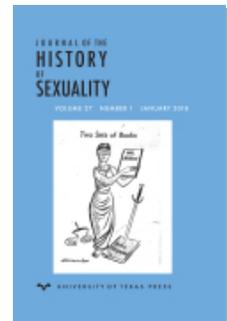




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Peripheral Desires: The German Discovery of Sex by Robert Deam Tobin, and: *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History 1880-1945* by Clayton J. Whisnant, and: *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* by Laurie Marhoefer, and: *Violent Sensations: Sex, Crime and Utopia in Vienna and Berlin, 1860-1914* by Scott Spector, and: *Vita Sexualis: Karl Ulrichs and the Origins of Sexual Science* by Ralph M. Leck (review)



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Journal of the History of Sexuality, Volume 27, Number 1, January 2018,
pp. 186-206 (Review)

Published by University of Texas Press

Whisnant's *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History 1880–1945* presents a strong, timely survey of the birth of LGBTIQ politics in that country, covering more than six decades, from the founding in the 1890s of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the world's first dedicated homosexual rights organization, through the fin-de-siècle scandals in the kaiser's inner circle,¹⁴ the growth of urban gay "scenes"

¹⁴ On these widely studied scandals, see, for example, Claudia Bruns, "Masculinity, Sexuality, and the German Nation: The Eulenburg Scandals and Kaiser Wilhelm II in Political Cartoons," in *Pictorial Cultures and Political Iconographies: Approaches, Perspectives, Case Studies from Europe and America*, ed. Udo J. Hebel and Christoph Wagner (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011);

in the Weimar Republic, and a brief history of Nazi persecution. This wide-ranging examination of individual actors, media representations, medical discourses, and political reforms is well suited to a more general readership and readily accessible to undergraduates; clear summaries and short profiles of individual activists and intellectuals introduce each chapter, and key questions are expressed in point form. For historians, it offers a highly current navigational tool across English- and German-language scholarship and primary sources on gay and lesbian history. Of particular note is the level of attention Whisnant pays to the work of “a relatively small cadre of devoted historians” that emerged from the 1970s West German gay rights movement (6)—scholars whose pioneering and at times severely underfunded research has frequently not been given its due, particularly in English-language scholarship.¹⁵ Whisnant also does much to flesh out the gaps in existing “big picture” studies, from James Steakley’s *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* to Beachy’s *Gay Berlin*, charting the changing historiographical landscape on topics such as Hirschfeld and the Weimar queer publishing landscape.¹⁶ He pays careful attention to lesser-known figures such as feminist sexologist Johanna Elberskirchen and conservative masculinists Gustav Jäger and John Henry Mackay, whose efforts to contest stereotypes of effeminacy were, he argues, ironically “emboldened” by the efforts of left-wing scholars of sexual intermediacy such as Hirschfeld (34). *Queer Identities* is also attentive to the role of smaller cities as spaces of LGBTIQ existence and, like Marhoefer’s book, pays much more than lip service to the history of female homosexuality. Furthermore, Whisnant’s survey perspective, which he complements with concise new readings of selected primary sources such as Klaus Mann’s *Pious Dance*, is valuable

Norman Domeier, *The Eulenburg Affair: A Cultural History of Politics in the German Empire*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015); Isabel Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Peter Winzen, *Das Ende der Kaiserherrlichkeit: Die Skandalprozesse um die homosexuellen Berater Wilhelms II, 1907–1909* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010).

¹⁵ In addition to the works cited above, Whisnant discusses German-language research on female homosexuality by scholars including Hanna Hacker, Adele Meyer, Kirsten Plötz, Heike Schader, and Claudia Schoppmann; on male homosexuality by Manfred Baumgardt, Jens Dobler, Ralf Dose, Günter Grau, Manfred Herzer, Rainer Hoffschildt, Joachim Hohmann, Jörg Hutter, Burkhard Jellonek, Rüdiger Lautmann, Stefan Micheler, Florian Mildenerger, Joachim Müller, Suzanne zur Nieden, Andreas Pretzel, Christian Schulz, Volkmar Sigusch, Frank Sparing, Andreas Sternweiler, and Hans-Georg Stümke; several coauthored histories of queer experience in Cologne, Hamburg, and Munich; and influential scholarly exhibition catalogs such as Michael Bollé, ed., *Eldorado: Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin, 1850–1950: Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur* (Berlin: Frölich and Kaufmann, 1984); and Schwules Museum, ed., *Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung* (Berlin: Rosa Winkel, 1997). Tobin, too, acknowledges an explicit debt to German “activist scholars” (*Peripheral Desires*, xvii–xviii).

¹⁶ James Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

for its identification of ongoing areas of scholarly neglect, such as the rise in homosexual convictions in the mid-1920s, which, as Edward Ross Dickinson has observed, runs counter to the progressive reputation of the Weimar Republic (105).¹⁷

Like the books outlined above, Whisnant's tale of origins seeks to draw out the relevance of German "firsts" for a post-Stonewall era: "The first homosexual activists were German; the first writer to coin the term *homosexual* was a German-speaking Hungarian . . . , [t]he first periodicals addressed to gay men, lesbians, and transgender people were all German. A German scientist [Hirschfeld] coined the term *transvestism*, paving the way for the distinction that we make between homosexual and transgender. . . . The first sex reassignment operation was done by a German doctor in 1920" (4). Yet while this list of "firsts" suggests a concerted focus on trans, as well as lesbian and gay, history, this topic remains rather on the margins of Whisnant's account of "queer" identities. Thus the doctor who performed the aforementioned sex reassignment operation remains unnamed, and famous cases such as that of Lili Elbe, in the recent film *The Danish Girl* (dir. Tom Hooper, 2015), go unmentioned, as does existing scholarship on German trans history by Rainer Herrn, Sabine Meyer, and others. On intersex history, too, Whisnant's survey is much less thorough than on homosexuality, although this topic receives some attention in a discussion of Hirschfeld's theory of "sexual intermediaries" (27–30).¹⁸

Unlike Leck's study, though, *Queer Identities* is not a traditional work of recovering gay pasts or "ancestral genealogy," to use Laura Doan's phrase.¹⁹ It is clearly informed by queer theoretical debates and carefully engages with the problems of writing LGBTIQ histories and imposing presentist identifications onto past subjects. Queer frameworks also infuse the book's thematic structure, despite a roughly chronological ordering of chapters, allowing connections to be drawn between seemingly disparate political and scientific currents. Chapter 2 is exemplary here, with Whisnant deploying Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's account of an early twentieth-century dynamics of "homosexual panic" to frame a wide-reaching analysis of the changing shape of heterosexual and same-sex relationships; the political implications of prominent homosexual scandals in the business community and kaiser's court; and their role as a catalyst for new alliances between feminists,

¹⁷ Edward Ross Dickinson, *Sex, Freedom, and Power in Imperial Germany, 1880–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 224–25.

¹⁸ See, for example, Rainer Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts: Transvestitismus und Transsexualität in der frühen Sexualwissenschaft* (Giessen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2005); Ulrike Klöppel, *XX0XY ungelöst: Hermaphroditismus, Sex und Gender in der deutschen Medizin: Eine historische Studie zur Intersexualität* (Berlin: Transcript, 2010); and Sabine Meyer, "Wie Lili zu einem richtigen Mädchen wurde": *Lili Elbe; Zur Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Identität zwischen Medialisierung, Regulierung und Subjektivierung* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015).

¹⁹ Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 59, 72.

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sexologists, left- and right-wing gay activists, psychoanalysts, and youth organizations.

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