

Siegfried Schnabl, *Men and Women Intimately* (1977)

Abstract

East German sexologist Siegfried Schnabl first published his sex education book *Men and Women Intimately* [*Mann und Frau intim*] in 1969; over the years, eighteen editions were published. In the introduction, he describes his central concerns and reports on his experience in psychotherapy, marriage counselling, and sex therapy. His goal in educating GDR citizens about sexuality was to contribute to reducing the incidence of marital and relationship problems. In the chapter featured here, Schnabl discusses homosexuality, which he understood not as a pathological, but rather as a normal sexual orientation.

Source

Introduction

This book deals with intimate relationships between men and women.

Many questions arise from this subject: Should and may what happens in the quiet togetherness of two loving people be described, examined, and discussed? Isn't it more beautiful and exciting if the loving persons experience the physical expression of their affection unencumbered by knowledge? Doesn't sexuality sort itself out, guided by "instinct?" The experience that we gained during years of work in marriage and sexual counselling tells us that knowledge in this area helps guide the way to a happy partnership, whereas lack of knowledge often impedes it.

Sexuality is by no means the most important thing in our lives. If we let it run rampant, then it easily overpowers the deep substance and meaning of our existence. But if we restrain it too much or burden it with notions of sinfulness, then it withers, and we rob ourselves of many beautiful, even uplifting, experiences. In other words, sexuality must be integrated into the totality of our life's circumstances. Its significance for wellbeing varies from person to person, depending on individual needs. There is no justification for basing moral value judgments on these differences alone.

The reader should not expect to find solutions here for all marital problems. We will put the sexual component at the forefront without overlooking its close relationship to other marital and family issues. However, we have designed our book in such a way that the attentive reader will find new knowledge in it and will be able to critically examine his previous behavioral habits on that basis in order to recognize and overcome the factors that may cause his own difficulties in interacting with his partner.

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The desire to be happy, even in the most intimate interpersonal relations, can be fulfilled. That its fulfillment has not yet become a reality in the life of every citizen of our nation is a challenge to those who, through their professional education and skills, i.e. through the use of social means, are in a position to help others. Only then is it possible to guarantee the right of every person to the all-around, harmonious development of his personality as enshrined in the basic law [i.e. constitution] of our social order. Physicians, psychologists, and pedagogues are especially called upon to prevent impediments and conflicts in the intimate sphere and to help overcome existing difficulties.

That is all the more likely to succeed, the better the affected person knows himself and the societal and biological conditions of his existence, and the more clearly he has grasped the interconnection of the life process and interpersonal relationships. In this way, it will be possible for him to consciously manage his human existence—and the partnership between a woman and a man is an important part of that—and make it a happy one.

With the intention of helping many people solve their own partnership problems through the information provided, and with the expectation that every reader would correctly understand our concern, we presented this book to the public at the end of 1969. The subsequent seven print runs always sold out immediately, despite their considerable size. That wide circles of the population need such information is not surprising, for almost every person is somehow personally confronted with this set of problems.

[...]

Part III.

Variants and Different Forms of Sexuality

Chapter 10

Homosexuality of Women and Men

What is Homosexuality?

Much of what was presented in the preceding chapter related to the capacity for empathy of the emotionally normal individual. He may find it even more difficult to understand how someone can desire a person of the same sex as an intimate partner and love that person—the man, a man, and the woman, a woman. False information and poor educational influences even led to same-sex love being rejected as something repugnant and immoral. But as an argument against homosexuals, personal feelings and opinions are just as invalid as all other prejudices not based on precise knowledge of the variants of human sexuality. We must ask how the homosexual behaves in love and in society and how the otherness of his sex life is to be explained. Furthermore, we do not classify homosexuality among the perversions, particularly as it does not preclude mutually enriching, felicitous physical and spiritual companionship with another human being. And genuine love absolutely exists among homosexuals.

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Society and Homosexuals

The efforts described above all too often fail due to a lack of understanding of our fellow human beings. Patients who were pressured to resign by company management only because it came out that they were homosexual often complain to us about their misery. Certainly, the homosexual must learn to come to terms with the fact that he lives in a world where at least 96 percent of the population have sexual feelings that are different from his, and that none of the social institutions, customs, and practices relating to sexual relationships can meet his interests and inclinations. But why should people make it more difficult for him to integrate into society than it already is? He cannot choose the preferences of his libido. It is neither his fault nor ill will if a pretty girl does not appeal to him, but only a man.

Just as for heterosexuals, it cannot be expected that he simply abstains or contents himself with self-gratification for his entire life.

Same-sex acts were and are today still penalized in many countries, at least acts between men and those that have

a “coitus-like” character—a differentiation that is complete nonsense from a sexuological perspective. In Holland such acts were still subject to the death penalty in the eighteenth century, and it was actually imposed and carried out.

After penal provisions were gradually relaxed, they were once again severely tightened after 1933 in Hitler’s Germany. In Nazi jargon, homosexuals were “perverts” [*Sittenstrolche*] who had to be eradicated to protect the German people from degeneracy. In effect, they were persecuted for minor man-to-man contact, and were given inhumane prison terms and even killed en masse in concentration camps.

The arguments invoked since time immemorial to justify the need for laws against homosexuals are unsubstantiated by research and can be refuted without exception. Even the assumption that homosexuals endanger population growth proved erroneous: Statistical comparisons show that repealing the penal provisions did not affect birth rates.

Religious views have always influenced public opinion about this form of sexual activity, and in the Christian realm it has been burdened with the attribute of sin. Today, however, leading representatives of both confessions increasingly plead for homosexual conduct to be exempt from punishment.

It was feared that relaxing legislation would spread sexual variance, and that homosexuals would form cliques and further endanger young people. That has not proven to be true in any of the countries that tolerate this form of sexual activity. Quite the contrary: Opposition groups dispersed, and there was a decline in blackmail and exploitation of dependency relationships based on knowledge of the victims’ sexual feelings.

Furthermore, the emotional prejudices that are served by catch phrases such as “unnatural sex acts” or “healthy public feelings” do not justify criminalization. What two consenting adults of legal age do in private does not offend the moral conceptions of society, and there is no reason to intervene.

Juveniles are in an especially difficult position. A young person who, after a phase of vague feelings of otherness, becomes aware of his homosexual inclinations, experiences a psychological crisis. Its severity depends on the sensitivity of the young person and the reaction of the people around him when they learn about his homosexual proclivities. If they disparage, scorn, or even only mock him, they can very seriously undermine his will to live. The fact that suicides among eighteen-to-twenty-two-year-old homosexuals are three times higher than for heterosexuals is also an indictment of their fellow man.

No doubt parents are shocked when they are confronted with the fact of a son’s homosexuality. But they should consider that he needs their immediate understanding and trust, not for them to abuse or shame him, or even to expel him from the family and thus leave him alone with his distress. The same thing applies to teachers and apprentice trainers. To the extent that society rids itself of prejudices against this minority and accepts it, its problems can be solved with fewer conflicts. Every other young person is prepared through sexual education in some form for his later life with a partner and finds relevant role models in his immediate environment, in film, television, and literature. Who concerns himself with young homosexuals and gives them the information they need? Usually they only hear disparaging comments because they are “queer,” that is, they have a characteristic which they are as unable to choose as the color of their eyes. People should think that through and put themselves in someone else’s shoes.

There is absolutely nothing that homosexuals as a whole can be accused of, except that their inclinations stand in contrast to the sexual feelings of normally predisposed people and that they are in the minority. That is no reason

to lock them up or even to reproach them.

Everyone has the right to live sexually according to his needs, as long as he does not hurt anyone or force certain acts on others against their will. That applies to deviants and homosexuals just as it does to people with completely normal sexuality.

In the German Democratic Republic, as in many other countries, conclusions were drawn from the results of research on homosexuals. The criminal code that took effect in July 1968 no longer includes paragraphs threatening penalties for homosexual acts. However, young people continue to be under the protection of the law. Paragraph 151 says, "An adult who performs sex acts with a juvenile of the same sex will be sentenced to a prison term of up to three years or be placed on probation."

However, impunity from punishment remains a matter of legal form, as long as people morally discriminate against homosexuals, disparage them, whisper about them, laugh derisively, warn of them, or pity them as if they were sick. We must respect their intimate sphere and the ways in which they obtain partners and live together, as they do ours, for they are members of society with equal rights. Homosexuals, just as all citizens, have the right to be valued and recognized according to their objective achievements and behavior.

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Source: Dr. Siegfried Schnabl, *Mann und Frau intim: Fragen des gesunden Geschlechtslebens*, Ninth, revised edition, Berlin: Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1977, pp. 9, 17–18, 295, 301–03.

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