

## Right, Left or Free to Choose

by Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D.

Recently, I have received feedback from over 300 people concerning the recent columns I have written concerning homosexuality and biological causes ("Homosexuality and Genes: Déjà vu All Over Again" and "Of Mice and Gay Men").

The vast majority of people have been quite supportive of the columns exposing the apparent agenda of the popular media to find an exclusively genetic basis for homosexuality. A few have written to say they are looking at the research in a new light. However some have assailed me for daring to question the notion that aspects of identifying as gay probably involve environmental factors.

For staying close to the research, I have been "credited" with causing the deaths of "gay children," accused of inciting hatred and called a couple of things I won't repeat.

Obviously, this issue is sensitive for many people. I certainly have no intention of hurting anyone and feel that bringing up the truth is in the best interest of us all. With these thoughts in mind, I want to address a recurring theme in the negative comments I've had over the last two weeks concerning the issue of causation and homosexuality.

The question: Aren't the people who question the genetic theory of homosexuality all really homophobic, Christian right wing, conservatives?

No, not true. Most scholars who take the social constructionist view of sexuality question the genetic determinism implied by the born gay view. And many of those scholars are gay. For quotes and background information from this point of view, consult the website [www.queerbychoice.com](http://www.queerbychoice.com) <<http://www.queerbychoice.com>>. This gay-affirming site takes great exception with the view that biology exclusively shapes destiny.

One of the more prominent gay activist figures in Great Britain is Peter Tatchell. He scorns the born gay view on his website, [www.petertatchell.com](http://www.petertatchell.com) <<http://www.petertatchell.com>>. He notes that many gays may have developed feelings early enough in life that they seem innate, but he is quite skeptical that same-sex attractions arise from genetic factors. He acknowledges (as do I) that sexual feelings are not always consciously chosen, but one's sexual identity is.

Last, many of the scientists conducting the research linking homosexuality with biological factors discount the idea that sexual orientation is completely hard-wired and thus immutable. Simon LeVay, who authored the study concerning brain structure differences between gay and straight men had this to say about immutability:

"There are probably very few people who have not felt, at some time or another, some sexual attraction to both men and women. A person's sexual orientation is not necessarily a fixed, life-long attribute. Sexual orientation can change: for example a woman may be predominantly attracted to men for many years, and perhaps have a happy marriage and children during that time, and then become increasingly aware of same-sex attraction in her thirties, forties, or later. This does not mean that she was concealing or repressing her homosexuality during that early period. To argue that she was really homosexual all the time would be to change the definition of sexual orientation into something murky and inaccessible." — Simon LeVay and Elisabeth Nonas, *City of Friends: A Portrait of the Gay and Lesbian Community in America*, 1995, p. 5.

"The real issue is whether people have choices about sexual identity."

That is a pretty remarkable statement coming from one of the most prominent researchers of biological factors in homosexuality. However, what makes his statement consistent with his science is one little factor that many people miss. The existence of biological factors in causation of human traits, even genetically mediated ones, doesn't mean the trait is unchangeable or inevitable.

I think the reason so many people of all ideological stripes react strongly to the media distortion of sexuality research is the resulting implication that people can't or shouldn't choose their sexual identity in life. There are numerous former homosexuals who experience life now as straight. And on the other side of the spectrum, LeVay's description above is also accurate about former heterosexuals who now live as gays and lesbians.

While this could never be the last word on this contentious subject, I hope it is clear that the division over this issue is not best viewed as right-wing versus left-wing or even nature versus nurture. Rather, the issue is about whether people have choices to deliberate and determine their own sexuality. ■