

The problem with the belief that child sexual abuse causes homosexuality / bisexuality.

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There is an assumption among some people that the reason people become homosexual or bisexual is because of trauma resulting from sexual abuse in childhood.

Understandably, the majority of LGBT people, when coming to terms with their sexual orientation or trying to understand it, will ask the inevitable question, "*why?*" or, more specifically, "*why me?*". I personally have heard many LGBT survivors question whether their sexual orientation is a direct consequence of their earlier sexual abuse (Dimock, 1988).

Within the scientific and social science literature, there is a myriad of research claiming to have identified the direct cause for homosexuality. One of the hypotheses regularly tested is that of whether sexual abuse itself can be the cause of homosexuality in adult life. The results of this research is inconclusive since some research finds a direct correlation between child abuse and homosexuality (Macmillan, 1997; Tomeo et al, 2001; Holmes et al, 1998; Doll et al, 1992; Soukup, 1995; Shrier et al, 1988; Dickson; Finkelhor, 1984), whereas other research expressly denies any correlational link (Ridley, 2003; Balsam et al 2005; Bell et al, 1981; Hammersmith, 1982; Peters & Cantrall, 1991; Slap, 1998). Clearly, the jury is still out!

The intention of this article is not to question why someone becomes homosexual or heterosexual as despite there being many theories focussing on the nature verses nurture debate, there is no universally acknowledged conclusion. In the presence of such conflicting research, we are no closer to conclusively understanding whether a persons' sexual orientation is determined or strongly influenced by a history of child sexual abuse. However, leaving contradictory statistics aside for the moment, the aim of this article is to identify how problematic it is to claim or jump to the conclusion that anyone is LGBT as a direct result of sexual abuse experiences. Its just some food for thought!

SO - why is it a problem to claim that CSA *causes* a person to become GLBT?

The numbers don't add up!:

The National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs) 1.51% of the population of the US identify as GLBT, whereas other studies put this figure as high as 8% (Fay et al, 1989). However, statistics for people abused in childhood are significantly higher than this, with reliable estimates given for child sexual abuse to be 16% for males and 27% for females in the USA (NRCCSA, 1994).

Therefore, if there is a causal link between childhood sexual abuse and identifying as GLBT later in life, then why aren't the figures for the number of GLBT people in the population reflected by the abuse statistics? There are significantly more cases of sexual abuse than there are people that identify as GLBT (Macmillan, 1997), and furthermore, the vast majority of persons sexually abused as children are heterosexual (Keith, 1991).

In addition to this, virtually all statistics agree that females are more likely to be sexually abused in childhood than males are - and yet, and yet there are proportionally more men that identify as being gay than there are women who identify as lesbian (Hite, 1991; Janus, 1993, Jefferson, 2001).

Isn't it just too simplistic?

Some claim it is impossible to develop universal theories about the origins of homosexuality because there is no theory that is going to fit for every individual and every situation (Moberly, 1983).

As human beings, we are very complex, and it is far too simplistic to say with any certainty that A caused B to happen. To use an analogy, you can teach someone who is left-handed to write with their right hand, but they will forever remain naturally left-handed.

One neuroscientist wrote, "Any human behavior is going to be the result of complex intermingling of genetics and environment. It would be astonishing if it were not true for homosexuality" (McFadden, 1998).

The discrepancy between genders:

Some people question whether it is the fact that they were abused by a man / woman that results in their being GLBT.

Female children are statistically more likely to be abused by a male. Lesbian survivors may question whether the reason they are a lesbian is because they fear men as a result of their abuse. This could make sense until you consider the gay male argument related to this.

Male children are also statistically more likely to be abused by a male. Some claim that a man may become gay because he has been abused by a man and therefore identifies sex with men.

In effect, this proposes that a female becomes a lesbian as she is so scared of men because she relates all men to her male abuser. BUT a male actually becomes gay, and hence seeks relationships with men, *because* he had a male abuser??

Homosexuality itself could increase the chance of abuse:

There is one interesting theory put forward by Wachob (1999) that children who grow up later to identify as LGBT are more at risk of sexual abuse as children. She stipulates that being abused does not cause homosexuality, but rather that children who will later identify as LGBT are more vulnerable to child abuse.

The reasons she gives for this is that LGBT adults report that their behavior and interaction with others was often atypical in childhood when compared to their peers. Being or feeling "different" can result in social isolation / exclusion, which in turn can lead to a child being

more vulnerable to the instigation and continuation of abuse (Gracia, 2003).

In addition to this, many gay men in particular, report that they remember feeling dissatisfied or uncomfortable with their body as children, and as young teens they sought out situations in which to try to make sense of their sexual feelings (O' Leary, 2006). Unfortunately, therefore, abuse could occur in this situation because abusers take advantage of the child's uncertainties and insecurities.

Being GLBT is not dysfunctional!

Claims that GLBT can be "caused" by child sexual abuse are troublesome because this implicitly implies that being GLBT is not a positive thing, but something that has occurred as a result of serious trauma. Therefore are we not comparing being GLBT to suffering from PTSD, DID or depression? Being GLBT is not an illness!

Infact, talking of illness, according to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), a history of sexual abuse does not appear to be more prevalent in children who grow up to identify as GLBT than in people who identify as heterosexual.

Of course, sexual abuse can interfere with a survivors sexual development, sexual enjoyment, the way they engage in sexual behaviors, the ability to know and voice what they want – but it seems unlikely that it would play a role in creating passion, attraction and love for another person.

It just feels "right"

For many LGBT people, they just feel that their sexual orientation is "right" for them. Like it just clicks in with who they are and that it is naturally how they identify with themselves, with others and with the world. As one woman said *"I know I was predestined to be a lesbian. If I wasn't, it wouldn't feel so perfect"* (anonymous).

"The truth is that sexual abuse and sexuality are a million miles apart; they truly have nothing in common. Something as wonderful and beautiful as our sexuality could never have arisen out of something as ugly and painful as sexual abuse." (Kali Munto, 2002)

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