

One of a Kind



In 1869 a Hungarian physician, Karoly Maria Benkert, coined the word **homosexual**.¹ It was a curious (dare we say “queer”) blend of Greek (*homos*) and Latin (*sexus*), meaning “same sex.” Lots of people were confused, thinking it meant “lover of men.” Others were downright uncomfortable with the merger. Havelock Ellis was furious, calling it “a barbarously hybrid word.” There have since been numerous attempts either to make the word philologically pure or to find substitutes for it.²

Scholars approached it from both sides, first creating the **homogenic**, the **homoerotic**, and the **homophile**; later, the **simulsexual** and the **isosexual**. Some made their feelings even clearer with the **controsexual**, or by cutting him down to size as a **homo** (also **homie**, c. 1925).

As the word became increasingly identified with men, it inspired the **feminosexual**, which created a new problem. If men were **homosexuals** and women **feminosexuals**, what were they collectively? From this dilemma there briefly emerged the **intersexual**.

Our most current entry is the proposed **herosexual**, who sounds as if he came out of a telephone booth rather than the closet. America, however, is not quite ready for that one.

Is it any wonder that we finally returned to the **homosexual**, the worst of all possible words—save all others.

Out of This World

It's not as if there weren't plenty of other options. **Urnings** may sound like something out of Dr. Seuss, but they really were the creation of Dr. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895), a nineteenth-century scientist. He was one of the first to try to explain and classify such behavior, calling it **uranism**, a condition he described as the female soul residing in a male body. **Urnings** and **uranism** came from the numerous references to Uranus in Plato's *Symposium*, which idealized **homosexual** activity. Like Plato, the good

Gentlemen will be Gentlemen

—Anita Loos



Q. Was your first sexual experience heterosexual or homosexual?

A. I was too polite to ask.

—Gore Vidal, replying to question
by David Frost, 1971