

circumcision from their neighbors up to the time of their Babylonian Exile, for all those who lived around them until this time were also circumcised except for the coastal-dwelling Philistines, a people of Aegean origin who are often mentioned on the pages of the **Old Testament** quite distinctly as "the uncircumcised" or "the unclean" (Judges 14:2; I Samuel 14:6). Around 1000 B.C. the Israelite king Saul demanded of David as a bride-price for his daughter Michal one hundred Philistine foreskins (I Samuel 18:25), alluding to the practice of stripping the foreskin off a slain foe.

Jesus never mentioned circumcision, though the Jewish rite was [Luke 2:21] performed upon him on his eighth day as it was with all other males of his community of faith—hence the designation of the calendar in which the first day of the year is January 1 as "circumcision style." In the early church the party of Paul of Tarsus which opposed circumcision was victorious, and uncircumcised Greeks and Romans poured into the new faith, so that to this day the majority of European men have retained their foreskins. With the coming of the faith of Islam, however, in the seventh century the Middle East and North Africa became a stronghold of the practice of circumcision. Hindus and Buddhists avoid it, hence East Asians—and Amerindians—retain their foreskins.

Among Americans in general circumcision was relatively rare until Victorian times when it was thought to be a deterrent to the practice of masturbation. But it was not until World War II that it came into widespread use, supposedly to overcome soldiers' occasional infections associated with poor hygiene. Circumcision of male infants became popular in the United States, but was believed unnecessary in most of Europe.

In the late twentieth century the trend is being reversed in America as more and more medical articles—and some books—have argued that the operation in most cases is needless. In July 1986 Blue

Shield of Philadelphia announced that it will no longer pay for routine infant circumcision as a part of its childbirth insurance coverage, defining the operation as cosmetic and not essential to the health of the child. Recently Rosemary Romberg has gone so far as to argue that there may be numerous negative effects of routine infant circumcision and that the practice, in general, ought to be dropped. She cites remarkable cases in which a number of American Jews—or at least those who were born into the Jewish faith—have elected to do so.

Some male homosexuals have a decided preference for an uncircumcised ("uncut" or "unsliced") or circumcised partner, as the case may be. There are even groups of men who have retained their foreskins (and others who admire them); these individuals with generous or pronounced "curtains" are in demand. In a few rare cases the overhang of the foreskin suffices partially to sheath the partner's penis during sex. A few uncut men neglect personal hygiene to the point of allowing smegma ("cock cheese") to accumulate beneath the prepuce in a manner that tends to repel the partner, but this is easily remedied.

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CLASS

Although class is one of the most commonly used political and sociological terms today, it is not easy to define. A degree of consensus obtains that a class system is hierarchical, allocating power according to rank order. A class structure in which all classes were equal would be a

contradiction in terms. Class membership may be a function of income (the traditional measure), occupation, education, residence, patterns of consumption, and even to a certain extent of ethnicity. The mix varies from one observer to another, so that class remains an "essentially contested concept"—that is, an idea whose very nature precludes final agreement, but which serves as a focal point for the disputes of various interest groups.

General Features. Apart from the debates of scholars, there is no doubt that contemporary American society (like that of other Western industrialized countries) has adopted a practical or folk classification of the concept that shows some stability. This lay model of class usually articulates in three main strata: upper, middle, and lower. Middle may be divided into upper- and lower-middle, and some recognize an "under-class" below the others. Taste preferences are generally a good index of popular judgments, so that grand opera, tennis, and sushi restaurants fall on one side of an invisible boundary, with country music, bowling, and fast food on the other. Of course there are "taste-crossing" individuals and occasions, but the ensemble of such choices makes up a mosaic of ever-present reminders and reinforcers of the folk distinctions, which often come to the fore when persons anchored in different strata seek to work together, as in a political campaign.

Class and Homosexuality. Because class status is so intimately associated with family identity and membership, homosexual behavior has often discounted and crossed class lines; in many cases homosexuals in search of partners—especially casual ones—need have little concern with what the family (or society) would think of the liaison, while heterosexuals must often choose their prospective spouse within narrowly prescribed limits.

For some individuals, homosexual arrangements may offer a path to mobility between class strata, or more

commonly for a positional improvement within a single class. Yet like most heterosexual marriages, most gay/lesbian unions are endogamous, in that like tends to bond with like: the partners come from the same class (and relatively similar strata therein). Still gay dyads of members stemming from contrasting class backgrounds do exist, though very little study has been made on how taste preferences are negotiated in such households. How is money made and spent? What compromises are needed so that entertainment and vacations can be enjoyed together? How are the couple's friends chosen? Which of the two partners is more likely to compromise to "keep the peace"? Complications may ensue among lesbian couples because of the cross-cutting of the traditional butch-fem role contrast with class perceptions. The butch woman is supposed to be "working class," but in the actual situation it may be the fem who is.

Cross-Class Relationships. Short-term relationships are more likely to involve connections between persons of different strata and classes. Upper-class socialist gay men, such as Edward Carpenter and Daniel Guérin, rationalized their fondness for lower-class men by claiming that the encounters helped to promote harmony among classes. Such expectations point to a utopian-socialist rather than Marxist theoretical background, where the perception of class struggle is central. Certainly many politically unsophisticated upper- and middle-class homosexuals prefer lower-class partners whom they perceive as "more macho." It has been proposed that this difference—together with that of race, which often meshes with class in this arena—represents a surrogate for the missing male-female dichotomy.

Viewed in historical perspective, such seemingly unlikely conjunctions may prolong an old linkage, at least in matters of sexual enjoyment, between the "rake," the aristocrat of easy morals, and the accommodating proletarian. These transient

liaisons could present a dangerous side, as suggested by the expression current in the circle of Oscar Wilde: "feasting with panthers." When the arrangements worked, however, both ends of the social spectrum found themselves in alliance against the straight-laced morals of the emerging middle class, for whom respectability was an ideal to be honored at all costs.

When there are no children to raise there is more discretionary income, so that adopting a homosexual lifestyle provides a margin for class enhancement. The chances are particularly favored if the novice links up with a mentor more experienced or wealthy than he or she is. An established gay man or lesbian may put resources which parents would use for raising the status of their children into helping a lover-protégé. The mentor may also provide private lessons in manners and business acumen. Conversely, two men or two women living together across class lines may provoke from outsiders subtle or not-so-subtle ostracism that hinders career advancement. And the negative reaction of one or both sets of parents may cause anguish. Curiously, some parents seem to tolerate same-sex alliances by their offspring more easily than those that cross class or racial lines.

Internalizing the folk belief that homosexuals are more "artistic," some gay men cultivate musical, theatrical, and culinary tastes that are above their "station"—and above their income. Acquisition of these refined preferences, together with "corrected" speech patterns, hinders easy communication with former peers, though there are many factors that work for geographical and psychological distance between homosexuals, on the one hand, and their families and original peer groups, on the other. Given their relative freedom, some individuals may be inclined to experiment with "class bending," sometimes with paradoxical results. Observations of the American metropolitan scene in the 1970s revealed that patrons of leather bars tended to be lawyers, physicians, and other

professionals "dressing down" after a day at work, while the denizens of "fluff" establishments were likely to be clerks and stockboys flaunting elegant gear that they could not wear on the job. There is class, and there is class fantasy.

Prostitution. A study of young men beginning a career of hustling showed that lower-class recruits entered it immediately on discovering the financial rewards, sometimes suffering identity conflicts as a result. Middle-class boys, less in need of money, often began their involvement in prostitution casually and marginally, taking their time about making a full commitment. As for the clients or "Johns," there is a major contrast between the working-class man who pays a street transvestite for quick oral sex in his car, the middle-class man who can only afford to rent a body occasionally for a few hours, and the wealthy connoisseur who "leases" his sex object, installing him in luxury as a semi-permanent resident.

Sexual Behavior. An interesting question is whether class differences affect what is done in bed. There seem to be considerable differences in the conceptualizations of homosexuality; the older model (strict dichotomy between inserter, who is considered "normal," and insertee, who is the only one labeled "gay/feminine") is more firmly entrenched, if not dominant, among the working class, while the newer model of reciprocity among two gay men prevails in the middle and upper classes. One consequence of the older model is that there is less of a psychological barrier for lower-class males who consider themselves "straight," "normal," and "masculine" to participating in homosexual acts as long as they remain in the inserter role; for them it is not a homosexual act on their part. This is one reason why homosexuals from other classes who are content with the insertee role have frequently sought out macho partners from the working class; they are more likely to be willing than randomly-selected males from the middle class. Other factors which

encourage "trade" behavior by working-class males are a more accepting attitude toward any activity done for income (such as prostitution), a greater familiarity with jailhouse sexual mores, and a lesser interest in sophisticated categorical schemes ("sex is sex; if it feels good, who cares what you call it").

In the 1940s Alfred C. Kinsey and his associates found significant distinctions of this kind among men based on educational level, which he found the best objective test for class status. His data indicated the highest incidence of homosexual activity among males who had attended high school but not college; at the same time he found the highest levels of **homophobia** in the same group. This may be explained by the difference in conceptual models referred to above, under which males could experience what Kinsey called a "homosexual outlet" without thinking of themselves as homosexual, and while looking down on their sexual partners. But since a substantial proportion of the lower-class male interviewees were prisoners, the data cannot be considered wholly reliable.

The Kinsey Institute data for females, which are more reliable (though not per se applicable to men as well), show that the percentage with homosexual experience to orgasm rises with educational levels; at age 30 the females without college had a cumulative experience level of 9 or 10 percent, while those who had attended college had 17 percent and females with some graduate school education had 24 percent. However, when data are limited to the period between adolescence and age 20, the girls with the lowest education show the most homosexual activity and the future college students the least.

Beginning with the sexual revolution of the 1960s (together with rising incomes) substantial changes occurred in sexual behavior in many sectors of the population, and class allegiances would have been unlikely to have deterred these

shifts in the way that, say, religious conviction did. Premarital sex became more accepted among heterosexuals, while some homosexuals seemed willing to experiment in a broader range of sexual practices, even including "way out" activities such as fisting.

It has been suggested that there are some variations in preferred sexual practice among classes, with lower-class men being more likely to prefer anal over oral sex, and middle-class men the opposite, but there are few hard data to support or contradict this hypothesis, which is based on anecdotal evidence.

Some homosexuals tend to eroticize a class other than their own. In England and France, for example, many educated upper-class men have sought their partners exclusively among the **working-class** men, whose perceived overt masculinity is much prized. Conversely, some men of working-class background find great satisfaction in being accepted in jet-set circles. In white men attracted to blacks or the converse, the element of crossing class lines may be central.

Class boundaries in modern industrial societies are more fluid than in times past, and this fluidity in turn has impacted on sexual behavior, though the consequences are not always easy to assess. Further shifts may be expected.

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CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (CA. 150–CA. 215)

Greek church father. Born in Athens, probably of pagan and peasant ancestry, he is not to be confused with Clement, bishop of Rome, author of the **New Testament** epistle. After his conversion, Clement of **Alexandria** traveled widely to study under Christians, finally under the learned Pantanus in Alexandria. Of the early Fathers, he had the most thorough knowledge of Greek literature. He quoted Homer, Hesiod, the dramatists,