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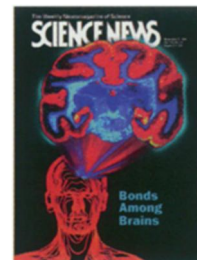
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Cover: Each brain puts its own interpretation on what it encounters in the world, a neurophysiologist argues. However, humans exploit a mammalian brain mechanism for pair bonding to form a myriad of social groups and thus transcend cerebral isolation, he proposes. (Image: Mark Gilvey, Design Imaging)

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Letters

Where credit is due

"Bringing nanomagnets into quantum step" (SN: 9/28/96, p. 202) credits L. Thomas *et al.* with the discovery, published in the Sept. 12 NATURE, of abrupt steps between different magnetic states in manganese acetate due to quantum mechanical tunneling. Four months earlier, in the May 13 PHYSICAL REVIEW LETTERS, J.R. Friedman, M.P. Sarachik, J. Tejada, and R. Ziolo reported the discovery of this effect in the same material.

Jonathan R. Friedman
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Reorienting sexual theories?

Bem's theory describing cultural influences on sexual orientation ("From Exotic to Erotic," SN: 8/10/96, p. 88) highlights the difficulty of assessing such behavior from a nonbiological perspective. It is possible that the so-

called choices one makes in childhood regarding typical or atypical behavior may themselves be driven by a biological impetus that simply sustains itself into adulthood.

The consistent flaws in much of the research data gleaned from polling gay populations—questionable bases resulting from the fear of a significant number of gays to admit to their orientation and the failure to include all age groups—severely compromise the conclusions drawn from them.

It would seem that the most valid data upon which to ground a substantive theory of sexual orientation must ultimately come from a primarily biological investigation.

Carl Brice Archibald
Des Moines, Iowa

Gay people generally seem eager to believe in a genetic basis for homosexuality; for me, Bem's thesis resonates more strongly. I believe that sexual identity arises over time, that it marks the end of a process rather than a hereditary *fait accompli*.

This is not to suggest that the results are any less permanent or profound.

Maybe sexual orientation resembles such variable traits as musical ability more closely than it does such either-or conditions as handedness.

Richard Grant
Lincolnton, Maine

Bem maintains that cultural factors, such as being taunted as a sissy, result in later attraction to one's own sex. He is plainly confusing cause and effect. Being taunted as a sissy is a result of being gay in a homophobic society, not a cause. Prejudice and ignorance are dramatic influences in gay people's lives, but they are not the causes of their sexual orientation.

In the nature-nurture debate, several important questions are never addressed: What is the goal of such research? Why do we focus on sexual minorities? What will we do with our knowledge?

Philip Bockman
New York, N.Y.