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## **Lesbian Life Worlds Between 1920 and 1970**

Interdisciplinary research project by Heidelberg and Freiburg scholars

What was life like for women attracted to women in the years between 1920 and 1970? What obstacles and discrimination did they come up against during the time of National Socialism and what were the consequences of this persecution and exclusion in the post-1945 period? Was it possible to lead non-normative lives within the norms set by politics, law, society and science? Researchers from Heidelberg University and the University of Freiburg are examining these questions in an interdisciplinary research project on lesbian life worlds in the German Southwest. The Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science has allocated approx. 200,000 euros to fund the project, which is led by Prof. Dr Katja Patzel-Mattern, Prof. Dr Karen Nolte (both from Heidelberg) and Prof. Dr Sylvia Paetschek (Freiburg).

“The life situation of lesbian women brings into focus central aspects and structures of social minorities and, in so doing, the way society at the time dealt with diversity. Yet their life stories should not merely fit into a story of discrimination and persecution,” underlines Prof. Patzel-Mattern from the Department of History of Heidelberg University. According to Prof. Nolte, the story of lesbian women, particularly those living outside the big cities, can provide new insights into the transformation of mentalities and society. “This in-depth view is instructive for women’s and gender history, the history of sex and the body, the history of knowledge and medical history, and likewise for social, economic and political science issues,” says Prof. Nolte, who heads the Institute for Medical History and Ethics, part of the Medical Faculty Heidelberg.

The current research project comprises three sub-projects. At the Department of History of the University of Freiburg, Prof. Paetschek and her team are concerned with biographies of lesbian women who were active in politics, society and culture, or in social movements, notably the women’s and homosexual movements. “We want to highlight their networks and communication spaces,” explains the Freiburg academic. The sub-project led by Prof. Patzel-Mattern focuses on the “limits to the private sphere”. It inquires about the legal, police or welfare contexts in which lesbian women were forced to reveal their identities. Prof. Nolte and her team will reconstruct the way medicine, particularly psychiatry, dealt with female homosexuality in the Southwest.

The studies in the research project “Single women, girl-friends, women loving women – lesbian life worlds in the German Southwest (1920s to 1970s) with special attention to the National Socialist period” will continue until the end of 2022.

### **Further information:**

Project “Lesbian Life Worlds” – [www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zegk/histsem/mitglieder/patzel-mattern/lesbischelebenswelten.html](http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zegk/histsem/mitglieder/patzel-mattern/lesbischelebenswelten.html)

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