

Is Homosexuality Biologically Influenced?



It had four hands and an equal number of legs.... It had four ears and two organs of generation and everything else to correspond. —Plato, Symposium

For more than two decades, researchers have presented evidence for biological mechanisms underlying male homosexuality. Simon LeVay of the Institute of Gay and Lesbian Education and Dean H. Hamer of the National Institutes of Health summarize their work in the first of the following two articles. William Byne of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine argues that current data lack substance.

LeVay, Hamer and Byne join distinguished company. Almost 2,400 years ago Plato told in his *Symposium* how humanity once consisted of three sexes rather than two: its members were joined in pairs consisting of two men, two women, or a man and a woman. Zeus cut each pair apart to diminish their power and to teach them to fear the gods. Humans thus spend their

time on the earth searching for their other half, with whom they can merge in love.

The disposition of these people differed, Plato wrote, according to original pairing: those whose sex had once been mixed were obsessed by coupling and often became adulterers, whereas people sprung from single-sex pairs were more fitted for the everyday business of the world. In particular, men whose bond was with another man were most suited for government and leadership. This story is perhaps the earliest “biological” explanation of sexual orientation; it also demonstrates how attitudes toward homosexual behavior vary from culture to culture. Plato’s myth furnishes the theme and text for the photographs by Joyce Tenneson that accompany the two articles.