

“Sexuality and Gender” by Lawrence S. Mayer and Paul R. McHugh, *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2016.

**P**lain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy in England, a 1728 tome, blamed tea and the “pernicious influence” of Italian opera. Today, there’s still alarm over the growth of what folks still confuse with that ancient xenophobic gang’s attempted rapes at Sodom. During the intervening centuries, same-sex orientation and relationship for which we’ve not been adequately prepared has been blamed on astrological quirks, demons, masturbation, fluoride, trauma in utero, genes, smothering mothers, distant fathers, child sex abuse, “lifestyle choice” and almost anything else but the kitchen sink.

A conservative policy group focusing on “crucial moral and political questions” has published this survey of selected studies culled by Mayer, a psychologist, and McHugh, a psychiatrist, though the authors claim not to be dealing with “morality”.

“Born that way” is an oft-repeated catchphrase that does catch the fact that *everyone* – whether heterosexual or homosexual – *feels* “born that way”. But these authors’ assumed purpose is that, in the case of homosexuals, “born that way” must be debunked.

Also, the authors reject the view that, “homosexuality or heterosexuality is in any given person unchangeable and determined entirely apart from choices, behaviors, life experiences, and social contexts.” But, the data from many decades of failed “ex-gay” efforts and prior decades of psychoanalysis indicate the *immutability* of the orientation of one’s sex drive, at least in males, whatever fluidity some females may experience. Of course, one’s circumstances, e.g., religious scruples or the unavailability of a preferred sex partner, may prompt a male homosexual to marry a woman or a heterosexual prisoner to rape a cellmate. But neither case demonstrates any “fluidity” of sexual orientation.

Oddly, the report claims the term, “orientation”, is itself, “highly ambiguous” and that it “can refer to a set of behaviors, to feelings of attraction, or to a sense of identity”. But, the *very common, everyday* use of the term is for the *direction* of one’s *involuntary sexual attraction*. All who tried for so long and failed to get rid of their sex drive’s *same-sex direction*, still sense their *orientation* as *anything but* ambiguous. They chose to change their *behavior* and *identity* but that never changed their *involuntary sexual orientation*.

In the mid-1960s, in my doctoral dissertation on homosexuality, I reviewed the research on etiology and treatment. Carlfred Broderick, editor of *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* and a member of my dissertation committee, judged it, “scrupulously thorough [and, with its] remarkable analytic ability [it’s] the best in existence.” I concluded that the etiology involved one’s sense of self and others and may be a matter of genetics and experience, and it was otherwise unclear. Sociologists William Simon and John Gagnon called its etiology, “the most difficult and least rewarding of all questions”. *It still is*.

Yet, however complicated the pathways to same-sex orientation, and for all practical purposes, the complexity need not be better figured out before a flourishing partnership of same-sex orientation *can* be and *is* lived for a lifetime of loving intimacy, “for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, etc.”

In view of the *mental health problems* of *heterosexuals* growing up in a society that fully expects them, accepts them, never criminalized them or classified them as mentally ill or disqualified them from jobs or kicks them out of their families or tells them

they’re going to hell for their sexuality, these authors are far too quick to conclude, so unfittingly, that, in the same-sex oriented, *more* than *social stressors* must account for their “elevated risk [of] anxiety, depression, and suicide, as well as behavioral and social problems”. On the contrary, their survival in such a homophobic society is evidence of mental health.

While the authors of the report are civil, unfortunately and predictably, the antigay Right is pushing its take on the report with headlines that misunderstand and misrepresent the report’s significance. *Charisma* cheers: “Johns Hopkins Scientists Offer Absolute Proof Gay Agenda’s ‘Born This Way’ Is a Lie”. *The Daily Signal* gloats: “Almost Everything the Media Tell You About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity is Wrong”. *But the lies and the wrong* are really in *these headlines*.

The frank title of the *The Weekly Standard’s* review is, “Studying the Unstudiable”, yet the reviewer, Jonathan V. Last, uses a metaphor of a *microscope* to refer to the authors’ “dismantle[ing of] ‘politically correct orthodoxies’ piece by piece.” The authors, though, only *reviewed* others’ research; they didn’t try to *replicate* it. And while Last *politicizes* the report, he says, “It is *not* a political document.” Neither is it *science* of the sort that comes to mind by Last’s mentioning a “microscope”. He notes that nobody knows *what all* is behind sexual orientation and warns that, “anyone who insists that they *do* know is likely to be selling you a political agenda” – as he, himself, is doing.

Refreshingly, *The American Conservative’s* Robert VerBruggen’s review notes that Mayer and McHugh, “don’t strike quite the right balance between the innate and the environmental – in fact, they gloss over some of the most compelling evidence on the innate side of the ledger.” He’s right. He cautions his fellow conservatives, “rather than treating it as definitive, readers should seek out the other side of the story before making up their minds. The case for ‘born this way’ is stronger than they let on.”

Erosion of conservative antigay rhetoric continues. A stalwart evangelical publisher, Zondervan, has announced a November release of its new book, *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*: “Until recently most books on Christianity and homosexuality fit neatly into two camps: books on the traditional view were written by evangelicals and books on the affirming view were written by non-evangelicals. Today, this divide no longer exists. ... The question of what the Bible says about homosexuality is now an intra-evangelical discussion.”

In this new book, two authors present an “Affirming view”; two present a “Traditional view”. Yet, the venerable Eerdmans has been publishing several works by one of the “Affirming” authors who’s supported same-sex couples for years. And a “Traditional” author, Wesley Hill, untraditionally calls himself a “gay Christian” or a “celibate gay Christian”, to the distress of antigay Christians. But Hill is thus granting his *given sexual orientation* and his *commitment to celibacy*, with no expectation of reorientation.

The evangelical reformation’s understanding of homosexuality and acceptance of same-sex couples goes back longer than Zondervan suggests. For more than four decades now, Evangelicals Concerned has been encouraged by support from many of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century’s leading evangelicals and over a hundred of them have keynoted EC’s retreats.

