

# SPECTRUM

Positively Pink

## The great homosexual debate

GENESI/ There are many misconceptions about what they do.

by Adrian Park

It has been a bubbling twelve months or so on the scientific front - the hunt for the "cause" of homosexuality in full cry. From the pages of the New England Journal of Medicine, via Newsweek to the Advocate, debate, informed and ill-informed rages. The players are certainly diverse. Teams from at least two US universities have reported studies of identical twins where one is gay and the other has

a nearly 50% chance of being so inclined; far higher than simple probability would predict. As identical twins are genetically identical too, there simply has to be a genetic cause - a gay gene. Never mind the small sample sizes, and forget for the moment that slightly over 50% of identical siblings of gays were heterosexual. Enter Simon LeVey and his studies of brain structure - in another remarkable small sample his gay cadavers showed differences in a microscopic portion of

the hypothalamus gland. Forget the fact that his heterosexual control group were also cadavers and therefore not amenable to the sort of detailed questioning usually considered necessary to assess sexual orientation. Forget also that LeVey's gay cadavers had all died of AIDS-related illness and that HIV infection of the brain has a complex and largely uncharted pathology. The first impression of these studies, which incidentally all exclude lesbians, is that they are, shall we say, "methodologically challenged." Still, not to be outdone, a group at McMaster University provided CanCon in this cabaret by suggesting a statistical link between left-handedness and homosexuality - even Philippe Rushton's cranial bump and penis measuring outfit got in on the act, but as this publication has pretensions toward good taste, I'll skip the details!

There are many misconceptions about what genes do, and how what they do is expressed in the whole organism. For sure, some genes are expressed very directly. If a man has the recessive gene for hemophilia, he will be hemophiliac, the gene for albinism has similarly direct expression, - the studies of identical twins containing a majority of pairs where one was gay and the other was not suggest that something far more subtle is afoot here.

This subtlety extends into the wider field of human sexuality in general. The physical expression of gender, genitalia, body hair and such like, is controlled by genes on the X and Y chromosomes. Most women have the pair XX, most men XY - but even this is not a direct correlation. Physical gender is partly determined in the foetus by the X and Y chromosomes and

partly by exposure to the mother's hormones at around the sixth week. An XY foetus exposed to excessive estrogen at this time may well go on to develop female genitalia, while an XX foetus, exposed to excessive androgens may develop male genitalia. The medical literature is also littered with examples of hermaphrodites, androgynes, humans who apparently change sex at puberty, or whose physical gender is not defined until puberty. Cultural influences also play a role, with many examples of male children born with birth defects being surgically emasculated and then being raised as girls, and vice versa. Sexual orientation, on the other hand seems to be quite firmly rooted in that most important of human sex organs, the brain. Human sexuality is clearly a many faceted phenomenon, and to expect a simple genetic link borders on naiveté.

A number of prejudices are clearly at work behind the gene quest (my own, hopeful being obvious!). Firstly, some members of the medical fraternity have proven extremely reluctant to abandon the "disease model" for homosexuality. Find the cause, and presto, you're but a step away from the cure. There is more than a whiff of eugenics about all this - the desire that has waxed and waned over the last century, to "improve" the human stock by breeding out the diversity of perceived defects. We've already experienced several excursions down this particular by-way, of which the one that led to Josef Mengele's clinic was but one. William Jennings Bryant crusaded against another, while even this country has laws on the books dating from the hay-day of the eugenics movement. For gay men and lesbians the spectre at this feast is

pre-natal diagnosis - "Well Mrs. Smith, you are expecting a lesbian. Will you be carrying her to term?" Now there is an ethical dilemma to behold! At the same time, the fate of a child with a diagnosed gay gene in a fundamentalist household does not bear thinking about.

Secondly, many commentators, in the gay and more liberal mainstream press especially, have expressed the fond belief that demonstration of the existence of a genetic cause for homosexuality will finally silence the institutional homophobes. Dream on! Knowledge of the inherited nature of skin-colour pre-dates Mendel by centuries, if not millennia - and as anyone of a tint other than delicate pink can tell you, racism ain't dead yet! I would humbly submit that genetic engineering to remove genes for skin colour is not the way to go to ensure its demise.

The quest for knowledge is a noble venture (I'm biased, as it does provide me with a salary!), but rationality and objectivity alone do not guarantee how the knowledge gained is used. If the search for the genetic underpinnings of human sexuality could be carried out with the objectivity and detachment of say that for blood groups or eye-colour, there would be little cause for concern. While "crusaders" still dominate the field I have the feeling that the genie in this bottle has the potential for doing far more than the granting of three wishes.

### Tampons

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forced to buy a costly (and probably unsatisfactory) box of pads on short notice. One might argue that wimmin should keep track of when their period is expected and plan on bringing pads or tampons that day. However, a wimmin's menstrual cycle is not always regular. Even if it were, a wimmin can forget due to a busy schedule!

One notices that there is always soap and toilet paper in both sexes' washrooms. No one (to my knowledge) has ever gone to the store to buy either of these items. So why are there no pads and/or tampons in the wimmin's washrooms? Are they not considered necessary because they are not used by both sexes (or, more specifically, the male sex?) Mulroney's government charges GST on tampons and pads because they are considered a luxury. I'd like to see people's reactions if wimmin decided they couldn't afford these so called luxury items!

"We will bleed, we will bleed until we bathe the Mother Earth in our blood & she turns slippery new like a baby birthing."  
from "Tampons" by Ellen Bass.

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