Psychological Medicine, 2001, **31**, 753. Printed in the United Kingdom
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CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

Male homosexuals have a greater birth order than chance expectation, and this is because they have a greater number of older brothers (but not older sisters when controlled for brothers). Green (2000) confirmed this in a sample of male homosexual male-to-female trans-sexuals. He wrote: 'the theory of the birth order phenomenon most enthusiastically embraced currently by previous workers' is one of progressive maternal immunization.

It is not clear that it is necessary to find a mechanism that would explain both: (*a*) the additional brothers; and, (*b*) the birth order phenomenon. Since (by chance) some sibships contain many brothers, it is logically necessary only to find a birth order mechanism that operates preferentially in the presence of brothers (without, in a sense, 'creating' these extra brothers). So the evidence that sex ratio at birth is not affected by immune selection (Adinolfi *et al*. 1985) is irrelevant.

Such a mechanism could be either pre-natal or post-natal. Green (2000) expresses dissatisfaction with the (pre-natal) immunization hypothesis. So perhaps we should consider the possibility that just as homosexual behaviour is sometimes partly opportunistic (as in prisons), so male homosexual orientation might be partly learned, or acquired, or facilitated within families or same-sex boarding schools. Wellings *et al*. (1994) conclude that the sexual orientation of adult men is largely unrelated to whether they were educated at a same-sex boarding school: however, their data leave some room to qualify this conclusion. I suggest that sexual orientation is, to some extent 'plastic', and that boys with older brothers or male boarding class-mates are more likely to acquire homosexual orientation either simply through physical proximity or otherwise.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291701003919 Published online by Cambridge University Press