

# THE “DURABLE HOMOPHOBIA” OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

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Psychoanalysis is at once a system of thought, a toolkit for cultural diagnosis and criticism, and a therapeutic practice. In Dagmar Herzog’s exciting new book *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes*, psychoanalysis is among the most transformative intellectual events of the twentieth century and is itself transformed by that century’s roiling forces, shaping and profoundly shaped by politics and culture. Foregrounding the historicity of psychoanalysis requires Herzog to wrest psychoanalysis from its own claims to historical transcendence. “While psychoanalysis is often taken to be ahistorical in its view of human nature,” Herzog writes, “the opposite is the case” (2). After Freud’s death, during the heyday of psychoanalysis in the 1940s and 1950s, through challenges to its authority in the 1960s and 1970s, to what Herzog calls its “second golden age” in the 1980s, the analytic frame offered by psychoanalysis (and the debates it generated) helped people grapple with the aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War and offered novel ways of thinking about the most important questions of the postwar decades: about aggression, guilt, trauma, the capacity for violence, indeed about “the very nature of the human self and its motivations” (1).

Along with other historians, Herzog observes that psychoanalysis could have “both normative–conservative and socially critical implications” (2). In the final section of *Cold War Freud*, Herzog explores the radical iterations and emancipatory appropriations of psychoanalysis by thinkers and practitioners including Frantz Fanon, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and Félix Guattari. In recovering these dissident voices and renegade agendas and in taking a global view, *Cold War Freud* provides a crucial counterpoint to the more conventional story of the depoliticization of psychoanalysis. That makes for an exhilarating read, and Herzog turns up some great surprises that reorient and revise the history of psychoanalysis. But here I want to pause and consider her discussion

of less easily recuperated or celebrated psychoanalytic histories in the immediate postwar period.

The “durable homophobia” that Herzog observes in psychoanalysis is surely among its most marked “normative–conservative” aspects, and one that she documents and analyzes in an important and illuminating early chapter of the book. One could argue that disapproval of homosexuality is hardwired into the psychoanalytic paradigm of normative psychosexual development, but Freud himself vacillated on the subject over the course of his career, offering a number of explanations for same-sex attraction. At various points he characterized homosexual desire as narcissistic, as fetishistic, as arrested, as regressive, and as paranoid, and also as sometimes associated with genius. As a clinician, however, Freud did not believe that homosexuality was a neurosis, that it was a unitary phenomenon, or that it should or could be “treated.” His belief in the constitutive bisexuality of all human beings meant that “homoeroticism was a possibility within everyone”—a proclamation later seized on by gay and lesbian activists (59). And equally consequentially, though less often thematized by scholars and critics, Freud understood *heterosexual* object choice as one that required explanation as well.

After Freud’s death, psychoanalysts’ ideas about homosexuality hardened into a dogmatic hostility. Although Herzog points to important roots of psychoanalytic homophobia in interwar Britain, it was a largely post-Freud, postwar, and American innovation. Homophobia was not tangential to the project of postwar psychoanalysis, especially among its American practitioners; as Herzog reminds us, it was at its core. In the context of postwar homophobia more generally, psychoanalysts’ new faith in curing homosexuality was construed as countering Freud’s therapeutic “pessimism” with newfound “optimism.” Herzog summarizes brilliantly the diversity and incoherence of psychoanalytic theories of homosexuality. Male homosexuality was cast by psychoanalysts as

a way of attempting to avoid castration by the father—or as a way to unite with the father. It signaled an overidentification with a seductive or domineering mother—or it was a sign of a profound fear of the female genitals. It functioned as a hapless way to repair one’s sense of inadequacy as a male—or it was a powerful sexual compulsion that required better control. (63)

Herzog captures as well the ugliness of many psychoanalysts’ contempt of people they wished to “cure.”

Why was hostility to homosexuality so central to psychoanalytic thinking and practice in the postwar period? Among the sources of that enmity, Herzog speculates, was psychoanalysts’ anxiety about their own professional authority and cultural relevance in the face of competing sexual theories, with the publication of Alfred Kinsey’s reports on male and female sexuality published

in 1948 and 1953 and William Masters’ and Virginia Johnson’s studies of human sexual response published in 1966 and 1970.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to imagine a collision of more different diagnostic methods or metrics for determining the “truth” of sexuality than the psychoanalyst’s consideration of the individual’s unconscious, Kinsey’s quantification of sexual experiences to orgasm from his tens of thousands of amassed sexual histories, and Masters and Johnson’s laboratory observations of sex and scientific measurement of lubrication, dilation, heart rate, and erection. Implicit (and often explicit) in Kinsey’s statistics was a desire to uncover what was “natural” as opposed to what was purportedly “normal,” leveraging a powerful critique of the normative models of both psychoanalysis and religion. The commitment of many psychoanalysts to a deep-seated hostility to homosexuality also sprang, Herzog proposes, from their own ironic ambivalence about their association with matters sexual—ironic because sex was unavoidably central to the psychoanalytic project. “The trouble was that the issue of libido was always palpably present,” Herzog writes, “hovering over the enterprise, at once necessary to the entire conceptual framework and yet continually threatening to make the enterprise seem dirty and tawdry and trivial” (64). (I will note that Kinsey’s treatment of sex, denounced as “zoological” by psychoanalysts, perhaps attempted a similarly strategic desexualizing aim through its communication in graphs, charts, and scientific language.) If psychoanalysts had employed the self-reflection encouraged by their own practice, Herzog observes (following psychologist Kenneth Lewes), they would have recognized their commitment to homophobia as itself a neurotic symptom.

In *Cold War Freud*, Herzog analyzes the impact of “epochal historical transformations” on psychoanalytic premises and practices. Of course, it is also the case that psychoanalytic practices and pronouncements actively shaped history. Psychoanalytic understandings of the compulsive nature of homosexuality underwrote mid-century sexual psychopath laws, which resulted in the widespread criminalization of consensual same-sex sex in the postwar period. They also validated the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act that barred individuals “afflicted with psychopathic personality” and the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Boutilier v. Immigration and Naturalization Service* that concluded that the language of that law was intended to exclude homosexuals (even in the face of opposition from physicians). Psychoanalysis both shaped and was shaped by people who engaged with it as analysts and patients as well. Herzog centers the

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, 1948); Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, and Paul H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, 1953); William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (Toronto and New York, 1966); Masters and Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Toronto and New York, 1970).

thinking and writing of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in *Cold War Freud*. But psychoanalysis, at least in its clinical form, was a dialogic process in which people positioned as patients engaged and contributed to psychoanalytic knowledge in complex and understudied ways. My own current research, in which I ask how people assimilated, accommodated, challenged, and rearticulated the judgment, widespread in this period, that their sexual or gender difference constituted a form of mental illness, will surely be enriched by Herzog's analysis of psychoanalytic thinking and debate.

The outlines of this important story of psychoanalytic antipathy to homosexuality will be familiar to historians of sexuality, especially historians of the US, where psychoanalysis assumed its most virulently antihomosexual expression. Herzog offers an illuminating account of the fierce and effective challenge to the psychiatric establishment leveled by psychiatrists themselves, in alliance with gay and lesbian activists in the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in the declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973 and its removal from the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. George Weinberg, the psychotherapist credited with coining the term "homophobia," recalled that he felt like "an apostle for the obvious" when he campaigned to remove homosexuality from the *DSM* in the early 1970s, but the wisdom of that move was far from obvious to many of his colleagues, a majority of whom continued to hold firm to their belief in the psychopathology of homosexuality years after the American Psychiatric Association's vote to remove it from the *DSM*. Gay men and lesbians were not allowed to be certified by the American Psychoanalytic Association as analysts until 1991—more evidence still of what Herzog characterizes as the "durability" of psychoanalytic homophobia, long past the postwar period.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the tenacity of psychoanalytic hostility to homosexuality, Herzog identifies some dissenting psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who resisted those dominant impulses, singling out UCLA psychiatrist Robert Stoller for special praise. Stoller argued for a universalizing rather than minoritizing understanding of perversion, proposing that "almost everyone was a pervert in some way," and he worked alongside gay and lesbian activists to persuade his colleagues to remove homosexuality from the *DSM* (79). Stoller's progressivism seems more equivocal or complicated, though, when we consider his efforts to disaggregate a de-medicalized and de-pathologized homosexuality from what was termed at the time "transsexualism," his endorsement of the medicalization and treatment of effeminacy in children assigned male at birth, and especially his hope that early behavioral therapy might eradicate future transgender identity. At the same time,

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<sup>2</sup> Interview by Raj Ayyar, *Gay Today*, 1 Nov. 2002, at <http://gaytoday.com/interview/110102in.asp>, accessed 28 May 2017.

Stoller’s emphasis on “core gender identity”—an immutable and foundational sense of maleness or femaleness consolidated in the first years of life, sometimes in conflict with the sex assigned at birth—laid the foundation for transgender claims for recognition.

Histories of the encounter between psychoanalysis and homosexuality typically end on a note of triumph in 1973, with the removal of homosexuality from the *DSM* and the marginalization of psychoanalysis and its stigmatizing views within the larger discipline of psychiatry. But Herzog continues her story into the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond, documenting the tenacity of the hostility of psychoanalysis to homosexuality, and also its flexibility. In one of her most exciting revisionist interventions, Herzog tracks the continued engagement of psychoanalysis with homosexuality into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Psychoanalytic paradigm shifts in the mid-1970s, particularly as formulated by American psychoanalysts—from Oedipal to pre-Oedipal conflicts—Herzog argues, reinvigorated homophobia and sexism in new and possibly more insidious and enduring form. Even more provocatively, Herzog discerns troubling sexual value judgments that persisted into the 1990s and 2000s, decades after the declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder. In that recent past, she charts the return of what she calls “the love doctrine”—a psychoanalytic preoccupation with love and emotion first levied in critique of Kinsey’s purportedly loveless sexual empiricism and resurrected in new guise by purportedly gay-friendly psychoanalysts, whose preoccupation with enduring relationships and a “new domestic paradigm” could work to shame and even pathologize people unable or unwilling to fit its norms. Despite feminist and queer critiques of romance and the normative couple form, love, in its ideological and compulsory form, has proven to be remarkably durable—naturalized and transhistoricized as a universal good and marshalled with tremendous success in defense of marriage equality. Herzog encourages us to see the ways in which what she calls the “love doctrine” has been put to homophobic and sexist purposes.

*Love*, Herzog proposes, is not ideologically innocent, at least as championed by late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century psychoanalysts. Though less obviously stigmatizing than the psychoanalytic homophobia of the 1950s and 1960s, the love doctrine could also pathologize nonnormative sexual expression. Love was a powerfully normalizing ideology, Herzog argues, rendered more potent by its link in psychoanalytic discourse with *health*. In *Cold War Freud*, Herzog rewrites a story we thought we knew—one foundational to LGBT/queer history and important as well to the history of psychoanalysis—by revealing its resonance in our own recent past and present.