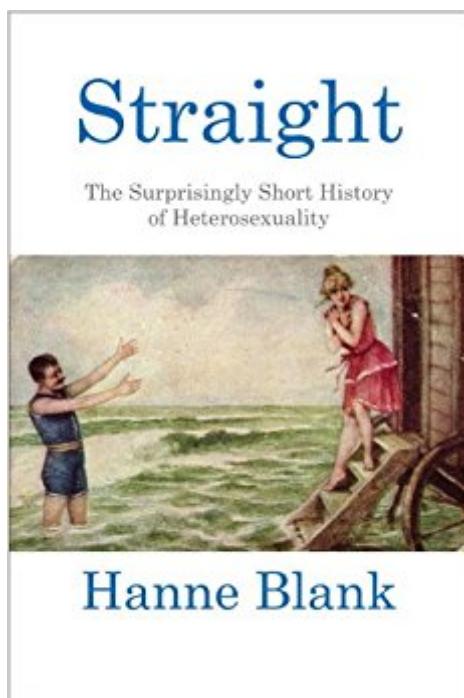


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# Straight: The Surprisingly Short History Of Heterosexuality



## Synopsis

Like the typewriter and the light bulb, the heterosexual was invented in the 1860s and swiftly transformed Western culture. The idea of “the heterosexual” was unprecedented. After all, men and women had been having sex, marrying, building families, and sometimes even falling in love for millennia without having any special name for their emotions or acts. Yet, within half a century, “heterosexual” had become a byword for “normal,” enshrined in law, medicine, psychiatry, and the media as a new gold standard for human experience. With an eclectic scope and fascinating detail, *Straight* tells the eye-opening story of a complex and often contradictory man-made creation that turns out to be anything but straight or narrow. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Fascinating. . . . *Vanity Fair*” [An] amusing, readable synthesis . . . Blank darts from one intriguing, thought-provoking point to another. . . . [And she] offers the provocative solution that soon we will move on from our present fixation on the binary to a more fluid understanding. . . . Abigail Zuger, *New York Times* “Using wit and wisdom, Blank substantiates her argument that love and passion are not defined by biology. . . . EDGE Publications “A lively, accessible synthesis of decades of scholarship on the history and sociology of sexuality. . . . CHOICE “Wry, witty and thoroughly researched. . . .” *A Lavender Magazine* “Blank has produced a challenging, clear, and interesting study of how Western views of what it means to be

Ã¢ ¬ËœstraightÃ¢ ¬â„¢s have changed over the past two centuries and continue to change.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Library JournalÃ¢ ¬Å“BlankÃ¢ ¬â„¢s work reaches further and deeper into the history of heterosexualityÃ¢ ¬Â|highly accessible.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Lambda LitÃ¢ ¬Å“Straight Ã¢ ¬Â|is accessible and engaging, often witty and penetrating in its insights.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ New York Journal of Books Ã¢ ¬Å“BlankÃ¢ ¬â„¢s tenacious research and insightful arguments make clear how malleable the attitudes of the world we live in really are.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Michelle Kehm, BustÃ¢ ¬Å“Blank writes with great erudition and humor, so that, even a skeptical (or anxious) reader will be hard-pressed not to find it enjoyable and thought provoking."Ã¢ ¬â „ HaaretzÃ¢ ¬Å“Hanne Blank has rendered a meticulously researched romp through the history of Ã¢ ¬ËœheterosexualityÃ¢ ¬â„¢Ã¢ ¬â „ that pesky orthodoxy still looming over Western culture like smog. Her sweeping synthesis takes on everything from Freud to Larry Craig, expertly weaving this untold history with insight and a refreshing dose of irreverence.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Lisa M. Diamond, author of *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding WomenÃ¢ ¬â„¢s Love and Desire*Ã¢ ¬Å“The author uses wisdom and wit to substantiate her contention that love and passion are not definable by biology.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ KirkusÃ¢ ¬Å“From its thorough but brisk explorations of sexual orientationÃ¢ ¬â„¢s intersections with sex, gender, and romance, this illuminating study examines our presuppositions and makes a powerful, provocative argument that heterosexualityÃ¢ ¬â „ mazy, unscientific, and newÃ¢ ¬â „ may be merely Ã¢ ¬Å“a particular configuration of sex and power in a particular historical moment.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Publishers WeeklyÃ¢ ¬Å“With impeccable research and detail, Hanne Blank uncovers the fascinating, often hidden, history of heterosexuality. Straight is a marvelous cultural history that is as entertaining as it is profoundly enlightening and necessary for understanding the world in which we live.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Michael Bronski, author of *A Queer History of the United States*Ã¢ ¬Å“What would it mean to dispense with our current categories of sexual identity? Writing with grace and wit, Hanne Blank demonstrates that what sounds like a radical proposition is also historically inevitable. This is a book that really shakes up an assumption or two!Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Laura Kipnis, author of *How To Become a Scandal and Against Love*Ã¢ ¬Å“Challenging our cultureÃ¢ ¬â„¢s deeply entrenched, stubborn assumption of heterosexuality, Straight helps us to think newly and critically. Starting from her own experience, Hanne Blank creatively analyses the unexamined idea that heterosexuality is given, unchanging, ahistorical.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â „ Jonathan Ned Katz, author of *The Invention of Heterosexuality* and co-director OutHistory.orgFrom the Hardcover edition.

Writer and historian Hanne Blank is the author of *Virgin: The Untouched History* and seven other books that explore the intersections of sexuality, gender, the body, and culture. From the Hardcover edition.

I'm putting this book on my very short list of works, including "The Selfish Gene" The Selfish Gene: 30th Anniversary Edition--with a new Introduction by the Author, Davies' "Deptford" Trilogy The Deptford Trilogy, and "The Nurture Assumption" The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do, Revised and Updated, that have fundamentally changed the way I view the world. It really doesn't matter whether one agrees completely with Blank or not as to the historical reason the term and concept came into our culture; those are interesting opinions. The incontrovertible fact is that "heterosexual" has a specific meaning, a meaning that changes over time, and a meaning that impacts ones understanding of all other aspects of gender and sex identity. The life-changing aspect of this book is, in other words, not so much Blanks specific explanation of what heterosexuality is and means but rather the underlying concept that its meaning is not self-obvious and is important to understand. From this point of view Blank's ideas become data in a personal analysis of an entire area of thought that had never occurred to me before. Another reviewer likens "Heterosexual" to post-modern "everything is a social construct" fallacy. I think seeing it that way completely misses the point. Of course who I am sexually is a physical reality, founded in my genes, my gestation, and my life experience. Who I actually am is not a construct but a reality. But the name given to that reality IS a social construct. Who falls under this umbrella, and who does not? I often call myself bisexual, for want of a better term, but never felt it is particularly accurate. Reading this book has led me to coin a new term, "NH", or "Not Heterosexual", which has some of it's own baggage but is perhaps a little more accurate. How many books will ever cause someone to redefine his own sexual orientation? Here's the reason I recommend this book to everyone: if you and your brother are monozygotic twins, and share the same sexual orientation, the reality of your own sexuality is still different from his. Your husband's sexuality is substantially different from that of your college boyfriend, even if they both self identify as "straight". Considering these facts will, I think, give anyone reading it a deeper understanding of themselves. For anyone who, like myself, is not (to use the APA term) "gender-normative" [...], or who is close to someone like me, I consider it essential reading.

I read this with mixed thoughts. Was I trying to confirm my heterosexual status? Maybe! I have always thought yes, but I have often been annoyed that others thought otherwise. Now I think, why

should I really care? I am what I am.

this is a popular history but very well balanced. I recommend to any one who is interested in the dichotomous sex relationships in our current culture.

This is a wonderful history that diligently researches a word that many use but few really understand. A compelling story of how and why we, as Western society (there is little to no mention of other cultures), refer to and think in certain ways about the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. I found this to be delightfully informative and well researched. There is a bit of, perhaps willful, disregard to whether certain historical shifts are causation or merely corollaries of some greater force, however, this does not distract from the essential premise of this work. I would heartily recommend this to anyone looking to learn more about the history of Western sexuality, marriage, and family.

Excellent analysis. Thorough, informative, and provocative. The author gets a few points wrong but is otherwise very persuasive.

Blank's exploration of this cultural norm is as thorough as I was hoping for. It opened my mind and helped me have a more nuanced understanding of sexuality and human relationships. I can't give higher praise than that as the quality of my relationships is where I find the value and balance of my life.

**AWESOME AWESOME BOOK.**

Simply fabulous and poignant work... a must read! Hanne Blank is a vivid, authentic and powerful writer.

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