

## Book Review:

# My Genes Made Me Do It: A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation,

by Neil and Briar Whitehead

Reviewed by Linda Nicolosi

This clearly written, simple-to-understand little paperback book should be stocked in all public libraries. Dr. Neil Whitehead, a research scientist and biochemist, with his wife Briar, a writer, methodically examine the evidence for the "born that way" theory and explain why none of the biologically based theories can be substantiated as causative, rather than simply predisposing.

The authors address the following issues: Are heterosexuals born that way? To what extent do our instincts control us? How does sexual identity develop? What is the cross-cultural evidence? Does prenatal hormone exposure cause homosexuality? How does sexual identity form in people with genitalia of both sexes? Is homosexuality changeable?

One section particularly useful for researchers is the discussion of path analysis, the statistical method used by Bell et al. to analyze the data in the 1981 study published as *Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women*. The Bell study is often used by gay activists as proof that family factors cannot be implicated in homosexual development. Yet a closer analysis of Bell et al.'s findings had led other observers to a different conclusion.

Kenneth Zucker and Susan Bradley had earlier been critical of Bell et al.'s interpretation of that same data, stating in their 1995 book, *Gender Identity Disorder in Children and Adolescents*:

"Although this may come as a surprise to some readers, the data obtained from the Bell et al. study were actually consistent with the data obtained from the clinical researchers that preceded it...detached-hostile father, for example, was deemed relatively characteristic of 52% of white homosexual men and 37% of white heterosexual men--a finding quite similar to the overlap in the Bieber et al. (1962) data..."

Zucker and Bradley attributed the distortion of the Bell data to the politicization of science, saying it was "clearly colored by political correctness." The Whiteheads add further support to that same interpretation. Their analysis will be useful for debaters countering those gay-activist claims which lean on the Bell study for corroboration.

The Whiteheads draw an interesting parallel between the problems of changing homosexual orientation and of over-

coming alcoholism. They say:

"Alcoholics Anonymous came on the scene when the medical profession had no answers for the alcoholic; ex-gay groups surfaced at a time when the APA backed away from reparative therapy for homosexuals. AA had its detractors; people said the stories sounded spurious, or they didn't like the 'God rackets.' [The leader's] right-hand man relapsed, some members got drunk again, and one at least committed suicide. The ex-gay movement has its detractors too, and for similar reasons. Gay activists in particular like to quote the relapse of an ex-gay leader, Michael Bussee, in the ex-gay movement's early history. AA today has wide credibility and an unofficial success rate of something like 25 percent, and it is quite possible that in several decades the general public will be aware that gays can change their orientation, as they are now aware that alcoholics can achieve permanent sobriety."

The authors note that to be consistent, gay advocates who call reparative therapists "homophobic" would also have to say that Alcoholics Anonymous "hates alcoholics."

This book has pulled together an impressive array of research and analyzed it clearly and usefully. Perhaps the only element missing is that which an experienced clinician could have been brought to the the section on gender-identity development--the striking, descriptive clinical pictures that give the reader the "aha!" experience. The authors are researchers pulling together data, rather than clinicians offering inspired interpretations as a result of years of working with struggling individuals.

Nevertheless this book fills a very important need. It is carefully researched and annotated, and will be very useful to students and researchers seeking a clear, simple summary of the most relevant data. This book is available from Huntington House Publishers at 1-800-749-4009, and from many booksellers. We enthusiastically recommend it. ■

