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The Problem of Homosexuality*

Wilhelm Reich, M.D.

EDITOR'S NOTE. *This monograph, written in 1932, is of historical interest to the student of orgonomy and reflects the early influence of Marxist doctrines. At that time, Reich had hoped that revolutionary societies, like the Soviet Union, would alleviate the sexual misery of the masses by fostering sound sex-economic practices. As a matter of record, Reich quickly became disenchanted by the Soviet Union's abrogation of all sex-economic principles in favor of sexually repressive measures. He then unequivocally severed all ties with Marxism and the Soviet Union, in recognition of the fact that sex-affirmative principles could not be established by political fiat. The clinical and theoretical aspects of this excerpt remain valid.*

We are often asked whether homosexuality is natural, why it is penalized, and whether it is really so damaging and shameful for one to engage in its practice. It would be vitally important to resolve the whole dispute that is raging between sexological and legal experts. But that would lead us too far afield, so we must confine ourselves to some salient points that will put our view of this problem on solid ground.

According to the latest scientific research, every individual is at first sexually bipotential, and therefore psychically as well as somatically bipotential. Up to the first trimester, a fetus can develop into a male or female with the corresponding sex organs. Usually from the second trimester on, one or the other potential predominates while that of the opposite sex is stunted in development. The stunted primordia of the opposite sex always remain, though in a nonfunctioning state. At a certain stage of development, a penis is present, along with traces of a vagina; the clitoris

* Translated by Barbara G. Koopman, M.D., from *Der Sexuelle Kampf der Jugend* (*The Sexual Struggle of Youth*), Verlag für Sexualpolitik, Berlin, 1932. The translator gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Heimbach.

is merely an undeveloped (partial) penis, while male nipples represent stunted female breasts.

There are some individuals who actually develop these usually retarded primordia, along with a goodly portion of their own sex organs, so that both sets of genitals dwell side by side or in combination. They are referred to as hermaphrodites. Additionally, there are males who develop a feminine pelvis and breasts, and females who develop a penis. Some individuals possess the glands and tissues of both sexes. As a rule, such hermaphrodites, or dually equipped individuals, have sexual attitudes more or less similar to those of the opposite sex, i.e., they feel physically attracted to their own sex. But there are others in this group who do not. The puzzle is not yet solved nor even unravelled.

The physically determined homosexuals are clearly in the minority. Most homosexuals are entirely normal in body habitus, which means that most of them, as far as we know, have no signs of physical development of the opposite sex. When opposite-sex mannerisms appear in their expression, gait, and speech, a thoroughgoing examination of their psychic development shows that initially they did not have such signs. However, owing to certain vicissitudes of their sexual drives, they developed these attitudes to the point of externally resembling the very sex they do not desire. In addition, there are many males who are physically and psychically built like men, who desire young, effeminate-looking males, toward whom they behave as a man to a woman; and there are entirely feminine women who relate to rougher, masculine-looking women, like a woman to a man. These types of homosexuals are not biologically aberrant but suffer from a developmental failure in early childhood, having experienced very early and severe disappointment from the parent of the opposite sex.

Similarly, boys readily become overt homosexuals, if they experience too many severe disappointments in love from an overly strict, harsh mother. By the same token, girls can easily turn homosexual at an early age, if they suffer severe disappointment from their fathers. Such children readily turn away from the opposite sex and toward their own. The early disappointment is, as a rule, repressed. As adults, the subjects are unaware of it and can only recall it by reliving the early phase of development through psychoanalysis, a special kind of mental therapy.

Both types of homosexuals, then, are cases of deviant psychosexual development, which we would call pathological, if the subjects, as is usually the case, suffer because of it. It is incorrect to think that their suffer-

ing is only socially produced by the legal persecution of homosexuals. Many homosexuals (it is impossible to know the percentage) are also psychically and sexually sick, in other words, neurotic. Many homosexuals who manage to feel well in this lifestyle protest the labeling of homosexuality as an illness or result of faulty development. They see in this a derogation of their sexual tendencies or tend to regard themselves as the "third sex," a special sexual category. This we must emphatically negate on purely scientific grounds. Most important, we must protect young people against a decisive turning toward homosexuality, not on moralistic grounds but on sex-economic grounds; for it can be shown that the sexual satisfaction of healthy individuals is far greater than that of well-adjusted homosexuals. And this is crucial for the regulation of the psychic economy. As to the opinion of some homosexuals that they represent a distinct sexual category, we can strongly rebut this by the fact that a special type of psychiatric therapy can eliminate homosexual feelings but never convert a heterosexual individual to a homosexual orientation. If the homosexuality is not of excessively long duration and if relations with the opposite sex are not fully repressed — also, if the patient does not feel well and wants to be cured of it — he must undergo reversal of the faulty psychosexual development through psychoanalytic treatment.

All these observations are scientifically based and further buttressed by the fact that among primitive peoples who lead satisfying sex lives and refrain from inhibiting their children's sexual development, homosexuality, except in its spiritual form as friendship, does not exist. According to the latest findings of Malinowski, a British anthropologist, homosexuality develops among primitive peoples to the same degree as the missionaries — those purveyors of capitalism — begin to bring Christian morality to their natural sex lives and to segregate the sexes. This corresponds well to our observation that wherever adolescents or adults are hindered in their normal sex lives (as for example, at boarding school, or in the army or navy, etc.), homosexuality develops proportionally. Our preliminary conclusion is that homosexuality, with the exception of biologically determined cases, is a purely social phenomenon, a matter of sexual upbringing and development. The best prevention is coeducation and the appropriately timed initiation of sexual intercourse.

It would be totally incorrect to conclude from these facts that homosexuals should be hated or persecuted. It is equally wrong if, unconsciously prejudiced by bourgeois morality, we condemn homosexuality as

an “unproletarian” attitude. As long as sexual upbringing makes some people homosexual, it is no one’s business if these people, without harming anyone, pursue their lifestyle and feel all right. The finding that homosexuality is a result of aberrant development and not naturally determined gives no one the right to condemn or punish it. Some homosexuals want to abandon this lifestyle because they are suffering from it and do not feel sexually satisfied. One should try to cure them but never force them — not only because no one has that right but also because force does not work.

In class society, homosexuality can easily become quite dangerous because of blackmailers who threaten homosexuals with exposure and extort money from them. Economic need especially fosters this. Also, there are many working-class youths who, because of poverty, go to the extreme of giving themselves to affluent homosexuals. Homosexuality also plays a not inconsiderable role in reactionary political circles, such as in the nationalistic students’ and officers’ clubs. This closely coincides with the strong expression of moralistic sexual repression of natural sex life in these circles.

Aside from that, homosexual activity — which capitalism spawns en masse through its institutions, churches, sexual segregation, and repressive sexual upbringing — is harmful, though certainly not as damaging as the public stupefaction wrought by religious dogma. And here we see the difference between capitalism and socialism: In the former, the stupefying machinery, called religion, is held in highest honor and even allowed to reap substantial monetary profits, while homosexuality is penalized. By contrast, in the Soviet Union homosexual activity is tolerated but the religious stupefaction of children and adolescents is roundly punished.