A Crash Course To "The Construction of Homosexuality"

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All information comes from Jeffrey Weeks theoretical and historical article *The Construction of Homosexuality* which argues that the homosexual identity has been created and fostered throughout history and that as such, is a social construction rather than born trait.

- Heteronormativity: Our societal view that heterosexuality is the normal sexual identity
- Homosexual behavior has always existed, just not in the same terms that we think of it today
- Attitudes toward homosexuality vary across time and culture
  - Today, we’ll be talking about the West’s attitude towards it
In the West...

- Recently, the “Born This Way” argument has taken root.
- This is to say that those who are queer are “born” as sexually deviant people who cannot help, but to have something wrong with them.
- This is an issue because it assumes that people can’t be normal and queer at the same time.
How did this idea come about?

- Recently, researchers have started to recognize that had it not been for our society’s attempt to define and construct deviance, then we’d never even need the words “homosexual” or “heterosexual” to begin with.
  - It all happened as an attempt to define what was normal and what was not, thereby constructing both heteronormativity and homosexuality.
Well...How Did They Do That?
There Are Three Main Things They Used to Regulate Sexuality

- Christian Morality
- The Legal System
- Medicalization
Morality

- During the Christian era, the West was one of the only cultures that completely tabooed all forms of homosexuality and sodomy.
- It was called a “sin against nature” that was not to be named by Christians.
- Condemned all sodomy no matter what it was.
  - Could be between a man and woman, a man and man, a man and beast, or anything else.
  - Peaked hostility toward anyone who was even thought to have engaged in it.
The Legal System

- There was no separation between church and state at the time, so a lot of the laws tie in closely with the Christian moral ideas of the time.
- “Before 1885, the only law that directly affected homosexual behavior was in fact that referring to sodomy” (44).
  - Wasn’t directed against those who participated in homosexual behavior specifically, but rather, against an entire series of sexual acts; anything that was non-procreative.
The Legal System cont.

- Sodomy Law
  - It wasn’t regularly enforced
  - When it was enforced, it was enforced harshly in order to make an example of what a “deviant” was in order to encourage others to stay away from that kind of behavior
  - Enforcement steadily increased in the 19th century, particularly during times of social or political turmoil
    - The punishment of homosexuality was a way for people to deal with their larger social anxieties
The increase in enforcement could also be because people were starting to develop a clear notion of what homosexuality actually was rather than clumping it together with everything else under sodomy.

Because if the men specifically were participating in homosexual behavior, then they wouldn’t be fulfilling their duty to reproduce (another moral issue made legal) and, thus, would threaten “both the family and national decay” (53).

This new conceptualization of homosexuality “provided a new subject of social observation and speculation and…opened up the possibility of new modes of self-articulation” (48).
In the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century and early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, there was a transition from thinking about homosexuality less as a sin and more a sickness or innate trait that could not be helped.

Where the “Born This Way” argument began.

Many earlier homosexuals had already identified as “sick”, but having the medical model “profoundly shaped the individualization of homosexuality, and contribute[d] to the construction of the notion of a distinct homosexual person” (51).
“Changes in attitudes towards homosexuality were often unintended consequences of other major changes” (52).

As people continued to try to privatize sex into the domain of marriage, they also found new ways to define and control all other variant forms of it.

Now, homosexuality was a cause for social concern only whenever sexuality became a matter of public importance.

This only made new spaces for homosexuals to find others that, in turn, contributed to a growing awareness of homosexuality which “created the elements of resistance and self-definition that led to the growth of distinctive homosexual identities” (54).
So in conclusion...

Through moral, legal, and medical outlets the homosexual identity has been socially constructed in an effort to clearly demarcate normal versus “deviant” sexual behavior. The reinforcement of this has lead to the heteronormativity that we know and do not question today.
A Quick Note on Lesbians

- Though lesbian behavior was just as condemned as other forms of buggery, its threat was less recognized because there was a belief that it was more important to deal with the sexuality of men rather than women.
  - This was because lesbian behavior was considered less of a threat to the family and national structure than homosexual behavior among men.
  - As such they were able to fly under the radar for much of the last couple of centuries.
Works Cited