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MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2005

What Makes People Gay?

by Michael in New York on [8/15/2005 11:53:00 AM](#)

A lengthy, interesting [Boston Globe article about why people are gay](#). It looks at all the recent studies and concludes that people are "born" that way, though well-funded studies are needed and there's a lot more to learn. Basically a sympathetic, friendly article for gays. But, hey, this is a blog and blogs were born to nitpick, so here goes. (Thanks to threader Gypsy Queen for pointing us to this.)

What makes the case of Patrick and Thomas so fascinating is that it calls into question both of the dominant theories in the long-running debate over what makes people gay: nature or nurture, genes or learned behavior.

Actually, only the MSM would describe the debate that way. It's been pretty clear to researchers (and obvious to queers) that sexual orientation is typically due to some combination of genetics and "environment," with environment typically referring to in utero exposure to certain amounts of hormones, etc. People are genetically disposed to being gay and that orientation is "locked in" by the time we're three at most, and most of the factors that lead to it are in utero. (A gross generalization, of course.) But no one serious in the field has argued for many years that dad refusing to play catch with his eight year old son is a contributing factor. Of course, this doesn't account for rare and unusual cases where children are raised in extreme or oppressive environments that lead to sexual confusion or messed-up psychology, nor does it deal with frat boys who are really drunk and really horny.

Proving people are born gay would give them wider social acceptance and better protection against discrimination, many gay rights advocates argue. In the last decade, as this "biological" argument has gained momentum, polls find Americans - especially young adults - increasingly tolerant of gays and lesbians.

No, young people are "tolerant" -- a better word might be "indifferent" or even "gay positive" -- not because of any biological argument but because quite simply they've grown up with gay classmates who've come out at earlier and earlier ages, they've grown up with TV and movies and cable shows where gay characters are common and unnoteworthy (everything from "The Real World" to "Will & Grace" and "Survivor") and thanks to gay civil rights movements many have gay relatives out there in the world. That's why young people think being gay is normal and a part of life -- it is normal and it's always been a part of their life.

Most women, whether they identified as straight, lesbian, or bisexual, were significantly aroused by straight, gay, and lesbian sex. "I'm not suggesting that most women are bisexual," says Michael Bailey, the psychology professor whose lab conducted the studies. "I'm suggesting that whatever a woman's sexual arousal pattern is, it has little to do with her sexual orientation."

Yes, it's the return of J. Michael Bailey, a researcher who is quoted several times in this article, even though the simplest of Google searches would show [Bailey is at the very least a controversial figure who shouldn't be quoted without some serious caveats](#). As Americablog readers know, Bailey lost his prominent post as head of department at Northwestern because of a lengthy year-long

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