

Human Sexuality (Second Edition)

By Simon LeVay and Sharon M. Valente. Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts, 2006, 651 pp., \$95.95.

Sari M. van Anders

Published online: 5 February 2008
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2008

Breedlove (2004) reviewed the first edition of this textbook for this *Journal* and helpfully noted that there were over 3,200 hits for “human sexuality” on Amazon.com, and the best selling book was *Five Minutes to Orgasm Every Time You Make Love*. Now, there are over 11,500 hits, indicating a near four-fold increase in the amount of information to know (I hope we have all kept up). And, the current best seller is *She Comes First: The Thinking Man’s Guide to Pleasuring a Woman*. Wow! Goodbye rapid-onset orgasms, hello female-centered pleasure from men. Does the increase represent a dramatic swell in knowledge or in facts that are need-to-know for the public? More likely, the ever-increasing world of sex-related literature is a response to people’s curiosity about sexuality and dissatisfaction with some of the available relevant material. If so, *Human Sexuality* should be a welcome addition.

LeVay and Valente write clearly, peppering the text with interesting facts and commentary. The inclusion of excellent visuals and examples, including fascinating boxes further exploring points of interest, makes this textbook a good choice for courses on human sexuality. The content is challenging, engaging, and accessible, and the text would certainly make an appropriate course book for use in courses from psychology, family studies, health sciences, and perhaps other fields. For lower-level courses, it could be a stand-alone text, but it would still be appropriate for upper-level courses with extra readings attached or more in-depth exploration of pertinent topics.

The second edition has been updated such that one chapter (Sexual Bodies) is now presented in two (Women’s Bodies and Men’s Bodies). Additionally, the content included in the first edition chapter on Sex, Illness, and Disability is now

dispersed into other chapters. LeVay and Valente note that the emphasis in the chapter on Atypical Development has changed to reflect their belief that the majority of variations in sexuality do not warrant the label of “disorder” or “paraphilia.” Also newly included and/or expanded is a discussion of problems in women’s sexual arousal and interest and related controversies. Finally, the “technical” sections that covered more biomedical information about sexuality have been moved to the new (and excellent) companion website. Are these factors sufficient to warrant a new edition? LeVay and Valente allude to collegial doubt, but note new sex-related happenings reported in the media seemingly to affirm the need of a revised textbook. I have not read the first edition, so I cannot comment on whether its contents were outdated enough to require an update. However, I can point out that the new edition is exceptionally current, with up-to-date examples and content that will be relevant to students and instructors.

Chapter 1 (Perspectives on Sexuality) contextualizes sex research and includes a survey of both sex research and pioneers in the field. Importantly, it also helps provide a perspective for why sexuality should be a field of academic study and why knowledge about sexuality should be important and valued. Informative and interesting, this chapter provides a lively introduction that not only is readable and thought-provoking, but also instructive. To wit: I have always felt like a sex researcher and not a sexologist, and Chapter 1 provided a clear rationale for my core sexual academic identity.

Chapter 2 (Sex and Evolution) would likely be challenging for the majority of students. Still, the chapter covers a diversity of topics, including the mainstays (e.g., parental investment, kin selection, Bateman’s gradient) with a critical engagement. However, omissions of female competition or infanticide seem particularly noticeable. I am also not convinced that “nurturing” and “exploitative” are the least value- or culture-laden terms that could have been selected to describe female

S. M. van Anders (✉)
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Indiana
University, 1101 East 10th St., Bloomington, IN 47405, USA
e-mail: smvanand@indiana.edu

and male reproductive strategies or, more importantly, the most accurate in light of the energy expended by males to defend territories or prevent outside males from accessing their group of females. Additionally, the critical attention is somewhat muted in regards to evolution of gendered roles in humans (this will be a continued theme) such that gendered behavior is always framed as resulting at least in part from evolutionary influences. At the least, LeVay and Valente could acknowledge relevant controversies or critiques by experts (e.g., Hrdy and Small) in the field.

Chapters 3 (Women's Bodies) and 4 (Men's Bodies) present good overviews of their content. We are left, though, with something of a feeling of mystery about women's sexual accessories. For example, what do the vestibular bulbs really do? What are Bartolin's glands? There is a great level of detail about women's health, including both positive and clinical considerations. The visuals in both chapters are excellent, however, it is somewhat shocking to see a photograph of a woman's vulva before and after surgical reduction of the labia immediately upon opening Chapter 3, especially when one reads that a main purpose of Chapter 4 is to "...normalize the diversity of men's sexual anatomy" (p. 87). To be fair, Chapter 3 presents four diverse images of vulvas upon opening the chapter and Chapter 4 (Men's Bodies) presents a schematic of circumcision; yet, a possible equation of labioplasty to circumcision would seemingly ignore the very different cultural imperatives. And, I am left with the question of why the normalization of men's—but not women's—genitals should be a stated priority. Chapter 5 (Hormones and the Menstrual Cycle), a title near to my heart as a menstruating behavioral neuroendocrinologist, presents an excellent, clear, and detailed description of the menstrual cycle, among other topics, though it might be more accurately titled Sex Hormones and Hormonal Rhythms. Also, the introductory claim that a woman's menstrual cycle is the "...very core of her sexual physiology" (p. 119) is debatable.

Chapter 6 (Sexual Development) presents a very interesting and comprehensive discussion of sexual differentiation in individuals with and without intersex conditions. The chapter would benefit from at least one positive picture in color of a living individual with an intersex condition, as Chapter 3 did from positive pictures of women with breast cancer showing their chests after mastectomy. Chapter 7 (Gender) could have included more detail and seems less wide-ranging than other chapters, but was notably sensitive in its description of people who are transgendered. Chapter 8 (Sexual Attraction and Arousal) presents a good survey of recent scientific issues, though surprisingly the focus is mainly on either sexual orientation or evolutionary approaches to sexual attraction. Chapter 9 (Sexual Behavior) provides a very detailed description of various sex acts with helpful diagrams. The condensed version of Mark O'Brien's (a man with polio who spends large amounts of time in an "iron lung") experience seeing a sex

surrogate was an extremely moving and valuable addition to an important section on disabilities and sexuality.

Chapter 10 (Sexual Relationships) seemed less empirically based at points than other chapters with their more rigorous reliance on data. For example, "Women, in particular, may *intentionally* attempt to provoke their partner's jealousy by mentioning their attraction to another man or by openly flirting with another man" (p. 316, emphasis in original). If this is a "fact," then it might do well to substantiate it. The continued emphasis on evolutionary understandings is present in this chapter, but there is little mention of social systems possibly being the source of male–female differences in, for example, extra-pair mating. In comparison, Chapter 11 (Fertility, Pregnancy, and Childbirth) was an excellent chapter, both informative and easy to follow. Additions of research on men's hormones in association with fathering would have further strengthened it (e.g., Fleming, Corter, Stallings, & Steiner, 2002; Gray, Kahlenberg, Barrett, Lipson, & Ellison, 2002; Storey, Walsh, Quinton, & Wynne-Edwards, 2000). Chapter 13 (Sexuality Across the Lifespan) presents an interesting and sensitive account of children's sexuality. LeVay and Valente also address race and ethnicity, though this exploration could be more contextualized in sociopolitical research. Again, there is a strong focus on evolutionary understandings (e.g., an economic model of how individuals choose partners).

Chapter 14 (Sexual Minorities) includes discussions of sexual orientation (e.g., homosexuality and bisexuality) and people who are transgendered. The exclusion of other groups that could be included under the aegis of "sexual minority" (e.g., genderqueer, intersex-identified individuals) makes it apparent that the term is being used euphemistically here, and I wonder whether it is a useful label. The inclusion of a section on gay parenting is important, but seemed somewhat acontextual (e.g., little reference to custody laws or adoption laws that affect gay men or lesbians). And, should the question of whether boy-loving men are sexual minorities be posited in Chapter 14 or Chapter 15 (Atypical Sexuality)? Chapter 16 (Disorders of Desire and Performance) presents a thorough discussion of the controversy surrounding "female sexual dysfunction" and is generally an informative section.

Chapter 17 (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) is not your high school STD lesson; it contains graphic visuals (e.g., a penis covered with genital warts, a close-up of crabs), and is exceptionally informative and detailed. An inclusion of geographic patterns of HIV strains would have been an interesting addition, but other fascinating points abound: I had no idea that 1 in 10 adolescent women were infected with *Chlamydia* in the U.S.! Chapter 18 (Sexual Assault, Harassment, and Partner Violence) again has what I see as an over-representation on evolutionary perspectives. And, this coverage could be more critical; for example, the chapter notes that the majority of rapes are conducted by friends, acquaintances, or intimate partners, but also notes that rape occurs more

commonly when the costs of doing so are low (e.g., through retribution by victim's relatives) using wartime rapes as an example. The incompatibility of these two statements is apparent but not discussed. There is an excellent section on rape laws but I think the chapter could benefit from addressing the role of police in affecting rape reporting and charges (e.g., Doe, 2004) and same-sex partner issues. Chapter 19 (Sex as a Commodity) again and unexpectedly (though I probably should not be surprised at this point) gives primacy to evolutionary considerations. For example, is it true that the traditional clientele for prostitutes in the U.S. were single men without resources and, if so, is this support only for evolutionary hypotheses? Seemingly contradictorily, it is also noted that college-aged men frequently visited prostitutes in the past. The chapter largely discusses prostitution and sex work, and a chapter on the commodification of sex could likely include more on sex toys and related industries.

An extremely informative and engaging textbook despite some caveats or quibbles with the material, *Human Sexuality* is an excellent resource that is likely to be enjoyed by students. It is exceedingly teachable and online accompanying material

should be helpful to students and instructors alike. Though the textbook has more of an evolutionary focus than is warranted for a generalist text, or by the breadth of sex research, there are a variety of perspectives presented in an accessible and informative manner.

References

- Breedlove, S. M. (2004). [Review of the book *Human sexuality*]. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *33*, 169–170.
- Doe, J. (2004). *The story of Jane Doe: A book about rape*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Fleming, A. S., Corter, C., Stallings, J., & Steiner, M. (2002). Testosterone and prolactin are associated with emotional responses to infant cries in new fathers. *Hormones and Behavior*, *42*, 399–413.
- Gray, P. B., Kahlenberg, S. M., Barrett, E. S., Lipson, S. F., & Ellison, P. T. (2002). Marriage and fatherhood are associated with lower testosterone in males. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *23*, 193–201.
- Storey, A. E., Walsh, C. J., Quinton, R. L., & Wynne-Edwards, K. E. (2000). Hormonal correlates of paternal responsiveness in new and expectant fathers. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *21*, 79–95.

Copyright of Archives of Sexual Behavior is the property of Springer Science & Business Media B.V. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.