

The Magnus-Hirschfeld Society of Berlin: Researching the "Father of the Homosexual Movement" and the "Godmother of the Homo-Sexual Reform Movement"

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Panel presentation by Richard Alan Korb of Columbia University's Department of Germanic Languages, in conjunction with "The History of Sexology Exhibit" from the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft e.V., March 23, 1999, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Other panelists: Eric Clarke, University of Pittsburgh Gay Studies; Sabine Hake, University of Pittsburgh Germanic Languages, and Wendi Miller, Director of TSG, Pittsburgh.

Introducing the exhibition: "The First Institute for Sexual Science (1919-1933)" at the University of Pittsburgh, March 1999 ↑

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to share this evening celebrating women's month 1999 here at the University of Pittsburgh. I am honored to be introduced by a woman whom I consider one of the greatest women, I have ever known, Beverly Harris Schenz, and to share the podium with my three distinguished colleagues, Sabine Hake, Eric Clarke, and Wendi Miller. Thanks to the Women's Study Program for organizing this panel and giving the Magnus-Hirschfeld Society of Berlin a chance to introduce Pittsburgh to the World's first Institute of Sexual Science.

I spent last week in Berlin, visiting with the Hirschfeld Society's director, Ralf Dose. He sends his best wishes and thanks to Janet and Co.

The purpose of my remarks this evening is to provide the viewers of this incredible recreation of Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science with some background information about the Magnus Hirschfeld Society in Berlin today and the important work which it is doing to rediscover and rehabilitate long lost and forgotten sexual histories. One major achievements of the Hirschfeld Society is the rediscovery and celebration of the work of Helene Stöcker, a forgotten pioneer of the German women's movement. Without the diligent research of Dr. Ilse Kokula and the documentation of the Magnus-Hirschfeld Society in Berlin, I would not be able to share Helene Stöcker's story.

I. The Magnus Hirschfeld Society ↑

The Magnus Hirschfeld Society (Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft e.V.) was founded in 1982 by members of the gay and lesbian movement in West-Berlin. The Society was founded because it had become clear to gay and lesbian activists that the events planned in 1983 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Hitler's Coming to Power, once again had forgotten one group of victims of fascism: homosexual men and women. Seeking an appropriate moment to commemorate the fate of gay men and women in the fascist takeover in 1933, led organizers to history of Dr. Magnus

Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science. On May 6 1933, the Institute's archives, which contained over 40,000 items were ransacked and burned by the Nazis, thus destroying the world's first collection of writings and photographic records of human sexuality. Fifty years later, there were still no history books on the Weimar Republic or the Third Reich which remembered this event, homosexual victims of the Third Reich were still not recognized by the German government, and the Magnus Hirschfeld Society was founded to ameliorate this state of affairs.

Organizers of the 1983 commemoration of the events of May 6 1933 have in the ensuing 17 years dedicated themselves and the work of the Magnus Hirschfeld Society to researching the history of Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science, the history of sexology and the sexual reform movement, as well as establishment of gender and sexual research at the University in Berlin. Since 1986, the Hirschfeld Society has maintained its own offices, first in Berlin-Kreuzberg and today in Prenzlauer Berg. Since 1992 its range was dramatically increased through the establishment of a research center for the history of sexology.

This small research unit is not funded regularly by scientific institutions, but depends on shaky German labor market policy and schemes for unemployed social scientists. Ralf Dose reported this morning by email that he has been informed that their actual research program cannot go on after June 14, 1999. Due to budgetary cuts, he will have to dismiss a group of nine men and women originally funded for another year to do background research on the Institute of Sexual Science and the sex reform movement. Dose wrote "once again we do not really know how to go on."

Beginning in 1983, the Magnus Hirschfeld Society has presented an ongoing series of lectures in the Jewish Adult Education School in Berlin. The series addresses historical topics on sexology and homosexuality and has been documented in the Society's journal (*Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft*). Lectures are frequently held at other adult education programs including those in the Berlin city districts of Tiergarten, Charlottenburg, Steglitz and most recently in Prenzlauer Berg. The Society supports research and maintains a library and archive. It also works in close association with the "Schwules Museum" in Berlin. Current research projects by associates of the Society include: testimony of Institute members in court prosecutions against homosexuals in Wilhelmenian, Weimar, and Hitler Germany; in prosecutions against pornography, history of publications and publishers of sexology materials destroyed by the Nazis, reception of sexology theory in pre revolutionary Russian literature and in 20th century theater; Hirschfeld's reception among his contemporaries; history of reform movements, and discourse of population theory and politics. The library and archives includes works by Hirschfeld and his male and female contemporaries, with a special emphasis on magazines from that period which dealt specifically with sexology. Also included in the archives are the collection from the estate of Iwan Bloch, the personal papers that belonged to one of Hirschfeld's transsexual patients, and volumes of signed correspondence from members of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the Institute of Sexual Science. The collection is a treasure chest not only for academic research, it is often visited by the press, radio and TV reporters, and filmmakers. At present there are two films being made about Hirschfeld, one of which is Rosa von Praunheim's feature film entitled "The Einstein of Sex" which is to be released in the USA later this year. Other activities of the Hirschfeld Society include panel discussions,

congresses, publications, and exhibits.

Among the numerous publications which have issued from the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Society in recent years are 9 volumes of reissued and catalogued works by Dr. Hirschfeld, 28 issues of the Report of the Magnus-Hirschfeld Gesellschaft, and the two latest monographs: "Verqueere Wissenschaft" and "Das Malthusische Erbe". The most prolific writers among the members and associates of the Society include Ralf Dose, Ursula Ferdinand, Rainer Herr, Manfred Herzer, and Ilse Kokula.

Ilse Kokula has been a steadfast feminist voice among the Society's members. Already in 1985 she took it upon herself to establish the feminist roots of Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee and Institute of Sexual Science. I have adapted Dr. Kokula's 1985 documentation [1] of the life and work of Helene Stöcker to share with you this evening. And on the basis of my reading of this documentation from the Hirschfeld Society, I have to ask why Helene Stöcker isn't among the women honored in 1995 by the Federal German cultural service's InterNationes celebration of the German women's movement? [2]

While Magnus Hirschfeld is reverently recognized today by gay and lesbian activists as "The Father of the modern homosexual rights' movement", Helene Stöcker OUGHT to be recognized as the "Godmother of the sexual reform movement", that is the hetero- and homosexual reform movement. Helene Stöcker was one of the most important theoreticians, scientists, agitators and organizers in the German women's movement and sexual reform movement of late Wilhelmenian and Weimar Germany. I suspect that her connections to the Homosexual Rights movement remain problematic for official German recognition of Stöcker's overall role in the struggle for human rights.

II. Women and the Scientific Humanitarian Committee - Helene Stöcker ↑

Getting involved in the Hirschfeld movement wasn't easy. ↑

The chief reasons why women were not actively pursued by Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee, formed in Berlin in 1898, are very much related to the reasons that women WERE pursued and that feminists DID take on an important role in Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science, founded in Berlin in 1919.

1. Women in Germany did not enjoy the right to vote until 1919.
2. The primary activity of the Committee was collecting signatures on its petition to abolish German Penal Code Paragraph 175 which outlawed male homosexuality. The Committee originally pursued a politic of "quality" rather than "quantity" and sought first and foremost the names of important men to support the cause for homosexual rights. The original list of signatures to be sought was taken in 1897 from Kürschner's Literature Handbook!
3. Women in Wilhelmenian Germany were not privileged to obtain "higher education." The first generation of feminist activists and scholars were self-trained or enjoyed privileged tutoring. The first female high school graduating class in Germany completed the Abitur in 1896. At that time women were permitted to visit classes at select universities, but only as guests,

- not enrolled as students. The first universities to admit women were Freiburg and Heidelberg in 1901, with German universities moving to general admission for women in 1908. Nonetheless, it was not until 1920 that habilitation privileges were granted to women, with Mathilde Vaerting becoming the first female professor of social sciences at a German university.
4. In the world of sexual reform and scientific discussion, it was often forbidden for men and women to attend joint session in which sexual topics were discussed. (This evening's harmless panel discussion would have been strictly forbidden 100 years ago in Berlin!)
 5. Lesbian relations were not regulated by German law, which was a blessing on the one hand, while at the same time it indicated that women who loved women were ignored or simply not recognized. The government's 1909-1911 version for reforming the penal code addressing homosexuality, recommended that Paragraph 175 be expanded to cover lesbian relationships. The forces seeking to protect women's rights along with men's rights - at least the forces commanded by Helene Stöcker and Magnus Hirschfeld - join forces from this point onwards.

Helene Stöcker' Career ↑

Helene Stöcker was born into male-controlled German society on November 13, 1869. She was the eldest of eight children and lived with her strictly religious parents until she was 22 years old. Beginning in 1892, Stöcker attended classes in Berlin to become a teacher at a school for girls. The "professional" training to teach at a middle and upper school for girls lasted less than two years. In 1896, the "school marm" Stöcker became one of Germany's first young ladies to matriculate at the university in Berlin. She studied in Berlin for six semesters, one semester in Glasgow and three semesters in Bern, Switzerland. Concentrating on German literature, history, national economics, and philosophy, Stöcker completed the Ph.D. in 1902. With her thesis on art appreciation in the 18th century from Winckelmann to Wackenroder, Helene Stöcker became one of the first women in Germany to receive her doctorate.

As a young woman Helene Stöcker was an activist in the left wing of the women's movement, she then became engaged in the sexual reform movement and after World War I, she was instrumental in formulating and motivating the pacifist movement in Germany and worldwide. Already in 1892, Stöcker had become a member of Berta von Suttner's German Peace Society (Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft), an organization in which she was to remain active for some 40 years. After 1919, Stöcker was one of the movement's leaders. Since 1902 she was also an elected leader of Minna Cauer's "Frauenwohl", an organization which campaigned for women's rights and abortion rights. Likewise in 1902, Stöcker co-founded the "German Alliance for Women's Right to Vote" (Deutscher Verband für Frauenstimmrecht).

Stöcker was acquainted with all of the leaders of Germany's first women's rights movement, and she was particularly close to the left wing leaders. Most all of them were members of the Alliance for the Legal Protection of Motherhood (Bund für Mutterschutz) which Stöcker founded in 1905 and led for about 20 years. In that

same year, 1905, Helene Stöcker met her life companion, Brunold Springer. Putting into practice what Stöcker called the "new ethic", she and Springer did not marry since "not marriage, but rather love was the only basis for sexual relations." From 1905 until his death in 1931, Stöcker and her companion refused to accept what she identified as christian morality's suppression of sexuality and male capitalism's pressure to transform females into sexual objects.

Probably Stöcker's greatest achievement and likewise the political involvement that brought her into such close cooperation with Magnus Hirschfeld and the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the Institute for Sexuality was the Alliance for the Legal Protection of Motherhood.

The primary goal of the Alliance was improvements in the area of sexual life and reproduction. The Alliance sought to protect single mothers and their children from economic and moral persecution and worked to break down social prejudice against single mothers and their children.

From the founding of Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science in 1919, the Alliance provided sexual advice in conjunction with the Institute. Unlike state operated advisors, the Alliance sought out and gave advice to unwed mothers. After 1924, the Alliance, which counted all of the leading feminists, sexologists, and left-wing political leaders of the Weimar Republic as members, openly took a stance on sexual reform and henceforth called itself "The German Alliance for Legal Protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform" ("Deutscher Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexual Reform"). From 1905 until her emigration in 1933, Helene Stöcker was the editor of the Alliance's magazine, entitled: "Mutterschutz: Zeitschrift für Reform der sexuellen Ethik" (Legal Protection of Motherhood: Magazine for Reform of Sexual Ethics). The Alliance cooperated with some 20 other organizations representing sexual and social reform, pacifism, and free thinking. The Alliance carried on its work until February 1933 when it was disbanded by the Nazis.

As founder and leader of the Alliance, Helene Stöcker was the primary contact between the women's movement and the male dominated sexual reform movement. Stöcker became the predominant spokeswoman within the women's rights movement to work in close contact with leaders of the homosexual rights' movement. Under her leadership, the Alliance actively sought abolition of Paragraph 175 and for an end in general to discrimination based on sexuality. Meanwhile, the first meeting between the men representing the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and feminists had taken place in Berlin at the October 1904 annual meeting of the Committee. Anna Rühling gave a talk entitled: "Welches Interesse hat die Frauenbewegung an der Lösung des homosexuellen Problems?" (What interest does the women's movement have in a solution of the homosexual problem?)

This interesting question seems to have been answered with a response of "well, not very much. . ." Of the 6000 names collected by 1907 on Hirschfeld's petition, there were less than 10 women's names. Nonetheless one of the very first signers was "Dr. med. Agnes Hacker, Berlin." [3] Others sometimes chose to remain more anonymous and included, "Fräulein M.B., Frau Theresa Eschholz, Berlin, Frau H. in Berlin, Frau F.-Lehmann, Berlin; Pauline S., Gertrud Zucker, Friedenau, Frau Regierungs-Rat Dr. Martha Marquardt." [4] On a later version of the petition signed by some 500 additional people between 1922 and 1926, after women had the right to study and to vote, a grand total of 17 signatures came from women.

The greatest interest among feminists concerned with the rights of homosexuals in Wilhelmenian Germany came about in the years 1909 to 1911 when the Prussian Government attempted to make the anti-homosexual paragraph in the penal code more severe. Among other changes, the government sought for the first time to prosecute lesbians for their sexual behavior. In February 1911, after a meeting between Magnus Hirschfeld and Helene Stöcker, the Berlin leader of the German Alliance for the Protection of Motherhood and Reform of Sexual Reform issued the very first statement by a feminist organization regarding the topic of homosexuality. Helene Stöcker declared the government's intentions to include women under penal code 175 (proposed paragraph 250 in the revised law), "ein schwerwiegender Mißgriff" (a grave error). Stöcker said, it would be juristically and ethically wrong to expand the law to cover women. Rather than eliminating one inequality, it was Stöcker's position, that revision of the penal code to include lesbians would double the injustice. Such a revision, Stöcker argued, would open the door to denunciation and blackmail, making victims of unmarried working women who shared quarters with other female colleagues.

The sole newspaper article of any length and credibility to discuss female homosexuality in the press of Wilhelmenian Germany appeared in 1911 in "Die neue Generation." The author was Helene Stöcker. Meanwhile, Hirschfeld held several speeches on homosexuality for the Alliance in 1911. In September 1911, the Alliance held a congress in Dresden entitled "International Congress of Legal Protection of Expectant Mothers and Sexual Reform." Both Hirschfeld and Sigmund Freud signed the international call for homosexual rights which was formulated by the women's congress.

The cooperation at this time between the two branches of the rights' movement extended in both directions. Hirschfeld expanded his usual topic in his address to the Alliance in March 1912. With its title, "Sexual abstinence among adults" Hirschfeld's speech was of keen interest to an Alliance which actively pursued the abolition of celibacy rules governing women's service in the government and education. Meanwhile, in May 1912, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee elected its first female Obmänner, including Helene Stöcker.

Helene Stöcker's causes and way of life brought her into open conflict with the governors of Wilhelmenian, Weimar and Nazi Germany. In 1915, Stöcker joined with other German feminist leaders Minna Cauer, Lida Gustava Heymann, and Anita Augspurg to found the "International Women's League for Peace and Freedom" (Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit). The 1136 women who participated in the League's conference at the Haag, joined the peace movement there in spite of great inconveniences to travel during the world war and accusations that they were all traitors against the national war efforts in their countries. The most severe threat peace to activists like Helene Stöcker came in 1933 with the Nazis rise to power in Germany. On February 28, 1933, the day after the Reichstag fire, Stöcker left behind everything she owned, all of her life's work including her collected archives, and fled through Czechoslovakia to Austria and then on to Switzerland. She lived for several years in Zurich. In 1938, living in London, Stöcker once again lost everything to a fire. All of Stöcker's letters, note books, and journals were consumed and destroyed when her apartment went up in flames. In 1939, 70 years old, Helene Stöcker moved on to Sweden, then fled across the Soviet Union and Japan, finally to the United States. Stöcker died on February 24, 1943 in

New York City. She was 74 years old.

50 years later, as we can see from this commemorative placard of the German women's movement put together by InterNationes, Helene Stöcker still doesn't fit in with the official picture of the women who led the equal rights movement. One possible explanation is that the Godmother of the Homo-Sexual reform movement had too much to do with the Father of the modern homosexual rights' movement. Without the research and documentation efforts of the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Society in Berlin today, Helene Stöcker and the whole history of the early sexual reform movement might remain lost.

Thank you. Ralf Dose has asked that I announce: - If anyone is interested in a catalogue of the exhibit: please be advised, that the Society is presently working on an internet version (or, maybe, a CD-ROM) that should be available in summer this year. There will be a homepage of the Magnus Hirschfeld Society soon with more information.



[1] Ilse Kokula, "Helene Stöcker (1869-1943), der "Bund für Mutterschutz" und die Sexualreformbewegung, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Emanzipationskampfes homosexueller Frauen und Männer", in: "Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft" Nr. 6, August 1985, 5-24. All information included here regarding Stöcker is adapted and/or translated into my English version based on Kokula, unless otherwise noted.

[2] "Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung", 1995 InterNationes, Bonn. Text by Antje Dertinger; layout by Stefan Röhl.

[3] Cited in Manfred Herzer, "Das Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäre Komitee" in: Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung (Berlin: Rosa Winkel 1997), 37-47.

[4] Manfred Herzer, Magnus Hirschfeld. (Frankfurt/M.; New York: Campus 1992)