

What “Causes” Homosexuality?—Part 1

By Dr. John F. Ankerberg

People are “born gay.” Therefore, it’s impossible for anyone to change. This myth is primarily based on two widely reported scientific studies:

- 1) The study of slight differences in the hypothalamus region of the brain of homosexuals as discovered by Dr. Simon LeVay at the Salk Institute in San Diego, California.
- 2) The study of identical twins done by Dr. J. Michael Bailey from the Department of Psychology at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois and Dr. Richard C. Pillard of the Family Studies Laboratory, Division of Psychiatry, Boston University School of Medicine.

Research attempting to show a biological or genetic cause and effect for homosexuality dates back almost a century. But over the years, no research has ever proven a biological basis for homosexuality.¹ The latest studies on brain research and identical twins are just another attempt trying to establish a genetic link.

The Secular Media Perpetuates the Myth With Biased and Inaccurate Reporting

On August 30, 1991 the headlines in many newspapers and popular magazines claimed:

- “Brain Stem Part Different in Gay Men: Studies Suggest Biological Basis for Homosexuality” (*Seattle Times*).²
- “Are Gay Men Born That Way?” (*Time*).³
- The cover of *Newsweek* magazine asked, “Is This Child Gay—Born or Bred?: The Origins of Homosexuality.”⁴
- “The Survey of Identical Twins Links Biological Factors with Being Gay” (*Los Angeles Times*)⁵

Almost all of the newspaper articles written concerning Dr. Simon LeVay’s brain research concluded that he had found genuine scientific evidence that homosexuality was both biological and genetic in nature—but this just wasn’t true.

I. Dr. Simon LeVay’s Theory

Dr. LeVay studied a certain group of neurons in the hypothalamus structure of the brain (called INAH3 or interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus). He examined 41 cadavers, 19 of whom were allegedly homosexual men, 16 of whom were assumed to be heterosexual men, and 6 of whom were assumed to be heterosexual women.

He found that some of the neurons in the hypothalamus region of the brain of heterosexual men were larger than those he found in homosexual men. He therefore theorized that if homosexual men had smaller neurons, then possibly these smaller neurons were responsible for causing these men to be homosexual.

Likewise, if heterosexual men had larger neurons, then possibly these larger neurons caused them to be heterosexual.

He assumed that if the size difference in neurons could be shown to be true 100% of the time, this would be evidence that homosexuality was biologically based. But even his own statistical chart published in *Science* magazine, revealed that his theory was flawed.

LeVay's Statistical Chart Revealed Flaws in His Theory

Dr. LeVay's chart revealed that 3 of the 19 homosexual men actually had larger nuclei than did the heterosexual men. Also, 3 of the heterosexual men had smaller nuclei than did the homosexual men. Thus, 6 of the 35 male subjects he investigated, or 17 percent of his total study, contradicted his own theory.⁶ Yet in spite of this contradiction, the Associated Press reported that Dr. LeVay had *always* found that the nuclei were larger in heterosexual men and smaller in homosexual men. Again, that simply wasn't true.

No Proof That This Region of the Brain Is Related to Sexual Orientation

No scientist has ever proven that the particular region of the hypothalamus under discussion causes sexual orientation. Consider the comments of Dr. Joseph Nicolosi who specializes in working with male homosexuals. He has appeared on several network television programs and has been interviewed by prominent weekly news magazines.

His book, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, has gained him world-wide respect as an authority in same-sex attractions. Dr. Nicolosi emphasized, "We're talking about a general area of the brain that has to do with emotions, including sexuality; but in this *particular nuclei*, we have no clear understanding of what function it serves at this point."⁷

Dr. Charles Socarides, Professor of Psychiatry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, also emphasized the following, "I believe this theory is completely erroneous. There's no possibility of somebody developing homosexuality from hereditary or organic causes. It's just impossible."⁸

He further noted that "the question of a minute section of the brain—sub-microscopic almost—as.... deciding sexual object choice is really preposterous.... Certainly...a cluster of the brain cannot determine sexual object choice. We know that for a fact."⁹

Cause or Consequence

Even if the anterior hypothalamus area of the brain could be shown to relate to sexual behavior, it still would not answer the question of cause and effect. Scientific studies have indicated that behavior itself might *cause* the size of the neurons to fluctuate—rather than the *neurons* causing specific homosexual or heterosexual behavior.

For example, Dr. Kenneth Klivington, assistant to the president of the Salk Institute where Dr. LeVay did his study, has pointed to "a body of evidence showing the brain's neural networks reconfigure themselves in response to certain experiences."¹⁰ Therefore, the difference in homosexual brain structure may be *a result* of behavior and environmental conditions.

Sexual Orientation Not Verified: In addition, Dr. LeVay did not know conclusively the sexual orientation of those he studied. Some were alleged to have been homosexual; others may have been bisexual; others may have been homosexual yet passed themselves off as heterosexual. We simply don't know.¹¹

Research Bias: Dr. LeVay is on record as saying that he set out to prove a genetic cause for homosexuality after his lover's death. He is openly gay himself and said if he did not find such a cause he might abandon science altogether.¹² Therefore, it is not incorrect to say that his study was politically biased to justify homosexuality, attempting to make it as acceptable as heterosexuality. As *Newsweek*, February 24, 1992, stated, "He is promoting the idea that homosexuality is a matter of destiny, not choice. 'It's important to educate society,' stated LeVay."

Interpretation of Measurement Questionable

Even the measurement that Dr. LeVay used is suspect. Do you measure the nuclei by size, by volume, by actual cell count? Do you measure them by density? What do each of these measurements mean? And again, has anyone scientifically established that INAH3 has any impact at all on sexual orientation? No!

Study Lacks Replication

There is no replication of this finding in any other scientific study. In fact, at least one study by Dr. Schwab in the Netherlands flatly contradicts it. Thus, there is no clear evidence to back up Dr. LeVay's research. (Nicolosi interview)

(To be continued.)

Notes:

¹ In a longer report we have examined the biological theory and found no biological cause for homosexuality. In the *Family Research Report* and other publications, the Family Research Institute of Washington, D.C. frequently evaluates the scientific literature on this topic. Interested parties should contact the Family Research Institute, P.O. Box 2091, Washington, DC 20013 for documentation. Dr. Nicolosi points out that he has examined the entire range of literature relating to the alleged biological foundations of homosexuality: "I myself have reviewed all the literature, including LeVay's study, and I certainly don't believe, and I don't think any scientist really believes that there is a biological predetermination for sexual orientation. There's much more evidence for early environmental factors that would set the stage for a person's sexual orientation" (Dr. Nicolosi Interview, The John Ankerberg Show). Alfred Kinsey himself, as cited by W. B. Pomeroy, his research associate, in *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. 147) confessed, "I have myself come to the conclusion that homosexuality is largely a matter of conditioning." Perhaps this explains why Masters and Johnson themselves emphasized, "It is of vital importance that all professionals in the mental health field keep in mind that the homosexual man or woman is basically a man or woman by genetic determination and homosexually oriented by learned preference." (cited in Gerhard van den Aardweg, *Homosexuality and Hope: A Psychologist Talks About Treatment and Change*, Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988. p. 32).

² *Seattle Times*, 30 August 1991.

³ *Time*, 9 September 1991.

⁴ *Newsweek*, 24 February 1992.

⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1991

⁶ "Homosexual Brains," *Family Research Report*, June/September 1991. See the evaluation of the original report in *Science* magazine available from the Family Research Institute.

⁷ Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, taped Interview for "The John Ankerberg Show."

⁸ Dr. Charles Socarides, taped Interview for "The John Ankerberg Show."

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Dr. Kenneth Klivington, *Newsweek*, 24 February 1992.

¹¹ The homosexual reporter M. Botkin concedes this in, "Salk and Pepper," *Bay Area Reporter*, 5 September 1991, pp. 21, 24, cf., "Homosexual Brains," *Family Research Report*, June/September 1991, p. 1.

¹² *Newsweek*, 24 February 1992.

2SLStaff0703