GUEST EDITORIAL

Psychosurgery on Sex Offenders and Sexual “Deviants” in West Germany

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About 70 men have undergone a stereotaxic hypothalamotomy in West Germany for sexual behaviors. In most cases the nucleus ventromedialis (Cajal) has been unilaterally destroyed. The question of whether this kind of psychosurgery should be legally controlled is being discussed by both scientists and the public in West Germany. The justification for this psychosurgery is taken from a theoretical basis which is at least questionable and which stems from a biologically truncated and therefore limited perspective on human sexuality. An inspection of the published reports shows that the indication for surgery was based on questionable scientific and clinical grounds and practically excludes psychotherapeutic and sociotherapeutic aspects. In the authors' opinion stereotaxic hypothalamotomy can in no way be regarded as an unquestioned, applicable method of therapy. We consider it essential that this surgery be suspended at least as long as the possible therapeutic effectiveness and the possible adverse side effects remain unclear.

The first stereotaxic hypothalamotomy with the aim of eliminating unwanted sexual behaviors was carried out by Roeder in 1962 in West Germany. He performed a right-sided destruction in the region of the tuber cinereum on a 51-year-old man described as a pedophilic homosexual. During the surgery approximately two-thirds of the nucleus ventromedialis was destroyed (Orthner et al., 1969). Since then approximately 70 men described as sexually abnormal

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1 Translated by Michael Green, Frankfurt/Main. This article is based on the public statement of the German Society of Sex Research, the Hamburg Institute of Sex Research, and the Frankfurt Institute of Sexual Science in "Stellungnahme zu stereotaktischen Hirnoperationen an Menschen mit abweichendem Sexualverhalten" presented by I. Rieber, M.D., A. E. Meyer, M.D., Ph.D., G. Schmidt, Ph.D., E. Schorsch, M.D., and V. Sigusch, M.D.

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have undergone such surgery in West Germany. This appears to us to be a practice which is almost exclusively observed in West Germany. In other countries, for example, the United States, the reservations about such psychosurgery are substantially stronger.

The publications of the West German surgeons indicate to us that they mistake that area of the hypothalamus defined on the basis of animal experiments as the "mating center" for a "control center" for sexual feelings and behavior. They equate sexual mating behavior in animals with sexual "feeling and behavior" in humans. We regard this as an inadmissible transference of animal-experimental findings to human beings. We want to illustrate this with a quotation (Roeder and Müller, 1969): "This film which Schreiner and Kling showed... was a veritable mine of information on human sexual pathology.... we would merely point out that the behavior of male cats with lesions of the amygdala region in some respects closely approached that of human perversion. The films convinced us that there was a basis for a therapeutic, stereotaxic approach to this problem in man" (p. 266). Furthermore, the authors deny that the results of experimental brain research are not sufficient to provide a definite basic knowledge of human sexual behavior.

In our opinion the surgeons have a one-sided biological conception of human sexuality and sexual "deviation." They ignore the basic psychodynamic, learning theory, and sociological knowledge of the origins of sexual behavior, as well as the results of anthropological research. For example, Roeder and Müller said (1969): "In our own patients we were faced with a problem which according to past experience was unlikely to respond to psychotherapeutic measures to correct their 'retarded' development. The most reasonable approach appeared to be to regard them as having disorders of 'emotional behavior' with underlying organic cerebral changes. This we regard as a problem of 'Anlage' or hereditary predisposition in which an a priori constitution (genetic determination) of the brain structure determined the behavior of the individual" (p. 266).

As a rule, the surgeons destroyed the subdominant side of the nucleus ventromedialis hypothalami. According to our information, two men, however, underwent bilateral surgery. It should also be noted that there is an increasing tendency to destroy other brain regions, e.g., the area preoptica and the posterior lateral field of the tuber cinereum.

Because of inadequate documentation, it is not possible to say exactly how many men have been operated on. Approximately 50 men who have been operated on are mentioned in the publications of three teams in West Germany: in Göttingen (Roeder and co-workers), Hamburg (Müller and co-workers), and Homburg/Saar (Dieckmann and co-workers). With the exception of the report on the first surgery (Orthner et al., 1969), the scientific-clinical presentation is unclear, disunified, incomplete, and contradictory. When statistics are presented, they cover only some of the patients and only a few characteristics (Müller et al., 1974; Roeder et al., 1971b, 1972). For example, the Göttingen