TOWARD UNDERSTANDING

The purpose of this column is to create a better understanding of homosexual problems through the psychiatric viewpoint.

BLANCHE M. BAKER, M.D., Ph.D.

Dear Dr. Baker,

Over a year ago I read a very interesting article in ONE where it was said that one of the causes of homosexuality is inheritance and the case history of two identical twins, separated at birth, was mentioned. Both of them had, in maturity, been found to be homosexual to the same extent. Ever since, I've been engaged in a very difficult and (unfortunately) not too scientific an investigation on this subject.

I'm one of those exceptionally lucky individuals who has found a very satisfactory lover, a job I like and which has given me a very satisfactory income and independence from both our families and society in general; and I've also had the great fortune of acquiring a large group of "gay" friends, all of them of similar backgrounds, social and economic levels. Most important of all, we are all quite well adjusted to homosexual life in Mexico where taboos are even greater than those in the States due to the fact that this is an exaggeratedly masculine society ("macho" is the real term).

I started looking around and made a very interesting discovery: ALL of the members of my group have some relative who is also a homosexual. Some have had grandfathers who practiced a certain amount of it before their marriages; most have had uncles, and there is even one whose mother lives with her friend and has done so for many years. Many have homosexual brothers or sisters.

I guess this is an exceptional group because we have had the opportunity of investigating into our family histories two or three generations back, which is only possible in a society like the one we have in Mexico. Here people seldom move away from their home towns more than once in their lives and family skeltons are easy to dig out of the family closet.

Now I must admit that there are a few whom I have not been able to get any information on, nor do I think I ever will, and perhaps in most of their cases there has been a suppressed homo in the family who due to social pressure never let his or her true nature come out, and who has passed his true nature on to his offspring who in the freer society of our day have been able to live a truly satisfying life.

I submit this information to you so you can let some of my fellow readers find out about themselves and maybe do some investigating along the same lines and submit it to you.

Maybe in the future we can establish a greater knowledge of why people are gay and society will come to realize that it would do better to let homosexuals be than to try to force us into marriage and child bearing, which would probably just lead to a greater increase in our numbers.

Another bit of interesting information about our group is that we range from the rather effeminate type who has always known he is gay and has never tried to change, to those of us who have fought against it for years and who have tried to get out of gay life through all means available—church, psychiatric care, marriage and suppression.

Among the girls in our group, some are very feminine and others are quite butch, but all have good jobs and manage to keep their families and associates out of their personal lives. This is true of the boys, too. Some of us have let our families know of our true personalities and in all cases at least a great amount of acceptance has been achieved, if not complete understanding.

Sincerely,
A. L.

Dear A.L.,

I wish to thank you for your very frank letter about genetics and homosexuality. This according to my way of thinking is the basic factor producing homosexuality. Your letter comes at just the right time to give information about the role of genetics in the production of homosexual individuals. From time to time in my column in ONE I have mentioned various factors which contribute to the production of a homophile.

In the last issue of ONE, for July, I discussed the role of the Mother figure. This covers but part of the picture of the enviornmental factors at work. However, in that article I indicated that basic biological factors exist upon which enviornmental factors operate as molding influences. The chief of these is the blending of elements inherited through the bodies of the Mother and Father. The testicles or male sex glands and the ovaries or female sex glands, in addition to functioning as endocrine glands which supply chemical regulators for the body, produce special sex cells (sperm from the Father and eggs or ova from the Mother.) These sex cells or gametes carry small bodies which stain deeply called chromosomes within which are tiny chemical packets called genes which regulate the formation and function of organs of the physical body. These chromosomes are sorted out before the body in which they reside can function sexually to produce new individuals. This sorting process is a complex process known as reduction division, and it results in the mature sex cells or gametes carrying half the number of chromosomes found in ordinary body cells. In the mature gametes, the picture is further complicated by the fact that in human males there are 47 X-chromosomes and one small chromosome which is quite different from the others called a Y-chromosome. The functions of the X and Y chromosomes have been carefully studied in the lower animals and it has been found that offspring which have all X chromosomes tend to be females, while those which carry X chromosomes and a Y chromosome tend to be males. Thus sex determination according to X and Y chromosomes would seem to be a very simple matter, but in human beings genetics is so tremendously complicated there are other factors at work which make it more difficult to determine if a given individual is male or female.

While it seems very likely that the balance of X and Y chromosomes may be a strong determiner in the production of a male or female body, there are so many other complex factors at work that we cannot say a

person is a male because he has a penis or other characteristic male secondary sex factors, for there are many cases on record where a person who appears to be quite masculine has many behavior patterns resembling a female and vice-versa. In fact we must bear in mind if we are to understand the nature of homosexuality that men and women are not as different as we have been led to believe; every male has certain female characteristics such as rudimentary breasts and a rudimentary uterus while females have a rudimentary penis called the clitoris. Furthermore some individuals have been found to have both male (testicles) and female (ovaries) sex glands. Such individuals are known as true hermaphrodites. This condition is extremely rare. More common is the condition known as intersex in which the penis is much smaller than the ordinary male, or the clitoris much larger resembling a small penis. Thus, at birth it is sometimes extremely difficult to tell if the child is male or female and only surgery may reveal the true state of affairs. Further complications arise, however, because the size of the sex organs do not necessarily determine the sex functions of an individual. For example, a man with very small penis may actually be potent as a male while another with a normal penis may have strong feminine drives, loathe being a man and playing the manly role. The latter type frequently finds the penis to be an annoyance so they beg for surgery to eliminate it so they may have a vagina and function as a woman. There are many cases of this on record; the most publicized being that of Christine Jorgensen. There are also cases of individuals who have been reared as women, who have had plastic surgery and hormone therapy so they may function as men. A Scotish woman doctor whose sex was changed was able to marry a woman. This is sex reversal and is very complex.

If you wish to know more about the heredity mechanism mentioned above it would be well for you to get a book which deals with elementary genetics. Monk, Gregor Mendel worked out the laws of genetics from the peas he grew in his garden. The basic truth of these laws of genetics has been demonstrated beyond question. However, when we come to the laws governing genetics in the higher animals, especially in man, we find that there are many other factors at work, thus is it well to bear in mind that while there are definite laws of human heredity, man is much more complicated than a garden pea. The study of identical twins is very helpful in evaluating the roles of heredity and environment in producing homosexuals. Theoretically twins, having the same heredity makeup, should both be homosexual or both heterosexual; yet this is not anways true. Environmental factors get in the way.

An adequate study of the genetics of homosexuality has never been made. Your letter indicates a growing acceptance of homosexuality which has been considered so vile and loathsome that it has been difficult to obtain honest data regarding its existence in families. They would rather admit there were murderers in the family than admit the existance of a homosexual. Ignorance about homosexuality has continued because many who have been homosexual were unaware of its presence and became mentally ill, developed alchoholism and other neurotic symtoms because they did not know how to handle their condition. We are all fortunate to be living in a time in which there is an ever growing understanding of the problem.

I would appreciate it if those who read this column would send us information about their own hereditary factors.

Sincerely, Dr. Blanche