

Interview with Oswalt Kolle (1928–2010): German Sex Education Pioneer

René F. Kropman, MD, PhD, FECSM,* Marcel D. Waldinger, MD, PhD, FECSM,^{†‡} and Dirk Schultheiss, MD, PhD[§]

*Department of Urology, Haga Hospital, The Hague, The Netherlands; [†]Outpatient Department of Neurosexology, Haga Hospital, The Hague, The Netherlands; [‡]Department of Pharmacology, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands; [§]Department of Urology, Protestant Hospital Giessen, Giessen, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956) was the first pioneer of scientific sexology after World War II with his surveys on human sexuality in the male (1948) and the female (1953), which underwent worldwide translations and also had a major impact in Europe.

Aim. To clarify the role of the journalist Oswalt Kolle (1928–2010) as the promoter of sex education in Germany and Western Europe in the late 1960s.

Methods. The information is almost exclusively based on a live interview taken with the time witness Oswalt Kolle in February 2010. This scientific technique of oral history is well established in the field of history research today.

Results. Kolle has a strong family background in the medical field as his father was a well-known psychiatrist and his grandfather a prominent bacteriologist. Before starting an interest in sex education, Kolle was a successful journalist by interviewing celebrities but turned into one of the most important critics against the restricted views on sex in Germany and Western Europe in the 1960s. His books and films on sexuality were translated into at least 12 languages and were major blockbusters for at least a decade.

Conclusions. Oswalt Kolle had more influence on the public awareness and practice of sexuality in Western Europe and especially Germany than any other single person in his time. **Kropman R, Waldinger M, Schultheiss D. Interview with Oswalt Kolle (1928–2010): German sex education pioneer. J Sex Med 2014;11:1876–1881.**

Key Words. History of Sexual Medicine; Interview; Oral History; Sexual Education; Sexual Freedom; Homosexuality; Journalism

Introduction

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the West European public was confronted with the sexual education films of Oswalt Kolle, a journalist who had harvested success and criticism with his articles and books about education and sexuality that were translated in many languages. The revolutionary ideas and activities of Oswalt Kolle had a tremendous effect on sexual education and have made him one of those rare historical individuals who can change the attitudes of an entire generation. In Germany in those years, one would say, “Whenever a couple makes love, Oswalt Kolle is the third person together with them in bed!” Finally, in 2000, he received the highest national scientific merit in the field of sexology, the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Medal, for his extraordinary services from the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozialwissenschaftliche Sexualforschung” (German Society for Social-Scientific Sexual Research).

For taking the interview, Oswalt Kolle received us at his home, located in one of the nicest areas of southern Amsterdam. He came to live in the Netherlands in 1969 and has since become a Dutch citizen. He has a very friendly and relaxed attitude, occasionally smoking a cigarette. We had barely been seated when he asked us to call him Oswalt and presented us with a signed copy of his latest book named “*Ich bin so frei*” (which in a double sense means “I am very free” or “If I may take the opportunity”) [1], mentioning that some of the necessary information for the interview can be found in this book. We were particularly interested in the background and motivations of his remarkable and courageous career. How did he become the most important man in Germany and Western Europe in the field of sexual education after World War II and particularly in the 1960s and 1970s? The interview was taken in Dutch language and later transcribed by Marcel Waldinger and René Kropman. Where necessary, the authors have added a comment with further information. Moreover, the dates of birth and death of prominent persons have been added.

Interview

Waldinger and Kropman (W&K): Could you tell us more about your family? Your father was a psychiatrist. What was his influence on you? Was it your father who laid the foundation for your later career in sexology and sexual education?

Kolle: I was born in Kiel, Northern Germany, in 1928 as the son of Kurt Kolle (1898–1975), who was a well-

known psychiatrist. My father was born in Kimberley, South Africa. His father was the famous Wilhelm Kolle (1868–1935), a bacteriologist or, as it was called these days, “Hygieniker” (sanitarian or hygienist). At that time, grandfather Wilhelm Kolle worked in Africa under the commission of the famous bacteriologist Robert Koch (1843–1910). He worked on cholera, typhoid fever, and did research on the development of a vaccine against rinderpest (cattle plague). Later, Wilhelm Kolle became Chairman of Hygiene and Bacteriology at the “Institut zur Erforschung der Infektionskrankheiten” (Institute for Research of Infectious Diseases) in Bern, Switzerland, and so, my father Kurt went to this city as well. From 1917–1935, grandfather Wilhelm was president of the “Staatsinstitut für experimentelle Therapie” (State Institute for Experimental Therapy, today Paul Ehrlich Institute, The Federal Institute for Vaccines and Biomedicines) and director of the “Georg-Speyer-Haus” (The Institute for Chemotherapeutical Research) in Frankfurt am Main, Central Germany.

Comment of the authors: A remarkable fact about the life of Wilhelm Kolle is his support for the legal fight to repeal the law against homosexuality. Paragraph 175 (known formally as §175 StGB) was a provision of the German Criminal Code from 1871 till 1994. It made homosexual acts between males a crime, and in early revisions, the provision also criminalized bestiality. In 1898, the later famous sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) initiated a petition to the “Reichstag” (German Parliament) to overturn paragraph 175, and he gathered over 5,000 signatures from prominent Germans [2]. This open petition also showed the signature of Wilhelm Kolle.

Later on the statute of paragraph 175 was amended several times. The Nazis broadened the law in 1935; in the prosecutions that followed, thousands died in concentration camps. East Germany reverted to the old version of the law in 1950, limited its scope to sex with youths under 18 in 1968, and abolished it entirely in 1988. West Germany retained the Nazi era statute until 1969 when it was limited to “qualified cases”; it was further attenuated in 1973 and finally revoked entirely in 1994 after German reunification.

Kolle: My father Kurt Kolle worked in Kiel starting in 1926 and since 1928 he joined the Christian Albrechts University. He had to leave Kiel in 1933 because of the Nazis. New laws in April 1933, in November 1935, and in 1937 made it possible for the Nazis to ban from the University Jews or employees married with Jews [3]. There were many students and colleagues who resisted or opposed these measures. The name of Kurt Kolle stands in the long list of 57 names of scientists who were banned from the university. In the “*Kieler National Socialist Newspaper*,” he was called a Marxist. In 1934, his membership of the “Gesellschaft Deutscher Nervenärzte” (German Society of Neuropsychiatrists) was dropped. Still in 1934, he published a paper in which he opposed euthanasia as popularized by the

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