

LETTERS

Values, Research Questions, and the News Media

The recent report by B. A. Gladue, R. Green, and R. E. Hellman (28 Sept., p. 1496) of different neuroendocrine responses in heterosexual men, homosexual men, and heterosexual women was immediate news. An Associated Press (AP) dispatch stressed that the study found "clear evidence of a biological difference between homosexual and heterosexual men . . . that may have developed before birth." The AP quoted Gladue as cautioning that the hormonal response pattern could not be used as a "screening device" to identify potential homosexuals (1). Elsewhere Gladue was quoted as warning that the findings do not indicate there is "a correctable chemical difference in the brain or elsewhere that makes a man gay or straight [emphasis mine]" (2).

Underlying these reports is the popular ideology that homosexuality should be screened out, corrected, or prevented. While researchers studying politically charged topics such as sexual orientation cannot be held responsible for journalists' reactions, we can shape those reactions by carefully framing research questions and explicitly stating alternative explanations of data. Gladue *et al.* may have attempted this, but their report contains subtle value assumptions nonetheless.

By locating their research within the context of pursuing "a biological explanation of homosexuality" and characterizing their findings as inviting "the idea that there may be physiological developmental components in the sexual orientation of some homosexual men," Gladue *et al.* reveal two important assumptions. First, they imply that heterosexuality needs no explanation. Critics of "heterosexual bias" in scientific research point out that trying to explain homosexuality (rather than sexual orientation in general) presumes that heterosexuality is somehow more natural and desirable (3).

Second, focusing exclusively on a biological approach obscures an important alternative interpretation of the data. Gladue and his colleagues scrupulously avoid the conclusion that a particular neuroendocrine response pattern shapes subsequent sexual orientation, but comment that "our findings are not inconsistent with such an interpretation." Other possibilities are not detailed, including that psychological variables may have strongly influenced physiological responses. Because subjects were adults selected on the basis of exclusive homo-

sexual or heterosexual behavior patterns, their biological responses may have been more a consequence of their professed sexual orientation than antecedent to it. Since the role of psychological factors in physiological processes (for example, psychogenic illnesses and placebo effects) is not well understood, laypersons reading press reports of the study might not have been led to this interpretation without guidance from the researchers.

Explicit consideration of all plausible hypotheses is especially important in this area because the relative contribution of biological and cultural factors to what we call sexual orientation remains obscure. Recent anthropological and historical studies point to the necessity of distinguishing discrete sexual acts from the social roles and identities constructed around them. In other cultures, terms such as "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" may have very different meanings, if they are meaningful at all (4). Studies in this society of "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals" tap cultural identities, individual preferences, and specific behaviors. Which of these can be explained with biological data remains unclear.

As long as the status of homosexual persons in the United States remains a politically charged topic, the very framing of a scientific research question on sexual orientation will elicit value-laden coverage from the news media. Researchers studying human sexuality, therefore, should take care to avoid reinforcing popular prejudice against lesbians and gay men.

GREGORY M. HEREK

Department of Psychology,
Yale University,
New Haven, Connecticut 06520-7447

References and Notes

1. San Francisco *Chronicle*, 21 September 1984, p. 1; Seattle *Times*, 21 September 1984, p. A13.
2. J. Brody, *New York Times*, 21 September 1984, p. A16.
3. S. Morin, *Am. Psychol.* 32, 629 (1977).
4. G. M. Herek, *J. Homosexual.* 10, 2 (1984).

Some readers, generally uninformed about our research, may (on the basis of a few press reports and without a careful reading of our scientific report) draw erroneous conclusions about the scientific scope of our research and our motives and values. Herek's letter, in which he tends to highlight some facts and ignore others, exemplifies this problem.

We do not agree with Herek's characterization of the research as looking for the "explanation" of homosexuality and ignoring that of heterosexuality. Two of our three study groups were heterosexual, and each of the groups we studied

Zeiss dealers for laboratory microscopes and image analysis systems

MA, NH, ME, VT

Altantex & Zieler Corp., Dedham, MA (617) 326-7410

MD, DC

Baltimore Instrument Co., Inc., Baltimore, MD
(301) 426-3656

MT, ID, OR, WA, AK

Bartels & Stout, Inc., Bellevue, WA
(206) 453-1705/883-2587

NV, northern CA

Carson Optical Instruments, Inc., Oakland, CA
(415) 834-2587

West TX

Dexter Instrument Co., San Antonio, TX (512) 699-0063

VA, NC, WV

Eastern Microscope Co., Inc., Raleigh, NC
(919) 782-0000

IN, WI, IL

Eberhardt Instrument Co., Downers Grove, IL
(312) 964-4240

Southern CA

Max Erb Instrument Co., Burbank, CA (213) 849-2374

MS, LA

Flanagan Instruments, Inc., Mandeville, LA (504) 885-1414

SC, GA, AL, TN

Georgia Instruments Corp., Atlanta, GA (404) 458-8946

KY, IN, IA, IL, MO, KS, NE

Hitschel Optical Instruments, Inc., St. Louis, MO
(314) 727-2250

PR, FL

Instrument Associates, Inc., Longwood, FL
(305) 830-8616

CO, WY, UT, NV

JCS Associates, Inc., Englewood, CO (303) 798-9611

NY (upstate)

Micro-Med Instruments, Inc., Walden, NY
(914) 564-2999

AZ, NM, NV, OK

Microscopes Southwest, Inc., Tempe, AZ
(602) 838-7801

Northern CA

Microscopes West, Inc., Sunnyvale, CA
(408) 735-7474

AR, northcentral TX

Micro-Tech Instruments, Inc., Dallas, TX
(214) 446-9600

OH, IN, MI, KY, WV, western PA

Morgan Instruments, Cincinnati, OH
(513) 874-2191

NY (Long Island)

Morrell Instrument Co., Inc., Melville, NY
(516) 673-8777

MN, SC, ND, WI, IA, MI

North Central Instruments, Inc., Plymouth, MN
(612) 559-3008

PA, DE

Opto-Systems, Inc., Jenkintown, PA (215) 884-3337

HI

Otake Instruments, Inc., Honolulu, HI
(808) 395-0891

MA, RI, CT

Rainin Instrument Company, Inc., Woburn, MA
(617) 935-3050

NY (New York City & Westchester)

Reinhardt Instruments, Inc., Woodbury, NY
(516) 427-3636


Southeast TX

Schares Instrument Corp., Houston, TX
(713) 468-4460

NJ

Sylvax Scientific, Inc., Morris Plains, NJ
(201) 267-5799/267-5047

One Zeiss Drive
Thornwood, NY 10594
(914) 747-1800



Carl Zeiss, Inc.

demonstrated its own characteristic hormonal response pattern. We emphasized that neither male group showed the typical female response pattern (which itself counters a popular myth about gay men). Indeed, the title of our paper is clear about what we report: "Neuroendocrine response to estrogen and *sexual orientation* [emphasis ours]." It is not possible to understand or "explain" the development of heterosexuality without also knowing something about the development of homosexuality.

The notion that we fail to consider alternative physiological or nonbiological explanations for our findings is without merit. Our report explicitly stated, "Since we may have measured an adult hormonal correlate of sexual orientation that is causally independent of sexual differentiation, a causal relation [between the endocrine response and sexual orientation] should not be inferred. Unknown physiological factors in the adult may account for the differential responses of LH [lutening hormone] and testosterone reported here" (page 1498). In addition, we carefully enunciated a multitude of interpretations of the data in our report and to the news media.

Herek writes that scientists can shape media coverage of research by carefully framing research questions and explicitly stating alternative explanations of data. To some extent this may be possible, and we share Herek's concern about what the press chooses to emphasize in its coverage of research. But we do not write press reports. Nevertheless, while journalistic coverage of our research varied in quality and accuracy, it was, for the most part, responsible. As Herek points out, however we interact with the media in our effort to educate and inform, we cannot be held responsible for journalist's reactions, nor for reactions of readers who will not be persuaded by logic, scientific evidence, or reason.

If there is an underlying assumption behind this research project, it is that there may be influence from the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis on sexual orientation. Overall, our research interests focus on many aspects of sexuality and the development of sexual orientation. This report is but one brief paper among many related to patterns of sexual orientation, nearly all of which are psychological and sociological studies.

We agree and regret that prejudice is rampant against lesbians and gay men in our society. Yet many lesbians and gay men have applauded our report of a biological correlate of homosexual orientation. We understand that they see it as an inroad against the vicious attacks of certain organizations that condemn ho-

mosexual orientation as purely willful, sinful, and objectionable. If homosexuality should some day be demonstrated to be a biological variant of human sexuality, in the way left-handedness is a biological variant of handedness, acceptance of alternative sexual lifestyles may become a reality.

BRIAN A. GLADUE

Department of Psychology, Laboratory of Psychoendocrine Research, North Dakota State University, Fargo 58105

RICHARD GREEN

Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science, State University of New York, Stony Brook 11794

RONALD E. HELLMAN

South Beach Psychiatric Center, Brooklyn, New York 11201

Academic Freedom

Harold Shapiro's editorial (6 July, p. 9) praises the university for being an "intellectually open community" and urges that it not become "the ally of a particular point of view." Shapiro writes that academic freedom is threatened by "interest groups" who exhort the university to take "official positions" on such issues as South Africa and militarism. It seems to me that he is misdiagnosing the situation.

A university, of course, is more than a community of scholars and students; it is also a political and economic institution in society. Such an institution is not and cannot be neutral on social issues. It has funds to invest, and it either does or does not invest some of them in South Africa. Either way it is making a moral and political statement as well as a financial one. Does the university have an ROTC program? If so, it has taken an institutional stand in favor of U.S. military preparedness and the uses to which it is put, and it is clearly an ally of the "particular point of view" that shapes these policies. To me it appears that the non-ideological position for a university would be refraining from actual participation in ROTC or other military programs, while remaining intellectually open to all points of view. Yet many academics regard ROTC as acceptable, but find attempts to remove it undesirably "political." Why is this?

I certainly agree with Shapiro that we must defend academic freedom. But this cannot be done by the impossible attempt to avoid taking stands on moral or political issues. Surely the first step in addressing such issues as military programs or investment policy should be to discard the myth of the nonpolitical uni-

versity and to look at the situation more realistically. We might find, for example, that ROTC is a price universities must pay in order to function, or that South African investments are too profitable to forego. (I believe neither.) But let us not delude ourselves that the institution has escaped being "the ally of a particular point of view."

JOHN LAMPERTI

Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

The question of whether or not a university should "take sides" must certainly include the question of who (if anyone) speaks for the university and how the spokesperson arrives at decisions. In some cases the regents or trustees take an unusually significant position, in others it is a president or chancellor, and occasionally it is a faculty or student group. Until the spokesperson question can be answered, the question of taking sides is moot.

Shapiro concludes that in order to maintain its intellectual openness the university should not take sides. It is not clear that this precludes acceptance of basic operating (or moral) principles that would guide policy decisions. A belief in, and application of, justice would support an affirmative action policy. What can be lost in intellectual openness by acknowledging this relationship? Without acceptance of at least the basic virtues, the integrity of educational institutions is easily lost. With these, creativity and community can operate with greater freedom.

Damage to higher education as an institution has resulted from well-publicized dogmatic positions. The Nixon library has yet to find a university home. Jean Kirkpatrick may not be hosted on campus. So it seems that with the described switch to academic freedom, there is no less dogmatism—just a different kind. In no way does the new dogmatism, or any other, support inquiry, creativity, and community.

JOSEPH B. HARRIS

Department of Biology, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point 54481

As a careful reading of my editorial reveals, I did not say that universities should refrain from taking stands on all moral issues, merely that we must be cautious about adding to the number of issues on which we have already taken a stand. I still believe that this is good advice.

HAROLD T. SHAPIRO

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 48109