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This is the published version of a chapter published in *Sex, State and Society: Comparative Perspectives on the History of Sexuality*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Tedebrand, L-G. (2000)

Introduction.

In: Lars-Göran Tedebrand (ed.), *Sex, State and Society: Comparative Perspectives on the History of Sexuality* (pp. 9-11). Umeå: Nyheternas tryckeri KB i Umeå

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-134597>

## Introduction

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The history of sexuality was for long a hidden, not to say a forbidden history. The historiography of the field was mainly dominated by medical authorities. The most well-known is perhaps the Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. He defined standards of behaviour for heterosexuality within a traditional bourgeois family context. Sexual activities before and outside marriage, masturbation not to speak of homosexuality, were often condemned as perverse behaviour per se. Radical reformers, both scholars and politicians, rejected these ideas even before 1900, mobilizing neo-malthusian arguments. In the case of Sweden can be mentioned the renowned economist Knut Wicksell and the radical politician Hinke Bergegren. The latter's pamphlet "Kärlek utan barn" ("Love without children") published in 1912 became widely spread and led to oppression on the part of society.

During the last 25 years the history of sexuality has been an expanding field of research, engaging theorists like Michel Foucault, family historians, feminist historians and gay study specialists. Some family historians have stressed that a deeper periodization of the history of sexuality since the fifteenth century is a necessity. Others, like Lawrence Stone, have argued that major alterations in the organization of gender, sexuality and the family were instituted in the latter part of the eighteenth century. A growing number of scholars now maintain that significant developments have been taking place in the past hundred years. The interwar years have been stressed as a crucial period in the development of modern sexual politics.

When testing Edward Shorter's much disputed hypothesis concerning a correlation between industrialization, female emancipation and sexual revolution earlier studies of Swedish pre-industrial night courting traditions – especially K. Rob V. Wikman's *Die Einleitung*

*der Ehe* from 1937 – have recently experienced a renaissance. In this context it can be mentioned that Carl von Linné (Linnaeus) 250 years ago published a wonderful leaflet about how young women and young men met.

The conference papers and comments published in this anthology reflect the growing interdisciplinary character of the history of sexuality, combining new historical evidence and interpretations with new aspects of sexual behaviour in the most recent past. A comparative and multidisciplinary approach to the history of sexuality entails considering the unique problems of human sexuality in its socio-cultural context. By doing so we will get a better understanding not only of the lives of men and women in the past but also of history itself.

The studies will hopefully also stimulate further debate and research strategies. But they have also a bearing on present-day societies. When AIDS was being discussed during the first day of the conference the news agencies reported that the number of infected persons in eastern Europe has increased from 30 000 to 270 000 during the last four years. The alarming situation in Africa today is well-known to us all.

Sexual oppression of minorities has been touched upon in several of the papers. Sexual rights are human rights. These rights bring policy into our own most personal and intimate spheres. Let me mention two aspects. More than 60 000 women were sterilized in Sweden between 1935 and 1975. The situation was almost the same in other so-called democracies, regardless of the political colour of the governments. Doctors and relatives knew about it but it was never discussed publicly. One of the chief motives for introducing the sterilization laws of the 1930's and 1940's in Sweden was to prevent mentally ill and "feeble-minded" individuals from reproducing, mainly for population policy and social reasons. Surgery on the human body was thus used to implement "normality" in society.

Disabled men and women are not expected to reproduce. Their ability to have children, or sexual relations at all, is considered a threat to our cultures. Because of this, they have been sexually and socially segregated, and prevented from expressing their sexuality. Sexuality and love have been the most painful parts of their lives. Keeping especially disabled women genderless by discounting them as women and as sexual beings helps to keep them harmless to society.

These stereotypes create many barriers. Disabled women and girls often lack information about relationship, sex, menstruation, pregnancy, birth control, the menopause and preventive health measures.

Many of these women and girls never receive key information and are susceptible to misinformation about their sexuality. Let us in the future also include these aspects in our research concerning sexual minorities and the political and social oppression of human sexuality.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude for the funds, and towards the contributors that made the conference and the anthology possible. A special thanks to Anna Lundberg for helping me to prepare the sessions.