group who defended him in times of trouble.

Another interview was with a middle-aged woman who described herself as a chairperson of "Elegant Women's Association". This association comprised 53 young widows. According to the informant,

I was attracted to women, especially the slim ones. I started proposing to them and with my financial background, it was difficult for them to turn me down. Sometimes they called on me for financial help and also satisfied my sexual needs. I am 44

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<sup>9</sup>The Statesman, "Why Should Kufuor Peep into Our Bedrooms", (7 Sept. 2006). Online.

[Http://ghanaweb.com](http://ghanaweb.com). See also, M.S. Luckie, "Ghana: Somewhere over the Rainbow". (N.d.). [Online].[Http://goggle.com](http://goggle.com).

<sup>10</sup>F. Adjeley, "Is the Homosexual my Neighbor?" Life Journal, vol. 138, (2004), p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>Joy Online, "Education Ministry fights homosexuality in schools." (2011). [Http://myjoyonline.com.gh](http://myjoyonline.com.gh).

years now but still a virgin because although they insert their fingers into me, my hymen is still intact. I use vibrators and other objects on others, but apart from fingers, nothing enters my womanhood. I want to take my virginity back to my Maker.

The group interviews corroborated many of the issues considered in the individual interactions. The 200 respondents, including 35 women were accessed, as indicated, via availability sampling procedure in homosexual parties organized in the field locations. According to the interviews, each homosexual sleeps with about 90 to 170 different same sex per year. Asked why they were involved in the act, majority indicated economic reasons such as poverty caused by unemployment. Some also indicated that many homosexuals are well to do individuals in society. As a result, they are able to attract many young men and women to them. According to some of the interviewees, "such rich homosexual husbands always provide financial support." Thus, the group acts as a social capital for members.

A study published in March 2004 by Dela Attipoe, the then Greater Accra Research Coordinator for HIV/AIDS, showed that the phenomenon of men who have sex with men (MSM), is real and is spreading; and that there are same sex secret weddings in Ghana. According to Gye Nyame Concord, a Ghanaian local daily newspaper, Adabraka, Tesano, Paloma and Osu are homosexual hot-spots in Accra and that homosexual sex is a lucrative business, which is gaining ground in Ghana. The newspaper indicated that fees charged are based on the type of sex - oral or anal or both. Another study conducted in Tema and some parts of Eastern region of Ghana corroborated the fast spreading of homosexuality within the nation. The findings have shown that while some engage in it for pleasure, others do it as a trade; and that some homosexuals charge as much as \$200 (US dollars) for a three-minute sex<sup>12</sup>.

Similarly, in an HIV/AIDS training workshop in Takoradi for health-care workers, it was realized that 8,000 homosexuals had been registered in the Western and Central regions of Ghana alone<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, the Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) Survey, commissioned by the Ghana AIDS Commission in 2011, also estimated 30,000 men who slept with men (MSM) in Ghana at the time. These statistics involved the 10 regions of the

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<sup>12</sup>Ghanaian Chronicle. "Study Shows Homosexuality Hits High in Tema, Eastern Regions". (2003).

[Online] [2nd July 2003]. Available at <http://ghanaweb.com>.

<sup>13</sup>Refer to Stateman, footnote 9.



country at the time. In 2014, according to [gayghana.com](http://gayghana.com) (a website for Ghanaian homosexuals), there were about 200,000 gays in Ghana, forming about one percent of the total population<sup>14</sup>. A 2004 study on homosexuals in Ghana, commissioned by the West Africa Project to Combat AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections has also shown that homosexual life is mostly private; and majority of homosexuals meet at house parties organized by friends all around the country<sup>15</sup>. Thus, homosexual men and women often do not arouse suspicion at all. They blend with their heterosexual counterparts.

## Scientific View on Homosexuality

The debate over homosexuality, as indicated, is whether the phenomenon is genetic (an inherited trait) or a learnt behavior<sup>16</sup>. Some scientists indicate that sexual orientation is not a choice, but a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors. This school of thought argues that homosexuality is an ordinary normal occurrence in nature as found with humans and other animal species<sup>17</sup>.

Experiments in the biological study of the phenomenon date as far back to the late 1930's, beginning with the pioneering research of Alfred Kinsey on human sexuality. Swaab's experiment in 1990 was the first to document a physiological difference in the anatomical structure of a gay man's brain. Laura S. Allen claimed a similar discovery in the hypothalamus in the same period. She found that the anterior commissure of the hypothalamus was significantly larger in homosexual subjects than that of heterosexuals. Simon LeVay conducted a similar experiment regarding the hypothalamus of the human brain in 1991. LeVay concluded that homosexual and heterosexual men differ in the central neuronal mechanisms which control sexual behavior, and like Allen and Swaab, agreed that this difference in anatomy was no product of upbringing or environment, but due to prenatal cerebral development and structural differentiation. There is also neuroendocrine viewpoint's basic hypothesis which postulates that sexual orientation is determined by the early levels of androgen on relevant neural structures. If highly exposed to these androgens, the

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<sup>14</sup>Refer to Owusu, footnote 5.

<sup>15</sup>P. K. MacDonald, "Gay in Ghana; from gay-bashings to AIDS". The Gully Online Magazine. (24 June 2004). [Http// google.com. /](http://google.com/).

<sup>16</sup>Refer to Knight, footnote 2.

<sup>17</sup>Nimisha. Kaushik, "The Difference between Homosexuality and Gay". (2011). Available at: <http://www.differencebetween.net/science/nature/difference-between-homosexual-and-gay/>.

fetus will become “masculinized”, or attracted to females. In simplification, if the person’s genetic code is heterozygotic (one homosexual gene and one heterosexual gene), and if the homosexual allele (half of the genetic code) is the allele passed on to the next generation, it will become the phenotype. Heterozygotes are only capable of being passed through to the next generation by mothers (as the Y-chromosome is incapable of heterozygosis). This again links homosexuality to X-linkage.<sup>18</sup>The American Psychological Association (APA) also first regarded the phenomenon as a mental disorder, but later stated that it is the result of nature and therefore, neither a mental illness nor a moral depravity. This led the APA to remove it from its list of diagnoses and disorders. The National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), on the other hand, debunk the APA’s claims describing its stance as unfounded<sup>19</sup>.

There are other schools of thought that argue, among other things, that there is no scientific finding that has emphatically established the causal correlation between genes and homosexuality<sup>20</sup>. This makes the above scientific claims as hypothetical since no concrete biological or neural differences have been established between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Moreover, other scientific enquiries into these findings have produced differing results. This school of thought indicates that scientific results must be verifiable and replicable, but this was not the case in correlating homosexuality with genetic make-up. Interview with a number of medical experts in Ghana has also revealed that there is nothing physiological about homosexuality. With this uncertainty about the cause of homosexuality, the study decided to use insights from the social learning theory and religious perspectives on the phenomenon in Ghana.

## **Social Learning Theory**

With the evidence of wide spread of homosexuality, some have the propensity to argue that the practice is part and parcel of the Ghanaian culture. For example, Prince Kweku MacDonald, the executive president of Gay and Lesbians Association of Ghana, insists that homosexuality is not an alien practice introduced by

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<sup>18</sup>Christopher Heffner, “Homosexuality: Nature or Nurture”. (2003). [Online]. [Http://All Psych Journal.com](http://AllPsychJournal.com).

<sup>19</sup>E. P. James and C. Doyle, “Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE): Faith-based Challenges in the Midst of Cultural and Legal Shifts—Harboring the Storm” (November, 2014). [Http://www.nacsw.org/Convention/PhelanJSexualOrientationFINAL.pdf](http://www.nacsw.org/Convention/PhelanJSexualOrientationFINAL.pdf).

<sup>20</sup>Refer to Knight, footnote 2.

Westerners into Ghana. According to MacDonald, it is a phenomenon even in villages where at dusk, men have sex with men<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, Busangokwakhe Dlamini<sup>22</sup> argues that homosexuality conforms to the African culture, cosmology and spirituality. Others also argue that a woman-to-woman-marriage is an institutionalized African practice<sup>23</sup>. The Nankani ethnic group which shares linguistic, cultural and geographical characteristics with the Gurrne or Frafra and the Tallensi in the north of Ghana, for example, is alleged to practice same sex marriage as part of its cultural heritage<sup>24</sup>. It is in connection with these arguments that Matt Foreman contends that each society has about 5 to 10% of its population engaged in same sex relations<sup>25</sup>. If this holds true, then in Ghana, according to the Foreman, with even a conservative estimate of 1%, same sex relations may have increased over the years. With an estimated population of 30 million currently in Ghana, homosexuals' presence in the country might be significantly high.

While there is evidence that many women and men exhibit homosexual behavior, one cannot objectively ascribe this homosexual behavior to the Nankani in the modern understanding of the act. Woman-to-woman-marriage or marriage involving a woman "husband" "refers to the institution whereby a woman marries another woman and assumes control over her and her offspring"<sup>26</sup>. In most cases, the wife bears children for the female husband. All ceremonies of these marriages, including payment of bride wealth are observed. Rules of divorce of the particular society also apply<sup>27</sup>. Interview with some Frafra women confirmed this

<sup>21</sup>P. K MacDonald, "Blackmail and Extortion on the Increase in the gay Community in Ghana".

(7 February 2011). [Http:// www.gay and lesbians' association ghana.com/](http://www.gayandlesbiansassociationghana.com/).

<sup>22</sup>B. Dlamini, *Homosexuality in the African Context*. Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity.

No. 67. African Feminisms Volume 2, (3), (2006), p. 128.

<sup>23</sup>Herskovits, M. "A Note on "Woman Marriage" in Dahomey." *Africa* 10(3), (1937). See also E.J. Krije, "Women Marriage with Special Reference to the Lovedu - Its Significance for the Definition of Marriage." *Africa* 44(1), (1974), p. 11; R.S. Obbo, "Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya." *Ethnology* 19(1), (1980); D. O'Brien, "Female Husband in Southern Bantu Societies." Pp. 99-108 in A. Schlegel (ed.), *Sexual Stratification: A Cross-Cultural Views*. New York: Columbia University Press, (1987); R.S. Oboler, "Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya." *Ethnology* 19(1), (1980), pp. 69-88;

<sup>24</sup>R.M. Amenga-Etego, "Marriage without Sex? Same-Sex Marriages and Female Identity among the Nankani of Northern Ghana. *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*. Vol.4, (2012).

<sup>25</sup>Anthony Mawuli Sallar, "My Turn: The homosexuality debate in Ghana", (Dec. 2010). [Http://ghanaweb.com/](http://ghanaweb.com/) accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

<sup>26</sup>Refer to Krige, p. 11, footnote 23.

<sup>27</sup>Refer to Herskovits, p. 335, footnote 23.

practice. In Zuarungu a few kilometers from Bolgatanga in the Upper East region of Ghana, for example, a Frafra woman who lived outside Ghana, married another woman in Ghana so that the latter could take care of the former's house while she was away. In other words, in the Nankani or Zuarungu context in Ghana, female husbands marry other females not for sexual relationships, but to get children, which they themselves are not able to have because of barrenness; and for some other reasons. Thus, even though there is evidence that homosexuality is spreading, one cannot make a gross generalization that the practice is a cultural phenomenon in Ghana. In other words, MacDonald's analysis and that of Dlamini seem over-stretched. This is because the authors' studies were not trans-cultural and therefore do not merit a generalized conclusion. Homosexuality is still a sub-cultural activity within communities and institutions in Ghana. It is not the accepted normative practice of the Ghanaian society. In fact, traditional societies in Ghana frown on the practice. But the fact that the homosexual practice was first criminalized during the British colonial rule seems to suggest that the phenomenon pre-dated colonization<sup>28</sup>. The cultural arguments neither establish homosexuality as genetically caused nor as a behavior learnt by people.

Insights from the social learning theory, however, appear to relate homosexuality in the context of Ghana largely to a learnt behavior. This claim is supportive of the field data. For example, majority of homosexuals interviewed in the fieldwork locations explained that they were introduced to the homosexual practice at a time they needed either financial or moral support from homosexual benefactors. This was easy because their benefactors were tutors or senior officers in their institutions.

A number of medical experts from Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi, who formed parts of the key informants, confirmed that homosexuality is a learnt behavior. According to the medical experts, their work experience over the years has shown that when heterosexuals start practicing homosexuality, the practice leads them to a form of addiction; the person soon prefers homosexual sex to that of heterosexual. One of them illustrated how his colleague learnt the homosexual act in order to attract finance for his education when he was in Europe. He returned to Ghana as a homosexual. "This colleague who used to be a faithful husband to his wife now developed a strong homosexual urge. In order to be able to make love to his wife, the wife would have to put on male outfits to be able to attract her husband into having an anal sex with her". According to the key informant, in trying to look for the solution to the problem,

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<sup>28</sup>Refer to Sallar, p. 11, footnote 25.

the colleague resorted to fasting and prayers for two years; and this helped him come out of it. The medical experts indicated that over 70% of homosexuals who received treatment from them were heterosexuals before converting to homosexuals. They indicated how economic factors led many to become homosexuals. This finding coincides with the social learning theory, which nullifies attribution of homosexual behavior to inner forces (genes or biological make up) or to environmental forces. For the theory, those claims at their best can be considered as early explanatory schemes, which are neither adequate nor have the demonstrable predictive powers<sup>29</sup>.

According to the social learning theory, “new patterns of behavior can be acquired through direct experience” such as observing the behavior of others. “The more rudimentary form of learning, rooted in direct experience, is largely governed by the rewarding and punishing consequences that follow any given action”<sup>30</sup>. This explains why mentoring of fresh students and military personnel by continuing homosexual students/teachers or ranking persons in various institutions are likely to spread more incidents of homosexuality in Ghana. This is precisely because human beings have anticipatory capacity and “conditions of reinforcement” turn to have “strong incentive-motivational effects” on them<sup>31</sup>. Thus, in any given human institution, “subordinates” are more likely to be influenced by modeling behavior of seniors or superiors that they regard as their models or social capitals. In the context of this study, continuing homosexual students or teachers in educational institutions, a homosexual pastor or a high ranking homosexual military officer can have a profound homosexual influence on the lives of their subordinates and those around them. This observational learning requires that people “attend to, or recognize, the essential features of the model’s behavior”<sup>32</sup>. Learning homosexual behavior through homosexual characters may be extremely impacting because people whom one regularly associates with delimit the types of behavior one repeatedly observes and learns. One may ask: why not all but only some numbers of the population within a particular institution or society become homosexuals? According to the social learning theory:

Within any social group some members are likely to command greater attention than others. The

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<sup>29</sup>Bandura, Albert, *Social Learning Theory*. New York: General Learning Press, (1971), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>Refer to Bandura, p. 5, footnote 29.

<sup>31</sup>Refer to Bandura, pp. 2-5.

<sup>32</sup>Refer to Bandura, p. 6.

functional value of the behaviors displayed by different models is highly influential in determining which models will closely be observed and which will be ignored. Attention to models is also channeled by their interpersonal attraction<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, a model who possesses interesting and winsome qualities is likely a focal point of attraction; whereas the one who lacks pleasing qualities is ignored or rejected even though she or he may excel in some other ways. Furthermore, one may not be much influenced by observation of a model's behavior if one has no memory of what is observed. One therefore needs long term retention of activities that have been modeled<sup>34</sup>. This is why it appears homosexuals at the fieldwork locations continuously organize parties, orientation and hospitality or philanthropic programs for sexual interactions. In educational institutions as indicated, retention of modeled events is verbally coded such as *homo*, *supi*, *ashetu*, *lottosa*, *muski* and other related terms. Thus, through retention and practice, homosexual tendencies are learnt and developed.

It is also argued that a "person can acquire, retain, and possess the capabilities of execution of modeled behavior" but such a "learning may rarely be activated into over performance if it is negatively sanctioned<sup>35</sup>. This may explain why homosexuals in Ghana are clandestine in their activities because of the frequent police crackdowns and societal disapproval. As indicated, some of these homosexuals are active church members. A number of them are not only influential Gospel singers, but also active top leaders in their churches.

Some of the informants, as indicated, were introduced to the homosexual practice when they needed financial help from some homosexual benefactors who were their tutors in Senior High Schools. Some informants were in their teens when they had the first gay sex. As indicated by one of them: "I was the one who always penetrated my elder friend until I turned seventeen. It was on my birthday that for the first time the elder friend slept with me through my anus".

One homosexual recounted how he added sedatives to meals and drinks of a number of male relations and friends in order to have anal sex with them while they were unconscious. Some also confessed having sensations in their manhood as soon as they set

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<sup>33</sup>Refer to Bandura, pp. 6-7, footnote 29.

<sup>34</sup>Refer to footnote 33.

<sup>35</sup>Refer to Bandura, p. 8.

eyes on certain types of males. They admitted that most time they indulged in masturbation when there was no “homosexual community” nearby. They also “have sexual fantasy of attractive men they met or saw in pictures.” This act drives them to reach orgasm. As a top ranking church leader explains in an interview:

Invert gays cannot have sex with the opposite sex. I am one of such homosexuals. My ex-girlfriend was doing everything she could to make me happy. But for two years in the relationship, I slept with her just twice; and even that I had to rely on alcohol and fantasy. I was imagining myself making love to my former ‘wife’ who was a man.

The field findings, therefore, identified homosexuality in the context of Ghana as largely a learnt behavior. The next section tries to find out about the religious understanding of the phenomenon.

## **Religion and Homosexuality**

Ghana Statistical Service 2010 Population and Housing Census has established that Ghanaians are extensively religious with the following breakdown: Christians: 71.2 per cent; Muslims: 17.6 and African Traditional Religious practitioners: 5.2 per cent and others 6 percent<sup>36</sup>. The sacred texts (the Bible and the Qur’an) of both Christianity and Islam apparently shaped both Christians’ and Muslims’ perspectives on the issue of homosexuality. Accordingly, the opening chapter of the Letter to the Romans 1:26-27 and the Qur’an 7:80-81, have more often been officially and unofficially evoked as the people’s responses to homosexuality in Ghana. Thus, the paper reflects Biblical and Qur’anic perspectives on the subject matter.

## **Biblical and Qur’anic Perspectives**

A number of Christians, notably from factions within mainstream Protestantism to organizations of Reform rabbis have argued on theological as well as social grounds that homosexuality should be accepted. Some also argue, among other things, that there should not be any sexual constraint among consenting adults. While it is agreed that “forced sex and sexual abuse of children are wrong, many homosexuals contend that it is a violation of their freedom to prohibit any free sexual expression” and that “what two persons do

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<sup>36</sup>Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Housing and Population Census, (2012).

sexually and freely is their own moral business"<sup>37</sup>. Another attempt to justify the practice, as indicated, is based on the assumption that certain people are genetically homosexual. New translations of the Letter to the Romans 1:26-27 such as Queen James 2012 "Gay" Bible, and Al Dobra's Oxford's New Pro-Homosexual Bible have been made by pro-homosexual groups, which are tolerant to the practice and used as ground for ordaining homosexuals as bishops in some Protestant denominations. This situation has threatened to cause outright intra and inter schisms in some churches<sup>38</sup>.

Proponents of homosexuality argue that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as narrated in Genesis 19 was not homosexuality but inhospitality. This understanding is derived from the Ancient Near East custom or practices that guaranteed the protection of strangers. According to this context, Lot was referring to this custom as he indicated in Genesis 19: 8 (NIV): "Don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof". Lot, therefore, was trying to sexually appeased the angry crowd by offering his daughters in order to guarantee the security of the lives of his visitors<sup>39</sup>. In addition, some proponents of homosexuality argue that "homosexuality was not envisioned in the request of the men of the city to "know" Lot's friends, since this Hebrew word (yada'), in Genesis 19: 5, for them, simply means "to get acquainted". This term occurs about 948 times in the Old Testament, and in the overwhelming number of occurrences, according to the proponents of homosexuality, the term has no sexual connotations whatsoever. Thus, proponents of homosexuality believed that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality, and not homosexuality as heterosexuals claim<sup>40</sup>.

Biblical text of the Letter to the Romans (1:26-27) in particular has been subjected to intense debates on the subject matter. While the traditional interpretation of the text condemns homosexuality, there have been various contemporary interpretations and translations, as indicated, of the same Biblical text that are tolerant of this sexual behavior and consequently call for its social acceptance. For instance, homosexuals' Queen James 2012 "Gay" Bible<sup>41</sup> renders the translation of the Romans text as follows:

For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions.  
For even their women exchanged the natural use

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<sup>37</sup>L. N. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*. Second edition, Michigan: Baker Academic, (2010), pp. 282-283.

<sup>38</sup>Refer to Encyclopedia Britannica Online, footnote 1.

<sup>39</sup>Refer to Geisler, pp. 280-281, footnote 36.

<sup>40</sup>Refer to Geisler, footnote 36.

<sup>41</sup>Queen James Bible, (2012), Online.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-queen-james-gay-bible/>



for what is against nature by defiling themselves in idolatry. Likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful in pagan temples, and receiving in themselves the penalty for their idolatry which was due.

Al Dobra's Oxford's New Pro-Homosexual Bible<sup>42</sup> interprets the texts thus:

While Torah forbids a male "lying with a male as with a woman," Paul's Jewish contemporaries criticized a range of sexual behaviors common in the pagan world. Although widely read today as a reference to homosexuality, the language of unnatural intercourse was more often used in Paul's days to denote not the orientation of sexual desire, but its immoderate indulgence, which was believed to weaken the body.

The words in the original text have been eloquently summarized in both versions. Both translations appear more like an attempt to use both *Skopos theory* which is a purpose based translation theory that looks at the translation process holistically so that majority of the readers can have a voice in the processes that are meant to serve them. Here translations can even be made for a particular program or speak to a particular situation with a chosen text. There is also enculturation hermeneutics which is used to expand the original meaning<sup>43</sup>. However, over-stretching of these two theories (which is the case with the above translations) could render the translation into something else. This is because the intended message can lose its relevance entirely. In translation, there are key words which cannot be changed because doing so changes the message of the text. But in the above translations such rules have been ignored.

The text in Al Dobra's Oxford's New Pro-Homosexual Bible and the Queen James Bible are entirely different from the Greek New Testament text. This is an indication that the two translations are other people's statements other than that of the author of the Letter

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<sup>42</sup>Al Dobras, Oxford's New Pro-Homosexual Bible, (3rd Edition), (2001-2017). [Http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles/DobrasOxfordBible.php?/articles/DobrasOxfordBible.htm](http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles/DobrasOxfordBible.php?/articles/DobrasOxfordBible.htm).

<sup>43</sup>W. Randolph, Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, (2013).

to the Romans. According to the editors of the Queen James Bible, it is the homosexual practices in a form of idol worship which the text is against and not a loving relationship between people of the same sex. Steve Golden in disagreement with the gay translation argues that, the idolatry stance of the Queen James Bible still does not fit well with the whole of Romans 1. This is because sexual perversion as well as excess was a common phenomenon in the Roman Empire at the time of Apostle Paul. This made his words in Romans 1 fit well for his audience. Again, the clearest interpretation of this passage is one that deals with the plain meaning of the words: homosexual behavior is sinful in the eyes of God<sup>44</sup>.

One would corroborate Steve Golden's stance because there is nothing like idolatry in the original Romans 1:26-27 text. A close examination of the original Greek text reveals that the idea of idolatry could not be fixed even remotely. According to rules governing Bible translation and interpretation, a meaning of a text can be located in the world behind the text; in the world within the text; and in the world in front of the text. The first, which is the oldest and most dominant, focuses on issues of history which is the writer's intended meaning, the historical authenticity and the historical circumstances of the text. The second category concentrates on the text in a way that suggests authentic meaning is derived from the text and not outside the text; while the third category is oriented towards the reader(s) or reading community and the part they play in the communication process. The readers bring their own points of view and concerns to the text and so may end up with different meanings. It is obvious the pro-gay translation relied heavily on the third translation and interpretative rule and ended up with a different meaning from the original text. This methodology which is reader-centered is based on the presupposition that "once the text leaves the hands of the author, the author's intention and entire matrix of originating circumstances lose any claim of being constitutive of meaning. This runs contrary to the position of formalist critics, who argue that a text itself has autonomy, and provides the objective standard of meaning."<sup>45</sup>

For a high-ranking pro-homosexual church leader (Bishop), who is the chaplain general of *Petit Club International*, a gay pride organization for privileged gays around the world, the Romans text has nothing to do with homosexuality in any age. It is the misrepresentation of the text which makes it appear homophobic.

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<sup>44</sup>Steve Golden, "Pro-Gay Theology: Does the Bible Approve of Homosexuality?" (2013).

[Online]. Available at: <http://goggle.com>.

<sup>45</sup>Refer to Tate, footnote 42.

For him, just as it is immoral and even illegal for an adult to have sex with underage girls, so also Paul was addressing the pederasty which was prevalent in the Roman society. Paul saw the practice as unnatural and immoral because it was harmful to the minors. Men were abusing boys sexually in the name of love and culture. Norman Pittenger also argues that a homosexual person is not an “abnormal” person with “unnatural” desires and habits, because he acts naturally when he acts homosexually just as a heterosexual act naturally when he has heterosexual sex. These arguments reflect the position of gay right theologians. Their central thesis is that Paul addressed the reckless, shameless, profligate, promiscuous pederasty in the Greco-Roman society and not homosexuality per se<sup>46</sup>. Such arguments have their bases in the ideology of Derrick Sherwin Bailey, a Christian theologian, whose 1955 work, “Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition” paved the way for the production of the 1957 Wolfenden Report; and for the Parliament of the United Kingdom's decriminalization of homosexuality in England and Wales a decade later<sup>47</sup>.

Contrary to the pro-homosexual arguments, Geisler<sup>48</sup> sees Romans 1:26-27 in its original Greek version as “the most descriptive passage on homosexual act in the entire Bible” and that the “descriptions of the sin of homosexuality are virtually unrivaled anywhere in scripture”. Even a cursory look at the text reveals that it is on homosexuality. The use of the Greek:

*Διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ Θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας· αἱ  
τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετέλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς  
τὴν παρὰ φύσιν.*

That is,

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature,<sup>49</sup>

sustains this fact. This clearly indicates homosexual practices. Paul made the picture even more vivid with:

*οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας  
ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἄρσενες ἐν  
ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι.*

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<sup>46</sup>J. Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press, (1994), p. 77.

<sup>47</sup>Refer to Stott, p. 398, footnote 44.

<sup>48</sup>Refer to Geisler, p. 291, footnote 36.

<sup>49</sup>Rom. 1: 26, (ESV).

That is,

and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.<sup>50</sup>

Paul then links the two passages together with the use of *ὁμοίως* “likewise”. This indicates that the women and the men were practicing a similar unnatural sex. The women driven by strange passion and lust just like the men abandoned sexual relationship with the opposite sex which is natural and were rather having sex with people of the same sex. The passage describes it as *ἀσχημοσύνην* “reprehensible” and “reproachful”, similar to the shame of nakedness. According to Stott,<sup>51</sup> there is an ample evidence that the opposition of “natural” (*φύσιν*) and “unnatural” (*παρὰ φύσιν*) was ‘very frequently used as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behavior. The pro-homosexual arguments such as that of the high-ranking church leader (a Bishop) are therefore faulty so far as the Letter to the Romans is concerned. Furthermore, the text is neither isolating pederasty nor heterosexuality from immorality. It is simply measuring sexual behavior by “nature” – that is, what is natural, to indicate that pederasty as well as all homosexual practice is part of the *παρὰ φύσιν*, contrary to nature, and classified as *πάθη ἀτιμίας*, passion of dishonor or disgraceful passion.

On the pederasty argument, the text simply narrates how women were having sexual intercourse with other women and describes it as “unnatural”. Paul indicates that the natural way of having sexual relationship is between a woman and a man. Here there could be no ambiguity as to how they were changing sexual practices from natural into “unnatural”. It is clear there are neither boys nor men but women were having “unnatural” sex. Therefore, the original Romans 1:26 text has nothing to do with boys or girls, but only women doing the unnatural. They had abandoned what could be described as natural sexual practices and were involved in unnatural sexual practices.

Romans 1: 27, however, explains what the unnatural sex was. An influence which is a “strong but strange sexual lust” had driven the men to lust after one another and to move them to have sexual intercourse with fellow men. There was no mention of boys or girls

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<sup>50</sup>Rom. 1: 27, (ESV).

<sup>51</sup>Refer to Stott, p. 78, footnote 44.

in that verse too, but men with men (*ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν*) the same sex themselves, men with men. To avoid ambiguity and in order not to restrict the text to pederasty, Paul specifically uses *ἄρσην*. “Men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:27, ESV). According to the LXX Concordance for *ἄρσην*, the Greek word *ἄρσην*, an adjective occurred 38 times in 36 translations,<sup>52</sup> but all in reference to men; *ἄρσεσιν* is a noun (dative) feminine plural. It has also been used twice in the Greek Bible both in reference to men. The word in the noun and adjective forms could not be used to represent boys. Therefore, the issue of pederasty cannot be alluded to so far as the Roman 1:26-27 text is concerned. This is because pederasty is a sexual relationship between an adult man and a boy. There is nowhere in scripture where it is presented that homosexuality is sinful only when it involves a juvenile.

The word of God does not have to change to conform to the changing trend of the world. Rather, it is the world that must be affected by the word of God. This fact is applicable to the cultural situation in both the Ancient Near East and the first-century Greco-Roman world just as it does to the contemporary sexual question of homosexuality. The reason for the Biblical prohibition is the same reasons why contemporary homosexual relationship needs censorship<sup>53</sup> if one wants to take the word of God seriously. Genesis 1: 27 - 28 supports this argument against homosexuality, namely that in the beginning, God created human beings, both a man and a woman in his own image and likeness. As indicated, the first man and woman were blessed to multiply and fill the earth. Leviticus 20:13 also describes the homosexual practice as an abomination (*תועבה*) and prescribes a capital punishment for it.

A close look at the arguments by proponents of homosexuality shows that they are based on a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Scripture. For example, while “it is true that the Hebrew word *know* (*yada'*) does not necessarily mean “to have sex with,” Genesis 19, the context of the text on Sodom and Gomorrah, clearly portrays this meaning. “This is evident for several reasons. Virtually every time this word “know” is used of the relation between a man and a woman in Genesis, it refers to sexual intercourse”.<sup>54</sup> These sexual connotations can be seen in Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 19: 8; 24: 16; 38: 26. According to Geisler, the context within which this word “know” is used cannot refer to getting acquaintance with

<sup>52</sup>LXX Concordance for *ἄρσην*.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/inflections.cfm?strongs=G746&t=LXX&ot=LXX&word=%E1%BC%80%CF%81%CF%87%E1%BD%B4>.

<sup>53</sup>Refer to Geisler, p. footnote 36.

<sup>54</sup>Refer to Geisler, p. 284.

someone because as depicted in Gen. 19:7 the word is “equated with a “wicked thing”<sup>55</sup>. Lot decided to offer his virgin daughters to appease the perverse sexual desire of the men from Sodom. This was intended to prevent them from having homosexual affair with his visitors. Thus, the sin of Sodom was not merely inhospitality, but also homosexuality. In Ezekiel 16: 49, selfishness includes homosexuality. This is the same word used to describe homosexual sins in Leviticus 18: 22. Another indication that these were sexual perversions is manifest in the very origin and usage of the word “sodomy,” which comes from “Sodom”<sup>56</sup>.

One may then ask: What is the position of the Qur’an on homosexuality? Moral objection to the phenomenon of homosexuality is observed throughout the Muslim world<sup>57</sup>. Even in the Netherlands where homosexuals enjoy tremendous “Dutch tolerance”, Muslims represented by their Imam Khalil El Moumni, vehemently objected to the practice declaring, among other things, that while they would not approve violence against homosexuals, “homosexuality was a sin, a disease and a danger for Dutch society as it jeopardized reproduction”<sup>58</sup>. In his study, *Homosexuality in Islam: A Difficult Paradox*, Nicole Kligerman similarly argues that “the Qur’an explicitly condemns homosexuality... even though in traditional Islamic societies, homosexual acts behind closed doors were not condemned”<sup>59</sup>. In fact, the Qur’an, which acts as the common constitution of all Muslims refers to homosexuals as *qaum Lut* (Lut’s people). In the Qur’an 26: 165-166, Lut questions, “How can you lust for males, of all creatures in the world, and leave those whom God has created for you as your mates? You are really going beyond all limits”. Commenting on this verse, Abdullah Yusuf Ali compares this narrative to the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter in Genesis. This establishes the fact that the Bible and the Qur’an proscribe the act of homosexuality<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup>Refer to Geisler, footnote 36.

<sup>56</sup>Refer to Geisler, p. 284.

<sup>57</sup>Shafiqah Ahmadi, “Islam and Homosexuality: Religious Dogma, Colonial Rule, and the Quest for Belonging.” *Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development*. Volume 26, Issue 3 (2012).

<sup>58</sup>Gert Hekma, “Imams and Homosexuality: A Post-Gay Debate in the Netherlands.” *Sexualities*. 5(2), (2012), p. 237.

<sup>59</sup>Nicloe Kligerman, “Homosexuality in Islam: A Difficult Paradox.” *Macalester Islam Journal*. Volume 2, Iss. 3, Art. 8, (2007), p. 53.

<sup>60</sup>Van der Krogt, Christopher. “Homosexuality and Islam: What does the Qur’an Actually Say about Gay people?” (23 June 2016).

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/06/23/homosexuality-and-islam-what-does-the-quran-actually-say-about-gay-people/>.

Moreover, scholars of sharia have interpreted homosexuality as not only a sin, but also a crime<sup>61</sup>. Similarly, several recorded traditions of the Prophet empower Muslim leadership to punish people engaged in homosexuality. Muslim jurists equally forbid the practice of homosexuality; though differ on the nature of sanction<sup>62</sup>.

From the discussion done so far, it has become abundantly clear that there is no scientific basis for the practice. Science itself is uncertain about why people indulge in homosexuality. But insights from social learning theory have indicated that homosexuality in the context of Ghana as illustrated by the field findings, portrays a learnt behavior. That is to say that people learn the behavior through experience that leads them to an addiction in homosexual act. This means that it is a personal choice that people make. This stance of social theory seems to confirm the religious perspectives as reflected by the Biblical and Qur'anic understanding that homosexuality is a personal choice and therefore sinful and must be discontinued. In other words, the study shows that the traditional Islamic position on homosexuality is unequivocal and corroborates the traditional Christian stance in Ghana, therefore, making it needless to repeat the arguments. In other words, the Christian and the Muslim responses in Ghana is that homosexuality goes against the divine law and will, and must be discontinued.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has analyzed homosexuality in Ghana. The findings have shown that homosexuality in Ghana to a large extent, is a learnt behavior. People learn the behavior through experience that leads them to addiction of the phenomenon. This means that the practice of homosexuality in Ghana to a large extent is a personal choice. This stance apparently confirms the Biblical and Qur'anic points of view that phenomenon is a personal choice and it is therefore sinful and must be discontinued. The reason for the Biblical and Qur'anic prohibition is the same reasons why homosexual relationship in contemporary Ghana needs prohibition.

It means as the homosexual act is condemned, the people involved must be treated with magnanimity, mercy and respect. Since the cause of homosexuality in Ghana is largely economic, this needs to be thoroughly and dispassionately discussed so that a palpable solution can be reached. It calls for an urgent policy discussion by the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, religious bodies, human rights agencies and relevant

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<sup>61</sup>Refer to Kligerman, footnote 58.

<sup>62</sup>Refer to Krogt, footnote 59.

others, leading to a positive practical intervention by the Government of Ghana. The intervention may be how homosexuals need to be helped in every necessary way. For example, they can be helped to obtain alternative means of making money or livelihoods that can help them earn their living. Another issue is the need for discussion of the single boarding schooling system under the auspices of Ministry of Education since it appears that this schooling system acts as nursery beds for homosexuality in Ghana. There is also the need to discuss the manner of personnel recruitment into security services so that equal chances are given to both sexes for emotional reasons. Last but not least, the subject matter of homosexuality needs to be taught in schools, churches, mosques and other institutions to make people understand all that it entails so as to prevent them from learning or indulging in the act. The study is important because it highlights the state of homosexuality in Ghana and suggests ways of dealing with the phenomenon. It also contributes to the existing global knowledge on the phenomenon.