

# Pride by Raphael

It's All In Your Genes  
by J.

There have been many factors that have been hypothesized about why some people are homosexual or bisexual. For example, certain Native North American beliefs view gay and bisexual men and women as having "two-spirits" - a balance of the masculine and feminine natures of a person. In contrast, many Christian beliefs hold that homosexuality and bisexuality are anathema; an abomination in the eyes of God. Yet, religion and philosophy are not the only realms of theoretical thought on the whys of being gay, lesbian or bisexual. The mental health profession once viewed homosexuality and bisexuality as a mental illness. This "illness" could be "cured" through certain therapeutic practices, such as electro-convulsive therapy, hypnosis, and so on. However, the latest research jumping on the gay/bi bandwagon, are the biological studies that began some years ago.

Biological studies concerning homosexuality have been in existence for quite some time. Previously, these studies focused on physiological and anatomical "differences" that supposedly marked homosexual men and women from their heterosexual counterparts. The late 1960's and 1970's found possible differences in the brains of animal and human test subjects. Other studies postulated hormonal differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals. The most recent studies now focus on the genetic level of research.

Genetic studies on the whys and hows of homosexuality began with



### Designer Genes for future or just a means of control?

separate studies by Laura Allen in 1989, Dick Swaab in 1990 and Simon LeVay in 1991. These studies explored the human brain structures, and found differences between men and women, and within sexual orientation. This sparked interest in the possible biological influences of homosexuality. In 1993, Dean Hamer of the National Cancer Institute found some correlation between a section of the long arm of the X chromosome and sexual orientation. This study was replicated in 1995 along with an extension that found similar results. However, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

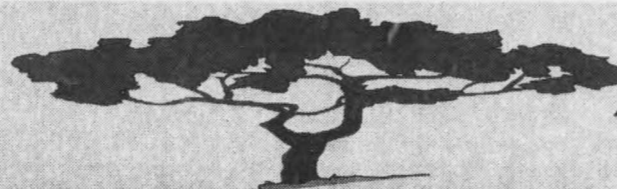
First, the studies have only dealt with a small sample of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals have not been subjects in the studies concerning biological determinants of sexual orientation. Second, some of the studies used a sample of people who have some biological illnesses such as Hamer's cancer genes. Third, the studies are correlational, not causal. The possible genetic material that is being studied, does not cause homosexuality. It may be one factor in helping a person

determine sexual orientation, but it is not a cause. The fourth factor is a question. What are the repercussions of these studies?

One outcome may be that no significant difference will take place in society. The studies may provide some information about biological determinants of homosexuality, but the information will be as profound as eye or hair colour. A positive outcome may be the fact that the discovery of a

biological basis for homosexuality, may promote the understanding that gay and bisexual men and women are just as much a part of the natural world as heterosexuals. This could help in the fight for acceptance and equality for the gay and bisexual population. On a negative note, the same studies could potentially promote genetic genocide of homosexuals and bisexuals. The discovery of a possible genetic link to homosexuality may result in the

encouragement of genetic "therapies" to eradicate this sexual orientation. To quote clinical geneticist, Philip Reilly, "...if we have the gene and we have the protein it makes, it would be only logical...to think about a biochemical intervention...that could change the effects of the underlying protein to return a person to the "standard" orientation (heterosexuality)." Care needs to be undertaken, when interpreting the studies.



# Forest Breeze by Helen Rooney

Last term I listened to two forest managers from Irving and Georgia-Pacific give an interesting talk about how they made decisions when choosing a harvest systems (e.g. clearcut, selective cut, etc.) and machines for a block. Their decisions were based on a wide range of factors that included their own experience in forestry, knowledge about biological factors, and company goals. By combining these factors, both managers could make decisions that had good environmental sense and were reasonably profitable. When asked about the new "standardized decision-making" Forestry Code in British Columbia, one manager commented, "It [the Forestry Code] is sad, but they [the forest industry] asked for it."

The BC Forest Practices Code is the result of recommendations published by the Forest Resources Commission in 1992 that eventually became law in 1994. The Forest Resources Commission had gone on a province-wide tour in the early nineties and had asked citizens how they felt forest operations were conducted. Obviously, people weren't too happy with the way companies such as MacMillan-Bloedel and Weyerhaeuser harvested trees, built

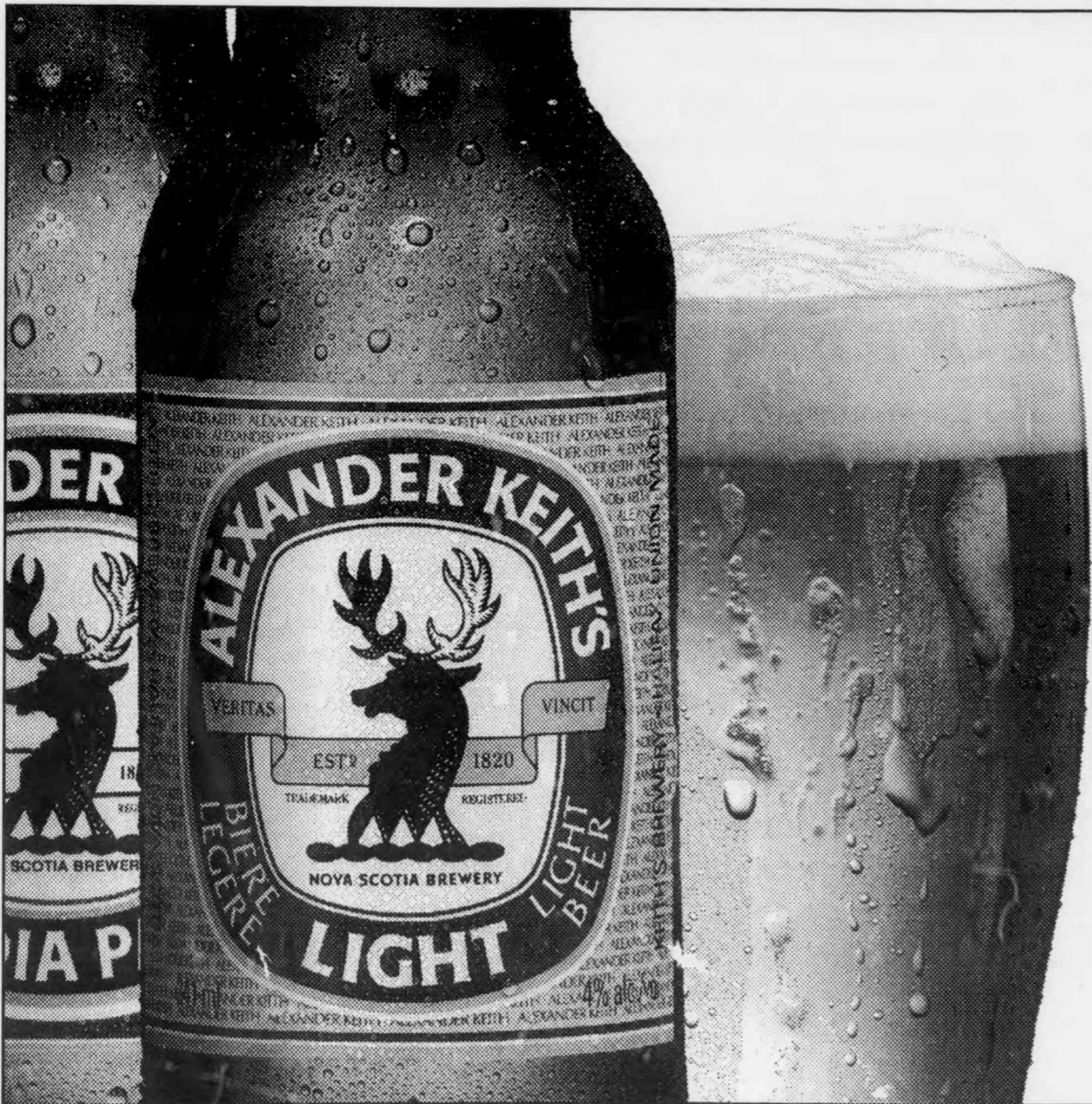
roads, respected waterways, etc. The result of the tour were laws intended to act as guidelines that will standardize forest operations across the province.

Thinking of the Code I can't help but be amazed at how forestry behaves more like a seesaw than an applied science: public input, with all good intentions, often results in counterproductive effects on the way we work in our forests. The point here isn't whether or not companies were doing a bad job in the forest; some undoubtedly were, and twenty years ago I'm sure the majority of forestry companies in BC conducted their forest operations in a way that would put today's forester and engineer to shame. But the BC governments' response to the disgruntled public does not address the problem properly. In creating the Forest Practices Code the Commission immediately made the assumption that companies, not the public, were poorly informed about operations. Rather than trying to educate either one about forest practices, the government simply made a list of "Thou shalt" and hoped that the problem would disappear.

The Forest Practices Code is really a set of stringent procedures for

problems that in reality require unique solutions based on a large number of factors, like the two managers I mentioned earlier demonstrated. The Code overrides the most valuable source of knowledge in forestry: the experience and intuition of foresters and engineers who work in the forest on a daily basis. Their decisions won't be based on what they think is good forestry, but rather what they have to do to avoid astronomical fines or even a jail term.

However, anyone who reads this article should exercise caution when judging the Code using only what I have written. Throughout the past century all changes have been characterized by criticism and bitter debate (my grandfather still sputters and swears at "that goddamn gov'nment" that once passed a law forcing him to wear a seatbelt when he drives his car), and the Code is no exception. Criticism is the ever-present companion of change, even when change is for the better. Education and patience are the only tried-and-true ways of weathering the storm that follows change, but they require time, and time is a luxury that the forest industry no longer has.



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