

This document contains Clarence Tripp's review of Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women. It was published in the Journal of Sex Research, vol. 18, no. 2 (May 1982).

SEXUAL PREFERENCE: ITS DEVELOPMENT IN MEN AND WOMEN (vol. I); **SEXUAL PREFERENCE: STATISTICAL APPENDIX** (vol. II). Alan P. Bell, Martin S. Weinberg, & Sue Kiefer Hammersmith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981; Vol. I: 242 pages; \$15.00; Vol. II: 321 pages; \$20.00.

To people who for some years have been looking forward to this Bell, Weinberg & Hammersmith study of the origins of homosexuality, the result is likely to be a shock and a disappointment. For despite the study's definite contribution in one area, it so backs off from both the methods and findings of Kinsey as to make an irony of its billing as "The New Kinsey Study on Homosexuality." In contrast to Kinsey's warning to avoid theory and to try to make careful first-hand observations of whatever is to be understood, the authors do

an about-face into a conventional hypothesis-testing program designed to check out the possible validity of many armchair theories that, over the years, have been contrived by various psychoanalysts and sociologists.

Using a questionnaire of more than 500 items they obtained answers and self-ratings from 979 homosexual and 477 heterosexual men and women, white and black, whose responses were then compared via elaborate statistical processing (primarily path-analysis). The hypotheses they chose to test were mainly the Freudian and sociological family-based theories: The effects (if any) of close-binding and other odd mothers, and/or of weak or cold fathers, on their sons; the influence of various mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships on girls; the effects of various mother-father relationships; the effects of "identification" with same-sex vs. opposite-sex parents; the possible effects of mothers' and fathers' personal traits on their children; the effects of early sex experiences, seduction, dating experiences, and rejection by opposite-sex partners; the consequences of birth-order, sibling constellations, and sibling sex-play; relations with peers; "happiness" and self-esteem measures; various gender traits ("conformist" & "nonconformist"); differing patterns of development in effeminate men and masculine women, bisexuals, homosexuals-in-therapy, etc.

There is a note of gratification and more than a little pain in all this. Quite understandably in the case of each variable such as "Mothers," "Fathers," "Mother-Father Relationships," etc., the authors, before discussing their own findings, review the whole conglomeration of psychoanalytic dogma from the "Oedipal struggle" up through Bieber's close-binding mother/weak father/wrongly identified son (or daughter), etc. For trained observers who may not have waded through these swamps in some time, there is shock anew at the *deja vu* of just how much stereotypy there really is in all these stereotypes. But on another level, too, it's a painful voyage. For in retrospect, it makes one realize how costly these notions have been to the field, not just in the vacuousness of their main themes, but also in the promulgation of their underlying assumptions: that heterosexuality [being "instinctive"] can be taken for granted and thus *its* development need not be accounted for; that homosexuality arises from factors other than those which are also involved in heterosexuality; and, worst of all, that a preference of any kind can *ever* rest on a negative base. (A person likes what he likes because of its rewards, not because he hates or fears something else.) One sees the diverting power of these underlying assumptions in the case at hand. For while it is unlikely that Bell, Weinberg & Hammersmith personally believed in all the stereotypes they set out to test, the fact is that they tested nothing else. Thus, astonishing as it seems, they too fell victim to the underlying assumptions of their hypotheses and thus dared to seek the "development of sexual preference" without mentioning, let alone testing, a single fundamental factor in sexual selection, nor exploring so much as a single positive motivation.

Then where is the note of gratification? It's in the fact that at last all the old stereotypes have been subjected to formal analysis; it's a valuable service. For while many of these notions have long since lost credibility among profes-

sionals, they very much live on in popular thinking where they continue to satisfy the curiosity of the unwary. The authors deserve credit for this, and for so frankly concluding, "We consider one of the major contributions of the present study to be the lack of support it gives to many of the traditional notions about the causes and development of homosexuality."

Having tested their batch of traditional psychoanalytic and sociologic ideas and found them lacking (and after making a handful of very modest observations of their own, such as "By the time boys and girls reach adolescence, their sexual preference is likely to be already determined . . ."), what the authors then do is remarkable. They act as if this is all that modern psychology and the vast field of social learning have to offer and proceed to throw the whole issue over into biology—saying, in effect, that the development of human sexual preferences must somehow spring in various [unspecified] ways from genetic and hormonal factors. This is astounding enough at first blush, but it is a hundred times more so when it is realized that in order to make this giant inferential leap the authors had to ignore (or be unaware of) many relevant contributions, those of Frank Beach, for example, who is not cited at all. And as an extra fillip to make matters worse, the citations they do give are extremely low level. There are a few very dubious, never-replicated "hormone" papers along with a number of statements of support from various psychiatrists and psychotherapists (some are still worse: citation #91 turns out to be from unnamed "experts" quoted in an Ann Landers newspaper column), not a single one is of basic or fundamental importance. Here again, what *would* have been important (though it would have undermined their whole case) is Kinsey's specifically relevant paper in this area, "Criteria for a Hormonal Explanation of the Homosexual," plus his eight "Conditions" for any acceptable hereditary evidence of homosexuality (Kinsey *et al.*, Vol. I, pp. 662-663).

Since the whole hereditary issue is of some importance, and the authors make such loud speculations about it, it might be worth another question here: What if their evidence or argument had seemed stronger; would it then have been safe to entertain notions of a genetic/hormonal origin for homosexuality in the face of what is already known? Hardly—at this stage in evolution, human gene-pools are astonishingly homogenous throughout most of the world (enough so to stabilize left-handedness, for instance, at around 5 to 7 percent wherever it has been measured) and yet the frequency of homosexuality varies radically from one society to the next. Or, to attack the same problem from the other direction, most American blacks are of West African stock, a racial/cultural area in which the indigenous homosexuality hovers as near zero as has ever been discovered anywhere, yet the frequency of homosexuality among their offspring, American blacks, is now indistinguishable from that of our white population. Farewell to genes, and all that.

Time after time in Bell, Weinberg & Hammersmith, one encounters the sorts of errors and misinterpretations which, at first glance, may seem logical or mere oversights but which, in fact, are major mistakes that obscure central, sometimes pivotal issues on which Kinsey and Beach spent countless hours exploring, isolating, and then thoroughly investigating. For instance, we read

here (pp. 111-112), "It has been argued [by Kinsey] that those [boys] who mature earliest are more likely to eroticize their relationships with other males, simply because at early ages boys associate more with one another than with girls." But Kinsey never said any such thing, nor did he think it. On the very day that his early-puberty/higher-homosexuality finding turned up, there happened to be some prominent visitors present, and one of them (Yerkes or Dickinson?) said something like, "Oh, that makes sense; an early-puberty boy is not yet of dating age, so of course homosexuality is encouraged." But Beach immediately said, "That's just the kind of item we have to be especially careful with; I'll have it checked [at Yale]." In due course the results came in. It turned out that the same thing is true in rats—that is, that those who mature even slightly ahead of the others show a marked proclivity to more, as well as, earlier sex, to a greater inversion-readiness, and thus to more [active as well as submissive] homosexual contacts (and conversely, that those who are slightly late in maturing are markedly disinclined to either accept or to instigate homosexual contacts). In fact, it was largely from these startling observations that Kinsey and Beach, together, arrived at a major realization: that much in sexual development is affected by several closely related items—early puberty, high androgen levels that invigorate the sexual substrate (both early and throughout life) and, from the beginning, boost its inversion-readiness. It is of far-reaching significance that inversion rides on the crest and not on the trough of the androgen curve, and that in group data on homosexuality there turn out to be important correlations between the time of puberty, the amount of sex, particular masturbatory patterns, and even penis size.

How in the world could the present authors have ignored and missed so much? (It is clear how they missed the early puberty differentials in their own work; they didn't compile any tabulations for 11- and 14-year-olds, and they grouped together their 12- and 13-year-olds, thus wiping out the data on the very ages between which the sharpest differences occur [Kinsey *et al.*, Vol. I, p. 317].) But how could they have missed the basic issues and, thus, all the rest? Did they simply not read their own library that lies "amouldering" on the shelf? (It almost seems worse to suppose they did read it and could still have turned out this product.) In any case the final picture presents an excruciating irony. Certainly, Kinsey could not have imagined in his wildest dreams (nightmares!) that anyone claiming to carry forth the torch he lit could have so recklessly cast aside both the letter and the spirit of all his work (forsaking inductive for deductive methods in the process) and offer in their place the trivial, starting assumptions of psychiatry as the be-all and end-all of sex research.

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