

ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

(Est. 1970)

Private Mail Bag 6

Maitland SA 5573

AUSTRALIA

Email: info@atheistfoundation.org.au

Web: <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au>

Phone: (08) 8835 2269

International: + 61 8 8835 2269

16 June 06

National Inquiry into Discrimination against People in Same-Sex Relationships: Financial and Work-Related Entitlements and Benefits

Dear Commissioner,

We are fortunate to live in an age where erroneous concepts formulated in times when there was little understanding of nature, are being re examined in the light of present day knowledge. Same sex entitlements are one such area in desperate need of investigation.

The evidence that gay, lesbian and heterosexual orientation is a matter of nature and not a result of post environmental influences is not in dispute from unbiased investigators. (See below *article taken from 'The Australian' by Anjana Ahuja: Even taking the unproven extremist view of those against financial equality, that homosexuality is chosen and a 'moral' lapse, should not exclude people because of a choice that is harmless.

Unless evidence is forthcoming, that same sex orientation is a purposed distortion of human sexuality in whose ends are to do harm to others, then grounds for discrimination are non-existent. No such evidence or an inkling of such evidence exists.

It therefore follows in the court of reason that equality before the law in financial matters concerning same-sex partnerships, is not only preferable, it is a prerequisite for justice to be done and seen to be done.

Arguments centring on the procreation role of couples, as though all heterosexual partnerships are based on it, are at the best mischievous and at the worst a convenient smokescreen hiding a deep seated prejudice.

Religious and other bigotry must not be supported by the State, as those with an opposing view are not expected to form partnerships with which they are not comfortable.

The Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc is of the informed opinion that denial of equality of "Financial and Work-Related Entitlements and Benefits" for same sex couples is anti-democratic, oppressive, unfair, harmful and not in line with other progressive governments in the western world.

Yours Sincerely,

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia.

*Genetic plays in being gay, say authors by Anjana Ahuja

To heterosexuals – the idea that they can be persuaded to change something as fundamental as sexual orientation seems ridiculous. And so it is to homosexuals, who are often told their “deviant” behaviour is a lifestyle choice.

Science has so far trodden carefully in the controversial debate about whether gays are born or made. Disparate pieces of evidence – such as homosexuality running in families, and identical twins having more similar sexual preferences than ordinary siblings – have long suggested that biology rather than upbringing shapes sexual orientation.

Now two researchers are throwing out the caveats in an attempt to “out” the bald scientific truth: **we are born either straight or gay and nothing will make us otherwise.**

In their book *Born Gay: the Psychobiology of Sex Orientation*, Glenn Wilson, reader in personality at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, and Qazi Rahman, a psychobiologist at the University of East London, declare that “the accumulation of evidence from independent laboratories across the world has shown that the biological differences between gay and straight people cannot be ignored . . . our sexual preference is a fundamental and immutable component of our human nature”. Wilson and Rahman’s account goes beyond whether there is a gay gene – there is no single gay gene, but genes do contribute – and considers the effect of sex hormones to which fetuses are exposed in the womb.

The boldly titled book says the research leaves absolutely no room for parental or societal influence on this intimate trait. Children cannot be seduced or otherwise led into homosexuality and, however overbearing the mother or absent the father, no amount of poor parenting can waylay a child born to walk the path of heterosexuality.

No serious, evidence-based scientist, they charge, would deny that sexual orientation is fixed at birth. The authors also speculate that we face an evolutionary future in which homosexuals become more prevalent. The genes that are implicated in gayness do not just influence sexual orientation – in low doses they might confer personality advantages to heterosexual men (such as making them loyal, empathic and considerate), turning them into attractive mates and thus propagating those genes further.

Rahman says that his view of corrective therapies designed to turn gay men straight is simple – they will never work: “You just can’t do it. If people suggest they can, I ask them, ‘Can you turn someone from straight to gay? Show me the evidence’. But it’s never going to happen, is it?”

Andy Forrest, communications officer for Britain’s Stonewall, a charity that campaigns for gay equality, says the book’s central message rings true for most gays. “Most people I’ve come across say they’ve always been gay and that their upbringing has played no part in whether they are gay or not. They would say it’s an innate part of who they are, not something they need to be ‘cured’ of.” According to Wilson and Rahman the biological origin of sexual orientation means that discriminating against gays and lesbians is as justifiable as discriminating on the basis of eye colour or ethnicity. They have declined to reveal their own sexual orientations.

So, why are some men born gay?

Homosexuality tends to run in families, prompting a search for the so-called gay gene. In June biologists in Austria discovered fruit flies can be turned gay by altering a single gene. It is almost

impossible that a single gene determining human sexual orientation exists: identical twins, who have identical genes, do not always have the same sexual preferences. But it points to genetic influence.

“Gay men tend to have more gay brothers than straight men,” Rahman says. “Heritability is thought to be around 30 to 40 per cent, which means that around 30 to 40 per cent of the variation in homosexuality is down to genes. Strictly speaking, it’s better than zero (which would imply no role for genes) but that shows there’s significant environmental variance.” And this, Rahman says, is where a “massive misunderstanding of the concept of environment” comes into play.

Studies have shown that the popular idea of environment – parental upbringing, peer norms, the family home, schooling – have no effect whatsoever. For example, the psychoanalytical idea that distant fathers or overbearing mothers sabotage their sons’ sexual development is not borne out by evidence.

Wilson and Rahman dismiss such theories as “beyond the pale of science”. In conversation, Rahman is more brutal, dismissing “95 per cent of psychology as rubbish”.

Initial sexual experiences do not appear influential – one study showed boys educated at single-sex boarding schools, where early same-sex experiences are relatively commonplace, are no more likely to become gay than other boys. What about the seduction hypothesis? Men who, as boys, had gay encounters with men have reported that they already knew they were gay before the encounter. Adopted children of gay and lesbian parents are predominantly heterosexual.

The missing environmental link, the authors argue, is the womb.

This would fit with findings in the early ‘90 that the brains of gay and straight men differ slightly.

Rahman explains: “We argue that genes produce differences in the brains of pre-straight and pre-gay fetuses and those differences might affect certain receptors in the brain that influence the activity of male sex hormones.”

Put simply, Wilson and Rahman suspect that some male fetuses absorb low amounts of testosterone in certain parts of the brain: full absorption is needed for full masculinisation. “In a foetus which has a genetic predisposition to be gay, these receptors are not as effective at soaking up testosterone. The result is that this slightly insensitive part of the brain follows the default development route, which is female.”

In other words, the neural circuit that promotes sexual desire towards women is never laid down; the result is a male who is attracted to other men. This also explains, the authors claim, why gay men show a “mosaic” of female-like and male-like cognitive traits.

In their handling of language and in their spatial awareness, for example, gay men are more similar to women than to heterosexual men. As Rahman puts it, this makes gayness just one item in a package of traits hewn in the womb. In 2003 he showed that the startle response – how people respond to sudden noises – was different in gay and straight men. As this response is instinctive and cannot be learnt, it was viewed as further evidence that gay and straight men are neurologically different.

Why should some male fetuses absorb less testosterone than others?

It is possible, the researchers say, that there is a chemical battle between the mother and her foetus, much like the clash of blood types that can cause a mother to develop antibodies to her unborn child. The antibodies can stay in the blood and threaten future pregnancies. The idea that the womb environment may have consequences for future siblings is interesting because researchers have noted a sibling pattern among gay men called the “big brother effect”. The more older brothers a man has, the more likely he is to be gay. It is possible that maternal antibodies developed in early pregnancies may cross the placenta in later pregnancies to disrupt testosterone absorption.

Lesbianism may also be due to hormonal conditions in the womb (although scientists stress that lesbianism cannot always be examined as a direct parallel of male homosexuality – there is no “big sister effect”, for example). “There’s a protein in the womb that protects female fetuses from excessive exposure to male sex hormones,” Rahman says. “Perhaps this protein doesn’t kick in

early enough in lesbians.” Some brain circuits then follow the male development; a sexual preference for women may be a consequence. Lesbians show more male-like language production, which strengthens the theory of “neural sexual mosaicism”. As for bisexuality, there is no biological evidence that some people are turned on equally by both sexes. Physiological studies show that self-declared bisexuals exposed to straight and gay erotica are aroused by either one or the other but not both. Academics suggest that bisexuals may be omnisexuals with libidos so high that the gender of the target doesn’t matter.

Source: http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,16625063%255E23289,00.html