

In order to proceed with the investigation of some person of the past believed to have been homosexual, one should ascertain the presence of several of the following indicators: the subject is unmarried (even, as sometimes happens, to the point of vehemently resisting marriage); the subject belonged to a circle other members of which are known to have been gay; the subject had interests or pursuits prevalent at the time among gay people; and the subject adopted unusual turns of phrase (say the use of pronouns appropriate to the opposite sex). Once the scholar has attained familiarity with the period, a cluster of such signs triggers a bell. One need scarcely add that the absence of one of the others should not bring the investigation to a halt. Many almost exclusively homosexual figures, for example, have been married; the giveaway is the taunting phrase "the marriage was a failure."

Above and beyond these endeavors of detection, sexual orientation needs to be fitted into larger contexts that will show how it molded the individual's own personality, and in turn what are the social functions of the orientation in the host society. The task is formidable, but conscientiously pursued it will yield substantial rewards in understanding the inner life of the subject of the biography.

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## BIOLOGY

See **Animal Homosexuality;**  
**Sociobiology.**

## BIRDS AND AVIAN SYMBOLISM

Human interest in birds, both wild and domestic, and study of their behavior impinge on sexual concerns in several ways. From ancient Greek times onwards, barnyard fowls have provided a ready source for the observation of behavior, including sexual acts. Principles drawn from study

of these birds have sometimes been transferred to other species, including the human. Aristotle noted homosexual behavior in fowls, and in the eighteenth century the French naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon reported his own independent observations in birds. In the present century, the social hierarchy of the barnyard formed the starting point for the concept of the pecking order in psychology.

In 1977 a considerable stir took place in the American media over the reports by George and Molly Hunt (University of California, Irvine) of female-female pairs of gulls. As early as 1885 a female-female swan pair had been reported from England, and there is now documentation of preferential same-sex patterns among a number of species of birds living in the wild.

Birds figure in erotic metaphor and symbolism in a variety of ways. In contemporary North America the term "chicken" circulates among pederasts to denote an attractive teenage boy. This usage should not be confused with the clipped form "chick"—occasionally found in older sources in the full form, "chicken" showing the origin—meaning woman. The general derivation from slang *chicken* = child is clear (attested from the eighteenth century onwards). The homoerotic sense may be traced back as far as the late nineteenth century: "The Affection which a sailor will lavish on a ship's boy to whom he takes a fancy, and makes his 'chicken,' as the phrase is." (*Congressional Record*, April 21, 1890). In another bird metaphor, the pursuer of adolescents is called the *chicken hawk* in today's street language.

Curiously, this semantic development had a forerunner in Latin, where *pullus*, chicken, was a general term of endearment, especially for handsome boys. *Pullarius* (literally "poulterer") meant a "kidnapper of boys" or "boy stealer"; more generally it signified "pederast."

The male fowl, the *cock*, has provided a slang term for penis, by way of

the watercock or faucet (an evolution paralleled in other languages). Once the metaphor was created, however, it was reinforced by a natural similarity: "The extreme erectness of the cock, straining upwards, has suggested to many besides the Greeks the erectness of a tumid penis" (Smith and Daniel). There is also evidence of a broader association of birds with the penis, as seen in Italian, *uccello*, bird, penis, and German *vögeln*, to copulate (from *Vogel*, bird). Somewhat unusually, contemporary Spanish street language uses the female form *polla*, hen, to designate the penis. Contrast the established French *poule*, hen, whore. In older American slang, the word *capon*, a castrated rooster, served as an abusive epithet for an "effeminate man, a homosexual."

Confusingly, in a few parts of the English-speaking world, as in the southern United States, the slang word *cock* refers to the female pudenda. There is no doubt, however, that in the compounds cock-sucker and cockteaser the male organ is meant (though the former term is usually limited to male homosexuals, the latter to flirtatious heterosexual women).

In seduction scenes depicted on ancient Greek vases, roosters are the most common gift presented to youths by older male suitors. In the mythological realm the cock was associated with the bisexual god Dionysus. The noblest bird of all, the eagle, sometimes deputizes for father Zeus in depictions of the rape of Ganymede. A common emblem for homosexual lust in classical writing was two male partridges, who were said to be so highly sexed they turned to each other as easily as to the female. Another bird, the kite was linked to homosexual behavior because of a fanciful association of its Latin name *milvus* with *mollis*, a passive homosexual. Ancient folklore held that ravens conceived through their beaks; hence the Roman satirical poets Martial and Juvenal styled fellators "ravens." Finally, the ibis, a bird well known to the Egyptians, figured as a symbol of anal preoccupations because it

was reputed to employ its long beak to clean its own bowels.

*See also Animal Homosexuality.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Page Smith and Charles Daniel, *The Chicken Book*, Boston: Little Brown, 1975; Beryl Rowland, *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978.

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## BISEXUALITY

Human bisexuality may be defined as the capacity to feel sexual attraction toward, and to consummate sexual performance with, members of the opposite and one's own sex. The concept needs to be distinguished from **androgyny** and **hermaphroditism**, with which, however, it is historically affiliated.

*History of the Concept of Bisexuality.* Modern thinking about bisexuality stems in part from medical investigations in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, which found that during the first few weeks after conception the urogenital system of the human embryo is undifferentiated as to sex. (Bisexuality in plants had been recognized since the beginning of the nineteenth century.) Determination of the anatomical gender of the organs of the originally neutral being is triggered by the intervention of mechanisms later identified as chromosomal. This embryological discovery suggested that human maleness and femaleness is in some sense secondary, and the puzzling duality of our natures could be restored, at least on the level of ontogeny, to a primal unity. Almost inevitably, these modern findings called to mind ancient Greek and Near Eastern mythological thinking about primordial androgyny. From this fertile mix of ideas it could be concluded that human sexual attraction should also be undifferentiated as to gender, since our postnatal gender dimorphism is but a secondary process superseding, but not completely effacing, an original oneness. The result of such