

been more representative of a wider cross-section of gay video as then practiced than the New Museum selection, which was intended to point new directions.

See also **Television**.

*William Olander*

## VIOLENCE

The relationship between violence and homosexuality, both fundamental to social relations, but with quite different historical and cultural forms, is a very complex one. Most of the research has suffered from a lack of general perspective. The most relevant topics are male initiation, persecution and social repression of homosexuality, rape, queer-bashing, homosexual murder, internalization of negative social norms by homosexuals, the esthetization of cruelty by homosexual artists, and homosexual sadomasochism.

*Initiation and Male Rape.* The initiation of youths into adult styles of masculinity has a long history in which homosexual behavior, sometimes **rape**, plays a prominent role. The anthropologist Gilbert Herdt has documented rituals of manhood in Melanesia where the oral or anal transmission of semen, and so homosexual behavior, is central. These rituals are at the same time cruel: the entry into the world of adult males is a liminal, traumatic experience for the initiates. The enforced submission seems to enhance the youngsters' loyalty to adult males and their affective participation in the latters' secrets. These initiations are an extreme form of such rituals, which exist in other cultures as well. Chinese **pirates** of the eighteenth century used anal rape to initiate captives into their new career as outlaws. The hazing and ragging in boarding schools, in student fraternities, and in sports are modern survivals of these initiations where violence and homosexual penetration occasionally occur.

Male rape in jails, especially in America, seems to be fundamental for the

**prison** hierarchy, which wardens often tolerate because of its functionality in maintaining order in prison. Donald Tucker published in *Male Rape* an insightful essay on his experiences with involuntary homosexual behavior in jails. The sociologists Wayne Wooden and Jay Parker have written a book on prison sexuality that has much to say on the same topic.

In the myths of **Egypt** and the history of Assyria, and in the armies of ancient **Rome** rape of males served as an official form of punishment. The Turks raped Greeks and Armenians whom they captured. During the 1980s the Panamanian authorities used male rape as a form of punishment for political dissent.

Rape of males "in the community" and by gangs is far more common than usually supposed, but according to researchers both the assailant and the victim are usually heterosexual, and the motivation seems to be the acting out of a superior power position on the part of the aggressor and the humiliation of the victim.

*Murder.* A special case of violence with regard to homosexuality is that of homosexual lust **murderers**. It seems that especially in places and times where emancipation and discrimination against homosexuality are much discussed and youth move freely, cases of homosexual serial murder happen as expressions of the strained relations of homosexuals with heterosexuals: Germany in the twenties (Haarmann), the United States in the seventies (Corll, Gacy).

*Anti-gay Violence.* The most common type of violence homosexual men and lesbian women encounter is the violence connected with legal and social **discrimination** against homosexuality. At a very general level, many of them experience psychological and physical violence when **coming out**—from their families, peers, instructors, and colleagues. As the degree of hostility toward homosexuality differs strongly according to historic periods and to national, ethnic, and social

backgrounds, the level of violence also varies. The same applies to harassment by queer-bashers, which also seems to have become a rather typical reaction against homosexuals and homosexual emancipation in western countries, as in the assault on Magnus Hirschfeld in Vienna in 1921. In a "tolerant" country such as the Netherlands, reportedly half the homosexuals have experienced violence from queer-bashers. Because of the legally sanctioned oppression of homosexuals, which prevailed in many countries until recent times, the level of unofficial harassment in former periods is not well documented, but seems to have been less widespread than nowadays. A special case of violence against homosexuals is the murder of older gay men by boys and younger men in situations of prostitution (J. J. Winckelmann, Gustav Gründgens, Marc Blitzstein, Pier Paolo Pasolini).

Violence against homosexuals from law-enforcement and police authorities is still common in many countries such as Great Britain and the United States, as well as in Eastern Europe and the Third World. In Western Europe, from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century and in England until the nineteenth, capital punishment for sodomy was carried out with some frequency, though mostly in a haphazard way. Several hundred executions have been documented by historians, and several thousand were probably executed, though one can merely speculate on the number of cases of "lynch justice" in which the victim was secretly killed to avoid scandalizing the community. The Inquisition more systematically attempted to terrorize potential offenders by parading the few at autos-da-fé to burn them. Thousands more fled prosecution as exiles and émigrés. Official violence was most vehement under Nazism in Germany (1933-1945), when many thousands of homosexuals died in concentration camps; this aspect of the holocaust has been all too often obscured. The legal prosecution of homosexual behavior, in itself the out-

come of Christian condemnation of non-procreative sexuality since the Middle Ages, served to rationalize the social oppression of homosexuality which nationalism with its measures toward conformity reinvigorated.

*Internalization of Violence.* External repression has been internalized by its many victims. In the early modern period, most sodomites did not dare oppose the condemnation of sodomy, and some, often after torture or out of fear, even cooperated with the authorities to prosecute their partners. With the individualization and psychologization of sexual preferences, which can be attested since the eighteenth century, confusion about sexual and gender roles and fear of being contaminated by "wrong" sexual predilections led men to extreme resolutions such as suicide. Heinrich von Kleist, the German writer, is the first known case of suicide because of individualized homosexuality. Spectacular examples were the Dutch law reformer J. E. Reuvers and the English political leader Lord Castlereagh, both of whom committed suicide, in 1816 and 1822 respectively, after having been blackmailed for alleged homosexual relations with unlikely partners. This phenomenon probably peaked in Nazi Germany. Recent sociological literature attests that homosexual men and lesbian women are much more prone to attempt or commit suicide than their heterosexual counterparts. For a long time this way of death provided a common ending for gay and lesbian novels.

*Literary Treatment.* Many homosexual writers transformed violence with regard to homosexual behavior into an esthetics of cruelty. The Marquis de Sade was the first to develop an esthetics and philosophy of violence and sodomy. Many others followed suit: in the orbit of the decadent movement (Rimbaud and Verlaine, Lautréamont, Wilde, Couperus); later Proust and authors with a surrealist background (Crevel, Jahn, Arnold Bronnen); in the postwar era it became a

general trend: **Genet**, Tournier, Guyotat, Reve, Bowles, Purdy, Burroughs, **Warhol**, **Pasolini**, Fassbinder, **Fichte**. Could their esthetics be understood as a transposition of the feeling of "living dangerously" which was widely shared by homosexuals in those times? In the post-Stonewall generation comparable esthetics of cruelty and male love make a new breakthrough, as in the work of such writers as Tony Duvert, Hervé Guibert, Dennis Cooper, and Josef Winkler.

One of the refined forms of violence which have become more visible since the sixties, gay **sadomasochism**, shows that many desire a semblance of cruelty in a situation of mutual consent. This has given birth to a new and innovative variation within gay and lesbian culture.

*Conclusions.* The widespread connection between male homosexuality and various forms of violence requires some explanation; unfortunately because little has been provided or seriously studied, one is left with speculative suggestions. The comparative dearth of violence in lesbian relationships suggests that there may be a factor of maleness—the absence of the inhibiting influence of females—in the frequency with which violence is associated with male homosexuality. Reported instances of violence among lesbian couples, however, reveal that this may not be the whole story.

The perceived casting off of general social inhibitions against the expression of homosexuality since the **Stonewall Rebellion** (1969) may also carry with it a partial discarding of general social inhibitions against violence. Once the taboo is broken in one area, it may be hard to reimpose it in another. Both homosexuality and violent aggression are secretive, condemned, and suppressed. According to neuroscientists, both are intimately connected with physiological processes, arising in the same areas of the brain (the ancient "reptilian brain"). What cannot be dealt with openly and verbally becomes

relegated to the furtive and the physical, whether in favor or opposition.

Because so many cultures associate homosexuality with a deficiency of masculinity, equating aggressive sexuality and aggressive violence with masculinity, there may be an interplay at work which calls forth the latter to confront the perceived failings of the former. In such phenomena as queer-bashing, male rape, and police violence, aggressive violence seems to be used as a kind of shield to ward off the contaminating, tabooed homosexuality, as if its mere presence constituted such a threat to one's male self-image that the other reservoir of maleness, violence, must be summoned to stanch the wound, as in **Nazism** and **Fascism**.

Research on the connection between homosexuality and violence is much needed. If violence (symbolic, attenuated, or expressed without restraints) is indeed fundamental in social relations, the gay and lesbian communities should not ignore it, but find constructive social, perhaps ritual, forms of expressing it. The theatre of cruelty, as Antonin Artaud imagined it, sadomasochism, contact sports, and erotic play-violence offer possibilities for experimentation. Perhaps violence, too, will have to come out of the closet.

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