

Charlotte Wolff

(September 30, 1897- September 12, 1986)

*This essay was written by Pink Triangle Legacies Project Intern Gabby Perales and based on the important research of Claudia Rappold, Harriet Freidenreich, and Julia Baumann.
Thank you for your efforts in preserving queer history.*

Charlotte Wolff was born on September 30, 1897 in the town of Riesenburg, West Prussia (now Prabuty in Powiat Kwidzyński, Poland). Charlotte lived openly as a lesbian starting as early as her days in primary school.

As a daughter of a middle class Jewish family, Charlotte described her parents as caring, but also overprotective and prone to spoiling her. Despite an attributed lack of discipline in her family, Charlotte credited the unwavering attention she received from her parents as giving her a fundamental sense of trust in herself and in other people.

While living in Danzig (now Gdańsk, Poland), Charlotte attended Viktoria School, where she graduated in 1920. Later in her autobiographies, Charlotte described how she had fallen in love with female teachers throughout her school years. She later described her feelings for one of her teachers as “somewhat more intense than that of the usual crush of a schoolgirl on a teacher.” Her family was aware of her love of women and remained supportive and accepting.

After graduating, Charlotte eventually enrolled in medical school and received her license to practice medicine on February 15, 1926. Afterwards, she worked in obstetrics at the Rudolf Virchow Municipal Hospital in Berlin. While living in Berlin, Charlotte described how the climate of Berlin motivated her while feeling accepted in her sexual identity, “In the atmosphere of the 1920s, one breathed the air of freedom and tolerance [here].”

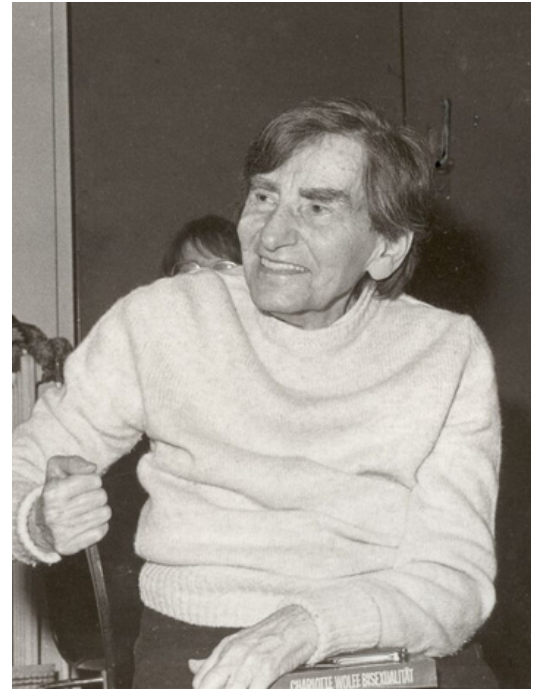
Unfortunately for Charlotte, the Nazi Party encouraged rising levels of antisemitism by blaming Jews for all of Germany’s social, political, and economic problems. Forced to end her medical career, Charlotte could not afford to remain unemployed, and in April 1932, she got a new job as director of the Electro-Physical Institute in Neukölln.



Dr. Wolff performing a palm reading, circa 1935.
Man Ray

With Hitler's appointment as Chancellor on January 30, 1933, antisemitism was backed by the full force of the German government. Charlotte's partner, Katharine - who was not Jewish - decided to separate from Charlotte, since she feared for her safety if she continued associating with a Jew. In February 1933 Charlotte was forced to resign from her job as director at the Institute because of her Jewish background.

Shortly afterwards, the Nazi Gestapo arrested Charlotte on the subway for wearing men's clothing. Fortunately, a guard recognized Charlotte as his wife's doctor, and released her. The Gestapo were still convinced that Charlotte was a spy, so they searched Charlotte's house. This convinced Charlotte she had to flee Germany. On May 23, 1933 she left for Paris. Wolff stayed in Paris until a close friend, Maria Huxley, invited her to live and work in London.



An older Charlotte Wolff, circa 1970s.
Schwules Museum

Leaving Paris in 1936, Charlotte received a permanent residence permit and a license to practice psychoanalysis in England (but not medicine) in 1937. In the 1950s, Charlotte met and fell in love with Audrey Wood, a midwife. The two women remained together until Charlotte's death. British authorities did not recognize Charlotte's medical license until 1952. In the 1960s, Charlotte began conducting empirical research on female bisexuality and homosexuality. Published in 1971, Charlotte's book *Love between Women* was among the first investigations and attempts to look at the subject scientifically.

Charlotte's last work, a biography of notable German-Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, was published in London in 1986. Titled *A Portrait of a Pioneer in Sexology*, it is regarded by many as her most important work. Charlotte Wolff died in London on September 12, 1986. She was 88. Just as she wished for Hirschfeld's work and ideas to be accessible, Charlotte Wolff is remembered for her willingness to fight prejudice against sexual minorities by raising awareness and fostering empathy.

Sources & Further Reading

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