

The development of sexual orientation essay samples

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Is my sexuality my choice? This is the question that all studies focusing on sexual orientation are grappling with (Wardell, 1972). Pomeroy. Sexual orientation is an enduring sequence of being attracted emotionally, sexually, or romantically to men, women, or both sexes. It also relates to one's sense of identity founded on attraction, behavior, or membership of people with the same attraction (Arreola, Neilands, & Diaz, 2009). Sexual orientation is divided into three categories that include heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. Groups of people including scientists and academicians as have tried to explain the causes of sexual orientation and its genesis. Some myths suggest that a mental illness causes homosexuality. All homosexual people are psychologically disturbed. Another myth is that the sexual orientation is a choice that an individual makes. This myth discounts any explanation based on genetics and biological causation (Ronald, 1987). Finally, other myths suggest that the orientation will change if one is willing to change. Sexual orientation is a topic that has also elicited various reactions from religious and social conservatism who have developed countless myths to explain and discourage this phenomenon. Emotional response has impeded objective discussions surrounding this topic (Rothman, Exner & Baughman, 2011). Scientists also have not been left behind in this controversy; they have failed to reach a consensus on what exactly is the cause of sexual orientation (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). The existing research nonetheless point to the possibility of influence caused by genetics, hormonal development, social and cultural as causative agents of sexual orientation. These factors are finding their way into various legal

systems and continue to influence approval of same-sex marriages, as well as discrimination on the basis of sex (White, 1994).

Scientific Determination of Sexual Orientation

Biological Explanation

Scientists have linked sexual orientation to biological factors. The factors are categorized into three theories that attempt to explain it. The theories include maternal stress theory, genetic theory, and fraternal birth order (Champagne & Curley, 2005). The study describes clear contribution of biological factors to sexual orientation. The maternal stress theory asserts that when a woman is under stress during pregnancy, she undergoes hormonal imbalance in the womb that leads to incomplete masculinization of male fetuses causing homosexuality (Whitehead, 2007).

The theory of maternal stress asserts that stress during pregnancy causes hormonal disturbances in the womb that leads to incomplete masculinization of male fetuses, which in turn results in homosexuality. The theory was established when a study showed that women who experienced stressful pregnancy gave birth to children who later developed to be homosexual and their family had an enormous number of male children (Jacklin, Snow, & Maccoby, 1981). The homosexual boys seemed to have older brothers. These mothers have intricate biological responses when they carry a male fetus. Some develop same allergic-like reactions to as their bodies carry male hormones produced by the fetus (Langevin, Langevin, & Curnoe, 2007). Their immunity against male hormones is reduced which affect masculinization process during the fetus development. The theory asserts that the impact of these hormones on a woman increases as she carries

more male fetuses. This increases the chances that the younger male child will become gay (Herek, 2010).

One of the proponents of this theory LeVay (2010) argues that homosexuals have significantly older brothers compared to straight men. He asserts that a same-sex attraction will depend on the number of the male population in the family and the size of the family. He nonetheless refutes the idea that the elder brother effect in any way feminizes the brain development of late born sons. However, other studies show that maternal stress theory is the weakest of the three biological theories explaining diverse sexual orientation. The theory does not explain other aspects of sexual orientation such as lesbianism and bisexuality. Further, another theory asserts that older brother effect is nonexistent and instead points to the elder sister effect (William & Bruce, 1993). The Brain Studies on Sexual Orientation Other studies show that the brain structure may cause sexual orientation. This is especially so if the brains of homosexuals resemble those of straight women than they resemble those of straight men (Nielsen et al., 2008). In 1991, Simon LeVay conducted a study using a brain of cadavers. The study included 18 men known to be gay and one who was bisexual. He compared their brain to those of 16 other men and six women whom he presumed to be straight. The study found out that INAH 3 was twice as large in the straight men as it is in women showing that INAH is dimorphic with sexual orientation. LeVay uses these findings to indicate that sexual orientation has some biological underpinnings. (LeVay, 1991).

Neurohormonal theory links the brain to sexual orientation through interaction between sex hormones and the developing brain (Phoenix, Goy,

Gerall, & Young, 1959). LeVay supports this theory by stating that the human brain is sexually organized during its prenatal stages and contains huge chunks of testosterone hormones. Sexual orientation can only be developed after puberty when the brain is activated by high hormones level. Thus, homosexuality only occurs as a disturbance in this sexual orientation development process. This is a natural process with nothing in common with one's surroundings. For instance LeVay (2011, p. 40) cites a study the case of David Reimer, who was born as a boy with XY chromosomes. David was however raised as a girl due to medical negligence that saw him lose his penis at a young age. In spite of this socialization, Reimer decided and settled for a male identity. LaVey uses this study to point out that nature other than nurture plays a critical role in sexual orientation (Turkheimer, 2000). Twin Studies Twin studies are another scientific explanation that attempts to explain sexual orientation by comparing genetic and environmental influences. Bailey, Willerman, & Parks (1991) discovered that 52 per cent of monozygotic brothers and 22 percent of dizygotic twins were concordant for homosexuality. Monozygotic shows high concordance of sexual orientation than the dizygotic twins. This variation shows a genetic component in sexual orientation. This study is however criticized by Bouchard and McGue (2003) on the ground that it used small select sample with non-representative selection of subjects. They conducted another study using 289 pairs of monozygotic twins and 495 pairs of dizygotic eggs. The study established 7.7 percent of concordance rates for gay and 5.3 percent for lesbians. This pattern supports LeVay position that genetic influence is independent of social factors.

However, another study conducted in 2010 depicts environmental factors as a cause for homosexuality. The environmental factors include prenatal environment, experience with illness, peer groups, and societal attitudes (Whitehead, 2011). The study revealed that genetic effects accounted for 34 to 39 percent of the variance in sexual orientation while environmental factors accounted for 61 to 66 percent in men. 16 to 17 percent explained genetic factors while 64 to 66 percent explained environmental factors in female. According to the studies, both social and biological factors account in homosexual behavior (Scott, 1997).

Twin studies have been heavily criticized for various reasons. First, monozygotic twins can also be different which account for their discordance for homosexuality. Andersson et al., (2006) list some of the causes of this variance between monozygotic twins. These causes include chorionicity and amniocity. Dichorionic twins will have different hormonal environment because their maternal blood is received from separate placenta resulting to different levels of brain masculinization. On the contrary, monoamniotic twins have the same hormonal environment but can still be affected by twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome (Bailey, Dunne, & Martin, 2000). Another criticism is directed to hormonal exposure during prenatal development that control brain masculinization. The difference in brain structure and cognitive processing between homosexuals and heterosexuals are influenced by exposure to prenatal hormones (Daniel, 1963). However, studies also point out to the fact that the concentration of these chemicals is affected by both fetal as well as maternal immune system, consumption of drugs during pregnancy and maternal stress. All these factors are environmental and have

an impact on one's sexual orientation. This explanation is also connected to fraternal birth order (Case & Ramachandran, 2012) Exotic Becomes Erotic

Another study is pointing to the reason for sexual orientation posits that biological factors on sexual orientation are mediated by one's childhood experience (Hines, 2011). Such factors as child's temperament attract him to certain events more than in others. These factors that are influenced by genetic factors make the child get attracted to things that are enjoyed by children of the same gender (Daryl, 1996). Other children will be attracted to activities enjoyed by opposite sex. This will make such a child feel different from other thus start considering to change. These psychological orientations will then be transformed into sexual arousal making a child inclined to a particular sexual orientation. This is exotic becomes erotic theory.

This study is supported by the fact that most of the homosexuals are gender-nonconforming during their childhood (Leif, Braaten, & Douglas, 1965).

These children are never interested in the activities of their sex in their childhood. In a study conducted by Kinsey Institute where around 1000 gays and lesbians were interviewed, 63 percent of the interviewees reported that they were gender-nonconforming during their childhood. Rosenthal et al., (2011) argue that most of them start feeling the nonconformity at the age of seven and the feeling follow them to adolescent and finally in adulthood. 63 percent of these nonconforming boys grew into gay or bisexual adults while few girls exhibited this phenomenon. In a group made up of 18 girls aged nine years old, all of the girls reported sexual orientation at adolescent and eight of them had requested for sex reassignment.

How People Know their Sexual Orientation

Scientific studies show that people understand their sexual orientation between their middle childhood and early adolescence. This is a period that the young adults start developing attractions towards a certain gender (Savin-Williams, & Ream, 2007). These patterns appear in the form of emotions, romantic and sexual attraction without any prior sexual experience. This means that someone can be celibate but still be able to know their sexual orientation be it gay, lesbian, heterosexual or bisexual. Gays, lesbians, and bisexual have very different experiences of their sexual orientation.

Unfortunately, prejudice, stigma, and discrimination make it cumbersome for many people to accept their sexual orientation, which makes it a long process of identity searching (Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2009).

Conclusions

Existing relationship between biology and sexual orientation continue to elicit much attention from researchers. There is no single reason that reasonably explains the causes and motivation behind sexual orientation. Scientists seem to have concentrated on a combination of factors such as genetic, hormonal, and social factors to explain this phenomenon. From the study, biological theories are the most common explanation for sexual orientation. These factors may include multifaceted consideration such as the relationship between genetic factors and the prenatal environment. They include genes, prenatal hormones, and the brain structure. Since the causes of sexual orientation are multifaceted, other studies have shown that some influence other environmental factors influence sexual orientation. These

factors include the biological randomness, body shape of a parent, prenatal stress, and early maternal interaction. It will, therefore, be necessary as a matter of public interest not to adopt a single cause hypothesis. This would be the best way to answer the question whether our sexual orientation is our choice and be able to explain why a person is gay or straight.

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