

**“-- SIMPLY A VARIATION OF THE NORM, NOT TO BE REGARDED AS
MORBID OR DEGENERATE --“:**

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEPICTION OF HOMOSEXUAL WOMEN IN
HAVELOCK ELLIS' *SEXUAL INVERSION* (1897)**

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Työn nimi ”-- Simply a Variation of the Norm, Not to be Regarded as Morbid or Degenerate --”: An Analysis of the Depiction of Homosexual Women in Havelock Ellis’ <i>Sexual Inversion</i> (1897)	
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Tiivistelmä <p>Englantilaisen seksologi Havelock Ellisin vuonna 1897 julkaisema <i>Sexual Inversion</i> oli ensimmäinen englanninkielinen lääketieteellinen homoseksuaalisuutta käsittelevä oppikirja. Teoksessaan Ellis käsitteli seksuaalista inversiota (homoseksuaalisuuden aikalaistermi) yleisesti, mutta keskittyi myös siihen, miten seksuaalinen inversio ilmenee miehissä ja naisissa. Hän toi esille esimerkiksi tiettyjä eroja mies- ja naisinverttien välillä.</p> <p>Perehdyn pro gradu -tutkielmassani siihen, miten Havelock Ellis kirjoitti homoseksuaalisista naisista ja millaisia näkemyksiä hänellä oli heistä. Johdannossa esittelen lyhyesti Havelock Ellisiä henkilönä, seksologian alaa ja sen kehitystä, eugeniikkateoriaa sekä valtiollisia konteksteja, jotka vaikuttivat <i>Sexual Inversion</i> -teoksen julkaisuun ja vastaanottoon. Tutkimukseni päämetodi on lähiluku ja lähestyn lähteitäni seksuaalisuuden ja sukupuolen historian ja käsitehistorian näkökulmista.</p> <p>Työni on jaettu kolmeen merkittävään teemaan. Ensimmäiseksi tarkastelen Ellisin käyttämää terminologiaa ja syvennyn pohtimaan sitä, miten terminologia on kehittynyt ja mikä asema Ellisillä oli terminologian luomisessa. Tämän jälkeen siirryn käsittelemään Ellisin ajatusta homoseksuaalisista naisista henkisesti ja fyysisesti maskuliinisina olentoina. Ellis oletti homoseksuaalisten naisten olevan ”miehekkäitä” pukeutumiseltaan, käyttäytymiseltään, harrastuksiltaan, seksuaalisilta haluiltaan ja ajatusmalleiltaan. Esittelen tässä luvussa myös sitä, miksi minun mielestäni Ellisin teokseensa sisällyttämiä henkilöhistorioita voi tulkita muunsukupuolisuuden ja transsukupuolisuuden näkökulmasta. Lopuksi käsittelen sitä, miten Havelock Ellisin eugeniset uskomukset näkyvät hänen tulkinnoissaan homoseksuaalisuudesta. <i>Sexual Inversion</i> ei ole eugeninen teos, mutta Ellisin näkemykset ovat silti havaittavissa implisiittisesti sekä eksplisiittisesti.</p>	
Avainsanat Havelock Ellis, seksuaalinen inversio, lesbous, homoseksuaalisuus, seksologia, eugeniikka, degeneraatioteoria, maskuliinisuus, masculinity, homosexuality, eugenics, sexual inversion, sexology	
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Muita tietoja -	

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Sexology, the study of human sexuality, was an ever-growing field in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. One of the key figures of this field at this time was the English physician and writer Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), who published a seven-book series entitled *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928). His works are now considered classics of the field of sexology and Ivan Crozier, a historian who has written many texts on Havelock Ellis, described him as "England's premier sex psychologist".¹ Ellis was also a passionate eugenicist, and he published many works on the topic of racial purity, degeneration, genetics, and how racial degeneration should be avoided and controlled.

In my research I will focus solely on the second book of the series, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), which focuses on homosexuality which was, at Ellis' time, commonly known as *sexual inversion*.² The edition of *Sexual Inversion* I am studying is the revised 3rd edition. It is unclear to me when the 3rd edition was originally published, as my physical copy does not have the publication year and there are differing information online. For example, the Project Gutenberg website has a free, online copy of the 3rd edition of *Sexual Inversion* which it claims was published in 1927, and the free library and museum Wellcome Collection and the Internet Archive, a non-profit online library, have copies of the 3rd edition which they say was published in 1915. The year 1915 is the one I have most often seen as the publication year, so I have decided to use it in my work. I also did not come across any mention of World War I in my copy of Ellis' book, which strengthened my belief that this edition must have been published either before the war or just after its start. I assume that Ellis would have somehow included a historical event as monumental as World War I in his book, as the war and its aftermath introduced many new conversations surrounding gender and sexuality.³

The aim of my thesis is to explore how Ellis depicted homosexual and otherwise non-heterosexual women in this book and answer the three following research questions:

¹ Crozier 2001, 62.

² I explore Ellis' terms in depth in chapter two, but to avoid confusion until then, here is a short rundown of the terms "sexual inversion" and "homosexuality" meant to him. Sexual inversion, Ellis' preferred term, meant an innate trait and something that was exclusively found in humans, whereas homosexuality was, in his mind, a broader term that included same-sex acts between humans as well as animals.

³ For more information on the "crisis of gender" after World War I, see, e.g. chapter 4 "The End of Civilization" in Richard Overly's *The Inter-War Crisis 1919–1939* (3rd edition 2017, originally published in 1994).

- 1) What kind of terminology does Ellis use in *Sexual Inversion* and how does he understand the meaning of his terms?
- 2) How does Ellis depict homosexual or otherwise non-heterosexual women and what kind of mental and physical attributes does he associate with them?
- 3) What kind of role does eugenics play in *Sexual Inversion* and Ellis' understanding of homosexual or otherwise non-heterosexual women?

This introductory chapter will include a brief explanation of eugenics as a field, a short biography of Havelock Ellis, an examination of the contemporary situation in the countries that were most significant to the creation and publication of *Sexual Inversion*, a deeper introduction to my original source and the series to which it belongs, and finally a breakdown of the literature I have used in my thesis and the methodologies I applied when writing my research. The second chapter is dedicated to answering the first of my questions. After explaining what sexual inversion was, I will explore how Ellis understood sexuality and sex/gender, and what he means by his terms. I will also elaborate on why I have chosen to use certain terms in my text and why I have chosen to only use some when quoting Ellis. Chapter three focuses on my second research question. In this chapter I examine the different traits Ellis considered innate or common for homosexual women and their relationships. The chapter's overarching theme is homosexual women's assumed masculinity (both mental and physical), which Ellis, just like many experts of his time, believed was something all homosexual women shared. In chapter three I also explore how the case studies of *Sexual Inversion*, can be interpreted from a nonbinary or trans point of view. Chapter four answers my third and final question. I will go over the different ways in which Ellis' eugenical beliefs come across in *Sexual Inversion*, despite the book not being explicitly an eugenical work. I also touch upon how Ellis' eugenical views echo still common character tropes and types still seen in media to showcase how many stereotypes have long, historical roots. In the concluding chapter of my thesis, I will analyze my main ideas and findings.

My work is a contribution to the recent re-evaluation of Havelock Ellis' importance and legacy, following in the footsteps of historians such as Ivan Crozier, Martha Vicinus and Chiara Beccalossi, who have written about him in the recent past. But I also challenge some of the previous research done on *Sexual Inversion* by linking my findings to contemporary discussions of gender diversity as well as the idea of trans and nonbinary potential of the past.

1.1 Eugenics – A Brief Explanation

Eugenics, also known as *racial hygiene*, has its roots in 19th century theories about the survival and development of the human race. It is however important to remember that racial hygiene theories are not solely a 19th-century creation. The dangers of degeneration had already been discussed in earlier centuries before the birth of actual eugenics: for example, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau had written about racial purity in the 18th century.⁴ French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809–1873) discussed, in the 1850s (30 or so years before the term eugenics was created), how an illness or the environment a person developed in could cause degeneration. He theorized that this degeneration could be passed down to the next generation, where it might manifest itself in even more dangerous ways. He suggested that this kind of accumulative degeneration would show up, in the first generation, as general nervousness, in the second as neurotic and the third as psychotic, and finally, in the fourth generation, as so-called idiocy.⁵

During the late 19th century, scientists proposed theories on the human race that were based on Charles Darwin's ideas on evolutionary natural selection and the survival of the fittest within the animal world: the strongest creatures survived while the weaker ones perished.⁶ One of the most notable figures leading this conversation was Darwin's cousin, Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911), who coined the term eugenics in 1884. He saw eugenics as “Darwinism in practice”.⁷ As eugenics developed, Darwin's concepts were applied to humans. The belief that different human races were struggling against one another for survival became common, and this “struggle” was used to justify different oppressive actions, such as colonial and imperialist conquests and the act of placing cultures and races in hierarchies.⁸ Eugenics was a theory that was based around the idea that the human race was in constant danger of degeneration and destruction due to people considered unfit or flawed procreating and passing their defective genes on to the next generation.⁹ Eugenics was popular among many countries such as the United States, which was considered one of the leading countries in eugenical research until 1933.¹⁰

⁴ Isaksson & Jokisalo 2018, 258.

⁵ Laaka 2002, 18–19.

⁶ Gibson 1998, 73.

⁷ Laaka 2002, 22–23.

⁸ Isaksson & Jokisalo, 244–245.

⁹ Gibson 1998, 84.

¹⁰ Isaksson & Jokisalo 2018, 261.

Eugenics was not solely tied to race. Alongside racial minorities, many other marginalized groups were categorized as unfit. These groups included criminals, people who suffered from different kinds of mental illnesses, syphilis patients, epileptics,¹¹ homosexual people, sex workers,¹² blind and deaf people, and poor people of the lower classes.¹³

Eugenicists attempted to prevent the degeneration of mankind in different ways. In the United States, widescale sterilizations of people considered unfit and unwanted began in 1850, and by the 1960s around 63,000 people had been lawfully sterilized in various states.¹⁴ While forced sterilizations have become a symbol of American eugenics,¹⁵ they were not the only way states attempted to prevent degeneration. Other ways included banning people from certain cultures and countries from immigrating into the United States, euthanizing people deemed unfit for life, encouraging fit individuals to have children by holding “better baby contests” based on livestock competitions, and focusing on research regarding disease inheritance.¹⁶ Eugenicists also sometimes attempted to heal those they saw as degenerate. For example, homosexual people were occasionally “treated” in the United States with hormone therapy, convulsions brought on by cardiazol medication, and shock therapy.¹⁷

European eugenics was slightly different from that of the United States as it was more tied to ideas of nationalism and worries about possible negative influences and competition from neighboring countries that were considered racially less pure. In the United States, eugenics focused more on controlling migration and weeding out already present signs of degeneration in the population. In Great Britain, eugenics became a part of society on many levels – it affected medicine, politics and became especially popular among the middle class, who were, according to this theory, considered more pure than lower classes. The leading eugenicists of Britain, members of the Eugenics Education Society, were most commonly medical professionals, university staff or scientists, and they aimed to prevent widescale degeneration through means of positive eugenics.¹⁸ In Europe, eugenics was also tied to colonialism and the colonists’ fear of racial mixing with the oppressed indigenous populations. Many colonialist countries – such as Great Britain, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Belgium

¹¹ Lombardo 2008, 1.

¹² Largent 2008, 3.

¹³ Isaksson & Jokisalo 2018, 260.

¹⁴ Largent 2008, 1.

¹⁵ Lombardo 2008, 1.

¹⁶ Pernick 1997, 1767.

¹⁷ Largent 2008, 21.

¹⁸ Laaka 2002, 15–18.

– created methods of preserving racial purity within colonies. There was a similar colonial approach in the treatment of indigenous populations within Europe’s borders. For example, in Nordic countries, the indigenous Sámi people were subjected to mistreatment and various eugenic acts as they were seen as culturally and racially inferior and dark-skinned compared to the superior, white Nordic European peoples of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland.¹⁹

Eugenical practices can be divided into *positive* and *negative eugenics*. Positive eugenics refers to practices that aimed to improve the health and well-being of the human race, whereas negative eugenics refers to the elimination of negative traits and genes through acts such as forced sterilizations or, in extreme cases, killing.²⁰ Perhaps the most drastic example of negative eugenics in history is the systematic slaughter of different minorities in Nazi Germany under the pretext of protecting the purity of the Aryan race during the Second World War (1939–1945). In most countries, it was common to use both negative and positive practices. For example, in Nordic countries, eugenicists relied on methods of negative eugenics – such as segregation, institutionalization and marriage restrictions – as well as positive eugenics, which included maternal and child benefits and contraception.²¹

1.2 Who Was Havelock Ellis? – Careers in Sexology and Eugenics

Havelock Ellis was born in 1859 in Croydon, Surrey, to English sea Captain Edward Ellis and his wife Susannah.²² He was their firstborn, and only son. Later, Susannah Ellis gave birth to four daughters. Ellis’ father’s profession led him to often be absent from home for long periods of time which meant Havelock Ellis grew up mainly looked after by his mother. In England, Ellis studied in French and German schools.²³ His father’s profession also led to Ellis getting chances to see the world at a very young age: at the age of six, he sailed around the world with Captain Ellis and visited countries such as Australia, Peru and Belgium.²⁴ When was 16, he embarked on another world tour with his father, but ended up staying for four years in Sydney, Australia, during which he worked as a teacher.²⁵

¹⁹ Balogun & Turda 2023, 170–171.

²⁰ Mehler 1988, 11.

²¹ Weßel 2018, 9.

²² Goldberg 1926, 28.

²³ Allen, read 14.9.2023, <https://modjourn.org/biography/ellis-havelock-1859-1939/>

²⁴ Goldberg 1926, 33–34.

²⁵ Goldberg 1926, 45–46.

Ellis married Edith Lees (1861–1916), who was an openly non-heterosexual woman and very politically active. She took part in socialist, pacifist and feminist movements, and spoke and wrote openly and positively about homosexual lives and experiences. In her texts, she always highlighted herself as an inverted woman, calling herself, for example, a pervert, an abnormal person, and a true invert.²⁶ Edith Lees described her marriage to Ellis in her book *The New Horizon in Love and Life* as the partnership of two economically independent people who lived separately to avoid the stress of daily domestic cohabitation but communicated regularly through letters and visits.²⁷ They also helped each other in their writing careers. In his biography of Havelock Ellis, Isaac Goldberg wrote that Lees was always eager to talk with Ellis about her work and that she expected helpful criticism from him.²⁸ Later in their lives, Edith Lees used her husband’s fame to gain larger platforms for her own ideas.²⁹

Ellis was aware of his wife’s sexuality, but it did not seem to bother them or their relationship.³⁰ Lees had informed Ellis about her past infatuations with girls and women before they got married in 1892. During their marriage, when she had relationships with women, she was open about them. For example, when she had a relationship with her old friend Claire, she confessed the truth to her husband who described his feelings on the matter in his autobiography: “We neither of us needed apologies for we bravely faced our difficulties together, and out of them we won a new harmony and reached profounder depths of love.”³¹ When he married, Ellis was not yet a devoted researcher of homosexuality nor did he have any practical knowledge of sexual inversion at this time.³² Edith Lees’ sexuality and relationships inspired Ellis’ research and even played a part in the creation of *Sexual Inversion*. He used Edith Lees and her friends as examples and case stories in *Sexual Inversion*.³³

Ellis is known for his works on different areas of human sexuality as well as his eugenical writings. Before his groundbreaking research on human sexuality and specifically homosexuality, Ellis worked as a teacher in Australia and studied medicine. He became a qualified physician, but he never practiced this profession. What had motivated him to study medicine had not been the career of a doctor, but the fact that, at the time, doctors were among the few professions that were considered to have the “right” to speak and write on the topic of human sexuality, which was a subject Ellis wanted

²⁶ Vicinus 2012, 583–587.

²⁷ Goldberg 1926, 126–127.

²⁸ Goldberg 1926, 130.

²⁹ Vicinus 2012, 583–587.

³⁰ Vicinus 2012, 583–587.

³¹ Ellis 1940, 264.

³² Ellis 1940, 263.

³³ Vicinus 2012, 583–587.

to focus on. Over the course of his career, Ellis studied sexuality from multiple angles, focusing on, for example, love, homosexuality, the relationship between eugenics and sexuality, and contraception. He studied feminist theories of his time – he was, for example, highly inspired by John Stuart Mill, who authored the famous *The Subjection of Women* (1869) – and was intrigued by how politics, gender and sexuality were tied together.³⁴ Ellis saw sexuality as one of the most significant driving forces of human life and he emphasized, throughout his career, the importance of sex in people's lives.³⁵

Ellis wanted to modernize the way the people of Britain regarded women's sexuality and loosen the societal rules that upheld traditional views on what was appropriate and what was not. This led him to, for example, advocate for easy-access contraception and women's right to enjoy sex without fear of unwanted pregnancies.³⁶ He was also a significant figure in the discourse surrounding the understanding of homosexuality in the 20th century. For example, he advocated homosexuality to be understood as an organic, inborn trait and deviance rather than a sin.³⁷ One of the most notable achievements in Ellis' career in the field of sexuality research was the publication of *Sexual Inversion*.

Ellis played a role, alongside people like Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935)³⁸, in popularizing *sexology* and making it a notable field of research.³⁹ Sexology became its own, separate field of research in the late 19th century. This does not mean that sexuality had never been researched before the 19th century – there had, naturally, been research and writing on the subject, but it had not been its own specific field until the late 19th century. Later, in the 20th century, through figures such as Ellis, sexology became an even more respected field.⁴⁰ In the early days of the developing field of sexology, research was mostly focused on issues surrounding sex that were considered problematic, such as masturbation, venereal diseases, prostitution, birth control and, on detecting signs of sexual crimes such as rape in victims.⁴¹ As sexology became more prominent, experts became more and more interested in so-called sexual deviations, such as homosexuality. It is even considered that sexology

³⁴ Crozier 2008, 188.

³⁵ Lyons 2020, 308.

³⁶ Crozier 2008, 190.

³⁷ Hobson 2020, 225.

³⁸ Magnus Hirschfeld, a German Jew, was one of the most notable sexologists of his time. During his career, Hirschfeld, a homosexual man himself, founded the world's first homosexual rights organization, Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the purpose of which was to research sexuality, advocate for homosexual people and work towards societal change. He also formed the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*, an institute for sexual research. His theories on sexuality leaned on biological essentialism. (Steakley 1997, 134, 138–139, 150.)

³⁹ Hobson 2020, 225.

⁴⁰ Stein 2020, 326–327.

⁴¹ Crozier 2008b, 13.

developed in tandem with the rising interest in homosexuality and the desire of experts to explain the phenomenon because they wanted another point of view to the subject outside traditional assumptions of homosexuality as a mental illness.⁴² Even though writers like Ellis had a significant impact on their field, it is important to remember that their publications and ideas did not have an instant, global affect nor did they change, overnight, how people understood same-sex sexuality and desire⁴³ – sometimes new information was welcomed and accepted, and sometimes new ideas were ignored or they simply did not stick.

Homosexuality, and what would now be referred to as transgender experiences, were both, during Ellis' time, considered to be aspects of a larger phenomenon of deviant or differing sexuality and gender presentation known as sexual inversion. People who broke gender rules and norms were most often the research subjects – for example, regarding women, early sexologists focused on, among other themes, the masculinity of lesbian women and the dynamics in relationships between masculine women and more feminine women. Later, as sexology developed as a field, sexologists began to pay more attention to what was considered normal sexuality and gender presentation.⁴⁴

The inspiration to Ellis' – and other English sexologists' – active work in sexology lies partly in the harshness of the laws on homosexuality in England at his time. Sexologists like Ellis, who saw homosexuality as something not inherently sinful or wrong, wanted to challenge the laws which deemed homosexuals as criminal. They wanted to create a society where the law was not the only discipline that was heard in cases regarding homosexuality and make medicine the central authority on such topics. Integral aspects of this campaign were introducing new terminology for homosexuality and emphasizing homosexuality as something innate rather than as a chosen act and a criminal act.⁴⁵ The law acted as a kind of antagonist against which new theories and ideas were created.

Ellis' works were widely read. But despite this and his campaigning to change people's and the law's perception of homosexual people, his ideas did not create any meaningful change in his time. It was only after his death that his works started to be cited in, for example, court.⁴⁶ But this should not be seen as evidence that Ellis' works created no change at all. Even if no legal changes occurred,

⁴² Crozier 2008b, 18.

⁴³ Rupp 2011, 152–153.

⁴⁴ Stein 2020, 327–328.

⁴⁵ Crozier 2001, 81–82.

⁴⁶ Crozier 2001, 63.

considered how widely Ellis was read, his works surely inspired change on an emotional and individual level. He was an important part of his time's conversations surrounding sexuality and his writings became an integral part of the canon of sexuality research.

Over the course of his life and career, Ellis also published multiple texts on the topic of eugenics. Ellis was an active member of the British Eugenics Society⁴⁷ from 1907 until his death in 1939. While and after publishing his studies on sexuality, he focused on popularizing his eugenic ideas. Some examples of his eugenical writings are *The Sterilization of the Unfit* (1909), in which he critiqued the ways in which people considered unfit were sterilized in Switzerland⁴⁸, and *The Problems of Race-Regeneration* (1911), where he suggested ways in which people with unfavorable genes could be coaxed into sterilization. Instead of forced sterilizations, Ellis suggested, for example, that people would be persuaded to choose sterilization by withdrawing monetary aid such as Poor Relief or by educating people considered unfit of their own genetic flaws.⁴⁹ The goal was that people would, on their own, realize that sterilization is the wisest decision they can make for their country.

1.2 The National Contexts of Ellis' book: England and The United States

Ellis attempted to publish *Sexual Inversion* in England, using a publisher that was considered dubious. His work was banned as obscene, and he was forced to publish his books outside of his home country, in Germany and the United States.⁵⁰

Ellis' more sympathetic understanding of homosexuality did not align with the morals and laws of Victorian English⁵¹ society. As Ellis put it in *Sexual Inversion*: "The existing law in England is severe but simple".⁵² At the turn of the 20th century, England was the European country with the most severe

⁴⁷ The society was originally called Eugenics Education Society, but in 1926 they changed their name to Eugenics Society.

⁴⁸ Ellis criticized the way the Swiss began sterilizing "unfit" individuals. Ellis saw castration and removal of sexual glands as unnecessary, as people can be sterilized through less invasive means, like a vasectomy or the ligation of the Fallopian tubes. These methods do not result in anything being removed from a body, which Ellis considered a plus, because removing any organs or glands can result in medical issues. Ellis also had worries regarding the consent given by the patients to be sterilized - he was an advocate for voluntary sterilization, not forced. (Ellis 1909, 204–205) Ellis' criticism is a good example on how eugenicists had the same goals – purification or protection of race – but different approaches. Some favored negative eugenics and some positive eugenics.

⁴⁹ Crozier 2008a, 191.

⁵⁰ Dixon 2009, 73.

⁵¹ The Victorian era in Britain is considered to have spanned from around 1820 to the early years of the 20th century. The era was named after the reign of Queen Victoria which lasted from 1837 to 1901.

⁵² Ellis 1915, 426.

laws regarding homosexuality.⁵³ In 1861 the Offences Against the Person Act was passed. It reinforced the existing laws regarding homosexuality and introduced the new punishment of ten-years-to-life in penal servitude for homosexual actions. Interestingly, while the Act in some ways heightened the punishment for homosexuality, it also got rid of the rarely implemented death penalty.⁵⁴ In 1885, some years before Ellis attempted to publish *Sexual Inversion*, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed. It criminalized not just anal intercourse, but all kinds of homosexual acts between men, including kissing and proposing or looking for sexual partners. The law did not only condemn sexual acts between men committed in public, but also in private – all acts were considered, by the law, as “conspiracy to commit sodomy”.⁵⁵

The Criminal Law Amendment is considered to have been the first law in England to target specifically and only relationships between men.⁵⁶ These acts were all labeled under the newly created offense *Gross Indecency*.⁵⁷ It has been said that the harshness of the English law regarding homosexuality culminated in the 1895 trials of Oscar Wilde, a famous author and darling of London society known for his flamboyant persona and his works that included homosexual subtext⁵⁸, who was charged with Gross Indecency.⁵⁹ Wilde was prosecuted and punished as harshly as possible even though the evidence against him was only circumstantial and uncorroborated. He was also vilified and demonized in public conversation.⁶⁰ Ellis explored the law and its impact in *Sexual Inversion*, referencing different Acts, the Wilde scandal and punishments, and while he did agree that certain kinds of acts, such as acts done in public or acts between an adult and a child, should be punished by law, he emphasized that in his opinion the law was too harsh on relationships of two consenting adults of the same sex.⁶¹

Despite the harshness of the English laws, there was a certain laxness to implementing them throughout the Victorian period. Convictions were relatively rare (in the 1840s, for example, there were only 12–18 sentences for sodomy), and the police often let the famous and the powerful off the hook if they were caught.⁶² Certain kinds of cases were also hushed up for fear of creating scandal.

⁵³ Adut 2005, 214.

⁵⁴ Lemmey & Miller 2022, 11.

⁵⁵ Crozier 2008b, 10.

⁵⁶ Lemmey & Miller 2022, 11.

⁵⁷ Adut 2005, 224.

⁵⁸ E.g. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)

⁵⁹ For more on Wilde’s trial as a culmination of the harshness of English law, see e.g. *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of Late Victorian Britain* (Trevor Fisher, 1995) and *Oscar Wilde* (David Pritchard 2001)

⁶⁰ Adut 2005, 214.

⁶¹ Ellis 1915, 431.

⁶² Adut 2005, 214.

For example, actions of schoolboys in elite schools were frowned upon but kept secret, and teachers suspected of homosexual behavior in respected establishments were quietly fired rather than exposed for fear of the school getting a bad reputation.⁶³ But even though the law was not perhaps utilized to its full effect, that does not mean the society of Victorian England was kind to homosexual people. There were convictions, juries were occasionally harsher on suspected “sodomites”⁶⁴ because of their own personal disgust and prejudice, and historians have uncovered cases of mob violence where the motivation behind the violent acts was specifically anti-homosexual hatred.⁶⁵ Ellis also wrote on the problem of blackmail. Because the laws were so severe, blackmailers could easily threaten to turn homosexuals in to the police if their demands were not met.⁶⁶ Ellis believed that public opinion on homosexuality tended to swing between extremes. His ideal state of opinion was somewhere between extreme hatred and extreme acceptance.

English society’s approach to homosexuality was also characterized by silence. Public conversations surrounding sex and sexuality were considered inappropriate, and the mere mention of homosexuality was enough to tarnish someone’s reputation. Sodomy was considered “unmentionable”, a “nameless” crime. Even hearing of homosexuality was considered dangerous to children and women, as it was feared that they would be easily corrupted due to their inherent delicacy. The desire to keep the subject of homosexuality a secret and away from the ears of those considered most vulnerable to corruption and seduction was also one of the reasons why lesbian acts were never criminalized in English law. If there were no laws regarding the subject, that would make it harder for innocent women and girls to learn such a sin even existed.⁶⁷

After failing to publish *Sexual Inversion* in England, Ellis went on to publish the work in Germany and in the United States. In Germany, it was published as a translation, but in the United States, it was finally published in its original language, making it the first English-language medical textbook about homosexuality. Ellis became a respected and widely read figure in the United States.⁶⁸ The reasons as to why Ellis became popular there while his works were banned in England lies in the differences between the countries’ public conversations on homosexuality. The decades between

⁶³ Adut 2005, 225.

⁶⁴ The term “sodomy” had its roots in the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodomy referred to any kind of sexual acts that were considered unnatural, not just homosexuality. Zoophilia, for example, also fell under the category of sodomy. Being a sodomite also did not refer to an identity or a state of being like homosexuality did: sodomy was an act, not an identity. (Aldrich 2006, 10–11)

⁶⁵ Adut 2005, 215.

⁶⁶ Ellis 1915, 431.

⁶⁷ Adut 2005, 223–224.

⁶⁸ Lyons 2020, 308.

1880 and 1920 were a period of active conversation and research on sexuality in the United States.⁶⁹ By contrast, the 19th century was a period in Britain where people only rarely wrote explicitly about homosexuality, rather hiding references to it in books on other subjects, such as venereology and forensic medicine. Research on homosexuality also was not supported on an institutional level. Havelock Ellis often presented himself – and he has largely been regarded as such by later historians – as the first English scientist to tackle the subject of homosexuality explicitly. This declaration is very ambitious, but it is true that, before Ellis, medical discourse in Britain was scarce and British research on the subject was overshadowed by the research done in continental Europe.⁷⁰

In late 19th century and early 20th century, sexology developed rapidly as a field in the United States⁷¹ despite there being many laws against homosexuality and other sex acts that were considered reprehensible, such as incest, adultery, sex with a child and sexual assault.⁷² The United States had eradicated the death penalty in all 13 original colonies by 1869, but, just like in Britain, convicted homosexuals were still subjected to punishments, such as forced labor and time in prison.⁷³ But despite the laws against homosexuality, conversation and research surrounding sexuality was active, not characterized by silence like it was in Britain. The American sexological research was heavily based on the writings of notable European scientists, such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902)⁷⁴, Karl Westphal (1833–1890), as well as Havelock Ellis himself, but the era also saw many American sexologists rise to fame and engage in conversation with European colleagues while also focusing on issues of sex and society that were considered solely American.⁷⁵

1.3 Original Source

Studies in the Psychology of Sex is a seven-volume series on the nature of human sexuality. Ellis published the first volume in 1897 and in 1928 he finished his series with the seventh volume. In my thesis, I focus on the second volume, entitled *Sexual Inversion* (1897), but a brief look into what the

⁶⁹ Duggan 1993, 791.

⁷⁰ Crozier 2001, 62.

⁷¹ Stein 2020, 326.

⁷² Weinmeyer 2014, 916.

⁷³ Beemyn 2006, 152.

⁷⁴ Krafft-Ebing was a German psychiatrist who is considered one of the founders of scientific sexology. He was known for advocating for homosexuality to be researched properly rather than be classified simply as a crime or a sin. His most well-known book on the subject is *Psycopathia Sexualis* (1886) which is considered one of the cornerstones of sexology and deals with many different topics alongside sexual inversion such as sadism, masochism, bestiality, and necrophilia. (Oosterhuis 1997, 67, 70–71.)

⁷⁵ Stein 2020, 330.

other volumes focus on is warranted as it helps in understanding what kind of series Ellis wrote and the subjects on which he was an authority.

The first book of the series is entitled *The Evolution of Modesty, The Phenomena of Sexual Periodicity, Auto-Erotism* (1897) and explores, among other things, the idea of auto-erotism or autosexuality, which refers to the practice of sexually pleasuring or stimulating oneself.⁷⁶ In volume three, *Analysis of the Sexual Impulse, Love and Pain, The Sexual Impulse in Women* (1903), Ellis attempted to explain the nature of sexual impulse and emotion, and what makes humans experience different complex aspects of sexuality, while also offering a closer look into the links between love, pleasure and pain, and sexual impulse in women specifically.⁷⁷ Volume four, *Sexual Selection in Man* (1905) explores the significance of the senses – touch, smell, hearing and vision – in sexual selection and in choosing a partner.⁷⁸ In volume five, *Erotic Symbolism, The Mechanism of Detumescence, The Psychic State in Pregnancy* (1906), Ellis wrote about different aberrations of human sexuality. Among other things, he explored the reasons and emotions behind fetishes such as foot-fetishism and masochism. He also discussed bestiality and zoophilia, which refer to sexual attraction toward animals, and exhibitionism which refers to the desire to expose one’s genitalia in public and the sexual excitement gained from the act. The book concludes with a brief exploration of women’s emotional state during pregnancy.⁷⁹ Volume six, *Sex in Relation to Society* (1910) is Ellis’ deep dive into the relationship between sex, love, sexuality, and society. He explored the nature of sex education, ideas of chastity and virginity, sexual morality, sex work, and the links between prostitution and venereal diseases.⁸⁰ The seventh book of the series, *Eonism and other supplementary studies* was published much later in 1928, and contains discussions on different types of sexual “deviations”, such as eonism which refers to a person’s desire to act, dress up and live like a member of the opposite sex⁸¹ and *undinism* which refers to finding sexual arousal and satisfaction from being urinated on, witnessing someone else urinate, or the smell of urine.⁸²

Sexual Inversion is a significant book in the history of homosexuality research and study, because it was the first medical English-language book solely focused on the topic of non-heterosexual feeling,

⁷⁶ Ellis 1897.

⁷⁷ Ellis 1903.

⁷⁸ Ellis 1905.

⁷⁹ Ellis 1906.

⁸⁰ Ellis 1910.

⁸¹ I am aware that terms like “opposite sex” are problematic from a modern point of view, as today we understand gender and sex to be separate and complex phenomena, and the idea of a gender binary is considered old-fashioned and false. I will be elaborating on my use of gender and sexuality terms in chapters 2.1 and 2.2.

⁸² Ellis 1928.

love, and sex. There had been multiple respected and well-known works from sexologists that included the subject in their works on sexuality, but none had, before Ellis and his co-writer John Addington Symonds (1840–1893), dedicated an entire medical textbook to it. Addington Symonds, born in Bristol, England, was the son of a physician who studied at the university of Oxford, where he developed an interest in topics he, later on in his life, published essays and books about, such as poetry and cultural history.⁸³ Addington Symonds married and had four children, but also had, throughout his life, relationships with other men.⁸⁴ One of his most notable publications was *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883), which focused on heavily ancient Greek concepts of homosexuality. He originally circulated the text privately among like-minded acquaintances.⁸⁵

Even though they never met in person, Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds combined their individual fields of expertise to create *Sexual Inversion*.⁸⁶ Ellis focused on the book's scientific content while Addington Symonds authored the content surrounding historical cultures and peoples.⁸⁷ A version of Addington Symonds' *A Problem in Greek Ethics* was originally the third chapter of *Sexual Inversion*.⁸⁸ The book was published after Addington Symonds' death under both their names.⁸⁹ However, in later editions of the book, Ellis edited the book's content to be more focused on the science and reduced the historical overviews that Addington Symonds had contributed.⁹⁰ *A Problem in Greek Ethics* was demoted from chapter three to an appendix, and later taken out completely.⁹¹ In many newer editions – including the one I am using as my source text – Addington Symonds is not credited as the co-author of the book. Leaving Addington Symonds' contributions out and publishing just under his own name was not Ellis' own idea. Horatio Brown, the executor of the literary side of his client's legacy and his advisor, claimed that on his deathbed, Addington Symonds had asked him to consider his family when thinking of future publications. To protect Addington Symonds' legacy and his family's reputation, Brown demanded his name be left out of the book.⁹²

⁸³ Butler 2022, 1–3.

⁸⁴ Butler 2022, 3, 5.

⁸⁵ Butler 2019 (read 28.5.2024): <https://symondsproject.org/greek-ethics-history/>

⁸⁶ Butler 2019 (read 28.5.2024): <https://symondsproject.org/greek-ethics-history/>

⁸⁷ Dixon 2009, 72.

⁸⁸ Butler 2019 (read 28.5.2024): <https://symondsproject.org/greek-ethics-history/>

⁸⁹ Dixon 2009, 72.

⁹⁰ Dixon 2009, 72–73.

⁹¹ Butler 2019 (read 28.5.2024): <https://symondsproject.org/greek-ethics-history/>

⁹² Crozier 2008b, 56–57.

Sexual Inversion is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the book and discusses, for example, terminology, homosexuality in different cultures, notable homosexual historical figures (including, among others, the Renaissance artist and genius Michelangelo) and homosexuality among different animals. Chapter two focuses on the history of sexuality research. Ellis explored accomplishments and ideas of sexologists and scientists such as Karl Westphal, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895), Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing and Magnus Hirschfeld. The third chapter is dedicated to the study of homosexuality and inversion in men and includes multiple personal accounts from homosexual men. The fourth chapter is dedicated to homosexual women and explaining how and why homosexuality appears in women and in what contexts it is most common. This chapter also includes personal testaments from homosexual women. Chapter five is about the nature of sexual inversion and Ellis’s deep dive into the personal histories and the common attributes they share. The sixth chapter is focused on different theories surrounding homosexuality, such as Freud’s theories and the link between homosexuality and degeneration. The final chapter features Ellis’ conclusions and his deliberations on how society should treat and think of homosexual people. My copy of *Sexual Inversion* also features two appendices, the first of which is written by Josiah Flynt and entitled “Homosexuality Among Tramps”. The second appendix is written by Ellis himself and is focused on friendships between girls at schools.⁹³

A notable aspect of *Sexual Inversion* is Ellis’ use of personal stories from homosexual informants. Alongside his own research, findings and deductions on the subject, the book was written using 80 stories from non-heterosexuals. The ones he explores the most, Ellis referred to as *histories*. All his cases are either American or British – the ancestry of his subjects was not of special interest, but he does go on to reference the different countries his subjects had roots in.⁹⁴

Ellis gathered his histories from many sources. Some were given to him by his homosexual friends, some were sent to him by strangers who wanted to tell him their own story because they knew he was an expert on the matter, and some were from homosexual acquaintances of Ellis’ friends who later became acquainted with Ellis too. Not everyone who wrote to Ellis or told him their story was aware of homosexuality or sexual inversion as concepts – some thought they were the only ones to have ever felt that way – while some were fully aware of homosexuality as a wide, common occurrence.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ellis 1915.

⁹⁴ Ellis 1915, 330.

⁹⁵ Ellis 1915, 109.

Some of the histories were written down in Ellis' own words – summaries from conversations he had had or stories he had been told – but some were written down as they were sent to him.

It was quite common at the time to consider homosexual people as, as Ellis put it, “lying and deceitful degenerates”⁹⁶, which often led to people disregarding the stories and experiences recounted by homosexual people of their own lives as fabricated stories and lies. In *Sexual Inversion* Ellis, however, states that in his opinion, the stories he was given by homosexual people were often as good, if not better, than stories he was given by heterosexual people. Ellis praised, for example, homosexual people for their frankness, intelligence and their ability to analyze themselves and their emotions.⁹⁷ Ellis might have thought so because it is likely that homosexual people had to think about, explore and question their feelings more than heterosexual people, because they lived in a society that deemed them and their identities as unacceptable or even unreal – the journey of realizing who you are would have demanded a lot of introspection, as is evident in many of Ellis' case histories.

Even though Ellis generally seemed to trust the histories sent to him, he did not use every story he was given. He left out some histories that seemed to include some level of fabrication and kept those he deemed as truthful as possible. Of the histories he did include, he did offer some criticism and warning. For example, he stated that it is not uncommon for people's stories about themselves to include “emotional-coloring”, which can lead people to present themselves as either too good or too bad.⁹⁸ Ellis did not go further into why he decided to ignore some stories and include others. If he based his decisions on the supposed accuracy of the stories, it begs the question as to what could have made a story stand out as untrue to him. It is possible that Ellis left out stories that did not fit into his own preconceived ideas of homosexuality and thus felt, to him, wrong or inaccurate. If this was the case, Ellis left out stories that would have given his readers and himself a wider understanding of homosexual experiences.

The stories remain anonymous, with only nicknames, such as Miss V or Miss D, indicating sex and marital status of the subject. The stories create a vivid picture of how varied the homosexual experiences of people can be and offer the reader a glimpse into what it was like to grow up, live and have relationships as a homosexual person at this time in history. Most of the histories are from men and based on men's experiences, even though Ellis highlights in his book that homosexuality is just

⁹⁶ Ellis 1915, 105–106.

⁹⁷ Ellis 1915, 107.

⁹⁸ Ellis 1915, 109.

as common in women as it is in men. As an explanation for the imbalance between male and female histories, he mentioned that it is more difficult to find and hear non-heterosexual women's stories.⁹⁹ Ellis offered some explanation as to why women's stories might be more difficult to uncover. One reason could be women's tendency to be physically affectionate with each other, which makes it difficult to distinguish between close friendship and "abnormal passion". Another reason could be women's lack of understanding when it comes to matters of sexuality, which can lead to women not being able to comprehend what they feel or recognize their emotions as non-normative.¹⁰⁰ It is worth noting that the number of case histories Ellis included in his book is relatively small. He makes bold claims and generalizations about large groups of people – homosexual men and women – based on a very limited collection of stories. They should not be seen as representing all homosexual men and women of the time.

1.4 Historiography

Attitudes surrounding non-heterosexual desire, love and sex in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have been explored by many historians. My thesis is a continuation of this research tradition. In my work, I will be leaning on, among others, the following texts. For general information on the life of non-heterosexual people of the time, I will be using *Gay Life and Culture: A World History* (2006), edited by Robert Aldrich, which features several essays about queer life and culture in several historical time periods, including chapters dedicated to non-heterosexual women and the early 20th century United States and Great Britain, the two central countries for my research, as Ellis lived and worked in Britain and published his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* for the first time in its original language in the United States.¹⁰¹

When discussing how different thinkers of Ellis' time understood homosexuality, I will be using *Science and Homosexualities* (1997), edited by Vernon A. Rosario, which features articles on other notable sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld.¹⁰² For how the field of medicine and law generally understood homosexual or bisexual women at this time, I have leaned on texts such as Lisa Duggan's *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, violence*

⁹⁹ Vicinus 2012, 566.

¹⁰⁰ Ellis 1915, 255.

¹⁰¹ Aldrich 2006.

¹⁰² Rosario 1997.

and *American Modernity* (2000)¹⁰³, Karin A. Martin's "Medical Opinion on Homosexuality, 1900–1950" (1993)¹⁰⁴ and Martha Vicinus' "The History of Lesbian History" (2012)¹⁰⁵, among others. For my chapter focusing on female masculinity, I used Jack Halberstam's *Feminine Masculinity* (1998)¹⁰⁶.

Havelock Ellis is an important figure in the field of sexuality history and research, and thus it is not surprising he has been explored a fair amount by researchers. One of the most notable historians whose works influence my own is Ivan Crozier, who has written extensively on Ellis' sexuality research as well as his eugenical thinking. Crozier's article "Havelock Ellis, eugenicist" (2008) offers a look into Ellis' eugenical career, his most notable eugenical writings and ideas,¹⁰⁷ and Crozier's critical edition of *Sexual Inversion* from 2007 explores the background, meaning and importance of *Sexual Inversion* in depth.¹⁰⁸ His 2001 article "The Medical Construction of Homosexuality and its Relation to the Law in Nineteen-Century England"¹⁰⁹ helped me in understanding the context of Victorian England.

Ellis' views on homosexual women have been studied and challenged by feminist and lesbian scholars.¹¹⁰ Martha Vicinus explores Ellis and his understanding of women as a part of her "The History of Lesbian History" (2012) and Chiara Beccalossi contributed to the book *Tribades, tommies and transgressives: history of sexualities* (2008) with an article "Havelock Ellis: sexual inverts as independent women".¹¹¹ My thesis is an attempt to both continue this research tradition and to offer a deep and encompassing look into Ellis' views on homosexual women. My thesis also joins a mere few academic studies written and published about Ellis and his works in Finland. I have only found two Finnish master's theses on Ellis. Marja Laaka writes, in "Havelock Ellis rodun parantajana 1900-luvun vaihteen Britanniassa" from 2002, about how and why Ellis wanted to improve the British race and how Ellis can be considered a somewhat moderate eugenicist.¹¹² Hanna Ikola explored moralism in Havelock Ellis' writings in another master's thesis "‘Ihmissielua vapauttamassa’: Havelock Ellisin julkinen moralismi" (2008).¹¹³

¹⁰³ Duggan 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Martin 1993.

¹⁰⁵ Vicinus 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Halberstam 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Crozier 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Crozier 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Crozier 2001.

¹¹⁰ Beccalossi 2008, 211.

¹¹¹ Beccalossi 2008.

¹¹² Laaka 2002.

¹¹³ Ikola 2008.

One of the major themes in my thesis is the link between eugenics and Ellis' views on homosexual women. Laaka's thesis and Crozier's aforementioned "Havelock Ellis, eugenicist" offer a deep dive into Ellis' eugenical career. Crozier's article specifically discusses, albeit briefly, the connection between eugenics and sexuality in Ellis' publications. I have yet to find any papers focused solely on the relationship between eugenics and Ellis' understanding of sexuality in *Sexual Inversion*. My thesis will aid in filling this gap. When it comes to the larger understanding of eugenics as a phenomenon and ideology, I will be leaning on Pekka Isaksson and Jouko Jokisalo's *Kallonmittaajia ja skinejä: Rasismien aatehistoriaa* (2018), which explores discusses racist ideologies in multiple historical time periods and how, for example in the case of eugenics, racism has fueled scientific theories.¹¹⁴ Other texts I have used for the chapters on eugenics in my thesis include, alongside Laaka's thesis, Margaret Gibson's article "The Masculine Degenerate: American Doctors' Portrayals of the Lesbian Intellect, 1880–1949" (1998)¹¹⁵, *Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (2008)¹¹⁶ by Paul A. Lombardo, Angel Logan and Maxwell J. Mehlman and *Breeding Contempt: The History of Coerced Sterilization in the United States* (2008)¹¹⁷ by Mark A. Largent.

1.5 Methodology and Theoretical Traditions

My research is *qualitative research*. The aim of qualitative research is to understand different historical phenomena and events, and how the people of the time felt about them and comprehended them.¹¹⁸ In qualitative research, the researcher approaches their source material with an open mind. The researcher might have an aim or an idea of what they specifically want to explore through their source, but they don't often have a set of concrete hypotheses they wish to prove or disprove. The researcher analyses their sources extensively, looking for, among other things, repeated phrases, words, or terms, and comparing them to the information they've gathered from their additional sources.¹¹⁹ The goal of qualitative research is not necessarily to find out an objective truth or a large set of results, but a deeper understanding of an event or an idea.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Isaksson & Jokisalo 2018.

¹¹⁵ Gibson 1998.

¹¹⁶ Lombardo 2008.

¹¹⁷ Largent 2008.

¹¹⁸ Grenier & Merriam 2019, 4.

¹¹⁹ Grenier & Merriam 2019, 6–7.

¹²⁰ Cooper & White 2012, 7.

Close reading is a key approach and method in qualitative research. Close reading, which is the central method in my thesis, is a method based on observation, analysis and interpretation, and the close, intricate study of your source. In close reading, the researcher puts their source under a microscope and looks for patterns, contradictions, repetition, and then uses these findings to back up their interpretation of their chosen topic.¹²¹ Close reading can be applied to many kinds of sources, both digital and physical. I used a physical copy of *Sexual Inversion* in my research.

I have approached my sources from the perspectives of *conceptual history* and *gender*, and *sexuality history*. Gender and sexuality history focus on exploring how people of the past understood gender, sex, and sexuality. Gender history began as women's history and became popular in the 1970s as historians began to focus on the lives and experiences of history's women.¹²² In the 1980s the field became more diverse, as historians started to explore lives of ordinary women alongside the famous and the powerful.¹²³ While my research is not focused on non-heterosexual women's own thoughts and feelings about themselves, but on how an outside authority, and, based on my findings, a heterosexually feeling man, understood these women's lives and loves, my research is firmly placed in the field of gender history, as I am trying to uncover how women's gender and sexuality were understood. My research is also a part of the field of gender studies.

Historians began to focus on the history of sexuality in the late 20th century as sexuality became a more widely discussed topic. This was due to the prominence of publications of noted researchers such as the philosopher / historian Michel Foucault, who published *The History of Sexuality* in 1976.¹²⁴ In my attempts at figuring out an appropriate way of discussing non-heterosexual sexuality and sexuality overall, I have familiarized myself with discussions that notable historians of sexuality have had in the past; for example, when deciding what terms I will use when it comes to the people Ellis writes about and when discussing homosexual women, I have explored which terms earlier researchers have used and why. For example, Amy Richlin's article "Sexuality and History" in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory* offered me a significant look into debates surrounding terminology in the field of sexuality history.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Kain 1998. <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading>, read 8.4.2023.

¹²² In the 1970s scholars published many groundbreaking female-centric works in many fields of history, such as *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Woman Healers* (Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English 1973), *Hidden From History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against it* (Sheila Rowbotham 1973), *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (Sarah Pomeroy 1975) and "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" (Joan Kelly 1977).

¹²³ Lipscomb 2021, 179.

¹²⁴ Richlin 2013, 294.

¹²⁵ Richlin 2013, 300–303.

Conceptual history is a branch of history that focuses on the weight and importance of terminology, the changes in terminology over time¹²⁶ and how the terms people use can act as windows into the past and reveal how the people of a certain time period thought about particular things, understood their world and comprehended different phenomena.¹²⁷ My research is not solely focused on the terminology used by Havelock Ellis in his works, but understanding what he means by certain words and how his understanding of terms that might still be used widely today differs from the way we, in the 21st century, comprehend them.

¹²⁶ Ihalainen & Marjanen 2022, 50.

¹²⁷ Freeden & Steinmetz 2017, 1–2.

2 TERMINOLOGY

What is sexual inversion? Is it, as many would have us believe, an abominably acquired vice, to be stamped out by the prison? or is it, as a few assert, a beneficial variety of human emotion which should be tolerated or even fostered? Is it a diseased condition which qualifies its subject for the lunatic asylum? or is it a natural monstrosity, a human 'sport', the manifestations of which must be regulated when they become antisocial? There is probably an element of truth in more than one of these views.¹²⁸

Havelock Ellis, 1915.

In this chapter, I will focus on two main themes. First, I will analyze Havelock Ellis' views on sexuality, and then I will focus more on his views on sex and gender. The goal of this chapter is to explain how Ellis saw the terminology he used, why I chose to use certain terms and not others, and to present certain problems that come with dealing with homosexuality in a historical context, trying to assign labels on people of the past and working with historical texts that are, from a modern point of view, outdated.

2.1 Ellis' Views on Sexuality

Terms that Havelock Ellis used when describing people and sexuality in *Sexual Inversion* include *sexual inversion* and *invert*, *homosexuality* and *homosexual*, *heterosexual* and *bisexual*. Heterosexuality refers to sexual attraction and relations between men and women. Ellis emphasized, on multiple occasions, that heterosexual people are the norm. He said, for example, when listing different kinds of sexualities: "There remains the normal person, who is 'heterosexual'." Bisexual and bisexuality refer to people who feel attraction to both men and women.¹²⁹ Homosexuality and sexual inversion are, as terms, closely linked. Both referred to people who are attracted to their own sex, but while homosexuality was a broader term that encompassed all kinds of homosexual actions between both humans and animals including temporary emotions and singular acts¹³⁰, sexual inversion referred to an innate, fixed aspect of a human being.¹³¹ Ellis did not believe a true homosexual or invert could be "cured", and, regarding proposed treatment methods, he commented:

¹²⁸ Ellis 1915, 376.

¹²⁹ Ellis 1915, 8.

¹³⁰ Ellis 1915, 8–9.

¹³¹ Ellis 1915, 5.

“The question of the treatment of homosexuality must be approached with discrimination, caution and skepticism. Nowadays we can have but little sympathy with those who, at all costs, are prepared to ‘cure’ the invert. There is no sound method of cure in radical cases.”¹³²

Homosexuality was, at Ellis’ time, a commonly used term for non-heterosexual behavior and feeling, whereas sexual inversion was a term less widely known. One of the reasons Ellis offered for homosexuality becoming the most common term was the way it fits into many languages and how it has fewer negative connotations than former terms such as *contrary sexual feeling*.¹³³ Havelock Ellis championed the term sexual inversion in the late 19th century and early 20th century, a term which presented non-heterosexual feeling and expression not as a sin, but a biological difference.¹³⁴

Ellis viewed homosexuality as something based in biology and thus something that one cannot change about oneself. For example, he thought that hormones, biological chemistry, and internal secretions affected how a person’s sexuality is manifested because they are closely linked to sexual phenomena. But he also argued that these biological phenomena might not be a sole cause of inversion but more like signs of an inborn, organic predisposition. They do not make anyone inverted, but they aid in bolstering a person’s innate invertedness.¹³⁵ Ellis did not believe inversion was somehow biologically determined on an embryonic level: there is no gene that determines one’s sexuality, just biological aspects that might make you more inclined to inversion.¹³⁶ He thought that all babies were born with equal amounts of male and female “germs”. As people grew up, the germs of your biological sex would overpower those of the other sex, but in the case of inverts, something becomes mixed up, and biological women, for example, end up having more male germs within them, which results in a woman who is inclined to inversion.¹³⁷ Ellis compared, albeit he admitted the comparison is not without its flaws, homosexual people to people who are inclined to idiocy, criminal activity or genius: people might have an inclination for these things and their biological development might support those aspects of them, but their biology does not necessarily control what they become.¹³⁸

The idea of terminology and placing people in strict categories was something with which Ellis seemed to find issue. Though he used the terms I introduced in the first paragraph of this chapter, he

¹³² Ellis 1915, 404.

¹³³ Ellis 1915, 6.

¹³⁴ Hobson 2020, 225.

¹³⁵ Ellis 1915, 390.

¹³⁶ Ellis 1915, 391.

¹³⁷ Ellis 1915, 384.

¹³⁸ Ellis 1915, 391.

also critiqued the terminology of his time and discussed their flaws. Ellis stated: “The early attempts of Krafft-Ebing and others at elaborate classification are no longer acceptable.”¹³⁹ Ellis challenged the classification methods of his time and explored the difficulties that come with trying to put labels on complex phenomena such as sexuality.

One of the key differences between homosexuality and sexual inversion was inversion’s innateness. Homosexuality, on the other hand, could be acquired in certain circumstances. If people are in a space where they have no way to fulfill their sexual desires with a partner of the opposite sex, some people will turn to members of their own sex for release. Some examples of spaces like these are prisons and ships. The belief that homosexuality and/or inversion could be fully acquired was supported by notable scholars, such as Krafft-Ebing and Iwan Bloch, but later on in their careers most gave up on this idea.¹⁴⁰ When the edition I am using as my source text was published there was, according to Ellis, two differing fields of interpretation: one which seeks to brand inversion as something acquired – this field’s notable thinkers included Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing and several psychoanalysts who followed in Sigmund Freud’s footsteps – and another that sought to emphasize inversion as something congenital. This “movement” included researchers such as Krafft-Ebing, Albert Moll and the majority of what Ellis considered the authorities of his time.¹⁴¹

Ellis criticized the idea of acquired homosexuality. He stated it is near impossible for an outsider to determine, based on a person’s testimony or on conversations, whether their homosexuality is innate or learned: ”Supposing, indeed, that we are prepared to admit that true inversion may be purely acquired the decision in any particular case must be extremely difficult, and I have found very few cases which even with imperfect knowledge, could fairly so be termed.”¹⁴² Ellis argued that if inversion is formed through suggestion and acquirement, if men begin to feel attracted to men and women to women because of exposure to their own sex, should not the same be true for heterosexuals as well. He pointed out that if exposure is the key to acquirement, would not everyone become inverted, as men associate, in their daily life, mostly with men and women with women.¹⁴³ Ellis did not completely deny the effect suggestions and notable events, such as being seduced by someone of the same sex, might have on a person’s sexuality, but he disputes that suggestion can ever be enough to cause true inversion. As he put it: “The seed of suggestion can only develop when it falls on a

¹³⁹ Ellis 1915, 100.

¹⁴⁰ Ellis 1915, 100.

¹⁴¹ Ellis 1915, 377.

¹⁴² Ellis 1915, 100.

¹⁴³ Ellis 1915, 378.

suitable soil”.¹⁴⁴ Ellis also emphasized that even though some people might only begin to feel attraction to members of their own sex later on in life, that does not mean their homosexuality is acquired – instead, Ellis refers to it as *retarded inversion*, which means innate inversion that is only realized later on. The idea of retarded inversion was not Ellis’ own creation, but was an idea created by the French physician Léon Henri Thoinot in 1898 and later shared by other scholars.¹⁴⁵

Another major dilemma Ellis explores when it comes to terminology and the concept of inversion was the idea of bisexuality, and bisexuality as the basis of people’s sexual life. During Ellis’ time, it was commonly considered that in childhood and youth, people’s sexual emotions and desires are more undifferentiated than they are in adulthood. Max Dessoir, a German scholar, theorized that it is common for children and youths to feel attraction to people of the same sex. For boys, this is especially common from the age of 13 to 15, and in girls from age 12 to 14.¹⁴⁶ This idea of undifferentiated sexual feeling in youth was also shared by many psychoanalysts, such as Sigmund Freud, who suggested that homosexual behavior is common in childhood but later corrected by the presence of healthy heterosexual love.¹⁴⁷

Ellis himself suggested that the most essential classifications when talking about sexuality were bisexual people and sexual inverts.¹⁴⁸ But differentiating between innate bisexuality and bisexuality as part of normal childhood development was not clear-cut for Ellis, because it is not rare for people who have otherwise always felt heterosexually in their life to have moments of attraction towards people of their own sex or for people who consider themselves homosexuals to have moments of desire towards the opposite sex. Ellis suggested that the classification of people into homosexuals and bisexuals should not be considered a scientific division but more a useful tool.¹⁴⁹ People, in Ellis’ opinion, rarely fit one category cleanly, but to create a cohesive, understandable text, he admitted you must use some kind of general categories and terms.

I use both Ellis’ terms and modern terms in my research. When I am referring to Ellis’ text – or any original, historical text – I will be using the terminology used in the text itself. I will thus end up using outdated terms now considered inappropriate or insulting, but I do so to avoid modernizing my

¹⁴⁴ Ellis 1915, 337.

¹⁴⁵ Ellis 1915, 101.

¹⁴⁶ Ellis 1915, 96.

¹⁴⁷ Ellis 1915, 97.

¹⁴⁸ Ellis 1915, 104.

¹⁴⁹ Ellis 1915, 105.

historical sources and imbuing them with modern sensibilities and values. For example, the term sexual inversion is no longer an appropriate term to use when describing non-heterosexual people and desires, but when I use terms like sexual inversion, I am referring to the historical term of Ellis's time. It is also significant to remember that while, in current time, sexual inversion might be considered an uncomfortable term to use when referring to a homosexual person, it was, at its time, considered one of the more positive terms, as it emphasized inversion not as a sin but a biological quality. The way we see it now was not how it was always seen. When discussing homosexual and otherwise non-heterosexual people in general, I will be using modern terminology. I will use terms homosexual women and lesbian women, and in cases of women who are known to feel attraction to men as well, I will be using either non-heterosexual woman or bisexual woman.

I am aware that using modern terminology like this when discussing people who lived in the past is problematic. Modern terms are imbued with modern meanings and ideas, and it is likely that some of the women Ellis writes about would not have felt comfortable referring to themselves as homosexuals, lesbians, or bisexuals in the word's modern sense. Sexuality, love, and sex are complicated aspects of the human experience and can rarely be easily defined by one simple term, but I have chosen to work with my listed terms in order to bring clarity to my thesis.

2.2 Ellis' Views on Sex and Gender

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, gender and sex were understood very differently than they are now. Today, our understanding of sex and gender is much more complicated and fluid, as many people, including academics in the field of sexuality and gender history, have begun to approach sex and gender as two different things. The fluidity or complexity regarding gender and sex is not a new invention; it has been theorized and discussed for decades.¹⁵⁰ In 1986, historian Gerda Lerner (1920–2013), who specialized in gender history, described sex as a person's biological sex and their physical attributes, such as genitalia, and gender as a person's identity and feelings about who they are as well as the set of norms and social rules we attribute to genders.¹⁵¹ But in Ellis' time, the idea that there were only two separate sexes – male and female – was dominant.

¹⁵⁰ Notable texts in this field of research include Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), Luce Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1982), Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of the Patriarchy* (1986) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990).

¹⁵¹ Lerner 1986, 238.

In the field of sexology and amongst its experts, however, there was an understanding of sex as something more complex and nuanced than a strict division into males and females. There were, for example, conversations and theories surrounding people who identify with the opposite sex and who wish to live their lives as members of that sex. This desire manifested in dressing up in ways that are considered traditional to the sex you identify as and adopting behavioral patterns more suitable to that sex. Ellis referred to this phenomenon as *eonism*.¹⁵² The term eonism can be seen as a predecessor to the modern term *transgender*. Ellis named the concept of eonism after Chevalier d'Éon and used their story to inspire his idea behind the term.¹⁵³

Ellis did have an understanding of some form of gender fluidity and diversity, but in *Sexual Inversion*, he often leans on a traditional, binary concept of sex even when discussing case histories of people who explicitly state they do not identify as their birth-sex. It seems that even if he did understand sex as something more than just a strict divide into men and women, he built his theories on the idea that there are primarily men and women, and then deviations of those normal sexes.

Regarding sex and gender, when writing about the people Ellis used as examples and case studies in his works, I will be using the terminology Ellis himself used, except in situations where the person in question has clearly stated they do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, in History XXXIX, Ellis quotes the subject matter: “When I was 5 or 6 years old I began to say to myself that, whatever anyone said, if I was not a boy at any rate I was not a girl. This has been my unchanged conviction all through my life.”¹⁵⁴ Ellis introduces another similar case, quoting a mother whose child’s story was presented by Magnus Hirschfeld and Ernst Burchard. The mother had written about how her child, whom she referred to as her daughter, had never been interested in feminine activities or clothes, and how nothing helped in making them more ladylike. Ellis concluded, saying this was a rare case in which the subject in question was not physiologically a woman at all, but a rare case of someone who possesses the external characteristics of a woman while also capable of certain, masculine biological functions, such as emitting semen.¹⁵⁵ In cases like this where the subject

¹⁵² Ellis 1915, 5.

¹⁵³ Ellis coined the term eonism inspired by the French spy Chevalier d'Éon. They lived in the role of a woman for many years in both France and England, and even used the role of a woman in their spy work. In 1777 the king of France, Louis XVI, issued an official order that commanded Chevalier d'Éon to dress according to her sex and abandon the garments of men. This order essentially legally declared and recognized Chevalier d'Éon as a woman. (Encyclopedia Britannica, read 7.9.2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-chevalier-dEon-de-Beaumont>)

¹⁵⁴ Ellis 1915, 291

¹⁵⁵ Ellis 1915, 338–339.

matter's own words regarding their gender and those of Ellis are in conflict, I will be referring to the subject as either a person or another gender-neutral term in order to remain respectful of the person's identity and sense of self.

There is always a risk of misgendering someone when using gendered language when describing people of the past as it is impossible for us to know how they felt or identified. And as can be seen in the case of History XXIII, the researchers might have written down how their subjects felt about their gender but still referred to them as members of their biological sex. I recognize this issue and the difficulties that come with using strictly gendered terminology, but as I am focusing not on the case studies specifically but more on Ellis' ideas overall, I will be relying, for the most part, on his terminology. I also think it is worth stressing that Ellis included people who do clearly state that they do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth in his exploration of men and women: it indicates how, during his time, the understanding of sex and gender was much narrower than it is now in the 2020s, and that gender non-conformity was seen not as a sign of a varied gender experience but a part or a sign of a person's homosexuality.

3 HOMOSEXUAL WOMEN ACCORDING TO ELLIS

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, homosexuality in women was largely considered to be less threatening than men's homosexuality.¹⁵⁶ Because of the androcentric nature of the time period and the fact that men held nearly all important public positions, men's homosexuality was considered more dangerous to the wellbeing of society. They were subjected to punishment, research and treatment more than women.¹⁵⁷ Some doctors and scientists even doubted homosexual women existed.¹⁵⁸ Ellis did not subscribe to this view: he considered lesbian women to be as common as homosexual men. He assumed that, just like with homosexual men, extreme cases of sexual inversion are rare in women, but that inversion in its less pronounced forms is quite common in women.¹⁵⁹

In this chapter, I will explore Ellis' views and opinions on homosexual women. In chapter 2.1 "What is Masculinity?" I will examine the idea and meaning of masculinity in Ellis' time, and what it meant for a woman to be masculine. In the next chapter, 2.2 "Masculine Appearance", I will focus on what physical, typically masculine traits Ellis linked to homosexual women. In 2.3 "Childhood, Personality and Mannerisms" I explore traits, mannerisms and behavior patterns that Ellis considered common for homosexual women – these include childhood games, ways of dressing and hobbies. Chapter 2.4, "Trans Potential of Ellis' Case Histories" is dedicated to looking at some of Ellis' case histories and ideas from a more modern point of view of gender diversity and examining the trans and nonbinary potentials of these cases. In chapter 2.5 "Dynamics in Relationships Between Women" I will focus on Ellis' ideas on dynamics between women and examine what Ellis had to say about sex between two women and how his case histories supported those views, and then move on to his thoughts on the commonness of both fetishism and a desire for a long-lasting relationship. I will briefly discuss female husbands. I will finish this section by discussing acquired, temporary feelings between women and what Ellis thought about these kinds of "friendships". Chapter 2.6 "'Birthplaces' of Homosexuality in Women" focuses on places Ellis considered to enable homosexual relationships between women, such as schools and factories. Chapter 2.7 is a summary of my key points in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Tamagne 2006, 168.

¹⁵⁷ Martin 1993, 249.

¹⁵⁸ Tamagne 2006, 168.

¹⁵⁹ Ellis 1915, 245.

3.1 What is Masculinity?

Ellis wrote: “The commonest characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity or boyishness”.¹⁶⁰ Masculinity was something Ellis considered typical for inverted women but not necessary. In his opinion, inverted women could also fit the gender expectations of their time and masquerade as “normal” women, though he considered extreme femininity to be found more commonly in bisexual women than in homosexual women.¹⁶¹

The ideal upper-class man in Victorian society was athletic and physically capable, mentally stable, and healthy, ambitious, and virile. A good education and a set of proper, Christian values were also key to being a good masculine man.¹⁶² Masculinity was also tied to ideas of power, privilege, and influence.¹⁶³ It is important to note, however, that concepts of masculinity differed in different areas, sub-cultures, and classes¹⁶⁴ – there was no single homogenous ideal man, even if different masculinities shared some key factors.

At the turn of the 20th century, conversations surrounding sex and expectations of women and men, were common. The idea that women could be masculine too, and that masculinity was not something just men could exhibit, started to rise to the surface. This conversation was not just between doctors and specialists like Ellis, but also a conversation of feminists, homosexual activists, educators, and representatives of the law.¹⁶⁵ Ellis took part in this conversation and supported more nuanced understandings of masculinity, even if his own thoughts and theories still leaned on the era-typical understanding of sex as something binary and masculinity as something normal to men. Masculinity in women was a sign of sexual deviance, something “strange” about them. Ellis’ ideas also echoed the androcentric values of the time: he presented masculinity as the ideal, and something everyone of note aspires to – for example, he linked many powerful and influential historical women to sexual inversion and an inverted woman’s desire for masculine sex presentation.¹⁶⁶ Jack Halberstam, Professor of Gender Studies in the University of Columbia, described the link between inversion and the sex binary in their book *Female Masculinity* (2018):

¹⁶⁰ Ellis 1915, 303.

¹⁶¹ Ellis 1915, 310.

¹⁶² Crozier 2008b, 8.

¹⁶³ Halberstam 2018, 2.

¹⁶⁴ Crozier 2008b, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Crozier 2008b, 12.

¹⁶⁶ Halberstam 2018, 76, 78.

Inversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package and attempted to explain all deviant behavior in terms of a firm and almost intuitive belief in a binary system of sexual stratification in which the stability of the terms 'male' and 'female' depended on the stability of the homosexual-heterosexual binary.¹⁶⁷

While Ellis mostly considered sex as something first and foremost biological, there is a sense that he did understand that sex and gender presentation were also influenced by the society people inhabited: biology was not everything, and sex and gender were also, at least on some level, social constructs. Ellis' claims and ideas about homosexual women were mostly based on their gestures and overall appearance, and less so on anatomy, as he found biological differences between homosexual and heterosexual women to be less obvious than the ones between homosexual and heterosexual men.¹⁶⁸ But Ellis' focus is on biological sex and how people's actions and way of presenting themselves either contradicts or conforms to biology.

3.2 Masculine Appearance

Ellis believed homosexual women to have physical attributes that could act as signs or clues into their sexuality. In terms of anatomical masculinity, Ellis had not been able to research many women's genital anatomy on his own, but what information he had been able to gather by himself echoed those of other researchers of the time, who had done more large-scale anatomical research, such as Krafft-Ebing. According to Ellis' own research of the three women whose bodies he has been able to study, he concluded that it is rather common for inverted women to show signs of arrested development or infantilism: they had a small vagina, large labia, a thick hymen, and a hooded, hidden clitoris. There was even a sign that one of the subjects had ovaries on only one side. Ellis went on to then reference Krafft-Ebing and Hirschfeld, who had made similar notes about homosexual women having small genitalia and a vagina that does not permit what Ellis referred to as normal intercourse, i.e. sex between a man and a woman. Ellis considered genital anomalies to be more pronounced in inverted women than in inverted men, while also thinking that inversion in women was not generally more obvious physically than it is in men.¹⁶⁹ Ellis' tendency to make wide-scale assumptions based on an extremely limited number of test subjects is very apparent in this case.

¹⁶⁷ Halberstam 2018, 82.

¹⁶⁸ Halberstam 2018, 78–79.

¹⁶⁹ Ellis 1915, 315–316.

Other physical traits Ellis considered common among homosexual women were a low, unfeminine voice due to what Ellis presumed was probably (relying on research done by Moll and Flatau), a masculine larynx, and well-developed muscles. Ellis saw homosexual women's muscularity as yet another sign of masculinity, as hard, pronounced muscles were considered unfeminine due to the lack of softness to the body. Ellis leaned on Hirschfeld's studies to make this point as well, saying that according to him, around two-thirds of inverted women were more muscular than "normal" women. Ellis mentioned that while inverted women were often masculinely muscular, inverted men were rarely the same – this indicates that just like Ellis saw homosexual women as something masculine, he saw inverted men as something feminine.¹⁷⁰

When discussing physical attributes of homosexual women, Ellis focused a lot on body hair and what the lack or presence of it means. *Hypertrichiosis*, abnormal distribution of body hair, was considered by some to be a sign of innate masculinity in a woman, while some disagreed. Ellis did not see a strict correlation between traditionally unfeminine body hair and inversion. For example, he did not think that so called bearded women were necessarily inverted. Quite the opposite, in fact – Ellis believed, just like Hirschfeld, that women who had pronounced masculine body hair, such as beards, were hardly ever inverts. But while Ellis did not necessarily link beards with homosexuality, he did link them quite strictly to insanity and mental fragility. He referenced experiment done in Paris, detailed by Dupré and Duflos in 1901 in *Revue Neurologique*, where 1000 "sane" women were compared to 1000 "insane" women. Unusual body hair was found in 50% of the insane women, but only 23% in the sane women. The sane women who showed signs of beards or otherwise unfeminine facial hair were often also considered to be from neuropathic, mentally fragile families.¹⁷¹ Ellis also considered moustaches to not be a sure sign of inversion and explained that whether women had moustaches or not was more a matter of race – Ellis thought it was more common for women in, for example, Greek and Armenian women to show more or less hair on their upper lips.¹⁷²

It seems that Ellis and other researchers of the time considered abnormal body hair in places other than the face to be more of a sure sign of inversion and masculinity in women. Ellis saw slight hypertrichiosis as very common among homosexual women. An Italian girl of 19 years who ran away from home, dressed as a man, and had more hair in her armpits, legs, genital area, and arms than was considered normal for women was considered by Ellis a typical case. He also referenced an American

¹⁷⁰ Ellis 1915, 315.

¹⁷¹ Ellis 1915, 311–312.

¹⁷² Ellis 1915, 311.

female physician who treated many inverted women who said it was very common for her patients to have abnormal amounts of hair on their legs.¹⁷³

One of the reasons Ellis gave for the masculine distribution of hair in homosexual women was the imbalance of secretions of the body. Inversion was, at the time, linked with chemical imbalances of the body, so it is not surprising that researchers considered these two phenomena to be somewhat linked, as they seemed to have a common cause. Alongside abnormalities in the distribution of body hair, the imbalance of secretions in the body was also thought to cause women's genital infantilism. The lack or infantilism of female genitalia, such as ovaries, was thought to cause masculinity in women. Ellis referenced two cases of women who lacked ovaries or had malformations in their genitalia: both were found to have small breasts, diminutive menstruation, and abnormal body hair. The body hair was not identical on both women, so it was not possible to say, based on the two of them, that inverted women all had similar type of hair distribution – but it can be said that masculine body hair is linked with inversion. Body hair was tied to masculinity in men. Abundant body hair in men was considered a sign of virility, while lack of hair was associated with attributes such as an infantile voice, shortness, small testicles, and other traits considered unmanly.¹⁷⁴ As inverted women were considered inherently somewhat masculine, it makes sense that a typically masculine physical feature was associated with them.

3.3 Childhood, Personality and Mannerisms

Signs of sexual inversion in women could also be found in their mannerisms, way of presenting themselves, in their childhood behavior and their personality – things over which women could have a certain amount of control.

Ellis deemed that masculine behavior and traits are instinctual to inverted women. He also decreed that these masculine aspects of their persona are not things homosexual women often want to highlight. In intense cases, the invert's masculinity was apparent in many areas, but in lesser cases, a female invert's masculinity mainly showed itself in their attraction towards women and their cold aloofness towards men or any kind of possibility of a sexual or romantic relationship with a man. Ellis believed that men tended to return those feelings of repulsion and disinterest. Friendship, on the

¹⁷³ Ellis 1915, 312–313.

¹⁷⁴ Ellis 1915, 313–314.

other hand, Ellis saw as possible between invert women and men.¹⁷⁵ Mentions around this theme can be found in Histories XXXIV and XXXV – in XXXIV Ellis mentioned that the subject had never cared about men, and in XXXV, he described the woman as not attractive to men, but also not masculine in an obvious way.¹⁷⁶ In Ellis’ time it was considered that a woman’s masculinity could also be deduced by the type of men who showed attraction towards them. If a man who was deemed as feminine showed an interest in a woman, it was assumed she had to be masculine.¹⁷⁷ There was a need for one partner to always be masculine and one feminine, so the traditional balance and relationship dynamic could be upheld.

In Ellis’ case histories, some of the subjects recounted their childhoods and mentioned how, as children, they had played male roles in games, identified with boys, and had a distaste towards games and hobbies usually linked to girls. In History XXXVI, Ellis wrote about Miss H. who, as a child, never liked to play with dolls, preferring more masculine activities and games where she could take on the role of a man.¹⁷⁸ Miss M, the subject of History XXXVII, mentioned, similarly, to Miss H., a dislike towards dolls. She also highlighted how she did not enjoy pretty clothes, and wondered why other kids would. Her conviction that she was different from other kids around her was bolstered also by her wanting to take part in boys’ pastimes and her feeling bored whenever she tried to play with other girls.¹⁷⁹ Miss V of History XXXVIII wrote about how they liked to pretend they were a boy, play ball and climb trees, and that even though they liked playing with dolls, they did not treat them like other girls. They also sometimes made other kids call them “John”.¹⁸⁰ Ellis also included similar stories from childhood in some of his male case histories. This was common at the time Ellis wrote and published *Sexual Inversion*. Doctors and experts delved into the histories of their patients, looking for evidence of their patients’ and subjects’ inversion in their childhood behavior.¹⁸¹

Another common way for experts of the time to try and spot a female invert or differentiate them from a “normal” woman, was to focus on the way they behaved and acted. Just like inverted women were believed to dislike feminine hobbies as children, they were considered to also prefer masculine activities as adults. Ellis considered it common for homosexual women to smoke cigarettes – though Ellis did highlight that also feminine women could enjoy smoking – and cigars. Interestingly, none

¹⁷⁵ Ellis 1915, 274.

¹⁷⁶ Ellis 1915, 275–276.

¹⁷⁷ Gibson 1998, 81.

¹⁷⁸ Ellis 1915, 276.

¹⁷⁹ Ellis 1915, 279.

¹⁸⁰ Ellis 1915, 284.

¹⁸¹ Gibson 1998, 81.

of the female case histories Ellis presented included a mention of smoking specifically. Ellis also asserted that they have a strong dislike towards domestic occupations and tasks, such as needlework. Inverted women could be utterly incapable of performing these tasks, while showing capabilities of masculine talents, such as athletics. Homosexual women also, while most held on to feminine way of dressing, had a simplicity to their style that spoke of, in Ellis' mind, a disdain towards traditionally feminine adornments.¹⁸² *Transvestism*¹⁸³, though not a guaranteed mark of inversion, was also seen as relatively common among inverted women and Ellis concluded that, in certain cases, it had less to do with practicality or impressing other women, but about the women feeling more at home in male garments.¹⁸⁴

Some traits Ellis listed as signs of inversion were less concrete than a way of dressing or smoking cigars. He quoted Hirschfeld: "The inverted woman – is more full of life, of enterprise, of practical energy, more aggressive, more heroic, more apt for adventure, than either the heterosexual woman or the homosexual man".¹⁸⁵ Ellis explained that inverted women had an energetic way of moving and a direct way of speaking, a masculine straightforwardness and sense of honor, and that they were not shy or audacious.¹⁸⁶ Extreme intelligence was also linked with masculine women.¹⁸⁷ One of the reasons behind this idea was the belief that inverted women had a masculine mind, which led to a lot of debate around whether homosexual women should be considered equal in intellect to heterosexual men or more clever than heterosexual women– a debate that led to experts, especially those who supported eugenical theories, quickly looking for ways to discredit the intellect of the homosexual woman and place her lower in hierarchy.¹⁸⁸

There are several mentions, in Ellis' case histories, about the way the subjects presented themselves and behaved. Miss H. of History XXXVII was said to have boyish manners and way of talking, and that it required a conscious effort from her to appear feminine.¹⁸⁹ In History XXXVII Miss V. mentioned that while their appearance was not decidedly unfeminine, they had a masculine way of walking that people pointed out to them. They also said that they had been told that they do certain

¹⁸² Ellis 1915, 309.

¹⁸³ Magnus Hirschfeld is credited with coining the term transvestism in 1910, when he published *Die Transvestiten (The Transvestites)* with the aim to distinguish homosexual men from men who dressed in women's clothes. (Herrn & Thomas Taylor, 65). Hirschfeld highlighted that, just like not all gay men are effeminate, not all transvestites are homosexual (Herrn & Thomas Taylor, 82).

¹⁸⁴ Ellis 1915, 303.

¹⁸⁵ Ellis 1915, 310.

¹⁸⁶ Ellis 1915, 309.

¹⁸⁷ Ellis 1915, 245.

¹⁸⁸ Gibson 1998, 84

¹⁸⁹ Ellis 1915, 282.

feminine activities, such as sewing, “like a man”. They also highlighted how they loved sports and gardening but hated household work.¹⁹⁰ The subject of History XXXIX was, according to Ellis, femininely developed but masculine in their manner and movements. The subject of XXXIX offered a long look into their life, relationships and self-image, and they highlighted how they had always felt unlike typical women and like they did not fit in with girls and women due to their interests and hobbies.¹⁹¹ Miss S of History XXXIV was described as loving women “as a man loves women”.¹⁹²

Behavioral masculinity was a complex category which included a variety of mannerisms, expressions and habits. It was at the heart of Ellis’ idea of sexual inversion. Even traits that seemingly had no connection to a person’s sexual identity or desire, such as speaking voice or way of walking, could have been seen as a hint at something bigger.

3.4 Trans Potential of Ellis’ Case Histories

In this chapter, I will explore the case histories Ellis included in his book and approach them from the point of view of gender diversity. I am not attempting to label the people of the histories I mention as transgender men or nonbinary people as I do not think it is my right or place to try and push a certain modern term on them. My only aim is to bring forth the possibility of these people having not identified fully with the role and identity of a woman.

In chapter 3 “‘A Writer of Misfits’: John Radclyffe Hall and the Discourse of Inversion” of *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam explored Ellis’ case histories. He presented the histories as cases of varied forms of female masculinity and the subjects as women who clashed against the strict norms of their time as well as their own bodies. He included, for example, “male identification” as an aspect of a subject’s form of female masculinity and addressed subjects who declared themselves as not women as women.¹⁹³ Ellis’ case subjects can be interpreted to be women who, due to their sexuality and their differences from the women society deemed as “normal” and feminine, felt like they had to be something other than women. I am not disregarding interpretations like Halberstam’s as inherently flawed, but I would like to expand these conversations by highlighting that there is transgender and nonbinary potential within Ellis’ subjects.

¹⁹⁰ Ellis 1915, 283.

¹⁹¹ Ellis 1915, 291.

¹⁹² Ellis 1915, 275.

¹⁹³ Halberstam 1998, 79–82.

There are two notable cases in the section of Ellis' book he dedicated to homosexual women that I think are important to highlight when discussing the trans and nonbinary potential of Ellis' works.¹⁹⁴ In History XXXVIII the subject recalls: "About this time I read a book where a girl was represented as saying she had a 'boy's soul in a girl's body.' The applicability of this to myself struck me at once—".¹⁹⁵ The history ends with the narrator's quote: "I regret that I am not a man, because I could then have a home and children".¹⁹⁶ The life of the narrator of history XXXIX was especially marked by their inability to relate to other women and their conviction of their own identity as something outside of the category of woman: "Ever since I can remember anything at all I could never think of myself as a girl and I was in perpetual trouble, with this as the real reason. When I was 5 or 6 years old I began to say that at, whatever anyone said, if I was not a boy at any rate I was not a girl. This has been my unchanged conviction all through my life."¹⁹⁷ In their story they wrote about their excruciating time in school and how being forced into the role of girl and woman caused them physical and emotional fatigue and pain. School felt like a punishment for them. Because of their differences in nature, hobbies and interests to girls her age, they were held up as an "evil example" to girls, who, they were certain, despised them.¹⁹⁸ Whenever they fantasized about being with women, they thought of themselves as a man loving a woman, and when they had close, but often not sexual, relationships with women, they thought about how, if they were a man, they could marry them.¹⁹⁹

The narrator of XXXIX saw the role of a woman as somewhat inorganic, something that was manufactured and made: "A consideration of social matters led me to feel very sorry for women, whom I regarded as made by a deliberate process of manufacture into the fools I thought they were, and by the same process that I myself was being made one. I felt more and more that men were to be envied and women pitied."²⁰⁰ They felt like this forced way of making women out of children also affected the way they ended up: "If it had been desired to make me a thoroughly perverted being I can imagine no better way than the attempt to mould me by force into a particular pattern of girl."²⁰¹ There is an interesting modernity to their views regarding sex roles, as currently gender is understood

¹⁹⁴ For similar cases in the section about men, see e.g. History XXIII, Ellis 1910(?), 199.

¹⁹⁵ Ellis 1915, 286.

¹⁹⁶ Ellis 1915, 290.

¹⁹⁷ Ellis 1915, 290–291.

¹⁹⁸ Ellis 1915, 291, 293, 297.

¹⁹⁹ Ellis 1915, 299–300.

²⁰⁰ Ellis 1915, 296.

²⁰¹ Ellis 1915, 301.

as something separate from biological sex as well as something that is built through roles, actions and learned behaviors.

In *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives* (2013), the book's editor Brian Lewis explains the idea of queer potential: looking at historical figures without assuming their identity or forcing a strict label on them and allowing a wider, queerer approach to their histories that is not based on binaries. Queer potential is about looking at historical events, people and relationships, and accepting different kinds of possibilities and complexities without a need to make everything palatable to a modern audience or label everything with modern terms.²⁰² Ellis' case subjects might have been women who struggled with the norms of their time and because of those struggles doubted their own womanhood, or they could have been people who truly did not identify as women and felt trapped by that role. There is potential for both.

3.5 Dynamics in Relationships Between Women

Ellis dedicated some pages of his book to discussing specifically the nature of sex and sex roles in relationships between women. There is an underlying belief in his ideas that in a relationship of two women, one party is more masculine and takes the role of a man in sex. For example, when discussing oral sex, Ellis mentioned that this act is usually performed by the “masculine partner”. Other sexual acts Ellis mentioned were the rare cases of penetrative sex with an enlarged clitoris, very common cases where one of the women uses an artificial penis – which he also referred to as an *olisbos* and a *baubon* – to perform penetrative sex, mutual masturbation and the act of rubbing their genital areas together, which is known as *tribadism*²⁰³, a term that dates back to antiquity.²⁰⁴

However, Ellis seemed to be of the mind that sex for two women together was not as crucial as tenderness and other forms of intimacy: he said that the women's passions find their “complete

²⁰² Lewis 2013, 7.

²⁰³ Ellis commented that especially southern Slavic women and women of the Balkans perform tribadism. He does not explore this further – it is possible it was merely an interesting fact Ellis wished to share but you might also interpret it as part of Ellis' eugenical frame of mind where peoples and cultures are attributed specific traits. In Ellis' time, the term “tribadism” and “tribade” had a long history of being regarded as something scary and unnatural (more on this topic, see: Beccalossi's “Female Same-Sex Desires: Conceptualizing a Disease in Competing Medical Fields in Nineteenth-century Europe [2011] and Traub's “The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England [2001]). Attributing this specific sex act and label on Balkan and Slavic women might be a way of placing them as something lesser, more uncontrollable and lustful than women of other European countries.

²⁰⁴ Ellis 1915, 317–318.

expression” mostly in kissing, sleeping side by side and embracing tucked against each other like two spoons.²⁰⁵ In Ellis’ case histories, only a few subjects focused on their sex lives, but the ones who did, highlighted similar things as Ellis. In History XXXVI, Miss H., explained that she found most of her pleasure in tender touching, kissing her loved one’s body, being kissed herself (she stated that she prefers the more passive role) and that while orgasms were rare between them, they usually accomplished them by lying on top of each other. Oral sex she referred to as an abhorrent act.²⁰⁶ In History XXXVII, Miss M. talked about how she wanted to control her sexual impulses and felt that they were rather tame compared to her other feelings, such as tenderness and the comfort she derived from her relationship. She highlighted how she aimed to dominate her emotions, even though sometimes this resulted in anxiety and problems with her nerves.²⁰⁷ In History XXXVIII, Miss V. explained that she and her partner both consider physical passion as something that degrades the love between them – she had experiences sexual desire in her life, but any acts of sexual intimacy with her partner or in general caused her “bad physical effects”.²⁰⁸

There were mentions of shame and other negative emotions accompanying sex and other forms of physical intimacy in other histories as well, for example History XXXVII and XXXIX. These instances could be interpreted as signs of some form of internalized homophobia, which refers to as a homosexual person’s negative or even hateful self-image that develops when living as a stigmatized person. This negative self-image can lead people to abhor or obsess over aspects of their identity that are considered “abnormal” by the majority.²⁰⁹ For example, a homosexual woman might, like some do in Ellis’ histories, regard sex as something uncomfortable or something that “taints” their more romantic feelings.

Ellis’ line of thinking, of highlighting intimacy other than sex in women’s relationships, can be considered as echoing the traditional views of women as creatures inherently asexual or with very low sexual drives – a view that began to change around Ellis’ time due to more detailed research²¹⁰ – but considering Ellis’ overall approach to women in his book, this claim does not ring fully true. Ellis himself criticized this belief, writing, for example in 1903, just some years after publishing *Sexual Inversion* which explores women as sexual creatures, that this belief has caused many to

²⁰⁵ Ellis 1915, 317–318.

²⁰⁶ Ellis 1915, 278.

²⁰⁷ Ellis 1915, 281.

²⁰⁸ Ellis 1915, 288–289.

²⁰⁹ Williamson 2000, 98.

²¹⁰ Chauncey Jr. 1983, 127.

consider any kind of expression of sexual desire in women as something pathological. The work of people such as Ellis in the field of homosexuality research started to challenge the norms, since if two women were able to find love and passion in each other, it necessarily indicated that women were not asexual beings. The general response to this dilemma was to assume that if a woman was able to find sexual gratification from a relationship with another woman, she had to be masculine, because male sexual desire was, at the time, considered aggressive, active, and sometimes even uncontrollable, while female sexuality was passive, innocent, and gentle. A homosexual woman's whole sexual character had to be inverted, turned upside down, for her to find pleasure in another woman, because "normal", feminine women could not satisfy each other.²¹¹

While Ellis highlighted more tender forms of intimacy between women, he did also briefly explore the prevalence of fetishism in women's relationships. He considered general fetishism, such as sadism and masochism, to be found in all kinds of relationships, but he saw these as less pronounced and prominent in sexual activity between women. They were more common in relationships of "normal" lovers – men and women – and gay men. Ellis included some case studies on fetishism, masochism and sadism in women into his book, such as the case of a woman of masochistic tendencies who found arousal in urine and feces, and being whipped.²¹² While masochism surely did appear in homosexual women, Ellis considered sadism to be more common: "Many homosexual women, however, display sadistic tendencies in a more or less degree."²¹³

There seems to be certain contradictions within Ellis' thinking – such as that fetishism is not all that common among homosexual women, but many of them still exhibit sadistic tendencies. Ellis introduced, as an example of a sadistic invert woman, a case study by American psychiatrist Dr. James G. Kiernan, who had, alongside his colleague Dr Harold N. Moyer, researched a woman who was known as a virtuous, modest woman in her community, but who, unbeknownst to many, had a history of pre-marital masturbation and sex with a dog. She had also "adopted" a young girl, whom she starved and physically abused for her own pleasure. When her actions were discovered, she was originally pronounced sane, but later, it was assumed she had gone mad, and she was sent to a hospital. Kiernan and Moyer published an article on this case in *Alienist and Neurologist* in May of 1907.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Chauncey Jr. 1983, 117–119.

²¹² Ellis 1915, 318–319.

²¹³ Ellis 1915, 319.

²¹⁴ Ellis 1915, 319–320. More on the links between female homosexuality, criminality and violence in chapter 4.3.

One phenomenon that Ellis, alongside other experts of the time such as Albert Moll, considered to be typical for inverted women was the desire to form and have a long-term, faithful relationship. Invert men, on the other hand, were seen as more prone to promiscuity, while women were assumed to dream of devoted, lasting loves.²¹⁵ In *Sexual Inversion* Ellis presented multiple cases of women who had gotten married and shared their lives together. In these cases, one of the partners in the marriage was a so-called *female husband*. Female husbands have been considered to have been transvestite women who adopted the role of a man as well as women who used this role to “play husband” for a woman²¹⁶ and women who assumed the social, legal, and economic roles of men and acted as the husbands to their lovers. The term was used around 200 years to describe these people who challenged the sex and sexuality binary and typical roles for men and women.²¹⁷

The term female husband is not without its problems: to describe all these people who adopted male names, attire and role in society and lived with their wife as women posing as men erases the possibility of some of them having been, in modern terms, for example, transgender men or nonbinary. This possibility has been explored more in recent years, as transgender studies and history has become a more prominent field of research. The role of a female husband is no longer as simple as it used to be. They are no longer just a woman who donned a man’s clothes, but they have also been interpreted from a trans and nonbinary point of view.²¹⁸ In her book *Female Husbands: A Trans History*, social and cultural historian Jen Manion described female husbands: “Throughout, I show that female husbands belonged to a category that was never simply woman or man. It was effectively a trans position, in one way or another, affirmed through accounts that move back and forth between masculine and feminine descriptors and male and female pronouns.”²¹⁹ While Ellis did mention that many who adopted a male persona did it because they felt “at home” in men’s garments and roles, he did not focus more on the possibility that some of these people might have felt more than just comfort in a man’s outfit, that some of them might’ve been, in Ellis’ terms, eonists.²²⁰ This is yet another case of Ellis having had some kind of understanding of gender diversity, but not applying this knowledge to his cases or taking it into consideration.

²¹⁵ Ellis 1915, 320.

²¹⁶ Halberstam 1998, 67.

²¹⁷ Manion 2020, 1.

²¹⁸ Manion 2020, 2.

²¹⁹ Manion 2020, 10.

²²⁰ Ellis 1915, 303.

In his book Ellis included eleven cases of these so-called female husbands²²¹ and highlighted that it was quite common for a certain degree of deception to be involved in these marriages: the priests performing the ceremony were commonly unaware of the nature of the couple they are marrying, and the wives were also not always aware of their “husband’s” biological sex. This confusion was often due to the “husband” using a very convincing-looking artificial penis.²²² It is possible that a woman who grew up sheltered might have spent her entire life until marriage not aware of what male genitals are supposed to look like and thus been confused by a convincing fake. The wives of female husbands have been somewhat ignored in history and they have been often displayed as tricked innocents, when many of them actually entered their marriages knowing the truth of their spouse.²²³ It is possible that this preference to show one party in the marriage as an innocent victim or to erase the wife of the story was a way for those writing about the couple and the husband to see the situation as less challenging and norm-breaking, something more palatable.

Ellis did not believe in profound acquired inversion, but he did believe that there are situations and cases where homosexual feelings might rise to the surface only to disappear later. Ellis explained that women might feel occasional passion or love for their friends, even if they were not inherently inverted by nature, and that often these emotions disappeared once the women became associated with men and their homosexual feelings were replaced by “normal” passion towards a man. If not “fixed” by a heterosexual bond, Ellis believed the women might, later in life, start to despise their own homosexual feelings. Lasting intense friendships with sexual and romantic undertones were also possible. Ellis considered that in these cases sex and intimacy might have been “parasitic”, something the women did and had because they had no other object of desire in their life.²²⁴

There were also, according to Ellis, women who allowed themselves to be loved and desired by invert women. These women lived like “normal” women – who would be shocked or disgusted by advances of other women – and were decidedly feminine in appearance and nature but were women men would often ignore because of their unattractiveness. Though Ellis did not see this as the only reason for this behavior, he believed some women agreed to homosexual relationships because men paid no attention to them. Overall, he considered their sexual impulse to be weak and perhaps slightly more tuned towards other women.²²⁵ In these ideas you can see how Ellis, despite not thinking inversion as

²²¹ See Ellis 1915, 303–308.

²²² Ellis 1915, 318.

²²³ Manion 2020, 3.

²²⁴ Ellis 1915, 270.

²²⁵ Ellis 1915, 273–274.

something criminal or sick, did see heterosexuality as the norm. He approaches inversion in a rather empathetic way, but his ideas about homosexuality are formed in comparison to and around heterosexuality.

3.6 “Birthplaces” of Homosexuality in Women

Ellis believed certain sex-specific places and institutions, such as workplaces, schools, and prisons, to enable homosexual relationships between individuals of the same sex. This was true, in Ellis’s mind and the general opinion of the scholars of the time, for both men and women. For example, John Addington Symonds discussed his time in school in his writings and Dr. William Acton explored the way “locking boys together” in school to read authors such as Plato²²⁶ might encourage boys to form relationships in his book *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1865).²²⁷

Schools were settings Ellis considered to enable and encourage homosexuality in girls as well as boys. He believed women’s school-time homosexuality was more about experimenting and finding sexual gratification in girls because there are no boys present – something that will be fixed once women start encountering normal objects of desire (i.e. men). Intimate relationships between schoolgirls were sometimes so common that Ellis and other thinkers of his time referred to them as “epidemic”. These “epidemics” have been most closely researched in Italy, but Ellis noted that similar cases can be seen found in other countries as well, such as England and America.²²⁸ But overall, intimate relations were more accepted in girls’ schools than they were in boys’ schools, which echoed the general idea of men’s homosexuality as something more dangerous than women’s. Relationships between girls were also less recognized than those between boys, since physical affection and close, intimate friendships were considered normal for girls and even encouraged in schools.²²⁹ Girls’ relationships could be hidden under the guise of normal fondness and excused as something regular, which was not an option for boys, who were not expected to touch, embrace, kiss, or hold their friends. Ellis suggested that

²²⁶ Plato (428/427–348 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher. In his famous philosophical text on love, *Symposium*, Plato discusses, through multiple speeches delivered by different characters, the origins and nature of love. Homoerotic relationships and bonds between lovers and beloveds are discussed in detail. (Schwartz 2008, 20). Though Plato’s *Symposium* can be interpreted as undermining the superiority of relationships between men as, in it, he emphasizes spiritual love between men over physical love and places so-called heterosexual relationships on a more equal footing with homosexual ones (Schwartz, 25) the emphasis of the book on homoerotic love, definitely could have been enough for young schoolboys to find validation for their feelings or relationships. Addington Symonds apparently considered the study of *Symposium* to be dangerous to impressionable youths (Crozier 2008b, 9).

²²⁷ Crozier 2008b, 9.

²²⁸ Ellis 1915, 269.

²²⁹ Ellis 1915, 267–269.

these kinds of schooltime relationships are more common in girls because boys have a better understanding of sexual phenomena and would more easily recognize the “unmanliness” of physical intimacy and do not require affection and self-devotion to another person as much as girls do.²³⁰

Ellis also discussed how schoolgirls often end up developing crushes on older students and become fascinated by their teachers.²³¹ In the early 20th century, schoolgirls’ relationships which had, thus far, been mostly accepted or even admired, became objects of scrutiny. Writers like Ellis devoted time to exploring these dynamics and warned readers, in their works, about the possible dangers of such relationships. Ellis explored behaviors of schoolgirls in Italy, England, the United States and Latin America.²³² The narrator of History XXXIX offered an example of an intimate relationship that formed between a student and a teacher: they detailed how they experienced their first true connection with someone when they became close with one of their teachers, who went on walks with them, talked with them and even kissed them on the lips when saying goodnight. Despite the intimate, even sexual actions committed by the teacher, the narrator described as having considered the teacher as more a maternal than a sexual figure. The narrator added that, later in their life, they realized that this teacher might have overstepped proper boundaries in her actions.²³³

Alongside schools, Ellis mentioned other female-only spaces where relationships bloomed and boundaries of normality were breached, such as theatres. He considered theatres to be fertile ground for inversion, since he considered inversion to be very common among people in the world of theatre, but also because women, such as ballet and chorus girls, shared dressing rooms and formed a close-knit community.²³⁴ Other places Ellis mentioned were women’s prisons²³⁵, convents, hotels and other establishments where workers often lived together and spent a lot of time together, and factories. Ellis referred, among others, to a study done in 1897 by Alfredo Niceforo in Rome on the customs and life of young girls in factories and mentioned how the researcher had found out that the women engage in innuendo-heavy conversation, work in their undergarments due to the heat, explore each other’s naked bodies and compare them, and even masturbate together.²³⁶

²³⁰ Ellis 1915, 269.

²³¹ Ellis 1915, 268.

²³² Rupp 2011, 162–163.

²³³ Ellis 1915, 294–295.

²³⁴ Ellis 1915, 266

²³⁵ Ellis 1915, 260.

²³⁶ Ellis 1915, 263.

3.7 Summary: Homosexual Women Through Ellis' Eyes

Masculinity was considered a fundamental part of a homosexual woman's nature. A woman was expected to be masculine in all areas of her life, both physical and emotional. Homosexual women were thought to have physical features that did not fit the feminine ideal, such as small or underdeveloped genitals, masculine muscles, and non-typical amount of hair in the genital area, legs and arms. These were also expected to behave in masculine ways, have a masculine sort of attraction to other women and feel a dislike towards feminine hobbies.

People like Havelock Ellis built their era's idea of a homosexual woman – it was during the late 19th century and early 20th century that the category of the lesbian was created. Naturally there had been homosexual women before this, but it was at this point in history that the lesbian started to be studied, explored, and understood as its own individual type of woman.²³⁷ Women's histories from childhood onwards were studied extensively to find proof of their sexuality. Masculinity was expected, so any sign of behavior that was considered unusual for women could be taken as a sign of something larger. While some traits Ellis presented as typical for inverted women in his book were things his case subjects seemed to share and relate to, it is important to understand that the way people like Ellis created their images of a homosexual woman was part artificial. Certain things were expected of the women they studied, and they combed through their histories to find them, certain that what instances of unfeminine behavior they found was surely a sign of something, when in reality, a woman's distaste for sewing or desire to wear masculine outfits could be just an aspect of a woman unrelated to their sexual orientation.

Understanding the concept of homosexual women in Ellis' time can also help understand how certain still common stereotypes about homosexual women were born. In 2019 in *The Pink News*, an English online newspaper marketed to the LGBTQIA+ community that has been published since 2005, journalist Tijen Butler published an article titled "10 lesbian stereotypes we've all heard". Included in this list were many stereotypes that people in Ellis' time also considered true about homosexual women: they love sports, they grew up as "tomboys", they hate men and cannot get along with them, they do not shave and one partner in a lesbian relationship is always more masculine, the so called "man".²³⁸ Even though the understanding of sexuality has developed a lot from Ellis' time and the

²³⁷ Duggan 1993, 791.

²³⁸ Butler 2019. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2019/04/03/lesbian-stereotypes/#page/6>, read 22.1.2024.

world has become more accepting of queer identities, lingering ideas and misconceptions about what homosexual women are like can still be found in modern ways of thinking.

In this chapter I also wanted to bring forth the possible problematic nature of talking about all of Ellis's subjects as lesbian women. Masculinity was expected of inverted women and while many, in Ellis' mind, seemed to embody this idea, I think it is possible, when reading the case histories, to conclude that some of these subjects might not have just been women who behaved in a masculine way but people who did not identify as women at all. This possibility is important to keep in mind as gender diversity has always existed but has just not been understood the same way we do now: there were not as many words for this experience as there is now, so people might not have been able to verbalize how they identified.

4 EUGENICS AND ELLIS' VIEWS ON HOMOSEXUAL WOMEN

In this chapter, I explore how Ellis' eugenical ideas can be seen impacting his opinions and views on homosexual women. Despite *Sexual Inversion* appearing, on the surface, to be a non-eugenical text, Ellis' interest in eugenics shines through in both subtle and unsubtle ways. Ellis saw eugenics as an interface, a link, between sexuality and society, two forces that impact each other.²³⁹

In chapter six of the book, "The Theory of Sexual Inversion", Ellis explored how degeneration and homosexuality have been, over the years, connected and seen as always appearing hand-in-hand. Homosexuality was one among many traits considered to be a sign of degeneracy: others included pyromania and kleptomania. Ellis challenged this way of thinking, suggesting – leaning on similar thoughts from notable scientists such as Magnus Hirschfeld and Sigmund Freud – that homosexuality should be seen not as inherently degenerative, but “– simply a variation of the norm, not to be regarded as morbid or degenerate, and not diminishing the value of the individual as a member of the society.”²⁴⁰

Ellis saw sexual inversion as something that was born out of sexual abnormalities, but he emphasized that these abnormalities were not always serious enough to be declared as signs of profound, true degeneration. Instead of taking mere homosexuality as damning evidence of a degenerative soul, a researcher should have, according to Ellis, looked for more evidence, because often, homosexuality was but one abnormality among many when it came to true degenerates.²⁴¹

While Ellis did not see homosexuality as an inherently bad thing or something that made an individual irredeemably corrupted, he did worry about homosexual people procreating. He was firmly of the opinion, that inverts should avoid marriage and having children because often, when looking at the children, it was possible to see that they were of “a neurotic and failing stock”.²⁴² He quoted his colleague Magnus Hirschfeld, echoing his sentiments, that the marriage of an invert is always risky from a eugenic point of view.²⁴³ While Ellis might not have seen inversion as a definite sign of

²³⁹ Crozier 2008a, 187–189.

²⁴⁰ Ellis 1915, 394–295.

²⁴¹ Ellis 1915, 394–395.

²⁴² Ellis 1915, 411.

²⁴³ Ellis 1915, 411.

degeneration, it can be gleaned from the text, that his thoughts on inversion were tied closely to his eugenical ideas.

Chapter 4.1 “The Concept of ‘Normal’ and Hierarchy” explores what Ellis meant by ‘normal’ and ‘normalcy’ as well as his way of placing people and cultures into a hierarchy. The second subchapter, 4.2 “Physical and Mental Health” focuses on a eugenical point of view into different forms of illness and how these views can be seen in Ellis’ text. The third subchapter, 4.3 “Criminality and Prostitution” explores the ways Ellis connected criminality and homosexuality in women. Finally, in subchapter 4.4, I will present my conclusions.

4.1 The Concept of ”Normal” and Hierarchy

A significant aspect of eugenical theory was the practice of placing people into a hierarchy with those considered normal and healthy at the top of the pyramid, while the various groups deemed as unfit and degenerate were placed at the bottom. In order to create a hierarchy and define people who are unfit or abnormal, the norm must be defined as well. Within a eugenical context, in the late 19th century and early 20th century, the person considered normal and good, was a white, middle-class European person²⁴⁴, who was, among other attributes, able-bodied, mentally stable and heterosexual.

In the first half of the 20th century, doctors, and other experts in the field of sexuality were crucial in creating the image of healthy, normal sexuality. When experts defined “abnormal”, they underlined and strengthened the concept of “normal”. By making what was considered “wrong” or “strange” clear, it became easier for people to recognize what was appropriate and the norm. Traditional values and understandings of sex were emphasized for example by labelling women demanding emancipation and new freedoms as sexually deviant²⁴⁵ and by looking for symptoms of insanity and

²⁴⁴ It is problematic to suggest that, from the point of view of eugenicists, all Europeans were considered one big group with equal worth. While Europeans might be considered, overall, ”better” than people from, for example, Africa or Asia or indigenous cultures, European cultures and nations were also placed in hierarchies. What was considered the best kind of European depended on where the people determining this were from. For example, England has a long history of depicting the largely Catholic Irish people – who were, until 1921, part of Great Britain – as an inferior race. They were lazy, violent and dirty, unlike the superior English, who were marked by their racial purity and protestantism. (Mac an Ghaill 2000, 138). In the 20th century, some decades after Ellis’ book was published, radical racial ideology gained popularity in Nazi Germany, where all other peoples were compared negatively to the Aryan race, which was considered the best kind of person and European. (Fogarty 2015, 242–243)

²⁴⁵ Martin 1993, 251.

degeneration in these women's family trees to explain their nature and thus discredit them as rational, thinking individuals.²⁴⁶

In *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis advocated for homosexuality to be understood as an innate aspect of a person. But even though he declared true homosexuality as something a person cannot change or acquire, you can see the time period's determination to place people in hierarchies, in Ellis' word choices and the terminology he used. When discussing homosexual practices of historical cultures and how sexuality has been understood in the past, he used terms like "lower races". Among those he deemed as lower races are cultures such as China, Egypt, ancient Assyria and Babylonia, and native cultures of both South and North America.²⁴⁷ European and American eugenicists considered European and North American westernized peoples as the least degenerate, and Ellis's use of terminology reflected that. For example, when discussing the prevalence of homosexuality among native cultures Ellis used terms such as "savages", and declared that homosexuality had always existed and was not an invention of "modern refined civilization", indicating that earlier historical cultures were not as civilized as the European culture of his time.²⁴⁸ When he wrote about homosexuality among criminals, working masses and soldiers, Ellis referred to them as "lower classes"²⁴⁹ – another term with hierarchical undertones.

The concept and idea of normative sexual behavior and normalcy is also apparent in Ellis' writing. Throughout *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis used the term "normal" when describing heterosexuality and heterosexual actions. This creates a power dynamic between homosexual people and heterosexual people despite Ellis' overall desire to show homosexuality as an innate, biological difference, not an illness.²⁵⁰ He saw sexual impulse and the search for sexual gratification as normal in all individuals whether that desire manifested in same-sex attraction or opposite-sex attraction, so there he did not see any strong divide into normal and abnormal sex,²⁵¹ but you can see evidence of his hierarchical thinking in his writing. This is not just the case in *Sexual Inversion*. Throughout Ellis' career in sexology, he seemed to regard and refer to homosexuality and homosexual partnership as inferior to heterosexuality, which he referred to as the norm.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Gibson 1998, 85.

²⁴⁷ Ellis 1915, 12, 18–19.

²⁴⁸ Ellis 1915, 255.

²⁴⁹ Ellis 1915, for example 24–28

²⁵⁰ For examples of Ellis' use of the word "normal" when describing heterosexuality, see Ellis 1915: 8, 257, 267, 270, 273, 310 and 315.

²⁵¹ Crozier 2008b, 28.

²⁵² Vicinus 2012, 586.

When it comes to the concept of normal and Ellis' use of the word, it is important to look at Ellis' position of power over defining what is and is not normal. Normativity and norms are created and strengthened through language, and by the words and terminology used by people who are considered experts. Ellis was a doctor and a notable sexologist, and those roles gave him authority over the subject – authority over “ordinary” people, even people who were non-heterosexual themselves.²⁵³ When someone with as much power as Ellis referred to heterosexual people as normal, even if he did not explicitly then refer to non-heterosexual people as abnormal or strange, he participated in bolstering heterosexuality as the norm. Ellis' views, though sometimes radical, echoed those of his time and it is important to remember the historical context he existed in and the discourses surrounding sexuality he would have absorbed and learned.

4.2 Physical and Mental Health

There is a long-standing history of linking homosexuality with insanity and illness. As eugenics developed as a field, one of the major topics that was discussed and debated over concerned the role physical and mental illnesses played in degeneration. The idea of illness as both a cause and a result of degeneration became common, as doctors combed through the histories of their patients looking for any alarming illnesses that could explain why their patients acted the way they did or had certain signs of degeneration, such as homosexuality. This theory was easily confirmed, as most family trees include individuals who have suffered from mental or physical illnesses such as dementia.²⁵⁴

The hereditary nature of illnesses and degeneration became another major subject of conversation among eugenicists of the time. In Europe, eugenicists discussed the complex relationship between environment and biology, and how much of a person's degeneration could be attributed to the area and environment they grew up in and how much of it was dictated by their heritage. This discussion posed the question of what could be done to prevent degeneration. Experts had differing opinions on what was the best way to quell degeneration. Those who considered environment to play the most significant role in degeneration, argued that people who were in most vulnerable positions in terms of their environment, such as poor people and members of the lower classes, should be supported and

²⁵³ Pyykkönen & Valtonen 2022, 31, 36.

²⁵⁴ Laaka 2002, 33.

that their living conditions should be improved. Those who believed that biology was the most defining force behind degeneration, considered improving living conditions of the poor as wasted time, as better conditions could not give a person stronger mental or physical capabilities since those were attributes that, they believed, developed as early as in the embryonic state.²⁵⁵

Women's homosexuality was linked with both mental and physical abnormalities. In the United States, women's homosexuality was seen as a form of insanity and this image of the mentally degenerate, insane lesbian was prevalent until the 1940s. To support this image of the women they examined, doctors looked for signs of degeneration in the women's families – these signs included addiction such as alcoholism, insanity and general feeble-mindedness.²⁵⁶ Homosexual women were also widely connected to obsessive, uncontrollable sexuality, nymphomania, and other sexual practices considered unnatural, such as excessive masturbation.²⁵⁷ Women having sex with each other rather than men was also considered one of the reasons for their insanity: it was theorized that women might end up going mad because they could never reach true satisfaction in sex without a man's semen.²⁵⁸ Physical abnormalities could also be seen as telltale signs of homosexuality – for example, women who had a more flat labia than most, were considered inverted more often than those who had supposedly "normal" genitalia.²⁵⁹ Ellis also pointed out the ties between homosexuality and physical abnormalities in the genitals: he found they were more common in lesbian women than homosexual men.²⁶⁰

Havelock Ellis was against the assumption that all homosexuals were insane or criminal. He agreed that heritage and the health of a person's family could affect how they ended up and what their health was like, but he denied the existence of an unwavering link between homosexuality and insanity.²⁶¹ Ellis believed biology was an important factor in the way sexuality presents itself in a person, but he denied that it was the only factor, criticizing eugenicists who considered biology as the be-all and end-all. Ellis highlighted the significance of society and other social aspects of a person's life and the way they impacted and fueled inversion.²⁶²

²⁵⁵ Laaka 2002, 22.

²⁵⁶ Gibson 1998, 85.

²⁵⁷ Martin 1993, 249.

²⁵⁸ Tamagne 2006, 168–170.

²⁵⁹ Stein 2020, 328.

²⁶⁰ Ellis 1915, 355.

²⁶¹ Crozier 2008a, 189.

²⁶² Crozier 2008b, 28.

Out of his case histories, Ellis stated that 53 people were of good health while 22 were of weaker constitutions. Only four cases were what Ellis referred to as "morbid". He admitted that a considerable number of those he deemed as good of health showed signs of nervousness and acknowledged that his collection of case histories did not represent the whole homosexual population. In Ellis' view, medical doctors were the ones who could speak on the subject of morbid insanity among homosexual people, as they were the ones who came into contact with people "who are suffering from a more or less severe degree of complete nervous breakdown".²⁶³ Ellis challenged the old way of seeing all signs of illness in a homosexual or their family as a sure sign of madness or degeneration: "In any case it seems probably that the families to which the inverted belong do not usually present such profound signs of nervous degeneration as we were formerly led to suppose. What we vaguely call 'eccentricity' is common among them; insanity is much rarer."²⁶⁴

Eugenics can be seen influencing Ellis' work in the way he approached physical and mental health when it came to his case histories. Though he did not state that he approached his cases from a eugenical point of view, his tendency to list and emphasize his subjects' family histories, health and heritage point to his eugenical ideologies.²⁶⁵ When describing his histories, Ellis often began the text by assessing his subject's health, emphasizing the different health issues they had. In history XXXIV, he stated his subject is a woman "of fine intelligence" who "belongs to a family in which there is a marked neuropathic element. She is of rather phlegmatic temperament, well poised, always perfectly calm and self-possessed, rather retiring in disposition, with gentle, dignified bearing."²⁶⁶ In history XXXV, he mentioned that his subject herself was healthy, but out of her siblings one was of neurotic temperament and one was also an invert.²⁶⁷ And in history XXXVI, Ellis wrote: "Among her paternal relatives there is a tendency to eccentricity and to nervous disease. Her grandfather drank; her father was eccentric and hypochondriacal and suffered from obsessions. Her mother and mother's relatives are entirely healthy, and normal in disposition."²⁶⁸

In 28 cases Ellis found morbidity or abnormality (terms that encompass, for example, alcoholism, insanity, general eccentricity, and neurasthenia) in either both or just one of the parents. He stated that in these cases, sexual inversion might have been the result of a union between a healthy and a

²⁶³ Ellis 1915, 332.

²⁶⁴ Ellis 1915, 334.

²⁶⁵ Crozier 2008, 189.

²⁶⁶ Ellis 1915, 274–275.

²⁶⁷ Ellis 1915, 275.

²⁶⁸ Ellis 1915, 276.

morbid individual, or the result of a union between parents who both exhibited minor signs of abnormalities.²⁶⁹ In 62 cases, Ellis saw signs of homosexuality being something inherited, but he acknowledged the difficulty of researching the hereditary nature of homosexuality as he was unable to cross-examine the cases of the subjects whose histories he included in *Sexual Inversion*. But despite admitting that he is not well-acquainted with the hereditary nature of inversion, he admitted the tendency is there.²⁷⁰ Even if Ellis did not fully subscribe to the idea of mental and physical illness being a clear indication of homosexuality and degeneration, he clearly placed emphasis on the health and heritage of his subject matters and thus, can be seen as having given weight to the idea of linking these themes together.

There are some instances in *Sexual Inversion*, where Ellis attributed acts that indicated an unstable mind to a person's homosexuality. He declared that lesbian relationships were a cause of suicide among women, and offered examples of cases like this, including a story of a young woman who, when her parents tried to separate her from her older lover, shot herself, and the tale of a young, rich woman who fell in love with an actress she did not personally know and shot herself when she realized she could never be with the object of her love.²⁷¹ Ellis' declaration of lesbian relationships leading to suicide bolstered the assumed connection between mental instability and homosexuality among women.

4.3 Criminality and Prostitution

Among the various groups eugenicists deemed as degenerated were criminals, and homosexual people were often linked with criminal activity and mindset.²⁷² Havelock Ellis disagreed with the idea that all homosexual people were criminals, for he saw homosexuality not as a defect but an abnormality akin to synesthesia: thus, he did not see the imprisonment or persecution of homosexuals as warranted.²⁷³ But as with the concept of normalcy and the idea of health as a sign of degeneration, while Ellis did not fully agree with how homosexual people were all placed in a certain category, you can see, from his text, that even if he might have disagreed, he did lean on old traditional views and occasionally lent his support to the idea of a link between criminality and homosexuality.

²⁶⁹ Ellis 1915, 331.

²⁷⁰ Ellis 1915, 331.

²⁷¹ Ellis 1915, 253–254.

²⁷² Laaka 2002, 33.

²⁷³ Dixon 2009, 73.

Ellis specifically linked women's homosexuality with violent crime. He stated: "It is, moreover, noteworthy that a remarkably large proportion of the cases in which homosexuality has led to crimes of violence, or otherwise come under medico-legal observation, has been among women."²⁷⁴ One of the reasons why homosexual women were seemingly more prone to violence than homosexual men, was, according to Ellis, the masculinity of inverted women and femininity of inverted men. Ellis saw homosexual women as a mixture of feminine emotionality, childlike impulsiveness and masculine energy, which, alongside jealousy and other common emotions shared by homosexual people, made them more prone to aggressive actions.²⁷⁵ Ellis' hierarchical understanding of class was also present in his understanding of homosexual women's criminality. He believed that in women of the upper classes, inversion exhibited itself often as heightened intelligence and genius, while in women of the lower classes, inversion often led to criminality instead.²⁷⁶

Ellis referenced some famous cases of homosexual women committing murders, such as the 1892 case of Alice Mitchell, who killed her lover, Freda Ward, when their plans to run away together were disrupted. The case of Alice Mitchell became a sensation and a highly documented case all over the United States since it was regarded as something "unique and incomprehensible on American soil".²⁷⁷ Alice Mitchell was a threatening figure for late 19th century America because she represented a masculine, cross-dressing inverted woman, who was estranged from nearly everything considered inherently feminine, such as motherhood, sexual purity and life built around family and the home.²⁷⁸ She also challenged typical notions of class and ethnicity: her crime was considered impossible or especially strange because she was a white woman from a good family. The way her act was considered depended heavily on the era's assumptions of race and class – the coverage of her crime and her treatment in court would've been different had she been male, non-white and poor.²⁷⁹ For example, at the time, in Memphis, where Mitchell lived, lynchings of black people by white mobs was relatively common and most lynchings were never jailed.²⁸⁰ There were different rules for black and white people, and violence against black people done by white people was not always considered

²⁷⁴ Ellis 1915, 251.

²⁷⁵ Ellis 1915, 251.

²⁷⁶ Halberstam 2018, 78.

²⁷⁷ Duggan 1993, 794.

²⁷⁸ Duggan 1993, 799.

²⁷⁹ Duggan 2000, 23.

²⁸⁰ Duggan 2000, 18.

something worth discussing in court. Black men were also considered inherently violent, which set them apart and made them less than white men.²⁸¹

Alice Mitchell's tale was also presented as something of a cautionary tale for homosexual women: her life story was part of a larger phenomenon of journalists focusing on homosexual women's crimes to paint a picture of inverted women and their relationships as doomed and inherently tragic. All the stories that were written about them ended in misery, indicating to everyone that there was no real chance of love and happiness to be found in a homosexual relationship between women.²⁸² The story of Alice and Freda helped introduce, into the collective consciousness, the terrifying imagined character of the murderous, masculine lesbian, who was, like "the violent black man", a supposed threat to the normal, traditional heterosexual couple.²⁸³ Alice Mitchell's story remained much discussed and explored in the 20th century, and was used by many sexologists of the time when discussing and exploring the link between criminal activity, insanity and sexual inversion. Alongside Ellis, for example Krafft-Ebing utilized Alice Mitchell's story in his research.²⁸⁴ Ellis described Mitchell as a typical, pronounced invert, and pointed out her mother's insanity and homicidal tendencies as well as Mitchell's own masculinity and unbalanced nature.²⁸⁵

Among the cases Ellis brought up was also the case of a young nurse in 1899, who lived with another woman for fourteen years on and off and proceeded to attempt the murder of her former lover's husband after she had left her and married. Just like in the case of Alice Mitchell, Ellis followed the story of the nurse by mentioning that her mother had spent time in a mental asylum and her brother had taken his own life.²⁸⁶ Ellis' habit of pointing out the fragility of these women's and their families' mental health, his declaration that homosexual women are more prone to violent crime and calling a murderess like Mitchell a "typical invert" all worked together to create assumed links between the phenomena of criminality, homosexuality and mental fragility.

After exploring violent crime and several notable female criminals, Ellis proceeded to explore prostitution and homosexuality among sex workers. Ellis considered prostitution as a sign of degeneration in some women, especially those who had been imprisoned for criminal activity, but

²⁸¹ Duggan 2000, 20.

²⁸² Duggan 1993, 808.

²⁸³ Duggan 2000, 27.

²⁸⁴ Duggan 1993, 795.

²⁸⁵ Ellis 1915, 251–252.

²⁸⁶ Ellis 1915, 252.

not in everyone. He admitted that most prostitutes shared physical traits that could not be found among sexually decent women and linked them to other criminals, but he did not see prostitutes as inherently degenerated.²⁸⁷ Ellis theorized that homosexuality was relatively common among prostitutes, because women often lived together, which made having affairs easier, because relationships with men were seen as business and thus could not offer the satisfaction and affection a more equal relationship provided, and because he considered prostitutes to be more prone to different mental issues, such as neurotic tendencies and general nervousness.

The fact that he found homosexuality to be common among people with nervous heredity was not surprising to Ellis. He stated: "The life of the prostitute may well develop such latent germs; and so we have an undue tendency to homosexuality, just as we have it among criminals, and, to a much less extent, among persons of genius and intellect."²⁸⁸ The assumption that, among criminals and prostitutes, homosexuality was common and often caused by health issues and heritage, echoes the eugenical theories and ideologies of Ellis' time.

4.4 Summary: Eugenics and Homosexual Women

While *Sexual Inversion* is not an explicitly eugenical text, Havelock Ellis' interest in eugenics comes across in implicit ways. I would claim it would have been impossible for someone like Ellis, who was such a passionate supporter of eugenics, to have written a work like this without having his ideologies impact his research and conclusions, especially when the focus of the work was a group of people whose identities were debated and considered by eugenical authorities as signs of degeneration.

Ellis' focus on his case subjects' family trees and possible illnesses, mental or physical, that were present in their parents or other relatives is reminiscent of eugenical ideas of the time where phenomena such as homoexuality were considered something that can be passed down or brought forth by degenerated genetics. His eugenical ideology can also be seen in his word choices, for example, in his repeated way of referring to heterosexual people as "normal", thus forcing everyone else into the role of "abnormal" i.e. something that must be assumed to be less valuable or good.

²⁸⁷ Laaka 2002, 43–44.

²⁸⁸ Ellis 1915, 262–263.

The legacy of linking criminality, insanity and murderous desires to homosexual women can still be seen in the way modern media depicts non-heterosexual women. In their master's thesis "Analysis of the Stereotypical Development of Lesbian Characters and its Impact on Audiences" (2023), Monika Tužinská explored the stereotype of a violent, murderous and crazy lesbian character, women who are presented as cold, emotionless, cruel and manipulative, who often struggle mentally.²⁸⁹ 1990s films like *Born Innocent* (1974), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Night Rhythms* (1992) and *Desire* (1993) exemplified this trope²⁹⁰, and in the 2000s and 2020s there has been movies like *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and TV shows such as *Killing Eve* (2018–2022), *First Kill* (2022) and *Harley Quinn* (2019–) that have continued to portray non-heterosexual women as insane, murderous or otherwise dangerous. In some of these examples, especially the more recent ones, the violent lesbian or bisexual women are the protagonists and thus characters you are called to root for. While the way of looking at these murderous non-heterosexual women might have shifted, the idea of a criminal, murderous woman is still prevalent, just like it was back in Ellis' time. By understanding how homosexual women were explored in the past it is possible to understand the prevalence of this trope in modern media.

It has been argued that Ellis' book portrayed lesbian women as near monstrous beings – criminal and insane. The effects assumptions like this had on, for example, the growing feminist movement, have been studied. The caricature of the monstrous, masculine lesbian was used to discourage feminist action and thinking by linking it with women who advocated for equality between men and women. Ellis has even been portrayed as a scholar who justified sexual violence against women by men because he saw it as an "extension" of normal sexuality.²⁹¹ Chiara Beccalossi wrote in her article "Havelock Ellis: Sexual Inverts as Independent Women" (2008) that even though Ellis' views do not align with our modern beliefs about gender and sex that does not mean he was not, in his time, a radical. She emphasized how many misconceptions about Ellis and his ideas are rooted in our failure to properly contextualize him and his work. Ellis argued for women's right to enjoy sex without fear of pregnancy, he didn't see homosexual women as inherently twisted or wrong and in his book he wrote a lot about homosexual women's intelligence and independence.²⁹² As Beccalossi put it: "Ellis was not an enemy of women and lesbians..."²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Tužinská 2023, 37.

²⁹⁰ Tužinská 2023, 37.

²⁹¹ Beccalossi 2008, 211–212.

²⁹² Beccalossi 2008, 223.

²⁹³ Beccalossi 2008, 223.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* was both revolutionary and of its time. It was the first medical textbook written in the English language on homosexuality, and Ellis' understanding of inversion as an innate trait, not an illness, sin, or inherently criminal, stood in opposition to the English law of the time. There is no doubt that his views were far more empathetic than those of the law or general society. Ellis' openly criticized societal assumptions and harshness of laws, especially in his home country, England. Though he was undoubtedly a radical in many ways, Ellis' views did echo the theories and beliefs of his time. He did not write *Sexual Inversion* in a vacuum – the discourses, ideologies and theories of the late-1800s and early-1900s played a part in the creation of the book and in the development of his ideas.

In chapter two, I examined Ellis' use of terminology and the complexities of the categories of sexual inversion, homosexuality, sex and gender in the context of historical research. Ellis presented sexual inversion as a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be easily explained. He thought the nature of human sexuality is extremely varied and complex and thus, in some ways, defied categorization. He found strict terms difficult but agreed that there was a need to create sort of terms to make creating and reading a text comprehensible. Ellis championed the term sexual inversion because, for him, it was a more neutral term than many that were used before, but also because it, to him, referred specifically to human sexuality, whereas, for example, homosexuality included same-sex acts among animals as well. While Ellis had an idea of what we might refer to as gender diversity – he even coined the term eonism, which could be seen as something of a cruder, early version of what we understand as transness – he didn't seem to focus on that possibility in his work, focusing instead on gender non-conforming individuals as members of their biological sex. His understanding of inversion, sex and sexuality in general relied on an idea of a sex binary and heterosexuality.

Chapter three focused on masculinity and homosexual women as well as relationship dynamics that Ellis considered typical for non-heterosexual women. Homosexual women's masculinity was considered all-encompassing: it included everything from ways of dressing and walking to people's hobbies and their preferred roles in sexual situations. To fully grasp how Ellis saw homosexual women, it is important to understand that he understood masculinity as something external as well as internal. He considered masculinity to be instinctual to inverted women – an idea similar to that of homosexual women having masculine brains, which was a topic of conversation and debate in Ellis'

time. Ellis' understanding of how women had sex and were intimate were also based on what was considered normal or typical for men and women. Because homosexual women were masculine, he assumed, for example, that one of the women in a relationship would take on the role of "the man" i.e. the more dominant sexual role. Ellis also had some seemingly contradictory opinions and thoughts on women's relationships. An example of this could be the way he saw fetishism as rare in homosexual women while also stating that sadism is quite common. While Ellis' contradictory ideas might seem confusing, I would argue they are an example of how Ellis' refused to see the complex and multifaceted nature of human sexuality as something black and white.

The emphasis on masculinity in Ellis' thinking and the era-typical understanding of the sex binary led Ellis to assume all his case studies were women, even though he clearly understood sex and people's identities did not always line up – after all, he created the term eonism. I challenged Ellis' assumptions and some earlier research done on *Sexual Inversion* by exploring the trans and nonbinary potential of his case histories. I do not have the authority or right to make staunch declarations on the identities of people of the past, but I think it is important that, when reading texts like these that include people specifically saying they do not feel like they are members of their biological sex, we remain open-minded and embrace the possibility of these people having been, in modern terms, not cisgender i.e. a person whose gender identity is in line with their biological sex.

Chapter four was dedicated to exploring the way Ellis' eugenical beliefs impacted his analysis in *Sexual Inversion*. He was both subtle and explicit. *Sexual Inversion* is not an eugenical textbook, but Ellis' passion for eugenics cannot be separated from his views on homosexuality. Even though Ellis was more empathetic towards homosexual people and presented himself as an objective authority who based their views on research and evidence, you can see how the eugenics-driven assumptions on different groups of people that were typical for eugenics of his era impacted his theories. He paid a lot of attention to the backstories and family histories of his case studies and highlighted any instances of physical or mental illness, bolstering the idea of a connection between sexual inversion and the health of both the individual and their family. Homosexuality was shown, throughout the book, in contrast to heterosexuality, which was presented as the norm, just like, in terms of sex and gender, masculinity and maleness was shown as the norm, the ideal. He declared Alice Mitchell, a well-known murderer, to be a typical invert and considered homosexual people, especially lesbian women, to be prone to not just criminality but violent criminality, such as homicides. I would argue that there is a link between works of people like Ellis, where homosexual women were portrayed as unusually capable of violent crime, and the common character trope of the insane, violent lesbian in

media, just like there is a connection between the way people of Ellis' time depicted homosexual women and the stereotypes we have about lesbian and bisexual women today.

There are many ways to continue the research I have done. I think it would be interesting to focus on the reception of Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* when it came out, how and when the book eventually made its way to publication in England and how book has gained its classic status since its initial release. Ellis' views on homosexual women could also be studied alongside those of other sexologists of his time in a large-scale comparative study. I would also be intrigued to see research done on not just the depiction of homosexual women in *Sexual Inversion*, but on how women in general were discussed and presented in Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* -series. A more intersectional approach to the analysis of Ellis' works would also be beneficial. It would be interesting to focus, alongside sexuality and gender, on how different social and political identities – such as class, age, disability and religion – manifest in Ellis' works. As many of these other roles and identities were also targets of eugenicists, a look into how Ellis' eugenical beliefs interacted with them would, I assume, yield interesting results.

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