

SEXUAL INVERSION

A Review and Commentary

by R. H. Crowther

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This new book, subtitled "The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality," is so important a contribution to the scientific literature in the field that it deserves far more than a cursory review. The following article, by an early writer for ONE's publications, is intended both as a review and as a commentary (from the homophile viewpoint) on the varied treatment given the subject by the seventeen authorities who have written expressly for publication in this book, and whose articles compose the bulk of the text. Following the general lines of this commentary, ONE Institute of Homophile Studies will continue to explore the book and its bibliographies, and give it further treatment in the Quarterly at a later time.

Judd Marmor, M.D., holds a number of distinguished positions, chief of which is that of Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles. In bringing together the authoritative writings which make up the text of *Sexual Inversion*. Dr. Marmor has produced as far-ranging a scientific review of this theme as can be found in the literature today. His comprehensive approach to the subject is reflected in the widely eclectic character of the source materials represented, which include biological, sociological, and clinical fields of research. His own position is suggested in his introduc-

tion, in which he rejects the common psychoanalytic premise that "heterosexuality is the 'biologic norm', and that homosexuality cannot therefore occur without some anxiety-provoked inhibition of heterosexuality... All the evidence from comparative zoology indicates, on the contrary, that bisexuality, or 'ambisexuality' is the biologic norm and that exclusive heterosexuality is a culturally imposed restriction." It is on the basis of fundamental concepts such as these that society can begin to formulate a natural and non-inhibiting sexual morality; and the merits of the viewpoints expressed in *Sexual Inversion*, especially on clinical

matters, can best be judged against the background of Dr. Marmor's remarks, above quoted.

The text begins with the biological survey, under the headings of "Ambisexuality in Animals" (DENNISTON), "Hormones and Homosexuality" (PERLOFF), and "Etiology of Homosexuality; Genetic and Chromosomal Aspects" (PARE). These studies reflect the fact that modern biological sciences have become highly refined and sophisticated, so that little is left of the conjectures and presuppositions of a century ago. This is especially true of the three branches of research represented here, in which almost every new finding has helped to demolish the old myth that sexual orientation and behavior (psychosexuality) had some necessary, or "natural" organic basis. Today, as these articles indicate, the relations of genetic and hormonal factors to organic sexual characteristics and functioning is well-determined empirically, and it is equally well-determined that *none* of these biological factors determine psychosexual development. As expressed unequivocally by PERLOFF, "genetic factors exert no influence upon the choice of the sex object. Hormones, similarly, do not influence the choice of the object of affection." The zoological evidence is thereby indirectly supported, since to establish that genetic or endocrine factors do not influence psychosexual development and the resulting orientations simply indicates that psychological factors interact freely and independently to produce a variety of natural gender-identifications and behaviorisms. The notion that any single resultant can be a "perversion" of some "natural" *sexual* "instinct" is thus rendered wholly untenable.

The sociological survey follows the biological, and is carried out under the following headings; — "Male Homosexuals and Their 'Worlds'" (HOOK-

ER), "Anthropological and Cross-Cultural Aspects of Homosexuality" (OPLER), "Legal and Moral Aspects of Homosexuality" (SZASZ), "Historical and Mythological Aspects of Homosexuality" (TAYLOR), and "Male Homosexuality and the Role of Woman in Ancient Greece" (FISHER).

In view of *Sexual Inversion's* subtitle, "The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality," it is something of an editorial mystery how the HOOKER article found its way into this collection at all. She has written a very lively and competent dissertation on the general social milieu—the customs and the institutions (gay bars, etc.)—of adult homosexuals. But such social habits and institutions are obviously the result, not the cause, of overt homophile interests; thus, disappointingly, this article contributes nothing whatsoever to an understanding of the roots of homophilia. Moreover, being committed to the usual "out-group" prejudices, HOOKER grossly overemphasizes the crude, sexual aspects of homophile orientation, and virtually ignores its romantic and comradesly aspects—that is, the subjective aspects which the homophile shares equally with the heterophile—which are definitely not demonstrated on street-corners, or in bars or public toilets.

In the anthropological and cross-cultural examination OPLER points out, among other things (and merely confirming a view long held at ONE), that the classic Freudian theory of homosexuality by no means rests upon some absolute psychological principle but is simply a reflection of the patriarchal, bourgeois European mores of his period, and their effect on children growing up under the resulting socio-sexual code. Due credit is given Freud, however, for establishing the vitally important general principle "that biological functioning in humans is subject to profound social and cultural inhibitions and that, in this sense, psychological factors have primacy and

control over organic ones." The article also includes a review of much anthropological material on primitive cultures, leading to the conclusion that each culture produces its own special psychosexual norms and variants by means of its own unique structure of sociosexual and other community values; and that these norms and variants can be properly understood only in terms of the total social context in which they arise.

The SZASZ review of the legal and moral aspects of homosexuality dwells extensively on governmental attitudes, both civil and military, and students of the field will find little that is new in his treatment of the legal issues. However, he introduces some of the most pungent ethical commentary ever to appear in a scientific treatise. For example:—"In defining heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as abnormal, what is the basis for our judgment? The main reason for adopting this standard is the value of heterosexuality . . . for the survival of the species. But, from an ethical point of view, such a decision begs the question; the survival of the human species today does not depend on the procreative performance of every man and woman. On the contrary. Our biological survival is now threatened by too much procreation, not by too little." After a close analysis of the legal and moral strictures suffered by the homosexual in this and other societies, this author concludes:—"For men and women, the performance of the sexual act—whatever it may be—is complex and symbolic. No simple generalization about it can be valid."

In his discussion of the historical and mythological aspects of homosexuality, TAYLOR stresses the attitudes of different ancient cultures to homosexual practices, and makes the interesting distinction between ancient cultivation of homosexuality as a form of religious expression, and the not infrequent intolerance of it in other soci-

al contexts. Ancient Greek pederasty, for example—a non-religious practice—was originally supposed to be kept free from sexual passions, and a sexual act between man and boy under the pederastic relationship was a felony punishable by death according to the code of Lycurgus (825 B.C.). But as the succeeding FISHER article points out, Lycurgus was Spartan, not Athenian, and, at any rate, by the time of the Periclean era, pederasty in the Athenian state was openly and legally homosexual under the laws of Solon, who was himself homosexual and, incidentally, the originator of most of the basic principles and procedures of modern democracy. FISHER also states (without, however, attempting to assert a causal relation) that during the much earlier Homeric period, pederasty was unknown, and that during this period women enjoyed great freedom and played important social roles; whereas, after pederasty began to flourish, the role of women in Greece became greatly depreciated—shrinking, in fact, to little more than that of childbearer and domestic servant. These juxtapositions are so pointedly stated and elaborated upon that it seems more than merely possible that FISHER intends his readers to conclude that a rise in male homosexual activity within a society generally and necessarily results in a depressed, impoverished social status for women. His readers should be warned against jumping to any such conclusion. What we know of history is a reflection, not of everything that was said or done by everybody, but only of what a few have recorded, or otherwise left behind for posterity. Thus, because certain Greeks, during a period of ancient history, were highly forensic and literate on the subject of male homosexual practices, it may not be supposed that similar activities did not exist in the same degree in some other period, merely because that other period appears silent on the subject. It is a well-recognized source of sociolog-

ical error to assume that increased or decreased publicity about a certain activity reflects a corresponding change in the extent of the activity itself. News media today, for example, can exaggerate or minimize various social conditions at will, simply by journalistic outcry or silence. In the field presently being considered, very extensive contemporary surveys must be conducted and thoroughly analyzed before any sociological principle can be declared which relates specific sexual behavior to the specific social status of men and women. It would seem almost certain that there is some such principle, but sufficient statistical evidence does not yet exist to formulate it, or even to be sure of the direction in which it might operate. On the basis of opinions stated in earlier portions of *Sexual Inversion* concerning the dynamic influence of social and cultural factors on sexual orientation, it appears likely that the relative social status and role of the sexes will be found to govern general patterns of sexual orientation and behavior, rather than vice versa as FISHER encourages his readers to assume.

The clinical survey occupies at least half of the entire text, and includes the work of nine contributors, under headings as follows:—"A Critical Examination of the Concept of Bisexuality" (RADO), "Passing and the Continuum of Gender Identity" (STOLLER), "Pseudohomosexuality and Homosexuality in Men; Psychodynamics as a Guide to Treatment" (OVESEY), "Latent Homosexuality" (SALZMAN), "Clinical Aspects of Male Homosexuality" (BIEBER), "Clinical Aspects of Female Homosexuality" (WILBUR), "Sexuality and Homosexuality in Women" (ROMM), and "Psychotherapy of Homosexuals: A Follow-up Study of Nineteen Cases" (MAYERSON & LIEF).

In *Sexual Inversion* and other tech-

nical works in the field, the reader must carefully distinguish between *biological* bisexuality, which is the subject discussed by RADO, and *behavioral* bisexuality, which simply means the capacity for sexual interest in individuals of both sexes. The now-discredited biological theory of bisexuality, RADO points out, was suggested in part by the ancient mythologies concerning sex, in which the sexes were considered as having been created or derived from a single, androgynous root. This appeared to be related in some way to 19th Century embryological studies, which established that both male and female genito-urinary systems develop in the uterus from the same embryonic cellular materials. Putting this fact together with the contentions of mythology (and without reference to the possible truth or falsity of the latter) it was concluded that, whether male or female parts of the total sexual apparatus are produced in the fetus, the organism retains essential characteristics of the so-called "opposite" sex. This led to the concept of the essential biological bisexuality of the individual, as a means of explaining the phenomena of homosexual as well as heterosexual orientation. But the most recent findings for the human species, however, indicate that regardless of the particulars of embryological history, the direction of fetal sexual development is irreversibly set by genetic factors at the time of conception. The results of these factors, however (as previously mentioned), are limited to the biological sphere, and do not determine later psychosexual development. The latter, according to RADO, involves a "total pleasure organization in the individual"—including powerful orientational factors not genitally based or determined. Because of genetic evidence, biological bisexuality can no longer be considered a scientific principle, and the search for orientational factors

factors must therefore proceed in other directions.

The STOLLER review deals specifically with the extremes of transvestism and transsexualism, and includes case histories illustrative of the points raised. In some ways, it is closely related to and supportive of the biological survey constituting the first portion of *Sexual Inversion*, as well as of the conclusions reached by RADO in the article just preceding. This is because it illustrates the absence of any absolute and "natural" etiological relation between genetic sex and later psychosexual development, or even between genetic sex and biological sex. Further, it clearly draws the important distinction between sex and gender, the former being organically established, the latter involving both an "identity" and a "role," which may be quite different from each other, and which are, respectively, felt and acted out in consequence of elaborate, culturally-induced responses. According to STOLLER, the gradations of gender-identity are imperceptible, ranging in a continuum along both the sociosexual and psychosexual spectra, producing at the extreme the transvestite or transsexual. Along this continuum, cross-gender impulses are always experienced to some degree, or, as STOLLER expresses it, "Identification with aspects of the opposite sex, which expresses itself in cross-gender impulses, is found in everyone."

New theories have arisen to substitute for biological bisexuality and its Freudian corollary of latent homosexuality. In what resembles a hybrid between Freud and Adler, OVESEY theorizes about the motives underlying homosexual orientation, which he describes as homosexuality, dependency, and power. The first has sexual satisfaction as its end, while the latter two have "completely different non-sexual goals, although the genital organs may be used to achieve them." These latter two are termed "pseudohomosex-

ual" motivations. However, instead of applying this formulation to the specific area of homosexuality, OVESEY uses it to "facilitate understanding of homosexual anxieties in heterosexual males" (and to) "reconstruct the psychodynamics of homosexuality in the treatment of male homosexuals." A number of case histories are commented upon within the neo-classical Freudian framework, thus raising as many questions as are answered. It is stated, for example, that "homosexual motivation does not exist in isolation, but always in association with the pseudo-homosexual motivations of dependency and power." But, we are told, the latter two motivations are also present in connection with heterosexual motivation. If all this is true, then scientific consistency suggests the parallel principle—not stated by OVESEY—that dependency and power as dynamic factors in heterosexual behavior are indicative of pseudoheterosexuality. This would take the OVESEY formulation back to something which appears very much akin to the latent homosexuality originally discarded. As will be commented upon in more detail later, clinical evaluations of homosexuality suffer seriously from inadequate terminology, and in this case, there appears also to be an erroneous or incomplete conceptual basis.

SALZMAN attacks the concept of latent homosexuality from a slightly different angle, rejecting it because of its implication that dormant homosexual instincts exist to the same extent or to the same degree of potency in all individuals—a theory which is not only undemonstrable, but in actual conflict with scientific findings. SALZMAN seems to view sex as playing a general, interpersonal role in human experience as well as a procreative role, and persons "actively use the dramatic integrating power of sex for establishing contact with other human beings, even of the same sex." But right alongside of this reasonable and

objective view comes the typical Freudian twist:—"Homosexuality can be visualized as a neurotic disorder characterized by readiness to relinquish the biological or procreative aspects of sex to fulfill a variety of individual needs." The connection, here made, between "neurotic disorder" and "fulfillment of need" seems somewhat ambiguous, since in most psychoanalytic theory, the presence of one means the absence of the other. Perhaps some new principle of neurosis is aborning.

BIEBER's Freudian bias is well known from his study of homosexuality published in 1962. In *Sexual Inversion*, he states his general conclusion that "Most men are not latent homosexuals; rather, all homosexuals are latent heterosexuals." However, with the theory of biological bisexuality in the discard, it is difficult to see how the notion of latency in the above statement could be scientifically supported. The bisexuality theory is the only one which could logically admit the assumption of two different sexual orientations, one latent and one actual, co-existing in the same individual. Following classical Freudian lines, BIEBER describes the "homosexual adaptation" as a "consequence of immobilizing fears surrounding heterosexual activity" without, apparently, ever entertaining the possibility that the converse might be equally true, and that heterosexual adaptations may also result from immobilizing fears surrounding homosexual activity. This glaring, and unfortunately typical bias plainly results from (A) the vicious legal-religious bias against homosexuality which influences most modern psychoanalytic thinking, in spite of specious denials, and (B) the failure to account for the same legal-religious (i.e., social) biases and taboos as the source of most of the neuroses associated with homosexuality. These two factors conspire to prevent most modern psychoanalysts from reaching any realistic regard for homosexual or bisexual be-

havior as a natural manifestation for some or many individuals within a given ethnological and cultural framework.

The two articles concerned with lesbianism cover very well what is regrettably still a limited field of investigation compared with that of male homosexuality. However, they do not appear to add anything new to existing psychoanalytic theory, in which lesbianism is most commonly ascribed to the influence of an antisexual, perhaps frigid mother who fills her small daughter with fears of men, of heterosexual copulation, of the pangs of childbirth, etc., thus bringing about an eventual rejection of males as sexual partners. Father-fixation, penis-envy, and other possible causes are also cited, but with the general reservation that (as with male homosexuality) the causes are "psychodynamic rather than physiological" (WILBUR). Since woman never depends on physical potency (an erection) to enact a sexual role, active ("butch" or "dyke") and passive ("femme") roles among homosexual women are even more difficult to account for than their counterparts among male homosexuals, it is observed. The involvement of woman with childbearing as an integral part of her sexual role further complicates psychosexual adjustment for the lesbian. Many lesbians definitely seek the sexual fulfillment of motherhood, while at the same time remaining emotionally committed to homosexual attachments. Considering the heavily Freudian undertones, it is predictably concluded that "Female homosexuality is a psychosexual aberration" but that if the lesbian is "incapable of making the transition to heterosexuality, she should gain enough benefit from treatment to lead a productive life, relatively free from anxiety, and to reconcile herself to her homosexual pattern with adequate self-esteem and dignity." (ROMM) Compared with BIEBER, who speaks of "the inevitable emotion-

al bankruptcy of homosexuality" the ROMM point of view seems almost reasonable, and awakens hope that psychoanalytic theory on the subject may eventually reflect the standards of objectivity expected of science generally.

The MAYERSON & LIEF contribution is a detailed statistical report on psychotherapy performed on nineteen cases, examined and treated under OVESEY's psychodynamic theories (see above). Their report is much too detailed to describe comprehensively within the scope of this article. Sufficient to say that after completion of the therapy and a follow-up period of several years, improvement (from "slight" to "apparently recovered") is claimed for fifteen cases (among whom nine were described as "exclusively homosexual"). Of the fifteen improved cases, only one is described as "apparently recovered" at the conclusion of the follow-up period. In spite of the small sample studied, the therapists have drawn a number of general conclusions. From the prognostic point of view, the conclusion having the most general significance is that the degree of heterosexual readjustment as a result of therapy is in direct proportion to the degree of therapeutic motivation, and also to the degree of heterosexual orientation initially present. But obviously, parallel conclusions could be (and have been) reached in connection with other forms of learning or psychological conditioning, so that a new finding can scarcely be claimed in this connection.

In conclusion, it may be remarked that a number of other collections of writings in the same field have been published during the past few years. However, *Sexual Inversion* is perhaps the one of greatest interest and value, since it is not an anthology drawn from previously published works, but rather an up-to-the-minute cross section of scientific opinion solicited by

one who is himself a qualified professional in the field. The reader, therefore, may be confident that he is being introduced to the most up-to-date published findings on the subject of homosexuality.

Generally speaking, it is not surprising that the clinical surveys in *Sexual Inversion*, though more extensive by far than other aspects treated, are nevertheless by far the least coherent and persuasive from a scientific point of view. This defect is partly the fault of the terminology to which psychoanalysis has been wedded since the days of Freud; for in spite of all the facts now known about sexual behavior, psychoanalysts still use "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" as if they were "either-or" categories into one of which each individual must somehow be fitted. It is thus no wonder that psychoanalytic literature on this subject continues to read like *Alice in Wonderland*. The "homosexual" and the "heterosexual," as individuals, are quite as fictitious as the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, for which reason theories spun around these figments of the imagination are bound to have no more than a superficial gloss of science. When psychoanalysis begins to do more than give lip-service to modern biological and sociological findings on sexual behavior, and to recognize many natural variations of psychosexual development, with all its nuances of "cross-gender" inclinations; and when it begins to develop a terminology which accurately reflects the realities of human sexuality, it will have made an enormous stride into a scientific evaluation of the field.

But even more basic than terminology are the value-judgments under which sexual orientation and behavior are divided into the "natural" and the "unnatural" — therefore, into "good" and "bad." In spite of the evidence that psychosexual characteristics have no necessary relation to or derivation from biological factors, modern psy-

choanalysts persist in patterning their concepts of what is *psychologically* natural in the area of gender-identification and gender-role upon the narrow limits of what is *biologically possible* in terms of procreation. Why this tendency should continue to prevail is a mystery explainable only by the enormous influence exerted by religious and other moralistic disciplines upon our legislative bodies and upon public opinion generally. This influence forces the clinician—simply as a person in modern society—toward conformity with the prevailing value-judgments on “natural” and “unnatural” sexual behavior, while as a scientist he automatically tends to try to fit all clinical phenomena into a framework of pathology. Thus, the clinician either actually believes that homosexual orientation is, per se, a form of psychopathology, or he actually believes that it is not, but is hesitant or afraid to say so publicly. Perhaps no clinician (certainly none represented in *Sexual Inversion*) can claim to be absolutely free from the traditional moral bias against homosexual behavior, or claim to be concerned solely with the homosexually-oriented person's *attitude towards* and *adjustment to* this orientation, rather than with his “cure.” Even Dr. Marmor, who in his introduction, allows that a homosexual adaptation can occur “without some anxiety-provoked inhibition of heterosexuality” nonetheless hedges on this point elsewhere, by stating that “in our time and culture” it can appear only in connection with “fear of intimate contact with members of the opposite sex.” And again, after speaking of exclusive heterosexuality as a “culturally imposed restriction,” he apparently sees no inconsistency in concluding his introduction with the hope that society will be able “ultimately to institute more effective means of prevention (of homosexual behavior) than now exist.” From the fact that even so eminently objective

a scientist as Dr. Marmor can be led to depart thus far from logic and from scientific objectivity and consistency, the awful weight of moral prejudice on this subject, and its insidious effect on scientific investigation, can be appreciated in its full and alarming proportions.

The signal service offered (whether or not intentionally) by this book is that it highlights so boldly the ominous extent to which modern psychoanalytic positions on homosexuality lag behind those of the biological and sociological sciences, and that it also highlights for the perceptive reader the reasons for this lag. While reading the stereotyped clinical viewpoints, one can almost see the spectre of Torquemada in his robes looming out of the dim past, in the glare of the blazing funeral pyres of his victims, pointing a skeletal finger, and forbidding—at the risk of some nameless and dire peril—the modern researcher in sexual behavior to face facts, and to spell out for the benefit of society what these facts actually mean. Here takes form the great and central error, which must be uprooted before lesser errors of definition or procedure can be permanently corrected. To complain that psychoanalysis uses inadequate or erroneous terms to define sexual orientation and behavior, or that it generalizes about homosexual behavior from a too-narrow and non-representative a sample (both of which criticisms are cited by Dr. Marmor) is to complain justly. Yet these are minor errors compared with that of allowing moralistic dogmas from the past to direct modern scientific investigation and to mold modern scientific opinion. If *Sexual Inversion* accomplishes no more than to help expose this central error so that scientists and laymen alike can correct their own positions, and work toward more equitable social and legal attitudes, it will have done much more than most other scientific publications of its kind up to the present time.