

Homosexuality

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle**

Band (Jahr): **22 (1954)**

Heft 1

PDF erstellt am: **11.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-567642>

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sexuality. We believe that this question, in particular, calls for a scientific, rather than for a sensational or a merely moralistic, approach. It provides the best example of the need for more scientific thinking in our public life, and for less irresponsibility in our journalistic practices and conventions.

Homosexuality

By a consultant in psychological medicine

Extract from «The Observer», Sunday, November 15, 1953

There is a strong human tendency to approach major sexual problems with violent emotional prejudice and a superstitious intolerance of anything which savours of objectivity; and nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of homosexuality. Recently considerable public attention has been focused on this problem, and some remarkable conjectures as to the frequency and implications of male homosexual practices have been made. It is reasonable to inquire what scientific evidence is available to guide further deliberations in this field.

The police figures in this country are of little help, since they include offences punishable under various Acts, some of which relate not only to homosexual crimes but to such varied activities as bestiality and living on the immoral earnings of a prostitute. Arguments based on such figures are inevitably misleading; they may well bear no relationship at all to the incidence of homosexual practices between consenting adult males who are discreet or fortunate enough to escape blackmail.

Random Samples

Some evidence can be drawn from privately conducted questionnaires, applied to random samples of the population along the lines of the Kinsey reports. Resulting estimates of the incidence of homosexuality in Western society as a whole have ranged from between two and ten per cent, of the adult population, where confirmed and consistent homosexual practices are concerned, to between fifty and sixty per cent, if any homosexual interest, no matter how transient or divorced from physical expression, is included.

There are reasonably substantial grounds for believing that a homosexual phase occurs as a temporary stage of sexual development in normal adolescence; moreover it may recur among normal adults when circumstances render it the only possible form of sexual expression, as, for example, in prison. But in only a very few of these cases will the tendency persist when heterosexual opportunities are again available.

More lasting homosexual dispositions and activities seem to spring from at least two possible sources. The first of these is a failure of emotional development to proceed beyond the homosexual stage of adolescence, usually associated with other aspects of emotional immaturity and arising from an abnormal or defective relationship with one or both

parents throughout childhood, sometimes later accentuated by frank sexual exploitation or seduction by adults. The second source is an abnormality of constitutional endowment which may be a simple anomaly, an inborn variation like colour-blindness or albinism. It is certainly not very uncommon to encounter in clinical practice individuals whose physical appearance, as well as their sexual inclinations, suggest a disproportionate endowment with characteristics of the opposite sex, despite a complete absence of anatomical or glandular evidence of true hermaphroditism.

Doctors who maintain this clear distinction between what may be called natural inverts, and individuals whose homosexuality is the outcome of psychosexual immaturity, believe that while psychological treatment can sometimes help the latter, it can rarely do anything for the former. But even where psychotherapy may be effective in bringing about the development of previously arrested or delayed emotional maturity, it can do so only if it is undertaken with the full, free and determined co-operation of the patient. It therefore cannot be regarded as something to be enforced by magisterial decrees or probationary conditions, however well intentioned.

However, it is probably the emotionally immature and unstable, rather than the natural inverts, who are more likely to commit offences which involve violence or outrage to the minds or bodies of others, seduction or violation of children, or public indecency whether from importuning, soliciting, or sexual exposure. No civilised society can tolerate these activities, but control of them might well be facilitated if offenders could be committed for their sentence to special institutions of the kind originally proposed in 1939 by East and Hubert for the further investigation and possible treatment of all forms of criminal psychopathic behaviour.

Ancient Law

Meanwhile it is surely high time that all the foregoing activities, inherently harmful to others, should be clearly and finally separated in the public mind from private homosexuality between adult men, who, unlike homosexual women, can at present be treated as criminals and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The existing law on this subject goes back to 1533, up to which time male homosexuality was identified with heresy and treated as a purely religious crime under ecclesiastical law. The persistence of this vindictive discrimination in subsequent criminal law may well have helped to maintain the stigma of degradation and persecution which now surrounds all aspects of the subject. The results of this are evil in themselves.

No matter how repulsive, inexplicable, or obnoxious private homosexual conduct may seem to the normal male, it remains by any objective standards far less socially destructive than adultery: criminal prosecution can claim no greater moral justification in the one case than in the other. Yet while the confessed adulterer has nothing to fear from the criminal law, the male invert is the natural prey of the blackmailer.

It would indeed be a sign, not of decadence but of a humane and

imaginative realism, if the medieval barbarity of the existing law concerning male homosexuality were recognised and abandoned.

This would require an alteration of the existing law by Parliament, whereby male homosexuality, ceased to be criminal in itself; leaving all forms of sexual offence involving injury or insult to others to be dealt with under simpler laws which were no longer founded upon discrimination between men and women, or between homosexuality and heterosexuality. It must be remembered that homosexual tendencies are the outcome not of choice but of affliction; and neither judges nor society as a whole are helped by the persistence of unjust and vindictive laws.

Walt Whitman:

P O E M S

*Vigil for boy of responding kisses (never again on earth responding):
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain—vigil I never forget, how as day
brightened,
I rose from the chill ground, and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.*

*When I peruse the conquered fame of heroes, and the victories of
mighty generals,
I do not envy the generals,
Nor the President in his Presidency, nor the rich in his great house:
But when I read of the brotherhood of lovers, how it was with them,
How through life, through dangers, odium, unchanging, long, and long,
Through youth, and through middle and old age, how unfaltering, how
affectionate and faithful they were,
Then I am pensive—I hastily put down the book, and walk away, filled
with the bitterest envy.*

*I believe the main purport of These States is to found a superb friend-
ship, exalté, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting,
latent in all men.*

*Come, I will make the continent indissoluble;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon;
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.
I will plant companionship thick as trees all along the rivers of America,
and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies;*