

Queer Planet

Candice Powell & Olga Soloveychik

Contrary to what has been written in scientific journals, sexuality is not binary. This statement applies to human beings and other animals within Kingdom Animalia. Research, although seemingly scant, proves this to be true. Its scarcity is due to the fact that scientific knowledge is social knowledge. In this essay, we will discuss the biological discovery of homosexuality in animals, its contributing factors and society's response to this revelation.

Homosexual behavior in animals is a discovery that conflicts with an old paradigm regarding the influence of biological, environmental and social factors on sexual behavior. Society's reluctance to accept scientific observations of homosexual acts in nature as credible dates back to a period in history when homosexual frontrunners who made important contributions to science spent their lives shrouding their personal lives in secrecy for fear of character assassination or worse, conviction. This was the case for Britain's Alan Turing. Turing, a distinguished mathematician, was castrated after being convicted of "gross indecency" (homosexual activity between men) during the 1900s, when homosexuality was considered a criminal offense in Britain (Littauer, 2016).

Darwin, Linnaeus and other great minds are well-known for theorizing the origin of similar traits, habits and behaviors of humans and other mammals. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, some researchers expressed the idea that what some consider to be homosexuality in animals is nothing other than our need to project homosexual behaviors onto them (Terry, 2000) thereby rejecting any scientific research relating to homosexuality. This was the case during George Murray Levick's expedition on the Ross Sea (1911-1922). Also hailing from Britain, Levick observed homosexual behavior in penguins, but could not publish his findings concerning this "astonishing depravity" because it would have been too salacious for publication at that time (Rosenfeld, 2016).

While some researchers chose not to publish their findings, others have been able to pinpoint a few environmental aspects linking queer behaviors within the animal kingdom to the environment and publish their findings. One of these examples is the octopus, a cephalopod mollusk, which has a relatively short life span. Consequently, the female octopi prefer mating with older males that have a proven high survival rate. As a result, the younger males adapt to their inability to access female octopi by engaging in homosexual behavior which allows them to discard superfluous sperm from their bodies (Lutz and Voight, 1994).

In contrast, biological variations within a species allow us to discuss gender in less rigid terms than sex which implies a strictly binary concept. There are certain physiological and psychological characteristics associated with sex

attributed to the amount of hormones present in an individual's body, generally androgens for males and estrogen for females. Neuroanatomist Simon LeVay first noted in 1959 that animal homosexuality can be rooted in biology based on an individual's hormone levels. As a result, society circumscribes the behavior to each sex based on the hormones received by nature. Thus, animals born with an unusual hormonal variation can demonstrate reversed sex roles and homosexuality. Later, in 1991, LeVay discovered that hormonal abnormalities in early embryonic development affect the size of INAH3, part of the hypothalamus that can promote homosexuality (Gerall, Goy and Phoenix, 1959). He used monkeys and rats to develop his studies to explain how homosexuality is wired in the brain from the moment we are born (Terry, 2000). Despite this biological predisposition in animals being well researched and documented, there are still scientists in 2016 who disagree with discoveries relating to homosexuality.

While America's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender movement has gained a tremendous momentum within the last 30 years, Britain has recently established the Turing Law which retroactively and, in some cases, posthumously pardoned thousands of males for homosexual behavior in an attempt to rectify its homophobic past (Chan, 2016). Homosexuality is thus a concept that is difficult to ignore, resulting in a cornucopia of scientists who are now publishing their findings in an attempt better understand it from a scientific perspective. This increased curiosity reaffirms a portion of Dr. Geoff Zylstra's lecture in which he states, "Scientific knowledge is a social knowledge"; homosexuality appears to be something new only because society was not ready to accept the preliminary discoveries that occurred approximately 100 years ago.

In conclusion, with this newfound awareness and acceptance, research on homosexuality will finally receive the respect and attention that it deserves. The origin of similar traits can be applied and accepted, as commonalities are drawn between *Homo sapiens* and other animals. Researchers will now publish their studies freely since it has been determined that these findings provide a greater insight not just into animals but into ourselves as well.

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Nominating Faculty: Professor Tatiana Voza, Biological Sciences 1201-1D (Interdisciplinary), Department of Biological Sciences, School of Arts and Sciences, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

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