

Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women* (1914)

Abstract

Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) was a physician and sexologist, the founder of the Institute for Sexual Science [*Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*] in Berlin, and a pioneer in homosexual liberation campaigns. This excerpt from the preface to his massive book (of over 1,000 pages) explains how the book originated in his clinical work with clients and their stories. Hirschfeld also stressed the extent to which previous work on homosexuality was steeped in prejudice or ignorance about actual homosexuals and their lives.

Source

Preface and Introduction

At first it may appear to be superfluous to add another comprehensive book to the extraordinarily great number of works that have been published in the last fifty years about homosexuality. Just within the decade from 1898 to 1908, more than one thousand shorter or longer original essays, brochures, and monographs on this subject have been printed in Germany and Austria. Faced with this gigantic project, I did not easily find myself prepared to author the volume before you, and Iwan Bloch, my colleague and publisher of this *Handbuch der gesamten Sexualwissenschaft in Einzeldarstellungen* (*Handbook of the Complete Science of Sexuality in Single Volumes*), continuously had to beg me until I was convinced it was my task and duty to work on all the material I have learned in the past eighteen years while occupied with this theme, from every aspect. Above all, it cannot be underestimated that precisely the vast number of new publications, the fullness of new observations, and the knowledge had to suggest the desire to own a book in which the entire problem was resolved with a unified treatment. To that end, it was clear that the *Handbuch* was the appropriate place; it was likewise clear that such a massive undertaking would be incomplete if in the scope of its examination it did not classify a manifestation that from time immemorial up to the present moves as a central theme through human sexuality, evaluated and judged in several ways, to be sure, but nevertheless present, even if now it is more above the surface, now more below it. In addition, in spite of all the publications, important sides of the question, such as the origin, definition, distribution, and theory of homosexuality still have not yet been answered without disagreement. Indeed, half of all the material, the homosexuality of women, for several reasons has been worked on only very little in comparison.

This book was created from the wellspring of life. Over the course of years, I saw 10,000 homosexual men and women in ever-increasing numbers, homosexuals from every status and class, from every people and nation, people who, except for the same sexual orientation, often had nothing in common. I got to know them in their unending, individual multiplicity, from the most virile to the most feminine types, from completely satisfied, robust homosexuals to emotionally broken ones at the edge of despair. Among them I saw the youthful and the elderly; the latter even recalled the days of Alexander von Humboldt; to wit, irresponsible ones, long-established ones, noble ones, and ones whose character and views were dishonest or had become so. They came to me in every situation while I was occupied as a physician and researcher, as an expert witness in court, and as chair of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, founded in 1897. I visited them in prisons and stood by their deathbeds; I saw hundreds of them in the hands of blackmailers, many on the witness stands, and also many before they prepared to commit suicide; but I saw just as many also under more favorable circumstances, at their evening

gatherings, when they put aside the masks worn during the day, for numerous consultations about events in life, their loves, suffering, and concerns at their social functions and festivities. For example, two older working-class homosexual women recently invited me into their home to take part in the small, modest celebration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of their lives together. I spoke to anxious mothers of homosexuals, who had to attend to the childhood and development of Uranian sons and daughters, with more or less understanding fathers. I spoke to many of their relatives, friends, and physicians, who obtained my advice on the homosexual conflicts of the persons in their charge or for whom they cared. I also spoke often enough to the spouses of homosexual men and women, whose secret gradually had been revealed with serious consequences for them, and in numerous cases also with their male and female friends, with those of great loyalty and devotion and with those who had become blackmailers, or, such as the Trier brewer, had caused the death of their victims. I saw thousands of homosexuals not only in Germany, in Berlin, Paris, and London, but also in almost every nation of Europe, in the East, in America, Africa, and Asia, some of whom I visited in order to become acquainted with them in their own surroundings; but from countries to which my path did not take me, such as Japan, China, South America, and Australia, I received detailed oral and written reports from sources I know and who live there, about relative conditions and situations.

It appears necessary to me that all who express independent views on homosexuality in its considerable complexity make it clear what observations and experience their results are based on.

In the world at large, the homosexual part of humanity makes up a world in itself, small compared to the rest, but large enough in size and significance so that it should be thoroughly explored. People who want to know and judge this unknown territory correctly have to put on the clothing of an explorer to study this different area from the ground up. Above all, the material from which the researchers draw conclusions shall not be a product of coincidence. The number of homosexual men and women and especially their differences is too considerable for that. However, each conglomeration of homosexuals that goes to the physician for consultation, to the judge for a trial, and to the priest for confession is "coincidental."

Many authors, who, whenever they have become acquainted with one or two dozen homosexual men and women, draw general conclusions, are like that traveler often referred to about whom it is reported, when at the train station waiting for his next train and being served by a red-headed, stuttering waiter, that he had written in his journal, "The residents of this city stutter and have red hair." For example, this is true of von Notthafft, when he refers to "terrible ugliness being a favorable element of homosexuality, which makes it impossible to win the other sex." But also many others, even homosexual men and women, often make the mistake of judging themselves – and for that reason it often is a false judgment – based on the few homosexuals they became acquainted with in a limited environment, for example, in bars or on the street, without considering that in this case it had only to do with a small and not always exactly the best cross-section of the greater majority. Especially remarkable, too, is that many psychiatrists render judgments concerning the causes, nature, and treatment of homosexuality (indeed, judgments that are very carefully defended), who have become acquainted only with psychopathic homosexuals, and above all with only one-half of the manifestation, the male one, but not with the other, likewise basic one, namely, female homosexuality. In contrast to that, it is decisively to Paul Näcke's credit that in his critical opinions he continuously has pointed out that "people who have not seen and become acquainted with at least hundreds should not take it upon themselves to make judgments in this difficult field." In the discussion of an article by Rudolf Fleischmann, who came to the most far-reaching conclusions from the material of the observation of thirty homosexuals at the Munich Psychiatric Clinic, Numa Prätorius has accurately stated, "Would people consider it really valid if from the degeneration of the heterosexuals in the clinics we drew conclusions about the origin of the normal drive of all heterosexuals?"

Näcke, himself, and many people in the fields of psychiatry and sexology essentially have changed their earlier opinions about this subject after numerous circles of homosexuals had been made available to them. In his final work on this topic that appeared a quarter of a century after his famous *Psychopathia sexualis* (*Psychopathic Sexuality*), based on a huge amount of clinical experience, even Richard von Krafft-Ebing did not hesitate to rectify the original views he held on important issues. For example, while in 1879 he strongly distinguished between inborn and acquired cases, he gradually dropped this differentiation and in 1905 stated that contrary sexual feeling always is based on an “inborn disruption of evolution.” Moreover, while in his first great publication Krafft-Ebing viewed homosexuality as a disease, a generation later he declared that he “no longer could hold to the concept of disease”; after everything he had seen in this long period, “contrary sexual feeling in itself must not be considered to be a psychic degeneration or even a disease.”

So, as an initial requirement we have to consider that persons who make general statements about these things must also be in a position to survey the complex matter from every direction, not merely piecemeal – a requirement that is all the more justified because the availability of sufficient live subject material today hardly ever creates any difficulty for conscientious researchers – because we would be doing only partial justice to the task at hand if besides the recent sources we did not consult the historical ones.

Only from the study of the literary traditions, often well hidden, do we discover that in this case it has nothing to do with phenomena of today and yesterday, but rather with those that reach back as far as any available document can take us: only through the historical method of working do we become aware that it has to do with a phenomenon that can be proven everywhere where people leading their customary lives have been researched. Only in this way can we determine how uncommonly and how differently the entirely same feelings and behavior have been judged and treated, now unfolding unobstructed, now given the death penalty. It is true, the oldest source, which we refer to in the chapter titled “History of Homosexuality,” is an Egyptian papyrus written 4,500 years ago.

Our book in essence claims to be an encyclopedic one, collecting and reviewing individual facts and isolated data, and to work through reality. Our ambition also does not consist in saying something absolutely new; most of what we present already has been expressed elsewhere, in part by others, in part by me, myself. Clear order, exhaustive investigation, and systematic presentation of the material seem to be a higher aim to me. This effort presumes limitation. We were tempted many times to take bypaths that would lead to the broader, parallel stream of the heterosexual sex life and to general sexology; however, the scope of what did directly apply to the subject demanded we omit what did not exactly relate.

For that reason, I as well believed I had to refrain from repeating regular biographies as they are found so numerous in earlier monographs on this subject. Since I own by far more than one thousand biographies of homosexual men and women, it would have been easy to fill a thick book with only a few of them. But it seemed more proper to me to edit the mass of material according to particular aspects, if feasible, and also statistically, and to relate the findings organically. I have omitted yet another resource: newspaper articles. Important references no doubt often are contained in them. But experience has shown that, having been written rarely by experts, they frequently contain errors, and at times are truly in error. I have therefore used only such articles from the press whose contents I was in the position to verify.

In the purely descriptive sections of my work I could count almost exclusively on independent investigations, for example, in the case of discussing the diagnosis of homosexuality, its classification and distribution, and the statements by, and fates of, persons living as homosexual men and women. But, a wealth of valuable source

material was available to me for the historical chapters. However, in the more theoretical parts, where, as it were, it had to do with the origin of homosexuality, its significance, or cure, I tried to do justice also to my different views. Above all I considered it to be important carefully to test the reasons and assumptions my opponents based their opinions on; for indeed their views are likewise based on reasons just as much as mine are: if they do not prove to be conclusive, then this for the most part lies less on the logical steps taken than on the mistaken premises.

Many differences of opinion are explained by the unusual quality of the cases seen now and then. Those who examined the more feminine Urnings [gay men] will not find that the same applies to the masculine ones; a researcher who met only virile Urninds could generalize findings no less. We should always keep in mind that between the two extremes on either side, a more significant central group always is present. Let us assume the case – I will return to this explanation further below – that the homosexuality of men is based on constituents (*Einsprengsel*) of ovary tissue in the body of men, that of women on constituents of testicular tissue; then it is obviously clear that the quantity of such organic principles and the inner secretions dependent on them can vary greatly in degree.

In any case, in all aspects worth considering, it appears to me that the first commandment is to represent in a truly factual manner without any emotional expression; to be as objective as possible, to weigh the facts as far as possible, and in every respect to be without prejudice and to be as unassuming as possible.

I have arranged this book into two main parts. The first treats homosexual men and homosexual women as isolated occurrence. After defining the concept (chapter 1), first of all the signs of homosexuality will be discussed in detail: diagnosis and differential diagnosis (chapters 2-12). Following that is the classification of homosexuals into different aspects (chapters 13-16). We attach here a critical survey of the attempts to explain homosexuality (chapters 17-20) and the methods of treating homosexuality (chapters 21-23).

The second main part portrays the homosexuality of men and women as mass occurrence. Here, first of all, we investigate in detail the distribution (chapters 24-29), then the organizing of the homosexuals (chapters 30-32), until finally on a broad scale we give an image of their ever-changing history, which extends from the beginnings of civilization to the present (chapters 33-39).

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