

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIA, SEMINARS

SEXUALITY IN MODERN GERMAN HISTORY

Conference at the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC. October 25–27, 2002. Conveners: Edward Ross Dickinson (University of Cincinnati) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Participants: Claudia Bruns (University of Kassel), Catherine Dollard (Denison University), Greg Eghigian (Penn State University), Jennifer Evans (Carleton University), Geoffrey Giles (University of Florida), Elizabeth Heineman (University of Iowa), Dagmar Herzog (Michigan State University), Maria Höhn (Vassar College), Simone Lässig (GHI), Britta McEwen (UCLA), Kristin McGuire (University of Michigan), Tracie Matysik (Harvard University), Bernd Schäfer (GHI), Sara Ann Sewell (Virginia Wesleyan College), Scott Spector (University of Michigan), Annette Timm (University of Calgary), Lisa Todd (University of Toronto), Karl Toepfer (San Jose State University), Cornelia Osborne (University of Surrey), Christine von Oertzen (GHI), Tilmann Walter (University of Heidelberg), Thomas Weber (Oxford University/University of Glasgow).

This conference brought together scholars from the United States, Canada, England, and Germany who are working on the history of sexuality in Modern Germany from 1870 to the present. All participants reported on research that is currently in progress.

The first panel discussed female sexuality in Imperial Germany. Catherine Dollard's paper "The *Alte Jungfer* as New Deviant: *Sexualwissenschaft* and the Single Woman in Imperial Germany" examined how the emerging field of sexology transformed the cultural stereotype of the "old maid" into an updated, "scientific" portrait of unwed women as sexually deviant. The extensive sexological literature portrayed single women as sexually repressed, oversexed, lesbian or engaged in bestiality with their pets, and thus provided new grounds for the continued condemnation of unwed women. Turning from sexual science to the sex reform movement, Kristin McGuire's paper "A Decade of Sex, Love and Reform: Helene Stöcker's 'Neue Ethik' from 1905–1915" examined a major women's activist who worked to provide help for unwed mothers and to reform the system of sexual morality. Stöcker's call for the legitimation of sexual relations outside of marriage provoked attacks from critics across the political spectrum, many of which accused her of promoting a

“sexual anarchy” that would destroy the foundations of society. Stöcker’s defense of individual sexual freedom and her belief in the power of love, McGuire argued, “created a different space to rethink the meanings of equality and democracy” that was profoundly threatening to her opponents.

Tracie Matysik’s paper “The ‘Female Homosexual’ and the Criminal Code in Germany, 1909” examined the controversy surrounding the proposal to criminalize sexual relations between women in the 1909 draft for a revised German penal code. Opponents of the proposal argued not only that homosexuality was innate and therefore should not be punished, but that it was impossible to define “beischlafähnliche Handlungen” (acts similar to intercourse) between women. The female homosexual, Matysik concluded, “proved to be a social entity particularly resistant to legal categorization” and thus revealed the fragility of several key categories in the debate: the individual, the social, and the moral. Another aspect of sexual deviance was the subject of Lisa Todd’s paper, “The Married Woman Who Ran Away With the Russian: The Public Discourse on Marital Infidelity in Germany during the First World War,” in which she examined sexual relations between German women and French and Russian prisoners of war, primarily through newspaper reports and the commentaries of contemporary sexologists. By punishing the extramarital affairs of women on the home front while facilitating extramarital sex for soldiers in the field, German civil and military authorities were trying to reinforce a sexual double standard that had already come under serious attack from reformers like Helene Stöcker in the years before the war.

The comment on the first panel was delivered by Dagmar Herzog, who raised a number of key questions concerning the study of female sexuality. When exactly did the new discourse about sex that Foucault talked about emerge in Germany? Was there a liberalization of heterosexual practice before 1914? How did the availability of birth control change the practice of intercourse, especially for women? How does one reconcile the repressive advice offered by turn-of-the-century sexology and its exhaustive cataloguing of perversities, which indicated that everyone was a potential pervert? Finally, Herzog suggested that the controversy over orgasm in current feminist theory should make historians of sexuality expand their definitions of “sexuality” beyond a narrow focus on orgasm or sexual intercourse. The ensuing discussion raised the question to what extent the discourse on sexuality was connected to modernization and to anxieties about modernization. Were anxieties about other aspects of modernization displaced onto women’s bodies and female sexuality? Or were male anxieties about the changing role of women in society projected onto other targets, such as male homosexuals? The discussion also called attention to the connection between sexu-

ality and religion at a time when most people saw marriage as a sacrament. It was pointed out, too, that because heterosexual sex at the turn of the century carried a significant risk of pregnancy, it was much more closely connected with reproduction in people's minds than it is today. Moreover, the late nineteenth century witnessed the efforts to interfere in reproduction through eugenics and population policy, which politicized sexuality in a very direct way. Finally, the discussion featured reflections on the methodological challenges involved in doing the history of sexuality, including the roles of secrecy and shame, which make it virtually impossible to know a person's innermost sexual desires. Sexuality is situated at an even deeper level than the private, and yet this very secrecy makes it more vulnerable to being instrumentalized for political purposes.

The second panel was devoted to male sexuality in the *fin de siècle*. Thomas Weber's paper "Student Sexuality in pre-1914 Heidelberg and Oxford: National Differences Compared" argued that Heidelberg was sexually much more permissive than Oxford. In both places, class was a crucial variable in heterosexual relations: Male students had hardly any interactions with women of their own social class, but had sexual relations with women of the lower and lower middle classes. In Heidelberg, such liaisons took place in the open, whereas in Oxford they had to remain secret. While Weber rejected the homoerotic image of Oxford as exaggerated, he argued that the greater repression of heterosexual sexuality at Oxford contributed to a more homoerotic culture at Oxford, even though the extent to which romantic friendships involved homosexuality is difficult to determine.

The remaining three papers on this panel dealt with male homosexuality at the turn of the century. Whereas much of the historical literature on homosexuality in this period has focused on the emergence of medical discourses of homosexuality or the homosexual emancipation movement, these three papers called attention to different aspects of the history of homosexuality: the self-perceptions of a homosexual worker, masculinist theories of homosexuality, and the association of homosexuality with power and corruption. Sara Ann Sewell's paper "Sexuality and Class: The Case of Franz Siedersleben" examined the posthumously published autobiography of a homosexual worker who committed suicide in 1908 after having been prosecuted under Germany's sodomy law (article 175). Unlike most workers' autobiographies, Siedersleben's text said little about work, political activism or family, and focused almost entirely on his sexual experiences. Sewell showed that Siedersleben saw his homosexuality as innate and perceived it as a feminine trait, but did not regard it as an illness.

Claudia Bruns's paper "(Homo-) Sexuality as Virile Social Principle: Sexological, Antifeminist, and Anti-Semitic Strategies of Hegemonic Masculinity in the 'Masculinist' Discourse, 1880 to 1920" examined the theories of the so-called "masculinists," who argued that—far from being ill, feminized or members of a "third sex"—homosexuals were especially virile men who played a particularly useful role in national life. Bruns's analysis of how masculinists like Gustav Jäger, Benedikt Friedlaender, and Hans Blüher redefined homosexuality and "normal sexuality" in order to have homosexuality included in hegemonic masculinity demonstrated that definitions of sexual desire, gender, and normality were (and are) socially constructed and malleable. The masculinists, she argued, sought to achieve their own inclusion in the category of "normal masculinity" through an exclusionary strategy directed against women and Jews.

Scott Spector's paper "Sexual Sensations and the Social Order in Vienna, 1900–1910" explored the identification of the homosexual with power and corruption in turn-of-the-century sex scandals. The German Krupp scandal of 1902, the Viennese Beer affair of 1905, and exposes of homosexual life in the *Oesterreichische Kriminalzeitung* (1907) all transformed a private perversion into a public affair by hinting at corruption in high places. In doing so, Spector shows, those who "exposed" these scandals—be it the German SPD or the Austrian *Gerichtszeitung*—were usually enmeshed in two contradictions: advocating the legalization of homosexuality while simultaneously criticizing the police for not sufficiently enforcing the existing anti-homosexual law; and trying to link a supposedly "modern" degeneracy to the corruption of premodern elites.

Richard Wetzell's comment on the second panel questioned the distinction between homosexuality and "romantic friendship" in Weber's paper, arguing that friendships between men who went on to heterosexual lives might have included homosexual behavior during their college years. He placed Sewell's paper in the context of recent work which has argued that the construction of a "homosexual subject" was the result not just of a medical discourse imposed on homosexuals, but of autobiographical discourses with emancipatory elements. Finally, Wetzell wondered whether the current state of research allows us to draw up a map of the competing discourses on homosexuality at the turn of the century, which might include: moral purity movement, medical discourse, intermediate sex theory, homosexual rights movement, masculinists, and autobiographical discourses. The ensuing discussion raised the question whether public discourse about marginal sexuality, such as homosexuality, was not also about sexual self-knowledge. Taking this argument further, it was argued that many readers undoubtedly derived voyeuristic pleasure from reading about sexual "abnormalities" in Krafft-Ebing's books or the Austrian *Kriminalzeitung*. Drawing on George Chauncey's

work on New York, discussants also suggested that the world of homosexuality was one in which momentary sexual roles—including the participation of married men in clandestine homosexual encounters—were more important than a fixed homosexual identity.

The third panel addressed the topic of sex reform, sexual culture, and the regulation of sexuality in the 1920s and 1930s. Cornelia Osborne examined the “Representation of Abortion in Weimar Popular Culture” through a study of several mid-1920s films and serialized novels. These films and novels associated women’s sexuality with danger, death, and criminality, and uncritically accepted the medical claim that the aborting woman was safe in a doctor’s hands, whereas lay abortionists were portrayed as negative characters. Osborne noted that these fictional narratives contradicted the actual experiences of working-class women, who often turned to lay abortionists and regarded abortions as fairly routine events rather than tragedies. Despite these discrepancies between fiction and reality, Osborne concluded that these films and novels played a major role in raising public awareness of the abortion issue view during the Weimar years.

Moving from fictional narratives to sex manuals, Britta McEwen’s paper “Popular Sexual Knowledge for and about Women in Vienna, 1918–1934” charted a transformation in the content and dissemination of sexual knowledge. Whereas prewar sex manuals were written by doctors, after the war psychologists, sex reformers, and advice columnists all began to participate in the popularization of sexual knowledge for a wider audience. Furthermore, whereas prewar sex manuals had focused on sexual abnormalities and diseases, interwar texts focused on heterosexual partnerships with a mutually satisfying sex life, female pleasure, basic anatomical knowledge, and contraceptive methods. The popularization of sexual knowledge was a process of de-medicalization, replacing the medical discourse with melodramatic stories.

A different aspect of the shift from a medical to a popularized discourse on sexuality was the subject of Karl Toepfer’s paper “German Monumentalization of Perverse Eroticism, 1928–1932,” which examined the large, lavishly produced, and encyclopedic tomes on eroticism and sexual aberration that were published in the last years of the Weimar Republic. Whereas scholarly works on sexuality before 1928 usually took a medical-anthropological approach, with images functioning to document the text, the works published in 1928–1932 displayed a profusion of autonomous images that connected perverse eroticism to aesthetic experience rather than medical or anthropological theories. The dissemination of erotic fantasy in these works played a crucial role in establishing the political significance of feminism, sex reform, racial hygiene, and nudism. They also marginalized normal heterosexual intercourse by suggesting

that the true "art of love" was revealed in sexual climaxes outside intercourse.

Geoffrey Giles's paper "Legislating Nazi Homophobia" examined the "radicalization of prosecution against homosexuality" that resulted from the revision of article 175 of the penal code in June 1935 and a Reichsgericht ruling in August 1935. The original article 175, in effect since 1871, had proscribed "unnatural indecency" (*widernatürliche Unzucht*) between men, and the courts had established the interpretation that only anal intercourse was punishable. The revised article 175 of 1935 criminalized simple "indecency" (*Unzucht*) between men, and that same year the Reichsgericht interpreted the new provision to mean that any touching of another man's body (even if clothed) with sexual intent was punishable, thus declaring "open season" for the hunt for homosexuals. Because the meaning of "indecency" was never publicly explained and court cases involving homosexuality were subject to a news blackout, the Nazi campaign against homosexuality was deprived of any deterrent effect and therefore led to the arrests of tens of thousands of men who had no idea that their behavior (sex between men other than penetrative sex) had become illegal.

Edward Ross Dickinson's comment on the third panel addressed the theme of change in several of the papers: from medical discourse to melodramatic stories; from a cataloguing of sexualities to the activist project of helping people understand their sexuality; from the dominance of the medical treatise to a variety of media (films, lectures, advice clinics) for the dissemination of sexual knowledge; from the study to the evocation of perverse sexuality; and finally, a shift in the audience from bourgeois men to women and the working-class. He also noted that these developments undermined the pose of the detached sexologist, as authors began to identify themselves as participants and practitioners of perverse sexuality. Since all these changes appeared to have a liberating effect, Dickinson asked whether the authors were ready to replace Foucault's emphasis on discipline with a new stress on a democratic regime of power. In the discussion, Geoffrey Giles noted that the law could influence self-perception: Because article 175 (in its pre-1935 version) punished only anal sex, many young men regarded mutual masturbation between men as perfectly normal, and those who engaged in it did not consider themselves homosexual. Karl Toepfer noted that the monumentalization of sex amounted to an industrialization of sexual discourse. The catalogue of perverse acts in Toepfer's books and the careful distinctions between sex acts drawn by the men in the Giles's court cases led one discussant to challenge Foucault's thesis that sexuality was transformed from a multiplicity of sexual acts into fixed sexual identities (especially homo- versus heterosexuality) starting in the late nineteenth century.

Finally, the discussion raised the question of the distinction between sexual enlightenment and pornography. Whereas some suspected that Toepfer's works were simply titillating to most readers, others argued that titillation could also be a form of enlightenment. If reading the text and looking at the images involved not only knowledge but also arousal, it was suggested that historians of sexuality pay closer attention to the connection between knowledge and arousal.

The fourth panel examined the history of sexuality in postwar West and East Germany. The first two papers, on West Germany, challenged the widespread image of the 1950s as a period of sexual repression, calling attention to a liberalization of some sexual norms and the rise of a sexual consumer culture. Maria Höhn's paper "The Struggle for *Wohlanständigkeit*: West German Debates on Premarital Sexuality during the 1950s" examined the failure of a national morality campaign targeting the relationships between West German women and American GIs. The deployment of more than 200,000 GIs following the Korean war led to a proliferation of sexual relationships of GIs with German women, which could take the form of long-term relationships akin to common-law marriage, more casual relationships with girlfriends, and sexual encounters with prostitutes. Unconcerned with such distinctions, the Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge convinced the Federal Government to call on local authorities to prosecute all German women who had relations with GIs as prostitutes. This morality campaign, however, met with resistance at the local level, as local officials and judges refused to prosecute women just because they lived with GIs. While this public tolerance had an economic aspect (local girlfriends ensured that the GIs' dollars went spent locally), Höhn argued that this relaxation of sexual norms also shows that Germans no longer recognized any right of church or state to regulate private sexuality. Nevertheless, the Nazi legacy of racism was alive and well: by the second half of the 1950s, the morality campaign focused almost entirely on women who had relationships with black GIs.

Elizabeth Heineman's paper "Sex Objects: Sexual Consumer Culture and the Society of Affluence" discussed the entry of Germans into the marketplace of sexual consumer goods during the 1950s. Critical of zero-hour narratives, Heineman stressed postwar continuities with Weimar and Nazi-era developments, revealing different stories for men and women. Since women were subject to the Nazis' highly repressive population politics, a focus on women suggests that the postwar sexual consumer industry was fueled by women's desire for the contraceptives they had been denied during the Nazi years. Heineman showed, however, that even under the Nazis the back pages of popular magazines advertised mail-order catalogues through which condoms and erotica could be ob-

tained. As for men, since the Wehrmacht disseminated condoms and even erotic literature to every soldier, postwar men's demand for these products was nothing new, but a matter of renewed access after a brief disruption. Thus the major change after 1945 was the equalization of sexual consumer opportunities (in the form of mail-order catalogues) for men and women—not because opportunities for women expanded, but because the demise of the Wehrmacht curtailed men's access. Heineman concluded that the triumph of the mail-order catalogue as the main site of sexual consumption in the 1950s made for a more domestic sexual consumer culture.

Jennifer Evans and Greg Eghigian explored aspects of the history of sexuality in East Germany. In her paper "The Moral State: Sex, Normality, and Socialist Personhood in the GDR," Evans drew on Foucault's work on governmentality to examine the treatment of homosexuality in GDR 1950s legal theory and practice. Although a 1952 draft for a reformed penal code called for decriminalizing consensual sex between adult men, the repression following the June 1953 uprising not only aborted this reform, but led to an intensified prosecution of homosexuals. Whereas SBZ and GDR had previously used the pre-Nazi version of article 175, in 1954 the GDR reverted to enforcing the 1935 version with its Nazi-era legal interpretation, which did not require evidence of penetrative sex for convictions of homosexuality (see Giles paper above). Evans's analysis of court cases in Chemnitz from 1952–1956 showed that, ironically, the effort to forge a "socialist morality" by prosecuting homosexuality as a remnant of "bourgeois degeneracy" mobilized bourgeois notions of morality that were indistinguishable from those current in West Germany.

Greg Eghigian's paper "Socialism and the Limits of Desire" examined the development of "East German Forensic Psychology's Encounter with Sex Crime." Initially, in the 1950s and early 1960s, party officials rejected criminology and forensic psychology altogether. One of the first GDR studies of sex crime, published in 1961, explained child molestation as a bourgeois remnant that would disappear as socialism developed. By the early to mid-1960s, however, party officials, judges, and legal scholars began to take an interest in psychopathological approaches to sex crime, leading to a rebirth of criminology and forensic psychology in the GDR. By the mid-1970s psychopathological research was gradually eclipsed by the more sociologically oriented field of victimology, and in the 1980s psychological tests became more prominent. All these changes, Eghigian concluded, show that after the 1950s, the GDR's human sciences were not exclusively determined by political ideology and were in fact significantly influenced by international trends in East and West.

In her comments, Christine von Oertzen urged the authors to adopt a comparative perspective regarding East and West Germany. She also

asked what impact the rise of a sexual consumer culture had on sexual behavior and whether economic factors, such as the money that the G.I.'s spent in the local towns, changed the population's moral views only temporarily or in the long term. The discussion explored the ambiguous relationship of the sexual consumer culture to the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the women's liberation movement. On the one hand, the sexual revolutionaries aimed their criticism not only at the repression of sexuality but also at the commercialization of sex; on the other hand, enterprises like Beate Uhse anticipated a central topos of the women's movement by stressing the importance of female orgasm.

The conference's concluding discussion was introduced by two papers, by Tilmann Walter and Annette Timm. Walter's paper "Veränderte wissenschaftliche Blickwinkel auf die Sexualität im 20. Jahrhundert" (Changed scientific approaches to sexuality in the twentieth century) provided an overview of the history of sex research from Karl Heinrich Ulrichs to Masters and Johnson. The late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century pioneers, including Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Sigmund Freud, practiced sexology as a "Geständniswissenschaft" (confessional science) that focused on sexual deviance. Almost all of Krafft-Ebing's and Freud's cases were patients whose sexuality led to suffering or failure and who told their case histories in the hope of finding relief. By contrast, sex research in the second half of the twentieth century, exemplified by Alfred Kinsey and Masters-Johnson, shifted its focus to "normal" sexuality, which it increasingly reduced to orgasm. According to Walter, the key characteristic of "bourgeois sexuality," influential to the present, has been the belief that the individual must control (*Selbststeuerung*) and take responsibility for his or her sexuality. In her paper "The Politics of Fertility or the Politics of the Body? Methodological Speculations on the History of Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Germany," Annette Timm surveyed the recent historical literature on "body history" in order to assess its strengths and weaknesses as an approach to the history of sexuality. While recognizing that historians such as Ute Planert and Gunilla-Friederike Budde have made profitable use of body history in their work, Timm concluded that body history is of little use to historians who seek to study the relationship between "sexual systems" and civil society by examining the implementation of social policy in the area of human sexuality.

The concluding discussion focused on the question of how to write the history of sexuality. After many papers that had explored connections between sexuality and politics, Tilmann Walter led off with the statement that, in his view, the history of sexuality ought to be about sex and not about something else, such as gender relations, politics or the state. He also argued that the role of power in sex is fundamentally different from

other power relations: a sexual desire for someone makes us weak, and sex always involves emotions, which are power-laden. This statement met with different reactions. Some endorsed the call to focus on sexuality itself, noting how rarely beauty, love or ecstasy had been discussed during the conference. Others argued that sexuality was inextricably connected to social and political conditions. Still others worried that attempts to write the history of sexuality as a history of pleasure would result in a male-centered history, because an exclusive focus on pleasure ignored women's fear of pregnancy. This claim, in turn, elicited different reactions. On the one hand, it was pointed out that pregnancy was not always perceived as a threat, since it was sometimes a desired outcome. On the other hand, it was argued that sexuality always involves fears for both genders—not only of pregnancy, but also of sexually transmitted diseases. At the end of the conference, it was clear that the history of sexuality is work in progress and that historians of sexuality face a number of challenges. Among them: How to recover something as private as sexual experience? And: How to explore the connection of sexuality to social and political forces without losing sight of the experience of pleasure that is a crucial part of sexuality?

Richard F. Wetzell