

Is sexual orientation  
choice or biologically  
predetermined



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There have been heated debates concerning sexual orientation in almost all the societies in the world. Becoming either a homosexual, bisexual or a heterosexual is a matter of choice according to many cultures and races. The society is made in a way that there are norms that govern the way people behave including the tastes and preferences. Anything done against the societal construction is deemed strange and therefore unacceptable and it is liable to negative sanctions.

The biggest question that many people contend with is what exactly determines the sexual orientation. Several scientific studies have been conducted and they are disapproving the conventional beliefs that people have. It is believed by most people that if someone is a homosexual, then they must be abnormal, cursed, and immoral or under a certain kind of punishment. They are considered social outcasts in most societies as what they do is contrary to the norms of the communities they belong.

According to some theories, for instance 'exotic becomes erotic,' it is made clear that sexual orientation is brought about by the biological factors rather than what is currently held by many. Many people look at the environment under which one is raised as the main determining factor of one's sexual orientation.

The study of the twins done by some researchers is an indication that indeed environment does not dictate whether one will be a homosexual or a heterosexual. There is a high likelihood that identical twins can be homosexuals than it is for the fraternal twins where only one of them could be but the other one remain heterosexual. This is an

illustration that indeed genes play a great role in determining the gender where one will project their erotic feelings.

There has been discrimination against the homosexuals to the extent that some of them have been attacked by the people they live with. Most of them live in fear of isolation and rejection making them not practice their sexual orientation publicly. The religious institution has been one of the greatest forces that have been hitting hard on them because of the beliefs held. However, this is wrong and that's why several recommendations have been highlighted at the end of this discussion in order to live in harmony and love for all people.

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## Thesis statement

Many studies now show that one's sexual orientation may not be by choice at all; rather a biological predetermination.

## Statement of the problem

Sexual orientation issues unless addressed could result in disastrous moments in our times. The number of those practicing homosexuality and the bisexuals has been on the rise not only in the western countries but throughout the world. However, they have not been so explicit in their activities for fear of being lynched or alienated by the society.

In the recent past, homosexuals faced the wrath of the law once found guilty of the act. This goes back to the 14th century when Leonardo da Vinci who is said to have been a homosexual escaped death by a whiskey. Most societies

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have not changed their stand and still there is little being done to eliminate the conventional beliefs about sexual orientation.

In the recent past, Uganda and Malawi, African countries have declared that the homosexuals are not welcome in their countries because they are considered, 'violating the morality' of the society. The main forces behind the decisions being taken by these and many other countries has been the religion and the cultural beliefs of the people.

Therefore, sexual orientation poses a big challenge in the society and unless undressed can lead to social unrest. One of the main reasons why people want to have nothing to do with the homosexuals is lack of correct information apart from the biased one they have gotten in their cultural backgrounds. The society is therefore deemed to be exclusively heterosexual which is not true since even the Holy Scriptures indicates that there were indeed homosexuals.

People in general have ill information concerning the matter making it hard for the homosexuals to live in peace and harmony. Even the educated few fail to express empathy to this category of people which many have labeled 'marginalized' or the 'minority' group. The world is moving towards liberalization and therefore people should be given the freedom to exercise their tastes and preferences without being discriminated on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Due to the negativity associated with prejudice and discrimination against the homosexuals, it justifies then that there is need to let the society

appreciate the fact that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice but it is <https://assignbuster.com/is-sexual-orientation-choice-or-biologically-predetermined/>

predetermined by the genes. This is what has prompted me to research on the biological factors as the main determinants of sexual orientation.

Therefore, to bring the society at the level of normalcy where everyone will be appreciated regardless of their sexual orientation, there is need for more information to be disseminated. It is important that the society understand that the environment has little influence on one's choice of sexual partner. On the contrary, it is the biological factors that really affect such a choice.

Having said that, it is clear that there is need to conduct this kind of research, as it will help to change the society's perspective, and enable them to develop a sense of tolerance towards one another regardless of their sexual orientation.

## **Definition of terms**

### **Sexual orientation**

Has been defined as the emotional or sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex, same sex or of both sexes. The choice is influence by environmental factors, but to a larger extent by hormones and biological factors.

### **Heterosexuality**

Has been defined as the sexual or emotional attraction towards the people of the opposite gender or sex.

### **Homosexuality**

This is the emotional or sexual attraction being directed towards people of the same sex.

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## **Bisexuality**

It has been defined as the sexual or emotional attraction towards the people of both genders.

## **INAH-3:**

In full it is 'interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus. The concentration of these cells in this part of the brain has the power to dictate the sexual orientation. Homosexual and women have little INAH-3 compared with the heterosexuals.

## **Hypothalamus**

It is a part of the brain which controls many activities including temperature regulation, hunger and thirst. It also influences the sexual arousal and sexual orientation to a certain degree.

## **Monozygotic twins**

These are identical twins that are formed when one egg is fertilized to form one zygote which later divides to form two embryos.

## **Dizygotic twins**

These are twins formed when two fertilized eggs are implanted in the walls of the uterus at the same time.

## **Limitations of the study**

One of the main impediments for the success of this study is that the findings are biased to some extent and may not apply to certain people.

What I mean is that the studies have mostly been conducted in the western world by people of same race and cultures. With the notion that the other

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nations have on the western world, this will be difficult as it will be viewed by many as a way to justify the practice which is deemed immoral by many people. The fact that many nations have not yet softened their grounds on matters of sexual orientation is a good indication that they do not approve anything that is abnormal to them.

The samples collected do not represent the feelings of the entire population. For instance, some studies collected information of less than a hundred people and purported that this represented the whole population. Therefore, some of the information collected is under scrutiny and criticized by other scholars in the same field.

Some of the studies were subjective rather than objective. This is because it involves mostly gathering information about how the homosexuals conducted themselves while they were young, and then from there the researchers compared with what they had in mind and made conclusions which could be biased. For instance, not all people who fail to involve themselves in activities of their gender automatically become homosexuals as we are going to see soon. Another important thing is that one piece of information could be true in one culture while it is not in another one. It is therefore important that other races too be involved in the study.

Another weakness of this study is that it seeks to send a strong statement that people have no power over their sexual orientation. It means that people can not be recruited into becoming either gays or lesbians. Other studies have shown contrary findings because they also find the environment to be a strong factor determining one's sexual orientation.

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Another limitation of the study is that it is being frustrated by other forces and especially the religious groups. Research has shown that the choices that people make in matters relating to their lives are largely influenced by their belief systems rather than the facts collected. Most of the population is religious who have been socialized in a way that they know how to differentiate between what is evil and what is good. Changing the minds of such people therefore becomes difficult and almost impossible for the researchers.

Finally, another limitation is the fact that little is done by the scholars to pass this critical information to the general population. Most of the scientific findings have remained in books while people continue holding unsubstantiated beliefs. The researchers should come out to educate the people by proving to them about the realities of life while at the same time poking holes in their belief systems. This will be the beginning of the success of this kind of controversial study.

## **Theoretical framework**

Bearing in mind the ambiguity and the contentions that the issue of the sexual orientation has had on the environment, many scientific theories have been developed with an aim to dispel the common belief that homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality are matters of choice. They all indicate that the biological factors are actually the greatest determinants of one's sexual orientation.

One of such studies is found in the theory of 'exotic becomes erotic' which explains that if one fails to interact with the people of same sex in the early

ages, they were likely to develop some erotic feelings for such people they avoided at later age. The scientific study also indicates that the temperaments to a certain extent dictate which gender one will be interacting with as they grow up which subsequently will affect the sexual orientation to a larger extent.

## **Literature review**

### **American Psychological Task Force.**

There are many studies that have been conducted before in the aim of explaining different views o sexual orientation. Some of this information is found on the ' Report on American psychological task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation' (APA, 2007). Their main idea was to dispute what many refer as normal to be a homosexual. They agree unanimously that this is a problem that needs to be addressed through therapies so that people can begin leading a normal life.

However, they also agree that sexual orientation is caused by biological factors which a person has no power over (APA, 2007). They are also very particular on matters of discrimination and they call for empathy as a way of including all members in the national building activities regardless of their sexual orientation.

On the other hand, they believe that the environment has also a role to play in matters of sexual orientation (Fay 1989). They believe that the environment under which the child develops could contribute to the child either becoming a heterosexual or homosexual. And in this they concur with

the theory of 'the exotic becomes erotic' which stress that the gender interaction dictates one's sexual preference.

Their study calls for therapeutic exercises rather than letting this people become what nature has predisposed them. Therapies have been found to be very useful when it comes to dealing with the conflicting issues in the minds of the individual. How one behaves is largely determined by what is held in the unconscious parts of the mind. Therefore, therapy works to bring the unconscious to the conscious so that the person can learn to dispute the irrational acts and lead a real life.

However, the study does not seek to dispute the fact that biological processes play the part in determining one's sexual orientation. It only tries to state that one can move from homosexuality which is deemed abnormal to heterosexuality which majority of the population sees as normal.

The study however does not address the issue of discrimination and prejudice as it ought to. By telling the people with such sexual orientations attend therapies amounts to calling them abnormal. Though it is a step aimed at helping the people thought to be 'sick' it could intensify the prejudice and discrimination that people still hold on people who have different sexual orientation from the norm. It goes against the freedom that people have in practicing their tastes and preferences. On the other hand, it assumes that all the people in the entire population will afford to meet the cost of the therapeutic processes. However, the bottom line is that the study has agreed that it is indeed the biological processes that determine one's sexual orientation.

## **Exotic Becomes Erotic Theory**

The other theorist who played a big role in explaining that the biological processes were indeed the main causes of the sexual orientation was Bem (Bem, 1996). He developed the theory of 'exotic becomes erotic'. The 'exotic' is what is referred as different from who a child interacts with as they grow up. Erotic on the other hand is the emotional or sexual arousal to the people of either same, different or both sexes (Bem, 1996).

His theory speaks about the power that the genetic material have over the sexual orientation of the individual. It asserts that the possibility of a person becoming a heterosexual or homosexual are determined during the early ages of development. The theory says that if a child does not interact with the people of his or her gender during his early ages this will have an implication on their choice of people to whom they will express their feelings and erotic desires.

## **Biological Determinism and homosexuality**

The other theory that seeks to reinforce the fact that sexual orientation is caused by biological factors is the biological determinism and homosexuality (Spanier, 1995). The theory focuses on one part of the brain known as the hypothalamus. Several studies conducted indicate that certain cells known as interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH-3), have the effect of determining one's sexual orientation. Their concentration in this part of the brain is what brings the whole difference. It has been found that the women have a relative smaller concentration as compared to the male.

However studies conducted on the homosexuals indicate that they have a smaller volume of INAH-3 compared with their heterosexual men. They have <https://assignbuster.com/is-sexual-orientation-choice-or-biologically-predetermined/>

the same concentration with that of the female and this may explain the reason why they are attracted to people of the same sex.

From the three theories above, it is clear that the sexual orientation is caused by biological rather than the environment as it is conventionally believed. The following discussion will seek to elaborate more on the above three theories, giving statistics and other supporting evidence on the same claim.

### **Discussion, recommendation and conclusion**

Sexual orientation has been a topic that has received numerous contentions especially amongst the conservative people. It has been linked to inherited disorders, deviant hormonal exposure, harmful family patterns, and in many situations especially amongst the religious groups; it is associated with sinful nature of man. For those reasons, people of all races and cultures have different perspective of sexual orientation.

Seeking to shed light on sexual orientation, Daryl Bem asserted that the biological factors that determine sexual or erotic preference among the people are linked to the experiences during the childhood. As the child grows, they interact with the environment which on the other hand shape not only their cognitive, behavioral and emotional parts but to a larger extent affect their biological traits. There is also a correlation between nature and nurture. This means that the, biological processes and the environment in which the child is exposed are always affecting the way the child grows and the preferences that they make regarding their lives. Therefore this

explanation seeks to dispute the fact that sexual orientation is caused by an exclusively one factor.

In his theory ' Exotic becomes erotic, ' Daryl who was a social psychologist said that the temperaments that the child acquires as it grows predisposes them to develop certain likes and dislikes of activities in their life.

Temperaments are biological in nature which are passed from generation to generation through inheritance. They have the power to make the child choose the people they want to interact with and those that they would want to avoid.

According to this theory, those children who fail to conform to the activities of their genders are at a higher risk of becoming homosexuals than those who do conform. To elaborate this statement further, assume that a boy decides not to interact with other boys in his early ages of development. He indulges himself in all activities done by the opposite gender. According to this theory, as he grows up, he will develop some physiological arousal to the people with whom he never interacted with. Therefore, when he becomes a teenager, he will be expected to develop certain erotic feelings to the people of the same sex.

The opposite is true according to this theory. It means that, the heterosexuals are so because during their early ages they took time to play with people of their own sex and therefore, during their teen age, they felt sexually attracted to the people they never had much interaction with during early ages.

To support his theory further, he carried a study involving one thousand lesbians and gay people. According to his finding, 63% of them said that they exhibited non-conformity to the activities of their gender as they were growing up. Only 15% of them said that they participated in those activities involving their sex. Therefore, to a greater extent, his theory can be used to explain the discrepancy in observed in the sexual orientation.

The following table gives a brief summery for the work that was performed by Ben to demonstrate the correlation between gender activities and sexual orientation.

Table 1. Correlation between gender activities and sexual orientation.

Sample group

Control group

Lesbians

Gay

Percentage of non-conformity in same gender activities during childhood

Percentage of conformity in same gender roles

1000

500

500

500

63%

15%

Source: Bem DJ, Herdt G, McClintock M (2000). Exotic become Erotic. . Arch Sex Behav 29 (6): 531-48.

To further support the fact that the sexual orientation is inherited rather than acquired in the environment, Bailey and Pillard (1978), conducted a study where they used to models. In one of the models, they hypothesized that homosexuality or heterosexuality is inherited. The other model they assumed that sexual orientation is learnt from the environment. They carried their study among monozygotic twins raised together, dizygotic twins raised together and men with adopted brothers. The following table summarizes their findings.

Table 2. Genetic inheritance and sexual orientation

Relationship

Monozygotic ( identical twins)

Fraternal twins

Inherited brothers

Rate of homosexuality

59%

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21%

10%

Source: Bailey & Pillard, Arch. Gen. Psychiatry 48: 1089-1096)

According to the results obtained in the table above, there is a higher likelihood that the identical twins who have been brought up in the same environment will become homosexuals more than the fraternal twins. The greatest question that the two researchers grappled with was why there was the presence of this discrepancy. In order to explain their findings, they asserted that sexual orientation is as a result of genetic inheritance rather than environmental as many people would like to think.

Monozygotic twins have the same genetic make up as they originate from the same ova and therefore they will be expected to exhibit the same capabilities and the behavior in general. Other studies have found that even if the two had not been raised in the same environment, there is a greater tendency for them to demonstrate same behavior, tastes and preferences wherever they are. Therefore, this seeks to reinforce further the fact that biological factors have to a greater degree affected the sexual orientation.

The other factors that serve to dispute the factor that sexual orientation is the matter of the environment is the fact that the third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH-3), of the heterosexuals and the homosexuals is different (Zucker, 1999). Hypothalamus is that part of the brain which is so important in controlling the body temperature, hunger, thirst and also matters relating to sexual arousal. In general, the females

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have a smaller INAH-3 as compared to their male counterparts. However, there has been observed discrepancies also between the homosexual men and the heterosexual ones with the former having smaller capacity. Different theorists tend to presume that the difference in that capacity could also be the cause of homosexuality. This is because they appear to have the same preference as that of the female with whom they have relatively the same volume of INAH-3.

On the same biological findings, there is a morphological difference between the homosexual men in the appearance of their penises (Laumann1994). It is said that the homosexuals tend to have longer and thicker penises as compared to that of the heterosexual males. This however does not mean that whenever there is a difference in size and thickness it means that the person is a homosexual. The other findings indicate that most homosexuals tend to be left-handed people.

The above therefore serves to clear the notion that many people especially the religious groups and some cultures that such sexual orientation behaviors are a sign of insanity and abnormality. Homosexuality for instance is not a thing that has just appeared on this planet as many people would want to state. It has been there since the creation of the earth. In the holy bible scriptures, in the book of Genesis, it is said that certain men demanded that Abraham give them the men who had come to pay him visit so that they could have sex with them. Leonardo da Vinci one of the greatest gifted men on this planet is also said to have been a homosexual and that was back in 14th century.

The homosexual people have not been able to have their issues addressed for fear of being discriminated against or being lynched (LeVay 1996). For instance, a gay couple in Kenya (a country in East Africa), escaped death narrowly as they prepared to announce their marriage in public. They were rescued by the police when a group of conservative group attacked them in what they referred to as ' the infringement of the societal norms.'

One of the most important things that the society should know is that there are more homosexuals and lesbians than they presume. Amongst these groups are the heterosexuals who are sexually attracted to people of both sexes. The reason why sexual orientation appears strange to certain groups of people is because it has been suppressed. People especially in the African continent rarely discuss issues relating to sex. It is ' common knowledge that a man should marry a woman,' and therefore anything that seeks to violate this social belief is met with a lot of resistance and punishment.

In more liberal countries such as the United States, the homosexuals have the freedom to express their affections even in public (Bogaert 2004). The Anglican churches have even allowed the marriage amongst these groups of people who have been marginalized for many decades. However, such an act has resulted to sparked debate among other religious groups and to some extent; other believers have alienated themselves from such denominations.

## **Recommendations**

Having looked at sexual orientation and the perception that people have over the whole issue, it would be important to provide some recommendations on how people can change their view. Whether the gays

and the lesbians will be accepted in the society or not will depend on how people think about them. For this reason, it is important to consider the following recommendations which are aimed at helping people treat each other well regardless of their sexual orientation.

One of the recommendations that will see a change in the perception that people have against homophobia would be to strengthen communication gaps (Billy 2000). Several studies that have been conducted demonstrate lack of information amongst the people regarding the homosexuals and the lesbians. The biggest impediment to the information dissemination is the issues of culture which are form the fabric of any group of people. As we saw earlier, sexual topics are not discussed especially in conservative African cultures and certain religious affiliations. Such information is considered ‘ private’ and therefore should not be discussed. However, one of the causes of the negative attitudes that people have is because they have no information on what causes homosexuality.

Even those having the information, they might not pass it for fear of discrimination. Those purporting to help the society understand these matters provide biased information which not only serves to intensify the chasm and dichotomy against such groups but also calls for their elimination. I propose that a curriculum on sexual orientation should be published so that as people grow up, they understand that homosexuality is not a matter of choice, but what has been predetermined by the genetic makeup.

The second recommendation is that there should be a day set to set to celebrate sexual diversity (Wellings 2004). The only way to prove that indeed

we respect diversity is by having a day where this minority group of people is given time to express themselves in the society. This will not only serve to make them feel part and parcel of the society but will also act as a way to improve their self esteem and confidence in the society. On the other hand, the heterosexual society will develop tolerance towards this group of people and learn to accept them as they are. People will also develop a sense of empathy and avoid any judgmental remarks against this group.

The third recommendation will be to avoid discrimination at all costs. As we have observed in the discussion above, homosexuality is not abnormality or a curse. These are people who have same anatomical features like any other human being, with the only difference being found in their sexual partner preferences. Homosexuals have been prejudiced and discriminated against making them appear like social outcasts. They are alienated from certain social issues for the claims that they are 'different' and 'unclean' like the rest of the population.

To avert any chances of perpetual discrimination, the government should formulate policies that seek to protect such people in the society, and also taking the lead in the fight against such biased beliefs. The introduction of the Equality Act in 2006 was a big step forward in the fight against social prejudice and subsequent discrimination. The act called for the equality in the access for goods, services and any other facilities. This includes working in any social position without any fear of being labeled a social outcast or a demon.

The religious groups should also follow the suit in ensuring love prevails amongst all the groups of the people regardless of their sexual orientation. To a greater extent, the religious groups have been said to be the people behind the hard feelings between the heterosexuals and the homosexuals. This is because of the faith that is held in this important social institution. Religion can not be disputed when it comes to the matters affecting the society. It is viewed as the only institution that provides the society with moral precepts. Therefore, whatever the leaders say to their members is religiously followed and any other information that is contrary to theirs is nullified. Therefore, the fight against discrimination amongst the homosexuals will only be successful if religious leaders develop a sense of empathy and tolerance towards this group of people and learn to accept them as they are.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is apparent from various scientific researches that indeed sexual orientation transcends the social beliefs that it is purely environmental. To a greater extent, the biological factors dictate whether the person will become a homosexual or heterosexual. The temperaments which are as a result of the genetic inheritance are strong in determining which activities one chooses to accept during childhood. Those who choose to interact more with people of the opposite sex will likely become homosexuals due to physiological arousal that develops towards the people one had no chance to play with.

The society should be aware that homosexuals are not abnormal people in the society, neither are they social outcasts. They are very normal people <https://assignbuster.com/is-sexual-orientation-choice-or-biologically-predetermined/>

like the rest with the only difference being in their sexual orientations. They should therefore not be discriminated against or be made to die just because they are acting out of what the society has recommended.

The religious institutions and the government should be in the forefront to ensure that the homosexuals are protected and accorded with the respect that they deserve. Any one found showing contempt to anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation should be charged and disciplinary actions taken against them for such atrocious acts. This is because as indicated above, homosexuality is not a matter of choice but biological factors.

All in all every one should develop a sense of empathy so that we can tolerate each other regardless of one's sexual orientation. It is true