

## **Are People Born Gay?**

The notion that people are ‘born gay’ provides a good example of how preliminary scientific findings can be seized upon, politicised and then embedded in culture as an indisputable fact that ‘everybody knows’ is true.

Twenty years ago a study claimed to have found a specific gene linked to male sexual orientation. It was never replicated but it helped to spawn the idea that there are just two groups of people – gay or straight – whose sexual interests and attractions are somehow fixed at birth.

Since then the evidence for a genetic cause has weakened considerably. Genes contribute to the development of our sexual desires and interests – just as they contribute to the development of personality traits such as humility and compassion. But whatever our attractions and instinctive interests, they are almost certainly the result of a complex interplay between genes and environment. And of course all kinds of factors come into play as we decide whether and how to act upon our attractions and desires.

The ‘born gay’ theory also implies that our sexual interests are fixed and inflexible. But the more reliable surveys (all of them have problems of accuracy) now suggest that bisexuality is the most common identity label chosen by women. And there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that for many men, too, sexuality can be experienced as more fluid and changeable.

This complexity does not diminish the reality that a minority of men and women experience same-sex attraction as a powerful experience throughout their lives. But we need to recognise that it is but one part of a larger, more flexible, picture of human sexuality and we should certainly think carefully before saddling children and young people with identity-fixing labels. Many faithful Christians, whether or not they believe they were born gay, prefer their given identity in Christ as the basis on which to order and discipline their sexual interests and desires.

### RESOURCES:

[D. De Pomeroy \(2010\), ‘The Witness of Science’ in P. Groves, The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality. SPCK](#)

[L. Diamond \(a leading researcher on sexual fluidity\), 'Sexual Fluidity of Men and Women'](#)

[‘Generation LGBTQIA’ \(2013\), New York Times](#)

[P. Ould, ‘Can your sexuality change?’](#)

Jenell Williams Paris – an anthropologist critiquing the gay/straight distinction, '[Does Sexual Orientation Equal Identity?](#)' and '[BCSC - Interview with Jenell Pais](#)'.