The Biology Of Identity Essay, Research Paper

THE BIOLOGY OF IDENTITY

(In hopes to find the TRUTH behind sexual anomalies )

Without having any value judgments on sexual deviancy – the word itself many seem to imply disapproval. Whether it be transvestism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, or sadomasochism, sexual deviancy is by many considered unnatural and inhuman. However these two words unnatural and inhuman is exactly what homosexuality is not. The truth is, sexual deviancy is as much a function of biology and as much a product of nature – as the orthodox sexuality which society accepts as natural . Of course some adult sexual orientation is caused by early social conditioning, but through research and hard evidence, scientists have found that sex, gender and sexual orientation are all determined genetically.

Kate Bornstein the author of Gender Outlaw, states that sex, gender and sexual orientation are all interchangeable like the shuffle of cards. As in her case, she was a transsexual man, but still desired only women. As a transsexual lesbian she contends that though you may be born a certain sex (the physical genitalia), your gender identity can be the complete opposite. When Bornstein was still a physical man she stated: I felt I was a woman, and more importantly I felt I belonged with other women. (Bornstein, 24) The problem, in her eyes, is how people treat one another differently because of gender. Throughout her book, she states that society is the cause of the problem. She condemns the social structure that is based around a bipolar gender system. What is a man and what is a woman , in her mind, makes no difference. Her goal is to, …dismantle the (two-gender) system… and do away with any bias people have toward those who do not fit into the gender system that is already created (,such as herself).

However, Bornstein never questions what made her a homosexual. She describes gender and sexual orientation (to what gender one is attracted to) as a choice one makes. This is, however, is contradictory to her own case. She felt that she was a woman (gender wise), trapped in the body of a man (physically). She never said that she made a choice over what sex she was attracted to, or what gender she felt she was. She stated that she was just born a boy, with the gender of a woman. Through this example, one would have to assume that homosexuality is the product of biology, not psychology. Science has proven that, much like Bornstein, sex, gender and sexual orientation are separate and interchangeable, but genetically based.

The East German scientist, Dr. Gunter Dorner, has devoted his life s work to the theory that exposure to certain hormones before birth determines sexual inclination. He claims that potential future homosexual behavior can be detected through amniocentesis, the test of the uterine fluid which can reveal Down s syndrome in the unborn child. Dorner further claims that, with prenatal injections, homosexuality can be prevented. The male hormone masculinises the mind, where in the absence of testosterone the brain develops along a naturally female pattern. (Dorner, 365) Dorner finds that the brain is not masculinises all in one go. Dorner suggests that in men and women it is the presence or absence of male hormones that build the structure of the brain bit by bit into a male or female pattern of sexual identity. It happens, he says, in three stages – the development of what he calls the sex centre, the mating centres, and the gender-role centres of the brain. First, with the sex centre , the hormones set to work on creating the typical male and female physical characteristics. The next, and to some degree overlapping stage, is the transformation of the mating centre . This Dorner identifies as the hypothalamus which, it is now known, is arranged differently in men and women, and controls sexual behavior in adult life. The last stage is when the hormones get to work on the gender-role centres in the brain of the unborn child, laying down the network in the brain which determine our general behavior like the level of aggression or lack of it, our sociability or individualism, our adventurousness or timidity – characteristics which get fully expressed under the hormonal influence of puberty.

Dorner believes that each or these centres can be independently upset at each stage of development. Dorner has proven his theory with the development of the primary sexual characteristics, by taking genetically female foetuses and exposed them to an abnormal level of male hormone will result in the developed male-like organs. The development of the mating centre, the hypothalamus, Dorner argues, can be upset; in a male, the lower the concentration of androgens, or male hormones, the greater the likelihood that the eventual child will have homosexual tendencies. In girls, a higher level of androgens molds the hypothalamus in a manner which will produce same-sex attraction. Finally the gender-role centres, the wiring up of the brain, and the way the functions are distributed, may follow a male pattern in the female, or a female pattern in the male, depending on the abnormal presence of male or female hormones.

The beauty of this theory is that it explains how, for instance, obviously physical males, with obviously male identities and mannerisms, may be attracted to same-sex partners; in that case, only the second stage, the development of the hypothalamus, and the mating centre, has been upset. Similarly, it explains how some boys, effeminate in looks and behavior, may still be robustly heterosexual in their sexual preferences; their sex centres and gender-role centres have been hormonally unbalanced at a key stage of development, but during the development of the mating centre, nothing unusual occurred. In short, it explains why not all sissies are homosexual, and not all homosexuals are sissies.

A British psychologist, Glen Wilson, the author of Love s Mysteries, agrees with Dorner that the presetting of the brain before birth may sometimes be inappropriate, in that the gender of the child is male and his anatomical appearance is male, but for some reason or another, his brain had not received the necessary hormonal instruction that would cause it to be masculinised. (Wilson, 387) He reminds us that we are dealing with very fine and critical amounts of testosterone, measured in thousands-millionth parts of a gram; a possible explanation of how, in non-identical twins, developing in virtually identical condition in the womb, one may be homosexual and the other not. (Wilson, 89)

An American scientist, Dr. Milton Diamond, also comes to the same general conclusion as Dorner, but believes the development of sexual brain tissue involves four, not three, stages. First, basic sexual patterning, aggressiveness or passivity; second, sexual identity – what sex people think they are; thirdly, sexual object choice, which is the same as Dorner s mating centre; and finally the control centres for the sexual equipment, including the mechanisms of orgasm. If something goes wrong during the development of each or any of these stages, they will eventually be out of phase with each other. So a man may be assertive and aggressive – typically male – yet have a homosexual choice of sexual object; he may have effeminate mannerisms, yet have a high, heterosexual drive. The brain is not sexed in one big band (Diamond, 40)

This hormonal theory would explain why sexual deviancy is so much more common in men (about 10 : 1 ration of men to women homosexuality). (Kinsey, 13) Men have to go through a hormonal process to change their brains from the natural female pattern present in all of us, whatever our eventual sex, from the first weeks of our life in the womb; they have to be soaked in extra male hormone and restructured, which is much greater than that in a female who doesn t need any reconstruction of her brain.

Not surprisingly, these studies have attracted anger from homosexuals, who see these theories as equating homosexuality with disease, or as a 1930-style sexual totalitarianism involving the endocrinological euthanasia of homosexuality . (Dorner, 4) Scientists, too, were initially skeptical, until gradually, the weight of scientific fact has shifted the opinion to the belief in these views. As seen in the film, Paris is Burning, homosexuality is not much of a choice, but a way of life that not many would chose living unless biologically destined to be. We must trust that the very knowledge of the natural and biological springs of sexual abnormality will bring about the recognition that the syndrome is natural, and may change our perceptions of what is normal. After all, the problem, such as Bornstein stated, is with our intolerance that they do not conform with what we think is normal gender identity and sexual behavior. Though it is our biologically wired mind that makes us intolerable and aggressive to the outsider , it is our duty as a society to erase this ignorance by education of the genetically sexual deviant ones.