

Fingerprint study fuels gay-at-birth speculation

By KIM I. MILLS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two Canadian researchers have found a link between the number of ridges in fingerprints and male homosexuality, adding to the theory that sexual orientation is determined before birth.

The researchers, working at the University of Western Ontario, compared the number of tiny ridges on the fingertips of 66 homosexual men with the fingerprint patterns of 182 heterosexual men.

Thirty percent of the homosexual men showed more ridges on their left hands than their right, while only 14 percent of the heterosexual men showed the same pattern.

Most people have more ridges in the fingerprints of their right hands. Fingerprints are completely developed in human fetuses about 16 weeks after conception, and they are largely genetically determined.

"This certainly suggests sexual orientation is somehow determined by prenatal events," said researcher Doreen Kimura. The study is reported in the December issue of Behavioral Neuroscience.

Kimura said the fingerprint patterns are not distinctive to gay men or a marker for homosexuality. Most homosexual men show the more typical pattern of more ridges on the right hand.

"What we found is a statistically significant difference between groups of heterosexual and homosexual men," Kimura said.

Roger Gorski, a UCLA neurobiologist who has done extensive research on sexual differentiation, called the study "another suggestion that there's a biological component to sexuality." But he said he had some trouble with making the connection between ridges on fingers and sexual orientation.

"Sexual orientation is a multifaceted behavior and it's unlikely that one gene . . . or that one fingerprint, is going to be the explanation for everything," he said.

Kimura speculates that there is a link between finger-ridge patterns and the development of the nervous system. Many of the gay men with more ridges on their left hands were also left-handed. Research has found there is a higher incidence of left-handedness among gay men and lesbians than in the general population.