

The Search for the Gay Gene:

New Study, Predicable Results

Break Point – Sept. 2, 2019 John Stonestreet

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This is the Post-Truth Worldview on full display...

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Nothing in our culture so clearly demonstrates the controlling power of one’s settled presuppositions like how we think and talk about sexuality. This time the topic is a new study, the largest ever done, on the relationship between genetic makeup and same-sex sexual behavior.

“Research Finds Genetic Links to Same-Sex Behavior,” proclaimed the Wall Street Journal. The New York Times agreed, using this headline, “Many Genes Influence Same-Sex Sexuality, Not a Single Gay Gene.” But NPR, looking at the exact same study, chose a different headline: “Search for ‘Gay Genes’ Comes Up Short in Large New Study.” The AP put it this way: “New Genetic Links to Same-Sex Sexuality Found in Huge Study.” But Science News announced, “There’s No Evidence that a ‘Gay Gene’ Exists.” The Washington Post played it more in the middle with, “There’s No One ‘Gay Gene’ but Genetics Are Linked to Same-Sex Behavior.”

Oh, and then there’s the Guardian’s approach, which I predict will be the settled conclusion from most media outlets within a few days. They chose to Op Ed this story, which is garnering inconsistent and even contradictory headlines, by confidently concluding: “Gay Gene theories belong in the past – now we know sexuality is far more fluid.” In other words, the science is settled on sexuality

despite what any new science tells us. Or as Owen Jones, author of the Guardian article actually wrote, “...while the research may be interesting, it is surely irrelevant.”

Since the 1980s, researchers have been on the hunt for the elusive “gay gene” as a way to prove what was the defining argument of the early LGB movement (this was before the “T” was added): “Born this way.” Of course, as early as 1989, gay advocates admitted that what was increasingly being called sexual orientation was obviously a mix of both nature and nurture. Still, it proved to be not only useful, but effective, so it stuck.

That’s what makes the reaction to this new study so interesting. Clearly newspapers across the spectrum are clamoring for a headline that follows the instructions they were given a couple decades ago about the biological basis of sexual orientation. What they’ve missed (except for NPR and the Guardian) is that advocates have moved on. “Born this way” is no longer a necessary talking point. The cause has won, so the fact that a study like this comes up empty-handed in proving today the very thing everyone proclaimed yesterday as settled science will elicit only a shrug.

But newspapers know the sort of abuse they face if they get this wrong and, apparently, so do the researchers. They couched their study in all kinds of politically correct jargon and clarifications, even consulting with science communication teams (?) and LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups to help them communicate what they found about LGBTQIA+. The study’s lead author, Andrea Ganna, was careful to say that homosexuality is “a natural part of our diversity as a species.” See how she couched that ideological presupposition in the verbiage of scientific authority?

What the study showed, however, was unremarkable. There was no evidence of a single “gay gene.” There was evidence of modest to weak correlation between a combination of genetic factors and those who had reported to have had a same-sex sexual experience. That last clarification is important for two reasons: First, it’s being assumed that having had a same-sex sexual experience is the same as having a particular sexual orientation. And second, the same genetic combination also showed correlation for risky behavior. Might the decision to have risky sexual experiences be connected to the tendency to engage in risky behavior overall?

And even that tendency only has a correlation with this combination of genetic factors which, of course, is not the same as genes causing the behavior.

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