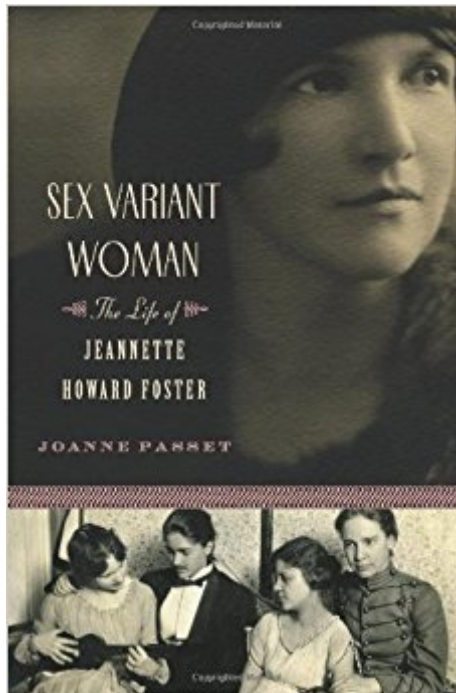




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# Sex Variant Woman: The Life Of Jeanette Howard Foster



## Synopsis

Jeanette Howard Foster was to lesbianism in the mid-twentieth century what out authors such as Gore Vidal and James Baldwin were to gay men. She unapologetically blew the lid off Cold War sexual repression in 1956 with her *Sex Variant Women in Literature*-the first-ever study of homosexual, bisexual, and cross-dressing characters appearing in more than 300 works, from ancient times to the present. Joanne Passet's *Sex Variant Woman* is a fascinating portrait of Foster, who served as the first librarian at the Kinsey Institute before leaving to publish her controversial book. It is also a riveting look into the pre-Stonewall past, the intense sexual repression and persecution endured by homosexuals, the groundbreaking advances put forth by a cadre of activists, and the rise of feminism and gay and lesbian liberation decades later.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Passet, a professor of history and author (*Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*), captures both the personal and professional obstacles faced by Jeanette Howard Foster, the foremother of lesbian literature. Passet begins with Foster's childhood and adolescence, a cold and confusing time with parents enthralled by their own business failures, living distantly from each other and their daughter. Tumultuous undergrad years take her through multiple colleges and her first few broken hearts. As a series of often-intellectual women traipse in and out of her life, a very driven Foster succeeds in obtaining her PhD and eventually works for famed sexual scientist Alfred Kinsey as the institute's first librarian-all before finally completing her own highly controversial book, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*. Somewhat ironically, Foster's personal life (especially her love life)

take precedence over her accomplishments in nearly every chapter; still, Passet does justice to Foster's important place in both literary and lesbian culture. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In 1956 a former librarian of the Kinsey Institute published the pioneering bibliography *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, listing 2,500 years worth of writings about love and sex between women. • Editions later, Jeannette Foster received a 1974 Stonewall Book Award for what is considered a cornerstone of gay-studies collections. In her detailed biography of Foster, Passet thoroughly explores the circumstances for gays in mid- to late-twentieth-century America, revealing, as may be expected, a not-always-pretty picture. Foster chose the term sex variant consciously, to help in destigmatizing women who chose to live as bisexuals, cross dressers, and lesbians, • and as a reaction to the Library of Congress™ policy then of assigning the subject heading sex deviate to works such as hers. (That cataloging policy no longer obtains, and LC's online database yields no hits, not even from the old catalog, • for sex deviate as a subject.) As a story of an important figure in gay literary studies as well as librarianship, this is a desirable title for many collections. --Mike Tribby

Really enjoyed reading this book! What a treasure of information about the changes in women's world from the 1880's to the 1970's. what a wonderful description of one woman's commitment.

Good book from what I've been told. Didn't buy the book for myself. Arrived sooner than expected and was packaged well. Book was in good condition. Recommend the seller.

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