Freedom in Oppression

The Promise of Sexual Democracy on the New York Cruising Scene, 1945–1982

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Abstract

In opposition to the conventional view that the Seventies' gay liberation brought freedom to gay men and diversity to their sexual realm, this thesis points to some of the paradoxical effects of sexual freedom and democratic tolerance. By focusing large parts of its analysis on situational interactions between "cruisers," i.e. homosexual men who searched for sex at public places like parks and restrooms as well as private establishments like bars, bathhouses and discotheques, it uses the history of cruising in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies as a case study for a broader discussion of sexual democracy. Prominent theorists of sexual democracy have denounced anonymity as a sexual strategy, while presenting diversity as an ideal avenue for social equality and personal freedom. By directing attention to some of the practical considerations and personal dilemmas that gay men faced "on the cruise," this thesis not only defends the personal value of sexual anonymity in some situations, but it also advocates a definition of diversity that encompasses not only respect for personal and group differences, but also more genuine interactions between different social and cultural worlds.

Acknowledgments

The foundation for this project was laid a while ago, in the Spring of 2019. I was enrolled in a social history class about “Class Struggle, Gender Trouble, and Everyday Life,” and decided to write my term paper on gay male aesthetics. The paper explored, among other things, the impact of AIDS on gay male body ideals; the stigma of weight-loss and the literally vital symbolism of muscles. Though I totally forgot about the deadline, the topic really hit home.

The social history course was taught by Klaus Nathaus, a German professor who gave me a positive first impression. During the summer I had sent Klaus a nerdy email requesting recommendations on things to read in preparation for the course. I was so impressed by his kind response. Klaus seemed enthusiastic, suggested numerous books on some really cool topics like “slumming,” street prostitution and RnB music. In the first seminar the class spent an hour discussing the term “contemporary social history.” My impression was that Klaus was meticulous in a good way.

In writing this thesis I am fortunate to have had Klaus as my advisor. In the last 18 months he has been my insightful mentor and — I mean this in a good way — editorial *Staubsauger*. He is direct, thorough, and generous with his time. I really thank you Klaus.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1971 in an influential book about the oppression and liberation of homosexuals, radical activist Dennis Altman described gay liberation as a "new consciousness" which could only "add to the growth in acceptance of human diversity." Like many contemporaries, Altman envisioned a radically androgynous future in which sensuality and eroticism pervaded all human relationships, breaking down the barriers between men and women, both gay and straight. It was the mission of the sexual revolution, Altman argued, to reveal "that we all possess far greater potential for love and human relationship than the social and cultural structures have allowed us to reveal."[1] His radical vision, in other words, was a social and sexual democracy in which personal and group differences were transcended through the celebration of personal intimacy.

Twelve years later the tone of Altman's writing had changed, and his optimism had waned. Now ambivalent about the impact of the gay liberation, he reacted to recent developments he saw happening in the liberated homosexuals' urban enclaves with a sense of unease. Gay pride had given way to gay chauvinism, Altman observed, widening the fault line between the gay and straight worlds and deepening old hostilities between gay men and women. Urban gay men were increasingly given to hypermasculine styles of behavior, which in Altman's view might signal an ominous "pressure for conformity" that could indicate a new form of repression.[2]

Altman's conflicting perspective on sexual liberation is reflected in his evolving and self-contradictory views on the personal and social value of sexual anonymity. In his younger days, Altman saw gay men's social predilection for impersonal sex as a sign that they were internally oppressed, implying that liberation could only mean the decline of "momentary and furtive contacts."[3] As Altman grew older, his view on sexual liberation became less definite, though perhaps more nuanced. For instance, he denounced the development of a new sexual market based on the provision of luxurious entertainment and indoor cruising while simultaneously celebrating the conviviality at commercial venues like the modern gay bathhouse as "a sort of Whitmanesque democracy," "a type of brotherhood far removed from

[1] Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation,* 94, 226.
[2] Altman, *The Homosexualization of America*, 209.
[3] Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, 94.

the male bonding of rank, hierarchy and competition."[4] Suddenly it was unclear whether gay men were freed or oppressed, for their oppression seemed to be an effect of their growing freedom.

This thesis focuses on "cruising," the practice by which gay men searched for sex partners and signaled sexual availability. The study has two principal aims. The first one is to explore the impact of gay liberation on cruising patterns and thus demonstrate some of the paradoxical effects of sexual freedom on relations of class, race, gender and age. Contrary to Altman's claim that oppression arose from new, unrestricted sexual freedom, I argue that gay men found, exercised and enjoyed considerable freedom in various forms of oppression throughout the period of study. My second aim is to use the history of gay liberation and cruising as a case study for a broader discussion about sexual democracy. In this regard, I argue that gay cruisers' unique social and sexual conditions offer valuable insights into the dynamics of diversity and sexual anonymity, concepts which are central to sexual democracy's ongoing debate.

Discussions about democracy have generally revolved around the conflicting relationship between individual rights and personal obligations, as many political scientists ask to what extent the democratic principle of equality should allow for public interventions into the private realm of freedom.[5] Indeed, whereas political theorists like Walter Lippman have understood democracy as a system which is able to provide "universal access to the good things in life,"[6] opponents of individualism like John Dewey have placed less emphasis on individual opportunities and greater stress on individuals' responsibilities towards other members their community.[7] A democracy is furthermore, as Dewey notes, not just a form of government;

> it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer her own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.[8]

[4] Altman, *The Homosexualization of America*, 79.
[5] Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 44–45, 52.
[6] Lippmann, *The Good Society*, 352–53. The quote is borrowed from Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, 83.
[7] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 100–101.
[8] Dewey, 101.

In other words, democracy is more than an abstract concept that applies to impersonal relationships between members of a political system. It has also been regarded as a form of social organization that requires a high degree of unity as well as constant and diverse interaction between its constituent members.

The term "*sexual* democracy" is usually defined in similar terms. The added connotations of gender and sexuality does not, in my understanding, imply a more specific or narrow understanding of political and social conflict. The addition of "sexuality" should rather be taken to signal a more expansive and inclusive approach to democracy because it invites further discussion about private and personal matters that were beyond the purview of conventional democratic debates. Feminist philosopher Ann Ferguson, who popularized the term "sexual democracy" in a book from 1991, uses the concept in the widest sense possible as a political slogan for a new "anarcho-social-feminist" movement with a basic commitment to "an overthrow of the existing capitalist, racist and patriarchal structures."[9] In advocating for a united political movement of all oppressed groups, Ferguson discourages the use of identity politics as a vehicle for emancipation, thereby disavowing all forms of radical separatism. Instead, she places the values of *respect* and *pluralism* (to which I soon return), as well as *self-determination* at the core of the democratic project.[10]

Ferguson's view on self-determination, as well as sexual morality, is most comprehensively expressed in a book from 1989 about motherhood, sexuality and male dominance. Among the concepts she advocates for here is "gynandry," a reconfiguration of "androgyny" that would allow women and men to combine as well as transcend traditional masculine and feminine qualities.[11] The fact that Ferguson idealizes a less antagonistic, more integrated gender identity does not, though, prevent her from taking a permissive stance on sex. Feminists can "agree to disagree," she writes,

> on personal choices of sexual lifestyles by distinguishing between *basic* ["safe"; conventional], *risky* and morally *forbidden* sexual practices, only morally condemning those who practice the latter [such as incest, rape and adult/child sexuality], while feeling free to disengage with, but not condemn, those who engage in risky practices

[9] Ferguson, *Sexual Democracy*, 241, 252.
[10] Ferguson, 246.
[11] Ferguson, *Blood at the Root*, 209.

> [like watching pornography or participating in consensual acts of sadomasochism among adults] [emphasis added].[12]

Some forms of sexual expression are, to be sure, presented as more desirable than others: Ferguson clearly prefers "gynandry" to masculinity and femininity; safer forms of sexual activity seem to be held in higher esteem than sexual behavior characterized by personal risk. But although some kinds of sexual expressions are considered to be more egalitarian and therefore more compatible with the democratic principle of equality, sexual activities that eroticize violence and hierarchy are not defined as antidemocratic as long as they are consensual, that is, practiced by individuals who respect each other's right to self-determination.

Ferguson's ideals of self-determination, respect and pluralism and are reflected in the works of other theorists of sexual democracy as well. But as is the case with sociologist Anthony Giddens, these ideals are sometimes interpreted in a way that places sexual anonymity beyond the pale of legitimate democratic behavior. This is because Giddens regards the democratization of the social domain as resting on the cultivation of intimacy.[13] Understood as the mutual recognition between autonomous individuals, intimacy becomes the primary mode of relating to, as well as overcoming, differences in a pluralist society. Furthermore, because intimate encounters are characterized by respect for personal differences, sexual emancipation "includes, but also transcends, 'radical pluralism.'" [14] Put differently, Giddens idealizes personal authenticity as the bedrock of intimacy and the cornerstone of democracy.[15] This explains why the principle of radical diversity does not cause Giddens to sanction individual expression of anonymity. Because anonymity implies, among other things, identification with generic types and impersonal modes of behavior, it precludes signifiers of individuality. So even though anonymity is compatible with ideals of autonomy, it still denies personal authenticity and with it, intimacy. Sexual anonymity is therefore antithetical to Gidden's democratic project. He would agree with Ferguson and other theorists that democracy implies a balancing act between individual rights and equality, but they disagree on the issue of diversity, and on to what extent standards of pluralism can encompass forms of expression that

[12] Ferguson, 224.
[13] Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 3.
[14] Giddens, 194.
[15] Giddens, 187.

either (1) impinge on the personal autonomy of others or (2) are counterproductive to equality or intimacy.[16]

Sociologists and historians generally agree that recent decades are characterized by the democratization of sexual relationships, which has been achieved at the expense of traditional authorities and hierarchies, making men and women more autonomous, and their personal and sexual relationships more egalitarian.[17] "Women," writes sociologist Michael Kimmel when commenting on the aftermath of the sexual revolution,

> are reconstructing the traditional view of female sexuality as passive and receptive; the fertile combination of feminism, technological and medical breakthroughs, and general cultural transition have ushered in an age of more casual and female sexual expression, of women increasingly claiming their own sexual agency, their own entitlement to pleasure.[18]

Not only has sexuality, in Kimmel's words, become "masculinized," but he also implies that sexual satisfaction has become democratized, more equally distributed between men and women.

Many gay historians share this progressivist view, as prominent scholars claim that gay liberation brought freedom to gay men and diversity to their sexual realm.[19] However, because of the unique trajectory of gay liberation — which culminated in the Stonewall riot in 1969, and which many historians have seen as the starting point of a long period marked by gay assimilation to straight norms and regression into hegemonic forms of masculinity — many gay historians tend to regard the concept of sexual liberation with ambivalence, if not cynicism.[20]

An example can be drawn from an essay about gay male pornography by historian Jeffrey Escoffier. In his essay, Escoffier argues that the proliferation of gay porn in the Seventies empowered homosexual men by normalizing perversity and sexual versatility (thus

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[16] In regards to eroticism, radical feminists have often argued that even conventional forms of sex are fundamentally unequal because they are "male-defined," that is, defined on men's terms in order to maximize male erotic pleasure at the expense of the female sexual satisfaction and autonomy, see: Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, 79; MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, 110.

[17] Weeks, "The Sexual Citizen," 40–43; Gail, *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality*, 110; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, 338.

[18] Kimmel, *The Gender of Desire*, 3.

[19] See for example D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Duberman, *Stonewall*; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*; Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*.

[20] See for example Mercer, "Coming of Age," 319; Sonnekus, "Macho Men and the Queer Imaginary," 39; Escoffier, "Beefcake and Hardcore: Gay Pornography and the Sexual Revolution," 342; Signorile, *Life Outside*, 31.

removing the stigma of anal penetration) and by presenting male homosexual consumers with hypermasculine gay role models. Although porn movies inspired gay men to take on new and potentially emancipatory roles, Escoffier also maintains that gay porn continued to be marked by a narrow pattern of representation which effectively "educated" gay male desires, thus giving rise to specific erotic tastes. As a result, the sexual revolution not only "emancipated those who were stigmatized for their sexuality," but it also, Escoffier writes, "facilitated the social discipline of the newly emancipated identities."[21] The fact that gay men were freer to express themselves didn't necessarily mean greater freedom of expression. Nor did personal freedom in itself secure greater diversity on the homosexual scene.

In the present thesis, I take a similar view on gay liberation as Escoffier. Using historical examples drawn from the realm of gay male cruising, the dissertation argues that sexual democracies are marked by a conflict between sexual anonymity and diversity, and that these concepts, furthermore, need to be understood in relation to each other as well as the specific contexts in which they operate. Indeed, even though feminists and theorists of democracy sometimes disparage the use of anonymity as a personal strategy, one cannot deny the potential of such strategies in procuring, however temporarily, equality and personal liberation. The challenge is, in my view, to distinguish between those anonymous sexual practices that are in accord with the democratic principle of self-determination and therefore represent legitimate forms of self-expression, and those that undermine personal autonomy. Diversity, on its side, is widely idealized. But as the example shows, diversity is not the only yardstick of individual freedom of expression. What is more, it is also a confusing concept which can mean different things in different contexts depending on its definition.

The concept of diversity is often used too abstractly, in a way that unwittingly allows authors to sidestep discussions of personal interactions in everyday life, ignoring whether greater diversity actually prompted more immersive, face-to-face encounters between different social, racial and cultural groups. For instance, in a seminal book on gay social history from 1977, Jeffrey Weeks describes as one of the most remarkable developments of his time "the gradual merging of the gay movement and the commercial homosexual subculture into a new, more open and diverse culture."[22] There is nothing in the immediate context, however, that would clarify whether Weeks, when referring to a more "diverse culture," means a proliferation of new and different communities, an expansion of old communities to make them more inclusive, or both. Similarly, in an article about gay travel magazines, historian Lucas

[21] Escoffier, "Beefcake and Hardcore: Gay Pornography and the Sexual Revolution," 342.
[22] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 222.

Hilderbrand uses the term to describe the proliferation of homosexual "types" and venues that emerged in the gay subculture in the early Seventies as a result of social differentiation and institutional specialization.[23] In this context, "diversity" seems to stand for a proliferation of subcultures where various cultural sets exist side-by-side yet without necessarily interacting with members of other groups. It is worth noting that since this form of diversity does not necessarily facilitate social crossovers between different communities, it may fail to promote the kind of diverse social interactivity advocated by theorists of democracy like Dewey.

By focusing large parts of my analysis on gay men's personal experiences and interactions at particular cruising sites, I not only hope to avoid this form of abstraction, but also to challenge some of the idealistic assumptions concerning the benefits of cultural proliferation ("diversity") and to address some of the theoretical biases against sexual anonymity.

To study diversity and anonymity in practice and *in situ*, I use as an analytical lens and concepts developed by sociologist Erving Goffman. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Goffman draws on metaphors from the world of theater to describe how people invent their social selves vis-à-vis others. For Goffman, social life consists of a "flow of expressive events" in which people take on different masks and act out elaborative roles in order to preserve their sense of integrity and self-worth as well as to secure the respect and compliance of other participants on the social "scene."[24]

Goffman's emphasis on compensatory strategies and his pragmatic view on personal interaction makes his analytical framework particularly useful in understanding gay male identity formation. On the one hand, he acknowledges several constraints on individual behavior. Not only do people tend to perform "themselves" in a way that fits with their own self-definition and personal aspirations, but individual actors also have to be conscious of how they are defined by other social players, and the social norms and responsibilities that apply to the situation in which they find themselves. Yet despite social constraints, individuals are ultimately free in their choice of expressive strategies. In *Stigma* (1963) for instance, Goffman describes how stigmatized groups like drug users, alcoholics, disabled people and homosexuals employ conscious strategies of stigma reduction in order to "save face" and maintain a positive sense of self despite numerous adversities.[25] So even though stigmatized people are constrained

[23] Hilderbrand, "A Suitcase Full of Vaseline, or Travels in the 1970s Gay World," 387.
[24] Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 21.
[25] Goffman, *Stigma*.

by personal ideals and social expectations they nonetheless work out creative and impulsive routes of action in order to improve their situation in life.

To get the symbolic "tools" that cruising men used to present themselves into view, I supplement Goffman's interactionist approach with sociologist Ann Swidlers' concept of "cultural repertoires." In accordance with Goffman's view on creative agency, Swidler argues that culture is a resource that we actively draw on in order to act and make sense of everyday situations. "We must think of culture less as a great stream in which we are all immersed," she writes, "and more as a bag of tricks or an oddly assorted tool kit containing implements of varying shapes that fit the hand more or less well, are not always easy to use, and only sometimes do the job."[26] Furthermore, because people know more culture than they can draw on in any one instance they tend to slip between different realties, "switching the frames within which they understand experience."[27] Personal strategies are not consistent but contextual. Following Swidler, I suggest that homosexual men mobilized different and at time contradictory cultural resources, including sexual myths and stereotypes, concepts of masculinity and masculine archetypes, in order to make the most of any given situation.[28]

It is safe to say that the sexual dynamic between gay cruisers is complex: They are defined by several mutual connections which involve not just individual subjects' relation to themselves and others ("sexual objects") but also spatial and temporal conditions — as well as the material and symbolic resources that aid cruisers in their sexual pursuit. In view of Goffman's and Swidler's theories, one might say that *someone* is looking for *something* at a given *time and space* by way of the *cultural resources* at their disposal. I shall give an example: "John" is a certain kind of man who thinks of himself in terms of specific social and sexual categories, identities that he regularly performs to show others how he sees himself and what he expects from the world. Tonight, John is cruising at a gay bar which caters to a specific homosexual type, defined by particular social, racial and cultural traits. John is looking for someone (preferably his sexual ideal) for a specific kind of experience. As such, he dresses and behaves according to the situation.

"The situation," the surrounding frame, encapsulates all of these connections. It defines how the homosexual cruiser — on the basis of objective attributes and personal identities — adjusts to his environment. The cruiser's environment determines his expressive strategy and implies a set of norms which regulate his behavior towards other cruisers. Other cruisers are

[26] Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 24.
[27] Swidler, 40.
[28] Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 25.

generally categorized according to class, race and gender performance, categories which correspond to social, racial and sexual stereotypes that are part of the cruisers' cultural repertoire. Stereotypes are important because they determine how cruisers are seen and treated by others, and the cruisers' success is largely contingent on how they meet these expectations through the careful manipulation of their image. Since the sexual stereotypes of marginalized people tend to be more defined narrowly, they have fewer options for identification, which limits their room to maneuver.[29] People who experience marginalization also tend to have fewer material and symbolic resources, and this may — in addition to limiting their erotic appeal — restrict their access to the public and private institutions in which sexual attraction is negotiated.

Mainstream culture, that is to say the media and symbols that aim at a heterosexual majority, presents people with elusive standards of beauty and templates for identification. But to say that people's desires are determined by media discourse is to ignore the extent to which erotic tastes are shaped by local, situational contexts. "A macrolevel examination of collective sexual life reveals a mosaic of sexual milieus," writes Adam Isiah Green, whose concept of "sexual fields" (inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's field theory) suggests that sexual players tend to congregate according to their erotic tastes and sensibilities. In turn, these congregations give rise to site-specific "systems of stratification," hierarchies of sexual attractiveness which determine local distributions of "sexual capital."[30] Sexual capital does not, in other words, derive its value from a universal standard.[31] It is better defined as a local currency that people accrue according to the sexual field's "structure of desire," to use another of Green's terms. Desirability is, furthermore, a field effect which arises from local representations of attractiveness like "advertisements, videos playing in the venue, the bar's atmosphere, the appearance of bartenders and popular participants," etc.[32] Even though Green's theory pays special attention to how desirability and sexual opportunities are negotiated at specific localities such as bars, nightclubs and other cruising grounds, his analytic vocabulary and reflections around sexual dynamics can also be applied more generally to understand everything from personal relationships to entire populations of large cities.[33]

[29] Adam Isiah Green, for instance, talk about how black men are called on to "do race" in a way that corresponds to racial stereotypes Green, "The Social Organization of Desire," 35–36.
[30] Green, "The Sexual Fields Framework," 26–27.
[31] A definition of "erotic capital" as a global currency is presented in Hakim, "Erotic Capital."
[32] Green, "Toward a Sociology of Collective Sexual Life," 14.
[33] For instance, the anthology on sexual field theory edited by Green presents two case studies on citywide and national as well as transnational sexual networks, see: Green and Adam, "Circuits and the Social Organization of Sexual Fields"; Farrer and Dale, "Sexless in Shanghai: Gendered Mobility in a Transnational Sexual Field."

New York City, in particular the borough of Manhattan, is the primary location for this thesis, because the city's cruising scene was an especially diverse and dynamic sexual environments whose innovations had a national and sometimes global reach. The study focuses on the period of sexual liberalization that began after the Second World War and ended with the AIDS epidemic in the early Eighties. The latter event changed the conditions of cruising drastically and has already been studied quite extensively.[34] The present thesis adds to this research a pre-history that allows us to understand the constitution of the gay community when they were faced with AIDS and the new stigma that came with it.

Using the male homosexual cruising scene as my object of study, personal memoirs written by gay men and ethnographical studies that describe various sites of homosexual interaction from public parks and restrooms to gay bars and bathhouses give critical insight into cruisers' everyday constraints and possibilities. Gay guide books, magazines that were created by members of the gay community serve the same purpose. I also used a selection of gay novels for an additional view on cruising in Manhattan, one that directed my view to scenes and situations which I then tried to verify with the help of the other sources mentioned. Moreover, in order to discuss how cruisers performed and negotiated their identities in relation to the various sexual stereotypes and aesthetic ideals that were available to them, I also draw from a range of scientific publications by psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists, popular movies, as well as newspaper and magazine articles written by (mostly) outsiders to the gay scene. The historical actors this thesis focuses on include gay men of all classes, races and age cohorts. Young, white men were covered most extensively and were also the most vociferous, whereas far less material was available in regard to minority groups like black and working-class homosexuals. Attempting to correct this imbalance, I have sometimes relied on material evidence collected from other cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco, making it known to the reader when generalizations are made from those cases.

A major theme that arises from my study is the topic of gay liberation: What it meant to different people and how it affected their lives. By presenting a series of chronologically ordered and thematically distinct chapters, I aim to show that the history of gay liberation offers a particularly fruitful avenue to explore the sexual democracy's relation to concepts like diversity and sexual anonymity.

In chapter 1 I present a paradox, namely that public policing and oppression of homosexuality in the postwar era — despite its particularly detrimental impact on the sexual

[34] See for example Shilts, *And the Band Played On*; Halkitis, "Redefining Masculinity in the Age of Aids"; Fox and Fee, *Aids*.

agency of gay men from disenfranchised groups — in some ways democratized the gay world by helping to sustain community spaces and public cruising grounds that were both culturally diverse and widely accessible. I argue that because of public hostility and widespread oppression the homosexual world before gay liberation was relatively small and culturally unspecialized, and that this forced participants on the scene to rub shoulders with people who were socially and culturally different from themselves. This incentive for cultural diversity was in many ways weakened by gay liberation. Indeed, a less inclusive and more artificial form of diversity is presented in chapter 3, which explores the sexual liberation's impact on gay nightlife and the cruising scene. The emergence of gay discotheques and the proliferation of sexual institutions such as bathhouses and porn movie houses created a potential for greater diversity. But as I show, discotheques sometimes aestheticized diversity in a way that fostered exclusion and discrimination. And although bathhouses had fewer regulations in terms of membership, the anonymity of these establishments tended to obfuscate individual differences, creating environments in which diversity was literally hard to see.

In chapter 2, I explore the influence of gay stereotypes on gay men's freedom of expression, arguing that the proliferation of scientific and public discourse on homosexuality in the decades preceding gay liberation expanded gay men's cultural repertoire, thereby allowing for new and diverse, yet racially and socially specific ways to articulate a "homosexual self." However, as I show in Chapter 4, diversified knowledge about homosexuality was not always conducive to more daring expressions of individuality. Following gay liberation, there was a massive turn towards more virile presentational strategies, raising once again the specter of sexual anonymity in the gay world. In theory, the virilization of gay male aesthetics had the potential to overturn social and racial barriers. Impersonal symbols of virility — like athletic physiques, proletarian clothing and macho body language — were easy to acquire, requiring neither wealth nor education, only implicit knowledge and hard work. In some situations, superficial, generic and self-objectifying modes of self-expression allowed for greater equality in terms of sexual opportunities without jeopardizing the personal autonomy of those involved. Too often, however, sexual anonymity came across as more of a personal sacrifice than a personal right. Indeed, because a disproportionate number of black and Asian men, as well as men that were old, poor and disabled, were pressured into conformity with narrow and impersonal roles, sexual anonymity often served as a symbol of disempowerment. So even though I defend the *practical* value of sexual anonymity in some situations, I do not regard it as defensible ideal of sexual democracy where — as theorists like Ann Ferguson has suggested — principles of respect and self-determination should be equally applied to everyone.

CHAPTER 1 | SETTING THE HOMOSEXUAL SCENE, 1945–1970

In *The Homosexual and His Society* from 1963, Donald Webster Cory and John P. LeRoy present an exclusive view from within gay men's cruising scene in large American cities. Depending on their individual preference and aim, gay cruisers had a range of locations to choose from. The fast-emerging "gay bars" were the most respectable of the homosexual meeting places. Strategically located off the beaten path, these bars were shelters of gay sociability which provided clients with a rare opportunity to meet likeminded men and cruise for sexual partners away from the hostile gaze of straight society. The reclusiveness of these establishments was conducive to a form of social openness, the authors imply, as the gay bars attracted people of all classes: "actors, sculptors, interior decorators, accountants, sailors, clerks, models [and] architects" — they all found solace and solidarity at the gay bars.[35]

Another distinct set of cruising sites emerged in "open air," as homosexual thrill-seekers and men with homoerotic inclinations who didn't want to be associated with the gay community bars flocked to public restrooms, parks and streets; places with few formal strictures on participation but, as Cory and LeRoy inform, whose low reputation and strict norms of impersonality placed them off limits to cruisers who conformed to conventional standards of respectability. Even though outdoor cruising was not for everyone it still attracted a remarkably diverse mix of people. Popular cruising streets, for instance, were said to represent a "cross-section of the American population." On a regular summer evening, "literally hundreds" of black, white and Hispanic men would saunter up and down the popular cruising streets; "stopping, looking, walking on, and then stopping again," coalescing into a tensely erotic, public atmosphere.[36]

In this chapter, I investigate Cory and LeRoy's assertion that homosexual bars and public cruising grounds in the early Sixties were inclusive sites that allowed for diverse sexual participation. In considering how participatory patterns in addition to personal preferences and individual considerations were influenced by social prejudice, public policing and institutional regulations, I make two observations. My first observation is that homophobic attitudes were often imbued with social and racial biases, making gay men who lacked social and economic privilege more vulnerable to institutional discrimination and harassment in public. At the same time, even though gay prosecution in general reduced gay men's public agency, it also stimulated the growth and expansion of a homosexual underworld which, because it remained

[35] Cory and Leroy, *The Homosexual and His Society*, 111.
[36] Cory and Leroy, 133–34.

small and relatively unspecialized in terms of subcultural styles, forced participants to interact with people who were socially and culturally different from themselves. In addition to these observations, the last section considers how the cruising scene was impacted by gay liberation, arguing that gay liberationists articulated a new vision of sexual democracy that was rooted in egalitarian principles. But as I point out, ideals of inclusivity were gradually undermined by gay male desires for homosocial bonding and sexual freedom.

THE EMERGENCE OF A HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY

The first gay enclaves in New York were formed in the neighborhoods of Greenwich Village, Harlem and Times Square. The incipient gay world was weaved together by overlapping networks of men of all backgrounds. These men developed, as historian George Chauncey notes, a secret code language that allowed them to recognize each other on the street and carry out intimate conversations whose potentially incriminating meaning was only intelligible to other members of the gay world. [37] For instance, in addition to sporting red neckties, "inverts" in New York were said to be particularly fond of green. [38] Members of the sexual underworld would, moreover, generally refer to each other using female pseudonyms and the pronoun "she," an internal joke that protected the speaker's heterosexual credentials in the midst of strangers. Chauncey makes the argument that gay men the interwar period enjoyed, contrary to popular belief, a strong public presence in New York where homosexuals, prostitutes and other sexually unconventional types came together to form a relatively stable and autonomous culture. His work is also a poignant reminder of how easily cultural autonomy can be taken away, for as he writes, the homosexual underworld was shattered during the Great Depression when rising homophobia and intensified policing sent gay men back into hiding.

Around the Second World War, homosexuality resurfaced. The war represented a massive disruption of old routines as millions of young men enlisted for military service. Historians have described life in American military camps, where gay men found each other, forged friendships, fell in love, and started to openly discuss their sexual desires and who they were.[39] An army doctor at the time commented on the remarkable affinity of these men: "Within a few hours after admission to the ward," he noted, "the homosexual will have located others

[37] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 2–4.
[38] Chauncey, 52.
[39] Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 3.

of his type and becomes one of the groups." After initial contacts were made, they tended "to stay grouped together and rarely [included] heterosexuals in their activities."[40]

After the war, gay veterans reconnected in the growing metropolises of New York and San Francisco.[41] Upon his return to New York, army veteran Gore Vidal wrote *The City and The Pillar*, the story of a young man "Jim," who is coming to terms with his homosexuality. By presenting Jim's homoerotic inclination as natural and morally redeemable, Vidal became something of a national celebrity.[42] In the book, the reader is treated to a peak behind the scenes of one of high society's "fairy parties."

> Several hundred men and women were in the apartment; most of them were in evening clothes. The women were, Jim was told, Lesbians, but except for a few short-haired ones they looked perfectly normal. The men, on the other hand, were not, most of them, too difficult to identify. They were of every age; many were handsome athletic types, many were pale and pretty, many were aging and fat and bald, but they all had very much the same expression in their eyes: a glittering awareness, both bold and guarded.[43]

The quote attests to how diverse some of these parties were in terms of social and aesthetic types. Looking back at life as New York's gay society's "golden boy," Alan Helms, expands on Vidal's point:

> A Manhattan leather queen circa 1958 might well be member of the opera queen set, which included people from the gym queen set, some of whose members were writers and painters and playwrights from the arts queen set, which spilled over into the international queen set, which boasted some tearoom queens and trade queens, and so on...[44]

In addition to supporting Vidal's point concerning social variety, the quote invites further comment on the social condition of the urban gay underworld. The term "trade," for instance, referred to straight men who engaged in homoerotic activities (usually for thrills; male prostitutes were referred to as "hustlers"); "tearooms" (from the British word "tea," meaning

[40] Loeser, "The Sexual Psychopath in the Military Service," 97.
[41] Bronski, *Culture Clash*, 76.
[42] Bronski, *Pulp Friction*, 343.
[43] Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*, 141.
[44] Helms, *Young Man from the Provinces*, 97.

urine) were public bathrooms where gay men came to have sex. These terms reflect central aspects of gay life in the postwar years. Firstly, the "trade"-category indicates that homosexuality was still a somewhat fluid identity, and that participation in homoerotic activity didn't necessarily challenge the heterosexual status of men who limited their sexual performance to an "active" penetrative role. Secondly, the centrality of public restrooms as places of sexual enjoyment is a reminder of gay men's official status as sexual outlaws. To elaborate on this points, the gay world consisted of an illicit network of men, as well as a few female homosexuals, prostitutes and "fag hags" (women who preferred to socialize with gay men); people who didn't necessarily identify as "homosexual," but were nonetheless bound together by a common understanding that they were not, or didn't want to be, conventionally straight.[45]

Homosexual's outlaw status didn't prohibit homosexuality from entering into public light. The topic of "sexual inversion" had been part of medical discourse since the late nineteenth century. In 1948 Alfred Kinsey caused a sensation when his massive study on *The Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* revealed, among other things, that over 37 percent of the male population had a homosexual experience and that four percent of male adults were exclusively homosexual.[46] Even though Kinsey's study destigmatized homosexuality by locating homoeroticism on the spectrum of natural human behavior, his findings may nonetheless have contributed to intensify prejudice against homosexuals by negatively appealing to people's moral anxieties. Indeed, homophobia reached new heights in the Fifties as senator Joseph McCarthy started his vociferous campaign against "sexual psychopaths" in public office. Homosexuals — a threat to national security — were everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

White-collar officials may have been the main targets of the Fifties' "which hunt," but the most vehement verbal attacks against homosexuals were often directed against low-status people, such as male hustlers and transvestites who lived and worked on the street. This is evident in an article from 1963 in which a journalist for the New York Times spilled Manhattan's "open secret," namely that "sexual inverts" had "colonized three areas of the city." In addition to their visible presence in the Greenwich Village and the Upper East Side, a particularly "pernicious" type of homosexuals had started to congregate around Times Square: "the dregs of the invert world — the male prostitutes — the painted, grossly effeminate 'queens'

[45] Hoffman, *The Gay World*, 54.
[46] Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 651.

and those who [preyed] on them."[47]

Men from the bottom of the social echelons were — in addition to members of high society — the most visible representatives of homosexual identity, an idea that is reflected in these groups' perceived sexual openness, as well as observations that low-status groups were more inclined to socialize in public. Regarding sexual tolerance, Kinsey and his team argued that people on the lowest and highest social levels tended to be more accepting of homosexuality. Low-level people were said to accept sex as inevitable. High-level people, on the other hand, were said to be in possession of a more profound understanding of human psychology, making them less inclined to repress their sexual desires.[48] In terms of gay society, social background was thought to have a strong bearing on how gay men socialized. In a well-known Canadian study of urban homosexual "cliques" in the Fifties, Maurice Lezoff and William A. Westley found that friend groups tended to form according to class, and that the most overt groups consisted of working-class men such as hairdressers and service workers. Although elite groups were assumed to be relatively open-minded, their backgrounds provided them with the means to escape public scrutiny. Their activities were therefore more often confined to the private realm.[49]

We are left with the members of the middle class who, according to prominent researchers, lacked both the licentiousness and privilege of the other groups. The middle class' growing cultural influence in the postwar era may explain why the first gay communities emerged in the semi-public spaces of (privately owned but publicly accessible) "gay bars." Even though these institutions, as I later show, were frequented by homosexuals from all backgrounds, they were particularly popular with middle-class men who found that furnished institutions with lamps, carpets, heating and so on, lent comfort and respectability to their activities, while providing them with a rare opportunity to socially interact with other homosexual men.

THE CRUISING SCENE

Still in the Sixties the idea that homosexuals could be friends and form communities apart from the rest of society was foreign to most Americans. Homosexuality was, after all, widely seen

[47] Doty, "Growth of Overt Homosexuality In City Provokes Wide Concern," 33.
[48] Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 383.
[49] Leznoff and Westley, "The Homosexual Community," 262.

as a mental dysfunction to be treated — not something to bond over. After many a night on the prowl, Paul Monette, a young Ivy League student with literary ambitions, still thought of homosexuals as "a dispersed race of exiles," and he "couldn't even conceptualize queers being friends, because queer only meant impossible sex."[50] Gay sociability was, furthermore, sometimes seen as incompatible sexual adventure. As Samuel Delany, a young bohemian from Harlem explains, everyone knew that "gay bar society" consisted of men who were pretty much "asexual" — men who had renounced sex in favor of passionate friendship.[51] These accounts point to a cultural schism that may reflect class attitudes about sexual openness, but also different strategies to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. The public cruisers who, in these authors' interpretation, sought pleasure and solidarity through sex, and the "respectable gentlemen" who favored friendship and conversation.

Despite such claims, relationships at gay bars were not all that platonic. A classic portrait of the homosexual bar scene is offered by sociologist Evelyn Hooker whose research in Los Angeles the Sixties emphasized the homosexual bar's centrality as a social and political institution. But her research also peels off the bars' veneer of respectability: "If one watches very carefully and knows what to watch for in a 'gay' bar, one observes that some individuals are apparently communicating with each other without exchanging words, simply by exchanging glances — but," she quickly adds, "not the kind of quick glance that ordinarily passes between men."[52] Indeed, the fact that most bars were not overtly sexual does not mean that sex was secondary to their operation.

A more promising approach to understanding the bars' relation to sex and sociability is to look at who the bars catered to at what times and for what purposes. In the classic *Ethnography of Bar Behavior* from 1966, Sherri Cavan distinguished between four types of bars. These were: (1) the Convenience bar, where people just "drop by"; (2) the Nightspot, which typically offered some kind of entertainment; (3) the marketplace bar, where people came to have sex for commercial and noncommercial purposes and, lastly (4) the home territory bar, which was treated like a second home.

As Cavan's taxonomy implies, the function of a bar was often predicated on its ability to provide clients with either sexual anonymity or social community. In the context of gay culture, the home territory bar was particularly important because it represented a free zone where men could be themselves; "let down their hair," as Cory writes, "to have a slow beer as

[50] Monette, *Becoming a Man*, 178.
[51] Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water*, 174.
[52] Hooker, "Male Homosexuals and Their 'Worlds,'" 96.

they talk, joke, gossip, and gesticulate."[53] In this sense, the home territory bar stood in sharp contrast to kind of establishments that facilitated and even encouraged sexual cruising. As someone told ethnographer Nancy Achilles: "Bars were everyone knows everyone else are hard to cruise in … You want to see new faces, and you don't want you sisters coming up and slapping you on the back and saying, 'Hi Mary' [generic greeting used by homosexuals] when you're trying to make an impression."[54] The remark reflects a recurring theme in the gay literature, namely the tension between homosexuality as a social identity and a sexual orientation. It also shows how the need for anonymity was a ruling factor in determining participation at bars. The impulse towards sexual anonymity and adventure may, furthermore, have contributed to diversify individual patterns of bar-going, allowing cruisers to meet, and potentially make friendly connections with people that were socially and culturally different from themselves.

The sources I have quoted so far suggest that social patterns at gay bars were not only influenced by class, but that they were, furthermore, determined by bar-goers' moods and motivations. An additional factor that shall be considered is that of personal style. As the gay world expanded in the post war era, bars catering to specific "types" of homosexuals started to emerge. These subcultures were, however, still in their embryonic phase, making the lines that separated them vague and easy to overstep. Manhattan's bar scene in the Fifties remained dispersed but interconnected; stockbrokers and bohemians were said to each other by sight.[55] To be sure, some bars were more decorous than others. But in terms of culture, they had much in common. Most of them were full of smoke and music; dancing was illegal, and so was kissing and groping.

Some bars, however, had rooms in the back where sexual mores were loose. Alan Helms remembers the 415 Bar on Amsterdam Avenue, where

> you walked in, saw a few locals talking with the bartender, and figured you'd make a mistake. But through an unmarked door in the back and down a flight of stair, you entered a cavernous basement teeming with hundreds of gay men who were dancing and laughing and cruising and kissing and drinking and passing out in the johns.[56]

[53] Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 121.
[54] Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution," 243.
[55] Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 121–22.
[56] Helms, *Young Man from the Provinces*, 91.

These bars didn't develop by accident, but were, as Achilles points out, "the result of careful and systematic planning." There was much money to be made in gay bar keeping (for homosexuals had a reparation for immodest drinking), but the illicitness of homosexuality made it risky. As a result, most homosexual bars in New York were run by the mafia and stayed open through bribes to the police. The gay bars' most visible representative was the bartender, who served an important symbolic function by offering clients an aesthetic point of reference. Achilles observed that one swift glance at the bartender was enough to identify the typical client.[57] Clients were, furthermore, often loyal to the bartender and followed them if the bar was to relocate, which venues often did due to the high frequency of police shutdowns.[58]

The bravest of bar-owners might cater to gay and straight hustlers and transvestites. There were also black bars, which were renowned as some of the city's most diverse venues. Their diversity was largely due to the presence of "slummers,"[59] bohemians and "dinge queens" (white men interested in biracial sex), sexual tourists and adventurous types that followed black patrons wherever they went.[60] These essentially "mixed bars" were often located on marginalized areas of the city. Delany references Dirty Dick's, a mixed bar on the Christopher Street Pier frequented by people like "late-teenaged dikes," "colorful bevies of Puerto Rican drag queens," "a whole range of truck drivers" and an "odd tailored uptown businesswoman."[61]

Another bar on the West Side waterfront was scene to one of the city's most unconventional crowds. The bars they favored was sparsely set with furniture — a long bar and sawdust floor that protected against spilled bear and kept people from slipping and falling.[62] The men drawn to this bar styled themselves after Hollywood rebels like Marlon Brando and James Dean. "Gay bikers," as they sometimes called themselves, were characterized by a hypermasculine exterior, and bound together by their generally unconventional erotic tastes. Robert Wood, the author of *Christ and the Homosexual* started to see the writings on the wall in the early Fifties — literally — as advertisements for sex slaves began to appear in the public restrooms, reflecting a new trend of sadomasochism within the homosexual community.[63] The leather scene originated in the postwar era when wounded veterans and dissatisfied rejects of

[57] Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution," 238–42.
[58] Warren, *Identity and Community in the Gay World*, 27.
[59] Historian Chad Heap defines "slumming" as a cultural practice in which generally well-to-do voyeurs and pleasure seekers participate in the local cultures of marginalized communities in a way that, Heap argues, generally reinforces social and racial divides rather than breaking them down, see *Slumming,* 11.
[60] Hoffman, *The Gay World*, 71.
[61] Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water*, 148.
[62] Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, 62.
[63] Wood, *Christ and the Homosexual*, 58.

society began to meet in exclusive clubs dedicated to their transgressive passions.[64] Whereas the motorcycle symbolized their desire for personal autonomy, leather was associated with virility; the raw essence of masculinity. In those days, leathermen approached their passions with serious dedication. As one leather veteran noted, when he entered the West Coast leather scene as a young man in the early Fifties, he received six months of training to become a "master," spending more than four hours every night to prepare for the technically demanding task of caring for his sexual "slave."[65]

But even as leathermen started to make their presence felt on Manhattan's waterfront, the gay world of the Fifties and Sixties remained relatively small and integrated, creating a unique potential to bring different people and crowds together. To provide an example, Hubert Selby's fictional character "Harry," a machinist from Brooklyn, is enjoying a beer at his local pub when a stranger tells him about "Marys," the bar that becomes scene to his homosexual debut. Harry returns to Marys the following weekend and is fast becoming part of its crowd of regulars.[66] The gay men at Marys introduce Harry to "drag balls," annual or biannual events that attract large crowds from across the city. At Harry's first drag ball, hundreds of effeminate "fairies" in expensive gowns flock to the center of the dancefloor; the masculine men — the "johns" (men who paid for sex), trade and bisexuals — roam at its margins, smoke cigarettes and watch the queens with stone-cold faces.[67]

Not all participants at the drag balls immersed themselves in the activities on the dancefloor. Nevertheless, the balls still served as communal events that were founded on principles of social inclusivity. Invitations to the balls traveled by word-of-mouth and became the topic of intense conversation weeks in advance.[68] Until the late Sixties, there were hardly any media channels to keep homosexuals informed on cultural happenings. The few "homophile" newsletters in existence had a small readership and were generally limited to political content.[69] This made participation at community events exclusive (you had to hear it through the grapevine, or you would not hear it at all), but also inclusive in that invitations extended beyond the readership of specialized lifestyle magazines, phone lists and websites, media channels which, in the coming decades, would revolutionize the way gay men organized their communities.

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[64] Thompson, "Introduction," 1992, xiv.
[65] Magister, "1950s ... One Among Many: The Seduction and Training of a Leatherman," 98.
[66] Selby, *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, 190.
[67] Selby, 216.
[68] Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 129.
[69] Chasin, *Selling Out*, 68.

The expansion and cultural differentiation of the gay scene that resulted from gay liberation is, for example, illustrated by the Seventies' proliferation of gay bar guides. These guides had circulated since the Forties, but they had been unreliable and hard to come by unless you knew where to look. After gay liberation, bar guides became more widely publicized through the growing gay media, making them symptomatic of a rising awareness of different gay "lifestyles," a term which entered into common use at this time."[70] Listings could include bars for "dancing"; "restaurants"; bars with "impersonators"; "gay girls' bars," "mixed straight and gay bars," "hippie or collegiate, young crowd bars," "elegant bars," "sadomasochist or leather crowd bars," "western-type attire bars," and a few others.[71] The gay scene in the postwar era was much less specialized in comparison.

There were, to be sure, significant social barriers to participation at gay community events before gay liberation. Black homosexuals, who had organized the first drag balls in Harlem in the Twenties, continued their communal celebrations in relative isolation.[72] "Nigger jokes" were still commonplace in the Sixties and reflected a social reality that extended far beyond the problem of racial segregation. But the demographic composition of New York City was changing. Triggered by the Second World War and propelled by economic restructuring, millions of black people migrated to the urban centers in the North. Between 1940 and 1980, the black population in New York City increased from six to 25 percent.[73] The same period also saw the emergence of a black middle class whose members, in addition to mastering the cultural norms of their white counterparts, were starting to assert themselves politically.[74] These developments prompted a marked increase in racial tolerance. A survey from 1958 show that 96 percent of Northern whites were opposed to racial intermarriage. By 1980, the national number had dropped to "just" 60 percent.[75]

Encounters between men from different racial and social backgrounds were most likely to occur in public places, an observation that can be attributed to the public cruising grounds' low threshold of participation. The accessibility of tearooms and parks is reflected in a survey from 1971, in which 200 urban homosexuals were asked about their "coming out" experiences. While 19 and 26 percent said that they had first come out in the context of the "gay bars" or "gay parties and other social gatherings," just as many — 24 and 21 percent — mentioned

[70] Hilderbrand, "A Suitcase Full of Vaseline, or Travels in the 1970s Gay World," 376, 385.
[71] The examples are compiled from two different bar guides presented in Harry, "Urbanization and the Gay Life," 243; Warren, *Identity and Community in the Gay World*, 20.
[72] Gabor, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," 331.
[73] National Research Council, *A Common Destiny*, 62.
[74] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 108.
[75] National Research Council, *A Common Destiny*, 138.

public parks or tearooms.[76] These numbers say little about general cruising patterns, but they point to the importance of these places as entry points into gay life.

Public restrooms, for instance, were widespread and usually free to enter. Another advantage that tearooms held over establishments like bars was that they were inscribed with strict norms of impersonality that allowed covert homosexuals to participate with reduced fears of exposure. In his field work on tearoom cruising conducted in the late Sixties, Laud Humphrey found that the majority (54 percent) of participants were married men.[77] His notes bear witness to the tacit knowledge and intricate maneuvering involved in this form of cruising.

> If the participant stands close to the fixture, so that his front side [his penis] may not easily be seen, and gazes downward, it is assumed by the players that he is straight. […] A man who knows the rules and wishes to play, however, will stand comfortably back from the urinal, allowing his gaze to shift from side to side or to the ceiling.[78]

Having entered the correct positions, the "players" must then establish who will take the insertive and insertor role in the sexual act:

> The prospective partner will look intently at the other's organ, occasionally breaking his stare only to fix directly upon the eyes of the other. […] Through all of this, it is important to remember that showing an erection is, for the insertor, the one essential and invariable means of indicating a willingness to play.[79]

Sexual encounters at tearooms were in other words negotiated by the help of strictly conventionalized cues. As the example indicates, communication was usually limited to nonverbal signals. Furthermore, it was noted by other cruisers at public bathrooms that luck and patience were among the tearoom cruisers' most valuable assets, thus emphasizing the public restrooms democratic potential.[80]

Although the lack of institutional regulation at public restrooms made them formally inclusive, many tearooms developed a specific character according to the class, ethnicity and sexual style of those who frequented it. For instance, the subway toilet on Canal Street was

[76] Dank, "Coming Out in the Gay World," 184.
[77] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 105.
[78] Humphreys, 62.
[79] Humphreys, 64.
[80] Greco, "The Manhattan Hunting Grounds," 237.

known to be popular with working-class men and members of ethnic minorities, especially during the working week. Similarly, because the West Village was scene to the most popular S&M clubs, the public restrooms there were on the "kinky" end of the spectrum.[81]

Another feature of the West Village that was popular with the leather crowd was the piers. Musical composer Ned Rorem notes in his diary of his "[c]ompulsive hanging around Christopher Street's docks, in the dull dry dust where an elephant graveyard is formed by those protective Mack Trucks beneath which indiscriminate vermin seethes, as I observe, unsmiling like the leathery others at this my age of forty-three."[82] The trucks to which Rorem poetically refers were usually left unguarded at night, at which time they served as notorious hubs for homosexual orgies.[83] Other major cruising zones included "the Rambles" in Central Park, the ice skating rink at Rockefeller Plaza, and the streets of the Upper West Side.[84] But in all, the entire island of Manhattan was a breeding ground for furtive homosexual encounters, and information about the best cruising spaces traveled fast. When police raids started to interfere with the activities of a particular teahouse or park section, participants would hear it through the grapevine and move on to a new location.[85]

POLICING HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

When it comes to understanding the policing of homosexual behavior it is important to distinguish law from practice. In most states, consensual acts between males continued to be illegal well into the Seventies. In New York, where it was a crime until 1980, any act of penetration could land a man up to three months in jail (estimate from 1975).[86] In reality, only a minority of homosexual arrests were made on this basis. Historians have pointed out that the juridical elite in New York in the Fifties and Sixties pursued an agenda of sexual liberalization which included the ambition to decriminalize prostitution and consensual homosexual behavior in private.[87] Because it was difficult to get homosexuals convicted on the basis of sodomy, they were mostly charged with "loitering" and "solicitation," which criminalized the *intent* of engaging in homosexual acts; and "disorderly conduct" which sanctioned the disruption of

[81] Delph, *The Silent Community*, 36.
[82] Rorem, *The Later Diaries of Ned Rorem, 1961-1972*, 216.
[83] Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, 62; Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water*, 120.
[84] Star, "The Sad 'Gay' Life"; Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 106.
[85] Hoffman, *The Gay World*, 47.
[86] Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, 48.
[87] Nelson, "Criminality and Sexual Morality in New York, 1920-1980."

"public decency."[88] It was, in other words, illegal to hang out in tearooms or to approach strangers in parks. What is more, the fact that people could get arrested for disorderly conduct (acting too loud, drunk, eccentric, etc.), served as a pretense for police harassment and for the exploitation of bar owners. As a result, much of the responsibility for policing homosexual behavior was placed onto the bar owners themselves, who were at risk of losing their license if they didn't play by the rules.[89]

At bars and elsewhere, individuals were unequally affected by policing and institutional regulations. It has been noted by sociologists that people tend to be less forgiving of the transgressions of lower-status individuals.[90] Sylvia Rivera, an effeminate queen who made her living as a prostitute, remembers being chased by the *camarónes* (Spanish slang for "plainclothes police," used in reference to the large vans they drove), explaining that "if you walked down Forty-Second Street and even looked like a faggot, you were going to jail." In addition to effeminate "queens," gay leathermen were also said to be particularly vulnerable to public harassment. [91] Policing was, moreover, extra heavy-handed in the "gay ghettoes," sections of the city where the concentration of homosexual bars and cruising zones known to be especially high. These areas were also popular destinations for young vigilantes who would enter the area in groups, beating up people who looked "queer" or chasing them with their cars.[92]

Taken together, these observations speak to the importance of personal aesthetics as well as residential patterns in determining gay men's access to public space and sexual freedom. Two hours north from Manhattan's Forty-Second Street by train was Fire Island, a small strip of sand that stood between Long Island and the stormy Atlantic Ocean. Once the reputed home of pirates and smugglers, it became a haven for homosexuals from the theater world around the turn of the twentieth century. Their community, Cherry Grove, became America's first gay and lesbian colony, a place where affluent homosexuals could come to escape the heat and oppression of New York summer. As prosecution in the city became more severe during the McCarthy years, the festivities on the Island grew in size and fervor. The parties were noted for free-spirited sexual atmosphere, usually influenced by a liberal consumption of alcohol. After dark, men would flock to the "Meat Rack," a part of the dunes that was known to provide opportunities for anonymous sex. To ensure that sexual encounters on the dunes were as

[88] Bernstein, "Identities and Politics," 540.
[89] Cavan, *Liquor License*, 71.
[90] Becker, *Outsiders*, 12.
[91] Rivera, "The Drag Queen," 189; Thompson, "Introduction," 1995, xviii.
[92] Fisher, *The Gay Mystique*, 53.

impersonal as possible there were unspoken rules against talking. Use of light was also frowned upon. [93]

Contrary to Manhattan's gay scene, policing on Fire Island was rare and sporadic, an observation which points to the relative sexual agency of wealthy vacationers' vis-à-vis low-earning city-dwellers. [94] Another example of how personal privilege and social prejudice affected the sexual freedom of cruisers is drawn from observations that city bars openly discriminated against "street people." In New York, there was a formal ban on cross-dressing which prohibited men and women from wearing more than three pieces of clothing traditionally worn by the other sex.[95] Such prohibitions incentivized bar owners to limit the number of effeminate homosexuals and street people that passed through their venues.[96] As a result, drag queens and transvestites were often made to stalk the streets, placing them at constant risk of harassment and arrest.

Attempts to limit police harassment against homosexuals were made by members of the Homophile Movement, a political organization which emerged in Los Angeles and San Francisco in the early Fifties. Its presence soon spread to other American cities. In 1966, for instance, members of the Mattachine Society effectively ended New York's State Liquor Authority's ban on serving homosexuals after a carefully orchestrated "sip-in" (inspired by the Civil Rights Movement's "sit-ins"). Although some say that police entrapment at local bars continued into the late 1960s,[97] others claim that this premeditated form of arrest ended over night that same year after a public meeting attended by the mayor and famous members of the intellectual elite.[98] The examples nonetheless show that homosexual rights were very much on the agenda in the late Sixties, and that people in high places were starting to heed to homosexual demands. At the same time, it took a turn-of-events, fueled by anger, booze and chants of gay liberation to free homosexual from the abovementioned menace.

SAYING NO TO OPPRESSION

Gay liberation, which unfolded in the late Sixties, had a profound impact on the homosexual scene in New York. When gay businessman H. Gerald Schiff returned to New York in 1975

[93] Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, 13, 40, 184.
[94] Newton, 190–95.
[95] Boggan, *The Rights of Gay People*, 148.
[96] Rivera, "The Drag Queen," 190.
[97] Duberman, *Stonewall*, 114–16.
[98] Burke, "The New Homosexuality."

after five years abroad, he was amazed by what he saw. "I came back to an entirely different city," he said. "It was very much more openly gay, more willing to seek out gay professional people, gay clients, gay customers, more conducive to 'coming out'."[99] A standard part of gay vernaculars in the seventies, to "come out" was to show the world that you were gay and proud. The expression therefore carried a different meaning than in the past, when it had been used by homosexual men and women to mark the entry into gay society.[100] Before gay liberation there was no "coming out" in today's sense of the term. Homosexuals were terrified of finding their names in the newspapers because to be openly identified as gay would, as historian Judy Grahn's writes, "have meant complete social shutdown, ostracism, persecution, expulsion from school with subsequent treatment as a criminal or mentally ill person—a pit of horror with no bottom."[101] This shift in meaning reflects a fundamental change in how gay men and women had come to perceive their role in society. To say it in today's jargon, whereas the homosexuals before liberations worked to expand the "closet" the gay liberationists were bent on tearing it down.

The sexual revolution was a culmination of numerous events. Since the Fifties, the corrosion of censorship laws and the proliferation of "naughty" media (like *Playboy* and Beat poetry) had already started to show that the postwar consensus was under strain. Alongside the contraceptive pill, which hit the market in 1960 and was in wide use by 1965, words of dissent against sexual inhibition and heteronormativity were starting to spread.[102] In the Sixties, demands of women's liberation converged with racial protests and cries to end the war in Vietnam. As sociologist Manuel Castells explains, by the end of the decade the streets of America cities had exploded.[103]

In late arrival, the homosexual vanguard threw its first Molotov cocktail during an ad-hoc event in the late morning of June 28, 1969, after the police had raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. Sylvia Rivera, who was reported to have thrown the first Molotov when she was, quote "spaced out on black beauties and Scotch," describes Stonewall as a white hustler's bar, "a very campy little bar owned by the Mafia — the type of gay bar that was typical of that era. You just went there to party and get high and pop pills and do drugs and drink watered-down drinks." When the police came, the atmosphere changed. "Besides being into drugs, everybody was into politics and into changing the system […] We were sick and tired of

[99] Cited in Lichtenstein, "Homosexuals in New York Find New Pride," 39.
[100] Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 6.
[101] Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue*, 77.
[102] Dixon, "Hallelujah the Pill?," 152.
[103] Castells, *The City and the Grassroots*, 49.

being put down, and things just started happening…"[104] After the police had made some procedural arrests, the streets outside turned wild with rage. Protests lasted through the night. When Allen Ginsberg arrived at Sheridan Square the following day, he marveled at their continuous cries of "Gay Power!" Walking home that night the poet remarked to his friend that the men at Stonewall had "lost that wounded look that fags all had 10 years ago."[105]

The protests on Sheridan Square were consonant with a broader vision to take back the streets from the police, which young radicals had come to view as an enemy of the people. Throughout the Sixties, in addition to regular policing, the mayors of New York launched sporadic campaigns to remove "promenading perverts" and "undesirables" and from their hangouts in Times Square and Washington Square Park.[106] Although these interventions did little to stamp out the illicit sexual market, they signaled that access to public space was a privilege and not a right. It was not just the homosexuals who felt the effects of policing. Abbie Hoffman, leader of the Yippie movement, claimed he got "busted" five times for simply being on the street.[107] "We are liberating the city," Jerry Rubin, another figurehead of the movement declared, "turning the streets into our living rooms." Indeed, Rubin's very definition of "power" was the "ability to stand on a street corner and do nothing."[108] The extent to which the New Left's claim to public space was conducive to new forms of public cruising remained to be seen, but they were undoubtedly an encouraging sign in their time.

Although police harassment didn't end with Stonewall, the mood had changed — and so had the gay movement's political organization and strategy as radical activists started to coordinate against police injustice through new media channels. A reporter for *Come Out!*, the mouthpiece of the newly founded Gay Liberation Front [GLF], complained to their around 6,000 readers about the arrest of three hundred people in a single week in August due to new clean-ups in the Times Square area.[109] Another reporter informed that several hundred gay radicals (men and women) had converged on the Charles Street precinct house on March 8, 1970 after a young homosexual was impaled on a fence after jumping out of a window during a police raid.[110]

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[104] Rivera, "In Their Own Words: Sylvia (Rey) Rivera," 66–67.
[105] Truscott, "Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square," 18.
[106] Knowles, "Cleanup Mapped for Times Square"; Pace, "New Police Drive Waged in 'Village' And Times Sq. Area."
[107] Hoffman, *The Autobiography of Abbie Hoffman*, 95.
[108] Rubin, *DO IT!*, 232.
[109] Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 125; Shelley, "The Boys in the Band-One More Time."
[110] Warshawsky, "Gays Protest Police Raid on Bar After Young Man Is Impaled on Fence."

The incident is a good example of how homosexuals were "caught in the crunch" between shady bar owners and the police. The raided bar, The Snake Pit, had been operating illegally after hours, but the restoration of justice came at the cost of 167 homosexual arrests.[111] In addition to police raids, radicals complained about steep prices, crowded locales and watered-down drinks, as well as the omnipresence of the mafia guardsmen who approached them with an ultimatum if their glasses were empty.[112] A few liberationists wanted to abandon the bar scene altogether, claiming that homosexuals had been conditioned by "straight society" — as it came to be called — to believe that this form of impersonal and oppressive environment was the only way for homosexuals to meet in public.[113] They were also dismayed by how gay men related to each other on the cruising grounds. "We must begin to make demands on each male GLF member," activist Steve Dansky suggested in an issue of *Come Out!*, "GLF must demand the complete negation of the use of gay bars, tea rooms, trucks, baths, streets, and other traditional cruising institutions. These are exploitative institutions designed to keep gay men in the roles given to them by a male heterosexual system."[114] Although few liberationists were on board with Dansky's radical vision,[115] there was a broad commitment to create new and friendly spaces where men could meet come to "rap," dance, and talk about the revolution.

After a long and public search, liberationists found the "Alternate U." The new community center located on Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue was to serve as the social and political hub for the "gay revolution." To cover the rent, liberationists organized community dances.[116] The first dance on August 16, 1969 catered to homosexuals of all genders. It had such a great turnout that the organizers made it a regular event. The event planners were clear in their intent to facilitate the kind of social bonding that would serve as an antidote to the promiscuity of the cruising scene. Unlike the traditional bars, which were as dim as the secrets of those who frequented them, the dances at Alternate U would be brightly lit so people could see each other's faces. Non-dancers could retreat to lounges which allowed for conversation. However, the liberationists were not prudish; there would also be strobe lights, occasional go-go boys, and acid-rock on the loudspeakers.[117]

Their style of dancing — which was often in groups — created a new form of togetherness that would define the gay sexual scene for decades to come. Homosexuals had danced in

[111] "Homosexuals Hold Protest in 'Village' After Raid Nets 167."
[112] Wakeham, "Lesbian Oppression."
[113] H., "There Is a Place for Us."
[114] Dansky, "Hey Man."
[115] See for example Diaman, "The Search for the Total Man"; Sondheim, "A Parade in Town."
[116] Hart, "Community Center."
[117] Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 58.

backroom bars throughout the postwar era, but not without a certain restraint. In New York there were laws against "intrasexual" dancing, as well as prohibitions on dancing in locales with an unequal balance of men and women, the minimum ratio being 1:3.[118] But in the late Sixties, gay nightlife was starting to change as various state courts began to repeal laws against public intimacy, deciding that same-sex dancing and physical intimacy were not necessarily "disorderly" as long as people refrained from touching each other's "primary sex organs."[119] To gay liberationists dancing was increasingly viewed as a political right, as witnessed by demonstrations against the ban on same-sex dancing at university dances and activists' use of "guerilla dancing" as a political strategy.[120]

Gay dances soon spread to the broader segments of the community, as less street-based organizations like the Gay Activist Alliance opened the doors to their soon famous SoHo Firehouse in the spring of 1971. GAA dances became so popular that historians have referred to them as the progenitors of the large discotheques of the late Seventies. [121] In opposition to the GLF events, which were open to everyone, the organizers of the GAA would sometimes require partygoers to proclaim their homosexual orientation upon entry, signaling a turn towards gay separatism.[122]

Indeed, gay male chauvinism became a rising concern at the dances as the Seventies wore on — and, one could add — as the revolution wore off. In December of 1970, members of the Radicalesbians, a group of lesbian separatists would go on the organize their own women's dances, reported feeling lost at the GLF dances "in a sea of spaced-out men." Their description of the events suggests that the overwhelmingly male organizers had completely failed in their attempt to foster a social and inclusive environment:

> The oppressive ambience of a simulated gay men's bar… an overcrowded, dimly lit room, where packed together subway rush hour style, most human contact was limited to groping and dryfucking. Earlier attempts by both men and women at encouraging group dancing and space for conversation were nullified by the 'pack 'm in' attitude of the GLF men running the dances.[123]

[118] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 31.
[119] Burke, "The New Homosexuality."
[120] Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 216.
[121] Clendinen, *Out for Good*, 76.
[122] Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 144.
[123] Radicalesbians, "Radicalesbians."

I cannot reconcile the Radicalesbian's description of the events with the sources I quoted earlier. If anything, their remark points to how different the experience of these dances could be if seen through the eyes of an outsider. Other women in attendance said that they enjoyed the dances — Kathy Braun, for instance, made an almost panegyric review of the event of February 6, 1970, congratulating the organizers for, among other things, their decision to restrict the light show to one section of the floor instead of imposing it on everyone.[124] It is ironic that the Radicalesbians cynicism resonates with the criticism members of the GLF leveled at the GAA: "It was a sexist dance," said Jim Clifford, who also complained about the darkened dance floor, old music and capitalist orientation of the GAA organizers.[125] The fact that members of the Radicalesbians waited until the December issue of *Come Out!* to publicly launch their complaint suggests that there may have been a period at the GLF dances where gays and lesbians could mingle on the dance floor in relative solidarity. Racial diversity, on the other hand, was never on the menu as both the GLF and particularly the GAA dances were overwhelmingly white.[126] And as we shall see in later chapters, homosexual activists would continue to enforce the idea that a typical homosexual was white, male and middle class.

Despite the prevalence of social and racial prejudice in the homosexual community and in society more widely, the smallness of the gay world in the Forties, Fifties and Sixties, and the relative absence of media to coordinate people's behavior, meant that homosexual men could still meet at bars and public cruising locations that were, in view to the heteronormative standards of the day, but also in comparison with the situation in subsequent periods, socially inclusive and remarkably diverse.

The growing specialization of the bar scene that followed gay liberation may have contributed to greater overall diversity, allowing gay men to choose from a growing array of stylized venues. However, as soon as participation on the mainstream scene became an option, members of the gay community had fewer incentives to mingle across social and cultural spheres. The growing cultural differentiation following gay liberation has been exemplified by the Seventies' proliferation of gay bar guides. Listings here could include bars with

[124] Braun, "The Dance."
[125] Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 263.
[126] Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 64.

"impersonators"; "gay girls' bars," "mixed straight and gay bars," "hippie or collegiate, young crowd bars," "elegant bars," "sadomasochist or leather crowd bars" and "western-type attire bars." Gay liberation didn't invent these styles, but it did transform the homosexual community into an open marketplace where subcultural styles could be advertised, and gay identities transformed. The next chapter comments on the early development of some of these styles and explores how gay men negotiated their sexual identities at a time when knowledge about homosexuality was monopolized by scientific experts and the media.

CHAPTER 2 | GOD SAVE THE QUEEN: GAY STEREOTYPES AND IDENTITY FORMATION, 1945–1970

The David Kopay story: An Extraordinary Self-revelation from 1977 is a candid portrait of the footballer who in the mid-Seventies became the first professional athlete in American team sport to publicly come out as gay. In his memoirs, Kopay reflects on how he came to terms with his sexual identity, and how his identification as a gay man inspired his aesthetics. As a Midwestern high school student in the early Sixties who aspired to a career in professional football, Kopay knew that he was nothing like the "nelly fags" one occasionally heard about in the media. Feeling alienated by the effeminate stereotype, Kopay didn't acknowledge his homosexuality before his mid-twenties. To initiate his homosexual metamorphosis he headed for Acapulco, where he invested in an entirely new wardrobe at a fancy men's boutique: flared pants, sandals and the first bright-colored shirts he had ever dared to put on.[127]

This chapter is about the various types of men who participated in the homosexual scene before and during gay liberation. In particular, I am interested in these men's constraints and possibilities in terms of self-presentation. To consider how gay men presented themselves to each other, I first investigate the homosexual stereotypes that guided gay men's pursuit of identity and sexual fulfillment. Even though homosexual stereotypes were often coined by medical experts and disseminated in the popular media, I argue that public discourse on homosexuality in the postwar era was diverse and expansive. In the second part, I consider how gay men before and during gay liberation related to the plethora of (mis)information that surrounded them. I argue that contradictory social and sexual expectations with effeminate stereotypes and community standards one the one hand, and communal ideals of youth and masculinity on the other, were conducive to aesthetic experimentation, producing, in turn, a range of homosexual types.

"GENDER DEVIANCY," "SECRECY" AND "ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT"

It has been by media scholars that many homosexuals before Stonewall relied on the mainstream media for understanding their sexual identities.[128] The media landscape was, however, replete with towering misconstructions about homosexual nature. Most books on

[127] Kopay and Young, *The David Kopay Story*, x, 114, 150.
[128] Gross, "Out of the Mainstream."

homosexuality were a bunch of "literary fodder," author Alfred Gross commented in 1962, complaining that publications tended to vacillate between "the heights of human beatitude and the depths of human depravity."[129] Pointing to a similar form of sensationalism, film historian Vito Russo called the history of portrayals of lesbian and gay men in mainstream cinema "politically indefensible and aesthetically revolting," thus confirming to the cliché that homosexual men were gravely mischaracterized by the media.[130]

To exemplify the media's rhetoric, the first TV documentary on the topic which aired on CBS in 1967, referred to homosexuality as a "mental illness." It had, the documentary stated, "reached epidemiological proportions."[131] The idea that homosexuals were mentally ill had been voiced by medical professionals since the nineteenth century. These putative experts of the mind discarded the religious concept of "sin," while introducing new words like "perversion" and "pathology."[132] In the United States, scientists were at the height of their power in the postwar era. Looking back at the pre-Stonewall years, historian and gay rights activist Martin Duberman characterized the psychiatric profession as a "cultural police, the prime arbiter of health, morality, and truth, its views everywhere parroted."[133] Throughout the postwar era, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists who specialized in "sexual pathologies" were regularly consulted by journalists who often presented their "expert" opinions as facts.

Although many homosexuals were misguided by misinformation produced by the mainstream media and medical professionals, others complained about the absence of guidelines, saying that there was not enough information. "In the early 1960s a young [homosexual] male had in a sense to invent himself," talk show host David Brudnoy writes in his memoirs, "to draw boundaries and create behavioral patterns not out of a long and well-regarded tradition but out of the vary act of coming to terms with his situation."[134] But not knowing who you were implied freedoms as well as constraints. Even though popular stereotypes tended towards negative representations of homosexuality, knowledge about such stereotypes also allowed homosexuals to escape their individual isolation and to become part of what historians have called an "imagined community."[135] Social identities and stereotypes were, in other words, not just oppressive categories, but also cultural resources which gay men actively used to make sense of themselves and their relationship to other people. And just as

[129] Gross, *Strangers in Our Midst Problems of the Homosexual in American Society*, 140.
[130] Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 325.
[131] Alwood, *Straight News*, 6.
[132] This shift has been explored by Jeffrey Weeks in a chapter entitled "From Sin to Crime" in *Coming out*, 11-22.
[133] Duberman, "We Are Born," 2.
[134] Brudnoy, *Life Is Not a Rehearsal*, 83.
[135] Nealon, *Foundlings*, 7.

different information was available to different people — and to different extents, gay men related to the homosexual stereotypes that surrounded them in different ways, yielding, as we shall see, different styles of expression.

When it comes to stereotypes, gay men have been categorized on the basis of different criteria. The following list of classification that were current before and during gay liberation is long and diverse. In a more recent study of homosexuality in classical Hollywood cinema, for instance, media historian Richard Dyer focuses on three recurring types which are *aesthetical*: the "queen," the "macho," and the "sad young man" (who responded to his sexual isolation and masculine conflict by aestheticizing his own suffering).[136] On a similar basis, in 1969, physician and best-selling author and physician David Reuben distinguished between homosexuals who were "queens," "butch" and "normal looking."[137] Another criterion may be called "*moral*." As the author of an essay about homosexual stereotypes from 1972 concluded, stereotypes tended to revolve around three types: the "promiscuous-belligerent" stereotype (the aggressive sex addict), the "loner-sneak" stereotype (the solitary pervert) and the "gifted-liberated" stereotype (of which the progressive gay liberationist would be a prime example).[138] A third distinction could be provided on the basis of *functional* criteria. An example is drawn from author Donald Webster Cory who, in reference to popular discourse, described the "effeminate," the "alcoholic" and the "depressed/suicidal" types.[139] Men who have sex with men could also be categorized in terms of their *sexual roles*, as exemplified by ethnographer Laud Humphreys who distinguished between "trade," "ambisexuals," "gays," "closet queens" and "hustlers."[140] An additional criterion is that of *etiology*. In a study from 1945, for instance, a psychiatrist suggested that homosexuals could be divided into four subgroups according to the origin of their condition: Endocrine homosexuals (with a glandular dysfunction), psychological (environmentally determined), regressive (they "regressed" into homosexuality due to feelings of inadequacy) and facultative homosexuals (which were homosexual depending upon circumstances; "bisexuals").[141] The list of criteria is overlapping and incomplete, but it points to some modes by which homosexuals can be, and indeed were, distinguished from each other.

[136] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 29.
[137] Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex, but Were Afraid to Ask*, 169–71.
[138] McCaffrey and McCaffrey, "Homosexuality: The Stereotype, the Real," 139–42.
[139] Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 92–99.
[140] Humphreys, "New Styles in Homosexual Manliness," 41–42.
[141] Loeser, "The Sexual Psychopath in the Military Service," 98.

Scientists in particular have quarreled over the most basic definitions of homosexuality, applying different perspectives drawn from various scientific disciplines such as medicine, psychology and, later on, sociology. Psychoanalysts, for instance, sometimes thought that there existed a plurality of "homosexualities" with different psychological roots. Most notably, Sándor Ferenczi popularized this idea in 1916, stating that effeminate and masculine homosexuals suffered from etiologically distinct mental conditions. In a nutshell, whereas the "passive homo-erotic" (the effeminate "invert") suffered from the desire to be a woman loved by men, the masculine "object-homosexuals" were afraid of women and therefore turned to other men for sexual satisfaction.[142] Evaluating the same phenomenon but using different criteria, medica experts in the interwar era and military psychologists (whose research proliferated during World War II), frequently pointed to a biological kinship between homosexual men and women. "The homosexual male is characterized by a feminine carrying angle of the arm," a study from 1934 found, pointing to his "long legs, narrow hips, large muscles [and the list went on and on]".[143] "Delicacy of speech and movement, high-pitched voices, aesthetic interests, feminine body configuration and 'white-collar' occupations were particularly noticeable" another study concluded in 1945, throwing some observations on social and cultural traits into the mix.[144]

Even though the scientists I just quoted acknowledged that homosexual men differed markedly from each other in terms of gender expression, they also tended to see gender expression as an effect of sexual object choice. Scientist' emphasis on *sexual orientation* — as opposed to *gender identification* — often caused them to see all forms of effeminate behavior as an expression of homoerotic desire. As a result, they generally rejected the possibility that some men and women genuinely identified with the opposite gender regardless of sexual preference.

In the postwar era, however, effeminate homosexual men were increasingly differentiated in the scientific discourse from what is nowadays called transgender women, creating new options for identification while redefining communal boundaries (see chapter 3). Three editions of *The Abnormal Person*, a psychological textbook on "mental abnormalities" by Robert Winthrop White, testify to the gradual emergence of a "transsexual identity" in the postwar era, a concept which, moreover, added nuance to public understandings of homosexual identity by disentangling the concept of sexual orientation ("who you liked") from gender

[142] Ferenczi, *Sex in Psycho-Analysis*, 298–213.
[143] Henry and Galbraith, "Constitutional Factors in Homosexuality," 1265.
[144] Greenspan and Campbell, "The Homosexual as a Personality Type," 684.

identity ("who you were"). White's third edition from 1964, for instance, does not even mention the concept of transsexuality. It only distinguishes between "gender-appropriate" and "gender-deviate" homosexuals. That is, homosexuals who did and didn't conform to gendered norms. In the fourth edition from 1973, White introduces a clear distinction between "homosexuals," and "transsexuals" who were "miscast and brought up in the wrong role." The fifth edition from 1981 shows a remarkable improvement in scope and sophistication. The word "gender identity," which previous editions referred to only in passing, was now treated under a separate heading. "Gender identity is the private or subjective experience of one's sex role," the authors explained with expert precision, "sex role is the public expression of gender identity."[145] What the quote indicates is that gender performance was increasingly viewed as a matter of personal preference that was, by the end of the late Seventies, no longer determined by sexual orientation.

The postwar era also saw the emergence of a sociological and anthropological literature on homosexuality which by emphasizing aspects of homosexual identity and socialization effectively undermined the scientific monopoly of medical professionals.[146] By the late Forties, comparisons of homosexuality with women were already becoming less common, signaling that theories that male homosexuals were anatomically female were losing sway. Most notably, Alfred Kinsey discarded this myth in 1948.[147] Another study from 1952 also disregarded biological criteria, emphasizing instead the gay men's behavioral pattern (which they still concluded was "generally 'feminine'").[148] Whereas these authors still defined homosexuality as a psychological phenomenon, social scientists in the Sixties started to see gay identity as a product of social conditioning. The position that homosexuality was a social condition was famously articulated by Mary McIntosh in an essay from 1968 entitled "The Homosexual Role." By arguing that the homosexual role was determined by historical developments that were unique to Western societies, and by pointing to the role's function as a "self-fulfilling prophecy," McIntosh's theory not only excluded homosexuality from the domain of medical expertise, but it also reminded gay men of their personal agency in determining their own gender expression.

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[145] White, *The Abnormal Personality*; White and Watt, *The Abnormal Personality*, 1973, 280; White and Watt, *The Abnormal Personality*, 1981, 430.

[146] The historical development of a social literature on homosexuality is presented in the essay "Studying Sexual Subcultures" by Gayle Rubin in *Deviations*, 310-346. To be sure, social and cultural aspects of "sexual inverts" were often mentioned in the traditional scientific discourse but usually as symptoms of an underlying medical or psychological condition, see for example Havelock Ellis's commentary on gay men's cultural preferences in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II,* originally published in 1900; and Magnus Hirschfeld's account of homosexual balls in *Berlin's Third Sex* from 1904.

[147] Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 616.

[148] Gough, "Identifying Psychological Femininity," 436.

Many homosexuals had, to be sure, already started to resist the predominantly effeminate social scripts. The *hypermasculine stereotype,* whose standard incarnation was the gay biker, was regularly invoked in the Sixties' social literature on gay men.[149] Around the same time, the biker stereotype drifted into the popular imagination as well. In particular, in 1964 a sensational article appeared in *LIFE magazine*, giving millions of Americans an exclusive view of what the author "antifeminine side of homosexuality." The article presented a double-spread image from "the Tool Box," a gay leather bar in San Francisco. The image represented a massive mural of muscular men in leather. To ward off unmanly homosexuals, the owners of the bar had tangles of tennis shoes, a symbol of homosexual effeminacy, dangling from the ceiling next to a sign saying: "Down with the sneakers!"[150]

A less extreme but still more recurring stereotype was the "closet queen." This masculine stereotype was neither eccentric nor butch — if anything, he was seen as exaggeratedly ordinary. As a journalist for *Time Magazine* declared in 1969, "90 % of the nations' committed inverts are hidden from all but their friends, lovers, and occasionally, psychiatrists." "The secret lifers," as they were called, "prefer subdued clothes and close-cropped hair, and these days may dress more conservatively than flamboyant straights."[151] Similar observations were made by social scientists and gay activists who invoked the notion of the conventional "closet queen" in order to combat effeminate stereotypes. [152] But suggestions that homosexual men operated incognito could also smack of homophobia. They were sometimes made on the basis of personal observation and conjecture in order to warn against a hidden danger.[153] Such observations were, to be sure, not drawn out of thin air. Prominent scientists like Kinsey had, after all, estimated that there were millions of homosexuals in America. [154] In all, by presenting homosexuality as a largely covert phenomenon, scientists, gay activists and their adversaries tacitly assented to the idea that homosexuals could not be defined by exterior traits.

Even as more and more Americans in the Sixties rejected the notion that homosexual men dressed and behaved effeminately, [155] psychoanalytical discourse on homosexuality continued to present gay men as psychologically immature, a stereotype which effectively

[149] Cory and Leroy, *The Homosexual and His Society*, 108–9; Hooker, "Male Homosexuals and Their 'Worlds,'" 102.
[150] Welch, "Homosexuality in America," 66–68.
[151] "The Homosexual, Newly Visible, Newly Understood," 62.
[152] Gross, *Strangers in Our Midst Problems of the Homosexual in American Society*, 40.
[153] See for example: Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex, but Were Afraid to Ask*, 169.
[154] Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 651.
[155] This observation is reflected in J. L. Simmons' investigation of popular attitudes from 1965, where only 29 out of 134 respondents likened homosexuality to effeminacy, see "Public Stereotypes of Deviants."

reinforced some homosexual men's sense of emasculation. In an influential study from 1962, for instance, Irving Bieber commented on the "immaturity" of his (mostly schizophrenic) homosexual patients, saying that many of them had been "babied" by their exceedingly protective and intimate mothers.[156] The theory that homosexuals suffered from arrested development was also internalized by many gay men: "In the difficulty of growing up," Paul Goodman noted on of his own sexual condition in a best-selling book entitled *Growing Up Absurd*, "the young [homosexual] man psychologically regresses to an earlier stage because it is easier." People turned gay, Goodman reflected, because they had failed to "take on the responsibilities of heterosexual love and masculine conflict."[157] The fact that members of the gay community regularly referred to each other as "boys" may, furthermore, give the impression that many homosexuals besides Goodman thought of themselves as somewhat childlike, and hence, less manly.

In addition to being associated with deviant gender expressions, secrecy and immaturity, the stereotypical homosexual was generally imagined to be racially white (and usually Anglo-Saxon at that). Then as now, the notion that homosexual identities could be imbued with particular racial experiences was often left unexamined by white authors and activists. The whiteness of homosexual identity went without saying.[158] Even though sociologists at the time remarked on the prevalence of overt homosexuality in black communities,[159] and others emphasized black people's relative tolerance of homosexuality,[160] black homosexuals were often erased from popular narratives on the topic. Gay and mainstream media channels' lack of black representation was mainly an effect of black people's social and economic marginalization. Gay physique magazines, the biggest purveyors of gay media content in the postwar era, can serve as illustration. These semi-erotic magazines, which were dedicated to topics like bodybuilding and masculine beauty, were often run by white and often wealthy homosexual entrepreneurs. Their target audience were, furthermore, largely middle-class men, who were often white, and whose aesthetic and sexual tastes were reflected in the magazines' content and racial representation.[161]

Just as gay community organizers have been accused in hindsight of de-emphasizing racial diversity in order to maintain the illusion of homosexual unity, sexual diversity was also

[156] Bieber, *Homosexuality*, 47–48.
[157] Goodman, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, 128.
[158] This point was recently made by gay historian Allan Bérubé in "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays," 184.
[159] Hannerz, *Soulside; Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community*, 119.
[160] Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water*, 222.
[161] Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 39.

ignored by members of the black community, who sometimes saw homosexuality as a "white thing."[162] Eldridge Cleaver, a leading member of the Black Panther Party, infamously stated that black gay author James Baldwin was a homosexual because he hated his own blackness and was obsessed with white masculinity.[163] What is more, the association of homosexuality with whiteness is likely to have made it harder for black men to identify with homosexual stereotypes and to participate in white homosexuals' communal activities. This observation draws on an essay from 1992, in which John L. Peterson distinguishes between "black gay men" — that is, homosexual who put "black first" — and "gay black men" who identify more strongly with the mainstream gay community.[164] One should be careful about applying these identitarian concepts, which were products of the identity politics of the Seventies and Eighties, to black homosexuals in the Fifties. Peterson's categories are nonetheless helpful in thinking about the kind of boundaries that separated black and homosexual communities in the postwar era, as well as the particular conditions that black homosexuals, as well as other ethnic minorities, faced when making sense of their identities.

ALL ABOUT MARY?

The stereotypical member of the gay community was not just white, but also slightly effeminate. However, in the following section which considers how homosexual men responded to their stigmatization, I argue that homosexual men's alleged inclination to display traits marked as effeminate didn't preclude aesthetic heterogeneity. My argument is based on the observation that there exist different ways of performing effeminacy. (I will come back to this in a moment). Another key insight is that gay effeminacy is aesthetically original and hence, different from heterosexual femininity. With regards to its originality, historians have argued that homosexual effeminacy has been part of an "independent cultural tradition handed along from faggot to faggot."[165] But even if one acknowledges that effeminate homosexuals were at least partially inspired by feminine ideals, femininity was not confined to one narrow aesthetic. As homosexual transvestite Sylvia Rivera explained, she always tried to dress like a "white woman," suggesting that various forms of femininity were available for emulation.[166] In

[162] Carbado, "Black Rights, Gay Rights, Civil Rights: The Depoloyment of Race/Sexual Orientation Analogies in the Debates about the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Policy'," 284.
[163] Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 102.
[164] Peterson, "Black Men and Their Same: Sex Desires and Behaviors," 153.
[165] Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue*, 225.
[166] Rivera, "The Drag Queen," 191.

addition to being influenced by race and class habitus, feminine identity was, just like homosexuality, in constant flux.[167]

Acknowledging femininity's influence on homosexual effeminacy, but without reducing gay male aesthetics to a mirror-image of the conventional gender norms, C.A. Tripp presents useful theoretical perspectives in a book from 1975 entitled *The Homosexual Matrix*. Tripp's typology of homosexual effeminacy contains four basic types. He first describes the "nelly queen," which had all the ease and elegance of a "natural woman." The pure representation of feminine grace, "she" lacked the masculine intensity of the next type, the "swish queen," whose name was derived from the sound one heard when she swung her hand through the air. The "shish queen" was very effeminate. The "blasé queen," Tripp's third type, was characterized by her studied indifference, combined with a quiet elegance which could come off as arrogance.[168]

Lastly there was "camp," an aesthetic sensibility that combined homosexual jargon, satirical wit and a bawdy sense of humor. In addition to characterizing the *modus operandi* of many members of the homosexual community in the postwar era, camp's most iconic representative was the drag queen. Drag shows often included singing and dancing. It therefore allowed performers to showcase their talents. By and large, however, the drag shows were characterized by risqué jokes and outrageous fashion. For one of his performances drag queen Kenneth Marlowe wore a jeweled white leotard covered in a pompous white coat with cape sleeves made from one hundred and sixty-eight yards of white netting.[169] Marlow's excessive costuming exemplifies the playfulness and theatricality of camp. As we shall see, its undeferential treatment of moral conventions and its ability to turn tragedy into comedy made camp a powerful survival strategy for gay men before Stonewall.

Although camp, and effeminacy more generally, was common in middle-class bars, people were often discouraged from taking it "too far." For instance, a bartender once commented on the presence of an effeminate individual who arrived at his bar in a lady's hat and rouged cheeks. "No self-respecting homosexual would have anything to do with him," the bartender said, adding that overtly effeminate homosexuals were often "barred from everything."[170] Hostile reactions against homosexual effeminacy were, furthermore, often tinged with class prejudice (see chapter 1). In an ethnographical study of mostly Midwestern

[167] Unfortunately, because of spatial contraints I have been unable to properly address the historical nuances that may have distinguished epochal styles of gay effeminacy from each other.
[168] Tripp, *The Homosexual Matrix*, 177–85.
[169] Marlowe, *Mr. Madam; Confessions of a Male Madam*, 164.
[170] Stearn, *The Sixth Man*, 41.

drag queens conducted in the late Sixties, Ester Newton refers to what homosexuals at the time called "street fairies." These were, Newton explains, "jobless young homosexual men" who, because they "publicly epitomize[d] the homosexual stereotype," were at the bottom of gay men's social hierarchy.[171] The implied tendency of some working-class homosexuals to "play up" the gay aesthetic rather than tone it down is reflected in many accounts. Apparently, working-class homosexuals tended to identify more strongly with their sexual identity — as opposed to their class backgrounds.[172] As a further explanation, it has also been suggested that people with less formal education tended to rely more heavily on stereotypes, causing them to overelaborate their gender expression.[173]

Some homosexual group's strategic reliance on stereotypical forms of self-presentation might have allowed for greater social cohesiveness in their inner circles, but effeminate men were, to be sure, at a sexual disadvantage in the larger gay world. The idealization of masculinity is arguably one of the most striking features of gay history in America: From masculine "trade" and bodybuilders in the first half of the twentieth century to "hustlers" in the Sixties and "gay clones" in the Seventies — the idealization of masculine beauty has been the norm.[174] In his study from 1962, for instance, Bieber tried to qualify homosexual men's stereotypical attraction to masculinity, stating that both effeminate and masculine homosexuals were pervasively (69 %) attracted to men with "predominantly masculine qualities."[175] These numbers should be taken with a grain of salt. However, Bieber's conclusion that homosexual men were overwhelmingly attracted to masculine men is supported by other members of his profession, as well as many gay authors and activists.[176]

We arrive at a paradox, for although it is said that most homosexuals favored masculine men, many members of the gay world continued to model themselves after effeminate stereotypes. Much has been written about effeminate homosexuals before the "sexual revolution," but the function of effeminacy is rarely explained in the historiographical literature. To better understand this phenomenon, I shall present some personal, social and political incentives to behaving and dressing effeminately.

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[171] Newton, *Mother Camp*, 8.
[172] Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, 326.
[173] Simmons, "Public Stereotypes of Deviants," 230.
[174] For explanations on the idealization of trade and bodybuilders, see Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 358; Benzie, "Judy Garland at the Gym, Gay Magazines and Gay Bodybuilding," 161. For idealization of hustlers see Rechy, *The Sexual Outlaw*, 153. For idealization of gay clones, see Chapter 4.
[175] Bieber, *Homosexuality*, 236.
[176] See for example Hoffman, *The Gay World*, 146; Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*, 142; Chavez, "Blatant Is Beautiful."

Sexually, effeminate behavior was advantageous because it expressed availability. In theory, because femininity was associated with the quality of being approachable, effeminacy makes one more accessible to strangers.[177] Furthermore, because effeminacy was the public trademark of homosexuality, it was a sure way to appear on the radar of likeminded men. Alluding to the concept of the "gaydar," cultural historians have explained how homosexuals in the Fifties communicated their desires through secret symbols (like chinos, crewneck sweaters and loafers).[178] In light of this, exaggerated effeminacy could bear witness to impatience — a lack of willingness to play by subtle rules, the result of which was enhanced sexual availability at the cost of social ostracism.

Psychologically, it made sense to exaggerate one's effeminacy to maintain the impression that one was in control. "Society sees him for what he is and condemns him," James Barr, the author of *Quatrefoil*, noted in 1950. "Not understanding his condemnation, he persuades himself he does not care, fights back by flaunting his nature, and thus" — the author added in a tone that was typical of his time — "downs lower and lower on the human scale."[179] To the contrary, Quentin Crisp, a British author who moved to New York in the Sixties, didn't see his exaggerated gender performance as a mode of self-denigration. For as he explains, he accentuated his effeminacy to show people that he was conscious of himself and proud of who he was.[180]

Politically, effeminacy allowed for silent protest. As gay author Edmund White has pointed out, one of the main functions of camp was to promote "uneasiness." It was, in his words, "a muted, irresponsible form of antagonism, one too silly to be held accountable, a safe way of subverting the system."[181] Historically speaking, effeminacy was regularly invoked by socially and politically dissatisfied men as a way of position themselves outside of "good society." This pattern is not only exemplified by bohemians, beatniks and hippies, who embraced androgyny and gender subversion as part of their political aesthetics, as well as by gay liberationists who, as we shall see, mobilized traditional stereotypes of homosexual effeminacy in order to protest against heteronormativity.[182]

Socially, it made sense to be camp because camp was "the thing to be," as one gay liberationist expressed it.[183] Throughout the postwar era, commentators have remarked on how

[177] Tripp, *The Homosexual Matrix*, 175.
[178] Bronski, *The Pleasure Principle*, 55.
[179] James Barr, *Quatrefoil*, 350–51.
[180] Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 34.
[181] White, *States of Desire Revisited*, 256.
[182] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 184.
[183] Shipp, "A Queen Is a Person Really."

effeminacy was institutionalized at homosexual bars. In *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* by Iris Murdoch, the main character is a straight-conforming homosexual who fights a losing battle against his campy partner who is unable to drop his "tribal habits."[184] What is more, homosexual men who grew up in the postwar era were sometimes compelled to act effeminately because they felt it was their only available option. "I tried desperately to be effeminate," a leatherman told magazine editor Jack Fritscher. "I was terribly unsuccessful. But I really tried, because, I thought, there are men and then there are people who like men, and I was one of the people who liked men."[185] Taken at face value, his statement suggests that the effeminate stereotype was so pervasive that many homosexuals had a hard time imagining that they could be anything else.

In the early Sixties, there were some bars that catered to overtly effeminate crowds. For instance, Webster Cory and LeRoy described a recently defunct place on New York's West Side which was almost exclusively frequented by "swishy" homosexuals:

> Young fair-skinned men, many of whom were scarcely out of their teens, adorned themselves with rouge, lipstick, and mascara, all ineptly applied. Their hair showed the effects of tonics, creams, shampoos, dyes, and rinses, and was curled, waved, and set in every imaginable style.

The locale was, furthermore, decorated in a way that seemed to reinforce the clientele's sense of communal identity, as "a weird array of feminine caricatures" covered all of the walls. There was also a juke box which played the music so loud that the clients were compelled (or perhaps one could say "forced") to "scream" and "howl"; "strut," "twist" and "cavort about."[186]

There are overtones of condescension and sensationalism in the homosexual authors' remarks. The fact that Cory and LeRoy only mentioned one bar of this kind (a bar which also no longer in existence) seems to indicate that highly effeminate bars were uncommon at the time. For as the authors noted, there were "*numerous* other bars where any allusion to effeminate behavior in any overt manner arouses strong disapproval."[187] Slight effeminacy was accepted but it was not encouraged. In support of this view, a psychiatrist and gay rights advocate described a typical middle-class gay bar saying that instead of the macho behavior

[184] Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, 35.
[185] Fritscher, "Foreword," 105.
[186] Cory and Leroy, *The Homosexual and His Society*, 108.
[187] Cory and Leroy, 108.

that characterized the typical straight man, there was a "certain softness" to the clientele who, he noticed, seemed to pay special attention to their dress and were "extraordinarily well groomed."[188]

To elaborate on this point, the author of a book on gay culture from 1960 noted that members of the homosexual community in the late Fifties tended to revamp the straight Ivy League style (preppy collage clothes) to give it a sexual edge, for example by wearing their trousers extra tight around the "crotch and rump." When a manufacturer noticed that his trousers were falling out of fashion, he allegedly reintroduced them in a "shiny material" and successfully revived his sales.[189] From the perspective of Jerry Rubin, the author of a sensationalist piece on homosexual men, it was the male homosexual's tendency to exaggerate mainstream trends that gave him away. "Two men may wear what superficially appear to be the same shirt," he noted, "the homosexual's is just a little tighter, a little brighter, just a little more."[190] Other adversaries of gay culture made similar remarks on homosexual men's tight clothes and "fierce display of crotch." However, the clothes they wore on Fire Island were — the same observer conceded — "slender, seamless, elegant and utterly chic," indicating a flair for fashion that was, furthermore, evidenced by the fact that the small homosexual vacation spot with only grocery store, had twice as many boutiques.[191]

In a similar, but less fashionable way, members of the homophile movement were known for conforming to strict dress codes. The black suit, which emerged in the late eighteenth century as a symbol of masculine productivity, became their preferred item of clothing.[192] Homophile activists dressed according to their political ambition of showing the straight world that they were conventional and well-functioning men and women. "We didn't call homosexuals, *homosexual*," says former Mattachine leader Hal Call when he discusses the movement's predilection for euphemisms, "We called them *sex variants.*"[193] In seeking accommodation, homophile activists hoped to remove old stereotypes and reduce legal discrimination.[194] However, most homosexuals at the time either didn't engage in or openly rejected homophile activism, seeing homosexual liberation as unrealistic.

When activism came into vogue in the late Sixties the aging representatives of the old guard (and old homosexuals in general) were sometimes disparaged by the "hip" young

[188] Hoffman, *The Gay World*, 55.
[189] Wood, *Christ and the Homosexual*, 45.
[190] Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex, but Were Afraid to Ask*, 171.
[191] Decter, "The Boys on the Beach."
[192] Bronski, *The Pleasure Principle*, 84.
[193] Call, "Gay Sexualist," 63.
[194] Bruce, "From 'Gay Is Good' to 'Unapologetically Gay,'" 36.

activists. “If those queens are still around, you don’t see them,” a young person told a news reporter of *Esquire magazine* when asked about the effeminate stereotype. *“*If you do, they’re *really* older, like in their sixties.”[195] The quote not only alludes to a familiar theme, namely effeminacy’s association to socially marginalized groups, but it also points to a generational gap which placed older members of the gay community at a sexual disadvantage.

SAD OLD GAY?

Journalist Midge Decter spent several summers in the Sixties, with her family on Fire Island. Midge and her heterosexual neighbors had many conversations about supine “boys” on the beach, whose hairless bodies made their skin look smooth and silky. Was it hormonal? Could it be contributed to some special form of depilation? Midge wondered. But her questions went unanswered. Instead, she pointed to the girlish narcissism of these men, saying that they would spend entire weeks in the sun in order to cultivate their tan. Recollecting her thoughts in magazine aimed at a conservative Jewish readership in 1980, her observations should be read with appropriate caution. Regardless of her political bias, Decter seems to have been correct when she noticed that homosexual ideals were shifting from innocence and youth in the Sixties, to sexual experience and maturity in the Seventies.[196]

It has been pointed out that Americans in the postwar era became more concerned with “youth,” “slimness” and “glamour,” ideals which also pervaded the homosexual world, but arguably to a more severe extent.[197] In the gay world, supreme beauty and youth were, as one ethnographer noted, like a social passport that provided access to gay institutions and private networks regardless of race and class.[198] At the same time, members of the gay community made admonitory comments on the tragic destiny that awaited young beauties. Narratives on homosexual aging often centered on the themes of premature sexual death (which usually occurred around the age thirty to thirty-five) or the loneliness of the old queen who had to pay for sex and, to make matters worse, “[did] not appear to live as long.”[199] Generally speaking, older men were relegated to more subservient sexual roles. It was sometimes noted that they had to woe sexual partners with money, gifts or expensive meals. “Here and there one spots a

[195] Burke, “The New Homosexuality.”
[196] Decter, “The Boys on the Beach.”
[197] Wood, *Christ and the Homosexual*, 56.
[198] Warren, *Identity and Community in the Gay World*, 85.
[199] Stearn, *The Sixth Man*, 258–59. The following authors have estimated the age of sexual death: Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, 310; Hooker, “The Homosexual Community,” 179.

man," Cory wrote in his account of the Fifties' gay bar scene, "usually middle-aged, offering to buy drinks for almost any accepting young person." He was often rejected, but the middle-aged man was rarely upset because, Cory explained in a condescending tone, "his kind" was "not easily insulted."[200]

Homosexual men's concern with youth was also reflected in gay slang. Here and there one would hear of elderly "aunties" and youthful "twinkies" — each of them positioned at opposite ends of the sexual hierarchy. Men who were too young, that is, under the age of consent, were sometimes referred to as "chickens." To be "chicken-looking" was to be young, and a "professional chicken" was someone who strived to stay young forever.[201] The Fifties' golden boy Alan Helms is a case in point. At the mere age of 38 he was struck by the "eerie sensation" that he had become invisible. To combat his hair loss and declining sex appeal, Helms injected his scalp with estrogen, but to almost no avail.[202]

Whereas Helms, who was still in his mid-thirties, was marginalized on the basis of looks, men who were past middle age faced further stigma as a consequence of their perceived sexual impotence. Myths of sexual impotence were furthermore, as medical researchers William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson pointed out, internalized by the old men themselves, whose sex lives were haunted by fears of performance.[203] Masters and Johnson were part of the groundswell of scientists and activists in the Sixties who began to challenge the sexual stigma surrounding the elderly.[204] This sexual renaissance of old people was synchronous with the sexualization of the culture at large, as social scientists at the time remarked that the sexual styles of parents and children were converging as young people were getting sexually active earlier and the old remained it for longer.[205] In the gay community as well, these deep-seated social changes were reflected in and perpetuated by grassroot protests, as gay liberationists in the early Seventies began to vociferously denounce the "youthism" that affected their community.[206]

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[200] Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 121.
[201] Rodgers, *Gay Talk*, 44, 158.
[202] Helms, *Young Man from the Provinces*, 197–98.
[203] Masters and Johnson, *Human Sexual Response*, 269.
[204] The effect of this campaign is reflected in the empirical research on homosexual aging from the Seventies onwards. In keeping with Masters and Johnson's agenda, this new line of research emphasized the sexual stealth and vigor of aging gay men. See for example, Fred Minnigerode's research on "Age-Status Labeling in Homosexual Men" from 1976 which repudiates the myth of accelerated aging. For surveys that argue that elderly gay men stay sexually active well into retirement, see Berger, "Psychological Adaptation of the Older Homosexual Male" and James, "Homosexual Behavior."
[205] Gagnon and Simon, "Perspectives on the Sexual Scene," 26.
[206] Schaffer, "Will You Still Need Me When I'm 64?"

REBELLING AGAINST OLD STEREOTYPES

The sexual liberation had an immediate and enduring impact on gay men's aesthetics and sexual hierarchies. Whereas the long-term effects of the sexual liberation are described in chapters 3 and 4, the following pages are mostly concerned the immediate aftermath of the Stonewall rebellion. I argue that the social radicalism that characterized the early Seventies allowed for greater freedom and wider options in terms of gender expression.

As previously argued, homosexuals in the Fifties and Sixties were stigmatized as effeminate, secretive and unable to cope with the challenges of growing up. Homophile activists tried to combat public misconceptions about homosexuality by conforming to respectable norms, but to no apparent avail. It was not until the sexual liberation that young Americans began to challenge basic assumptions about human sexuality head on, and to redefine the individual's relationship to society. Confronting conformism, members of the Sixties' counterculture subscribed to ideals of personal freedom and authenticity. The new generation "hated authority," Norman Mailer wrote in a famous book on the New Left, "because the authority lied."[207] A historically oppressed minority, homosexuals had long understood that they needed to develop their own media channels in order to break down the barrier of lies that walled them off from good society.[208] It was not until the late Sixties, with the rise of a radical gay press, that homosexuals were able to assert their own vision of what homosexuality was and could become.

Another important medium for activism was the street, where gay radicalization manifested itself in the weaponization of camp, as liberationist used bawdiness, wit and outrageous fashion in order to make a political statement**.** Writing in 1964, Susan Sontag was adamant that camp completely disavowed morality and with it, politics.[209] I have already rejected her premise that amorality presupposes apoliticalness by pointing to the "silent" political connotations of camp. In the late Sixties, however, camp aesthetic was increasingly used to protest against gender norms in ways that were no longer silent, but loud — even lurid. The politicization of camp resulted in what gay activists at the time sometimes referred to as "political drag," and later on, "genderfuck." This new style of activism sprung from the iconoclasm of the "hip generation" and its compulsive attack on old stereotypes.[210] It consisted in subverting traditional gender norms by emphasizing the incongruence between (natural) sex

[207] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*, 87.
[208] This point was perhaps most famously made by Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 13.
[209] Sontag, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*, 288.
[210] Bronski, *Culture Clash*, 12.

and (cultural) gender. By wearing female clothes and make-up at gay rallies and community events, the male gay radicals wanted to demonstrate that gender was a social construct that could be molded at will.

The liberationists' project was based on the realization that gay men were dually oppressed by male and female sex roles. In addition to being pressured to conform to strict masculine standards, their emasculation was proof of patriarchy's devaluation of all things feminine. Both the drag queen who accentuated her effeminacy and the leather type who sought to overcome it were oppressed by conventional gender norms, argued gay liberationist Dennis Altman.[211] It was therefore the choice between masculine self-effacement and effeminate stigmatization that defined the liberationists' crucial dilemma. Political drag represented an attempt to heal this divide, stating that men and women could be neither or both. At the same time, one should not reduce it to political dogma. Political drag was also about having fun and dressing according to the mood of the moment.[212]

With the rise of political drag, homosexual transvestites, who had been marginalized in the gay community in the previous decades, became the figureheads of the radical gay movement. In his *Gay Manifesto,* radical activist Carl Wittman hailed the flagrant "queens and nellies," martyrs for the homosexual cause. Consequently, in Wittman's view, "closet queens" had come to represent weakness and self-hatred.[213] "Blatant is beautiful," wrote another liberationist, calling on gays to respect the "flaming faggots" and "diesel dykes."[214] To follow up on their members' celebratory claims, organizations like the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activist Alliance set out to combat discriminatory policies which had targeted gender nonconforming people at bars, in the workforce and elsewhere.[215]

Not all liberationists were enthusiastic about transvestites and political drag. The staunchest opposition against camp in the gay liberation movement came from lesbian feminists who felt that the political aesthetic's play on female stereotypes was an affront to women. Many gay radicals sided with the feminists. "I think it is wrong to say that camp is Gay culture," an activist wrote in an issue of *Gay Sunshine,* an underground newspaper created by homosexual students at Berkeley. "Gay people camp most of the time for the amusement of straights and when gay people laugh at camp, it is most often the laughter of self-hatred."[216] The authors of

[211] Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, 68.
[212] "Homosexuals in Revolt: The Year That One Liberation Movement Turned Militant," 67.
[213] Wittman, *The Gay Manifesto*, 4–5.
[214] Chavez, "Blatant Is Beautiful."
[215] Manford, "Fearless Youth," 203.
[216] Young, "Camp Out?"

a popular gay column in the radical magazine *Screw* were also disillusioned with political drag, but for different reasons. The writer duo denounced camp as an impediment to homosexual progress, asserting that drag queens and transvestites had nothing to do with homosexuality.[217] The alliance of gay chauvinists' and feminists against camp is illustrated by a rally for Gay Pride Week in New York 1973, in which it was "rumored that if any drag queens appear on the rally stage, the lesbian feminists will trash the place, as they feel drags insulting to women, and that the gay genital-male leather-jacket-and-boots contingent will also riot, because they feel drag insulting to men."[218]

The artifice and effeminacy of camp was also at odds with the "natural" and rugged masculinity that was cultivated by many "hip homosexuals." This hairy type was generally middle class in origin but emphasized his virility by wearing working-class clothes such as denims, T-shirts and leather vests.[219] In terms of dress and mannerisms it was sometimes noted by members of the gay community that "hip homosexuals" — and gay radicals more broadly — had more in common with straight hippies than they did with gay men who were not radicals.[220] In this respect, attesting to the these men's ideals of bisexuality and virility, an anthropologist joked in an essay about gay male virilization that the new generation was "more apt to sleep with a girl than to mock her speech or mannerisms."[221]

The distinction between hip homosexuals and gay liberationists is often just implied, for many historians do not bother to comment on it. But since I have an explicit focus on types and diversity, it makes sense to disambiguate these terms. Jerry Rubin, the political activist, gave a telling example in an anecdote from a "be-in" that was organized by some straight Yuppies in San Francisco. What were the demands? A Berkley radical, who had been invited by the organizers wanted to know.

> The hippies patiently explained to him that it wasn't a "demonstration" and that we were just going to *be* there.
>
> "People will turn each other on."
>
> "Only good vibes."
>
> "But no demands."

[217] Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 141.
[218] Quoted in Sullivan, "Toward Transvestite Liberation," 147.
[219] Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 45; Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation*, 2.
[220] Altman, "One Man's Gay Liberaton."
[221] Humphreys, "New Styles in Homosexual Manliness," 41.

When the Berkeley radical kept insisting that there *be demands*, the hippies handed him a pencil and paper and told him to "write some."[222] In other words, a distinction could be made between radicals and hippies based on the importance they placed on respectively politics and spirituality. If we extrapolate Rubin's example from the be-in to the context of gay culture, we find that gay men who were more overtly political were inclined to either: embrace camp to subvert traditional sex roles, or to protests against its use due to the "misogyny" that was implied in playing up female stereotypes. Still others, refused camp on the grounds that it gave homosexuals a "bad reputation." And then there were those who didn't care about camp — who wanted to just "be," without concerning themselves too much with the political consequences of their actions.

In general, liberationists and hippies, who accounted for most of the movement's homosexuals, were both rebuked and admired for being very much like their straight counterparts — just "slightly more flamboyant."[223] Many radicals embraced camp, but there was a general understanding that effeminacy was detrimental to sexual appeal. As such, activists sometimes compartmentalized sex and politics. This double consciousness is reflected in the words of activist Mike Silverstein. His memoirs bear witness to his liberationist ambition of becoming "fully human" by rejecting oppressive sex roles. Still, the mature activist continued to woo his sexual partners by conforming to the role of stoic "father-protector." Getting, as it were, "caught in the game," Silverstein's sexual persona would eventually crumble. "They could all see that I needed them," he wrote, "[that] I wanted them to love me."[224] Bearing witness to the antagonism between social and sexual ambitions, his memoirs exemplify the major dilemma associated with politics and aestheticism, a dilemma which resonates in the question: is it better to be loved by others than to love the self?

For homosexuals who identified as masculine, this question caused less cognitive dissonance. Their sense of self was easily reconciled with their sexual ideals. Those who identified with effeminacy, on the other hand, had less to gain from the liberatory struggle against effeminate stereotypes and the contingent effort to re-cast homosexuality in a masculine mold.

[222] Rubin, *DO IT!*, 54.
[223] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation*, 2.
[224] Silverstein, "The Politics of My Sex Life," 270–72.

NEW VISIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The masculinization of gay culture, which escalated in the years following the sexual revolution, was embodied in few exemplary types. Some of them, like Hollywood icons Marlon Brando and James Dean, were products of the cultural mainstream. Famous for playing character who rebelled against "good society" and conventional gender norms, Brando and Dean became powerful symbols of homosexual resistance.[225] When Dean died in a car accident at the age of 24, millions of young Americans joined fan clubs in honor of his memory.[226] Jack Fritscher, a young homosexual in search of his identity, remembers that he was "stricken with grief" by the actor's death. "In the 1950s, I was a gay boy who — same as everyone else — did not know what being a 'masculine gay' was, and I could not let go of Jimmy Dean because I wanted to be like him," Fritscher says in retrospect, adding that Dean and Brando did as much for the liberation of gay men as Betty Friedan (who was instrumental in starting the "second wave" of feminism) had done for women. [227]

Fritscher also credited James Dean as the main inspiration behind the "Marlboro Man." This advertisement figure was invented by Phillip Morris in the mid-Fifties to convince male consumers that filter cigarettes were not just for women.[228] It gradually became an aesthetic template for gay men. "The image of the Marlboro man that we projected was one of the successful, up-the-hard-way sort of guy, who got himself tattooed somewhere along the line," an executive for the company explained.[229] By the Sixties, the Marlboro had become almost exclusively linked to the image of the cowboy, a popular advertisement figure at the time.[230] Alluding to the cowboy's potential for gay assimilation, John Reid, a gay stockbroker with an Ivy league degree, explained that cowboys "don't marry; they just pal around on the range and whore it up when they come into town."[231] In 1968 Andy Warhol's feature movie *Lonesome Cowboys* reinforced the association between cowboys and homosexuality by making the cowboy camp. "Where did you get that scarf?," a cowboy asks another member of his crew in a camp dialogue. "It looks the tackiest in the world. You must've gotten that back East."[232] Read, who snuck into a Manhattan movie theater to see the film, said that it was a huge "turn-on." His only complaint was that the queer cowboys rendered him "hornier" and more

[225] Bronski, *The Pleasure Principle*, 91.
[226] McCann, *Rebel Males*, 161.
[227] Fritscher, "James Dean: Magnificent Failure," 133–38.
[228] Starr, "The Marlboro Man," 54.
[229] Whiteside, *Selling Death*, 22–23.
[230] Blair, "Cowboys. Europe and Smoke," 197.
[231] Reid, *The Best Little Boy in the World*, 73.
[232] Warhol and Morrissey, *Lonesome Cowboys*.

"lonesome" than ever.[233] Many homosexuals were also touched by James Herlihy's book *Midnight Cowboy* from 1965 (adopted into a popular a movie in 1969) where the main character is a young Texan who goes to New York to work as a luxury prostitute for rich ladies but transgresses into homoeroticism as he starts turning tricks on Times Square.

Homosexuals' fascination with cowboys was reflected in their fashion, particularly in their love for Levi's jeans. Fashion historian Fred Davis has pointed to the blue jeans' unique ability to express status ambivalence, and thus its potential to promote egalitarianism. Through their association with workingmen and the American West, blue jeans are said to invoke sentiments of "democracy, independence, equality, freedom and fraternity." Davis also remarks on the garment's association with antiestablishment attitudes, which made it popular among social dissidents.[234] In view of (1) the complex social structure of homosexual culture (which made it desirable to deemphasize class difference); (2) homosexuals' outlaw status, as well as (3) the sexual cachet of working-class manliness, it makes perfect sense that the blue jeans would become an almost compulsory fashion garment for gay men in the coming years.

Male homosexuals were renowned by the late Sixties for wearing their Levi's 501 extra tight around the crotch. According to Marlon Brando's biographer, the first pair of skinny jeans were worn by the famous actor in *A Streetcar Named Desire* from 1951. Lucinda Ballard, who designed Brando's costume, claimed that she found inspiration for the look by watching a crew of "ditch diggers" in Midtown Manhattan. "Their clothes were so dirty," she recalled, "that they had stuck to their bodies. It was sweat, of course, but they looked like statues. I thought, 'That's the look I want...the look of animalness'." To enhance the character's low-class carnality, Ballard put the Levi's in the washing machine for twenty-four hours to make them shrink. At the first fitting, Brando (who shared Ballard's vision) insisted on having the jeans fitted onto his naked body to make them "skin-tight."[235] Shortly after the film's release, Brando's status as a gay icon was solidified by his performance in *The Wild One* from 1953, where he played a young delinquent riding a motorcycle. American society's fascination with juvenile delinquency in the Fifties is well documented.[236] Although the character's free-wheeling behavior resemble a teenage riot, his leather clothes were modeled after police uniforms, thus fusing the symbolism of authoritarianism and youthful rebellion.

[233] Reid, *The Best Little Boy in the World*, 91.
[234] Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 69–70.
[235] Manso, *Brando*, 228–29.
[236] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 22; Gay men's erotic fascination with delinquents in the postwar era was documented by a contemporary sociologist, see Reiss, "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers."

The leather look, for which Brando was an important inspiration, found its perhaps most iconic expression in the erotic drawings of Tom of Finland, which started to appear in gay physique magazines in the early Fifties. By depicting hypermasculine men — always working class and usually half-dressed in leather — engaging in mutually pleasurable sex, Tom of Finland presented a vision of homosexual identity that was new at the time. In the artists' own words, he wanted to show that "gays don't necessarily need to be just 'those damn queers,' that they could be handsome, strong and masculine as any other men."[237] His prototypes were not ashamed of their homosexuality and would often "switch roles," channeling the message that being anally penetrated or "sucking cock" was not incompatible with being a man. Into the Seventies, Tom's men became more avowedly gay — one could almost say "camp."[238] It was at this time that Tom of Finland entered the gay mainstream. Leather aficionado Durk Dehner, who co-Founded the Tom of Finland Foundation with the artist in 1984, recalls being instantly drawn to one of Tom's drawings at a leather club in the summer of 1976. "It's all it took for me," says Dehner, who identified so strongly with the poster that he stole it off the bulletin board. Attesting to the power of masculine icons, Dehner would eventually shape himself after his new ideal, "becoming what he desired."[239]

This chapter has identified the homosexual stereotypes that dominated popular and medical discourse in the postwar era. Subsequently, it has described the various ways in which homosexual men responded to mainstream clichés. The main point of this analysis was to demonstrate that homosexual aesthetics and politics before Stonewall, despite the prevalence of effeminate styles, were defined by variety rather than homogeneity and conformism. Although homosexual men after Stonewall were not necessarily more creative in terms of their presentational strategies, the countercultural movement seems to have been conducive to greater freedom of expression. With the proliferation of the discourse on homosexual identity in the postwar era, as well as the emergence of gay activism and independent media channels in the late Sixties, knowledge about homosexuality was, in a sense, democratized. The democratization of gay identity was, furthermore, indicated by observations that gay

[237] Quoted in Snaith, "Tom's Men," 78.
[238] This point has been made by Snaith, 83.
[239] THE LAVENDER EFFECT, *Durk Dehner*; Castro, "Meet the Men."

liberationists and members of the masculine leather cult were beginning to simultaneously reject the “homosexual role” and to acknowledge it as such. But as homosexual men continued to socially engineer their collective identity in the Seventies, the sexual democracy of their community increasingly came under strain. This is what I will argue in the following chapters, where we leave the allegedly “dark” pre-Stonewall days behind and enter into the “disco era.”

CHAPTER 3 | DIVERSITY, CULTURAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SEX, 1970–1982

"*Everybody* is here." Danny Slocum, the title character of George Whitmore's novel about gay life in the Seventies, is dancing at the Flamingo. He takes a sniff of amyl nitrate and puts the tiny bottle back in his pocket. He marvels at the handsome men around him. The Flamingo is a private club and an exclusive meeting spot for a closed circle of mostly white, middle-class partygoers. Housed in an anonymous warehouse building in the up-and-coming SoHo neighborhood, the venue is simply furnished with grey wall-to-call carpeting — what Slocum calls "the height of reverse-chic."[240]

Contrary to Slocum's excited declamation, not *everybody* is there. Further uptown, drag queens and hustlers; men from the "Latin crowd" and suburban gays gather at G. G.'s Barnum Room, a nightspot which is like a theater with its own stage and runway. There are balconies on three sides. From the ceiling hangs a net and, above that, trapezes to walk on. News of the place has just hit the media, causing trendy "slummers" to arrive *en masse*. "It was so fabulous the first time I came," Slocum's friend tells him as they are watching the spectacle from one of the balconies. "I was sure it would be a downer the second time around, but isn't it fabulous?"[241]

The literary example illustrates the impact sexual liberation had on the gay party scene. After decades of sexual reticence in dingy and dangerous bars, it was suddenly "chic" to party and "fabulous" to be gay. The proliferation of gay institutions like discotheques and bathhouses opened up new opportunities for socialization and provided gay men with safer and more comfortable ways of cruising indoors. However, as I argue in this chapter, while many discotheques and bathhouses were formally committed to ideals of radical diversity and sexual anonymity respectively, the commercial gay establishments often failed to live up to their democratic potential. In the first part of this chapter, I show how participation at discotheques was regulated by selective door policies and marketing strategies, mechanisms of exclusion that were reinforced by nascent ideals of sexual and racial separatism in the gay, racial and ethnic minority communities. The growing elitism and sectarianism of gay nightlife is also reflected in the last section, in which I comment on how the institutionalization of sex and the consequent decline of public cruising at parks, tearooms and streets affected patterns of cruising, while reinforcing the status of club managers and doormen as sexual gatekeepers.

[240] Whitmore, *Confessions of Danny Slocum*, 101–5.
[241] Whitmore, 81.

DISCO AND THE DILEMMA OF DIVERSITY

It has been said that it took a village to raise the Village People.[242] The same can be said of what we now know as "disco." Although historians disagree on its precise origins, the first discotheque is sometimes said to have emerged at a private Manhattan apartment on Valentine's Day of 1970. The event was hosted by David Mancuso, an eccentric music lover. For his first party at "the Loft," Mancuso invited an incongruous mix of people from all walks of life. His ideal of radical diversity was supplemented with the ambition to create a space where people felt safe to express themselves, make friends and to explore the transcendental power of psychedelic drugs and music.[243]

The early dance scene was communal and democratic, but when "disco" left the underground and was recognized as such in 1973, the phenomenon was co-opted by identitarian groups and entrepreneurs, making disco culture increasingly profit-seeking and sectarian.[244] By the mid-Seventies, there were around 150-200 discotheques in New York.[245] At this time, disco music and dancing was still a disproportionately gay and black phenomenon. Gay men in particular came to see the genre as essentially their own (leaving its black affiliations in parenthesis). As such, disco songs served gay men as anthems of homosexual pride that bolstered their territorial claims.[246] Popular tracks were on constant replay all over Fire Island; at bars and indoor cruising spaces, gay men were rarely out of earshot of disco.[247] This didn't change in 1977, when the sensational release of the movie *Saturday Night Fever,* starring John Travolta, incited millions of straight Americans to join in on the fun. By 1978, the number of discotheques in America was estimated at around 15,000-20,000.[248]

The influx of straights was reflected in the increasing heteronormativity of the dance floor, as trendy New York nightspots struggled to keep their establishments interesting to the in-crowd. As average Americans wanted to take part in the disco scene, some discotheque owners saw this as a threat to diversity, causing them to cultivate an artificially diverse environment that was increasingly elitist. The idea that it was chic to break down social barriers was institutionalized at Le Jardins, an up-scale nightspot located at 110 West 43rd Street, frequented by gays and straight alike. Le Jardin's owners worked hard to maintain the right

[242] Fritscher, "Leather Dolce Vita," 196.
[243] Lawrence, David Mancuso and the Loft heritage.
[244] This point was made by Lawrence in an essay about "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor," 240.
[245] Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night a Dj Saved My Life*, 164.
[246] Frank, "Discophobia," 279.
[247] Rumaker, *My First Satyrnalia*, 40.
[248] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 315.

social mixture of mostly beautiful, wealthy and "interesting" people. This was, as historian Peter Shapiro notes, "a precarious balancing act," as too much exclusivity would make the environment stale and cliquish, and too much inclusivity would ruin the exclusive vibe.[249] The management wooed members of Manhattan's jet set with finger food and extravagant shows that became the talk of the town.[250] Eventually, however, Le Jardin's selective door policy put the owners under pressure from the New York State Liquor Authority in 1977 after reports had been made that many private clubs in the city operated discriminatory admission policies.[251]

The exclusive and mixed atmosphere at Le Jardins impressed Ian Schrager, who founded Studio 54, the disco era's perhaps most iconic institution, with his business partner Steve Rubell in 1977.[252] Attuned to Le Jardins' philosophy, the owners envisioned a club full of "fabulous" people of all races, classes, genders and sexualities. At the same time, doormen were instructed to only admit those who were likely to add something to the club's atmosphere. In addition to models, businessmen and celebrities, Rubell had a special predilection for eccentrics, drag queens and black divas.[253]

In their pursuit of radical diversity and economic profits, the owners of Studio 54 jettisoned Mancuso's communal and democratic ideals, installing in their place a system that was thoroughly hierarchal. Barred behind the velvet ropes were the "bridge-and-tunnel," suburban barbarians whom, although their presence was paramount to the club's appeal, were treated as by the doormen as if they were an existential threat to the disco empire. On the inside, patrons were divided into "plebeians" and "royalty."[254] On account of the latter, Rubell courted celebrity clients with special favors like free cocaine and trips to the VIP basement. Preferential treatment was also put up for sale in the form of membership cards. Regulars at the club were sometimes handpicked by professional promoters. Carmen D'Alessio, who worked as a promoter for the club, kept lists with over 3,000 names of people they wanted to see at their club.[255]

Le Jardins and Studio 54 were fascinating attempts at social engineering. However, as the examples show, the owners' vision of diversity was achieved at the cost of exclusion, while serving aims that were fundamentally elitist and commercial.[256] Furthermore, the idea that

[249] Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 191–92.
[250] Haden-Guest, *The Last Party*, 4.
[251] Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 192; Radcliffe, "Disco Discrimination Studied In N.Y."
[252] Haden-Guest, *The Last Party*, 10.
[253] Pendelton, *Studio 54: Sex, Drugs & Disco*, 54.
[254] Haden-Guest, *The Last Party*, 219.
[255] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 277; Pendelton, *Studio 54: Sex, Drugs & Disco*.
[256] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 49.

patrons could have any gender, race, class or sexuality as long as they were beautiful, rich or "interesting" imply parameters of diversity which encompass only some of the ways in which people differ from each other. Only expressive personalities were rewarded, unless patrons had a public image or a body that turned people's heads. For in addition to the drag queens and black divas (which served as eccentric symbols of diversity), the common denominator at Le Jardins and Studio 54 was the patron's excess of sexual capital. Because it is a local currency, a high concentration of sexual capital would not necessarily preclude egalitarianism on the inside. But as I pointed out, local hierarchies were formalized by Rubell who continually cherry-picked his guests, leaving others in the cold.

"[THEY] RAN AGROUND ON THE ROCKS OF IDENTITY POLITICS"[257]

The success of places like Le Jardins and Studio 54 in mixing men and women of all sexual inclinations cannot be denied. However, more comprehensive, inclusive sexual diversity proved difficult to achieve in the Seventies. After gay liberation, some observers noticed that fewer and fewer homosexuals even socialized with women and straight men, and that younger gays in particular felt increasingly awkward at mixed parties.[258] Gay authors like Donald Webster Cory had long argued that gay men had to create a new set of beliefs to demonstrate the superiority of the homosexual way of life and that, furthermore, gay liberation required male homosexuals to "drop their masks" and come together in acknowledgment of their sexual kinship.[259] His remarks proved remarkably prescient: Referring to his sense of gay unity following the Stonewall riots, activist Arnie Kantrowitz knew that solidarity was more than a catchword. "It is a sense of belonging I have felt to my marrow, a kinship as thick as blood relation."[260] Feelings of kinship were supplemented with pride as fewer homosexuals saw their sexual desires as something to be ashamed of. In a trailblazing coming-out letter for the New York Times in 1971, journalist Merle Miller admitted that it was perhaps easier to be straight. "But then," he added, after some thought, "would I rather not have been me?"[261]

To live out their newly discovered selves, thousands of young homosexuals moved to New York and San Francisco in the Seventies and early Eighties, a phenomenon which

[257] This quote was originally used by historian John D'Emilio in reference to the breakdown of radical social politics in the early Seventies, see *Making Trouble*, 245.
[258] White, *States of Desire Revisited*, 258.
[259] Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 10, 13.
[260] Kantrowitz, *Under the Rainbow*, 146.
[261] Miller, "What It Means To Be a Homosexual."

historians have referred to as "the Great Gay Migration."[262] Having reached the "Promised Land," the new arrivals congregated in "gay ghettoes," as homosexuals called them at the time. To qualify the use of this word, sociologist Martin Levine concluded that both the Castro in San Francisco and New York's West Village (a subarea of Greenwich Village) were so predominantly gay that "ghetto" was an apt description.[263] Nonetheless, as others have pointed out, the demeaning term not only raised associations of delinquency and deprivation, but it also negated the agency of those who had deliberately moved to certain districts. Manuel Castells argues that "liberated zones" is a more fitting term for such urban quarters, because homosexuals were neither formally nor socially forced to live in the West Village, a neighborhood which was "deliberately constructed by gay people."[264] Homosexuals moved there to be with likeminded people, to live close to gay institutions, and to openly express their sexualities without fears of violence and persecution. Indeed, liberation had brought considerable freedom to these neighborhoods. For example, notes Levine, men were frequently seen walking hand in hand or with their arms around each other's waists.[265]

A hotbed for identity politics, West Village became a spatial symbol of the homogenizing force of gay identity. Gay male chauvinism in particular, was seen as an increasing threat to the political unity of the radical social movement.[266] The fragmentary effect of liberation was perhaps most acutely felt by members of the incipient transgender community who, in addition to feeling frozen out from community gatherings and political rallies, were no longer content to serves as "shook troopers in gay lib" without proper compensation.[267] The liberated zones were, in other words, scene to a mutually reinforcing process in which gay male chauvinism alienated previous allies, encouraging them to form their own communities and leave gay men to their own devices.

This was also the case with lesbian separatism. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, who founded the Daughter of Bilitis — America's first lesbian organization — in 1955, had claimed for a long time that male homosexuals "were just as sexist as heterosexual men."[268] In the Fifties and Sixties, the relationship between gays and lesbians was often fraught with frustration and their interactions were largely limited to private settings.[269] The counterrevolution temporarily

[262] Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City," 255.
[263] Levine, "Gay Ghetto," 375.
[264] Castells, *The City and the Grassroots*, 139.
[265] Levine, "Gay Ghetto," 572.
[266] Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay*, 229.
[267] Stryker, *Transgender History*, 122.
[268] Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 265.
[269] Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, 9.

interrupted this pattern by sparking a sense of sexual solidarity — but the harmony between homosexual men and women didn't last. Into the Seventies, the idea that gays and lesbians were like oil and water was continually reflected in the cliché that lesbian women worshiped things from which gay men steered clear: personal intimacy, monogamy and sensuality.[270]

In addition to the pornography and promiscuity that pervaded the gay scene, lesbian radicals were particularly averse to sadomasochism, which many of them regarded as a ritualized from of violence. This perception overlapped with the common view in the majority society, where sadomasochism was likely to be seen as a symbol gay men's perverse sensibility and a symptom of their personal trauma.[271] Neither of these group spoke from experience though, for women and curious straights were generally barred from the institutions where sadomasochism was most brazenly displayed. Gay leather clubs (as opposed to leather bars that were more casual and accessible to non-members) were known for their strict membership codes. According to Jack Fritscher, former editor of the gay leather magazine *Drummer ,* it was harder to get into the Catacombs, a sex club in San Francisco that catered to the most committed leather fetishists and "fisters," than to Studio 54; for women it was all but impossible.[272] Even at regular clubs like the New York Motorbike Clubhouse near the Christopher docks, aspiring members relied on the sponsorship from two insiders.[273] It has been noted that the membership code was designed to protect clients against the presence of onlookers. But usually it came down to logistics, as the locales were known to be crowded and often filled to capacity.[274] In effect, because membership codes favored communal bonding, they also facilitated more personal sexual relationships on the scene, an observation which goes against the general misconception that leathermen worshiped dehumanizing and anonymous forms of sex.

At the same time, the growing popularity and consequent de-stigmatization of sadomasochism in gay circles also lowered the social costs of participation, and — as a result — the leather scene became more dynamic and, at least by some standards, more internally diverse. In New York in 1977, membership was distributed between different venues, including thirteen leather associations, if we believe Wally Wallace, who opened the Mineshaft in

[270] Ponse, "Homosexual Behavior," 167, 171. In practice, the cliché was often proven wrong, as gay men and women often founded their relationship on identical ideals of mutuality and emancipation from heterosexual norms.
[271] Mass, *Dialogues of the Sexual Revolution*, 101.
[272] The term "fister" is derived from the verb "to fist," which means to manually penetrate the orifice of another person's body, usually the anus. For discussions on membership at the Catacombs, see Fritscher, "Foreword," 89. Fritscher, "Foreword," 89 and Rubin, *Deviations*, 233.
[273] Ward, "Who Is Jim Ward?"
[274] Young, "Inside Sado/Masochism," 48.

1976.[275] An iconic nightlife institution, Mineshaft is presented as an example of the kind of social variety that existed in some of these spaces. According to the owner, the club was patronized by men of every profession: "Journalists. Critics. The cream of the crop. Bob Mapplethorpe, of course. Clergymen. […] Theater people. Directors, writers. Not just performers."[276] Yet even in terms of occupational diversity there is a narrow pattern to Wallace's list. Those he names from the top of his head are either middle-class professionals or artists. In terms of racial inclusion, Mineshaft was famed for its international and racially diverse clientele. This makes it an exception from a leather scene that was, on the whole, predominantly white. For instance, Larry Townsend's widely distributed survey on the SM community from the early Eighties shows that less than two percent (19 out of 1149) of the North American respondents identified as black.[277] While Townsend admits that some of the racial disparity could be attributed to the way the data was collected, his findings do not seem to have been too far off the mark.

Feeling alienated from the predominantly white gay community, many black homosexuals chose self-isolation as a form of political protest. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had made racial discrimination illegal but it didn't protect black people from everyday racism, which continued to serve as a poignant reminder that "Negroes" would never be fully accepted by conventional standards. Lack of progress caused many black Americans to lose faith in assimilation. An increasing number of young folks in particular, set about to reclaim their African heritage and to restore their cultural identity. Black nationalists could be identified by their loose-fitting and colorful robes ("dashikis" from the Yoruban *dàńṣíkí*), Afro-inspired jewelry and natural hair.[278] Their desire for communal identity was also manifested in "soul," a mode of expression which emphasized authenticity and flamboyance. "Soul was sass," says historian William Deburg, who describes the soulful aesthetic that pervaded the gait and manners of a large number of young black men in the Sixties and Seventies. To "walk that walk" was to be "hip, super-cool, and so fine." Handshakes — the "giving and getting of skin" — were artful rituals of black solidarity which symbolized black people's cultural difference from "robot-like" white Anglo-Saxons.[279]

Black nationalism also served as a model for other minority groups who sought emancipation from the majority society. Among Mexican immigrants there was intensified talk

[275] Fritscher, "The Mineshaft," 453.
[276] Fritscher, 460.
[277] Townsend, *The Leatherman's Handbook II*, 317.
[278] Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 38.
[279] Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 195–97.

of "la raza." In the *Chicano Manifesto* from 1971, Armando Rendón warned his compatriots against being "sucked into the vacuum of dominant society." In Rendón's view, "Chicanos [encompassed] a new way of looking at life, of interpreting history, of defending our social role, of rejecting an alien and degrading concept" which was forced onto them by "the gringo."[280] Similar calls to solidarity were made by Native Americans. In the case of gay minorities, ethnic nationalism and gay pride cross-pollinated into separate movements that sought to integrate ideals of sexual tolerance into broader programs to restore native traditions. There was usually an emphasis on the latter though, as members of both the first Gay Latino Alliance (1975-1983) and Gay American Indians (formed in 1975) often remarked that they felt greater kinship with their ethnic compatriots than with white homosexuals. [281]

Racial and ethnic nationalism had a visible impact on how gay minorities related to each other sexually. There are indications that black homosexuals in the Seventies began to openly resist the presence of white "slummers" in bars which they considered to be on their home territory. Danny Slocum recalls his sexual debut at Willy's, a black dance bar on the Upper West Side. In the novel, he enjoys the friendly atmosphere and returns many times until people let him know that his presence is unwanted because he is a "dinge queen." "I want to keep seeing you," a black lover tells him, "for myself. But you should find your own type, you know."[282] The idea that it was better to stick to "your own type" was also reflected in a black survey from 1982, in which a quarter of the respondents stated that they had no interest in dating white men.[283] They may have had individual reasons for this, as black homosexuals sometimes complained that their relationships with white men were strained by racial dynamics which made them feel sexually objectified by their white partners. But as sociologists point out, it could also be that some black men chose black partners as an affirmation of racial pride. [284]

Social scientists noted that race was the most divisive factor in determining homosexual men's social patterns. In a study from 1974, Carrol Warren used the term "caste division" to describe the social barriers that separated the gay minorities in an anonymous West Coast city: There were "all-black communities," Warren noted, "all-Chicano communities, and communities composed only of interracial gay couples." Mingling between whites and blacks occurred, but this was generally limited to sexual interactions; sexual "hang ups" were often

[280] Rendón, *Chicano Manifesto*, 320, 325.
[281] Ramírez, "That's My Place!," 243; Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, 332–34.
[282] Whitmore, *Confessions of Danny Slocum*, 78.
[283] Johnson, "Influence of Assimilation on the Psychosocial Adjustment of Black Homosexual Men," 109.
[284] Dixon, *Vanishing Rooms*, 196; Hawkeswood, "One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem," 100.

short-lived and failed to foster lasting involvement.[285] These findings should not be uncritically applied to gay life in New York, but Warren's research still demonstrates the challenges involved in transforming sexual affinities into social communities, as well as the importance of social and racial boundaries in determining sexual opportunities.

MEMBERS' CLUBS AND THE GAY CIRCUIT

Cruising sites differed from each other not just in terms of how accessible they were to outsiders, but also in terms of the constraints they placed on local participants. While some places were inclusive and tolerant, others had stricter conventions and were more protective of social cohesion. Because members' clubs connote elitism and exclusivity, it is ironic that historians credit David Mancuso for inventing the membership model.[286] True to his philosophy, Mancuso wanted every party to run its natural course. However, state authorities in New York required all establishments serving alcoholic drinks to close at 3:30. In order to circumvent these restrictions Mancuso turned the Loft into a juice bar and charged membership fees to make up to the loss in alcohol sales.[287] There was another advantage to this arrangement that was at odds with Mancuso's democratic ideals. To the many club owners followed Mancuso's example in the Seventies the membership model became an effective way of regulating admissions without making oneself vulnerable to legal charges of discrimination.

A prime example of this is the Flamingo, a gay discotheque which opened in SoHo in 1974 and whose owner, Michael Fesco, was on good terms with the Fire Island elite. Fesco's first business venture, the Ice Palace, had been the Island's most popular nightspot in the early Seventies, by which time the Island had become divided between two rivaling communities: Cherry Grove, the original gay enclave, and the Pines, which was transformed in the Sixties into a fashionable vacation spot for gay Manhattanites. Old-timers in Cherry Grove saw the newcomers at the Pines as exceedingly status conscious. "The circuit," as the network comprised by the partygoers at the Pines was soon called, came to be associated with conspicuous consumption and hedonism.[288]

[285] Warren, *Identity and Community in the Gay World*, 88.
[286] Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 69.
[287] Lawrence, David Mancuso and the Loft heritage.
[288] Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, 279.

Etymologically, the "circuit" referred to the weekly calendar for "gay men in-the-know."[289] As a circuit participant told Levine: "After work, we go to the gym, either the Y or the Bodycenter; then we stop by One Potato or Trilogy for dinner. On Friday nights, we cruise the Eagle and Spike. On Saturday nights, we go dancing at the Saint, and on Sunday nights, we go to the baths."[290] United in their tastes and habits, the "circuit queens" developed strong communal ties. At parties tribal bonding was achieved through sex, drugs and dancing. What is more, the various cliques that made up these crowds consisted of men who related to each other on a deeply personal level, forming what Levine calls "surrogate families."

According to Tim Lawrence, Flamingo's core clientele consisted of around ten such cliques, each with twenty to thirty people, most of whom had at least some connection to Michael Fesco and the Fire Island Pines.[291] Membership at Flamingo was exclusive and expensive, priced at six hundred dollars a year (in today's money).[292] Historians note that physical transcendence at Flamingo was achieved through high tempo ("Hi-NRG") music and exclusion of unattractive people. The nightclub's racial composition was mostly white, and it was not rare to find that the only black person in attendance was the DJ. Unlike Le Jardins and Studio 54, female membership was limited to a couple of disco diehards, or friends of male members who had come as a plus one.[293]

Another establishment that excluded women altogether was the Saint, which opened in the East Village in 1980. The entrepreneur behind the project was Bruce Mailman, the owner of St. Marks Baths, a fashionable gay bathhouse. Supported by investors, he had renovated an old Yiddish theater to create the world's largest gay discotheque. Mailman's concept was similar to Fesco's, but even though his venue housed a few thousand people and membership in his club was less expensive ($150 a year plus $30 entrance fee), admissions were no less exclusive. His decision to open a members' club was announced through personalized invitations to friends and acquaintances in the circuit. "Since the beginning of recorded history," the invitation read, setting the tone for the opening night, "male members of the species have joined together in ritual dance. Adorned, semi-naked with rhythm instruments, they used this tribal rite to celebrate their Gods and themselves. The Saint has been created to perform the mystery—to continue the rite."[294] As mentioned, the continuation of the male ritual bonding

[289] Weems, *The Fierce Tribe*, 105–6.
[290] Levine, "The Life and Death of Gay Clones," 60.
[291] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 193.
[292] Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night a Dj Saved My Life*, 208.
[293] Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 70; Haden-Guest, *The Last Party*, 5.
[294] Clendinen, *Out for Good*, 441, 443.

meant the discontinuation of female participation. “Under no circumstances,” Mailman warned, “will women guests of male members be permitted in the club on Saturday nights.”[295] In addition to Mailman’s invitees, prospective members were required to make audition-like appearances at the club’s offices. Mailman wanted only the cream of the crop, men with chiseled faces and perfect bodies — and he succeeded, as close to 4,000 gay men — mostly white and overwhelmingly good looking — showed up on opening night. [296]

In gay nightlife more broadly, social cohesion and cultural homogeneity was often reinforced through less overt, inconspicuous forms of discrimination. For example, it was regularly observed that non-whites were required to show two- or even three documents of identification upon entering some gay establishments.[297] The reason for this was not always clear. Sociologist Chong-Suk Han has pointed out that racist policies at nightlife institutions tend to be “cloaked in discourses of class.” Here, “classist” arguments are often invoked to refuse non-white people to enter gay bars, thereby obfuscating the racial prejudices of those managing the door.[298] To give an example, a gay nightspot in San Francisco was accused in 1980 of “double-carding” against Asian men because Asians were reputed to be cheap drinkers.[299] The notion that black homosexuals in particular suffered discrimination for being black and poor is, furthermore, reflected in the consequences of gentrification. Statistics show that the black population on Manhattan fell by 18.6 percent in the Seventies. [300] And as competition on the club scene grew fierce, many black nightspots had to close their doors and relocate to more peripheral parts of the city.

In venues that refrained from using overt means of exclusion, entrepreneurs knew how to attract the desired crowd through subtle and gradual changes in the clubs’ environments. When the management at the Paradise Garage decided to turn the predominantly black club “white,” they redecorated the space to make it look more industrial, an aesthetic which appealed to many white middle-class homosexuals at the time. They invested in high-end food and hired a white DJ. The result was immediate. “It became so overwhelmed with white people for a couple of weeks that the black dancers vanished,” a local regular told Tim Lawrence. “They stood around the edges because they didn't like the music and so you didn't notice them.”

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[295] Clendinen, 447.
[296] Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 150.
[297] Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City,” 272; Bérubé, “How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays,” 184; Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 421.
[298] Han, “They Don’t Want To Cruise Your Type,” 58.
[299] Gay Asian Information Network, “An Account by Mark Dyer of the Discriminatory Practices He Observed at the Gay Bar N’Touch on the Evening of Friday December 26, 1980.”
[300] Oreskes, “Census Traces Radical Shifts in New York City’s Population.”

Despite their apparent discomfort at what was happening, the black dancers didn't go without a struggle. When the management's declared their decision to make Friday "black night" and Saturday "white night," the owner was bombarded with eggs and angry letters.[301]

As the example indicate, by institutionalizing homogeneity at gay nightspots, club owners reinforced conflict between minority groups, thereby contributing to the rising separatism that pervaded segments of the gay world. Furthermore, as argued in this section, institutions were not just passive spatial containers of social life, but influential agents that affected local access and patters of socialization.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SEX

Sexual liberation not only sexualized gay institutions (making displays of eroticism more common), but it also strengthened the role of private institutions as gatekeepers and facilitators of gay sex. The impact of gay liberation on the institutionalization of cruising is reflected in the observation that "in the years [after] Stonewall" it became more difficult "to spend your life in a toilet." This mutilated quote is drawn from Stephen Greco, a seasoned tearoom cruiser who, in addition to bemoaning the increasingly ill fame of outdoor cruising after gay liberation ("you'll get mugged, you'll get arrested, you'll get sick"), notes how the gay world in the Seventies saw the proliferation of new sexual scenes that allowed homosexuals to move away from the seedy underworld of "outdoor" cruising; tearooms, public parks, the waterfront, etc.[302]

Liberated homosexuals' aversion to outdoor cruising is, moreover, reflected in *The Joy of Gay Sex,* a popular gay sex guide from 1977 in which the reader is given an admonitory finger: "Tearooms are very dangerous," the authors of the guide explain. In addition to warning against the presence of plainclothes police with hidden cameras, the authors jokingly instruct the reader in how to spot a mugger before it is too late: "if you start fooling around with a guy whose heart is pounding and who can't get an erection, he may be anxious because he is nervous, or he may be about to rob you."[303] The fact that tearoom cruising gained an increasingly bad reputation in the Seventies does not mean that homosexuals in the Fifties and Sixties were unacquainted with its dangers. Their general silence on the topic should rather be interpreted as a sign that pre-liberation cruisers, in the absence of suitable alternatives, were

[301] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 418–19.
[302] Greco, "The Manhattan Hunting Grounds," 236.
[303] Silverstein and White, *The Joy of Gay Sex*, 210.

less inclined to speak up. Although many continued to frequent outdoor meeting places, an increasing number of urban homosexuals abandoned their old haunts when indoors cruising became more accessible.

The broadened opportunities for indoor cruising were largely attributed to the proliferation of gay bathhouses, sexual institutions which were known for their sexual discretion. By the early Eighties, there were around two hundred gay bathhouses in America — twice the number of the decade before.[304] Bathhouses held many advantages over public cruising spots, informed Martin Weinberg and Colin Williams, who reported on the phenomenon in a national study from 1975. Bathhouses' exterior was often inconspicuous and hidden form plain sight, the authors found, and their management was said to be extremely discreet. Some bathhouses had safety mechanisms to protect guests from police raids, like keeping locked doors to delay the intruders from catching members in mid-action. Much like tearooms, bathhouse cruisers cultivated strict norms of anonymity. The venues were often dimly lit, and conversation was frowned upon.[305]

Whereas homosexuals in the past had been wary about openly associating themselves with public bathhouses, the sexual liberation brought new energies and economic investments to the old establishments. In the gay circle of Arthur Bell in the Fifties there were certain "dos" and "don'ts" — and to cruise a public bathhouse was a big *don't*. "Years ago you'd die if you bumped into someone you knew at Everard's," Bell explained in reference to the bathhouse that became his guilty pleasure in the Fifties.[306] Into the Sixties, Everard's remained one the only commercial institutions committed to providing gay men with opportunities for indoor sex. When Steve Ostrow, a stockbroker from New Jersey considered getting into the commercial sex business in the late Sixties, he decided to inspect the infamous institution. He reported that it "stunk. The Smell! There was dung on the floor and they treated people like crap […] and it was run by the Mafia, and stuff like that."[307] However, perceiving a profitable business opportunity, Ostrow rented the basement of the grand Ansonia hotel, located on the Upper West Side and turned it into what would become the Continental Bathhouse. When it opened in 1969, the establishment boasted 400 rooms and 2,000 lockers, and what the owner claimed to be the largest swimming pool in the world.[308]

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[304] Bell, "The Bath Life Gets Respectability," 78.
[305] Weinberg and Williams, "Gay Baths and the Social Organization of Impersonal Sex," 128–29.
[306] Bell, "The Bath Life Gets Respectability," 77, 83.
[307] Mitchell, "The Continental Baths."
[308] David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War*, 235; Mitchell, "The Continental Baths."

An immediate success, Ostrow's state-of-the-art bathhouse represented a new type of scene onto which sexual emancipation could be publicly manifested and collectively celebrated. By installing a dance floor and organizing live concerts, the Continental ended up attracting the *crème de la crème* of gay Manhattanites. And as soon as it was known that Bette Midler, an up-and-coming singer at the time, held exclusive concerts in the club basement before jam-packed audience of towel-clad gay men, many heterosexuals — especially straight women — wanted to see the fabulous place for themselves.[309] When Ostrow opened the doors to women in 1972, the Continental became so crowded with female thrill-seekers that many of the original clientele had to wrestle to get in, if we believe fictionalized account of the events.[310]

The presence of so many straight women was off-putting to the original clientele, whose loyalty soon shifted to the exclusively gay Club Baths. A former owner of the Club describes how he, like Ostrow, brought respectability to his bathhouse:

> We made the baths beautiful and clean and treated our customers as special human beings and made them feel good about themselves. We gave them pink spotlights and real plants and numerous facilities for anonymous sex. For a year we operated a free venereal disease clinic at the Club. We turn[ed] away drunks and people on drugs.[311]

As the quote shows, renovations extended beyond standards of cleanliness and taste in furniture. The implication that bathhouse owners were increasingly strict about whom they admitted to their establishments brings us to comment on the institutional dynamics that affected membership and patterns of sexual participation.

According to historian Arthur Bell there were nine gay bathhouses in New York in 1979 which varied greatly in terms of both demography and style. He mentions places like Wall Street Sauna and the Beacon, which were frequented by businessmen and Upper East Siders, respectively. Towards the West Village there was St. Mark's Baths, a place for old people and "Third World gays" (by which I think he refers mainly to Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants) and Man's Country, which was favored by students. There was also a place in Harlem called Mount Morris which catered to black men. In addition to these places, which were distinguished by the class and race of their clientele, there were bathhouses that became associated with specific lifestyles. Just like the Club was popular among upwardly mobile

[309] Russo, "Bette Midler."
[310] Warren, *The Front Runner*, 75.
[311] Sanders, *Gay Source*, 243. Quoted in David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War*, 238.

homosexuals, the SM crowd preferred the New Barracks near Times Square. That is, if we exclude the "total masochists," which, Bell jokes, were "advised to visit the Continental, only because this once-great counterculture pantheon [had] turned into a pit."[312]

To Ostrow's credit, the Continental tried hard to create a sexually and racially diverse atmosphere. But whereas the initiative to include straights and women had worked only "too well," he had a hard time appealing to black people. This was reflected in his campaign to promote racial diversity by handing out free tickets in the city's black newspapers.[313] Normally, entrance fees at the Continental were around $30, and twice that amount if you wanted access to a private room. Similarly, at the Club, prices ranged from $20-35,[314] with the exception of Fridays, when it was "buddy night" and admissions reduced to half price for guests who brought a friend.[315] It was generally cheaper to enter on weekdays; in some less upscale establishments, Monday was "dollar night."[316] In Melvin Dixon's fictional "Paradise Bath," one of the patrons is an elderly black man who frequents the same bathhouse every Wednesday because of the discounts.[317] Conversely, the circuit gays would convene at specific bathhouses during its busy hours — usually on Sundays — to relax after a night of drugs and euphoria.[318] In light of the above, it seems fair to conclude that variations of gay bathhouses in terms of style, reputation and pricing widened the racial and social fault lines that sectioned the gay world.

These forms of preliminary selection are often disregarded by the many gay authors and historians who describe the Seventies' bathhouses as class-free zones.[319] Supporters of this claim are right to point out that cruisers at the baths, whose sartorial selection was limited to white towels, were stripped of class symbols. Furthermore, the hallways that were used for cruising were often dim and the saunas they used for orgies were steamy, making it hard to see. This allowed for anonymity. It also made good looks less important. Rita Mae Brown, a lesbian author who visited The Club Baths disguised as a man confirms this observation. As she writes, the darkness of its maze-like hallways was penetrated only by ultraviolet spotlights, forcing some hall walkers to feel their way through the corridor's twists and turns. When Brown arrived at the famous orgy room, which was pitch dark and full of naked men, she quickly realized that everybody in the room was literally up for grabs.

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[312] Bell, "The Bath Life Gets Respectability," 78–83.
[313] David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War*, 237.
[314] Bell, "The Bath Life Gets Respectability," 83.
[315] Brown, "Queen for a Day: A Stranger in Paradise," 69.
[316] Silverstein and White, *The Joy of Gay Sex*, 36.
[317] Dixon, *Vanishing Rooms*, 89.
[318] Weems, *The Fierce Tribe*, 116.
[319] Kantrowitz, *Under the Rainbow*, 169.

> Inching around the bed, I felt like I was sliding by a picket fence—all the erect penises behind me were hitting me in the small of my back. People reach for your genitals as you pass. [...] One huge fellow with a potbelly embraced me as I nudged him to get by. Another man quickly enclosed me from behind. Fighting off my instinctive violent response, I relaxed, then hugged the man in return whispering, "Thank you but I've been here for an hour and I'm tired."[320]

After feigning an excuse, Brown continued her tour of the house, including the corridors (where the cubicles were), the sauna, and another, brighter orgy room. In contradiction to her previous observation, she noticed that the most beautiful men congregated in the light orgy room and claimed that these beauties tended to (how she knows this I do not know) "hold their come" while they waited for someone worthy "to shoot for."[321]

The idea that gay bathhouses were governed by oppressive hierarchies of physical beauty is supported by allegations that bathhouse guests, due to the ban on clothing and conversation, were stripped of their personalities. Literary theorist Leo Bersani speaks from personal experience:

> Anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable. Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world.[322]

If rejection at the bathhouses were part of the experience, many cruisers understood this and reconciled themselves to their harsh environment. Put-downs could be blunt (a simple "no" would often suffice), and departure from a sexual scene required little ceremony (a simple "thank you" or a pat on the back was more than enough).[323] However, rejection was often polite ("just resting," or, "sorry, I've just come") and, in the cubicles, the negotiation of sexual roles

[320] Brown, "Queen for a Day: A Stranger in Paradise," 72.
[321] Brown, 74.
[322] Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, 12.
[323] Brown, "Queen for a Day: A Stranger in Paradise," 72.

was facilitated by subtle cues (doors left ajar meant that you were available and people lay on their backs or stomachs according to their sexual preference) to prevent blatant rejection and embarrassment.[324] In all, whereas some men experienced the bathhouse as a classless place which provided them with sexual opportunities, others, like Bersani, paid more attention to how desires were structured behind the façade of sexual camaraderie.

In addition to bathhouses, another phenomenon that contributed to the decline of outdoor cruising was the spread of backroom bars ("sex bars" not to be confused with the kind described in chapter 1) and blue movie houses. Like the latter, backroom bars were places for impersonal sex. Brandon Judell, a gay leatherman, spoke highly of "fuck bars" because they stayed open all night, were generally heated and relatively clean. These were luxuries which placed backroom bars at an advantage over piers and parks which, in addition to being exposed to all kinds of weather, subjected cruisers to a range of dangers. Regarding outdoor cruising, Judell writes that "there was always the possibility of being hurt by someone or something. A loose floorboard. A lonesome nail. A screwy sailor."[325] Although backroom bars and outdoor cruising spaces (like the Christopher Street Piers) continued to exist side by side, gradually more homosexuals found that a beer or entrance fee was a small price to pay for a safer and more comfortable cruising environment.

Compared to backroom bars, blue movie houses were more expensive to enter. But if you paid the around $30 entrance fee, you could stay as a long as you liked.[326] For this reason, Fritscher notes that movie houses in San Francisco gave shelter and entertainment to the homeless, which, other sources suggest, included many hustlers.[327] As gay establishment became more overtly sexual in the Seventies, it also became easier for male sex workers to find accommodation at bars. Gay prostitution — like sex — went indoors. Inside movie theaters, they were a much-welcomed distraction, as hustlers and other cruisers competed with the big screen for the audience's attention. Writer Bruce Vilanch mentions that at one such movie house, the "Bijou,"

> the men's room was behind the screen. […] And then, directly to the right of the screen was a big exit sign and a hallway with a light over it […] And so that is where people would pose […] pretending they were smoking cigarettes (which you couldn't do) and

[324] Weinberg and Williams, "Gay Baths and the Social Organization of Impersonal Sex," 132; Reid, *The Best Little Boy in the World*, 199.
[325] Judell, "Sexual Anarchy," 135–36.
[326] Gill, "Blue Notes," 8.
[327] Morrisroe, *Mapplethorpe*, 208; Gill, "Blue Notes," 11.

you would cruise them from your seat. And if you liked what you saw would go back in that hall. And so there was lots of activity…[328]

Like backroom bars and bathhouses, blue movie theaters were signs of the rapid commercialization of the gay sex scene which started in the late Sixties and culminated in the Seventies. The fact that these establishments provided gay men with safe and anonymous ways to cruise indoors meant that public spaces like tearooms, streets and parks became less popular. Public restrooms and parks were inclusive spaces where men could meet without the interference of institutional policies (like exclusive membership, doormen, advertisements, etc.), and equally important, without the aesthetic messaging of the venues. The style of the bartender, the look of the décor and the sound of the music were highly effective in signaling to potential customers who did or did not belong and therefore had an exclusionary effect. As the commercial interest became more pervasive and the sexual meeting places increasingly segregated along class and racial lines, venues gradually lost their potential to facilitate meetings across cultural divides. Social and racial diversity, the hope of many proponents of gay culture after liberation, was in many ways in decline. In this chapter, I have given examples of how commercial sex establishments went about the exclusion of undesirable groups while operating mechanisms which reinforced homogeneity. Further effects of institutional regulation are made clearer in the next chapter, where I discuss some of the aesthetic manifestations of the cultural segregation that I have just described.

[328] Schwarz, *Wrangler*.

CHAPTER 4 | TWICE A MAN BUT HALF A HUMAN BEING?: THE IMPACT OF ANONYMITY ON SEXUAL DEMOCRACY, 1945–1982

"I love you." It is a warm summer night on Fire Island when the young John Schaffer utters these words, sending a shudder down his lover's spine. "Oh God!" Malone says with a laugh. "Those words. Expunge them from your vocabulary. You don't love me. I am a professional faggot." Malone goes on to teach his young and naive lover what ten years on the circuit taught him. First of all, "never underestimate the importance of indifference, it is, finally, the great freedom." And more essentially: "Don't mope around looking for someone else to make you happy, and remember that the vast majority of homosexuals are looking for a superman to love and find it *very* difficult to love anyone merely human."[329]

The scene is from Andrew Holleran's novel *Dancer from the Dance,* which he published in 1978 in response to what he perceived to be a rising trend towards hedonism and sexual decadence in the gay world. Gay liberation, in his analysis, freed homosexuals from having to conform to straight norms, but it didn't liberate gay men from their desire for intimacy and affection. This was, in his view, perhaps the biggest failure of the sexual liberation, a failure which manifested itself in gay men's increasing tendency to engage sexually with a sense of indifference, as if nothing personal was at stake.

This chapter looks at sexual liberation with a focus on the often-conflicting relation between sexual fulfillment and personal authenticity. I start by pointing to how the new consumerist ethos that developed in the postwar era changed gay and straight people's perception of ideal masculinity, and how many gay men responded to the general culture's heightened focus on physical appearance by engaging in activities like fitness and bodybuilding. The new emphasis on exteriority (as opposed to personality) also manifested itself in the process of gay male virilization, an aesthetic trend which reflected homosexual men's personal and political priorities in the Seventies. Since virility is associated with well-established masculine qualities such as toughness and hardness, as well as emotional impenetrability and self-containment; and because it tends to emanate from specific parts of the person (like the penis, muscles, clothes, body hair, etc.), it can be associated with concepts like exteriority, fetishism and anonymity. The anonymization of gay male aesthetics was, furthermore, epitomized by the "clone look," a proletarian uniform that became a generic form of expression for many urban gay men in the Seventies.

[329] Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance*, 236.

A blessing and a burden, virility and anonymity were not only viewed as respectively virtuous and practical, but they often functioned as vehicles of sexual objectification. To be sure, the depersonalizing burden of virility befell some men more than others. Not only did signifiers of virility like penis size and muscle tone carry distinctly social and racial connotations, but the sexual stereotypes of marginalized groups also tended to be cast more narrowly, coaxing some marginalized men into identifying with sexual roles that greatly circumscribed their individual freedom of expression. Although this dynamic is identified as an impediment to sexual democracy, I do not see all forms of anonymization in the same light. In the final analysis, sexual anonymity and depersonalization was usually a choice, that is, an individual preference that was, moreover, performed in rituals like drug use, group sex and dancing, personal and social practices that allowed participants to connect with each other's bodies on an anonymous yet profoundly physical level.

THE ORNAMENTALIZATION OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Social scientists and historians have characterized the sexual revolution as a "raging commercial success."[330] Although apostles of sexual liberation like Herbert Marcuse and Gordon O. Brown and the activists that marched to their drums had envisioned a radical departure from consumerism, the New Left ultimately failed to prevent or undermine the commercialization of American life. In fact, it has been argued that the Hip Generation's principles of individual freedom and self-expression served as a Trojan horse of commercial expansion, as advertisers seized on the new imperative to express individuality by offering up merchandises for conspicuous consumption.[331] To indicate the scope of the commercial expansion, expenditures on advertisements increased fivefold between 1970 and 1985.[332] The new consumerist mentality was diagnosed in Christopher Lasch's bestselling book on *The Culture of Narcissism* from 1976. "Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success," Lasch remarked on the new paradigm, implying that appearance had become the inner essence of character.

Regarding male aesthetics, feminist author Susan Faludi has argued that consumerism caused masculine ideals to shift from an emphasis on personal character and collective

[330] Clark, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview," 66.
[331] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 32.
[332] US Census Bureau, "Statistical Abstract of the United States," 559.

responsibility, to external appearance and individuality and dates this change to the postwar years. Faludi explains that the masculine ideal of the New Deal era had been the "selfless public servant," the authoritarian father figure or the heroic soldier who put family and country first. The new man that emerged in the postwar era was more self-centered. He was "thrust into an ornamental realm" of consumerism where he, in the pursuit of freedom and personal opportunities, continued to remove himself from traditional obligations.[333]

A new ethos of ornamental masculinity was reinforced by the media's eroticization of the male body. It was considered a feminist triumph and a milestone for sexual liberation when footballer Burt Reynolds appeared naked on a bearskin rug in a centerfold of *Cosmopolitan* in 1972.[334] The watershed moment had been a long time in the making. Since the Forties, Hollywood studios had actively courted female audiences by presenting male stars as sex symbols.[335] However, the star's semi-nudity was usually limited to specific contexts where the showing of skin was conventionally called for, such as Roman antiquity or the boxing ring.[336] And although figures like Tarzan had invited sexual attention they were primarily valued for their heroic acts. "Men act and women appear," British art critic John Berger famously noted in 1972.[337] Ironically, Berger's expression was coined the very year that Burt Reynold's "appeared" in the pages of Cosmopolitan, indicating that popular magazines were already bending this rule.

The eroticization of male physical beauty penetrated other social realms as well, making all men subject to increasingly strict body standards. The regression to unattainable male beauty ideals is addressed in a recent study on the emergence of the "Adonis Complex," where a team of physicians and psychologists argues that the sexual liberation contributed to an "epidemic" of male body disorders among young men in the Nineties. Registering the growing prevalence of muscle dysmorphia, the researchers point to the historical development of the G.I. Joe doll to illustrate how male beauty norms became more muscular from 1964 onward. The first doll is said to have had a fairly normal built. It was reintroduced in 1974 after it had been "putting in a little time at the gym." — Its muscles continued to swell, for by 1991 it had grown to almost inhuman proportions.[338] For most young men, this added pain to injury. In addition to becoming

[333] Faludi, *Stiffed*, 16, 34.
[334] David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War*, 232.
[335] Bronski, *The Pleasure Principle*, 89.
[336] Dyer, *White*, 146.
[337] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47.
[338] Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia, *The Adonis Complex*, 42.

more *central* to conventional standards of male success following the sexual liberation, male good looks were also increasingly *difficult* to attain.

Cultural critics have noted that gay men were the first to "make a meal of male sexuality."[339] Accordingly, there are indices to suggest that gay men were disproportionately affected by sexual pressures to look physically attractive in accordance with shifting norms. A survey published in *Psychology Today* in 1973, which compared American men and women's attitudes towards their bodies, found that homosexuals were "exceptionally concerned with their body image."[340] A study from 1979 reached similar conclusions.[341] There are at least two reasons for why gay men felt more pressured to look good. For a long time, gay consumers had been exposed to sexualized images of male bodies in illicit erotic magazines, which defined expectations and normalized extraordinary physiques. More important still were the social norms on the gay cruising scene, where cruisers were encouraged to "advertise" their physical assets by posing and dressing in sexually provocative ways.[342]

The amplified body pressures felt by many gay men may explain why the trajectory of gay aesthetics, which ran parallel to the general trends, embodied these trends' most extreme manifestations. As stated in chapter 2, homosexuals were historically known for cultivating their beauty. In addition to observations that homosexuals had a proclivity for activities like shopping for fashion and tanning, gay men's long-standing investment in physical beauty was indicated by their involvement in the spectator sport of bodybuilding. The sport emerged in the late nineteenth century when rising income and leisure expanded the public realm of health and fitness. Public interest in physical helath manifested itself in, among other things, the rise of college football, the revival of the Olympic Games, as well as Bernarr Macfadden's publication of *Physique Culture*. Macfadden's magazine promoted the career of Eugene Sandow, the prototypical bodybuilder who became an international sensation.[343] Hailed as the "perfect man," Sandow often appeared on postcards with little more than a fig leaf to cover his private parts, making him an early poster boy for the muscular look.[344]

In the postwar era, Sandow was succeeded by stars like Charles Atlas, who built his career at a time when bodybuilding seemed to have lost its masculine credentials. In the Hollywood comedy film *Muscle Beach Party (*1964), Atlas and a troop of bodybuilders are

[339] Simmonds, "What's next: Fashion, Foodies, and the Illusion of Freedom," 123.
[340] Bohrnstedt, "The Happy American Body," 121.
[341] Prytula, Wellford, and Demonbreun, "Body Self-Image and Homosexuality," 570.
[342] Rodgers, *Gay Talk*, 18.
[343] Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 6.
[344] Walters, *The Nude Male*, 293.

depicted in pink swim trunks and capes to match. Bodybuilding's connection to homosexuality was made explicit in *The Detective,* a crime movie from 1968 starring Frank Sinatra. In the film, the murder victim is a homosexual dandy with a rich supply of weight manuals and baby oil (used for bodybuilding competitions). The gay connotation of bodybuilding was also reinforced by the gay media, which openly embraced the connection. The bodybuilding aesthetic was promoted in many physique magazines, where illustrators like George Quaintance and Tom of Finland depicted male muscularity in its idealized form. Kenneth Anger's underground film *Fireworks* from 1947 is another example homosexuals' long-standing erotic investment in the muscular body. By featuring long close-ups of a bodybuilder flexing his muscles, Anger treads a fine line between aesthetic admiration and sexual fetishism, while illustrating the bodybuilder's urge for self-objectification.

In addition to their role as bodybuilding spectators, many homosexuals actively participated in the building of their own bodies. Many contemporaries saw this activity as a "reparative technique for feelings of inadequacy and castrated masculinity," as one psychoanalyst put it.[345] Jesse Stearn made similar observations in his crudely drawn exploitation piece *The Sixth Man* from 1961, stating that many homosexuals were "addicted to body building and physical culture." New York gyms were known as "paradises for homosexuals," he claimed, "where gay men [came] to posture, flex muscles, and establish an intimacy among themselves in apparently conventional surroundings."[346] Gay author Alan Helms concurred, elaborating on the importance of good looks among his homosexual acquaintances in the Fifties. "I didn't know anyone who didn't have a sunlamp," Helms says, "or take time in the bathroom or wear clothes too small for comfort. I didn't know anyone who didn't belong to a gym, unless he was hopeless material, or anyone who didn't care a lot about bodies."[347]

Observations that "every" homosexual was a gym member already in the Fifties and Sixties do not, however, align with the standard narrative which dates the take-off of fitness to the Seventies. As one gay health expert notes, gay men before Stonewall looked good because they were young and *naturally* endowed; it didn't occur to them that they could "*become* hunky" or turn themselves into a "sex symbol" through strenuous exercise.[348] Other writers on gay culture note that bodybuilding before Stonewall was limited to a small subculture whose

[345] Bieber, *Homosexuality*, 187.
[346] Stearn, *The Sixth Man*, 21, 117.
[347] Helms, *Young Man from the Provinces*, 95.
[348] Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*, 272.

workouts consisted in simple exercises requiring little specialized equipment. They credit Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Austrian bodybuilder, as an inspirational force towards more advanced work-out regimes in the Seventies.[349] Schwarzenegger, who won the title of Mr. Olympia six years in a row was prominently featured in the work-out manual *Pumping Iron* from 1974, which was made into a popular movie documentary in 1977. The manual is a good example of how fitness entrepreneurs sought to restore the legitimacy of bodybuilding by dissociating the sport from emasculating stereotypes. The authors expressed sadness at the common misconception that bodybuilders were "narcissistic, coordinatively helpless muscleheads with suspect sexual preferences," emphasizing instead the sport's status as a respectable artform.[350] An article from 1975 entitled "Is it an art, a sport or sheer exhibitionism?" reached similar conclusions, referring to the growing attendance at bodybuilding contests, exemplified by a special event at the Sydney Opera House where Schwarzenegger posed in front of a fully-packed audience.[351]

To indicate the extent of the Seventies' fitness boom, historians estimate that the number of people who exercised on a regular basis tripled from 24 to 69 percent between 1960 and 1987.[352] Among those who joined the fitness trend was Jerry Rubin. The hippie organizer which we know from earlier had spent his youthful years "eating fast foods, taking drugs, forgetting to sleep." Now a middle-aged man, Rubin decided to confront his unhealthy habits. He traded in meat and carbohydrates for fruit, vegetables, fish and chicken; he started taking vitamin pills, and committed himself to a new regime of self-care, consisting of yoga and jogging, as well as visits to sauna baths, chiropractors and acupuncturists. "At the age of thirty-seven I feel like twenty-five," Rubin reflected in his 1976 memoirs, adding that he was beginning to make his body his "best friend."[353]

A general concern with physical health and slimness was reflected the booming sales of diet foods, an industry which experienced a ten percent annual growth between 1960 and 1980.[354] The fitness trends' clearest manifestation, however, was in fashion. Describing to "the layered look," fashion historians notes that many men and women in the Seventies, favored baggy clothes and heavy sweaters, indicating that it had become more important to look sporty than chic and skinny.[355] "Now it is muscle tone, skin tone, 'being in shape' rather than an

[349] Crimp, "DISSS-CO (A FRAGMENT) From 'Before Pictures', a Memoir of 1970s New York," 6, 11.
[350] Gaines and Butler, *Pumping Iron*, 8.
[351] Goldberg, "Is It an Art, a Sport or Sheer Exhibitionism?"
[352] Stern, "The Fitness Movement and the Fitness Center Industry," 1.
[353] Rubin, *Growing up at Thirty-Seven*, 23–24, 34.
[354] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 245.
[355] Bond, *The Guinness Guide to 20th Century Fashion*, 205–6.

insistent call to the scale," wrote Hillel Schwartz, the author of a book on the history of dieting from 1986.[356] The quote points to the Seventies' fitness movement's role in promoting a new ethics by which people were increasingly rewarded — not so much for "cutting back" on intake — but for combining the right consumption of food and self-care products with continual body work-outs.

To reference the refrain of a Diana Ross song, dancers at discotheques were increasingly called on to "work that body," pointing to disco music's role in promoting physical exhibitionism. The connection between disco and physicality has been theorized by Richard Dyer, who comments on the genre's insistence on sexually charged rhythms (connoting "primitive" African drums), as opposed to melody and harmony (which were the essence of "puritan" music).[357] Bodily awareness on the dancefloor was also heightened through excessive drug use. As the *Village Voice* noted, the Sixties had been a "mind trip" induced by drugs which stirred the imagination, such as marijuana and acid. Disco, on the other hand, was a "body trip," fueled by Quaaludes and cocaine — substances that made you want to dance non-stop.[358] The music – stripped down to powerful hooks and incessant beats, played on a loop at a volume that could be felt in the core of the body – added to this very physical experience of self.[359]

If disco and drugs stirred dancers to show off their bodies, the management of the discotheques gave added incentive to go "all the way." At places like Studio 54 and Flamingo, the use of scanty clothing was encouraged by the presence of shirtless bartenders. Although bare-chested waiters had graced the locales of gay leather bars since the Sixties, it was not until the disco era that the gimmick became fashionable.[360] In his memoirs, James Melson, a Midwestern migrant to New York, recalls his first of many visits to Studio 54, where he as a young man marveled at the "flawless" bartenders in bowties, whose "sweaty torsos" and "lascivious swaying and grinding to the music" gave impulse to his sexual ideation.[361] Another night after dancing at Flamingo, Melson returned to his hotel room drenched in sweat and baby oil. The baby oil probably stemmed from the professional bodybuilders who were regularly hired to pose amid Flamingo's dancing crowds.[362] Whether the bodybuilders stuck out is

[356] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 336.
[357] Dyer, "In Defense of Disco," 22.
[358] Originally published in 1979, the article is reprinted in Kopkind, "Music," 65.
[359] Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor, 1980–1983*, 426.
[360] Wrangler and Johnes, *The Jack Wrangler Story or What's a Nice Boy Like You Doing?*, 79.
[361] James Melson, *The Golden Boy*, 58.
[362] James Melson, 86.

another question, for as visitors pointed out, the entire Flamingo crowd could have been on professional display. They were all "extraordinarily muscular."[363]

On his tour of gay nightlife, Melson was also presented with another spectacle. The nipple piercing might seem insignificant but the small metallic accessory, which originated as a leather fetish in the Fifties and was turned into a fashion staple in the Seventies' gay discotheques, gives insight into the values and aesthetic priorities of those who donned them. In addition to being a jewel in the crown of sexual liberation, the nipple piercing can be read as an ornamental symbol of gay men's growing eroticization of pectoral muscles. At the discotheques, sculpted pectoral muscles quickly became one of the most desirable attributes of gay male beauty, says a visitor to the Flamingo, who experienced the so-called "disco tits" phenomenon firsthand.[364] By modelling themselves after Arnold Schwarzenegger's 57-inch chest, some gay men lapsed into anabolic steroids use, raising the stakes of physical perfectionism. But to some men it was worth the risk; it was not without reason that the editor of a 1978 issue of *Drummer* told readers that "[w]ithout pecs, you're dead."[365]

The eroticization of the body and (to a much smaller extent) the fetishization of individual body parts, become all the more tangible if one considers the proliferation of gay male sex ads, where sexual encounters were offered and requested with increasing bluntness and specificity. On the basis of four surveys of gay male advertisements from between 1976 and 1981 undertaken by psychologists and social scientists, generalizations can be made concerning the type of information that circulated.[366] The surveys consistently show that homosexual advertisers were less inclined than heterosexual men and women to volunteer information about personality traits. Although many gay men (ranging from a third to half of the samples) stated their racial or ethnic preferences ("Caucasian for Caucasian" being a standard phrase), the male homosexual cohort was also the least likely to give or seek information about class and social status. All reports comment on gay men's particular concern with age (specified in 87 % of cases in one of the samples). Another dominant theme was gender performance: According to one survey, 43 % and 63 % of gay male advertisers respectively sought and offered "masculine attributes" (e.g. rugged, very strong, athletic / gym body, etc.).[367] On account of penis size, another survey, which compared professional (i.e. models, masseurs

[363] White, *States of Desire Revisited*, 269.
[364] Crimp, "DISSS-CO (A FRAGMENT) From 'Before Pictures', a Memoir of 1970s New York," 11.
[365] Fritscher, "Gay Jock Sports," 535.
[366] Deaux and Hanna, "Courtship in the Personals Column"; Lee, "Forbidden Colors of Love"; Laner and Kamel, "Media Mating I"; Lumby, "Men Who Advertise for Sex."
[367] Laner and Kamel, "Media Mating I," 155.

and escorts) and private advertisements, suggested that it was rare (8 %) for nonprofessionals to reveal the size of their genitals. Yet in the professional group genital endowment was advertised in 33 % of the cases, pointing to the relative importance of having a big penis — as well as there being a tacit norm of disclosing such information — among men who expected to make money from the sale of sexual services.[368]

PENIS AND VIRILITY

Historians generally agree that gay liberation shifted gay men's aesthetic priorities from elegance and respectability to in-your-face virility in the Seventies.[369] But even though people often comment that gay culture placed high importance on genital endowment, the symbolic interconnections between virility and penis size are underexplored in the historical literature, and so is the impact of gay virilization on the sexual agency of social and racial minorities. If the sexual liberation amplified male concerns with penis size, this connection too, must be looked at more closely.

Henry Miller noted in 1964 that men "always think that to own a big cock is one of life's greatest boons."[370] Similarly, the author of *The Joys of Sex*, a sex manual which sold over two million copies in the early Seventies, felt these concerns to be so severe that he attributed them to biology.[371] If penis anxiety, as these authors suggested, was (biologically) instilled into men before the sexual revolution, then the revolutionary ethos of sexual fulfillment (also on the part of women) did little to ease men's concern. Seeing *The Joys of Sex* as a symptom of rampant individualism and hedonistic excess, Christopher Lasch worried in 1979 that Americans were heading towards a sexual dystopia "in which everyone has the right to everyone else, where human beings, reduced to their sexual organs, become absolutely anonymous and interchangeable."[372] It seemed that the penis was becoming ever more central to masculine identity and sexual appeal.

Scientists at the time noted that homosexual men were particularly indulgent when it came to sex, an idea which was frequently explained in terms of gay men's alleged obsession

[368] Lumby, "Men Who Advertise for Sex," 68.
[369] Cole, *'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, 93; Piontek, *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 53; Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*.
[370] Miller, *Sexus*, 184.
[371] Comfort, *The Joy of Sex*, 89.
[372] Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 131–32.

with big penises. [373] As physician David Reuben wrote in a sensationalist best-seller from 1969, male homosexuals "may have as many as five sexual experiences in one evening — all with different partners," adding that what all gay men have in common is that their "primary interest is the penis, not the person."[374] Misguided in his characterization, Reuben, like so many of his contemporaries, was probably under the spell of modern psychology. Prominent psychologists sometimes claimed that passive homosexuals suffered from a "castration complex," which induced them to seek out "bigger and stronger" men in order to extract their "phallic powers," inserting their partners' "manhood" into their mouth or anus.[375] As such, the penis was viewed as a talisman for virility. "It's as if there were only one penis and he had it" a young man confessed to psychoanalyst Irving Bieber; "[and] when I sucked it, it was mine."[376]

Even though many homosexuals were conditioned by scientists into thinking of themselves as penis-crazed perverts, members of the gay community also played a role in perpetuating this myth. As Martin Hoffman, a homosexual rights advocate claimed in 1968: "Any student of gay life can attest to the fact that very many male homosexuals are particularly fetishized on the size of the penis, and that this forms a recurrent topic of discussion among them."[377] Indeed, as researchers on gay vernaculars have shown, members of the homosexual community were historically well-versed in obscene and sexualized slang.[378] A popular gay slang guide from 1972, for instance, presents the reader with an overwhelming array of sexualized jargon, ranging from obscure concepts like "frilly dilly" (meaning "circumcised penis") and "cruising clothes" (defined as "skintight clothes accentuating the lower extremities"). The guide also lists 155 synonyms for "cock." Aside from gay vernaculars, further evidence of cruisers' primary concern with penises could be gleaned from the hustler's pose, where even subtle propositions for sex would involve "suggestive positioning to display a basket or a hand whose finger draw attention to an outlined penis."[379]

As much as penis size seems to have mattered there are other signifiers of penile attraction worth considering. Richard Amory provides us with a list of adjectives in his popular erotic novel *The Song of the Loom* from 1966, where he arouses his readers by invoking penises that are "veined," "thick and muscular," "pink" and "swelling"; "mauve-headed and sharply

[373] In *Homosexual Desire* (1972) for instance, Guy Hocquenghem presents a range of theories by authors like Marcel Proust and Sean-Paul Sartre as well as psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, Sándor Ferenczi and Alfred Adler that link homosexuality to the pursuit of the phallos, see pages 113-130.
[374] Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex, but Were Afraid to Ask*, 164.
[375] Socarides, *The Overt Homosexual*, 39;75.
[376] Bieber, *Homosexuality*, 210.
[377] Hoffman, *The Gay World*, 143.
[378] Baker, *Fabulosa!*, 115.
[379] Read, *Other Voices*, 86.

rounded" and penises with "fist-like" heads.[380] Safe to say, penises were admired for aesthetic as well as sexual reasons. An important aesthetic component with additional ethnic connotations was the foreskin. Because circumcision was especially prevalent in the United States, uncircumcised penises could be associated with people who were ostensibly "foreign," like Hispanic immigrants. According to one gay sex manual, many homosexuals expressed "strong preferences for 'cut' or 'uncut' meat."[381] Preferences in regard to foreskin could therefore, at least on a theoretical level, form the basis of ethnic discrimination.

Ethnicity, race and class have, moreover, long been associated with penis size and virility. For instance, white middle-class masculinity has, on account of its status as a more "cultured" form of manliness, connoted a lack of virile qualities. As historians have shown, physicians and reformers in the late nineteenth century frequently lamented that bourgeois men had lost their sexual potency as a result of "overcivilization." The "flaccid bourgeoisie," as some reformers called it, needed to "man up" through exercise and manly work.[382] In the postwar era, people with a higher education were sometimes considered to be more sexually refined than uneducated people, whose sexuality was portrayed as crude and licentious. "The upper level male is aroused by considerable variety of sexual stimuli," Kinsey reported, adding that highly educated people tended to have a minimum of pre- and extra-marital intercourse. "The lower level male, on the other hand, is less often aroused by anything except physical contact in coitus; he has an abundance of pre-marital intercourse, and a considerable amount of extra-marital intercourse in the early years of his marriage."[383] In the absence of moral prohibitions, Kinsey implied, uneducated men were unable to curb their sex drive.

Sociological discourse on working-class masculinities has presented them as exceedingly protective of their "manliness."[384] To make sense of this, Dyer explains that in the face of economic disempowerment, working-class men's bodies were their principal asset.[385] Their investment in physical and sexual power is exemplified by the bodybuilder, who originated as a symbol of proletarian strength.[386] In addition to bodybuilders, working-class icons like hustlers and "rough trade" (sexually aggressive and straight-acting men who were conspicuously blue-collar) were popular fantasy objects in gay physique magazines throughout

[380] Amory, *Song of the Loon*, 46, 103–4, 158.
[381] Silverstein and White, *The Joy of Gay Sex*, 104.
[382] Mumford, "'Lost Manhood' Found," 35, 45.
[383] Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 363.
[384] Gagnon and Simon, "Psychosexual Development," 39.
[385] Dyer, *White*, 147.
[386] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 178.

the postwar era.[387] On this note, gay author Michael Denney interviewed a young artist who was in high demand on the cruising turf, where he modelled his appearance on the hustler and performed the "mean" and "raunchy" attitude to go with it.[388] As hustlers themselves noted, "to look like a hustler" in gay jargon was to look "very, very good."[389]

The sexual fame of working-class men had certain down-sides. As I stated earlier, bodybuilders were often depicted as stupid and narcissistic. Hustlers and rough trades connoted danger and violence.[390] For men who conformed to these virile archetypes, it was sometimes sexually advantageous to be perceived as stupid. A young hustler in John Rechy's novel *City of Night,* for instance, is told that clients "dig it" when he "plays it dumb." On the job, he experiences this firsthand. He is leafing through a French novel when his client protests: "'Do you read books?" The hustler answers in the affirmative and is vehemently rejected because, the client explains, "really masculine men don't read!" [391] Following the incident the young hustler limited his literary activities to a private setting.

To the extent that these men were involved in their own image-making, they seemed to have compromised their status as full human beings, turning themselves into sexual objects while tacitly renouncing claims of being "relationship material." The impression that virility was antithetical to sociability is corroborated by the following analysis of black male stereotypes. But whereas working-class men were granted more leeway to define their individual expression, black men were often predefined as sexual objects and slotted into more narrow categories.

Robert Staples stated in an essay from 1986, that the media representation of black men had been limited to three recurring types: the "sexual superstud," the "athlete" and the "rapacious criminal."[392] In scientific discourse, working-class black men in particular were often presented as overtly masculine. Their alleged hypermasculinity was largely attributed to the social structure of the "ghetto," where young boys were raised by single mothers and "forced into a gang," as one folklorist noted.[393] In the popular culture, young black men were appraised for their verbal virtuosity (as exemplified in "joning," a cultural practice defined by the giving and taking of disparaging remarks, usually about female members of the opponent's family) and sartorial edge. But black men's image was also tinged with deep-rooted sexual

[387] Harris, "A Psychohistory of the Homosexual Body," 107.
[388] Denneny, *Lovers*, 104.
[389] Rechy, *The Sexual Outlaw*, 153.
[390] Fritscher, *Some Dance to Remember*, 421.
[391] Rechy, *City of Night*, 32, 44.
[392] Reprinted in Staples, "Stereotypes of Black Male Sexuality: The Facts behind the Myths," 466.
[393] Abrahams, "Some Varieties of Heroes in America," 345.

connotations. [394] The idea that black men were sexually omnipotent has obsessed white Americans since the beginning of slavery. [395] Black activist Eldridge Cleaver regarded the widespread assertion that black males were "physically superior" to whites was ultimately a left-handed compliment which, although it impinged on white men's claim to virility, confined black men to a sexual domain.[396]

The notion that black men were superior lovers was often attributed to the misconception that their genitals were larger. As Frantz Fanon wrote in a seminal book on black male dehumanization from 1967, for "the majority of white men the Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions."[397] To be sure, black people also propagated this stereotype. Black male virility was a recurring theme in urban black folk tales, whose heroes were frequently praised for their sexual prowess, as symbolized by his large penis which could be used to "chop down trees" or to "crack open coconuts."[398] The black men who internalized these phallic myths sometimes treated other black men with a mixture of racial solidarity and sexual innuendo. In a fictionalized encounter at a gay bathhouse, for instance, a young dancer was told by a middle-aged black man that he "sure look good," and that he probably got "good meat, too." [399] The quote is not clear proof that black men sexually objectified each other (which they certainly did), but — to the contrary — it illustrates how difficult it could be to spot racially charged speech, especially when spoken by other black men.

Among white homosexuals, explicit references to the "black phallus" were often presented in a humorous way, or as well-meaning compliments which reflected a lack of awareness of how sexual objectification negatively impacted racialized men and women. In gay parlance, the black men's penis was "black jack" (Forties' slang), "jungle meat" and "dark meat" (Sixties' slang); the penises of white men, on the other hand, were "light meat" with the implication that they were smaller and thus easier on the digestive tract. [400] In gay travel magazines like *Ciao!*, theories of black male "endowment" were propagated in travel descriptions from Senegal, where the men were rumored to be "extraordinarily handsome, extremely tall and very courteous" and whose "cocks" were believed to be "the biggest in the world."[401]

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[394] Rainwater, "Crucible of Identity," 206–7.
[395] Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, 68.
[396] Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 164–65.
[397] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 177.
[398] Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 226.
[399] Dixon, *Vanishing Rooms*, 89.
[400] Rodgers, *Gay Talk*, 49.
[401] Hilderbrand, "A Suitcase Full of Vaseline, or Travels in the 1970s Gay World," 397.

A person obsessed with large penises was called a "size queen." Someone who incapsulated this type while openly acknowledging his "black fever," was Robert Mapplethorpe. The famous photographer would treat friends to elaborate descriptions of the perfect black phallus, informs his biographer, drawing sketches with surgical precision and using medical jargon like "corpus spongiosum" to show for his devotion.[402] In the late Seventies and early Eighties, the artist sought sexual adventure at Keller's, a working-class black bar on West Street that was frequented by black and white homosexuals interested in interracial sex.[403] Mapplethorpe was attraction to danger, another biographer explains, ideally in the form of a dark and tall "athletic" type."[404] Mapplethorpe's aesthetic preference was echoed in the words of his friends, who felt the black body to be superior in every way. "The most beautiful black bodies have a thin layer of fat all over them," a friend noted,

> which gives an amazing consistency to the musculature and to the surface of the body. Another thing about black bodies at their best is the broadness of shoulders in proportion to the narrowness of the hips. Then, of course, there's the size of the cock. The average black cock *is* bigger. I don't think people realized how hard Robert worked to find the perfect one. He examined thousands and thousands of them.[405]

In his search for the "perfect one," Mapplethorpe operated with standards that excluded most black men from consideration. He and his friends had no interest in black men from the middle classes, for instance, because then, "they weren't black anymore."[406] In all, Mapplethorpe's example points to the implicit link between size queens and racial preference, while suggesting that racial preferences were not only defined by race, but could be imbued with other social characteristics, such as class and gender.

Furthermore, the racial unity of black people is easily deconstructed if we consider how differences in skin pigmentation impacted the social and sexual definition of black men. In black communities, lighter skin connoted high class and whiteness, making skin color a major signifier of class status and an important factor in sex appeal.[407] Darker skin could also be a sexual advantage, at least for black men who were attracted to white men, and were,

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[402] Morrisroe, *Mapplethorpe*, 233–34.
[403] Morrisroe, 233.
[404] Jack Fritscher, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, 214.
[405] Morrisroe, *Mapplethorpe*, 234.
[406] Morrisroe, 236.
[407] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 167; Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America*, 65.

furthermore, okay with being seen and treated as exotic and different. In Charles Wright's novel the *Messenger*, for instance, the main character is a black prostitute who "missed out" on several business opportunities because he "just wasn't dark enough."[408] Another remark made by a black woman in the Nineties also speaks to this point. Darker-skinned blacks were, as she expressed it, "good in bed, but the light-skinned ones was husband material."[409]

Taken together with examples of racial stereotypes and objectification, these observations give insight into the sexual agency of black homosexuals. Skin color was not a proletarian uniform to be donned at will — it was a biological given. As such, it prescribed black people with limited options of identification. And because their identities were influenced by phallic myths and sexual stereotypes, black men were more often that white men called on to efface their individuality thought the enactment of a few narrow archetypes which greatly reduced their sexual agency and freedom of expression.

Whereas the archetypical black gay man was positioned at the summit of sexual potency due to his alleged sexual aggressiveness, members of other minority groups like Asian and disabled men were often coaxed into compliance with roles that, in their submissiveness, seemed to reflect these men's cultural status as sexual "eunuchs."[410] In an essay from 1991, Richard Fung explains that Asian men in the Eighties were viewed as less sexual than people in general. As such, they were taken less seriously as homo*sexuals*, he argues, causing them to disappear from other gay men's sexual radar.[411] Furthermore, challenging the claim that Asian men were "nonexistent" in Seventies pornography,[412] Fung's analysis of gay porn in the Eighties points to a general pattern of how male Asian sexuality was depicted in relation to social factors like age and occupation. By featuring young Asian models in the roles of non-workers or housewives, porn producers frequently emphasized the young actor's sexual disempowerment vis-à-vis the generally older white (and more rarely black) models.[413] The example seems to confirm a broader historical trend where Asian men were rewarded for downplaying their social power and renouncing their sexual agency.

Other groups whose sexual value seemed to hinge on their renunciation of reciprocity were the old and disabled. As discussed in chapter 2, the Sixties saw successful attempts by scientists to salvage old men from old myths and misconceptions. Back then, Masters and

[408] Cited in Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, 181.
[409] William G. Hawkeswood, *One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem*, 100.
[410] Mura, "How America Unsexes the Asian Male," 9.
[411] Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," 148.
[412] Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 366.
[413] Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," 148, 162.

Johnson had to spell it out in italics, stating that the old man, despite common belief, "*[did] not lose his facility for erection at any time*."[414] Disabled people, on the other hand, had an even harder time than old people in convincing society that they too were sexual people.[415] Definitions of masculinity have been linked to concepts of physical strength and invulnerability, making some disabilities very emasculating. As a result, disabled men have frequently been regarded as asexual.[416] Homosexual men's disregard for disabled men as sexual players is witnessed by their near complete absence from the gay literature. A rare exception is offered by Lampert III, who commented on his life as a gay "cripple" in 1971. Being gay, he was sorry to say, was only fun if you had a "good face, good body, and a healthy cock." Too often at gay bars he was treated like a charity case or a fetish object. "I don't want people going home with me just because I'm a cripple," Lampert lamented. "And that's what's happening to me. I've become an object." He also noticed that he was "beginning to attract this strange type of people who have this hang-up for the maimed."[417] Lambert's wheelchair seemed to signify that he belonged to a specific male type which was defined in negative terms, as someone who lacked subjective passions or the powers to see them through.

The plight of homosexual men who were defined in certain contexts by their perceived absence or excess of virility was perhaps magnified in the Seventies, at which time virility itself became more important and thus more essential to gay men's sexual definition. There are several indices to suggest this. As suggested by earlier examples from homosexual slang and fashion, the penis had been the object of blatant worship since at least the Forties. But it was mainly after the sexual liberation, a period which spurred the growth of gay bathhouses and the proliferation of gay male pornography, that the cultural significance of the penis reached "totemic proportions."[418] Furthermore, just as naked men at bathhouses would constantly "play with themselves" to make their penis look extra-large, visitors at the baths also noticed that cruisers tended to "zoom to the crotch" before any eye contact was made.[419]

Historians have shown how the Seventies' porn industry contributed to the emancipation as well as the discipline of gay men's erotic desires.[420] It is arguable that gay bathhouses had a similar function. Not only did pornography and bathhouses represent virtual

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[414] Masters and Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, 326.
[415] It was not until the Seventies that disabled people, under the banner of the "disability movement," started to challenge their isolation and marginalization in society, see Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Dominic. Davies, *The Sexual Politics of Disability*, 1, 9.
[416] Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice*, 93; Murphy, *The Body Silent*, 97.
[417] Reprinted in Lampert III, "It's Hell Being Gay and Handicapped."
[418] Craig, "Critic Camille Paglia Thinks 'Revenge of the Sith' Is Our Generation's Greatest Work of Art."
[419] Brown, "Queen for a Day: A Stranger in Paradise," 73, 75.
[420] Escoffier, "Beefcake and Hardcore: Gay Pornography and the Sexual Revolution."

or physical spaces for sexual liberation. They also served a pivotal role in normalizing sexual objectification among gay men. Sexual objectification was, to be sure, not always a bad thing. Indeed, as this section has shown, for some men it served as a strategy to maximize sexual opportunities, or a source of eroticism in its own right. However, to say that some men were attracted to self-objectification or that they use it as a sexual strategy does not in itself justify its use. In this section I have tried to show how social and racial discourses made self-objectification the special domain of the disempowered. So even though self-objectification was a legitimate form of self-expression with potentially carried liberatory connotations, it usually adhered to those who lack freedom the most. It is perhaps this paradox which has caused historians and social scientists to challenge the use of self-objectification as an avenue for emancipation.

CLONES AND UNIFORMS

At certain gay discotheques, the virilization of gay culture and communal norms of sexual objectification fused into the clone look. I write, "certain discotheques," because the specific brand of virile homosexuality that I am about to describe emerged in some of Fire Island and Manhattan's most exclusive dance spots, like Ice Palace and Flamingo. Although the clone aesthetic cannot be neatly confined to one social segment it was originally associated with affluent members of the gay circuit to whom it had become a generic form of personal expression by the mid-Seventies.

The first hypermasculine gay aesthetic had been constructed by gay bikers and leathermen who, since the Fifties, had taken their aesthetic inspiration from working-class icons like James Dean and Marlo Brando as well as artists like Tom of Finland. It was not until the late Sixties that hippies and radical activists incorporated virile elements into a blatantly gay aesthetic that could be associated with the middle class. Their style was a cross-pollination of traditional masculine looks and radical ideals of androgyny. Many young radicals saw a tacit link between traditional norms of male aggression and American imperialism in Vietnam. Rejecting machismo, gay and straight hippies transgressed into androgyny, embracing long hair and peacock shirts, outlandish costumes and colorful beads.[421] However, the aesthetic of the

[421] Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 50.

New Left was also characterized by an "overpowering eroticism," expressed in symbols of virile strength like beards, boots, denim, buckles and yes, motorcycles.[422]

The clone aesthetic, which succeeded the "hip" aesthetic, shed all vestiges of hippie androgyny. Martin Levine, who studied the phenomenon in New York between 1977 and 1984, described the macho clone as

> the manliest of men. He had a gym-defined body; after hours of rigorous body building, his physique rippled with bulging muscles, looking more like competitive body builders than hairdressers or florists. He wore blue-collar garb – flannel shirts over muscle T-shirts, Levi 501s over work boots, bomber jackets over hooded sweatshirts. He kept his hair short and had a thick mustache or closely cropped beard.[423]

In terms of the clone's mannerisms, Clark Henley gave some useful pointers in *The Butch Manual* (1982), where he noted that the typical butch hid his affections behind mirrored sunglasses and heavy mustaches. In Henley's view, the homosexual butch's behavior was characterized by coarse manners and self-assertive body language, limiting individual expression to expressions of individual desire for sex and power.[424]

Incidentally, Henley's manual was part of a groundswell of literature aimed at instructing gay men in the Seventies on how to adopt to their newly liberated identities. Represented by titles like *The Queens Vernacular* (1972), *The Leatherman's Handbook* (1972), *The Joy of Gay Sex* (1977) and *Gay Semiotics* (1977) the new genre not only provided explicit instructions on how to talk, dress and behave like a "gay man," but it also indicated that initiatives to commodify gay identity had rendered it less fluid and more regimented. Indeed, the streamlining of gay male aesthetics was epitomized by the clone aesthetic which by 1980 had become so ubiquitous and so extreme that critics termed it "macho fascism."[425]

It is interesting to note that gay machismo emerged at a time when traditional male ideals were losing their general currency. In *Feminized Male* from 1969, Patricia Sexton sounded the alarm, saying that men's impulses had been "suppressed or misshapen by overexposure to feminine norms" in school, the workforce and the family.[426] This was particularly true for middle-class men who, according to Sexton, were becoming frail paper

[422] Berger, "Hippie Morality: More Old Than New," 67–69.
[423] Levine, *Gay Macho*, 7.
[424] Henley, *The Butch Manual*, 12.
[425] Edmund White, "The Political Vocabulary of Homosexuality," 242.
[426] Sexton, *The Feminized Male*, 4.

pushers, echoing the late-nineteenth-century concept of bourgeois impotency.[427] In the following years, apostles of the men's liberation movement continually aimed to reeducate those who clung to old concepts of masculinity. In his bestselling *Type A Behavior and Your Heart* from 1974, cardiologist Meyer Friedman warned that aggressive male striving caused stress and heart disease.[428] Similarly, in *The Hazards of Being Male* from 1977, Herb Goldberg argued that men were running away from their feelings and "destroying themselves" in the process. "Get in touch with your feminine side," the author urged in his guideline for male liberation. "Allow yourself to be sexually passive as well as active. Let her make love to you and take some of the lead. Lie back and enjoy it."[429] As pointed out by historians, this new and reformed style of male behavior was taken out of the textbook of middle-class decorum. It emerged against a cultural background where macho blue-collar males were increasingly seen as retrograde "hard hats," the subject of social concern and the butt of many Hollywood jokes.[430]

At the same time, the Seventies also saw a general trend towards more utilitarian clothing, favoring garments that were practical and generally affordable.[431] This utilitarian strain also ran through clone aesthetic, but in a less casual and more regimented manner. The clone uniform could be distinguished from mainstream fashion by its neatness and polish — extensions of the sartorial meticulousness which had defined gay fashion from its early beginnings. Historians and social critics have also called attention to the campy connotations of the hypermasculine uniform, explaining that gay men who carried the look over-the-top sometimes referred to it as "butch drag" (thus channeling the liberationists' instinct for political drag).[432] Hypermasculinity thus allowed for an implicit critique of traditional masculinity. When the political value was undermined by personal inhibitions, the aesthetic allowed gay men to pass as straight. But when asked if gay men's growing identification with masculine types suggested that they wished they were straight, gay psychologist Lawrence Mass responded: "I don't think so," explaining that the aesthetic was "more related to sexuality than to sexual orientation."[433]

In other words, Mass downplayed the social and political motives behind self-virilization, emphasizing instead masculinity's impact on the sexual dynamic between

[427] Sexton, 17.
[428] Friedman, *Type a Behavior and Your Heart*, 67.
[429] Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male*, 41.
[430] Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 132.
[431] Bond, *The Guinness Guide to 20th Century Fashion*, 213;217.
[432] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 42; Cole, "Costume or Dress?," 133.
[433] Mass, *Dialogues of the Sexual Revolution*, 103.

homosexual men. The men in question, he implies, would rather be "sexy" in front of their gay peers than straight in the eyes of the majority population.[434] Edmund White presents a similar view, describing how the butch aesthetic evolved against the backdrop of cruising, where it was so successful in attracting sexual partners that it simply stuck.[435] By configuring symbols of masculine eroticism in a way that was intelligibly gay to fellow insiders, the style appealed to gay men's desires to seem at once sexually attractive and available.

The clone uniform also came with individual costs, one of which was individuality itself. A gay cruiser complained that he worried that he would not get cruised if he strayed too far from the clone uniform, for example by trading in his bomber jacket (which was mandatory in the winter) for a personalized coat.[436] To be sure, depersonalization had certain advantages. As a uniform, the clone aesthetic down-played markers of subjectivity, inviting for objectification, and allowing for the projection of fantasy. By de-emphasizing the individual characteristics of the wearer, it also reduced the emotional stakes of rejection. However, when worn like a costume, the uniform had an emasculating effect. As Erving Goffman reflected in his study on *Gender Advertisement* from 1979, silliness and playfulness were female prerogatives. Men could wear guises (like business suits), but only if the identification was deep and serious; the guise had to be worn like a second skin — not a costume.[437] This explains why some members of the gay world responded to the clone uniform with ridicule. For instance, in a 1977 edition of *Drummer,* Jack Fritscher used his editorial powers to inveigh against the clone look which, after years of dull reiteration, was starting to seem like a joke.[438] As a nod of approval to gay men who acted truly "straight," Fritscher launched the term "homomasculinity," which celebrated the best of archetypal masculinity without clone-like transgression into hypermasculinity, and hence, emasculating parody.[439]

Other members of the leather community were also adamant in refusing any connotations of drag. "Any suggestion that they are involved in a dressing-up scene themselves, that they are wearing leather and Western *drag* had better not be made by an outsider," an insider to the gay leather scene warned.[440] Although the leather uniform could also be worn with a sense of irony, accompanied by swishy manners or pants with "a round shape over the

[434] This notion has been supported by historians as well, see Cole, *'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, 95.
[435] Edmund White, "The Political Vocabulary of Homosexuality," 243.
[436] Harris, "Andrew Holleran," 186.
[437] Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, 51.
[438] Fritscher, "Gay Jock Sports," 535.
[439] Fritscher, "Homomasculinity: Framing Keywords of Queer Popular Culture," 248.
[440] Fisher, *The Gay Mystique*, 84.

ass," such playfulness didn't conform to the homomasculine standards of the leather scene.[441] If anything, the emergence of leather camp reflected that the biker uniform, which had originated as a symbol of social rebellion, had entered into the gay mainstream and become a sign of conformity.

In its different manifestations, the leather uniform is another indication that ideals of virility and anonymity merged in Seventies' fashion. To explain this, leather uniforms were made of animal hides, which connoted animalism and virility. The thick and coarse material had the additional benefit of making the wearer seem, as it were, thick-skinned, allowing for the appearance of emotional invulnerability." [442] Leather has, furthermore, been deeply impregnated with historical meaning. Thorough its recurring use in military and police uniforms black leather invoked authority; a sense of exteriority (it is usually worn on the outside), and death. In addition to the unamiable connotations of leather, fashion historians associate its blackness with impersonality, making the black leather uniform the ultimate symbol of faceless virility.[443]

THE EROTIZATION OF IMPERSONALITY

If the "sexual revolution," as historians suggest, lifted "the veil of secrecy from the gay world," it is logical to assume that greater sexual openness would mean less anonymous sex.[444] However, there is sufficient evidence to the contrary: As proud masses of gay men in the Seventies were incited to "come out" into the open, many homosexuals started to openly celebrate impersonality through self-effacing practices and rituals of anonymity. The new openness of the gay world was particularly visible at bars which were beginning to advertise their presence by facing the streets.[445] But even though many bar-goers continued to fear exposure, these fears alone cannot account for the persistent, perhaps intensified anonymization of the gay world. Indeed, as gay men became sexually liberated, the social necessity of anonymity weakened, revealing its foundation as an erotic preference.

This was not only reflected in gay male aesthetics. Conventions of sexual anonymity were also inscribed into the material surface of homosexual institutions, making it an

[441] Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue*, 221.
[442] Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, 232.
[443] Harvey, *Men in Black*, 10, 243–45.
[444] Levine, *Gay Macho*, 27.
[445] Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City," 270.

institutionalized feature which reflected the cultural norms of the past. Anonymous norms were in other words installed into the cruisers' spatial environment; as cruisers adopted themselves to their surroundings, history became more than a memory — it became an agent in its own right. [446] To illustrate this point, the protagonist of the gay crime novel *The Butterscotch Prince* from 1975 visits the "Riviera Baths," an old and neglected bathhouse located on downtown Manhattan. The lobby looks like a lavatory. He registers, is handed a robe and towel, and enters. The guest arrives at his private room, his eyes still adjusting to the dark. The private room is simply furnished with a single bed and a chair, a spittoon and a wooden locker for clothes. The walls don't reach the ceiling. As the guest undresses, he hears gasps and moans over the partition. He stumbles through the hallways and reaches the dormitory. In the darkness, he discerns a group of "white figures gathered around one of the beds." They look like "a convocation of ghosts."[447]

The description — which echoes previous reports by visitors to more high-end bathhouses like the Continental and the Club — illustrates how norms of discretion and impersonality were built into the bathhouse's environment, lowering the threshold of participation, while making it difficult for cruisers to engage on a social level. The bathhouse's dirt and squalor are a metaphor of the emotional poverty of the client's sexual encounters. The darkness obscures the client's identities, emphasizing the importance of texture, reducing the client's contours, and obfuscating their colors. The pervasive silence urges cruisers to keep silent, for even in their private rooms they are remined of the presence of others, reducing their sense of privacy.

Many homosexuals thrived in these environments. This is indicated by the large number of gay men who continued to frequent older and dirtier establishments despite the introduction of modern and clean venues in the Seventies. The new bath owners, on their side, sometimes provided alternatives to anonymous cruising by introducing spaces for social relaxation. At the Club, for example, the owners installed a jacuzzi, and a television room where clients could come to hang out and engage in casual conversation.[448] At another bathhouse, there was a pool table; at a third, the operator built a "library."[449] Whether or not clients used these services is another question, for bathhouse visitors rarely mention them. Apparently, the modernization of the baths didn't interfere with their primary function as places for anonymous sex.

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[446] Lefebvre, Nicholson-Smith, and Harvey, *The Production of Space*, 37.
[447] Hall, *The Butterscotch Prince*, 72–75.
[448] Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 361.
[449] Weinberg and Williams, "Gay Baths and the Social Organization of Impersonal Sex," 133.

In the Seventies, bathhouses and backroom bars provided a relatively safe and homosocial environments where homosexual men could come to explore the limits of their sexual liberation. Group sex, an extreme manifestation of gay men's newfound freedom, became more widely practiced. This trend was reinforced by the widened opportunities for safe indoor sex. It also reflected the freedom and sexual ease of the new generation. As one "hip" homosexual remarked, to the older generation orgies were "calculated, planned things."[450] In those days, there were fewer places for regular group sex, and the places that accommodated it were often limited to specific areas of the city, like the meat trucks on the East Side waterfront. In the Seventies, a replica of the trucks was installed on the ninth floor of Man's Country bath, serving as a vehicle for gay nostalgia, while attesting to the luxury and expansive freedom of the new sexual establishments.[451] The orgies that went on here have been described with a remarkable degree of poetic license that illustrates the orgy's tendency to blur the personal limits of the participants. "Within dim lights," wrote author and hustler John Rechy, "naked bodies toss and squirm in one groaning mass, heads, feet, hands, buttocks bob occasionally out of the sea of flesh."[452]

The liberating experience of self-obliteration was often deepened by the use of drugs. Alcohol — which had been gay men's favorite drug in the past — was rivalled in the Sixties by colorful pills called "uppers and downers," as well as hallucinogenic substances like acid and angel dust. In the Seventies, cocaine became the drug of choice.[453] At some sex clubs like the Mineshaft, there were tacit rules against excessive drug use, because it was considered to spoil the fun and put the submissive participants in danger.[454] At gay discotheques, on the other hand, where alcohol sales were often banned, the use of psychoactive drugs became the norm. The most popular dance drugs were speed, Quaaludes and cocaine. But many continued to use psychedelic drugs like LSD, PCP and MDA; drugs whose principal effects were *hallucination*, *synesthesia* ("seeing" sound and "hearing" visual input) and *depersonalization*, the experience of being "out-of-body."[455]

At crowded discotheques, the combination of drugs, music and dancing could sometimes amount to an experience which resembled disembodiment, but which is more

[450] Burke, "The New Homosexuality."
[451] Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 362.
[452] Rechy, *The Sexual Outlaw*, 264.
[453] Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, 244.
[454] Fritscher, "The Mineshaft," 480; Townsend, *The Leatherman's Handbook II*, 38.
[455] Abadinsky, *Drug Use and Abuse*, 154.

accurately described as the feeling of embodiment in a body of bodies, to paraphrase Edmund White, who danced at Flamingo on a busy night:

> We were packed in so tightly we were forced to slither across each other's wet bodies and arms; I felt my arm moving like a piston in synchrony against a stranger's-and I did not pull away. Freed of my shirt and my touchiness, I surrendered myself to the idea that I was just like everyone else. A body among bodies.

Indeed, an intense group atmosphere pervaded many discotheques and sex clubs. Jack Fritscher explains that the group dynamic at the Mineshaft "was such high energy that a man had to be in control of himself so as not to get swept away in action that was too extreme for himself."[456] The quote speaks to the notion that sexual and social transgression not only unified participants but also allowed them to feed on each other's energies. In his *Leatherman's Handbook* (1972), Townsend instructed organizers in how to manipulate the mood of sexual participants by modulating the spatial environment. As a general rule, the room should be as dark as possible with the exception of warm lights in colors like red or amber. Warm lights had a flattering effect because they tended to obscure physical imperfections, and were, furthermore, said to intensify sexual tensions and feelings of hostility. The temperature should not be too hot — but definitely not too cold. Another way to make people more comfortable, and less self-conscious, was having the right selection of music. The best music was instrumental and obscure; composers like Richard Straus and Jean Sibelius were among Townsend's favorites.[457] Taken together, Townsend's remarks attest to the role of club owners and organizers in facilitating a sexual environment where participants could move with a limited awareness of external noise and simply go with the flow.

Townsend's recommendations suggest that songs which penetrated people's subjective consciousness were distracting, and thus counterproductive to the sexual experience. At discotheques like the Saint, however, where the musical experience was enhanced by a 26,000-watt sound system which blasted all of the latest hits, music produced a similar trancelike effect by appealing to the collective musical experiences of the dancers.[458] At Flamingo, the music and dancing produced a similar effect. "The dance was the purpose," a circuit participant told historian Tim Lawrence:

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[456] Fritscher, "The Mineshaft," 480.
[457] Townsend, *The Leatherman's Handbook II*, 178–82.
[458] Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 86.

> You would spend the whole night there. That was what brought people together, and it got really intense. The sexual energy in the place was just incredible, and it was exacerbated by the amount of drugs everybody was consuming. There was a kind of pure, male, testosterone-driven male bonding, and that was what Flamingo was all about.[459]

The quote sums up many of the themes of this section about the various, and often intersecting paths to depersonalization. But more significantly, it expresses the ecstasy of someone who felt, however temporarily, that they had found liberation.

In this chapter, I have traced the emergence of an ornamental masculine ethos, a more superficial male ideal which found fertile ground on the dancefloors of Manhattan's gay discotheques, where it prompted gay men to work out like never before. The style at Seventies' discotheques was, I have shown, characterized by increasingly virile modes of dress and behavior. Historically, virility was largely associated with working-class men, as well as black men whose options for sexual identification and self-presentation were consistently narrower than those of white homosexuals. Marginalized populations were, I argued, more often than middle-class white men expected to present themselves as sexual objects. Sexual self-objectification was, to be sure, also common among white gay men who often pointed to its efficiency as a sexual strategy. At popular gay discotheques and bathhouses, virile, superficial and generic aesthetics were often complemented by anonymous norms of behavior, communal practices and rituals that heightened cruisers awareness of their own bodies while at the same time enabling feelings of embodiment in an anonymous mass. I shall therefore conclude that although some disempowered groups were less free to express their personalities, depersonalization was just as often a legitimate form of self-expression that served gay men as a vehicle of sexual liberation, as well as an antidote against rising pressures to look good.

[459] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 191.

CONCLUSION

In his *Memoirs of an Ancient Activist* published in the aftermath of gay liberation, Paul Goodman argues that freedom can only be achieved in unity. "What is needed is not defiant pride and self-consciousness," Goodman writes, alluding to the spread of gay chauvinism in the homosexual world, but *"*social space to live and breathe."[460] The quote reflects a central theme of my thesis, namely how factors like sexuality, gender, class, race and age as well as various personal and physical attributes impacted gay men's ability to assume social space and to engage sexually with other people. I have, in other words, been concerned with how various conceptions of *difference* affected gay men's sexual opportunities on the cruising scene. In this conclusion, I shall briefly summarize and explain how my findings concerning (1) the politics of social and racial difference, (2) cruisers' access to public and private spaces, as well as (3) the sexual dynamics between cruisers, whose oppression gave rise to unique social opportunities and a considerable amount of personal freedom, add to our understanding of sexual democracy and, by extension, democracy in general.

My first point is about difference. Throughout my thesis I have asked what happened when markers of personal and group differences were activated and emphasized, and what happened when such characteristics were de-emphasized and erased. As strategies of overcoming difference, diversity and sexual anonymity in particular seem to have presented gay cruisers with potential avenues for sexual emancipation and equality. Diversity has been associated throughout the period with freedom of expression. I have shown how the proliferation of scientific and popular discourse on homosexuality afforded broader and more diverse definitions of what it meant to be gay. The emergence of the concept of homosexuality as a "social role" is one example of how scientific ideas could give leeway to aesthetic experimentation and freedom of expression, even in times of oppression. More public discussion about homosexuality seemingly expanded gay men's cultural repertoires, allowing them to blend various styles and concepts and to pioneer new styles like political drag and gay hypermasculinity.

But although a more liberal public attitude towards homosexuality and fewer legal restrictions on individual behavior, which came about in the late Sixties, were conducive to greater freedom of expression, my findings indicate that formal freedom was not enough to

[460] Goodman, "Memoirs of an Ancient Activist," 177.

guarantee aesthetic diversity in the gay world. It became evident by the mid-Seventies that many gay men were only too willing to renounce signifiers of individuality if this meant greater opportunities for sex. In the postwar years, gay men were forced to conceal their sexual identities. At the same time, however, the anonymity at places like public parks, tearooms and bathhouses provided them with opportunities to engage in sexual activities without revealing their identitiy and thus avoid the social and punitive costs of exposure. Sexual anonymity continued to serve gay men as a precautionary measure after gay liberation as well, but as I argued in chapter 4, sexual anonymity in the Seventies was just as often a strategy employed for the purpose of getting laid. What is more, sexual anonymity could also be a turn-on — if not primarily erotic, then at least *physical*. In combination with pounding music and drug use, dancing and orgies sometimes allowed for the dissolution of the ego, enforcing an acute sense of embodiment. Physicality in general was idealized in the Seventies. This tendency manifested itself in the virile postures and sartorial habits of many urban homosexuals. Whereas some homosexual men regarded the "clone uniform" as an aesthetic straitjacket, others saw uniformity as a source of empowerment. By deemphasizing aspects of the self, anonymity effectively emancipated cruisers from the burden of self-reflection, evoking strong, albeit often momentary, feelings of liberation.

Before I comment on the sometimes problematic effects of sexual anonymity and diversity, it may be worthwhile to reflect on their mutual relationship. Associated with conformism, anonymity is in some ways the opposite of diversity. When the operators of a venue favored anonymity, the loss of diversity was a likely outcome. This is what happened in the Seventies at certain gay discotheques like the Flamingo and the Saint. At the same time, norms that appeared to be hegemonic in one (local) context, were in discord with the rules and conventions of mainstream society. A presentational strategy that allowed a person to appear anonymous in a particular context had the opposite effect in a different setting. So whereas the "clone uniform" enabled gay men to fade into the crowd at gay discotheques and on the streets of the "gay ghetto," this virile brand of gay male aesthetics paradoxically seems to have contributed to greater diversity in mainstream society. Indeed, by recombining conventional symbols of masculinity to form a conspicuously homosexual look — and just as importantly, at a time when "machismo" was falling out of style among straight men — the "macho clone" served as a symbol of both "sameness" and "difference" in the gay and straight worlds respectively. As such, local — and some have argued "oppressive" — norms of hyperconformity were sometimes conducive to diversity on a more general level. It seems to me that if general diversity may emerge out of local ideals that are conformist or even

oppressive, then perhaps one should be careful to celebrate diversity in mainstream society as an unambiguous sign of freedom.

I have pointed to diversity as a condition for gay male liberation. At the same time, however, ideals of diversity also produced conflict. The impact of radical politics on cultural fragmentation was explored mainly in the third chapter. I argued that in the years after gay liberation, sexual and racial differences were increasingly celebrated (in the name of "diversity"), causing old rifts in the gay world to widen and new tensions to appear. As countercultural manifestations of black and gay "power," soul and political drag could easily be regarded as signs of democratic progress. However, by affording minority groups that had previously been oppressed greater freedom of expression, democratization not only relieved conflict but also caused it to fester. If social conflict was as a symptom of democratization, it is interesting to note that theorists of sexual democracy often prescribe "more diversity" (what Ferguson and Giddens refer to as "radical pluralism") as social fragmentation's most vital remedy. Thus diversity not only accentuates personal and group differences but also attempts to heal the social divides that arise from that differentiation. The role of diversity in promoting group conflict can be exemplified by gay activism in the early Seventies. Gay liberationists embraced diversity as a democratic counterpoint to what many found to be an oppressive ideology of conformism. Some gay men, however, used ideals of democratic tolerance to legitimate forms of gay self-expression that homosexual women in particular saw as anti-female. Indeed, as much as diversity nourished gay pride, it also facilitated the Seventies' emergence of gay male chauvinism, making it reasonable to question whether democratic tolerance, regardless of its aspirational, inclusive aim, is possible *in practice* without transgression into separatism and exclusion.

Another paradoxical effect of diversity concerns its relationship to inclusion and exclusion. Even though diverse spaces seem to be characterized per definition by a high degree of inclusivity, local diversity was sometimes secured through mechanisms of exclusion and dynamics of oppression. For instance, in the first chapter I showed how public hostility and policing of homosexuality in the postwar era contributed to the isolation of a secret gay underworld which contained a high degree of social and cultural diversity. Meanwhile, public parks and restrooms served cruisers as sites for sexual experimentation, places that, despite their limited opportunities for socialization, were easily accessible to everyone. Paradoxically, oppressive rules of conformity and police harassment served as a condition for social mixing, thus fostering sexual democracy in the homosexual world before gay liberation. As American society became more open and democratic towards the Seventies, communal safe spaces

gradually lost their *raison d'être,* suggesting that sites of democratic inclusiveness fell victim to democratic tolerance.

Furthermore, as cruising spaces in general became safer after gay liberation, they also became less publicly accessible. The privatization of gay men's sexual space was signaled by the emergence of gay discotheques and bathhouses, a phenomenon which emphasized the growing importance of doormen and private business owners as gatekeepers of the gay world. By inheriting some of the functions that bartenders, mafia guardsmen and policemen had performed in the past, the management at private clubs not only facilitated but also regulated social participation at their venues. At some nightspots, diversity was institutionalized as an ideal. Yet as illustrated by clubs like Le Jardins and Studio 54, diversity was sometimes achieved at the expense of inclusivity. Indeed, as cultural diversity was normalized in the Seventies, traditional norms of conformity were sometimes replaced by standards that were more inclusive but nonetheless narrow. Guests at Studio 54 had to look, dress and behave in a certain way in order to fit with the club's image.

These examples provoke a few important questions. For instance, if some forms of diversity are borne out of exclusion, can they still serve a democratic function? And is a democracy that relies on the exclusion of outsiders a democracy in the true sense of the word? Furthermore, if one concludes that discriminatory walls and borders are undemocratic, is there such a thing as a democratic state? These questions become ever more relevant when considering the current state of the world, where the process of globalization continues to transform local and national communities and blur the boundaries between national and global notions of citizenship. Yet instead of a cannibalistic process in which an emergent "global democracy" feeds on the powers of smaller democratic states, the results may just as well be the emergence of multiple citizenships — a sort of *matryoshka* doll in which smaller sphere of democracy are contained within the limits of larger realms. It is increasingly important to reflect on how various democratic realms — ranging from the social world of everyday interaction to the abstract realms of local, national and global citizenship — are connected, and furthermore, to ask how interaction in everyday life may affect politics, as well as how general politics affect everyday interactions.

I have shown in my thesis that cruisers adopted various roles which, much like citizenship, were defined by local and situational rights and responsibilities that were unequally applied to different people. The conventional understanding of citizenship as "a person under public law" was alluded to when I argued that public treatment of homosexual citizens depended on factors like class, race and gender. Privilege was conferred on men who passed as

straight or whose social and economic resources enabled them to escape public scrutiny. Homosexual citizens who, on the other hand, were poor, black and gender non-conforming were most susceptible to harassment in public. Social and racial marginalization also meant less access to social space at gay institutions and to personal space in general. The link between disenfranchisement and lack of personal space is reflected in my argument that black men in particular had fewer options for identification and more limited opportunities to express themselves. By presenting themselves as sexual objects — as opposed to subjects with a personal will — men whose sexual powers were limited by factors of class, race and gender sometimes renounced their claim to personal space in order to make themselves sexually accessible to others. Another implication that can be drawn from this finding is that marginalized men had less access to intimacy, but as I hinted in my discussion about sexual anonymity, this also applied to gay men in general. To summarize, the state's function in regulating intimate relationships between citizens has been acknowledged, though without ignoring the underlying social and institutional dynamics that influenced gay men's opportunities to really "live and breathe."

The examples concerning policing, institutional discrimination and sexual dynamics between cruisers stress the importance of democracy in securing equal access to public and social as well as personal space, physical (and nowadays increasingly virtual) sites where citizens can meet and interact. In my introduction I presented a quote by John Dewey which highlights the importance of diverse social interaction in everyday life in order to promote a more just and equal, in short, a more democratic society. I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis that a broad — indeed *sexual* — definition of democracy which encompasses intimate relationships is necessary because it allows us to talk about mechanisms of everyday exclusion as more than purely social issues, but as political problems and impediments to civic progress. By shedding light on how social boundaries and participation were influenced by personal dynamics as well as social and institutional mechanisms, I consider my thesis an attempt to contribute to this endeavor, namely to think about how to create a more genuinely diverse society through more inclusive interactions at bars, baths and beyond.

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