

Penguins, Fruit Flies, and People by Foster Stockwell

The popularity of the recent movie "March of the Penguins," (<http://wip.warnerbros.com/marchofthepenguins/>) with its depiction of the way these birds trek back and forth over the ice to reach their breeding ground, has brought forth a series of ridiculous statements from the religious right that have no support in the story displayed on the screen. Such comments are comparable to the Rev. Pat Robertson's conclusion that Hurricane Katrina was God's condemnation of the gay community in New Orleans (<http://mediamatters.org/items/200509130004>) and that homosexuality "is the last step in the decline of Gentile Christianity." Surely such vituperative comments need to be challenged.

According to *The New York Times*, various conservatives are invoking "March of the Penguins" as an inspiration for their causes. Some praise the penguins for their monogamy, even though the film makes it clear that the breeding pairs change partners each year. Opponents of abortion say it verifies "the beauty of life and the rightness of protecting it." A Christian magazine claims it makes "a strong case for intelligent design," which is the term lately used for Creationism. And many on the religious right say that the film proves there really are no penguins that are homosexual.

It is unnecessary to take issue with each of these misinformed views, but the matter of penguin homosexuality has come to the forefront because of the reports that are coming from various scientists and evidenced at a number of zoos. The New York Aquarium reports that it has two Humboldt penguins, Wendell and Cass, which have associated in a gay relationship for some time. Several other zoos report that they have observed the same behavior among their captive penguins over a long period of time.

None of this surprises biologists and zoologists who claim that among the approximately 1,000 to 3,000 animal species whose behavior has been well researched and described in the literature, there are about 450 species in which some individuals have been shown to have a clear homosexual behavior (<http://www.bidstrup.com/sodomy.htm>). It is of course relatively easy to determine this when carefully observing the activities of monogamous species, but much more difficult when the species are promiscuous. So the figure 450 is likely low.

Even among insects homosexual practices have been reported, and a recent experiment conducted by Ward Odenwald and Shang-Ding Zhang at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland (<http://www.skeptictank.org/gaygene.htm>), demonstrated that the transplantation of a single gene into male members of a fruit fly species caused each of them to immediately display clear homosexual behavior. (Fruit flies are among the most sexually prolific creatures on earth. Their ability to produce a new generation in two weeks has made them the darlings of genetics researchers for nearly a century.)

Various attempts to assess the percentage of the human population that is predominantly or exclusively homosexual in Britain, France, and the United States have led to assessments that range from one or two percent to the ten percent cited by Alfred Kinsey in his monumental study of sexuality, conducted in the late 1940s. Whatever the case, scientific evidence strongly suggests that homosexuality is a biologically determined trait, not a "lifestyle" choice. This is undoubtedly the reason why most, if not all, attempts to "choose either a gay or heterosexual lifestyle" inevitably end in failure.

Whatever the case, today there is overwhelming scientific and medical knowledge that points to the inescapable conclusion that homosexuality is one of God's gifts and that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice. It is something of which people become aware as they mature. Homosexuality is not something "that can be caught, like 'flu'" and it cannot be learned from people who make it look really cool and fun like those chaps on "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." Furthermore, homosexuality has nothing to do with "smothering mothers and distant fathers."

Every adult realizes that sex serves many more purposes than just the utilitarian one of procreation. And every psychologist will tell you that there is a wide spectrum of different sexual responses and orientations to be found within all human societies. It is now a widely accepted fact in academic circles that homosexuality in gay men and lesbians is caused by biological factors, and possibly genetic ones. Homosexuality, just like heterosexuality, is morally neutral. Both can be lived out in holiness or in degradation. Both are "givens" not "chosens."