

## Does "Born That Way" Mean "Designed That Way"?

When a person says that only heterosexuality is normal—and that all other forms of sexuality are *abnormal* variants—he is often dismissed with the statement, "Wrong—gays are born that way."

The "born that way" argument has now been widely refuted as false, and the current scientific consensus is that biological, family and social factors work together to set the stage for homosexuality.

But to understand the ultimate significance of what biological research there is, an important distinction should be remembered: that between the concepts of "born that way" and "designed that way."

### Temperament and Prenatal Influences

We continue to see a small but steady stream of research studies linking homosexuality with various biological factors. Even though researchers do not claim these factors *predetermine* homosexuality, such factors cannot simply be dismissed as utterly irrelevant to causation. (For a comprehensive review of this question, see "What Causes Homosexuality? Biological Theories," in *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse.)

Reports in the clinical literature continue to link male homosexuality to a sensitive temperament. Those writers theorize that a sensitive, passive nature (along with a lack of athletic ability) set a boy apart from his peers. When combined with the classic "distant father, over-involved mother" family dynamic, the stage is set for the boy to eroticize—rather than internalize—his natural longing for masculinity.

And in some cases, research also suggests another scenario: the influence of prenatal hormones in abnormally masculinizing or feminizing some developing fetuses. When a pregnant woman is exposed to certain environmental pollutants which have a hormone-like effect on the body, physician John R. Lee explains, they may blur sex

differences in her developing fetus. The resulting gender distortions could affect the child's sense of himself or herself as male or female, which could account for some of the biological "push" toward homosexuality.

Yet although we recognize that such individuals were "born that way" (in the sense of being biologically influenced toward a certain identity and behavior), it would not follow that they were in fact designed that way. *Such a condition would represent a biological error.*

Recently, an article in the prominent journal *Psychological Bulletin* recently linked both male and female homosexuality to a higher-than-normal incidence of left-handedness (1). The authors noted that both left-handedness and some forms of homosexuality may originate from prenatal "biological developmental errors."

In theorizing that homosexuality would, in such cases, also be an "error," the authors explain that left-handedness has also been linked with a higher number of spontaneous abortions, lower birth weight, higher rate of serious accident and serious disorders, and a shorter life span. Left-handedness has similarly been linked to neural tube defects, autism, stuttering, and schizophrenia.

A second study—this one in *Archives of General Psychiatry*—found significantly higher levels of pathology in the gay population than among heterosexuals (2). One hypothesis for the finding of higher levels of emotional disturbance—offered by prominent gay twin-study researcher J.M. Bailey—was that homosexuality may represent a developmental error.

### Developmental Errors and Genetic Misfortunes Are Common

Many people are born with genetic predispositions that we clearly recognize as problems. An alcoholism gene—an obesity gene—and a gene for shyness, violence, hyperactivity, or short temper are recognized as setting the stage for a lifetime of challenges. The same would be true of a

*continued bottom of p. 11*

## THE NARTH BULLETIN

Editor: LINDA AMES NICOLOSI

The *NARTH Bulletin* is published three times yearly by the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a non-profit educational association. For information contact NARTH



"Victory on the Bow of a Ship"

---

*Designed that Way, continued from page 2*

gene for near-sightedness, mental retardation, or attention-deficit disorder. And there are also prenatally induced, non-genetic conditions that we recognize as problems, such as fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal cocaine addiction. All of the affected persons must struggle to adjust in life.

But we do not respond to such conditions by assuring the person, "You were born that way, so *this is who you are.*"

The crux of the issue is as much philosophical as scientific: "What is human design and purpose?" The answer to the question will tell us whether we were merely "born that way," or in fact "designed that way."

We would not conclude that homosexuality is a normal

variant if we held to this simple definition, offered by a clinician more than fifty years ago: Normality is "**that which functions in accordance with its design.**"

—Linda A. Nicolosi

#### References

1. Lalumière, M.L.; Blanchard, R.; Zucker, K.L. (2000): "Sexual Orientation and Handedness in Men and Women: A Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 126, 575-592.
2. Bailey, J.M., "Commentary: Homosexuality and Mental Illness," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, October 1999, vol. 56, no. 10, 876-880. ■