

# Conference Reports

ORGANIZING SEXUALITY: GAY AND LESBIAN MOVEMENTS SINCE THE 1960s

*Amsterdam, 22–24 June 1994*

Taking place as part of the 1994 Europride celebrations, 'Organizing Sexuality: Gay and Lesbian Movements Since the 1960s' focused on the history and future of gay and lesbian movements in Europe and the United States. Exactly twenty-five years after the Stonewall riots in New York City sparked off what has since become known as the 'gay revolution', the conference sought to provide a platform for a critical and retrospective examination of developments that have been shaping the 'new' gay and lesbian liberation movements that came into force during the 1970s and 1980s.

'Organizing Sexuality' brought together more than a hundred scholars and social scientists from a variety of national and cultural backgrounds. Delegates from both Eastern, Middle and Western Europe, Canada, the United States and Australia, all made their way to the proverbial 'Gay Capital of Europe'. A total of forty papers were presented during two full days of workshops. Keynote speakers included Steven Seidman (USA), Angela Mason (UK), Jeffrey Weeks (UK) and Karin Lützen (Denmark). Three nights of public debates sought to place several central themes in a global perspective, e.g. the differences and similarities in developments of the gay and lesbian movements in Western Europe and the United States; the (dis)similarities between gay male and lesbian(-feminist) movements, and the current and future states of affairs in gay and lesbian movements. Plenary debates were chaired and introduced by the members of the Departments of Lesbian and Gay Studies of the Universities of Nijmegen, Utrecht and Amsterdam.

Daytime sessions consisted of panel discussions running simultaneously in a number of parallel workshops. Participants were requested to attend most if not all the sessions of one particular workshop, so as to ensure high-quality discussion. Panels focused on the different political environments of gay and lesbian movements, on their function and significance within a multicultural framework, and on the distinctions between gay male and lesbian sexuality.

Two additional debates were scheduled for late afternoons: one hosting representatives of 'Euroshame', a group of gays and lesbians who had strongly – and vociferously – objected to the name and format of the Europride festivities, in particular to its 'elitist' and 'commercial' character. Unfortunately, none of these 'radicals' showed up, so that a last-minute change allowed (male) gay activists from Italy and Romania to discuss the (rather gruesome) situation of gays, and sexual minorities generally in their countries. The other afternoon session gave particular edge to these inserted presentations: a video conference – the latest in

tele-technoculture – provided a group of Europeans with the opportunity to compare perspectives on Gay Pride cross-Atlantically. George Chauncey, Esther Newton and Karla Jay were among the US colleagues who had gathered at CLAGS headquarters (postgraduate centre) for gay and lesbian studies at the City University of New York), to discuss this major conference theme further.

The set-up of the daytime sessions, and the request to attend all sessions of one particular 'stream' proved quite successful: since most of those attending duly refrained from 'hopping' around, conversations could pick up on and extend issues raised earlier, so that discussions were brought to a higher level than the uneven quality of the papers would otherwise have seemed to vouch for. My implied disappointment with some of the papers' quality probably derives from the fact that few succeeded in moving beyond the descriptive or, in some cases, 'programmatically' stage, in order to address the significance of gay and lesbian sexualities in more theoretical terms. A less 'practical' approach might have cleared up several issues that repeatedly led to heated discussions, without, however, being brought near to anything like even a provisional solution. Among such 'unresolvables' were questions like the (un)viability of a politics of (sexual) identity; the interrelations between sexuality and other forms of sociocultural differentiation; and the difficulties of community building and political organization on a global scale without failing to take into account the contextual determinations of all aspects of identity. While I do not wish to claim theoretical pride of place for the humanities here, I do think that a more even-handed multidisciplinary representation of papers would have enhanced the quality of the – overwhelmingly sociologically and politicologically oriented – debates.

One of the outstanding features of this conference was the substantial presence of delegates from a variety of European countries (Italy, UK, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, France, Malta, Switzerland, Norway, Austria, Finland, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Portugal, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands), as well as a mixed group of cross-continental visitors (Canada, USA, Australia, Mexico). The sometimes poignantly diverging accounts of gay/lesbian life, culture and scholarship, voiced from such a wide range of national backgrounds, strikingly brought to the fore how profoundly 'situated' (gay and lesbian) sexualities and scholarship effectively are. Whether in terms of political organization, critical theory and practice, or indeed in the context of the practices of everyday life – private as well as public – there clearly can be no question of 'organizing sexuality' on a global, even overall European plane.

If 'Organizing Sexuality' has made one thing quite obvious, it would be that further research on the meanings and significance of different forms of different sexualities in an increasingly fragmented, 'postmodern' multicultural world is urgently needed. At present, the three Dutch departments of Gay and Lesbian Studies have begun discussing and negotiating the terms for a follow-up conference to be held in 1996, in collaboration with the COC/NVIH – which, in that year, will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its checkered existence. Under the provisional title 'The Identities of Sexuality/The Sexuality of Identities', this envisioned academic gathering on 'queer' politics and theory, intends to offer a truly multidisciplinary, international perspective on gay and lesbian life/lives and culture(s) in the era of 'postmodernity', and a century that is drawing to a close.

#### NOTE

The conference was the result of a collaborative effort by the three Departments of Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Netherlands (Universities of Amsterdam,

Nijmegen and Utrecht), the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the Free University Amsterdam, the Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality (COC/NVIH), and the Europride 1994 Committee.

renée c. hoogland  
*Universities of Nijmegen and Amsterdam*

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON TECHNOLOGY, WORK AND ECOLOGY  
(SECOND EUROPEAN FEMINIST RESEARCH CONFERENCE 1994)

*Graz, Austria, 5–9 July 1994*

'See you in Austria in 1994', we announced in Aalborg, Denmark – a little proud but also uncertain as the First European Feminist Research Conference 'Women in a Changing Europe' drew to a close. We did not really know if it would be possible to keep this promise. We had a diskette with the addresses of all the participants, everyone's best wishes and everybody looking forward to the next conference – and then the Second European Feminist Research Conference took place in July in Graz at the Technical University. Over 300 participants from thirty-two countries all over Europe, but also from North America, India and Australia came to either present their papers, their research, their work in progress or just to get new ideas on the various themes.

Women's involvement in technology, work and ecology has only partially followed the dominant routes and models provided by male researchers, engineers and political decision-makers. It approaches the terrain from 'another angle' – studying women's relations to work and to the design and use of technology within the theoretical frameworks developed by feminist researchers and focusing on neglected or hidden aspects.

This research conference was organized to bring some of this diversity to light. One of the underlying motivations was to highlight the fact that technology, work and environmental issues need the active participation of women and that the forms of involvement can be varied, multi- and interdisciplinary. All these questions were reflected in the various contributions to this conference. They covered research on women at work, be it as managers, as health workers, scientists, artists or system designers. They embraced feminist research on gender identity and the body and women's critical perspectives on science and technology. They also focused on how women use their specific qualifications and disciplinary knowledge to develop technical as well as literary and visual artefacts. All these issues were presented in various ways: in sessions, workshops, tutorial panels, exhibition stands, computer presentations and video sessions. The organizers had the opportunity to show the very interesting exhibition: 'Women Designing. Redefining design in Britain between the Wars', which was organized by Jill Seddon and Suzette Worden. They also edited a very detailed catalogue.

Science and technology were not the only subjects of this conference. Attention was also drawn to the political situation in Europe, which cannot be held as external or peripheral to our discourse as women and as citizens of different countries, many of them in transition, for example from dictatorship to democracy. Hardworking, professional women are massively exposed to campaigns for a return to 'traditional family values'. Tatiana Leontieva, senior lecturer