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A history of homosexuality : Europe between the wars

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Abstrak

Sexuality holds a place at the heart of human societies. However, the history of sexuality is quite a new field of study.1 It stands at the crossroads of several disciplines ? history, sociology, ethnology, anthropology, medicine ? and so this history is still finding its way, oscillating between embarrassed silence and tempestuous logorrhea. Discussions of sexuality have usually been sheepish or provocative, seldom neutral and objective. In fact, sexuality is not fixed and certain, independent of any context: quite to the contrary, its position within a society reveals the relations of forces, the founding myths, the underlying tensions, and the insurmountable taboos. To Michel Foucault, the very concept of sexuality is an ideological construction. Every form of society would, in fact, have its own corresponding attitude toward sexuality. The concept of sexuality is not only determined by culture, but also by class and gender. Thus, the traditional (so-called ?middle-class?) schema of sexuality is the monogamist heterosexual family. It may be associated with economic considerations (the woman does not work), ideological considerations (the woman does not have independent sexuality, she must embody the image of the ?eternal? female and conform to her ?womanly role?), and political considerations (the family is a factor of stability within society). This conformist model was spread from the middle class to the working class starting around the end of the 19th century, as a result of the bourgeoisie?s efforts to impose morality upon the masses. Under this highly restrictive definition of the sexual standard, any form of sexuality not conforming to that pattern was categorized as abnormal. Thus, under the combined pressures of religion, medicine, the law and morality, specific types were born: the child who masturbates, the hysterical woman, the congenital prostitute, the homosexual.