Another artist at the Fra’s sermons was Michelangelo. Even in his old age Michelangelo painting The Last Judgment, would recall the thunder of Savonarola’s sermons. Perhaps that memory intensified the gloomy, torn personality of the artist.

**Michelangelo Buonarroti 1475-1564**

“I live by sin, dying to myself I live
no longer my own life, but the life of sin”

Written by Michelangelo around 1511, this poem reveals the inner turmoil of the artist eclipsing all others in western art. He was majestic, tragic and lonely, but was recognized as the greatest artist of his generation by his contemporaries and subsequent critics. Against his fathers wishes, he left his all male family to become an artist by the age of fourteen. He apprenticed at Ghirlandaio’s botteghe, but after a few short months, he moved into the Medici Palace. Meanwhile, Lorenzo had recently opened a garden school, originally purchased for his, by now deceased wife, Clarice Orsini. The school was lead by Bertoldo, who used Donatello’s 3rd David as a training model. Donatello’s homoerotic David and his Judith and Hollofernes were also displayed there. Michelangelo invented or experimented with most sculpting techniques for the next four hundred years. He even inspired Rondin by works such as the Young Slave, where the figure is still emerging from the medium. Michelangelo was also one of the great architects of his generation; the Dome of Saint Peter’s Cathedral is his signature masterpiece. As a painter, his achievements in the Sistine Chapel is the largest painting treasure of the Western World.

Additionally, he was an accomplished writer and like the other members of Lorenzo’s household, Michelangelo, appreciated neoplatonism literature and the Classics. This
appreciation, combined with his pious personality, produced a duality (many say a darkness) which characterized him. He sculpted a youthful erotic Baccus and a heroic Hercules, then captured Dante's vision of Hell in The Last Judgment. He was a great admirer of Dante and would often recite his favorite passages. Late in life Michelangelo began writing poetry which combined Ficino's exaltation of male love and Dante's romantic love, (though without Beatrice).

**Demographic Evidence**

Michelangelo spent his formative years in the same neighborhood, San Lorenzo, where Donatello and Verrocchio had flourished. Therefore, Michelangelo had ample opportunity for sodomitical relationships in a liberal environment. When in Florence he lived within or adjacent to San Lorenzo Parish. Like Donatello, Michelangelo also worked in San Lorenzo on The Tombs of Lorenzo and Piero de Medici.

**Lifestyle Evidence**

Michelangelo led the lifestyle of a sodomite and was at least homosociable. Although he was concerned about the survival of his family name, he never married. For example, Michelangelo constantly wrote his nephew Lionardo urging him to marry and offering him advice about women in hopes of Lionardo carrying on the family name.

"It is up to you to take her or not to take her, or one rather than another as long as she is noble and well-bred...." In a latter letter Michelangelo advises, "See to it that you find one [a wife] that won't be ashamed, if need be, to wash the dishes and other house hold things, so that you won't have to get poor by foolishness and showing off." 102.

Michelangelo did not have any illegitimate children or sexual relationships with women.
The only long lasting correspondence that the artist had with a woman was Vittoria Colonna. Their relationship developed late in Michelangelo’s life and consisted mostly of religious discussions. His sonnets to her are characterized as “formal gallantry [and showing] emotional restraint.” On the other hand, his sonnets to youthful males, such as Cavalieri, have “remarkable emotional intensity”.

Also, many of Michelangelo’s associates and friends were sodomites. During his stay with Lorenzo he knew Bertoldo, Ficino, and Angelo Poliziano. He might have attended the sermons of Savonarola with Sandro Botticelli, who was denounced twice for sodomizing his apprentices after the expulsion of the Medic. Botticelli also incorporated Agnolo Poliziano’s homo-erotic themes into Botticelli’s paintings. Furthermore, Michelangelo befriended Benvenuto Cellini after he had moved to Rome. Cellini was convicted twice of sodomy.

**Contemporary sources**

In his autobiography, Benvenuto Cellini recorded an amusing tale involving Michelangelo. Michelangelo agreed to attend an informal artists’ dinner at an inn, a rarity for he usually shunned public gatherings. (Raphael nicknamed him “the hangman” due to his reclusive nature). For the dinner, the artists agreed on a contest. Whoever brought the most beautiful date would win. Cellini describes with glee, the way he dressed a young male as a woman complete with makeup. Michelangelo, whose date is not mentioned in the story, enamored with the youthful drag-queen, quickly declared Cellini the winner.

Vasari, a student of Michelangelo’s, also gave hints about his master’s sexuality. For example, he claimed that Michelangelo would not draw an individual’s portraiture “...unless it was one of incomparable beauty”. Vasari relates how Michelangelo drew many “wonderful red
and black chalk heads” and a life size portraiture of Cavalieri.106

Another anecdote of Vasari involves the painter Francisca, who had praised the bronze of Michelangelo’s statues instead of their craftsmanship. Insulted, Michelangelo retorted, “Well I owe as much to Pope Julius who gave me the bronze as you owe to the chemists who give you your colors for painting”. Later when Francisca’s son, a “very handsome man”, was introduced to Michelangelo said, still holding the grudge, “The living figures your father makes are better than those he paints.”107

Legal evidence

Michelangelo was always associated with powerful patrons, such as Pope Julius II and Lorenzo de’ Medici, who kept his sexuality out of the limelight. As I discussed under Verrocchio, charges of sodomy against Lorenzo’s associates disappeared and reappear as the Medici lost and gained control of Florence. Whenever Michelangelo’s patrons lost their support, he fled to another city or town. For example, when Savonarola took control of Florence and urged men to give up their love of boys, Michelangelo fled Florence to Bologna. Thus, the expulsion of the Medici was the world turned upside down and was a strong lesson in the instability of Italian politics. Next Michelangelo went to Rome and completed a Pieta. He returned to Florence only after the Borgia Pope (Alexander VI) had Savonarola burned as a heretic. The artist’s return was crowned by his colossal David, which replaced Donatello’s David in the Piazza del Signoria.

Michelangelo later returned to Rome to work for the warrior Pope Julius II. When their personalities clashed, however, the artist fled again. Back in Florence, Michelangelo executed the Tombs of the Medici. In 1508, Julius II lured him back with the commission for the Sistine
Chapel's ceiling. After another argument, Michelangelo fled again to Florence and designed the library of San Lorenzo for the "Republic of Florence". With the Republic overthrown by the Medici, Michelangelo again fled to Rome where he was pardoned by Pope Clement VII (de Medici) for working for the Republic; Michelangelo remained in Rome.

**Artist's Writings**

Michelangelo's reputation was also protected by his family, even after his death. For example, his great-nephew ignored and altered his sonnets and love poetry in an attempt to purposefully distort Michelangelo's sexuality.

The love of which I speak aspires on high;  
Woman is too unlike and little does it agree  
With a wise and manly heart to burn for her.  
The one draws up to heaven, the other down to earth,  
The one inhabits the soul, the other the senses.  

Michelangelo's grandnephew suppressed all references to sodomitical relationships when he published the sonatas in 1623. This sonata shows the impact of Ficino's ideas that a woman's love was inferior to a man's. The male love draws one to heaven and inhabits the soul, while womanly love pulls one down. Michelangelo's grandnephew also changed the subjects gender in Michelangelo's romantic love poetry. For example, at the age of 52, Michelangelo wrote to the young nobleman Tommaso Cavalieri,

I don't know if it is the longed-for light of its first maker, which my soul feels;  
or whether, from my memories of people,  
some other beauty shines forth in my heart;  
Or whether reports or dreams bring someone  
before my eyes and present to my heart,  
leaving behind something unknown and smarting

54
that is, perhaps what now leads me to weep.
What I feel and seek, and who might guide me to it,
are not within me; nor can I see clearly
where I might find them, though others seem to show me.
This, lord, has happened since I saw you:
a bitter sweetness, a yes-and no feeling moves me;
certainly it must have been your eyes. (76 Saslow)

Michelangelo’s grandnephew changed “Lord” to “Lady” when he published this poem.
Cavalieri was Michelangelo’s deepest love; he dedicated the majority of his one hundred and eighty sonnets to him. To another youth, the handsome Febo, the artist wrote,

Nothing comforts you, unless I die
Earth and heaven for me are moved to woe:
You seem to care the less, the more grieve I.
O sun that warms the world where’re you go,
O Febo, for ever light for mortal eyes-
Why dark to me alone, elsewhere not so?" 

Febo would not visit him. Moreover, Febo was spending his free time with another youth that infatuated him, Vincenzo. After having avoided Michelangelo for a few days, Febo wrote him back asking for money to buy new cloths and go to Monte Ato. Michelangelo, like Donatello, was generous to his friends; thus, he probably gave the money to Febo even though Michelangelo probably knew that Vincenzo was in Monte. Vincenzo and Febo were closer in age which led A. L. Rowse to conclude that Febo enjoyed Vincenzo’s company compared to the “ugly” artist. Michelangelo was probably even more disappointed in Cavalieri’s heterosexuality.

Homoerotic Art

Michelangelo also included homosymbolic drawings with the sonnets, such as a sensual
drawing of Ganymede, the son of King Tross, who was first seduced and abducted by Tantalus, then by Zeus. Zeus appeared as an eagle and sodomized Ganymede and whisked him away to Olympus. Ganymede remained on Olympus as Zeus’ cup bearer and bedmate. Michelangelo and his learned contemporaries used this myth as a symbol of sodomitical relationships. His drawing to Cavalieri is particularly erotic, depicting the rape of Ganymede by Zeus, with the “eagle’s penis piercing from the rear as Zeus’ talons clutch the youth while in mid flight...[and Ganymede]...passively yielding to anal eroticism”. In conjunction with the poem, could their be a serious question of Michelangelo’s passion for Cavalier? Another drawing for Cavalieri the Tityos, was a warning to the youth. It depicts an eagle ripping apart the youth Tityos, who was associated with the Fall of Phaeton, the fate of the persistent lover. This eagle could be interpreted as the fate that the artist feared most.

Even today, some scholars mistakenly insist that Michelangelo’s intentions with Cavalieri had no sexual connotation. The current Britannica article refers their relationship as “Michelangelo’s search for an apprentice in “a traditional manner”. As discussed, the traditional apprentice master relationship would not disqualify a sexual desire. Moreover, this theory seems weak because Tommaso Cavalieri did not seem to have any desire to become an artist. He was a nobleman, a class which patronized artists but usually believed that it was a profession beneath their class. Also there are no drawings, paintings, sculptors, or even pieces of embroidery attributed to Cavalieri. Taking Vasari’s testimony in conjunction with the drawings and the poems seems to point otherwise.

Moreover, the idealization of the male nude is the consistent theme throughout Michelangelo’s career. He was infatuated with sculpting, drawing, and painting the male nude. In sculptures, a medium which takes more time than the others, the majority of Michelangelo’s
nudes are males. Of the fourteen finished full size nudes that he carved twelve are male and two female. This would mean that eighty-five percent of the total finished nudes are male and only fifteen percent are female. Of the six unfinished life size nudes (the ones Rodin admired), all are male. This results in ninety percent of Michelangelo's nude sculptures are male and ten percent are females. Even when he was commissioned to execute a Victory group, traditionally a female and chariot, he chose male models. His Victory is a youth, wearing nothing but a cape, with his right knee resting on the bent back of a vanquished bearded older man—perhaps a self-portrait echoing his defeat with youths.

His infatuation with muscular males is as striking in paintings. The Sistine Chapel provides an excellent primary source. The ceiling was executed about half way through Michelangelo's career, while the altar's Last Judgement was his last major commission.

The Ceiling has over two hundred identifiable figures which were all painted by him for, he had sent his assistants back to Florence early in the project. The Chapel is a rectangle. Running through the centre of the ceiling are nine major rectangular panels, each depicting a different scenes from genesis. They each contain any where from one figure, as in The Separation of Light and Dark, to approximately 61 in The Universal Flood. Each of the nine panels are separated by Ignudo, large male nudes, seated at the corners of each panel; forming two rows of 10 on the long sides. Between the Ignudo, towards the walls, sit twelve Biblical figures on stone thrones; five figures on each long and one on each short end. They are centred under each of the nine panels forming a left and right side row along each wall) Each throne of the twelve has numerous small nude Putti in them, painted as though they were of stone. Between each of the rows of five enthroned figures are four large triangles (which abut the walls) containing one of Christ's fore families. Lastly, the four corners have larger triangles each
depicting a famous religious tale.

On the alter wall The Last Judgement contains over three hundred and fifty figures "in a sea of jumbled bodies". Beginning at the age of 61 he worked for six years on the wall that changed figurative art forever. The group is from the book of revelation and is centred on Christ who, beardless and virile, resembles Apollo and his angels who troops swoop down into Dante’s Hell and retrieve the elect, while pushing the numerous damned down to their fate.

In both projects Michelangelo used male models for his female nudes. In the ceiling for example, in The Expulsion Panel Eve’s biceps is actually larger and has a better developed peak than Adams. Likewise, in the Last Judgement, St Catherine is more “buff” than most male body builders today. She was originally nude but after Michelangelo’s death the indignant Counsel of Trent 1565, ordered Daniele da Volterra to cloth her and some of the males. Her muscles are developed better than any professional female body builder currently in completion. In particular her deltoids are better developed than the “ideal point” according to Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Encyclopaedia of Modern Body Building. Both St. Catherine’s and Eve’s biceps, trapezoids, upper chests and forearms are all masculine.

Michelangelo’s preference of male models while depicting females was once, and still is, explained by some historians as a social norm prohibiting female models in bottega. However, other contemporaries of Michelangelo’s such as Botticelli and Leonardo certainly used female models. Obvious examples are La Primavera, Birth of Venus, Mona Lisa, Women with Ermine. Even Vasari, Michelangelo’s protégée, used female models in The Castration of Uranus by Cronus.

For my use, only figures in the Chapel with readily definable gender will analysed for the two works. A figure will only be considered male if it possesses genitals, a beards, a bald head,
or clearly no breasts and female if the figure has breasts or is dressed in female clothing. These definitions discount the majority of the figures on the ceiling. Approximately one hundred and thirty figures are positioned so we cannot distinguish their gender. Of the approximately 205 major figures on the ceiling (Putti not included) one hundred and fifteen have strong gender determining features.

The major panels, enthroned prophets, families of Jesus, and four corners contain forty-two easily identifiable males and thirty six identifiable females. This would mean that the ceiling is about fifty-three percent and forty-seven percent female. If the Ignudos are included males slightly predominate, fifty eight percent to forty two percent female.

In the main nine panels their are approximately seventy-five nudes including the Indigo. Forty-five of them are gender identifiable, thirty-nine male nudes and six female. This would mean that male nudes outnumber female nudes almost nine to one, or eighty-six percent male to thirteen percent female.

Furthermore, the ceiling depicts some homoerotic activity. For example, in the right group of the Brazen Serpent Panel two men entwined in its coils are portrayed in positions that presume anal intercourse. One reclining on his back with his legs spreading, the other laying on his stomach with his buttocks raising to the viewer. The head of the serpent itself, about to enter a beautiful youth’s opened mouth, strongly resembles a penis and scrotum viewed from below.

Similarly the Last Judgement illustrates, his infatuation with male nudes continued into his golden years. Here the proportion of identifiable male nudes to female nudes is a overwhelming ninety-six percent male to four percent female! This figure is reached by using Marcello Venusti’s famous copy of the work which was completed before Volterra the “britches maker” was forced to make the fresco less obscene.
Homosexual activity occurs in the fresco. For example, to the left of Christ and Saints/Apostles, are the saved. Included are at least two male couples passionately holding and kissing each other. Reminding one of the complaint of Duke Cosimio’s counsellor on page 6. The serpent again makes an appearance, far below in Hell wrapped around Dante’s Minos. The face of Minos is a contemporary of Michelangelo’s Biago da Casein (Pope Paul III’s master of ceremonies) who was offended and spoke openly on the obscenity, nudity, and eroticism of the fresco. Hence, Michelangelo’s placement of Biagio into hell as the symbol of lechery. When he complained to Pope Paul III of his depiction, the pontiff played along with Michelangelo and reminded Biagio that his powers were limited to earth and purgatory, and could be of not help him in Hell.

Not as light hearted as his predecessor, Pope Pious IV agreed with Biagio that the fresco was obscene and “did not belong in a papal chapel, but in a public baths or brothels”. The new pontiff ordered the aged artist to “make it suitable”. Accustomed to dealing with pontiffs, he wrote back “Tell the Pope that this is a small matter and it can easily be made suitable; let him make the world a suitable place and painting will soon follow suit”. and made no changes.

Summary Michelangelo

Michelangelo’s lifestyle followed the same pattern as the other artists discussed, he was at least homosociable in his relationships, and never married or had children. He was raised in a sexually free environment and was trained by Bertoldo and Ficino. Celline hints at sodomy with his antedote of a drag queen. Vasari shows a strong physical admiration to the young Cavalieri, to whom Michelangelo was enthralled with. Michelangelo wrote dozens of love sonnets to him and other youths and sent them homo-symbolic art. His art shows that he was
infatuated with muscular men and he was most likely a sodomite.