

*Title*

**THREE CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO THE  
THEORY OF SEX**

**By  
Sigmund Freud**

*PeBook, 2013*

### ***About this eBook***

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***Author's Preface to the second edition***

Although the author is fully aware of the gaps and obscurities contained in this small volume, he has, nevertheless, resisted a temptation to add to it the results obtained from the investigations of the last five years, fearing that thus its unified and documentary character would be destroyed. He accordingly reproduces the original text with but slight modifications, contenting himself with the addition of a few footnotes.

For the rest, it is his ardent wish that this book may speedily become antiquated - to the end that the new material brought forward in it may be universally accepted, while the shortcomings it displays may give place to juster views.

Vienna, December, 1909.

***Author's Preface to the third edition***

After watching for ten years the reception accorded to this book and the effect it has produced, I wish to provide the third edition of it with some prefatory remarks dealing with the misunderstandings of the book and the demands, insusceptible of fulfillment, made against it. Let me emphasize in the first place that whatever is here presented is derived entirely from every-day medical experience which is to be made more profound and scientifically important through the results of psychoanalytic investigation. The "Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex" can contain nothing except what psychoanalysis obliges them to accept or what it succeeds in corroborating. It is therefore excluded that they should ever be developed into a "theory of sex," and it is also quite intelligible that they will assume no attitude at all towards some important problems of the sexual life. This should not however give the impression that these omitted chapters of the great theme were unfamiliar to the author, or that they were neglected by him as something of secondary importance.

The dependence of this work on the psychoanalytic experiences which have determined the writing of it, shows itself not only in the selection but also in the arrangement of the material. A certain succession of stages was observed, the occasional factors are rendered prominent, the constitutional ones are left in the background, and the ontogenetic development receives greater consideration than the phylogenetic. For the occasional factors play the principal role in analysis, and are almost completely worked up in it, while the constitutional factors only become evident from behind as elements which have been made functional through experience, and a discussion of these would lead far beyond the working sphere of psychoanalysis.

A similar connection determines the relation between ontogenesis and phylogenesis. Ontogenesis may be considered as a repetition of phylogenesis insofar as the latter has not been varied by a more recent experience. The phylogenetic disposition makes itself visible behind the ontogenetic process. But fundamentally the constitution is really the precipitate of a former experience of the species to which the newer experience of the individual being is added as the sum of the occasional factors.

Beside its thoroughgoing dependence on psychoanalytic investigation I must emphasize as a character of this work of mine its intentional independence of biological investigation. I have carefully avoided the inclusion of the results of scientific investigation in general sex biology or of particular species of animals in this study of human sexual functions which is made possible by the technique of psychoanalysis. My aim was indeed to find out how much of the biology of the sexual life of man can be discovered by means of psychological investigation; I was able to point to additions and agreements which resulted from this examination, but I did not have to become confused if the psychoanalytic methods led in some points to views and results which deviated considerably from those merely based on biology.

I have added many passages in this edition, but I have abstained from calling attention to them, as in former editions, by special marks. The scientific work in our sphere has at present been retarded in its progress, nevertheless some supplements to this work were indispensable if it was to remain in touch with our newer psychoanalytic literature.

Vienna, October, 1914.

## ***I. THE SEXUAL ABERRATIONS***<sup>1</sup>

The fact of sexual need in man and animal is expressed in biology by the assumption of a "sexual impulse." This impulse is made analogous to the impulse of taking nourishment, and to hunger. The sexual expression corresponding to hunger not being found colloquially, science uses the expression "libido."<sup>2</sup>

Popular conception makes definite assumptions concerning the nature and qualities of this sexual impulse. It is supposed to be absent during childhood and to commence about the time of and in connection with the maturing process of puberty; it is supposed that it manifests itself in irresistible attractions exerted by one sex upon the other, and that its aim is sexual union or at least such actions as would lead to union.

But we have every reason to see in these assumptions a very untrustworthy picture of reality. On closer examination they are found to abound in errors, inaccuracies and hasty conclusions.

If we introduce two terms and call the person from whom the sexual attraction emanates the *sexual object*, and the action towards which the impulse strives the *sexual aim*, then the scientifically examined experience shows us many deviations in reference to both sexual object and sexual aim, the relations of which to the accepted standard require thorough investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> The facts contained in the first "Contribution" have been gathered from the familiar publications of Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Moebius, Havelock Ellis, Schrenk-Notzing, Löwenfeld, Eulenberg, J. Bloch, and M. Hirschfeld, and from the later works published in the "Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen." As these publications also mention the other literature bearing on this subject I may forbear giving detailed references.

The conclusions reached through the investigation of sexual inverts are all based on the reports of J. Sadger and on my own experience.

<sup>2</sup> For general use the word "libido" is best translated by "craving." (Prof. James J. Putnam, Journal of Abnormal Psychology, Vol. IV, 6.)

## 1. Deviation in reference to the sexual object

The popular theory of the sexual impulse corresponds closely to the poetic fable of dividing the person into two halves - man and woman – who strive to become reunited through love. It is therefore very surprising to hear that there are men for whom the sexual object is not woman but man, and that there are women for whom it is not man but woman. Such *persons* are called contrary sexuals, or better, inverts; the condition, that of inversion. The number of such individuals is considerable though difficult of accurate determination.<sup>3</sup>

### A. Inversion

**The Behavior of Inverts.** - The above-mentioned persons behave in many ways quite differently.

(a) They are absolutely inverted; *i.e.*, their sexual object must be always of the same sex, while the opposite sex can never be to them an object of sexual longing, but leaves them indifferent or may even evoke sexual repugnance. As men they are unable, on account of this repugnance, to perform the normal sexual act or miss all pleasure in its performance.

(b) They are amphigenously inverted (psychosexually hermaphroditic); *i.e.*, their sexual object may belong indifferently to either the same or to the other sex. The inversion lacks the character of exclusiveness.

(c) They are occasionally inverted; *i.e.*, under certain external conditions, chief among which are the inaccessibility of the normal sexual object and initiation, they are able to take as the sexual object a person of the same sex and thus find sexual gratification.

The inverted also manifest a manifold behavior in their judgment about the peculiarities of their sexual impulse. Some take the inversion as a matter of course, just as the normal person does regarding his libido, firmly demanding the same rights as the normal. Others, however, strive against the fact of their inversion and perceive in it a morbid compulsion.<sup>4</sup>

Other variations concern the relations of time. The characteristics of the inversion in any individual may date back as far as his memory goes, or they may become manifest to him at a definite period before or after puberty.<sup>5</sup> The character is either retained throughout life, or it occasionally recedes or represents an episode on the road to normal development. A periodical fluctuation between the normal and the inverted sexual object has also been observed. Of special interest are those cases in which the libido changes, taking on the character of inversion after a painful experience with the normal sexual object.

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<sup>3</sup> For the difficulties entailed in the attempt to ascertain the proportional number of inverts compare the work of M. Hirschfeld in the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, 1904. Cf. also Brill, *The Conception of Homosexuality*, *Journal of the A.M.A.*, August 2, 1913.

<sup>4</sup> Such a striving against the compulsion to inversion favors cures by suggestion of psychoanalysis.

<sup>5</sup> Many have justly emphasized the fact that the autobiographic statements of inverts, as to the time of the appearance of their tendency to inversion, are untrustworthy as they may have repressed from memory any evidences of heterosexual feelings.

Psychoanalysis has confirmed this suspicion in all cases of inversion accessible, and has decidedly changed their anamnesis by filling up the infantile amnesias.

These different categories of variation generally exist independently of one another. In the most extreme cases it can regularly be assumed that the inversion has existed at all times and that the person feels contented with his peculiar state.

Many authors will hesitate to gather into a unit all the cases enumerated here and will prefer to emphasize the differences rather than the common characters of these groups, a view which corresponds with their preferred judgment of inversions. But no matter what divisions may be set up, it cannot be overlooked that all transitions are abundantly met with, so that the formation of a series would seem to impose itself.

**Conception of Inversion.** - The first attention bestowed upon inversion gave rise to the conception that it was a congenital sign of nervous degeneration. This harmonized with the fact that doctors first met it among the nervous, or among persons giving such an impression. There are two elements which should be considered independently in this conception: the congenitality, and the degeneration.

**Degeneration.** - This term *degeneration* is open to the objections which may be urged against the promiscuous use of this word in general. It has in fact become customary to designate all morbid manifestations not of traumatic or infectious origin as degenerative. Indeed, Magnan's classification of degenerates makes it possible that the highest general configuration of nervous accomplishment need not exclude the application of the concept of degeneration. Under the circumstances, it is a question what use and what new content the judgment of "degeneration" still possesses. It would seem more appropriate not to speak of degeneration: (1) Where there are not many marked deviations from the normal; (2) where the capacity for working and living do not in general appear markedly impaired.<sup>6</sup>

That the inverted are not degenerates in this qualified sense can be seen from the following facts:

1. The inversion is found among persons who otherwise show no marked deviation from the normal.

2. It is found also among persons whose capabilities are not disturbed, who on the contrary are distinguished by especially high intellectual development and ethical culture.<sup>7</sup>

3. If one disregards the patients of one's own practice and strives to comprehend a wider field of experience, he will in two directions encounter facts which will prevent him from assuming inversions as a degenerative sign.

(a) It must be considered that inversion was a frequent manifestation among the ancient nations at the height of their culture. It was an institution endowed with important functions.

(b) It is found to be unusually prevalent among savages and primitive races, whereas the term degeneration is generally limited to higher civilization (I. Bloch). Even among the most

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<sup>6</sup> With what reserve the diagnosis of degeneration should be made and what slight practical significance can be attributed to it can be gathered from the discussions of Moebius (Ueber Entartung; Grenzfragen des Nerven- und Seelenlebens, No. III, 1900). He says: "If we review the wide sphere of degeneration upon which we have here turned some light we can conclude without further ado that it is really of little value to diagnose degeneration."

<sup>7</sup> We must agree with the spokesman of "Uranism" that some of the most prominent men known have been inverts and perhaps absolute inverts.