

Thus it was under the name homosexuality that the subject became known to the general public at the time when the German sexual reform movement founded by Magnus Hirschfeld was beginning its long campaign to change the law and public opinion in favor of those whose sexual activity was still stigmatized and outlawed under the name of **sodomy** or crimes against nature. The tireless activity of Hirschfeld and his associates consolidated the status of the word among professionals (physicians, sexologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts) and among the public at large.

In English-speaking countries some controversy has arisen over the question as to whether the word homosexual is both a noun and an adjective or an adjective alone. Behind the seeming pedantry of such grammatical quibbling lies a conflict between those who claim that homosexuals are a "people," or at least a stable minority, and others who insist that there are no Homosexuals, only homosexual acts, which individuals—who should not otherwise be labeled—elect from time to time. John Boswell has persuasively traced this difference back to the medieval philosophical dispute between the realists (or essentialists) and the nominalists. However this may be, the first position (homosexuals as a people) may lead to separatism, the second (individuals engaging in elective behavior) may counsel integration. If homosexuals really are profoundly different they should form separate institutions; but if, despite the negative stereotypes with which they have been burdened, those engaging in homosexual behavior remain in the last analysis "just folks," they may look forward to fitting in as lefthanders, say, have done. Here we enter the realm of the homosexual concept, on the one hand, and that of political strategy, on the other, with the battleground the sense of identity.

Whatever one may think of the battle of the essentialists and the nominalists, which has been much waged in con-

temporary debates on **social construction**, it does not seem likely that the use of the word homosexual as a noun will be extirpated. The English language has no Academy to dictate such matters of usage. And in Romance languages any adjective may be used as a noun without special permission.

Existentially, for any human being to affirm "I am a homosexual" is both an act of courage and an acknowledgment that this attraction is a central element in one's personality. In other times and climes, sexual orientation seems to have been or is relatively labile and peripheral. In Western society, however, where the term engenders strong and often negative emotional responses from the general public and from those wielding power over homosexuals' lives, there are many who feel subjectively that homosexuality—or gayness—is a crucial personal attribute. What role words, as tools not invented by those to whom they refer but given to them and wielded against them, may play in the reinforcement of this perception is hard to determine, but one cannot deny the bearers of such sentiments the right to express them.

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HOMOSEXUALITY

In the sense used in the present Encyclopedia, the term homosexuality embraces the entire range of same-sex relations and affections, male-male and female-female. Some writers prefer to restrict the terms homosexual and homosexuality to the male, while female-female relations are designated **lesbianism**. Since there are in fact significant phenomenological differences, a good case can be made for separating the two phenomena. In ear-

lier times in the West and in other societies the equation of the two was not generally recognized, and it may be that at some future point research and public opinion will concur in effecting a separation. For present purposes, however, consideration of male homosexuality and lesbianism together seems to offer better prospects of attaining understanding, in particular of the social context of homosexuality.

One of the vexing problems with the homosexual concept is its ambiguity with regard to exclusivity of **orientation**: does it include **bisexuality** and **situational homosexuality**?

Another question is whether homosexuality should include deep **friendships** that are not genitally expressed: male bonding and female bonding. Some scholars place these phenomena under the general umbrella term of **homosociality**.

The Greeks and Romans focused on the phenomenon of **pederasty**, that is to say, age-graded relations between males governed by strong cultural tradition. Rarely did they attempt a synoptic view of the whole realm of same-sex relations. The modern Western world, by contrast, recognizes other types of age-graded relations (such as **ephebophilia**, the attraction to maturing youths, and **pedophilia**, the attraction to children) but then assimilates all male same-sex relations to ones between adults (**androphilia**), which are regarded as the norm.

The **Middle Ages** gave birth to the problematic concept of **sodomy**. While the abstract noun sodomy could cover almost the whole range of illicit sexual acts, the noun of agent, sodomite, tended to be restricted to the male homosexual. Sodomite then, allowing for significant cultural changes, foreshadows the modern term *homosexual*.

This expression arose out of an intense phase of discussion in the second half of the nineteenth century in Central Europe. Rival terms, such as **uranianism**, **contrary sexual feeling**, and **inversion**, were

coined and canvased, but in the end the word homosexual won out.

See also Typology.

HOMOSEXUALITY (ORIGINS OF THE MODERN CONCEPT)

The German term *Homosexualität*, the original form of the word, points to a concept of homosexuality that crystallized in Central Europe in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century. With some changes, this concept is the immediate predecessor of the mainstream of present-day Western thinking about same-sex **orientation**. Familiarity has made the model seem simple and straightforward, almost a given of nature. It is none of these things. The notion that modern society has adopted is a hybrid that owes its existence to the interaction and fusion of three remarkable semantic innovations stemming from historically distinct cultural epochs, two of great antiquity and one of recent origin.

Three Conceptual Sources. First, there was the Judaic law (Leviticus 20:13) that treated the union of two individuals having male genitalia as a single offense. Other civilizations of antiquity had accepted as a matter of course a dichotomy between the **active** and **passive** sexual partners. The consolidation effected by the Judaic legislation boldly disregarded this tradition. Second, there was the equation of male-male and female-female relationships in the more abstract thinking of the Greeks. By contrast, the ancient Near Eastern mind had never identified the two, and—as shown by the Babylonian myth reported by Berossus and echoed in Plato's *Symposium*—had traced male-male and female-female attraction to separate origins. But the Greek drive toward logical parallelism made it possible to regard **pederasty** and **tribadism** as two aspects of a single entity. Third, modern Europe—specifically nineteenth-century Ger-