The Complicated Terrain of
Latin American Homosexuality

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This essay is both a historiographical review of male homosexuality in Latin America and a historical synthesis of the intellectual and cultural traditions of attitudes, mores, and laws regarding homosexuality.¹ The topic of male homosexuality is a powerful lens through which historians can address and problematize the dilemmas of reconstructing the social past.² Taken originally as a corrective against overly diplomatic and political history, the new social history of the 1970s still bears crucially on the subject of homosexuality because the available scholarship still struggles with the basic issues of reconstruction.

The history of homosexuality bears centrally on the nature of sexual relations, reproduction, marriage, and family, all central components of social val-

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ues. Unfortunately, the scarcity of extant sources and the nascent quality of its historiography render the study of homosexuality in Latin America difficult. Scholars of this subject wrestle quite consciously over the dilemma of “realistic reconstruction” of action as opposed to the study of collective representations. The lack of narratives by gay men, the issues of “filtration” of sources through those who wrote about the “objects” of crime and sin, and the overall scarcity of material contribute to this dilemma. As a result, the use of epistemology as a framework retains strong allure for many scholars working on Latin American homosexuality. Precisely because there is scant documentation of the actual social behavior and cultural worlds of homosexuals in Latin America, scholars have understandably been drawn to theoretical models of gender and sexuality.

Two concerns are woven together into a strand of social, cultural, and intellectual history; in other words, homosexuality conjures the dilemma between behavior and proscription. On the one hand, there exist intellectual and cultural traditions of attitudes, mores, and laws regarding homosexuality. Taken in their broadest terms, Michel Vovelle defines this territory as both ideology and mentality. In this model, ideology represents the more formalized discussions that bear on a particular subject. Consequently, law, theology, military sanction, governmental policy, and propaganda constitute ideology. Mentalities are less definable, more fluid, and, as the famous annaliste historian Marc Bloch understood them, derive from collective representations. For our purposes here, mentality concerning homosexuality includes popular attitudes, social customs, response to Church teachings, reaction to law, as well as the beliefs, customs, and concerns of homosexual and bisexual men.

This essay is divided into several sections because the scholarship is fragmented along geographical and epochal boundaries: section 1 focuses on the Spanish colonial period, drawing on Mexican and Iberian theological and legal traditions to provide a fuller understanding of colonial attitudes toward homosexuality; section 2 offers a critical overview of the historiography of colonial Brazil; the third section is a speculative discussion of the period from roughly 1700 to 1870, a period marked by a near-complete absence of historiographic attention for the subject under review. Studies of the so-called period of modernization that followed showcase a growing body of scholarship on homo-

sexuality. For the most part, such work tends to show how attitudes toward homosexuality gained a positivist and psychiatric distinction. The essay concludes with a discussion of the works of anthropologists and sociologists, from 1940 to 2000.

The long-cherished assumptions of patriarchy and male-dominated sexuality have guided the historiography of homosexuality in Latin America. Two theoretical models inform this classification. First, the honor-shame paradigm of Latin American and Mediterranean society suggests that sexuality is a key component of the system of honor and shame. A classic formulation of this paradigm is Julian Pitt-Rivers’s discussion of the sexual honor in the Mediterranean. Pitt-Rivers argues that penetration is the overriding metaphor for such honor; thus before marriage, a woman needed to be a virgin in order to protect her honor and man should not have been sexually penetrated.4 Numerous Latin Americanists who specialize in gender studies have shown that this system is indeed endemic to domestic and marital culture,5 but the problem for the subject of homosexuality is that sexual metaphors and the honor-shame model do not always map neatly onto male-male sexual interaction. The result is that numerous scholars have taken the male-female honor-shame paradigm as a strict corollary for the active-“male”—penetrator and passive-“female”—penetrated axis of male-male sexual encounters.

The second model on which numerous scholars rely for theoretical guidance is the infamous hijos de la chingada mythology proffered by Octavio Paz. Nearly half a century has passed since he penned the much-debated essays that comprise El laberinto de la soledad, suggesting mentalities and universal characteristics of mexicanismo. His propositions about the essential nature of Mexican sexual identity have cast a tremendous shadow over the historiography and ethnography of Mexican and Latin American sexuality.6 In “Los hijos de la

Malinche," he argues that the immutable characteristic both of Mexican sexuality and genealogical identity is bastardhood. According to Paz, Malinche forsook "her people" to Cortés and the Spaniards, leaving the Mexican mestizos to fend for themselves. Thus Malinche became the "violated mother" (la chingada) who abandoned her offspring. According to this logic, to offer oneself passively (via intercourse) is akin to defeat and degradation; the sexually active partner is the victor. Extending the metaphor of sexual penetration for conquest and domination, Paz contends that homosexuality in Mexico operates according to a system in which the passive partners are denounced and the active partners are "tolerated" insofar as they satisfy their male nature through the penetration of a passive body. Anthropologists have described such a "system" of homosexual behavior as the "Latino Mediterranean" or "gender-stratification." The female is associated with passivity, disenfranchisement, reception, and helplessness; the male is associated with agency, power, penetration, and dominance. Furthermore, because this system operates in cultures that place a premium on masculine honor, to take the passive role and "become female" is to lose one's male honor.

These models assume that Latin American homosexuality is based on a rigid male-female, active-passive, dominant-submissive dichotomy. Thus many scholars assume that the ideology of masculine cultural and sexual control over women means that the functional definitions of homosexuality offer corollaries. The insertive, active partner is rendered "male," and the receptive, penetrated partner is considered to be subservient and plays the role of the "female." This essay will show that there is deeply imbedded in the sexual ideology of Latin America the theory that male means dominance and control and female means submission. By the same token, it will also demonstrate that


8. Paz, Laberinto de la soledad.


10. See Pitt-Rivers, The Fate of Shechem.
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this does not mean, as many scholars claim, that the “male” homosexual partner was somehow freed from legal condemnation and social stigmatization.\(^\text{11}\)

The “Pecado Nefando” and Early Modern Dispositions

In 1543 the first bishop of Mexico, the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga, penned and printed his *Doctrina breve muy provechosa*, intended as a primer on Catholic orthodoxy for literate Indians, priests, and lay colonists.\(^\text{12}\) In this doctrine, he wrote that “nothing fouls or destroys the heart of man as much as the desires and fantasy of carnality.”\(^\text{13}\) So pernicious was lust that Zumárraga considered it to be one of the chief enemies of salvation and one of the most dangerous of the seven deadly sins. At that time, *lujuria* (lust) was a sin that violated the Sixth Commandment. Lujuria literally meant luxury, but was also used to refer to excessive desire, effeminacy, or lust. Zumárraga echoed the influential Cardinal Cajetan (known best in his role as the Papal *nuncio* sent to convince Luther to recant), who offered some of the most representative and critical discussions of lust, sexual morality, and sodomy for his audience of parish priests and confessors.\(^\text{14}\) To early modern Catholic theologians, the Sixth Commandment prohibited several “species” of lujuria in increasing severity: fornication, adultery, lust between married persons, *stupro* (deflowering a virgin or rape), incest, sacrilege (sex with a priest), and the *pecado contra natura*.\(^\text{15}\)

Taking lujuria to be manifold in its forms, Zumárraga’s *Doctrina* placed the

\(^{11}\) Male homosexuality has enjoyed a variety of monikers— *pecado contra natura*, *sodomia*, *némiga*, *crimen contra natura*, *pecado nefando*, *pecado ocioso*, or simply “el pecado.” In Latin America such terms were used with regularity until at least 1800. In the nineteenth century, the terms *pederasty* and *homosexuality* came into use. By the late twentieth century, the term *gay* was adopted, although this term is used less commonly than a vast array of slang terms, most of which refer to the sexual function, rather than the identity of the man involved. But in order to understand the persistence of certain notions about homosexuality, we will have to go back to the sixteenth century. Many enduring ideologies concerning homosexuality in Latin America date to the early modern period, when natural law, theological designations, and social perceptions about the “sin that cannot be named” were forged.

\(^{12}\) Juan de Zumárraga, *Doctrina breve muy provechosa* (Mexico City: Cromberger, 1543).

\(^{13}\) Ibid., folio h v.


\(^{15}\) See Francisco Tomás y Valiente, *El derecho penal en la monarquía absoluta* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1969), which discusses the “second Spanish scholasticism.”
pecado contra natura at the apex of this sin, identifying three types of sodomy: male-female, male-male, and female-female.\(^\text{16}\)

Recto vaso, recta positione—“in the proper vessel and in the proper position”—was the Latin theological phrase that expressed the prohibition: legitimate intercourse had to involve the man on top of the woman, penetrating the vagina. If Zumárraga condemned pecado contra natura in no uncertain terms, what did he mean by it? Sodomy (sodomia) was by this time synonymous with the sin against nature, both of which were understood as male homosexuality. His explanation of this act was quite graphic: “Sodomy is a very abominable placing of the virile member in the dirtiest and ugliest part of the body of the person who receives the man; that part is delegated for the expulsion of feces.”\(^\text{17}\) It would appear from this definition that the act of a man having anal intercourse with his wife would be as damnable as that of two men engaging in intercourse, but Zumárraga concluded that the male-female form of sodomy was less sinful than sodomy between two males.\(^\text{18}\)

Zumárraga's discussion of sodomy had deep roots in medieval scholasticism. John Boswell addressed this subject and, indeed, he was one of the first historians of homosexuality for our modern period, tracing the changes in official proscriptions of homosexuality in the medieval period.\(^\text{19}\) In like fashion, Mark Jordan focuses on some of the more familiar medieval texts concerning homosexuality as well as contributes discussion of lesser-known works in a recent book, The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology.\(^\text{20}\) As Boswell and Jordan demonstrate, definitions of sodomy as male homosexuality began to solidify in the middle medieval period, and it was understood to be the worst type of lust. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas, the great synthesizer, defined sodomy as a violation of natural, canon, civil, and scriptural laws.\(^\text{21}\)

16. Zumárraga, Doctrina, folio f i.
17. Ibid., folio f ii.
18. For example, Zumárraga also ordered translated a work by the former rector of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, Tripartito del christianissimo y consolatorio doctor Juan Gerson de doctrina christiana: A qualquiera muy proyuecbosa (Mexico City: I. Cromberger, 1544), in which Gerson recommended execution by burning for sodomites as violators of the Sixth Commandment.
21. See Jordan, Invention of Sodomy; Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. Also consult St. Thomas Aquinas, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII.
Aquinas’s definition was new because he included natural law arguments to buttress theological and canonical discussions of sodomy. Such underpinnings are not superfluous for our understanding of Latin American homosexuality. Indeed, all official teachings on homosexuality for Latin America, at least until the eighteenth century, relied on medieval schoolmen. Aristotelian metaphysics lay at the heart of the natural law condemnation of sodomy, concluding that semen had one purpose—the fulfillment of natural coitus, with the end being conception. Therefore, acts that could never produce conception automatically violated nature.22

The great legal historian Francisco Tomás y Valiente traces the early modern Iberian conceptualization of sodomy to the “second Spanish scholasticism,” with Aquinas ruling supreme.23 Man was understood as a collaborator with God in the creation of a new human being, in the sense that the man created a new being from nothing, just as God created Adam from mud. The understanding of sodomy, or homosexuality, was based on the violation of this collaboration, since it was not possible to procreate with two men sexually interacting.24 As late as 1665, Juan de Enríquez wrote a treatise on this subject entitled Cuestiones prácticas de casos morales in which the discussion of the hierarchy of lujuria was virtually unchanged from that of Zumárraga’s and other early modern conceptions.25

Theological and legal documents from the colonial period reveal how sodomy was perceived. A recent study by Federico Garza Carvajal provides


22. See Jordan, Invention of Sodomy; and Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, Homosexuality.


25. Cited by Tomás y Valiente, “El crimen y pecado contra natura,” 35–37. Also, see Fray Juan de Enríquez, Questiones prácticas de casos morales (Madrid: n. p., 1665).
the only outline of the development of Spanish American law on sodomy in English.\textsuperscript{26} Despite these discussions, there is some confusion as to whether sodomy fell under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition or the civil courts.\textsuperscript{27} Scholars of the Inquisition generally pay little attention to this subject unless they specifically center their research on it. Nonetheless, the consensus is that the Mexican and Spanish Inquisitions prosecuted people for sodomy.\textsuperscript{28} For example, Mexico’s Inquisition prosecuted a sodomite as early as 1542, presumably by Zumárraga, but this case is only preserved with its cover sheet and we know nothing about it except that it involved some sailors.\textsuperscript{29} The question of civil law is uncertain, and a recent study of urban crime in Mexico City by Gabriel Haslip-Vieira sheds no light on sodomy vis-à-vis civil law.\textsuperscript{30} For Peru, we have some peripheral scholarship on extirpation that suggests that Spanish priests were horrified by sodomy committed by Indians, but such discussion never goes very far.\textsuperscript{31}

The problem with jurisdiction is that in many instances local municipal \textit{fueros} demanded juridical autonomy for a variety of issues, including sodomy. In early modern Castile, \textit{derecho real} generally dealt with sodomy.\textsuperscript{32} Even the

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\item \textsuperscript{26} Federico Garza Carvajal, \textit{Vir: Conceptions of Manliness in Andalucía and México, 1561–1699} (Amsterdam: Amsterdamse Historische Reeks, 2000). Unfortunately, this excellent study appeared too late for it to be considered in any length here.
\item \textsuperscript{27} See Richard Greenleaf, \textit{The Mexican Inquisition in the Sixteenth Century} (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1969).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), ramo de la Inquisición, vol. 212, exp. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Gabriel Haslip-Vieira, \textit{Crime and Punishment in Late Colonial Mexico City, 1692–1810} (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1999).
\item \textsuperscript{32} Tomás y Valiente, “El crimen y pecado contra natura,” and \textit{Derecho penal}.
\end{itemize}
Inquisition was not clear on its role in these crimes and was usually more concerned with heretical beliefs, such as the belief that fornication or sodomy was not a sin, than the act itself.33

In theory, Iberian law codes provided guidance for colonial alcaldes, corregidores, and oidores. But it is likely that many of these magistrates, excepting perhaps the audiencia judges, had not read the codes, and further, they might not have possessed copies of the codes.34 Secondly, the existence of a law code did not mean that it was effective. We know that multiple forms of sexual deviance proliferated in the colonies, so we must be cautious in using codes. Some argue that the mere presence of a prohibition indicates the behavior. This seems intuitive, but we must also remember that the fear and horror of sodomy often may have been enough to proscribe it in law codes, regardless of whether or not it was common.

Definitions of sodomy in Spanish law began in earnest in the thirteenth century. Title 21 of the seventh Partida condemned sodomy as a crime, relying on the biblical reference to Sodom and Gomorrah as a template for this understanding.35 Thus sodomy was legally understood to cause plagues, famines, and disasters. To remove the offense to the community and stave off or end the various ills that the sin of sodomy caused, the appropriate punishment for this crime was death.36 In addition to this Partida, the Fuero real promulgated by Alfonso X condemned sodomy in no uncertain terms. In fact, where the seventh Partida was silent on the method of execution of sodomites, the Fuero real detailed it rather gruesomely, recommending castration and execution.37 Both Boswell and Tomás y Valiente demonstrate that the concept of sodomy as a crime was rooted in an understanding of it as a sin in biblical and

34. António Manuel Hespanha has examined the phenomenon of local law and the relative lack of erudition for local magistrates in early modern Iberia. See António Manuel Hespanha, *La gracia del derecho* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1993).
35. See Tomás y Valiente, “El crimen y pecado contra natura.” One can also consult the *Siete Partidas*. A 1555 edition was produced with authoritative gloss by Gregorio López in Salamanca. See *Las Siete Partidas del Sabio Rey Don Alonso el Nono, nuevamente glossadas por el Licenciado Gregorio López del Consejo Real de Indias de Su Magestad*, 8 vols. (Salamanca: Andrea de Portonaris, 1555).
scholastic literature concerning the violation of religious and social order. Yet Garza argues that it was not until royal legislation of the late fifteenth century that sodomy began to be persecuted. He links this to a general persecution of heresy and crimes against the Crown that included the increasingly hostile and violent actions against the Jews.

The explanation of sodomy as crime against nature continued in jurisprudence. Jurist Gregorio López furnished the authoritative gloss to the 1555 Salamanca edition of the *Siete Partidas*. Predictably, López considered homosexual sodomy to be the most heinous variety of this crime, and thus ordered the execution of male sodomites. Another influential legal glossator to comment on sodomy was Antonio Gómez, who in penning the gloss on the Laws of Toro, defined sodomy as when “someone realizes carnal access that is not oriented to natural coitus and procreation.” Similarly, Gómez understood homosexual sodomy as the worst variety of the sin against nature, recommending death and the confiscation of property for male sodomites. In a twist that many scholars overlook, Gómez reasoned that the penalty was as applicable to both the “agent” (active, insertive partner) and the “patient” (passive, receptive partner).

The distinction between “agent” and “patient” has plagued modern-day scholars on the subject of social stigma and identity of homosexuality. Richard Trexler gives the fullest expression to an ideology of sexual power in his aptly titled work *Sex and Conquest*. In this controversial study, he asserts that constructions of homosexuality in Latin America cannot be separated from conquest and violence. According to Trexler, the dual traditions of Iberia and Mesoamerica fused to create a homosexual order that places the active partner

38. The *Nueva recopilación de Castilla* affirmed the law of the *Setena Partida* regarding sodomy and kept the punishment of execution in place. See *Nueva recopilación de Castilla*, libro 12, título 30, ley 1. Also, see Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*; Tomás y Valiente, *Derecho penal*.


40. Quoted in Tomás y Valiente, “El crimen y pecado contra natura,” 38. For the gloss, see the 1555 *Siete Partidas*, partida 7, título 21, ley 1.

41. Ibid.


43. Gómez, *Ad Leges Tauri*.

44. Ibid.
in a position of power and the passive person in one of degradation. He avers that in the Iberian tradition of sexual conquest and the Mesoamerican tradition of using *berdaches* (“men-women”) as sexual outlets because penetration was synonymous with domination. Therefore, this logic attests that the “agent” was an *hombre macho*, a real victor, and to him went the spoils of his conquest, that is, sexual dominance of a passive object. Trexler argues further that because sexual intercourse cannot be disassociated from conquest, the sex (male or female) of the object of penetration is immaterial. Ultimately, he applies a thin veneer of evidence over a vast time period and geographical area, attempting to generalize about the entire colonial Latin American world, from Brazil and Bolivia to New Mexico. Unfortunately, Trexler elides the lengthy Spanish tradition and medieval theology that made no legal distinction between active and passive partners. Additionally problematic is that Trexler seems more bent on establishing the “inherent” connection between intercourse and rape than on examining the evidence.

A host of anthropologists and some historians insist that because Iberian cultures place such a premium on machismo, taking the passive role in homosexual intercourse is much more socially damning than to take the “male” role. Yet in Spanish legal commentaries, when there was any distinction between the roles, it was only to say that both partners were punishable. Furthermore, if the passive partner was significantly younger than the active partner, he might be considered a victim of rape and therefore less guilty of sodomy. In fact, the *Siete Partidas* reasoned that a male under the age of 14 or who had been raped could not be guilty of sodomy as a matter of law.

We seem to know a lot about official law and theology on the question of sodomy for the colonial Spanish Americas; however, there is virtually no data to show how such laws were implemented. Garza demonstrates that persecution of sodomy increased in the sixteenth century and, like the persecution of other offenses, was often associated with foreignness. Tomás y Valiente suggests the same by illustrating that sailors were one of the most frequent targets of inquisitorial activity against sodomy. Thus the nexus between the invasion of “foreign vices” and fear of sodomy was conflated.

46. Ibid.
47. *Siete Partidas*, partida 7, título 21, ley 1.
49. Tomás y Valiente, “El crimen y pecado contra natura.”
The exigencies of archival preservation further complicate the problem of attempting to understand how law dealt with sodomy in this period. During the riot of 1692 in Mexico City, when hundreds of people reacted against grain shortages, the viceregal palace was burned to the ground. The archival source for the riot is located in Archivo General de las Indias (AGI), [Sevilla], Patronato, leg. 226. The most famous contemporaneous account of the riot is Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, “Alboroto y motín de México del 8 de junio de 1692,” in Relaciones históricas, ed. Manuel Romero de Terreros (Mexico, 1992). Good discussions of the riot can be found in Rosa Feijoo, “El tumulto de 1692,” Historia Mexicana 14 (1964–1965); and R. Douglas Cope, The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 125–60.

Along with the palace went the civil court archives and with them our possible key to understanding the nature, extent, and treatment of male homosexuality in Mexico before 1692. The civil authorities prosecuted sodomy in Mexico and presumably in other colonies such as Peru, but our knowledge is hamstrung by lack of documentation. For example, in 1658 a huge scandal broke out in Puebla and Mexico City in which over 120 alleged sodomites were arrested and interrogated. The only apparent record of this sensational event, in which 14 young men were roasted alive on 4 November 1658, are brief letters from the viceroy, the duke of Albuquerque, and Juan Manuel de Sotomayor, the alcalde del crimen (prosecutor).

Both Serge Gruzinski and Garza draw on this correspondence to reconstruct the social world of these men and to address issues of sodomy in midcolonial Spanish America. Their essays are noteworthy for several reasons. First, they show that men were using adolescent boys as sexual outlets. Second, they lend weight to the hypothesis that homosexuality was largely an urban phenomenon in the early modern period. Puebla and Mexico City were important cities in the 1660s. Unfortunately, this hypothesis runs into many counterfactual problems, since there is very little data on rural sodomy for this period.

One of the complications of Gruzinski’s and Garza’s essays is typical of scholarship for this period. Since we do not have the original trial transcripts, it is difficult to know exactly what transpired in this case. Nevertheless, these two essays show that civil authorities reviled sodomy for the same reasons as the theologians: homosexuality was a crime against nature, God, and the Crown. Furthermore, homosexuality was identified as effeminizing, regardless


52. AGI, México, vol. 38, no. 57.

of the role one took in sexual intercourse. Interestingly, though, the case shows that active partners identified their passive partners as their “female” lovers. It seems that from the viceroy’s account that active partners gave as nicknames the names of notorious whores and beauties to their passive partners. Furthermore, it appears that this case involved a fairly sophisticated and cohesive sodomitical subculture of a “secret” group with coded slang and behaviors.

As for the social history of homosexuality in the colonial period, there is scant scholarly investigation, with a scattering of essays like those by Gruzinski and Garza. In an article concerning the Aztec construction of homosexuality, Geoffrey Kimball uncovers some documents that indicate that the passive role in homosexual intercourse was reserved for special opprobrium for the abnegation of masculinity. Kimball’s sample, however, is very small and does not necessarily provide a complete portrait of Aztec sexual values. Still, he mentions briefly the development concerning sexual passivity as the equivalent of losing male honor. Kimball’s essay is an important beginning for some discussion of the earliest forms of homosexuality in Spanish America.54

In an essay on colonial Yucatecan Maya, Pete Sigal evinces considerable sophistication in his treatment of the “ politicization of pederasty.” He examines Mayan histories in this time period to show how homosexual intercourse took on political, social, and ritual significance. Thus Sigal is interested in understanding how homosexually charged dialogue in ritual persisted despite Spanish prohibitions to the contrary.55 Homosexual desire among the colonial Yucatecan Maya was politicized to the extent that older men employed intercourse with younger men as a way of demonstrating their status and prestige. This was seen as more or less acceptable, as long as it was understood that it held ritual and age-specific meaning. In due course, older men penetrated younger men, assuming a teacher’s role and imparting a patron-client relationship between an older active-partner man and a younger passive-partner adolescent boy. This type of pederasty also rested on the assumption that it was unacceptable for an older man to be penetrated.56 Sigal uses indigenous-language sources to examine the question of pederasty in Mexico, opening an entirely new area of study that has been ignored by previous historians.57

56. Ibid.
57. For details, see Peter Sigal, “Maya Passions: Colonial Yucatecan Ideas of Sexuality, Gender and the Body” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 1995).
Two works from Spain offer potential cues for future research. First, Rafael Carrasco produced the only monograph dedicated entirely to the question of sodomy and the Inquisition for Spain or Spanish America. He shows that, despite jurisdictional disputes, the Holy Office of Valencia was remarkably vigorous in prosecuting sodomy, recording the cases of hundreds of men and boys prosecuted for this offense. Carrasco provides some important conclusions that may bear on Spanish America, although archival research can only confirm them. Like Gruzinski, Carrasco suggests that sodomy was largely an urban phenomenon. He reasons so because cities had better opportunities for clandestine meetings and offered greater anonymity in sexual partnering. Secondly, Carrasco argues for what anthropologist Stephen Murray has called the “age-stratified” system of homosexuality. This system is what we recognize from ancient Greece, Renaissance Florence, or in the Mayan Yucatán. In such a system, an older man takes the active role with a younger man who always plays the passive role. In due course, the young men “initiated” into such a system or subculture would take the active/male role with younger men once they attained adulthood.

Pedro Herrera Puga’s study Sociedad y delincuencia en el Siglo de Oro offers a broad survey of crime, deviance, and punitive measures in Seville in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He dedicates an entire chapter to the pecado contra natura, and, like Carrasco, strives to make sense of the social world of homosexuality, demonstrating that sodomy was not only private but also quite public. For example, certain streets and sections of town were notorious for homosexual encounters and liaisons that were consummated in public or private rooms. According to Herrera Puga, such a homosexual culture was more than a shadowy undercurrent; sodomy was an obvious, if deviant and socially unacceptable, component of Seville’s urban landscape in the seventeenth century.

The question of sources rises again as Herrera Puga’s analysis is based solely on the account of one religious chronicler. While this should not rule out its importance ipso facto, it raises some questions: Did the chronicler not see sodomy everywhere when it was, in fact, quite limited? Were his depictions

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58. Carrasco, Inquisición y represión sexual.
of local spots to encounter other sodomites accurate? Does his *relación* depict the true visage of the culture of homosexuality in this period? Despite such queries, his important work suggests, like Carrasco’s and Gruzinski’s, that sodomy was rendered more accessible and acceptable by urban environments in which sodomites could seek out a specific, if marginalized, niche in the city’s streets.

Ultimately, the relative lack of understanding of the social world of homosexuality and the practice of homosexuality for the period from roughly 1500 to 1700 is severely limited and circumscribed by the scant data gleaned here from a small body of scholarship. Based on elite and official sources, it would be reasonable to conclude that sodomy was considered to be the most heinous offense to God, Crown, and society. Likewise, there was a distinction between the active and passive partners. This seems to have been largely a functional distinction; in fact, the active partner was perceived to be more guilty from the point of view of natural law and Aristotelian metaphysics. Consequently, there is nothing to suggest Trexler’s sexual conquest model, nor is there any evidence so far to prove that passive partners were especially denigrated. Indeed, Trexler seems to conveniently ignore the theological understanding that *lujuria* was always considered effeminizing. This, however, implies a potential misfire between theology and social practice, but even from the point of view of practice Trexler marshals no convincing evidence on this issue of active-passive partner dynamics.

Finally, abundant data on other subjects suggests that colonists and Indians were less than cooperative in obeying official dicta concerning sexual mores. Works by Solange Alberro, Richard Boyer, Ruth Behar, Asunción Lavrin, and numerous others demonstrate that illicit, unacceptable, and stigmatized sexual behavior was quite common. Cohabitation, sexual magic, adultery, bigamy, and fornication were vigorously attacked in what appear to have been ineffectual measures. For example, the Church made a tactical

62. Ibid.


retreat and ended prosecuting fornication itself and instead prosecuted the belief that fornication was not a sin. Numerous accounts by religious men complained of the lax sexual mores of Indians, castas, and Spanish colonists. Sodomy was a common complaint, and it does not seem impossible to imagine that homosexuality occurred with regularity, if only under circumscribed parameters.

Outlining some of the basic facets of the early modern Hispanic conceptions of sodomy may seem unnecessary, but many of these earliest conceptions persist well into the modern period. Aristotelian ideas of gender, theological conceptions of sodomy as community sin, and legal distinctions that conceived of sodomy as a violation of social order all made for powerful traditions that went virtually unchanged into the twentieth century in Latin America. For these reasons the colonial past formed a solid foundation on which future mores and ideologies would draw.

**Colonial Brazil**

While the scholarship and available sources uncovered so far on the Spanish Americas are disparate and possess no coherent critical mass, the work on Brazil is more focused and finely tuned. This may be the result of better documentation. The files of the Mexican Inquisition are incomplete and scarce on the subject of sodomy, but those of Pernambuco and Lisbon are extensive. In 1968 historian José da Costa Pôrto wrote *Nos tempos do visitador*, a study of Pernambuco during the first visit of the Holy Office of the Portuguese Inquisition at the end of the sixteenth century. Pôrto employed testimonies from the Inquisition along with travel reports, correspondence, and written accounts by administrators and priests to compile a social history of this early Portuguese colony. On the use of Inquisition and travel documentation, he suggested that “between the lines, in the fringes, and in the margins, it is possible to glimpse worlds that they reveal in the simplicity of registries of the most thrilling significance.”

Some 20 years after Pôrto's study, more studies on the Inquisition in Brazil have come from Luiz Mott, a prolific and influential historian who has

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65. Schwartz, “Pecar en las colonias.”
written on a variety of themes in colonial Brazil. In Mott’s work questions about sodomy, religion and morality can never be separated from questions of power. In this sense, Mott is a true descendent of Michel Foucault, a theorist who figures both explicitly and implicitly in Mott’s work. For Mott, as for Foucault, “discourses of power” are intricately intertwined with both political mechanisms and cultural attitudes.68 Fittingly, Mott’s studies have taken him on a wide journey of Inquisitional documentation, ethnography, religious edicts, travelers’ reports, and contemporary academic and sexual politics. At his best in providing descriptive chronological history, Mott’s essay, “Desventuras de um sodomita português no Brasil seiscentista,” is a tour-de-force narrative. Based on a large cache of Inquisition documents from Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and Lisbon, Mott reconstructs the sordid tale of Luiz Delgado, a libertine tobacco merchant, who was ultimately arrested in Brazil and sent to Lisbon to face the Holy Office in Portugal. On several occasions, authorities had questioned Delgado, who was often given relatively light sentences for sodomy. In one case, he was sentenced to exile for having committed the “nefarious vice” with a young boy.69

“Desventuras de um sodomita português” is an intriguing social history, providing details regarding the sale of tobacco, styles of shoes, and the conditions of a transatlantic voyage. Additionally, Mott delves into an analysis of the social markers of hierarchy in colonial Brazil. For example, he unveils the nexus of race, ethnicity, and class that informed the ways that people were to interact. Thus a white man was not supposed to interact socially with a slave or a servant. To this end, Mott’s protagonist Delgado violated social mores by walking down the street arm in arm with a servant. Mott also shows that it was common for people to believe that the presence of a sodomite in a community might bring disaster, plague, or famine, much in the same way Spanish law understood sodomy. Thus during the transatlantic voyage, many passengers feared that the presence of a sodomite, Delgado, would augur ill for them.70

The details provided by the Inquisition were often lurid, and Mott recapitulates the graphic and formulaic discourse of the Inquisition. Conviction hinged on a purely physical definition of sodomy. For example, intercourse

70. Ibid.
without ejaculation was considered "incomplete sodomy" and was less severely punished. In this sense, contrary to Mott's claims, the Inquisition made little inference about the inherent sexual orientation of the person accused of the "crime against nature," only to say that the man had violated Church teaching and the forces of nature. Consequently, the Inquisition did not distinguish between homosexuals or heterosexuals in this matter. All who committed this act were guilty before the Holy Office.

Using the same documents that Pôrto used, Mott provides distinctly different stories in “Relações raciais entre homossexuais no Brasil colonial.” Mott compiles a registry of the sodomy cases brought before the Holy Office in Pernambuco, tabulating the race, sex-role preference (whether active or passive), and the racial combinations of sodomitical unions. The inclusion of sodomy in the historical analysis shows how things have changed since 1968: homosexuality has gained certain respectability in scholarly circles, even if the subject is not completely acceptable.

While Mott’s work is important and perspicacious, it is not beyond criticism for its approach to Inquisition documents as well as methodology for a history of homosexuality in general. For example, in “Relações raciais,” and “O sexo cativo,” Mott spans a wide time frame in striving to prove the universal character of African homosexuality. Accordingly, he uses the twentieth-century anthropological scholarship along with travelers’ reports from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to explain behaviors for sixteenth-century Brazil. For example, Mott employs the work of Evans-Pritchard in a rather weak effort to "prove" that homosexuality must have been common for sixteenth-century slaves. Nor are Mott’s conclusions about the interethnic nature of sodomy much more compelling. He uses a total of 46 cases from Pernambuco to talk about sodomy and concludes that white men were able to exploit their status in forcing themselves on mulato, preto, and pardo men. Mott thus resolves that white men would sexually penetrate the blacks as a show of dominance. For example, he endeavors to prove this by showing that four mulatos were accused of being the active partner and that eight were...

72. Ibid. See also Luiz Mott, “Relações raciais entre homossexuais no Brasil colonial,” in Escravidão, homossexualidade e demonologia (São Paulo: Ícone, 1988).
73. Mott, “Relações raciais,” and “Desventuras de um sodomita.”
74. Mott, “Relações raciais.” Also see Luiz Mott, “O sexo cativo: Alternativas eróticas dos Africanos e seus descendentes no Brasil Escravista,” in O sexo proibido.
accused of being the passive partner. A mere difference of four cases for a 30-year period hardly proves that white men used anal penetration of non-whites to restate “the hierarchic parameters of the white as dominator,” as Mott suggests. Indeed, many white men had been accused of being the passive partner in sodomy to an active-partner black.

A frequent refrain of Mott is that men accused of sodomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were “gay,” employing this term interchangeably with that of sodomite and “fanchono.” Mott cites John Boswell for his authority on the use of the term gay as appropriate for this period and culture, arguing that Boswell had shown that the word gay was used in thirteenth-century Catalán. Such logic concludes that sixteenth-century Brazilians accused of sodomy can be considered gay. Even if one accepts the linguistic argument, Mott’s insistence on the concept of gay men in sixteenth-century Brazil remains problematic. Did these men really conceive of themselves as gay? Boswell points out that the term gay properly refers to men who have an exclusive attraction for men. But many, if not most, men denounced and investigated by the Portuguese Inquisition were married or engaged to women. Is it not possible that these men could be more accurately described as bisexual? Indeed, many men may have conceived themselves as “other,” but whether this meant “gay” is a stretch.

For Mott, scholarship is politics and he invokes a debate well worth having: how people formerly reduced to “object” status have now become academics in their own right. In other words, “blacks, women, homosexuals, Indians . . . are the preferred spokespersons of their people.” Therefore, ethnic property belongs to the “oppressed,” and only to their particular form of oppression: blacks must own black history; gays must own gay history. But nowhere is Mott’s agenda more apparent and perhaps nowhere as suspect as when he holds up men who had sex with boys as young as eleven years old as champions of the “good fight” against homophobia. Ultimately, Mott strives to present himself as an authentic bearer of the history of homosexuality while simultaneously revealing his own political rage that impedes the effectiveness of his excellent research.

75. Mott, “Relações raciais.”
76. Ibid., 31.
77. See Mello, *Confissões de Pernambuco*.
78. Mott, “Relações raciais,” 35.
79. Ibid.
80. See Mello, *Confissões de Pernambuco*; these cases show that between 1594 and 1595 most of the accused sodomites had relationships with women.
81. Ibid., 38.
In *Trópico dos pecados*, Ronaldo Vainfas provides a more even-handed approach to the question of the Inquisition in Brazil. While he and Mott deal with many of the same stories, Vainfas is clearly less interested in using his historical examination for political purposes. Instead, Vainfas draws on a lengthy and sophisticated tradition of historiography that attempts to understand the relationship between law, ecclesiastical dogma, civil ordinances, and popular mentality and behavior. Accordingly, he renders one of the best recent explorations of the tensions and the gaps between Church policy and everyday behavior. Thus he begins his study with the overlay of the Catholic Reformation and the ways that the reformed Catholic Church would assert its power in everyday lives.

Vainfas shows that the expectations of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Church for sexual mores were rarely met by the actions or even the beliefs of Brazilians. Despite the efforts of Church inquisitors and Jesuit “intimidations,” violations of official teachings of sexual morality were ubiquitous. Vainfas demonstrates that the denunciation of sodomy was not always about the denunciation of a sodomite but of the act. Furthermore, Vainfas shows that this wave of persecution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was accompanied with a wave of Inquisitional investigation of Judaizing. Similarly, David Higgs shows that the number of sodomy cases brought before the Portuguese Inquisition pales in comparison with cases for Judaizing among New Christians in Lisbon.

Vainfas provides two important contributions for the history of homosexuality and for mentality history concerning sexuality in the Luso-Brazilian colonial world. First, like Gruzinski and Carrasco, Vainfas outlines sodomitical subculture as a largely urban phenomenon. He argues that the tremendous penalties for sodomy coupled with the effectiveness of rural Inquisitions predisposed most people to avoid sodomy for fear of the bonfire. Moreover, urban settings like Lisbon, Seville, Venice, and Paris, as well as Mexico City, Lima, and Puebla, lent themselves to greater anonymity. Thus bathhouses and bars were places where sodomites could congregate. Using secret language and coded behaviors and dress, urban sodomites might more easily avoid denunciation, suggesting that the lack of sophisticated urban milieus and the

83. Ibid., 38.
84. Higgs, “Lisbon.”
85. Vainfas, *Trópico dos pecados*.
dominance of rural, plantation society prevented the growth of an organized sodomite subculture.86

The second important contribution of Vainfas’s study is the suggestion that bisexuality was much more common than many scholars, such as Mott and Boswell, have been willing to admit. Indeed, Vainfas seems to point out the obvious when he reminds the reader that many of the men accused of sodomy were married or engaged to women. This does not prove they were not exclusively interested in men while using marriage as a shield, but it does complicate the proposition of such men being “gay.” This is fraught with complexity, for it hinges on the man’s personal conception of himself, and as such may ultimately be inaccessible to the historian. Functionally, however, Vainfas is correct to call such men bisexual in the sense that they did not dedicate their entire lives to sodomy as an erotic expression.

The works by Mott, Vainfas, and Higgs suggest new avenues for both the history of mentality and homosexuality in other contexts, with their assiduous eye for detail and the difficulties in examining a topic usually left out of both the historical and historiographic record. Their ability to recount not only the aspects of inquisitional investigation but also their attention to the ways that such investigation reveal details germane to social history have given flower to Pôrto’s suggestion that “between the lines” one might reconstruct the mental and social world of people otherwise accused of crimes.

Likewise, Vainfas’s discussions of sodomy demonstrate the difficulties encompassed in simple inversion of elite sources. Some people rejected Church teachings while simultaneously accepting other aspects of them. For most people, the world was fraught with more inconsistency than the supposed elite-popular dichotomy suggests. As Vainfas argues, if Portuguese settlers engaged in fornication and concubinage on a wide scale, they did not do so without understanding that they violated Church teachings and morality.87 Ultimately, the relationship between sexual behavior and Church injunctions was paradoxical and did not always amount to simple rejection of or adherence to the rules, but revealed a fluid terrain where people struggled to understand their world as well as the teachings of the Church.

87. Vainfas, Trópico dos pecados.
Interlude: The Void from ca. 1700 to ca. 1870

There exists virtually no scholarship on homosexuality for this time period for Latin America. This invites speculation as well as evinces a potentially fruitful avenue of future research for historians. The traditional interpretation has stressed that Inquisitional prosecution of various crimes tended to be less robust in this period. The implications for homosexuality are that sodomy was generally no longer an executable offense. Indeed, in Spain very few men were executed for sodomy after 1700. In Mexico the prosecution of sexual offenses dropped after 1700. The irony is that once the Inquisitions became, seemingly, less concerned with sodomy, much evidence drops off the chart. In examining the civil court registries for Mexico City, one locates less than a dozen cases for sodomy in this period. The other obvious problem is that sodomy was always considered the sin that cannot be named. With this heritage it is not surprising that historians, if indeed they have looked, have turned up no documentation. Yet why was there so much documentation for the earlier colonial period, both in Brazil and the Spanish Americas? Thus far there are no clear answers for these queries, and this section attempts to speculate on how historians might deal with this period.

Whatever the causes, there can be no doubt that this period is the most opaque and uncertain period for the history of homosexuality in Latin America. There may, however, be some ways to right this imbalance by future scholars using a variety of sources. For example, an enterprising historian might look to the content of pícaro novels, chapbooks, and other lesser-utilized sources of print to examine questions of epistemology for this period. Likewise, one could look to the proliferation of confessional manuals to discern whether sodomy was of great concern to confessors. Records at the parish level may also turn up intriguing clues. After the Council of Trent in 1563, an institutionalized duty of the Tridentine bishop was the visitation, in which he and his coterie went to each parish in a bishopric. One could easily look to

88. Carrasco, Inquisición y represión sexual; García Cárcel, Herejía y sociedad; Tomás y Valiente, Derecho penal; and Alberro, Inquisición y sociedad.
89. For example, the Inquisition files in Mexico’s Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) and the civil court files of the Archivo Judicial del Estado de Puebla (AJP) contain hundreds of cases against amancebamiento and bigamía crimes which became increasingly rarely prosecuted after 1650. Yet there are no cases for sodomy in the AJP for this period. For the AGN there are slim records for sodomy—less than 35 in fact for almost 300 years of the Inquisition’s activities.
90. See AGN, grupo criminal.
91. For discussions of Trent, see Hubert Jedin, A History of the Council of Trent, trans.
these records as sources of social history, if indeed they were to contain discussions of homosexuality. Other potentially rich sources of discussion could be 
relaciones of viceroys, legal treatises, and civil case law. None of these sources have yet been exploited in any attempt to study the history of homosexuality in Latin America for this period.

Seemingly, the only exception to this scholarly absence is Lee Penyak's 1993 dissertation entitled "Criminal Sexuality in Central Mexico, 1750–1850." It is unfortunate that this work remains unpublished and unknown as it outlines some basic archival sources and conclusions about male homosexuality for this time period. Penyak utilized the Mexican Inquisition records as well as some civil court cases to offer a provisory portrait of deviant sexual practices. One chapter specifically looks at the issue of sodomy, offering some caveats on the social history of homosexuality that seem to contradict the conclusions of Vainfas, Gruzinski, Higgs, and others, or at least diverge in the late colonial Mexican context: (1) Penyak argues that there is no evidence that homosexual men "established their own subculture"; (2) according to Penyak, "societal condemnation of homosexuality remained strong in Mexico" until 1850; (3) he argues that priests were punished less severely than laymen, though the evidence for this conclusion does not appear especially strong, given the fact that Iberian and Mexican tribunals lessened penalties for sodomy across the board in this period; and (4) Penyak argues that homosexual men led furtive lives with little contact with a broader homosexual community. Penyak also adds important investigatory clues for future research. He shows that one may, in fact, use archival materials to discuss this issue and scholars may find that civil and ecclesiastical court archives of other parts of Latin America may offer similar caches of documentation. Penyak utilizes confessional manuals and treatises to discuss some of the religious attitudes toward male homosexuality up to 1850.

There are some other sketchy cases demonstrating that both the Inquisi-
tion and the civil courts prosecuted sodomy in Mexico. The earliest civil criminal investigation that remains in the national archive was in 1785. After this, five more cases of sodomy remain in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), from 1803 to 1810. Such paucity of sources is not unique to the national archive. The Archivo Judicial del Estado de Puebla turns up no cases of sodomy prosecuted by civil courts. Of the 30 Inquisition cases that remain today in Mexico’s AGN, for the period between 1542 and 1818, 18 have only the original cover sheet; although 12 cases include more than the cover sheet, the evidence is fragmentary. The Inquisition was held to strict standards of canon law in drawing up charges and bringing indictments. Since it was considered such a heinous offense and was often punished by burning at the stake, sodomy was difficult to prove. Certainly, many cases were never taken to the stage of full prosecution for lack of evidence.

The seeming paucity of documentation has manifold explanations. There has simply not been a critical mass of historians who have located and catalogued the sources. For example, thorough searches through provincial archives and church archives may bear fruit. The problem is that this is a massive undertaking and thus far virtually no one has attempted it. Compounding this dilemma is the rather obvious fact that homosexuality has always been heavily stigmatized. Indeed, searching for sodomy cases in archives in Latin America is a tricky enterprise, since few archivists would be happy to know one was investigating the sin that cannot be named. Furthermore, cases and documents may themselves have been burned or destroyed in symbolic destruction of the sin.

Despite these limitations and uncertainties, we can discern certain values about the official discussion of sodomy for this period, drawing on some of the prosecutions of sodomy in Mexico. My own research in the Mexican Inquisition archives reveals intriguing suggestions. From the few cases that remain, as late as 1800 conceptions of homosexuality hundreds of years old remained firmly in place. It was still described as the sin against nature and was still construed as a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Likewise, the notion of sodomy as a community sin still held value. Thus the understanding of

95. AGN, grupo criminal, vol. 219, exp. 5.
96. AGN, grupo criminal.
97. The catalogues and case files of the AJP turn up dozens of cases for bigamy, concubinage, and cohabitation, but not once case of sodomy between 1600–1800. See n. 90 above.
98. See AGN, Inq., various volumes, and the Índice al ramo de la Inquisición, AGN.
sodomy as infecting and endangering a land was also common to the late eighteenth century. Exile was a punishment for a sodomy conviction intended not only to punish the sinner but also protect the community by banishing the evil that could potentially harm it. Vovelle seems correct to suggest that social values die hard, as mentalities are long-enduring traditions deeply embedded in social consciousness.

The transition to the modern period was made in the shadows of historical knowledge. We do not fully understand how, when, or why the conceptions of homosexuality shifted primarily from a sin and a behavior to an identity. In most of the Western world such a shift occurred in this period, and it is possible that such a shift did not occur in Latin America until later. Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century homosexuality garnered a reputation as a behavior associated with an identity and social consciousness of being “different.” The difficulty for us at this stage of historiographic endeavor is that we know virtually nothing of the period from 1700–1870. This essay suggests that old traditional ideology and theology persisted and that homosexuality was still viewed as the champion of sins. The problem is that we know so little of the actual social practice of homosexuality for this period that we cannot understand just how effective such an ideology was.

The Age of Modernization (ca. 1870–1950)

The modern period has witnessed an increase in scholarly output. The available scholarship points to some important transformations both in the collective representation of homosexuality and to the social history of homosexuals as distinct individuals. First and foremost, the source material base shifted fundamentally in this period. Whereas for the colonial period one relies on theology, law, and criminal investigations of sodomy, the modern period possesses a different range of sources. This shift is not unique to Latin America. Indeed, as Rudi Bleys has shown, the very “geography of perversion” experienced a profound shift in this period. Accordingly, the modern period saw the proliferation of medical and sociological explanations for homosexuality, even in Latin America.

Another important development in this period was that homosexuality was decriminalized in numerous Latin American countries. The result was that while homosexual sex was officially protected, causing public scandal was still illegal. Indeed, in Argentina, as Donna Guy has pointed out, laws may have allowed prostitution, but other laws criminalized scandal and indecency on a broad scale. Therein lies the irony of the legal status of homosexuality vis-à-vis homosexuality as social practice.100

A shift from religious to social and medical theories may have signaled a change in the broader mentality and social historical worlds of homosexual and bisexual men. As Randolph Trumbach, George Chauncey, and others have pointed out, it was during this period that the concept of the homosexual as a person emerged in the West.101 Such a shift seems to have occurred in Latin America, at least partially. Studies for this period demonstrate an emerging vision of homosexuality as an inherent characteristic or a physiological defect.

Despite these changes some conceptions of sodomy did remain. For example, the idea of homosexuality as a community sin or vice retained great sway well into the 1930s. Thus criminologists and social thinkers rendered homosexuality both a personal sin and a social vice and contagion. The notion of homosexuality as a contagion with roots in the body politic was a widespread fear among early sociologists concerned with crime and urban dysfunction. For example, Mexican criminologist Carlos Roumagnac remarked on this theory frequently in his study of prisoners in the Mexican prison Belem in the early 1900s.102 Aristotelian understanding of the natural order of the sexes


100. On the decriminalization of homosexual sex, see Pablo Piccato, “Sexuality in the Prison,” manuscript in author’s possession, 1995. On the subtle distinction between sex and prostitution vis-à-vis public scandal, see Donna J. Guy, Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina ( Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990). For the new law code in Mexico that decriminalized homosexuality in the 1870s, see Antonio Martínez de Castro, Código penal para el Distrito Federal y Territorio de la Baja-California sobre delitos del fuero común y para toda la República Mexicana sobre delitos contra la Federación (Veracruz: La Ilustración, 1891).


remained firmly in place as well, and it was during this period that the additional stigma attached to the passive partner began. Such stigma was based on the Aristotelian metaphysics we saw earlier; that is, the man was the active agent and the female passive and therefore extraneous to the act of procreation. For example, Horacio Barreda, son of the famous positivist Gabino Barreda, penned a lengthy essay titled “Estudio sobre ‘el feminismo.’” Therein Barreda defended traditional notions of male-dominated political life against what he saw as the deleterious effects of feminism. To justify the view of men as active and women passive, Barreda looked to the same discussion of the order of the sexes in Aristotle’s *Politics* that the schoolmen of the late medieval period used to explain why sodomy violated order.103 One sees then just how little had changed from Aquinas to Barreda in over six hundred years.

Jorge Salessi produced an impressive study of the medicalization of homosexuality in Argentina for this period. Ostensibly a close reading of works by theorists like José Ingeneiros, Salessi draws apart the veil of physiology to show us the fascination with which physicians treated homosexuality. Indeed, homosexuality was viewed as a disease. More importantly, it was a social threat with the potential to unravel order. Like the threat against the Aristotelian order of Spanish scholasticism, the new conception of homosexuality was the perfect foil for positivist progress. Salessi’s work is emblematic of scholarship that touches on this period. Focusing intently on “official” discourse he traces the subtle and intricate ways that elite intellectuals construed the vice of homosexuality. Salessi’s work is one the finest studies on this score and reflects an intellectual history that focuses specifically on ideas in social context—something relatively new for the study of modern homosexuality in Latin America.104

Similar concerns about the “construction” of homosexuality inform the work of Daniel Bao. Considering early-twentieth-century Argentina, he focuses on the construction of attitudes toward homosexuality. He relies generally on popular and medical conceptions of sexuality that, at this time, emphasized a heavily stratified model of sex roles. Bao concentrates on showing how male (and female) homosexuals were seen not only as perverse but also as having violated the natural order of the sexes. Argentinean politics dic-


tated that such violations were not only biological but also had deeply social implications. In short, such gender “sins” might spell the upsetting of social order, where men became like women, and vice versa. Bao’s analysis places emphasis on the social reaction to and perceptions of homosexuality, echoing concerns about sex roles and the nature of intercourse determined by the male or female “function.” Likewise, Rob Buffington contributes some discussion of the “construction” of ideas of homosexuality in twentieth-century Mexico. Drawing on criminological theory, Buffington argues that only passive partners were stigmatized in a modernizing conception of “male” partners as machos and passive partners as degenerates. This argument, in Buffington’s analysis, is buttressed by Rougminac’s interviews of inmates in Belem, but like Trexler, Buffington seems to hold the active-passive dichotomy as the guiding principle, and concludes that “if Pax is correct, the inmates’ gendered construction of homosexuality was typical, even archetypical, of Mexican society in general.” While Buffington’s discussions of criminological history are excellent, his conclusions about the active-passive partner stigma seem to rely more on Paz’s theory than on the evidence available.105

James Green offers the best of the few monographs for this period in his recent study, Beyond Carnival.106 A comprehensive social and cultural history, Green employs many of the same strategies as Salessi and Bao. Thus Green examines the emergence of medical and positivist explanations for homosexuality as both disease and moral decay. Departing from most studies of this period, however, Green utilizes an array of archival documentation to reconstruct the social world of early-twentieth-century homosexual men in Rio, in much the same fashion that George Chauncey did in his groundbreaking work, Gay New York. Unfortunately, Green’s fine book appeared too late for extensive discussion in this essay. Nevertheless, it promises to become the standard by which future social histories dealing with homosexuality in modern Latin America are judged.

Other scholars have utilized similar discussions of emerging concerns about sex-role identity to examine the difficult subject of homosexuality for this period. In a consideration of the active-passive dichotomy for Brazil, Peter Beattie discusses court martial cases in the late nineteenth and early twentieth


centuries, focusing on the treatment of homosexuality by naval courts of Brazil. Beattie demonstrates the intricately woven network of race, sexuality, and machismo that informed the Brazilian military court martial cases for sodomy, which distinguished between active and passive roles of participants. In many instances, a sailor insisted that while he played the passive role he had resisted and tried to defend his honor. Those claiming the active role barely hid their activity but treated it as a temporary aberration, usually the result of too much booze. In either case, Beattie found that few sailors were discharged for sodomy.

Beattie portrays this nexus of active-passive roles and sailor homosexuality with impressive subtlety. He shows that sodomy was often tolerated in the Brazilian navy as a kind of surrogate heterosexuality in the absence of women. Beattie is perhaps the only scholar to provide some convincing historical evidence that the active homosexual partner was not stigmatized in Latino culture. Such tolerance rested, therefore, on the existence of a sex-role identified hierarchy in which the active partners assuage their conscience by referring to the passive males as females.

Beattie's discussion of Brazil does, however, beg the question of the relationship between Brazilian and Spanish American cultures. First, there is great significance for “situational homosexuality.” In other words, in all-male environments, such as prisons and ships, one often observes this type of homosexuality. Accordingly, men play one of two strict roles—male or female. In situational homosexuality the male is not generally considered to be gay or homosexual, but simply the man. The “female” partner, however, is a *puto* (bitch, punk, or queer). Interestingly, though, even in this situational sex the active partners in Latin America were none too apt to admit their activities. This contrasts with the modern North American evidence where the male partners seem to display minimal or no guilt for having engaged in such sexual activity. In the North American example male prisoners suggest that just because they “screwed a punk” in prison reflects nothing of their overall sexual identity, but rather demonstrates that they held the power to slake their sexual needs.


The second issue for situational homosexuality is rape. In many cases the male partners simply rape and sexually abuse those who are “turned into” the female partners. Often this is simply a reinforcement of prison or naval hierarchy based on physical prowess and rank. Indeed, we know that in Belén in Mexico City it was common for older inmates to rape younger ones. Pablo Piccato investigates this in an unpublished manuscript, providing another view of this infamous prison and its lurid sexual enclave. The point for Piccato, though, as it is for Mott, is that homosexual intercourse is, in the context of unequal power, an exercise in extortion.\textsuperscript{110} In this sense, the passive partner is indeed accorded greater stigma, since he is presumably “weaker” than the male partner, yet Piccato does not suggest that the active partners are free from stigma. The issue is less sexual identity and more sexual power. In this sense Trexler suggests something important for Latin America in the relationship between power and sex.

Other scholars have looked to belles lettres for historical research. David Foster is the most prolific scholar in this regard, although his work tends toward literary theory, examining the ways that literature as a genre has dealt with homosexuality as well as how various homosexual or bisexual men have written.\textsuperscript{111} In an essay of literary history, Oscar Montero presents a subtle discussion of Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, Uruguayan critic José Enrique Rodó, Latin American literary modernism, and homoeroticism. Montero relates the complicated ways in which men like Darío received the French poet Paul Verlaine, seeing in Verlaine the ultimate poetic expression of modernity. His literary partiality notwithstanding, Darío could not ignore Verlaine’s association with the so-called “decadent” school and his affair with Arthur Rimbaud. As a result, Darío felt it necessary to condemn Verlaine’s “lifestyle” choices when defending the Frenchman’s poetry to other Latin American critics.\textsuperscript{112} Rodó felt it necessary to condemn homosexuality as a pernicious vice. This laid bare the ambivalence writers like Darío and Rodó felt toward homo-


\textsuperscript{110} See Piccato, “Sexuality in the Prison.”


\textsuperscript{112} Oscar Montero, “Modernismo and Homophobia: Darío and Rodó,” in Balderston and Guy, \textit{Sex and Sexuality in Latin America}. 
eroticism, especially since one of their primary influences came from a homo-
sexual, Verlaine.113 Thus Montero exposes the connection between homopho-
bia and homoeroticism that is often absent from scholarship on Latino sexual
culture, although Herbert Brandt presents a thoughtful assessment of some of
Denevi’s work on this connection.114

This section concludes with a case study, about which much is known on a
“popular” and unwritten level but seems to have eluded historical research. Early in the morning on 18 November 1901 the police in Mexico City broke
up a large ball of drag queens and (presumably homosexual) men in a house on
the Calle de la Paz. It was a huge and notorious scandal, and the Mexico City
newspapers gave it coverage. Indeed, El Universal placed front-page editorials
denouncing the affront to public decency and social morals, describing the ball
as a “disgusting ulcer”;115 La Patria and El Tiempo (the Catholic newspaper) also
carried articles on the arrests.116 In all of the discussions, the refrain was that
this was a violation of public order and of the natural order of the sexes. Fur-
thermore, there was hardly any indulgence for the supposed “male” partners
of the ball.

This event was memorialized in other media as well. An antihomosexual
novel, Los cuarenta y uno, penned by Eduardo A. Castrejón, lamented the vices
of homosexuals as well as the degeneracy of Mexico City.117 The novel pur-
ports to tell the story of the fate of the men arrested from this ball. The title
refers to the 41 young men exiled to the Yucatán and sentenced to hard labor
cutting henequen. Such a fate was nothing less than a death sentence since
they were subjected to brutal treatment in addition to the already exhausting
nature of henequen cutting. The story of the 41 is outlined only briefly in
short articles by Carlos Monsiváis and Carlos Bonfil, and more recently an
article by Robert Irwin.118 Their analysis and what we know so far is based on

113. Ibid.
115. El Universal, 23 Nov. 1901.
116. See La Patria de México, 20 Nov. 1901; and El Tiempo, 19 Nov. 1901.
Castrejón’s novel and newspaper accounts. Accordingly, the case of the 41 is much like the rest of the scholarship for this period. There exists a good deal of material that discusses the deviance and social crime of homosexuality, but little outlines the social history for these men.

The potential for the study of homosexuality for this period is rich and intriguing, given that some scholars have already begun to tap into what appears to be a rich vein of documentation. One suspects that if more energy were dedicated to this area we could expect a flowering of historical scholarship. Research in civil and criminal archives may open a floodgate of scholarly output in examining the social history of homosexuality in the shift from the early modern to the modern period. What remains, it seems, is detailed, fine-grained archivally driven studies. This does not suggest that the available scholarship is flawed. Instead, the work thus far for this period has laid the foundation for the next generation of historians who should, inevitably, move into the archives in search of difficult and secluded sources.

**The Late Twentieth Century**

A bulk of the research material for this period comes from anthropologists and sociologists. While such work might strictly fall outside of the purview of this essay, its methodological and theoretical concerns offer potentially fruitful considerations for historians. Joseph Carrier is clearly the pioneer in the field of Mexican homosexuality. In 1969 he began work on his doctoral dissertation in anthropology at the University of California, Irvine. He could find no study of Mexican homosexuality at that time. Proceeding with a participant-observer study of homosexual behavior in Guadalajara, he established a complex network of contacts in the gay community that allowed him to conduct interviews with 53 males about their sexual behavior. Carrier’s study, completed in 1973, and recently turned into a book, *De los otros*, was truly groundbreaking.\(^\text{119}\)

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Carrier’s work is rich in observation and description. He has dedicated some 30 years to studying homosexuality in contemporary Mexico and his attention to detail is admirable. While there is occasional political grandstanding in his work, for the most part he restrains his inclinations and offers his readers the compelling story of everyday men and their loves, sexual encounters, struggles, and, tragically, in many cases, their deaths from AIDS. Carrier’s works are always compelling and he is a very good storyteller. Additionally, he is a sympathetic anthropologist, and this may be his greatest danger. Indeed, his sympathy for his subjects has often led him to uncertain conclusions. For example, he shows that many married men or men who live socially as straight engage in homosexual intercourse as a kind of substitute for heterosexual intercourse. He also shows that anal sex is the only form of sex that is considered true sex; oral sex, kissing, and other forms of intimacy are usually considered to be foreplay. Ultimately, however, Carrier is unable to establish proof of the double standard that is central to the conception of active-passive partner stigma dichotomies. His line of reasoning about the stigma potential of taking the active role in homosexual intercourse is partially flawed. For example, he was unable to interview any of these active partners who led heterosexual social lives. Carrier notes uniformly that these men feared that their wives, mothers, or girlfriends (not to mention other men) would discover that they had been seen in places associated with clandestine homosexual activity such as certain cantinas, parks, movie theaters, and plazas known as “cruising spots.” Carrier shows that homosexual activity is acceptable in certain social contexts but not in mainstream family life. He points out that active homosexual partners do not appear to be stigmatized on the basis of gender. In other words, they are still seen as basically male. But this acceptance seems to come only from other males, not from any women, and certainly not from mainstream social life. Instead, the acceptance of the active role comes from the already limited social sphere of homosexual partners. Carrier’s work is important precisely because he was the first scholar to provide a detailed picture of the ambiguous nature of late-twentieth-century Mexican male homosexuality.

Others support the active-passive stigma separation. Sociologist Tomás Almaguer takes Paz’s statement to be manifest evidence that homosexual intercourse is hierarchized, repeating without compelling evidence the axiom that

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120. Carrier, *De Los Otros*.

121. In gay parlance, to “cruise” is to look for sex in public. In Mexico, this is sometimes referred to as “zócaleando,” since many men stroll through the city zócalo in search of other male sexual partners.

122. Carrier, *De Los Otros*.
stigma is strictly divided based on the role one plays. Clark Taylor, an anthropologist noted for his work on the ways in which homosexuality and stigma of the passive role are played out in language, comes to the same conclusions as Almaguer. According to Taylor, passive partners are given names that carry stigma, such as *puto, joto, maricón*. In turn, he argues that the names given to active partners—*mayate, chichifo, chingón*—are free of stigma. This claim, however, overlooks the probability that few, if any, heterosexually-identifying men would call themselves *mayates* in mainstream family life.

According to Taylor, this linguistic system ensures a hierarchy where the actives dominate the passives not only sexually but also socially and politically. Again, such a claim remains hypothetical.

Stephen Murray’s treatment of the active-passive split is more satisfactory than those previously mentioned. He construes this dichotomy in Latin America, in terms of power and function. As mentioned, the gender-stratified “system” of homosexuality assigns roles according to sex-role function with a concomitant premium on male honor that elevates machismo. He shows that this is mostly functional, and this phenomenon depends on the outward and social condemnation of all homosexual activity, whether active or passive. In other words, even a man who takes the active role would generally be expected to keep this information secret and to condemn homosexuality even if he were personally engaged in it. The argument that the active-passive dichotomy is largely functional supports the notion that passive partners are more stigmatized than actives because they are seen as having abdicated their masculinity. Accordingly, Murray contends that this system serves largely to ameliorate cognitive dissonance in active partners who have a heterosexual social identity in that they “use” a passive male as a “female.” As a result, these men continue


125. Taylor, “Mexican Male Homosexual Interaction.”


to perceive of themselves as normal but realize that to acknowledge such activity would be socially damning.\textsuperscript{128}

The active-passive argument is not limited to scholarship on Mexico. Roger Lancaster is an influential political-economy scholar, having studied machismo and political sex-role identities of the urban poor and working class in Nicaragua. While he appears to make a better case for the lack of stigma associated with the active homosexual role in Nicaragua, he points out that such behavior is widespread, not tolerated.\textsuperscript{129} Lancaster’s reading of stigma and homosexuality relies heavily on notions of class inequity and politics, demonstrating the intricate connection between machismo, male privilege, and female status in Nicaragua. Constructing all relationships in terms of power struggles, he places sexual conflict in the context of Nicaragua’s political violence and the low social standing of working-class men. Such status, he argues, makes them more likely to assert violent control over those few aspects of their lives that they can, such as women or homosexuals. Additionally, Lancaster’s study shows particular subtlety in detailing the complex power relationships that feed expectations of machismo and manhood in lower-class households. Other scholarship on the sex-role debate emphasizes the distinction between feminine and masculine social perceptions. Those who have explored this topic include Barry Adam in Nicaragua,\textsuperscript{130} Paul Kutsche in Costa Rica,\textsuperscript{131} Michael Misse and Richard Parker in Brazil,\textsuperscript{132} as well as Alfredo Villanueva Collado on Latin American fiction.\textsuperscript{133} The general perception on

\textsuperscript{128} Murray, “Homosexual Categorization”; and Stephen O. Murray, “Machismo, Male Homosexuality and Latino Culture,” in \textit{Latin American Male Homosexualities}.


these matters is that the active partners are not truly gay. This is in part the result of sexual values in Latin American that differ quite dramatically from those of the United States. Indeed, the term gay has not been translated because there is no equivalent in Spanish. Instead, the term internacional is sometimes used to denote men who adopt a cosmopolitan sense of gay identity. This implies that they are not true Latinos but belong to a broader international community.

Despite the dominance of the active-passive dichotomy as an analytical tool, there have been some recent revisions of our understanding of modern Latin American homosexuality as well as bisexuality. Annick Prieur is a Norwegian sociologist who completed participant-observer research in Mexico City in the 1990s, casting light on the active-passive role debate. She observed the practices of so-called jotos (queers), jotas (men who dress and act like women), and vestidas (transsexuals or transvestites) in the house of a queen named Mema in Ciudad Netzahualcóyotl, Mexico City. One aspect of Prieur’s research examines the nature of male bisexuality, as “Mema’s house” was a center of male-male sex. Prieur grapples with the same dilemma as does Carrier, but sometimes to more satisfactory conclusions. She shows that while homosexual intercourse by men who socially identify as straight appears to be relatively common, these men generally refused to be identified as homosexual participants, despite the fact that they took the active role with identified jotas and jotos. Avoiding generalizations about the lack of active-partner stigma, Prieur elucidates the ambiguity of a sexual praxis that tacitly condones such behavior but reviles its elocution: “male bisexuality in Mexico is neither socially accepted nor stigmatized . . . but only so long as it remains relatively invisible, so long as it is kept within a purely male context, so long as it is not talked about, so long as certain rules are respected, and so long as it is euphemized.”

Prieur argues for an uncertainty between what is acceptable and unacceptable. Additionally, Prieur is keen to note the male context of such behavior. She is more attuned to this phenomenon, but she does make a solid case for the fact that homosexuality when practiced by men not socially identified as gay is generally only acceptable within that purely male and homosexual context. This implies that such behavior and its admission are not generally acceptable within the context of mainstream life.

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Prieur’s study is a welcome addition to the discussion concerning the distinction between bisexual and gay men in contemporary Mexico. Her allowance for the complex psychological and social processes at work in the behavior of socially straight men who have sex with identified gay men helps to clarify several issues. For example, she shows that there is a wide scope of attitudes about homosexuality. At one end of the spectrum, there is contempt and a complete disavowal of homosexuality in any form. At the other end of the spectrum, there is a certain tolerance of the use of transvestites (vestidas or jotas) as surrogate females. There is also a vast in-between area of attitudes. Indeed, Prieur found that even many of the mayates did not always view homosexuality in a favorable moral light but sometimes pronounced a certain disgust for their own behavior. Such findings complicate the picture of the macho mayate unconcerned with his social image and the long-suffering passive partner relegated to the margins while his “straight” lovers avoid condemnation. Instead, many contradictory attitudes inform homosexual relations in contemporary Mexico.136 As does Carrier, Prieur shows that the incidence of homosexual intercourse by socially heterosexual men in Mexico is more frequent than might be supposed.

Carrier and Prieur have produced excellent ethnographies based on scrupulous and painstaking research. Carrier, in particular, is to be commended for breaking the lengthy code of academic silence that shrouded this subject for so long. And while he is not strictly a historian, his groundbreaking work helped to open the door for historians in North America who wished to pursue this subject in Latin American historiography.

In addition to these studies, newer cultural examinations have tended to emphasize ambiguity. Furthermore, discussions of transgendered people—like that by Prieur—invite a debate about homosexuality. Indeed, many transsexuals (in this case men who are transforming themselves into women) do not see themselves as gay. Rather, many of these “women” consider themselves to be heterosexual—heterosexual women born in a man’s body. Don Kulick completed fascinating ethnographic work in Bahia focusing on transgendered prostitutes, or travestis.137 The important contribution of this work is to demonstrate that for many travestis the presence of a male lover is less about sex than gender. In other words, the “man” legitimates, a sense of female identity. But again, this does not always mean that the “man” would see such an

136. Prieur, Mema’s House.
arrangement as socially acceptable. In most cases, the men used travestis as surrogate females until they found a biological woman to satisfy them. This does not mean that all such men are straight but that the distinction between straight and gay is complicated in the Brazilian setting by the very ambiguity of gender identity. Consequently, the sexual orientation of both the travesti and the men who engage in sex with them are rendered complex and unclear.

Another informative discussion of the fluidity of Brazilian homosexuality comes from Rommel Mendès-Leite. He argues that Brazilian male sexuality is best described as an “ambigosexuality” that places a premium on appearances. This “ambigosexuality” relies on ideas about feminine and masculine attire and social comportment to determine who is queer and straight. He contends further that this is a game with constantly shifting borders and players who strive to satisfy homosexual desire while eluding social stigmatization as queer.138 Along similar lines, Lancaster, in addition to his previously mentioned work, recently provided some discussion of the “transvestism of everyday life” in Nicaragua. He argues that sex-role identity and masculine-feminine dichotomies are fluctuating arrangements of social structure that can be manipulated and played upon by those involved in such a system. Thus a man normally identified as straight might risk being called queer by dressing up as a woman in an impromptu performance of femininity. Lancaster attempts to understand how such behavior violates not only the code of machismo but also ideas about the stigmatizing nature of homosexual identity associated with drag. Such “play” subverts categories of stigma and male-female that accompany discussions of Latin American homosexuality.139

In a decided shift from concerns with gender identity and sex-roles, Ian Lumsden has provided social and political histories of the gay rights movements in Mexico and Cuba. His chronicle of the gay rights movement in Mexico is a very good history of a political movement, utilizing sources like newspapers and propaganda fliers effectively to demonstrate the trajectory of the gay rights movement in modern Mexico.140 The study provides a solid, linear account of the approach taken by gay male activists in Mexico in an effort to assert what they claimed as their political rights. Overall, the book is well

researched, thorough, and gives an almost exhaustive description of a political agenda. Interestingly, this movement, Lumsden points out, applied such logic in a society where such notions of inherent rights for gay men did not always resonate with the broader body politic or even with liberals. Lumsden’s book on Mexico was a sort of laboratory for a later similar work on Cuba, *Machos, Maricones and Gays*. This second book is perhaps less concerned with the political movement in Cuba than the one in Mexico. Additionally, the book on Cuba evinces greater sophistication and stylistic control. Lumsden’s study of Cuba is both a provocative and comprehensive account of the tragic circumstances under which gay men live under Castro’s dictatorship in Cuba. For decades they were rounded up and placed in internment camps as enemies of the socialist state and all HIV-positive people were quarantined. Lumsden’s study shows that conservative regimes are hardly the only state projects to enforce repressive measures against gay men; in fact, Cuba’s policies under Castro have been the most repressive in all of Latin America. Unlike Mexico, Cuba did not experience an organized gay rights movement; thus Lumsden focuses on case studies of individual men. For anyone seeking an overview of gay rights political movements in the twentieth century, Lumsden’s work is indispensable reading.141

Lumsden’s work reflects a change in documentary sources. In twentieth-century Latin America we find, for the first time, a significant amount of material written by homosexual/gay men. The proliferation of gay rights newspapers and documents, novels, films, and other such sources is completely unparalleled in any other period. This documentary base is still largely untapped and presents a tremendous resource for future historians who may wish to follow in the paths blazed by scholars of modern homosexuality in Europe and North America who have already capitalized on such sources. Once this happens, we can look forward to an explosion of scholarly activity on this field that has, until now, been dominated by ethnographic studies.

Scholarship on late-twentieth-century homosexuality is quite dense. By the same token, the abundance of documentation ought to mean that many future historians will be able to tap into the various resources to produce fine historical monographs. Having said this, there are two subjects that are grossly underrepresented. First, male bisexuality is generally not discussed. While there is brief and suggestive work on bisexuality by Ana Luisa Ligouri, this work tends to examine the role of bisexual men as conduits for HIV between

the gay and straight world. And while some scholars like Carrier and Prieur deal with this male bisexuality, in general the scholarly focus is on gay men. Although this is understandable, one wonders about the efficacy of this emphasis, given the lengthy resistance to such a form of identification in Latin America. The second subject that is generally not covered is AIDS. Few historians have been willing to discuss this as a historical question and generally seem to have left this discussion to the epidemiologists. Richard Parker is a notable exception to this trend and has expended considerable and commendable effort in tracking AIDS as an issue of medical and social history. Carrier, likewise, has used AIDS as a biographical tool, often in a tragic mode, when discussing some of his informants.

For historians, the greatest contribution of the material on the twentieth centuries lies in its engagement with critical theories of sexual identity and politics. Although these discussions sometimes lead to hackneyed visions of sexual “conquest” and machismo, the anthropological literature challenges historians to be circumspect of essentializing models as well as to debate the value of theoretical paradigms that may actually help to explain sexual identity. For example, it is apparent that the active-passive partner model is useful if one is careful not to ascribe overly broad generalizations that the evidence does not support. Likewise, the evidence from this scholarship demonstrates that indeed a major shift occurred before the 1940s from the older sodomite model to the modern conception of the gay male as a unique persona. The challenge then will be to determine when such a shift occurred and how it was manifested.

**Conclusion**

In sum, we can return to the central dilemma that plagues not only the history of homosexuality but all historical endeavors: sources and their use. We have seen that the answers for homosexuality were never simple. Zumárraga’s seven-part definition of *lujuria*, the Portuguese Inquisition’s graphic details of

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intercourse, the Mexican Inquisition’s longevity, Positivism, gay rights movements—all had something in common. All strove for a definition of homosexuality that would supercede others. Yet our discussion is limited by sources or the lack of documentation. In many cases, the documentation has yet to be unearthed. If we return to our original distinction, we see that such a history is, indeed, the history of mentality and ideology, not society. What then of the social history of Latin American homosexuality? Some have provided glimpses. Others have elided the question as a historian’s impossible gambit. We have, however, seen that such a social history can be written, but our knowledge here is still intermittent. In the future, we can look forward to greater investigation of this difficult subject. It seems evident, however, that the twenty-first century will change this for our field of Latin American history.