

Homosexuality: The Essentialist Argument Continues to Erode

By A. Dean Byrd, Ph.D., MBA, MPH

The essentialist argument that homosexuality is biologically determined, and is therefore not amenable to change, continues to find little support in science. Finding its way in to the *Monitor on Psychology*, the official magazine of the American Psychological Association, another study emphasizes the fluidity of homosexual attraction.

Dr. Ellen Scheter of the Fielding Graduate Institute presented her research at the recent meeting of the American Psychological Association. Her qualitative study included in-depth interviews with 11 women who had been self-identified as lesbian for more than 10 years. All of these women were in heterosexual relationships which had been ongoing for more than a year (Greer, 2004).

These findings provide support for the research of Dr. Lisa Diamond whose study was reported in the *Monitor on Psychology* in 2000. Dr. Diamond concluded that "sexual identity was far from fixed in women who aren't exclusively heterosexual" (Murray, 2000, p. 15; Diamond, 2000).

Dr. Kenneth Zucker, in his careful analysis of the innate/immutable argument of homosexuality, rostered a plethora of studies to support his conclusion that "sexual orientation is more fluid than fixed" (2003, pp. 399-400).

Friedman and Downey, the psychiatric researchers at Columbia University, offered a strongly worded conclusion opposing the essentialist argument: "At clinical conferences one often hears...that homosexual orientation is fixed and unmodifiable. Neither assertion is true...The assertion that homosexuality is genetic is so reductionistic that it must be dismissed out of hand as a general principle of psychology" (2002, p 39).

Yet the national organizations continue to offer the essentialist argument as a guide for law and public policy. No reputable scientist on either side of the political spectrum would disagree with the conclusion of Friedman and Downey. Even the gay-activist researchers themselves who studies have been used by the media to trumpet the message that homosexuality is biologically determined do not support the "born that way" myth.

Simon LeVay, the author of the hypothalamus study, noted, "It's important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality was genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that gay men were born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work" (Nimmons, 1994, p. 64).

Dean Hamer, the author of the "gay gene" study, agreed: "We knew that genes were only part of the answer. We assumed the environment also played a role in sexual ori-

entation, as it does in most, if not all behaviors...(Hamer and Copeland, 1994, p. 82). Hamer further emphasizes, "Homosexuality is not purely genetic...environmental factors play a role. There is not a single master gene that makes people gay...I don't think we will ever predict who will be gay" (Mitchell, 1995).

LeVay, the gay activist researcher, made an interesting observation about the emphasis on the biology of homosexuality: He noted, "...people who think that gays and lesbians are born that way are also more likely to support gay rights" (1996, p. 282).

Psychiatrist Robert Spitzer provides more insight into how activism has replaced science. He notes, "There's a gay-activist group that's very strong and very vocal and recognized officially by the American Psychiatric Association. There is nobody to give the other viewpoint...There may be a few people...but they don't talk."

Maybe it is time for legislators to call into question the "science" of the national organizations, particularly when the national organizations employ activism disguised as science to justify resolutions and policy statements.

References

- Diamond, L. M. (2000). Sexual identity, attractions, and behavior among young sexual minority women over a 2 year period. *Developmental Psychology*, 36 (2), pp. 241-250.
- Friedman, R. C. & Downey, J.I. (2002). Sexual orientation and psychoanalysis: sexual science and clinical practice. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 39.
- Greer, M. (2004). Labels may oversimplify women's sexual identity, experiences. *Monitor on Psychology*, 35, 9, p. 28.
- Hamer, D. & Copeland, P. (1994). *The science of desire*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- LeVay, S. (1996). *Queer science*. Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Mitchell, N, (1995). Genetics, sexuality linked, study says. *Standard Examiner*, April 30.
- Murray, B. (2000). Sexual identity is far from fixed in women who aren't exclusively heterosexual. *Monitor on Psychology*, 32(3), pp. 64-67.
- Nimmons, D. (1994). Sexual brain. *Discover*, 5, 3.
- Zucker, K. J. (2003). The politics and science of reparative therapy. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32, pp. 399-400. ■