

The Sexual Brain

Simon LeVay
MIT Press

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This little book is a large book, indeed. It is little in terms of its length—a mere 138 pages minus about 16 blank or mostly blank pages (a feature that might annoy those who price a book by the number of pages it contains). The brevity is partially made up by a useful list of references and a glossary that may be helpful to the non-scientist reader or to those not familiar with Shakespeare or the sexual role of the anus.

More importantly, however, this book is very large in its content and scope. Since the publication of LeVay's article in *Science* where he reported an apparent structural difference in the brain between homosexual and heterosexual men, there has been worldwide medial attention to the possible cause of homosexuality in human beings—by circumstances currently beyond his control, most specifically in gay men. In the scientific community, his publication has stimulated great controversy. Some point out obvious weaknesses, which are actually acknowledged by the authors of related reports including Dr. LeVay. Others espouse sociobiological, feminist, psychiatric, and just personal views.

Dr. LeVay is a vision neurobiologist who has currently published one research paper in the area of possible structural differences in the brain that at least correlate with sexual orientation. However, in *The Sexual Brain*, LeVay has very impressively summarized the literature in a field that is complex and not his formal, or former, speciality. The book is exceptionally well written, quite humorous at points, and, for the most part, an informed and unbiased look at the question of the origins of sexuality.

From an openly gay man, one might have expected a strong political statement or an open acceptance of homosexuality as a result of a prenatal hormonally regulated process. However, this is not the case. For exam-

ple, LeVay discusses the research of one of the strongest proponents of this view, Gunter Dörner, with both criticism and respect. LeVay comes across as critical of his own work, that of others, and of the field in general. He does make one political statement that bears repeating: given the possibility of screening tests for homosexual individuals, or individuals or even fetuses likely to become homosexuals, for scientists and society it "is not too early to begin thinking about what should or should not be done with this kind of information."

In the Introduction, LeVay apologizes in advance for any errors of fact he may express in his book. Indeed, there are in my opinion, a few minor errors but they have little to do with the main theme of this book—they are essentially immaterial. There is one "error" of omission that should be pointed out: On page 134 LeVay makes a strong conclusion based on the observations on men with an enzyme deficiency that makes them appear female until puberty when they "change" into males. Others argue, and this argument is not presented, that only the most virilized postpubertal "girls" change psychosexually into men and that this may be simply an acceptance of the fact that their bodies masculinize. However, in this country genetic men with this enzyme deficiency are often surgically transformed into females before puberty. Which is the greater error?

I believe that this book will be of great interest to professionals engaged in sex research or sex therapy and to the nonscientist who has an interest in his/her own sexuality, or who is the parent of a gay or lesbian son or daughter, or who is just interested in the origins of human sexuality. But to all, do not expect a concrete answer. Scientific research in this area is just at its beginning, but *The Sexual Brain* may well become viewed as a landmark book in the future.