

WHAT IS GAY HISTORY (FOR)?

by

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Gay History is a history of the politic of “gay.” It aims to foster a better understanding of the history of same-sex sexual behavior, homosexuality, and gayness in human history, as well as to reconcile the absence and mistreatment of these topics in the study of history. More specifically, the data and insight which Gay History provides contributes to the constitution of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identity. A consideration of the nature of “gay” reveals both constant and fluctuating conceptions. The examples of the historical narrative of Stonewall, the practice of classical paederasty in Ancient Greece, and the culture and (mis)conceptions of the American Indian Berdache yields a more in-depth enumeration of these ideas. Gay History is inextricably linked to the gay liberation movements of the twentieth century; the significance of Gay History is its essentiality to the subsequent development of gay culture.

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To Burt, who taught me the most important thing about Gay History.

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CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS GAY HISTORY (FOR)?

Gay History is a history of the politic of “gay.” Gay History aims to “fix” the absence of gayness, homosexuality, and same-sex sexual behavior in the annals of history; this absence is due to deliberate falsifications, “willful blindness,” and accidental misinterpretation. Gay History is a reaction to the misunderstanding and ignorance about homosexuality prevalent in modern American society, and to a similar degree, in modern Western civilization. Gay History seeks to understand how sex, sexuality, homosexuality and gender were constructed and considered throughout different periods. This process contributes to a greater understanding of what it means to be a homosexual, and/or what it means to be “gay” in modern society. Through study of Gay History, modern gays are able to learn the different ways which same-sex sexual behavior was conceived of and tolerated in different periods of history, and gain a better understanding of how gays, homosexuals, and those attracted to others of the same sex related to *each other*. Gay History was an important part of the more general gay studies movement taking place in the 1970s. There are several kinds of gay history, including biography, work which focuses on repression of homosexuality and same-sex sexual behavior, and studies of homosexual and/or gay cultures. These methods of study reveal several problems inherent in Gay History: obstacles resulting from a long trend of blatant falsifications, issues resulting from reliance on literary sources, and the limitations of prevalent anachronistic stereotypes. Gay History is a form of minority history, in that it seeks to correct the lack of focus on gayness, homosexuality, and same-sex sexual behavior in the annals of history, due to the heterosexist majority. However, while the Gay History movement has much in common with movement which seek to record the histories of racial and ethnic minorities, the particular attributes of homosexuality which make it different from a racial or ethnic identity also make Gay History significant in other ways. Gay History is a significant way for the particulars of homosexual culture and the

strategy of homosexual survival are passed on to “new” or recently-realized gay people. Gay History is not just for gay people; the study of homosexuality in human culture, of the intolerance of homosexuality across time, and of the very nature of sex, gender and sexuality shed new light on human existence in general.

"WILLFUL BLINDNESS" AND "COMING OUT": A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF GAY HISTORY

Most scholars consider the birth of "gay history," or at least, the birth of the study of gay history, to have been 1969. The summer of 1969, to be more exact, shortly after the Stonewall riots in June of that year. The Stonewall riots were the event that started the widespread and officially known Gay Liberation Movement (I cover this event and its ramifications in detail in chapter three). Such a birthday might seem odd to readers not intimate with gay culture; the truth of the matter is that Stonewall-era gay politics (post-1969) and gay history are permanently and necessarily intertwined. John D'Emilio writes that gay history itself is a political act, a political reaction to homophobia in general society and within the academic community:

The growth of gay history and the shaping of its concerns cannot be separated from the evolution of the gay movement. The oppression of homosexuals has inhibited scholarly work; it makes the pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge potentially risky and fraught with penalties for individual careers. Not surprisingly, then, the writing of gay history is occurring both inside and outside the academy. Self-trained scholars without university affiliations have produced some of its pioneering scholarship. At the same time, the progress of the gay movement has opened up space within the university to pursue gay scholarship.¹

It is important to understand that many gay academics were also activists; this was the case no matter if they were professional academics affiliated with an institution or independent scholars pursuing individual work and working with community centers. In the beginning of Gay History, it was basically impossible to study such a controversial issue without it being a political statement; most who did were aware of the political

¹D'Emilio, *Making Trouble*, 98-99.

strategy behind the work itself. Many academics were members of political groups such as the Mattachine Society (pre-Stonewall), the Gay Liberation Front, and the Gay Activist Alliance.

The fervor that Stonewall and these groups instigated led directly into written work. Jeffrey Escoffier writes that "Almost immediately after Stonewall a flood of books, periodicals and other publications found an audience eager to explore the political and cultural implications of lesbian feminism and gay liberation."² Such publications included the Radicalesbians' "The Woman-Identified Woman" in 1970; Dennis Altman's *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* "the first book after Stonewall on the politics of gay liberation," in 1971; anthologies by Karla Jay and Allan Young between 1972 and 1978.³

An informal gathering of gay academics (college faculty, graduate students, a writer and a director) in March 1973 ended up being the first meeting of the Gay Academic Union (GAU). D'Emilio, as a graduate student at Columbia, was one of the original seven men and one woman at this original meeting; he writes about the solidarity which each individual found within the group:

We were mostly strangers to each other. We were all interested in discussing problems encountered in doing research. We came from a variety of academic disciplines. Some of us had done research in what might broadly be construed as gay studies while others were virtually untutored. Our conversation ranged widely. We talked in highly personal terms of the difficulties of being gay in a university setting⁴, how we coped with being in the closet, if that was the case, or what sort of reaction coming out had engendered. A couple of people had taught or were preparing to teach gay-oriented courses and the rest of us listened with interest to their classroom experiences and the hassles involved in obtaining administration approval for such courses. Perhaps the most enlightening, however, was the discovery that our academic training, regardless

² Escoffier, 106.

³ Escoffier, 107.

⁴ As I write this part of the chapter, I have been questioning the point of including the history of the GAU. As D'Emilio himself writes, "I do not mean to suggest here that GAU is either the first or the only organization of this sort; merely that it is but one example of a trend discernible in several occupational areas." (D'Emilio, *Making Trouble*, 121). However, it was when I typed out "the difficulties of being gay in a university setting" that I realized the significance; I sincerely believe that today, one of the most fulfilling and supportive places in the world to be gay is on a university campus. I have written many gay themed papers for many classes (perhaps too many) and my professors have never suggested that the topic is too obscure or inappropriate. I was out for almost the entirety of my time at Oregon. Truly, this paradigm has changed, and the GAU, even though it was short-lived, was instrumental in this change.

of discipline or particular research interests, allowed each of us to contribute something of substance, some insight, to the discussion.⁵

That summer, the GAU took shape. Its statement of purpose justifies their collective work for change because "we know that no individual, alone, can liberate herself or himself from society's oppression." It lists five tasks which they undertake for "gay liberation in the scholarly and teaching community centers:

1. to oppose all forms of discrimination against all women within academia;
2. to oppose all forms of discrimination against gay people within academia;
3. to support individual academics in the process of coming out;
4. to promote new approaches to the study of the gay experience;
5. to encourage the teaching of gay studies throughout the American educational system.⁶

Further, the statement professes the GAU's hope of becoming "the agency for a critical examination of the gay experience that will challenge those generalizations supporting the current oppression." By working together, the GAU hopes to initiate "the arduous job of challenging the sexist myths that now dominate public discourse and influence private association."⁷

The organization had formed to combat the "virulent homophobia" existing within academia, but soon ran into an overlapping problem: gender imbalance. The overwhelmingly male organization preserved many of the sexist ideals of the academy, and soon, the few women who had originally attended left out of frustration. Many of these women found solace in the increasingly supported and popular women's studies programs, which were developing in universities across the nation during this time.

Escoffier writes that lesbian studies fit far better into this model:

The ideological basis for many of these courses was 'cultural feminism,' which emphasized the idea of a 'female nature' and proposed the construction of a woman's culture reflecting that nature. The lesbian community seemed to fit this theoretical model as an example of a woman's culture unsullied by male domination.⁸

⁵D'Emilio, *Making Trouble*, 127.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Escoffier, 107-108.

The vision of all gay liberation groups (if one considers gay liberation to begin no earlier than post-Stonewall) was to stand up and make the world realize that gay people would not be ignored any longer. Before the Gay History movement, the absence of homosexuality in the record of society, including history, was a major factor in the oppression of gays. In his discussion of the dehumanization of gay people, Evan Wolfson includes *visibility* in his list of injustices against gay people:

Of course, for gay people, dehumanization did not begin with AIDS. Indeed, it was the dehumanized and vulnerable posture of gay people as a minority that permitted AIDS to become what it has become. Our society forbids gay people to marry, denies us equal pay for equal work, throws us off the job, forbids us from serving our country in the armed forces, refused us health insurance, forces us into the closet, arrest us in our bedrooms, harasses our daily association, takes away our children, beats and kills us in the streets and parks, *smothers images of ourselves and others like us*, and then tells us we are irresponsible, unstable, and aberrant.⁹ (my italics).

"Smothers images of ourselves and others like us." The very fact that this phrase is located amidst phrases describing intense and violent oppression, such as gay bashing and confiscation of children, illustrates the enormous impact of "hiding" homosexuality from the annals of history.

Pat Califia writes that the first priority of gay anthropologists and historians during this period was to "establish the universality and frequency of same-sex behavior in as many different time periods as possible...to normalize homosexuality by simply documenting its widespread existence."¹⁰ This strategy, consistent with the political theory of gay visibility, is based upon the notion that the general public is only aware of a small portion of gay individuals and gay culture. Califia writes that this method sought to destroy the notion that homosexuals were a minority recent in the making and small in numbers: "According to this school of thought, gay men and lesbians were not unnatural freaks; we were a common and universal part of the continuum of human sexuality and relationships. We had always been everywhere, and would always be everywhere."¹¹

⁹Wolfson, "Civil rights...", 31-33.

¹⁰ Califia, Pat. *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*, 121

¹¹Ibid.

Wolfson writes that gay history is a crucial battle, in which we refuse to accept the heterosexist denial of the existence of gay people: "To wage our struggle against dehumanization, we gay people must reclaim our history, break the conspiracy of silence about our lives, and work to pierce the 'willful blindness' of others."¹² The idea of "willful blindness" is an idea originally coined by Judge Blackmun from the historic 1980s Georgia sodomy case *Bowers v. Hardwick*¹³. Writes Wolfson: "Justice Blackmun accused the majority of 'the most willful blindness' for its inability to recognize that 'sexual intimacy' is 'a sensitive key relationship of human existence, central to family life, community welfare, and the development of human personality.'"¹⁴ Wolfson continues, reasoning that

By speaking openly of our lives, and by demanding that the heterosexual culture take note of our existence, equality and diversity, gay people can help reduce the blindness and increase the understanding of our "rightness." Indeed, studies have demonstrated that the single most important factor in improving even a hostile person's acceptance of gay people is knowing and engaging with an openly gay person.¹⁵

"Willful blindness" was exactly the beast that the young gay activists (and scholars) decided to combat. Such efforts to promote visibility of homosexuality were clearly influenced by the concept of "coming out." "Coming out" is the primary strategy of the gay movement, a philosophy of openly and proudly proclaiming one's homosexuality and incorporating this fact into one's life. Such a method differed greatly from the goals of previous gay activists, whose main goal was secured support from the sympathetic straight community.

"Coming out" brings a new perspective to the feminist adage "The Personal is Political." In her political writing, Urvashi Vaid stresses the importance of telling one's

¹²Wolfson, "Civil rights...", 38.

¹³Georgia's state sodomy law "made private and consensual oral and anal sex between adults, gay and non-gay, a felony punishable up to 20 years in prison." In November 1998, the Georgia High Court struck down a Supreme Court ruling against a heterosexual man who had consensual oral sex with a woman in his home. Source: Lambda Legal Press Releases, 10/27/1999: "Lambda Staff Attorney Cited for Helping Overturn Georgia Sodomy Law."

¹⁴Wolfson, "Civil rights...", footnote, 38.

¹⁵Wolfson, "Civil rights...", footnote, 39.

own story, not just as an exercise of self-awareness, but as a lesson to everyone in the heteronormative world:

Even the act of coming out retains a private and highly individual character that does not lend itself to being organized. Everyone has his or her own story. And each is indeed unique, although there are some typical experiences, such as coming out to parents, siblings, in the media, coming out to co-workers or employers, coming out at the PTA meeting or at a conference with the teachers of one's children. These are stories that gay and lesbian people mostly tell to each other. The straight world tells stories to itself-- and mostly pretends that homosexuals are a tiny majority whose emergence from the closet will little affect the conduct of life for heterosexuals."¹⁶

Trends within the study of history in the late sixties, combined with the ideologies of radical politics, played a role in the emergence of Gay History. Writes Escoffier: "The new leftist idea of 'history from the bottom up,' added to the feminist motto, 'the personal is political,' gave intellectual significance to what appeared individual and private."¹⁷ D'Emilio concurs, reminding us that the discipline of history itself was changing during this period-- "beyond the study of national politics, war, and diplomacy" toward a more sophisticated "history of society." D'Emilio counts equally the efforts of movements and schools within academia (The *Annales* School in France, the Cambridge Population Study Group in Britain, the Social History movement in America) and the actual social movements fighting to write the "'history from the bottom up'", that is "a history of the lives of ordinary people."¹⁸ D'Emilio especially credits feminism and, likewise, the Feminist movement, as a main fuel for early forays into gay history. He writes that the study of women took history into "'the private world'", "Topics such as marriage, fertility, and courtship opened the domain of sexuality to historical scrutiny." Perhaps more significant was the political mindset of feminism attached political meaning to gender and sexuality, attaching to these ideas notions of "power and control, resistance and struggle," therefore transforming the manner in which we think about homosexuality. D'Emilio adds that by the early 1980s, "the study of gender and sexuality had become the most dynamic area of historical writing."

¹⁶Vaid, 222.

¹⁷ Escoffier, 42.

¹⁸D'Emilio, 97.

KATZ, WEEKS, FOUCAULT, AND BOSWELL: EARLY WORKS IN GAY HISTORY

Although gay activists had been fighting oppression for several decades before¹⁹, and sexologists had been studying sexual deviance since the 19th century, it was not until the 1970s that real volumes of historical work on homosexuality and same-sex sexual behavior began to surface. Most would agree that four books have been, as D'Emilio writes, "germinal" in the establishment of Gay History: Jonathan Ned Katz's *Gay American History: Lesbians & Gay Men in the U.S.A*, published in 1976; Jonathan Weeks' *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, published in 1977; the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* series, published in 1976, was first published in America in 1978; John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* was published in 1980.

Jonathan Katz, a gay activist and independent scholar who Richard Hall calls "an inventor of the American gay past,"²⁰ published *Gay American History*, a gigantic collection of documents-- including newspapers, diaries, medical journals, vice commission reports, court records, government documents, and social science literature-- relating to various periods of homosexuality in history. Chapters include "Trouble: 1566-1966" (includes documents substantiating colonial laws considering sodomy and public indecency, a "homosexual underworld" in cities); "Treatment: 1844-1974" (therapeutic and medical treatments for homosexuality and about its causes; "Passing Women: 1782-1920" (the stories of women who posed as men); "Native Americans/ Gay Americans: 1528-1976" (records pertaining to the two-spirit people of Native America, from Cabeza de Vaca in the 16th century to Matilda Cox Stevenson in 1896, to Dean Gengle in 1975); "Resistance: 1859-1972" (the beginnings of a subversive homosexual voice, Walt

¹⁹ I cover gay activism before Stonewall in chapter 3.

²⁰ Hall, x.

Whitman, Emma Goldman, Harry Hay, Barbara Gittings); and "Love: 1779-1932" (notes on homosexual love and passion from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Herman Melville to others in the early 20th century.) D'Emilio observes that while *Gay American History* was a pioneering effort, Katz included little analysis and was unclear as to his theoretical assumptions. However, he explains that Katz "...help[ed] shape a research agenda as issues of oppression, resistance, and the medicalization of homosexuality figured prominently in the scholarship of the 1980s."²¹

A year after Katz's book was published, Jeffrey Weeks, a British historian and gay activist, published *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. The work, which documented an emancipation effort in Britain, described the late nineteenth century as the critical moment for the articulation of a distinctive homosexual identity and the emergence of a modern gay subculture²². D'Emilio notes that Weeks' theoretical structure was more important than his topic: "Elaborating on ideas suggested a decade earlier by Mary McIntosh, a British sociologist, Weeks drew a sharp distinction between "homosexual behaviour, which is universal, and a homosexual identity, which is historically specific." According to Jeffrey Escoffier, Weeks' ideas laid the foundation for a social-constructionist paradigm in gay history; that is, an intellectual framework that supports the notion that "homosexual identity" was created during a certain period in (western) history rather than that it was a natural constant found throughout human history.²³ Weeks expressed this by saying gay identity was "'a changing reality'" instead of a "'new label...for old realities.'"²⁴

In 1978, Michel Foucault, the French Post-Structuralist, published volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, which "offered a similar account of the historical creation of the homosexual identity, but his work also presented a full-scale philosophical critique of

²¹ D'Emilio, 98.

²² Ibid, 99.

²³ Escoffier, 111.

²⁴ Weeks, qtd. in D'Emilio, 99.

‘essentialism’—the belief that "sexual identity is natural or has always existed, unaffected by social context."²⁵ Escoffier explains that Foucault's work strengthened the social-constructionist argument significantly; this argument was, in many respects, crucial to the development of gay studies:

The development of a social-constructionist interpretation of homosexual history is one of the major intellectual achievements of the Stonewall generation of lesbian and gay scholars. This theoretical paradigm provides criteria for historical and social research. Thus, the question that would send the social-constructionists off to the archives would be, for instance, “Why doesn’t every society organize homosexuality in the same way that the classical Greeks did?” rather than “Why did the Christian church repress the natural impulse of homosexual love?”²⁶

In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Boswell set out to prove two main arguments: that our popular conception of early Christianity as "the origin of popular antipathy" toward homosexuality is incorrect, and that seemingly similar ancient and modern objections toward homosexuality actually hold crucial differences.²⁷ His theory was that religion had not been the cause of intolerance of homosexuality throughout most of western history. In the volume, he discusses at length many periods when Christianity ruled Europe in which homosexuals lived openly, and credited a "decline of urban life and the rise of rural societies and...absolutist political rule"²⁸ as the real cause for oppression and intolerance.

D'Emilio notes that Boswell's book was notable also for its theoretical setting, which argued for a "transhistorical gay identity." "In his view, gay people "were dispersed throughout the general population everywhere in Europe; they constituted a substantial minority in every age,"²⁹ that "Homosexual identity was not socially constructed but a constant, continually reproduced from one era to the next."³⁰ Such a theory departed from the social constructionist theories of Weeks and Foucault, and somewhat, with Katz.

²⁵Escoffier, 111.

²⁶ Escoffier, 111.

²⁷D'Emilio, 100-101.

²⁸Ibid, 100.

²⁹Boswell, *Christianity...*, 5, qtd in D'Emilio, 100

³⁰D'Emilio, 100.

D'Emilio writes that subsequent books in the 1980s tended to focus around two themes: "the emergence of homosexual identities and subcultures" and "patterns of persecution and resistance."³¹ Kenneth Dover's 1978 *Greek Homosexuality* was the first book ever to proclaim that homosexuality was prevalent and central in Ancient Greek society. David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* set off from Foucault and Dover's work to develop the social-constructionist notion that gay people did not exist transhistorically. Alan Bray's 1982 book *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* considered the major change in attitudes toward sodomy and sodomites in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Katz continued with this idea in his 1983 book *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, setting up chronological periods in two adjoining essays called "The Age of Sodomitical Sin, 1607-1740" and "The Invention of the Homosexual, 1880-1950."³² D'Emilio also mentions Stuart Timmons' 1990 *The Trouble with Harry Hay*, a biography of Harry Hay, founder of the Mattachine Society in the 1950s as a formidable addition to Gay History.

KINDS OF GAY HISTORY

While these early works shaped Gay History from the beginning, Gay History encompasses several different kinds of historical documentation. In *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past*, Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey organize gay history into three main subsections, which also seem to have developed in a somewhat chronological order. First are biographies, more frequently of famous "gay heroes," who are "claimed" as "gay," like Sappho, Julius Caesar, Shakespeare, Willa Cather, Walt Whitman, and Gertrude Stein. Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey write that many of these biographies have supposed the subject's homosexuality as fact without exploring the significance of same-sex sexual behavior

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid, 100-108.

during the period in question or the different ways that such behavior was acted upon. It is common for these biographies to inspect the public and private lives of the subject; however Duberman, Bauml, and Vicinus believe that many of these works do not discuss the social ramifications of the subjects' homosexuality; that is, "...how their homosexual loves, their fear of exposure and experience of marginalization, or their involvement in a gay subculture influences their work and affected their careers."³³

Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey describe the second form of gay history as work which focuses on repression of homosexuality and resistance to this repression. A good example, they posit, is the history of the German homosexual emancipation movement and subsequent extermination during the Holocaust. Duberman, Bauml, and Vicinus write that this objective can obscure the quality of the gay life that is oppressed; they posit as an example the "popular myth" about American gay life before the Stonewall riots in 1969: "[the myth is that the period] before the...rebellion consisted of nothing but repression and isolation, opprobrium and closetry." The three suggest that criticism of Lillian Faderman's 1981 work *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* is a good instance of which questioned Faderman's simplicity in describing "the complex dialectic between social conditions, ideology, and consciousness." They also write that revisions of "the histories of homosexual victimization" has become another part of this form; they pose the examples of the work of John D'Emilio, Toby Marotta, and Salvatore Licata, who have not only investigated the evolution of pre-Stonewall homosexual rights group, but also studied the rise of lesbian feminism and the post-Stonewall gay liberation movement.³⁴

Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey call their third form of gay history "the social history of homosexuality": in their words, "the categories used by ordinary people to

³³Duberman et al., 3.

³⁴Ibid, 4.

interpret sexual relations, and the patterns of homosexual behavior in everyday life."

Work in gay oral history is noteworthy for this form: Liz Kennedy and Madeline Davis' work on lesbian bar culture in Buffalo, New York and its relationship to the gay liberation movement during the 1940s and 50s, and Robert Martin, Vicinus and Duberman's work with unpublished letters, diaries, novels, and memoirs to paint a picture of the concept of friendship in upper-class 19th century people. Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey note John Boswell's study of source interpretation and subject in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* as one of the first treatises for gay essentialist thought.

PREJUDICES PAST AND PRESENT: PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF GAY HISTORY

Like any historical study, Gay History comes complete with its own problems and dangers. Boswell outlines three types of problems inherent in Gay History: a long trend of blatant falsifications, the necessity of reliance on literary sources, and prevalent anachronistic stereotypes. Half of the problem, Boswell wisely states, is the "longevity of prejudice toward gay people and their sexuality"³⁵: we must wade through other people's errors, prejudices, and flat-out deception with a careful eye. The other half, however, consists of our own preconceptions of *what gay is*.

Since Roman times, accounts and mentions of same-sex love and sex have been changed to deaccentuate or hide homosexuality. Boswell cites many examples of such falsifications, which include actual changing of texts, translation with obfuscation in mind and "half-truths." Texts were changed quite frequently: for instance, a medieval censor changed a section of Ovid's *Art of Love*, which originally read "A boy's love appealed to me less" to "A boy's love appealed to me not at all," along with a note which read, "Thus you may be sure that Ovid was not a sodomite."³⁶ The switching of the gender of

³⁵Boswell, *Christianity...*, 17.

³⁶Ibid, 18.

pronouns has also been common: Alcibades, Socrates' male lover, sometimes appears in medieval literature as a female companion; Michaelangelo's nephew augmented his uncle's sonnets in a similar way; in the 19th century, Francis Gladwin changed the gay love storyline in the Persian moral fables of *Sa'di* into a heterosexual romance. Beyond augmentation, sometimes deletion itself occurred: Boswell posits the cases of the *Rubaiyat* (the removal of one word obscured the fact that the love object was in fact, male), and that of Psuedo-Lucian's *Amores* (the entire work was not translated by Thomas Francklin because it discussed the possibility of homosexuality).³⁷

Boswell notes that the editors of the Loeb Classics, the long-standing and well-respected collection of Greek and Latin classical works in English translation, played a major role in further complicating and obscuring the nature of same-sex sexual behavior in ancient times. He writes that only until very recently, numerous sections of Greek works considering "overt homosexuality" were translated into Italian instead of English. Further, Boswell writes that very "explicit passages" were translated into Italian. Boswell comments that such a practice, while effectively screening the content from many readers, ironically emphasizes it to any individual who might read Italian or who notes its curious state in the work:

In addition to the ambiguous comment this procedure makes on the morals of Italian readers, it has the curious effect of highlighting every salacious passage in the major classics, since the interested reader (with the appropriate linguistic skills) has only to skim the English translation looking for Latin or Italian. The practice applied equally to profane and sacred writers: even Christian condemnations of homosexual acts were deemed too provocative for English readers.³⁸

Boswell also notes "half-truths" as well as "slight twists of meaning" in translations which otherwise "appear to be complete and frank." As an example, he cites a translation of Cornelius Nepos which read, "In Crete it is thought praiseworthy for young men to have the greatest number of love affairs." The original meaning of the comment is "In Crete it is considered praiseworthy for a young man to have as many

³⁷Ibid, 18-19.

³⁸Ibid.

[male] lovers as possible." Boswell points out that "a wealth of information" concealed by this seemingly generalized translation: "In a climate of opinion which did not automatically assume that references to love affairs implied heterosexuality, this translation would only be too loose; for modern English readers, it is tantamount to falsehood."³⁹

Such flagrant desecration of historical record creates a supreme hazard to Gay History. Public libraries in the United States have begun to report the number of books in their collection on homosexual topics which are vandalized each year: we cannot keep believing that such acts are unique to this century. Boswell writes that gay topics in Classical history has been made inaccessible to person without knowledge of ancient and medieval languages; further,

Even those who have taken the trouble to learn the requisite tongues find that most lexical aids decline to comment on the meaning of terms related to acts of which the lexicographers disapprove; only painstaking collation and very extensive reading in the sources enables the investigator to uncover with any degree of accuracy the actions and attitudes of previous cultures which have not suited the tastes of modern scholarship. Until a new generation of translators has removed the fig leaves, research on a large scale will be difficult.⁴⁰

Boswell writes that there are two types of historical documents from which Gay History is derived: official legal documents and literary sources. He writes that his studies of gay people in history have relied more on literary sources, because "The monuments of love" are literary items: "...what bills of sale and records are to economic history, poems and letters are to the history of personal relations and attitudes toward them." Literary sources provide a very different view into the lives of humans than do legal documents. Boswell writes that literary sources concern "sexual and emotional matters which are essentially personal and would tend not to occur in official documents except in societies characterized by hostility to such feelings, where legal measures have been taken to suppress them." For all their hard data, legal documents can be misleading

³⁹Ibid, 20.

⁴⁰Ibid, 21-22.

to use in certain cases: they can create a misconstrued and overly narrow perspective.

Boswell uses an example in our current world:

...it would certainly be a mistake to draw conclusions about the position of gay people in most American cities from the legal strictures theoretically affecting them, and previous studies of this subject have doubtless erred in laying too much stress on the existence of restrictive statutes. Simply noting that something is illegal may be grossly misleading if one does not also comment on the extent to which such laws are honored.⁴¹

Boswell writes that using literary sources as historical documents creates several problems. The most major of these concerns arise from a line of thought Boswell terms the "historical theory of literary emanation." This approach, writes Boswell, is based upon the reasoning that if an antecedent from another culture can be found for a literary source, the location of that source in its later context becomes far less significant. He contends that,

If Roman writers imitate Greek homosexual poetry, for instance, one is assured that such verses are simply imitations and that they do not represent real feelings. One supposes that if Greeks could be shown to have imitated earlier forms, they would not have experienced homosexual feelings either, and the real enterprise of historical scholarship must be to discover the original people who alone experienced real emotions, bequeathing to the rest of the human race the motifs which are mechanically imitated in all subsequent literature.⁴²

Boswell believes that while it is important to be aware of preceding cultural instances, such a strong preoccupation with finding the "original" emanation of an expression or of an act can lead to glorifying the inconsequential. He reasons that there are only a limited number of methods to "express erotic expression" and also a limited number of genders with which to express it: "Seizing on the fact that an author is attracted to both genders as proof of derivation from Ovid, or on paederastic sentiments as proof of imitation of Greek sources, is laughable. Anyone erotically stimulated by boys may sincerely write paederastic verse, despite the fact that Greeks did it first."⁴³

⁴¹Ibid, 22.

⁴²Ibid, 23.

⁴³Ibid.

Boswell points out that imitation of homosexual lyric verse should not necessarily prove that the writers did not feel homosexual attraction;⁴⁴ indeed, it certainly seems plausible that such imitation more likely suggests that the writers felt this attraction than not. Boswell also reasons that the Christian writers who regularly imitated the literary styles of the "fathers of the church" can scarcely be considered hollow: "...on the contrary, consciously maintaining a literary tradition in this context is taken as proof of the persistence of the sentiments which gave rise to the tradition in the first place."⁴⁵ Further, Boswell contends that the imitation of homosexual themes is *itself* meaningful.

In most modern Western cultures prior to the mid-twentieth century one could not publish homosexual poetry of any sort without danger of prosecution, although the homosexual interests of the Greeks were recognized, and their poetry was studied and admired. That Roman authors published a great deal of homosexual poetry-- with or without ostensible Hellenic influence-- is evidence of a significant difference between Roman society and later ones."⁴⁶

Boswell writes that "anachronistic stereotypes" create the most dangerous problem for scholars of gay history. This is due primarily to the current state of gay oppression; he contends that in the first half of the twentieth century "widespread and vehement intolerance" toward gay people has been higher than in any other period in Western history. Therefore and necessarily, writes Boswell, "drawing inferences about homosexuality from observations of gay people in modern Western nations cannot be expected to yield generalizations more accurate of objective than inferences made about Jews in Nazi Germany or blacks in the antebellum South." He also points out that only the number of gay people have willing to identify themselves publicly has been quite small until recent years, and that those who did were probably "atypical." For this reason, Boswell stresses the importance of retaining an open mind when considering historical data; modern samples of gayness may very well lead us astray.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid, 24.

Current stereotypes about masculinity and femininity in gay men and women are products of today's gay culture and today's homophobia; such divisions and descriptions do not necessarily hold as we step backwards in history. Boswell writes that cultures intolerant of gay people tend to assume that males will only be attracted to things feminine and females only to things masculine, therefore assuming a paradigm in which gay males attempting to attract men will act feminine and gay women attempting to attract women will act masculine. According to Boswell, this does not hold as fact; these stereotypes did not necessarily affect people in other historical periods, that homosexuality and "inappropriate gender behavior" were not linked.

Atypical conformity to gender expectations appears in fact to be randomly distributed in most populations, completely independent of sexual preference; but even if a very small percentage of gay women are more masculine or a very few gay men more feminine than their nongay counterparts, they will corroborate the stereotype in the mind of a public predisposed to believe it and usually possessed of no large sampling as a control. (Effeminate nongay men or masculine heterosexual women are ignored, if possible, or considered part of the normal range of human adaptation.⁴⁸

In fact, Boswell writes that in some periods, the link between homosexuality and gender expression was exactly the opposite:

...among ancient peoples who acknowledged the likelihood and propriety of erotic interest between persons of the same gender it was often assumed that men who loved other men would be more masculine than their heterosexual counterparts, by the logical (if unconvincing) argument that men who loved other men would emulate them and try to be like them, while men who loved women would become like women, i.e., 'effeminate.'⁴⁹

Examples of Ancient Greek heroes who were both masculine and who had homosexual exploits include Zeus, Hercules, and Achilles. Plato's argued that homosexual men make the best soldiers and the Thebians actually created such an army. Romans Sulla and Hadrian were examples of the passing-down of such attitudes.⁵⁰ In later centuries, Richard Lion Heart, Edward II, the Duc d'Orleans, the Prince de la Roche sur Yon, the Grand Condé, the Maréchal de Vendome were all "noted for martial skill or valor were

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid, 25.

also noted for being gay"; Boswell contends that "it would have been difficult to form in the minds of their contemporaries any necessary association of effeminacy and homosexuality in men."⁵¹

In the same fashion, Boswell points out that many ideas about gay relationships cannot be dragged across "temporal boundaries." One such aspect is the notion that gay couples imitate heterosexual relationships ("e.g. with one partner adopting a 'male' and one a 'female' role."⁵²) Boswell reasons that such an idea must necessarily come from a society which is intolerant of gay relations:

Where gay relations are approved and open, imitations of this sort are generally neither expected nor evident. Especially where someone may be acceptably involved in gay and heterosexual relationships simultaneously, one would expect the two to be independent; overlap or imitation might occur, but there is no reason to assume *a priori* that it would be in one direction only.

Many Greek writers use homosexual love as an ideal to which heterosexual lovers might aspire.⁵³

Another misconception occurs if a historian heads into research with the idea that gay relationships are qualitatively different from heterosexual ones. Modern society characterizes gay relationships as "more transitory and physical in nature than their (often idealized) heterosexual equivalents." Again, writes, Boswell, this dichotomy can be linked better with intolerance of homosexuality than with a deeper quality.

It is obviously very much to a gay person's advantage in hostile environments not to be a part of a permanent relationship: the longer lasting and more intimate a relationship between two persons of the same gender, the more likely it is to incur suspicion where homosexuality is oppressed. Canny gay people may circumvent this, but the most effective defense against oppression will lie in fleeting and clandestine relationships which do not attract attention to provoke suspicion.⁵⁴

In societies without such intolerance, such a strategy would not exist. Boswell reminds us that "many Greeks represented gay love as the only form of eroticism which could be lasting, pure, and truly spiritual." Such Greeks include Plato, who believed that "only love between persons of the same gender could transcend sex." Boswell presents numerous further examples:

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid, 25-26.

⁵⁴Ibid, 27.

The Attic lawgiver Solon considered homosexual eroticism too lofty for slaves and prohibited it to them. In the idealistic world of Hellenistic romances, gay people figured prominently as star-crossed lovers whose passions were no less enduring or spiritual than those of their nongay friends. In Rome Hadrian's undying devotion to his dead lover Antinous was one of the most familiar artistic expressions of erotic fidelity. In Islamic Sufi literature homosexual eroticism was a major metaphorical expression of the spiritual relationship between God and man, and much Persian poetry and fiction providing examples of moral love used gay relationships. Among the ancient Chinese the most popular literary expression for gay love was 'the love of the cut sleeve,' referring to the selfless devotion of the last emperor of the Han dynasty, Ai-Ti, who cut off his sleeve when called to an audience rather than wake his lover, Tung Hsien, who had fallen asleep across it. Even among primitive peoples some connection is often assumed between spirituality or mysticism and homosexuality. Only in comparatively recent times have homosexual feelings come to be associated with moral looseness.⁵⁵

Another problem in Gay History appears when people overestimate the significance of sexuality in everyday life. Sexuality, no matter how fundamentally significant, is only a part of culture, part of an individual. Boswell writes that the "tendency to notice and remember what is unusual about individuals rather than what is expected" perpetuates not only a mistaken belief in "the nonreproductivity of gay people" but it overshadows the other aspects of that person's life:

Far fewer people are aware that Oscar Wilde was a husband and father than that he was gay and had a male lover. Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades attracts more attention than his relationship with his wife and children. The love of Edward II of England for his four children is scarcely mentioned in texts which dwell at length on his passion for Piers Gaveston. To a certain extent such emphasis is accurate: the persons in question obviously devoted the bulk (if not the entirety) of their erotic interest to persons of the same gender. But the fact remains that they married and had children, and fascination with their statistically less common characteristics should not give rise to fanciful explanations of these traits-- or of popular hostility to them-- which overlook or contradict the more ordinary aspects of their lives.⁵⁶

"THE ACCIDENTS OF BIRTH AND HISTORY" AND "A POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE": THE PURPOSE OF GAY HISTORY

In order to properly conceive the significance of Gay History, it is crucial to understand the particular form of cultural isolation in which gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people, and other queer people inhabit for some or all of their lives. I will

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid, 10

examine this question of gay isolation more closely in chapter two, but there are several salient features of this condition which warrant discussion here.

History is a connection to our past; by catching a glimpse of the way things were in the past, we gain insight into our own lives, and we begin to understand human culture in a wider sense. Gay History is often placed among histories of racial minorities, ostensibly because gay culture is comparable to racial culture. While it is easy to define gays as a minority, it is important to understand how sexual orientation affects the minority status. It is helpful to compare gay oppression to the oppression of other minorities. Numerous scholars have compared the history of oppression of Jews with the history of oppression of gays. Boswell writes that, on one hand, there are striking similarities between the two groups:

Most societies, for instance, which freely tolerate religious diversity also accept sexual variation, and the fate of the Jews and gay people has been almost identical throughout European history, from early Christian hostility to extermination in concentration camps. The same laws which oppressed Jews oppressed gay people; the same groups bent on eliminating Jews tried to wipe out homosexuality; the same periods of European history which could not make room for Jewish distinctiveness reacted violently against sexual nonconformity; the same countries which insisted on religious uniformity imposed majority standards of sexual conduct; and even the same methods of propaganda were used against Jews and gay people-- picturing them as animals bent on the destruction of the children of the majority.⁵⁷

However, Jewish faith and culture is far more easily passed from generation to generation, due to the physical fact of *blood connection*:

Judaism, for example, is consciously passed from parents to children, and it has been able to transmit, along with its ethical precepts, political wisdom gleaned from centuries of oppression and harassment: advice about how to placate, reason with, or avoid hostile majorities; how and when to maintain a low profile; when to make public gestures, how to conduct business with potential enemies. Moreover, it has been able to offer its adherents at least the solace of solidarity in the face of oppression. Although European ghettos kept the Jews in, they also kept the Gentiles out; and Jewish family life flourished as the main social outlet for a group cut off from the majority at many points in its history, imparting to individual Jews a sense not only of community in the present but of belonging to the long and hallowed traditions of those who went before."⁵⁸

⁵⁷Ibid, 15-16.

⁵⁸Ibid, 10

Boswell reminds us that "Gay people are for the most part not born into gay families." This may seem like an obvious assertion, but it is quite crucial. Since gayness is not a commodity or set of values that can be passed on or taught to the next blood generation, gay people are isolated from their families, too, and not just society as a whole. Boswell continues:

[Gay people] suffer oppression individually and alone, without the benefit of advice or frequently even emotional support from relatives or friends. This makes their case more comparable in some ways to that of the blind or left-handed, who are also dispersed in the general population rather than segregated by heritage and who also are in many cultures the victims of intolerance.⁵⁹

Wolfson concurs, pointing out that the first notions of gay identity are often forged alone in a world hostile toward homosexuality:

Unlike the members of most other minority groups, we are not born into our identity or our community; we have to find our way there largely on our own, after working through negative socialization from family and other institutions that most others rely on for self-identification, solidarity, and support. We have to understand and even construct our lesbian or gay identity around complex issues that American society handles singularly poorly: sex, intimacy, gender roles, and same-sex attraction.⁶⁰

Boswell writes that gay people's common dispersal into the general population rather than being "segregated by heritage," is unique, because "parents rarely realize that children are gay until they are fully grown."⁶¹ Beyond a simple lack of a "gay family system," gays do not assemble or bond together in the same manner in which a racial or ethnic people might be able to:

Unlike Jews and Muslims, they were dispersed throughout the general population everywhere in Europe; they constituted a substantial minority in every age-- rather than in a few periods, like heretics or witches-- but they were never (unlike the poor, for instance) more than a minority of the population."⁶²

Gay isolation is both self-perpetuating and potentially damaging. Although most people are familiar with their personal sexual inclinations at an early stage, the first moment when a homosexual person realizes that she or he might be homosexual is swiftly

⁵⁹Ibid, 16.

⁶⁰Wolfson, "Crossing the Threshold...", 586.

⁶¹Boswell, *Christianity...*, p. 16.

⁶²Ibid, 5.

followed by the sharp realization of the larger ramifications of that fact. Andrew Sullivan writes about the "sexual implosion" of his adolescence and of the subsequent horror:

Something like this [sexual awakening], of course, happens to gay and straight kids alike; but gay children have a particularly weird time of it. It was then that the scope of my entire situation began to click into place in my head. My longings became so intense that I found myself drawing sketches of the men I desired; I cut out male models from glossy magazines and made catalogs of them; I moved from crushes to sexual obsessions. I could no longer hide from this explicit desire: there it was on paper, in my brain, before my eyes-- an undeniable and powerful attraction to other boys and men. And of course, with all this came an exquisite and inextricable sense of exhilaration as well as disgust. It was like getting on a plane for the first time, being exhilarated by its ascent, gazing with wonder out of the window, seeing the clouds bob beneath you, but then suddenly realizing that you are on the wrong plane, surrounded by people who inwardly appall you. And you cannot get off. You are filled with a lurching panic. You are one of them.⁶³

The negativity of Sullivan's reaction sharply colors his account. However, his memory is quite similar to those of most queer people; this is the beginning of internalized homophobia, a simple reflection of societal homophobia branded into one's consciousness by the rigorous doubts of adolescence. We see in other minorities issues that might be considered similar; "internalized racism," if you will. However, children growing up under these circumstances are more likely to find role models and a support system of others like them, whereas gay youth are not usually so lucky. In fact, today's parents today tend to be very wary of their children having contact with gay adults.

If gay youth, and gays in general, cannot find initial support from others like them, they must turn to other sources, like literature and history, to learn about themselves and others like them. Escoffier writes about his hunger for knowledge about homosexuality, a hunger that accompanied his physical urges, that complimented them:

In my late teens, after my first sexual experiences, I tracked down everything I could read on homosexuality. I constantly sought information about homosexuality and worked hard to develop intellectual justifications for my own sexual orientation. In my freshman year at college, we read Plato's *Symposium*. On my own I read Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Gide's *Corydon* and *If it Die*, Cocteau's *The White Book*, a life of Rimbaud, Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*, Sartre's *Saint Genet*, Petronius's *Satyricon*-- anything that offered a view of homosexuality as important, good, and normal.⁶⁴

⁶³Sullivan, 10-11

⁶⁴Escoffier, 10.

Escoffier does not mention the books he found as a teenager; certainly the books he read in college should be on every gay teens' reading list. Some disagree with this; Tony Kushner writes about Bruce Bawer's opening example in his *A Place at the Table*, in which Bawer watches a 15-year-old page through *The Native*. Bawer is concerned about the book's influence on the boy's ideas about homosexuality, and writes "queer radicalism, sexual experiences, and kink frighten gay kids and the families from whence they came." Kushner, however, admits that while such topics do tend to receive more attention in our culture, the lack of information concerning more "domestic" and everyday situations has always been censored:

True, there aren't readily available, widely circulated images of homosexual domesticity or accomplishment or happiness, but I'm more inclined to blame the homophobic media than gay radicalism for that. Nor does the need for such images mandate the abandonment of public declarations of the variety of sexual desire, the public denial and repression of which is after all The Problem. Lesbian and gay kids will have less trouble accepting their homosexuality when the Gay Pride Parade is an orderly procession of suits arranged in monogamous pairs but when people learn to be less horrified of sex and its complexities.⁶⁵

Isolation is not a matter to be taken lightly; Wolfson cites the horrific suicide rates of gay and lesbian youth ("Gay and lesbian youth attempt suicide at a rate two to three times higher than that for other young people: these suicides represent up to 30 percent of all suicides each year."⁶⁶) When gay youth grow up in a world of sexual isolation, the need for information about homosexuality becomes paramount.

Gay History is more than simply history, more than simply history of oppression. It is the only avenue for gay people to discover some semblance of their "roots." Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey write that gay people have a unique interest in history:

...gay history has generated unusual interest among people otherwise unconcerned about history (history lectures and slide shows are among the most widely attended events at gay conferences and community centers) and has generated intense controversy when-- even in its most academic forms-- it has seemed to challenge previously cherished concepts of gay identity and community.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Kushner, 12.

⁶⁶Wolfson, "Civil Rights...", footnote, 37.

⁶⁷Duberman, 12.

Even beyond the immediate family, gay people lack a community which is able to transcend many generations. Racial and ethnic peoples may band together in solidarity during times of oppression, but gay people, because their type of difference is sexual and not physical, tend to attempt to blend into heteronormative culture rather than remain conspicuous and thus a target. Boswell writes that "Only when social attitudes are favorable do gay people tend to form visible subcultures. In hostile societies, they become invisible, a luxury afforded them by the essentially private nature of their variation of the norm, but one which greatly increases their isolation and drastically reduces their lobbying effectiveness."⁶⁸ Ironically, when society becomes more tolerant of homosexuals, familial isolation prevents gays from developing strategies to ward off recurrent intolerance or oppression: Boswell writes that "When good times return, there is no mechanism to encourage steps to prevent a recurrence of oppression: not gay grandparents who remember the pogroms, no gay exile literature to remind the living of the fate of the dead, no liturgical commemorations of times of crisis and suffering."⁶⁹

For the past century, the information available about homosexuality has been collected, analyzed, and distributed by a homophobic establishment, mainly by those in the religious and psychiatric fields. Escoffier writes that this information is thus tainted:

The stigma that categorizes homosexuality [sic] behavior as morally, medically, or psychologically undesirable is bolstered by elaborate edifices of scientific theory, theological rationale, and normalizing behavior modification. At the core of the stigmatizing process is the organization of knowledge. Since the late nineteenth century, homosexual emancipationists have battled deeply entrenched intellectual structures, which have perpetuated and disseminated the ignorance, silence, and hegemonic knowledge that sustained the social stigma against homosexuality.⁷⁰

Likewise, in his historic essay "Gay is Good," Frank Kameny writes that "More, probably than any other significant sociological phenomenon in our society, homosexuality remains immersed in a sea of persistent misimpressions, myths, folklore and legends." Kameny reasons that this is mainly because the straight world only sees a

⁶⁸Boswell, 16-17.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Escoffier, 118-119.

"nonrepresentative sampling" of homosexuality, brought to light by "people like clergymen, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, doctors, lawyers, policemen, and those in various social and counseling services, whose sampling is preselected for a high incidence of emotional and social maladjustment and problems."⁷¹ Therefore, Kameny writes, discourse about homosexuality necessarily

sink[s] quickly into a marass of psychiatry, criminal law, moral theology, emotional disturbance, 'abnormality,' 'deviance,' and the like, most of all of which is irrelevant or only peripherally relevant to the average, ordinary, guilt-free, unanguished, reasonably untroubled, basically happy homosexual, whose major porblems in regard to his homosexuality are not emotional problems but much more likely to be employment problems not of his own making.⁷²

Further, Kameny asserts that the straight world is unable to free itself from a "pervasive, pernicious, insidious-- and deeply destructive-- negativism," which "literally saturates every approach to the matter and colors initial assumptions and approaches, logic and reasoning, and final conclusions." This *de facto* negativism is the result of society's extreme intolerance of homosexuality: "unquestioned assumptions that homosexuality is undesirable, or less desireable than heterosexuality; that it is inferior to heterosexuality; that it is a second-rate condition, to be put up with at worst, and to be changed at best."⁷³

To combat such a plethora of misinformation, studies such as Gay History are invaluable. Escoffier writes that "Homosexual emancipation is not possible without a politics of knowledge."⁷⁴ He contends that the key to freedom from stigmatization was debunking this perspective in general: "...from the very beginning of modern homosexual emancipation, knowledge became one of the primary targets of political mobilization."⁷⁵ Suddenly, gay and lesbian activists realized that *they* should be the ones with the final say about the nature of homosexuality: "I can recall demonstrations and zaps (as quick,

⁷¹Kameny, 367.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Escoffier, 118-119.

⁷⁵Ibid.

surprise confrontations were called) in the early 1970s at public forums about homosexuality in which gay activists carried signs declaring "We are the experts."⁷⁶

Gay history is especially important in this debunking, as the realization that same-sex sexual behavior, and the people who practice it, have not always been so stigmatized is quite valuable indeed. Boswell writes that this knowledge is not still not well-known among gays:

Relatively few gay people are aware of the great variety of positions in which time has placed their kind, and in previous societies almost none seem to have had such awareness. Because of this, except in cases where they happen to wield considerable authority, gay people have been all but totally dependent on popular attitudes toward them for freedom, a sense of identity, and in many cases survival.⁷⁷

Another purpose of Gay History is to educate the general public about the prevalence of same-sex sexual behavior and about the cultures of homosexuality. Such a project is clearly motivated by the fact of gay oppression and a desire to change things for the better. Vaid writes that there is a clear necessity to educate all segments of heterosexual society about "homosexual lives and our aspirations for equality" because straight people will assume "dangerous and mistaken myths" about homosexuals.

Our exclusive focus on legal, legislative, and administrative policy reform helps end blatantly discriminatory practices, but it leaves these myths intact. By engaging homophobia in the cultural spheres, we challenge such myths where they originate and where they are perpetuated. Such a broad cultural front would tackle another conclusion of social science data; namely, that opposition to gay and lesbian equality is not monolithic: people oppose gay rights for different reasons. A broad-based cultural strategy aimed at America's sites of opposition could address these differences.⁷⁸

Some have argued that bringing the public's attention to issues like sexuality and sexual behavior is inappropriate. Vaid criticizes Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Democracy on Trial*, in which Elshtain takes exception to gay liberation's call for acceptance as part of a "Politics of Displacement." Vaid writes that while Elshtain affirms the quest for equal rights for queer people, she objects to bringing to the public sphere issues that should be

⁷⁶Ibid, 120.

⁷⁷Boswell, *Christianity...*, 17.

⁷⁸Vaid, 25.

private: "According to Elshtain, gay liberation's call for freedom is contradictory; it seeks to get government out of gay and lesbian lives at the same instant that it seeks to have government validate 'gay lifestyle.'"⁷⁹ Vaid argues that a notion of homosexuality as a private matter simply reinforces social stigma against homosexuality:

Elshtain misunderstands the devaluation of gayness that is at the core of our stigmatization, a degradation of which unequal treatment is but a symptom. The public-private distinction, like 'don't ask, don't tell,' reinforces the antigay stigma because it assumes the fundamental illegitimacy of homosexual desire. There is nothing wrong with telling (or asking or pursuing) the truth that we are gay or lesbian or bisexual."⁸⁰

Vaid concurs with Elshtain's assertion that movements like feminism challenged old boundaries between the public and the private; the public was defined in a manner which excluded women. However, she argues that Elshtain fails to see the similarities between a seemingly "womanless" public and a public which is without detailed knowledge of gayness:

Gay liberation similarly challenges the public and private division we have inherited, arguing that since there is nothing inherently shameful about human homosexual response, open homosexuality should not be stigmatized. The apparent contradiction, that government get out of gay lives and that government protect gay lives, is resolved if one accepts the premise that homosexual behavior is not wrong. Elshtain's invocation of shame, as an appropriate boundary between public and private, and the examples of sadomasochists and drag queens that she uses, reveal the persistence of liberal uneasiness with anything but the most 'respectable' forms of homosexual being.⁸¹

Duberman, et al, concur, writing that Gay History is far more than simply "filling in missing gaps in our knowledge of the past." Gay History, they write, illustrates the wide significance and crucial nature of sex and sexuality in society: "personal sexual behavior is never simply a private matter, but is it always shaped by *and* shapes the wider social and political milieux."⁸² They contend that historians of all backgrounds and focuses will find that the history of "gay and lesbian social networks" provides an excellent angle in which to study such topics as the "shaping [of] urban culture and social geography"; the

⁷⁹Ibid, 233.

⁸⁰Ibid, 234.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Duberman et al, 13.

relationship between these cloisters and "other ethnic, occupational, and neighborhood groupings"; the history of families and gender roles; "the changes in the cultural definition of deviance" and "the changing parameters of the acceptable"; and a new understanding of political culture through examinations of "the recurrent appearance of the supposed invidious influence of homosexuals on the Kaiser in Wilhelmine Germany or of the 'child molester' and 'security risk' in Cold War America." They write: "Just as the lives of lesbians and gay men are enhanced by a knowledge of their history, so too will the field of history be enriched by a reclamation of the homosexual past."⁸³ Boswell writes that the study of intolerance toward homosexuals is, in many ways, an example of pure intolerance. However, the example of homosexuality has several drawbacks:

The most fundamental of these [disadvantages] is the fact that the longevity of prejudice against gay people and their sexuality has resulted in the deliberate falsification of historical records concerning them well into the present century, rendering accurate reconstruction of their history particularly difficult. Distortion on the issue was little known in the ancient world but became more widespread with the dramatic shift in public morality following the fall of the Roman Empire in the West.⁸⁴

Further, Wolfson writes that the lack of and willful destruction of Gay History not only injures gay individuals, but society as a whole:

...because we are different from the present dominant heterosexist culture, we gay people have experienced discrimination, disenfranchisement, disfigurement, and dehumanization. And, of course, in holding us down, our society has also held itself down, harming millions of lives, gay and non-gay, for nothing. All Americans are injured by, and need protection against, sexual orientation discrimination and demands for gender and sexual community.⁸⁵

SEMANTICS: MARGINALIZATION AND EXCLUSIONS

The history and politics of the process of self-identification of homosexuality could easily commandeer an entire thesis. The common usage of the term "gay" to refer to all homosexual people certainly raises some problems. Many scholars of the social-constructionist school believe that calling the study of the history of homosexuality "gay

⁸³Duberman et al, 13.

⁸⁴Boswell, *Christianity...*, 17-18.

⁸⁵Wolfson, "Civil Rights," 36-37.

history” is inexact at best, flat out wrong at worst. Further, many lesbians feel that “gay” has been used in the past to refer exclusively to gay men; thus, to use it to describe a history which also includes them is to continue the pattern of gay male hegemony within the field. Further, others feel that the term “homosexual” also contains such sexist connotations, as well as being overly clinical. Bisexual and transgendered persons, certainly deserving a role in the history of same-sex behavior and the gender-queer experience simultaneously cry foul. Since the punk-affiliated AIDS-activist movements of Queer Nation and ACT-UP in the mid-eighties, many individuals who used to self-identify as gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people have begun to refer to themselves as “queer.”

In chapter two, I delve into many of these topics, to try and tease out the exact meaning of these words and these problems. The most important part of chapter two is that “gay” goes beyond the individual; even if a person self-identifies as “gay,” its meaning is far more important in the group sense, in the ways gay people have defined themselves as a group. While such a definition tends to change, the significance is in the communal aspect of “gay.” It is true that the study of history is quite important for one person seeking to identify herself in terms of sexual orientation. However, it is the interaction of gay people, or of homosexual people, or of people of the same gender in a sexual way, that is the other, equally important half of Gay History. For these reasons, I have decided to utilize the term already prevalent in academia: “Gay History.”

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I will suggest that gayness, homosexuality, and same-sex sexual behavior are acts and attributes which are primarily personal, unique in each individual. However, most (but not all) of gayness, homosexuality, and same-sex sexual behavior requires at least two people; it is in this fact that gay and homosexual partnerships, communities, and societies have formed.

Three case studies will illustrate these suppositions. In chapter three, I review Stonewall as the beginning of Gay History (because it is the beginning of the gay liberation movement) and also examine the manner in which gay historians and gay activists have created Stonewall as a gay origin myth. In chapter four, I consider Ancient Greek culture and determine that although it is impossible to call the Greeks “gay,” they are nonetheless a chapter in Gay History because their culture shares some attributes with modern gay culture. In chapter five, I assert the very same argument about American Indian berdaches; berdaches are a part of Gay History because of gender inversion and male-male romantic paring.

As Wolfson writes: “our society...smothers images of ourselves and *others like us*.” (my italics). Just as each gay individual today possesses a unique style of homosexuality, those who have sought same-sex sexual contact throughout history have done so in all different and unique fashions. *Homosexuality et al* has manifested itself in many different and varying ways throughout the world and throughout history; it is very difficult, if not incorrect, to say that there is indeed a “history of gay people” before the 20th century. However, there have been “others like us,” other people and groups who have shared similar emotions, desires, and experiences. It is through *both* the similarities and the differences between us that gay people today can learn about their gay identity and the significance of their homosexual desire. Even if we cannot call “others like us” *gay*, they are nonetheless important parts of Gay History.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS GAY?

The desire to live honestly underlies the political emergence of lesbians and gay men in our time. Such honesty requires self-knowledge. The moment of acknowledging to oneself homosexual desires and feelings-- the culmination of a process that for many, intermingles horror and excitement-- and then licensing oneself to act, and perhaps to discover anew one's vulnerabilities, is the central drama of the homosexual self. The moment of self-classification, of self-naming, and of exile from our natal culture is an emergency-- sublime, horrible, wonderful-- in the life of anyone who must confront it. Although we become ourselves in that moment of recognition, we also discover the injunctions of the law, the punitive rule of normalcy, and the ferocity of sexual exclusion. We see that our *selves* are traversed by social processes that shape our lives.⁸⁶

-Jeffrey Escoffier

"Gay" is a politic; that is, a body of people who identify as a group based on both their homosexual orientation and on their beliefs concerning the best method of addressing heteronormative ignorance and homophobic oppression in society. There are three characteristics of "gay." A gay person must be conscious of her or his gayness. In addition, a gay person must label her or himself "gay"; an external person or force cannot label an individual "gay." Finally, to be "gay" is to be open about one's gayness. "Gay" is specifically politicized homosexuality; these three tenets combine to form the basis of gay political strategy. Obviously, there are many other characteristics of "gay" on a both for the individual and for the "gay community"⁸⁷. However, these other characteristics change while the above three characteristics remain constant.

A "gay" person must be conscious of her or his gayness. In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Boswell argues that being "gay" must be a distinguishing characteristic of an individual:

'Homosexuality' refers to the general phenomenon of same-sex eroticism and is therefore the broadest of the categories employed; it comprises all sexual phenomena between persons of the same gender, whether the result of conscious preference, subliminal desire, or circumstantial exigency. 'Gay' in contrast, refers to persons who are conscious of erotic inclination toward their own gender as a distinguishing characteristic or, loosely, to things associated with such people, as 'gay poetry.' 'Gay sexuality' refers only to eroticism associated with a conscious preference.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Escoffier, *American Homo*, 1-2.

⁸⁷As I will explain, I am speaking about "gay" as a publicly defined concept, not as a personal one.

⁸⁸Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance & Homosexuality*, 44.

“Gay” as a distinguishing characteristic does not necessarily mean the distinguishing characteristic. It simply means that one is aware of the way her or his homosexuality affects her or his life, lifestyle, and interaction with the world.

Beyond consciousness, a person must label himself or herself as gay. Homosexual desire or activity alone is not enough; Boswell cites Paul Gebhard's statistic that over one-third of the adult male population of the United States has taken part in a homosexual act, yet nowhere near that number of men identifies as gay.⁸⁹ Like the preceding requirement of consciousness of homosexual desire, an individual must willingly adopt the term “gay,” an act which requires at least some understanding of how the world views homosexuals and gay people. Escoffier writes that self-identification and choosing a name is about placing oneself in a context with the rest of the world:

The debate about participating in the mainstream is in part about the meaning of adopting an identity or the possibility of repudiating it. Homosexual, lesbian, gay, queer, dyke, black gay, gay black, Latino/a, African American, Ms.-- each word implies a relationship to the social majority or to 'mainstream' society. For anyone to invest emotionally and politically in a social identity, he or she must believe that adopting this 'identity' is, in fact, a viable strategy for both satisfying emotional needs and negotiating social pressures.⁹⁰

Self-labeling means that “gay” is a choice: homosexuality may be biologically determined (partially or totally), but one must *choose* to be gay. For many, this choice means adopting a lifestyle which includes homosexuality as a major component. Urvashi Vaid outlines a four-pronged model of choice: “admitting, acting, telling, and living.”⁹¹ She writes: “Homosexuality is far more than a lifestyle, a status, or a sexual act for most of us who are gay. Gayness is our identity, our life, our family, our being.”⁹²

Finally, “gay” necessarily means “out of the closet”; that is, an open honesty about one’s homosexual desires and lifestyle to at least some extent. A homosexual can remain private about his sexual preference, “in the closet” or otherwise, whereas the term “gay” necessarily means openly affirming homosexuality as a part of one’s identity. Boswell uses the example of men in prison who take part in homosexual acts (for whatever reason) and yet do not ever consider themselves “gay.”

⁸⁹Ibid, 43-44.

⁹⁰Escoffier, 26.

⁹¹Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 30.

⁹²Ibid, 137.

In this chapter, I shed some light on the idea of “gay.” The progression of words and conceptions of same-sex sexual behavior, homosexuality, and gayness shows both the changing associations of homosexuality with other characteristics, as well as places the term “gay” in the late 20Th century only. Some of the main arguments between essentialists and social-constructions on Gay History: how the words we use to describe same-sex sexual behavior and the conceptions these words infer frames our view into other historical periods. Self-labeling is an essential part of “gay” because *measuring* gayness in people is very difficult. The gay community’s intra-community debate over such topics as authenticity, difference, politics, and “post-gay” illustrate some part of “gay” which have changed since Stonewall and which will continue to fluctuate.

SEMANTICS: A HISTORY OF GAY WORDS

Why is the word “gay” so important? What does it mean to have a specific “brand” of homosexuality? To begin to answer these questions, we must examine the words Western culture has used to describe same-sex sexual behavior of all kinds, and more recently, homosexuality and “gayness.” The etymology of same-sex sexual behavior also illustrates the different ways that cultures organized components of what we call “sexuality,” “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality,” as well as such topics as friendship, gender, and individual peculiarities.

David Halperin has constructed a five-part explanation of the conceptualization of male-male intimate relationships over time. The five categories are: (1) effeminacy, (2) sodomy/paederasty, (3) male friendship/love, (4) passivity/inversion, and (5) modern homosexuality. These stages illustrate the progression of thought about same-gender and opposite-gender relations, as well as categorize the different attributes that make up our notion of modern homosexuality. Halperin’s concepts do not necessarily move in chronological order (although inversion and modern homosexuality are certainly modern terms, and sodomy/paederasty is largely a classical term). The first four concepts listed are all components of modern homosexuality; they also simultaneously overlap with other types of male-male relationships (i.e., heterosexual or nonsexual).

According to Halperin, effeminacy in men has not always been associated with sexual preference: traditionally, effeminacy was distinguished from passivity, inversion,

and homosexuality and referred to “soft” men who were nonmasculine. In ancient periods, this descriptor was used to note men who practiced *heterosexual* excess or who spent a great deal of time with women, while in later periods, it was linked more strongly to same-sex sexual behavior. Boswell cites a portion from Aristophanes' speech from Plato's *Symposium*:

Those who love men and rejoice to lie with and be embraced by men are also the finest boys and young men, being naturally and the most manly. The people who accuse them of shamelessness lie; they do this not from shamelessness but from courage, manliness, and virility, embracing what is like them. A clear proof of this is the fact that as adults they alone acquit themselves as men in public careers.⁹³

Effeminacy was not associated with homosexuality or same-sex sexual behavior; Boswell writes that “In Greek debates about the relative merits of homosexuality and heterosexuality for men, advocates of the latter are sometimes stigmatized as 'effeminate,' never those who favor the former.”⁹⁴

During ancient times, classical paederasty was a highly institutionalized and idealized union between an older man and a younger man. The idealized relationship, which I explore in greater detail in chapter four, was based on numerous dichotomies of power: dominance/submissiveness, one who desires and the one who is desired, high and low social status, young and old. The act of sodomy was the basis of this relationship, and one's role in this act (active vs. passive) was key to preserving the power dichotomy.

Throughout western history, friendship and love between men has been the subject of literature, music, and philosophy. Although some love between men, even intense love, is platonic, Halperin notes that relationships between men in structured institutions (such as the military or the church) capitalize on the eroticism inherent in hierarchy. The “hero-and-sidekick” tradition is an important tradition of male friendship and love, as in the case of Achilles and Patroclus or Robinson Crusoe and Friday. More balanced relationships were also revered, in which “sameness” and equality are paramount; the epic of Gilgamesh and Enkidu is a good example of this. As Aristotle said, “...a true friend is another self.”⁹⁵

⁹³Boswell, *Christianity...*, 24.

⁹⁴Ibid, 25.

⁹⁵Halperin, David. Lecture: “Is there a History of (Male) Homosexuality?” given at the University of Oregon, January 19, 1999.

During the nineteenth century, scientists such as Havelock Ellis studied sexual inversion, a term given to those whose sexual role was a reversal of traditional masculine sexual identity. This covered a variety of behaviors and emotions, including the ancient Greek *eromenos* (younger, passive partner), transgendered and transsexual people, heterosexual transvestites, and women's desire in general. According to descriptions by Ellis and other sexologists, inverts were always penetrated, always perverted, and their status was physically identifiable. Halperin notes that inversion is about gender, not sexuality⁹⁶. It asserts that the active role is necessarily that of the male, and passive, of the female; therefore, an invert is one who assumes the opposite role of her or his biological gender. Attraction to persons of the same gender versus attraction to persons of a different gender is not important. This is a crucial point of contention in many issues in queer studies today, including two of my case studies (Ancient Greece and Native American berdaches).

The term “homosexual” did not exist until the very end of the 19th century. Jonathan Katz writes that the word was first listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1892; the term “heterosexual” first appeared a few years later. Before this, words did not exist to describe a polarization of sexual preference.⁹⁷ Halperin argues that modern homosexuality absorbs and combines three concepts: (1) a psychological condition, (2) a psychoanalytic notion of desire (erotic intentionality), and (3) a sociological notion of sexually deviant behavior.⁹⁸

“Gay” was not a part of the English language until very recently in Western society. John Loughery writes that the word “gay” was first used to describe homosexuality in the 1920s; this meaning was solidified by World War II. Loughery writes that the value of this word was “inestimable.” Before “gay,” hetero-society possessed many terms to describe men who liked men: “...either emphasizing their gender-role deviance (birdie, buttercup, fairy, flit, flutterer, nance, pansy, yoo-hoo) or aiming to be more general in its characterization and disgust (faggot, homo, queer).”⁹⁹

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Katz, Jonathan. *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, p. 10.

⁹⁸Halperin, David. Lecture: “Is there a History of (Male) Homosexuality?” given at the University of Oregon, January 19, 1999.

⁹⁹Loughery, John. *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 70.

Loughery writes that by the 1920s, “gay” had evolved into a common adjective with a sexual edge. He contends that using “gay” was a “new direction” for homosexuals:

Homosexuals had appropriated an existent word that had proved malleable over the last hundred years...Conscious of their status as fallen men, of the view of their lives as barren and joyless, of the stereotype of flippancy and silliness that attached to pansy culture, homosexuals latched on to a word that played off all of these different ideas and the word's own sly history. Best of all, it could pass undetected in its double meaning among heterosexuals. 'Is he gay?' or 'Did he have a gay time?' sounded like innocent questions to much of America before 1960. To homosexuals, they epitomized the power of coded language and effectively, or intermittently, moved away from the belligerence of 'faggot' and 'queer.'¹⁰⁰

“Gay” was intended to be more than simply a sexual orientation or gender expression. It was an attitude: homosexuals could be happy, funny, optimistic, “gay.” This sentiment is best expressed by the 1966 decision by the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) to adopt the motto “gay is good.” “Gay” is the word used primarily by Stonewall-era homosexuals to describe themselves, and those involved in some way with the gay liberation movements. The word has come into wide usage and is currently used by homosexuals who do not necessarily adhere to the three tenets of “gay,” as well as mainstream media and many individuals.

However, since the 1970s, there have been individuals and groups who reject the word or who have created new words to describe themselves and those who are like them. A major word that has gained recent notoriety is “queer.” Like “fairy,” “bulldagger,” “faggot,” and “dyke,” queer is a word which, earlier in this century, was only used as a strongly pejorative term, an insult to homosexuality and a statement of disgust. Like those other words, it has been largely reclaimed recently. Although many proponents of the use of “queer” are younger gays, influenced by the radical punk-affiliated ACT-UP and Queer Nation movements (“We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!” as the chant goes), the word queer has found its way into many parts of general gay culture. “Queer” has been met with both cheer and offense: David Thomas considers this issue through his examination of letters to the editor sent in 1993 to the *Bay Area Reporter* and the *San Francisco Bay Times*, the Bay Area’s two gay newspapers at the time. The letters concerned the theme of the 1993 San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade, which was “The Year of the Queer.” A major reason given for using “queer” is

¹⁰⁰Ibid, p. 70-71.

reclamation. Like “nigger” and “dyke,” some believe it is important to diffuse any harm from the word:

In some bygone era, the pink triangle was symbol of oppression used to separate us from the general population, to be rounded up and exterminated. Now the triangle is a symbol of pride. The lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender community has a wonderful ability to quote Lennon/McCartney-- 'take a sad song and make it better.' So it is with the word 'queer.'

Of course, there is flip side to any story: another individual writes: “I have serious doubts about its 'reclamation.' If some asshole calls me a queer as he's beating me over the head with a baseball bat, do I stop to ask if he know that the word's been 'reclaimed'?” Some of the individuals call “queer” “offensive and disrespectful” and an “insult.” “Never have so few been allowed to alienate so many,” writes one man. Another person writes: “Do we really expect other people to stop such name-calling and to think of us as gay people (or just other human beings) when we call each other 'faggot' and 'queer'?” Yet others love “queer”: “Year of the Queer is one big, flaming acknowledgment that queers are leading the movement.” “Already they are standing up on their bar stools and TV armchairs decrying this latest incursion on their right to be comfortably and invisibly 'gay.’” “It's about time to finally celebrate our uniqueness.” “The Year of the Queer calls out to those who are radically different to stand up and be counted.” “Let's face it: I am Queer! I am not a 'normal' gay man. I'm eccentric as hell.”¹⁰¹ Many of those who take exception to “queer” feel that those in favor do not take into consideration the previous 20-year struggle over gay rights. One man writes, “Most homosexuals who lived through the closeted '40s and '50s, the homophobic '60s and '70s, and who sweated and worked to achieve what this Pepsi generation is now free to enjoy, still haven't completely embraced the Q-word...words, along with thoughts, can shape and reshape history.” In addition, the use of “queer” as a highly derogatory term was more common in the 50s and 60s than in later years. Another letter states, “[Queer] brings up in me all the pain and self-deprecation I felt when the word was used to describe me in my youth and beyond.”¹⁰² Some believe “queer” is less male-specific than “gay” while others think that “queer” and “gay” both obscure lesbian visibility. A woman writes, “I'm not gay. Lesbians are not gay. But we're all here, and we're all queer.” Another person believed that using “queer”

¹⁰¹Thomas, David. “The 'Q' Word,” p. 70-86.

¹⁰²Ibid, 70-86.

in context of the parade was to welcome in those parts of the gay community who haven't always been so welcome:

...the whole point of the name is to give token representation-- via the parade's name-- to groups that have traditionally been excluded from politics-- the parade included-- and the social gains of the 'lesbian and gay community' for the past 20 years: people of color, the bisexual, transgender and S/M communities, fetishists, prostitutes, poor people, and 'minors,' among others.

There is logistical deftness to the word “queer”; this comes in handy in a movement where a multitude of labels and categories complicate and divide: one person writes, “I like the word a whole lot because it's a short-cut. It's a one-syllable word that identifies a community, which includes gay men, lesbians, bi people, transgendered people, supportive people, and questioning people.” Some believe that “queer” has something to offer besides a shortcut: a blanketing term:

Is Mr. Disler [a previous correspondent] aware of the difference between a lesbian and a dyke? A fag punk and a gay? A transvestite and a transsexual? As a transgendered bisexual, where am I supposed to fit in his rather limited scope of 'lesbian or gay,' especially when these groups tend to exclude both transpersons and bi's?

“Gay” is only one idea in a long line of conceptualizations and associations concerning same-sex sexual behavior. Many in mainstream society, homosexuals and otherwise, associate “gay” with such characteristics as female masculinity, male effeminacy, sado-masochism, and feminism. However, consciousness and openness, two of the three tenets of “gay,” tend to be only marginally associated with “gay.” In addition, it is very common for the self-labeling part of “gay” to be forgotten or glossed over.

GAY TRANSHISTORY?: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND ESSENTIALISM

It is clear from this study of semantics that “gay” is a historically specific term. Yet what is the significance of this in Gay History? This question has been taken up for the past 20-odd years in a debate among advocates of essentialism and social constructionism; undoubtedly, this debate one of the most important aspects of Gay History. From the very first volumes of Gay History up until the most recent, the

proper historical treatment of such ideas as “homosexuality,” “gay people,” and “sexuality” has been a (necessary) subject for concern. Within the debate, the very purpose of Gay History as a quest to uncover hidden and repressed information about homosexuality is brought under the microscope.

As I quoted Pat Califia in chapter one, early gay scholars sought to “reclaim” parts of history, to establish that homosexual people, or at least, that same-sex sexual behavior, had existed transhistorically. Escoffier writes that the wave of gay social thought in the early 1970s “assumed that the homosexual experience in different periods of history and in different cultures reveals a type of human personality called the homosexual.” He likens this process to tracing ancestral roots, “claiming” antecedents, “validating themselves through the achievements of great and famous queers and dykes.” Many studies searched for proof that homosexuality is “transhistorical, natural, or essential.”¹⁰³

Boswell’s formidable volume *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* and his subsequent articles are, in many ways, a culmination of these sentiments. Boswell’s work provided the first focused arguments for an essentialist view of Gay History. He explains that essentialists believe that “humans are differentiated sexually.” His major point is that sexuality is a reality, and even if words did not exist to describe such a reality, nevertheless, the reality exists:

Many categories might be devised to characterize human sexual taxonomy, some more or less apt than others, but the accuracy of human perceptions does not affect reality. The heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy exists in speech and thought because it exists in reality: It was not invented by sexual taxonomists, but observed by them.¹⁰⁴

Yet some Gay Historians began to realize that same-sex sexual activity had occurred in societies in which the dual concepts of “homosexual” and “heterosexual” did not exist, at least not as the polarity that 20th century society conceives them, and not

¹⁰³ Escoffier, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Boswell, John. “Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories,” 19.

with the same associations and components. Interestingly, Escoffier recalls that Mary McIntosh had written about such an idea before Stonewall; her paper, “The Homosexual Role” argued that homosexuality was a “social role and not a natural condition.”¹⁰⁵

Beginning with Jonathan Katz’s *Gay American History* and Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, a social constructionist theory of Gay History began to form. Halperin likens this debate to the spirit and content of the old “nature vs. nurture” debate, and Boswell writes that it is quite similar to the debate between “nominalists” and “realists” over the existence of universals.¹⁰⁶ Escoffier notes the incredible significance of social constructionist theory and study for lesbian and gay scholarship:

The development of a social-constructionist interpretation of homosexual history is one of the major intellectual achievements of the Stonewall generation of lesbian and gay scholars. This theoretical paradigm provides the criteria for historical and social research. Thus, the question that would send the social constructionist off to the archives would be, for instance, “Why doesn’t every society organize homosexuality in the same way that the classical Greeks did?” rather than “Why did the Christian Church repress the natural impulse of homosexual love?”¹⁰⁷

Boswell, (note that he is the best-known gay *essentialists*), defines social constructionism as being of the opinion that “categories of sexual preference and behavior are created by humans and human societies.” David Halperin, a self-described social-constructionist, agrees, writing that the debate comes down to “sexual categories”: determining the correct way to think about sex and sexuality transhistorically:

...it divides those who believe that terms like ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ refer to positive, objective, culturally invariant properties of persons (in the same way as do the terms for different blood types or genetic traits) from those who believe that the experiences named by those terms are artifacts of specific, unique, and non-repeatable cultural and social processes... ‘Essentialists’ typically consider sexual preference to be determined by such things as biological factors or hormonal levels, and treat sexual identities as ‘cognitive realizations of genuine, underlying differences’... whereas ‘constructionists’ assume that sexual desires are learned and that sexual identities come to be fashioned through an individual’s interaction with others.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Escoffier, 110.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 111.

¹⁰⁸ Halperin, David. *100 Years of Homosexuality*, 42.

Halperin, who published *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* in 1990, has engaged Boswell in scholarly debate often; the two have become something of a symbol of the two schools of thought.

Semantics play a major role in the Gay History debate between essentialists and social-constructionists: do words create reality, or do they simply describe it? Boswell writes that both essentialists and social-constructionists are “paralyzed by words.” He posits the example of “gravity” as a method of further understanding this paralysis: was there gravity before Newton “invented” it. He writes that a social-constructionist would argue that gravity did not exist before Newton “invented” it; this case would be supported by the fact that no mention of gravity could be found in any texts before this invention. An essentialist might argue that the Latin word *gravitas* “describes the very properties of matter Newton called ‘gravity.’” However, he writes as his own devil’s advocate, *gravitas* means “heaviness,” which is quite different from “gravity,” especially considering that Newton didn’t just coin a word, but described “the nature and operations” of the phenomenon called “gravity.” He reasons:

A distinction can be present and generally recognized in a society without forming any part of its social structure. In some cultures skin color is a major determinant of social status; in others it is irrelevant. But it would be fatuous to assume that societies that did not ‘discriminate on the basis of’ [i.e. make invidious distinctions concerning] skin color could not ‘discriminate’ [distinguish such differences].¹⁰⁹

Boswell criticizes social-constructionists for too hastily rejecting a word when it has a potential for numerous meanings:

In order to have meaning, ‘gay,’ for example, must be applied only as the speaker would apply it, with all the precise ramifications he associates with it. This insistence follows understandably from the implicit assumption that the speaker is generating the category himself, or in concert with certain contemporaries, rather than receiving it from a human experience of great longevity and adjusting it to fit his own understanding.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹Boswell, “Revolutions...” 24.

¹¹⁰Ibid, 22.

Essentialists, writes Boswell, assume that “lexical equivalence betokens experiential equality”; in other words, that “the occurrence of a word that 'means' homosexuality' demonstrates the existence of 'homosexuality'...at the time the text was composed.”¹¹¹

Social-constructionism takes exception to the idea that sexuality is a universal reality. Halperin writes that before the construction of the concept of “sexuality,”¹¹² an individual's sexual acts could be assessed, but a “sexual *orientation*” could not be determined. He writes, “There was simply no such thing, no distinctive combination that made up this idea.”¹¹³ It is important to note that to deem homosexuality and heterosexuality as culturally constructed items is not to say that they are “unreal.” Halperin argues that even though there are heterosexuals and homosexuals today, not all people find themselves so well suited for these descriptions:

...if homo- and heterosexuality—within some sectors of our culture, anyway—are not fictions, neither are they pure facts of life (as such things used to be called), positive and changeless features of the natural world. Rather, they are among the cultural codes which, in any society, give human beings access to themselves as meaningful subjects of their experiences and which are thereby objectivated—that is, realized in actuality.¹¹⁴

Such a supposition harkens back to Boswell's example of Paul Gebhard's statistic: not all homosexuals are gay, and all those who take part in a homosexual act are necessarily homosexuals. Further, Halperin believes that there is no such thing as “homosexuality itself” or heterosexuality itself.”

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are not to atomic constituents of erotic desire, the basic building blocks out of which every person's sexual nature is constructed. They just represent one of the many patterns according to which human living-groups, in the course of reproducing themselves and their social structures, have drawn the boundaries that define the scope of what can qualify—and to whom—as sexually attractive.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Halperin describes sexuality as “a positive, distinct, and constitutive feature of individual human beings— an autonomous system within the physiological and psychological economy of the human organism.” Halperin, “Sex Before Sexuality,” 41.

¹¹³ Halperin, “Sex Before Sexuality,” 41.

¹¹⁴ Halperin, *100 Years...*, 43.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 45.

Essentialists have a difficult time explaining away the fact that other societies created very different systems to consider what we call “sexuality”; beliefs and assumptions about the significance and association with other parts of life are not necessarily similar to those in modern Western society. Boswell maintains that most classicists agree that homosexuality “occupied a prominent and respected position in most Greek and Roman cities at all levels of society and among a substantial portion of the population.” Yet he admits that there is some doubt “whether the dichotomy suggested by the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' corresponds to any reality at all.”:

Terms for these categories appear extremely rarely in ancient literature, which nonetheless contains abundant descriptions and accounts of homosexual and heterosexual activity. It is apparent that the majority of residents of the ancient world were unconscious of any such categories.¹¹⁶

Boswell admits that this fact is “disturbing”; he writes: “How can such a dichotomy so obvious to modern society, so urgent in the lives of many individuals, have been unknown in societies where homosexual behavior was even more familiar than it is today?”¹¹⁷ In response, he argues that there are “certain acts” which have always been recognized as “homosexual” and “ask only when desire for such acts became the basis for a gay male identity.”¹¹⁸

Halperin argues that Boswell’s notion that homosexuality “takes different forms in different contexts, changing its character according to its cultural environment” is a dangerous assumption because “it effectively obliterates the many different ways of organizing sexual contacts and articulating sexual roles that are indigenous to human societies.”:

Does the ‘paederast,’ the classical Greek adult, married male who periodically enjoys sexually penetrating a male adolescent share *the same sexuality* with the ‘berdache,’ the Native American (Indian) adult male who from childhood has taken on many aspects of a woman and is regularly penetrated by the adult male to whom he has been married in a public and socially sanctioned ceremony? Does the latter share *the same sexuality* with the New Guinea tribesman and warrior who from the ages of eight to fifteen has been orally inseminated on a daily basis by older youths and who, after years of orally inseminating his juniors, will be married to an adult woman and

¹¹⁶Boswell, *Christianity...*, 58.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Duberman et al, *Hidden From History*, 6.

have children of his own? Does any of these three persons share *the same sexuality* with the modern homosexual? It would be more prudent to acknowledge that although there are persons who seek sexual contact with other persons of the same sex in many different societies, only recently and only in some sectors of our own society have such persons—or some portions of them—been homosexuals.¹¹⁹

Most agree that social constructionism has prevailed in Gay History. However, it is very important to understand that the original motivation for Gay History—to reveal and examine homosexuality throughout history—is not wrong or insignificant, just conceptually flawed. Just because the Greeks were not a “gay” society does not mean that they share many similarities with modern gay culture and gay individuals. Further, these similarities were ignored or stricken from historical record because of modern attitudes toward gayness and homosexuality.

MEASURING GAYNESS

Both essentialists and social-constructionists are saddled with the arduous task of locating gayness, or its parts thereof, in different historical contexts. Measuring “gayness” is an intensely difficult task for our “gay” present, let alone other historical periods or nonwestern cultures. Gay political organizations, sexologists and other scientists, advertising executives, and others have tried (rather unsuccessfully) to determine how much of the United States population is gay or homosexual.

Alfred Kinsey published his famous *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948, and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953, two of the first major studies to attempt to measure human sexuality on a variety of levels. Kinsey’s works found that 37 percent of adult men and 19 percent of adult women “had homosexual experiences to the point of orgasm at some point in their lives,” yet only 4 percent of the men identified themselves as “exclusively homosexual.” The Janus Report, a sexual behavior survey completed during 1988-1992, found that “22 percent of men and 17 percent of women reported having gay sex frequently or in an ongoing way.” The Harris Poll in 1988 studied 1834 men and women, ages sixteen to fifty, finding that 18.3 percent of men and 17.4 percent of women had “homosexual attraction and/or experience since the age of fifteen.” In this same study, 4.1 percent of men and 2.3 percent of women reported “having exclusively homosexual sex”; 1.9 percent of men and 1.2 percent of women

¹¹⁹ Halperin, *100 Years...*, 46.

reported they had such contact “fairly often”; 3.6 percent of men and 2.9 percent of women reported such behavior “rarely.”¹²⁰

Studies like these are crucial and exciting, not only in the quest for homosexual autonomy, but for our more general exploration into human sexuality. However, we must be wary: there are a host of reasons why surveys attempting to count homosexuals are highly problematic. First of all, since people elect whether or not to respond to these surveys, those who have homosexual feelings but worry for whatever reason about admitting to them can simply not respond. Also, given our highly homophobic world, it's possible that a person could have homosexual thoughts and not be able to admit to them on a survey. Next, just because someone reports same-sex attraction doesn't mean they practice it. In addition, there have not been enough studies on this subject because of the “politically charged” nature of the material. In addition, engagement in homosexual behavior doesn't necessarily mean an individual is gay. Vaid writes that “Studies done from the late 1940s to this day reveal that large numbers of people report same-sex attraction and even engage in same-sex behavior. But far fewer respondents call themselves gay or lesbian or bisexual.”¹²¹

In history, we can analyze documents to learn about who an individual spent her time with, whom he married, who she loved. However, this information is not sufficient to prove homosexuality or gayness. Boswell writes that there is no way to determine the sexuality of persons in past historical periods. He points out that even the accomplishment of homosexual acts does not provide a clear verdict:

...one supposes [that] a 'homosexual' person is one given to 'homosexual acts. But in just how many such acts must one indulge before becoming 'homosexual'-- one, two, ten, four hundred? And what of the person who only dreams of committing the act but never realizes the ambition? Is he or she 'homosexual'?¹²²

Boswell writes that the Kinsey scale tried to take into consideration fantasy life in addition to behavior, but that without a case history of the particular sex act, it was difficult to characterize. As an example, he notes Alexander the Great, a man who most

¹²⁰Vaid, 28.

¹²¹Ibid, 31.

¹²²Boswell, *Christianity...*, 41.

likely had sexual relations with hundreds of women and yet only two men. However, if one of the men (Bagaos) was “unquestionably the erotic center of his life,” a Kinsey scale score of Alexander would be quite incorrect. The reason this point is so important is because of the “enormous number of gay persons in highly repressive cultures [who] never express their sexual feelings at all.”¹²³

SOLDIARITY AND DIVISION: THE GAY COMMUNITY

I have defined “gay” with three tenets: consciousness of desire, self-labeling, and public openness. But what about all the other characteristics commonly associated with “gay”? These characteristics and associations have changed and over time since the early homophile movement in the 1950s. The “gay community,” in essence, is the intra-community debate(s) about a larger definition of “gay.” These debates include discussions of authenticity, difference, and politics.

Escoffier writes that the adventure of homosexual emancipation “starts with a drive for personal fulfillment, moves on to the building of communities, and almost invariably ends with a division of communities.”¹²⁴ This “division of communities” is a process in which gay people define gayness, or at least, different kinds of gayness. Escoffier contends that many homosexuals, “especially activists and intellectuals, are deeply divided about fundamental issues. Such issues include “the need to 'belong' (assimilation), the importance of same-sex marriage, the necessity of being out to the general public, the acceptability of publicly visible sexual expression, and appropriate political tactics to guarantee gay and lesbian rights.”¹²⁵ Escoffier writes that this phenomenon started during the mass coming out process that occurred immediately after the Stonewall period and into the early 1970s. He describes coming out (“the public disclosure of one's homosexuality”) as a “transformation of identity” in which one

¹²³Ibid, 42.

¹²⁴Escoffier, 2.

¹²⁵Ibid, 20.

“rejects self-hatred and affirms the previously stigmatized self.” Further, he reasons that such an event “requires a confrontation between individual autonomy and established moral codes.”¹²⁶ He writes that this “ethic of authenticity” became bigger, “a project of collective action” as previously disorganized homosexuals began to pull together, “galvaniz[ing] a loose network of social circles, habitués of dimly lit meeting places, and the customers of marginal businesses in communities.”¹²⁷

However, Escoffier is quick to note the automatic *loss* of personal autonomy when these communities were formed; he writes that the “irony of a politics built on the ethic of authenticity” lay in the “concomitant creation of a community that, itself, articulated new moral codes and norms of behavior.” “Irony,” in fact, may be too weak a word; for some, the triumph of acknowledging their homosexuality and the hopefulness of a new life without loneliness or oppression was quickly knocked flat by the realization of new judgements and intolerances:

These new ethical codes, reified and often resulting from a new communal solidarity, periodically posed all-too-familiar dilemmas for those lesbians and gay men who found themselves excluded, at that particular moment of history, by the new social norms of conduct. The new norms and ethical codes defined as 'deviant' those who experienced the new communal values as 'inauthentic' or as not matching their own values.¹²⁸

Over time, writes Escoffier, those who have been considered 'deviants' in the gay community have been “drag queens, pornographers, practitioners of casual sex, believers in monogamy, advocates of S/M, lesbians who practiced butch/femme, fairies, and boy lovers-- depending on the constellation of norms dominant at any given moment.”¹²⁹ The empowerment and disempowerment inherent in this process, combined with the influences of the feminist movement's interest in debunking polarized ideals of gender, created further divisions between gay people:

¹²⁶Ibid, 16.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid, 17.

¹²⁹Ibid.

Many of the groups who felt alienated from community norms were also implicated in the growing tensions between women and men, because many practices-- such as S/M, butch/femme, and transvestites, seemed to play off of gender roles or behavior. These new 'liberated' communities of authentic lesbians or gay men were presumed to be unified organic wholes predicated on the harmonious fusion of identical lesbians or gay men. But, in fact, lesbians and gay men were not 'unified organic entities,' because, of course, not all homosexuals are identical.¹³⁰

It is ironic, indeed, that a community which aims to support gay people and save them from their lifelong isolation ("the accidents of birth and history"¹³¹) might at the same time reject and spurn others who wish to belong. While some exclusions are hypocritical or, perhaps, not considered with an open mind, the act of exclusion can also be a clear-headed act of defending one's principles, or simply the establishing of limits.

GAY DIVERSITY: "MORE THAN ONE RIGHT WAY TO BE GAY OR LESBIAN"

"Not all homosexuals are identical," Escoffier reminds us: gay people, no matter how "out," possess lives with commitments to other "arenas" such as "jobs, political parties, religious affiliations" and to other "communities": race, gender identity, class, erotic preference." In a footnote concerning gay assimilationism, Evan Wolfson writes:

I myself write as a gay man who has chosen to be totally 'out' virtually all the time, believing that gay identity in a heterosexist society has a political dimension (and is also more true to myself: fortunately it works for me.) But I also believe there is more than one right way to be gay or lesbian.¹³²

There is, as Wolfson writes, "More than one way" to be gay. He continues, writing that gayness is only one part of a person's identity:

What many gay people do not want is an all-or-nothing model imposed on their lesbian or gay identity; they want both to be gay and married, to be gay and part of the larger society. For these lesbians and gay men, being gay is not just about being different, it is also about being equal. Their deeply-held convictions about how they want to live their lives and liberation are not mere intimacy. They are entitled to respect within our community as well as by the state.¹³³

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid, 18.

¹³²Wolfson, "Crossing the Threshold: Equal Marriage Rights for Lesbians and Gay Men and the Intra-Community Critique," footnote, 586.

¹³³Ibid, 587.

However, he does not equate assimilation with correctness; he also supports the right for others to live their lives outside of the norm:

I also believe that the same respect should be accorded others, gay and non-gay, who live their lives an unconventional, nonconforming, 'queer,' or separatist. That, to me, is the richness of our free society, ideally based on respect for the individual and appreciation of human difference.¹³⁴

In both cases, writes Wolfson, being different (no matter how slightly or profoundly different) is part of being human, not a reduction of it. Vaid agrees, writing that gay and lesbian organizing itself, from the very beginning, has been based upon a “false assumption” that “there is something at once singular and universal that can be called gay or lesbian or bisexual or even transgendered identity.” She reminds us that homosexual people are, in fact, “enormously diverse.” She argues that to believe in a universal gay identity is to disregard the “lines of gender, class, race, geographic location.” She cites Suzanne Pharr, who points out that other factors make each gay person different: race, religion, location, gender. In addition, gayness is only one part of our whole:

...as Pharr notes, each of us is rarely defined by one aspect of our identity: we are all more than gay, more than brown, more than our religion, more than our economic background. I can be at once all or three or four of the identities I embody: a lesbian, an immigrant, a Hindu, an Indian-American, a feminist, an organizer, a lawyer.¹³⁵

Vaid notes that her identification as a lesbian “allies me with other homosexual men and women, but it may or may not ally me with everyone who claims to be gay.” As an example the (modern) homosexual pedophile organization NAMBLA; while she believed in their First Amendment Right to organize, she rejects pedophilia itself as part of “homosexual identity.” In a broader sense, Vaid argues that a homogenous definition of “gay” is not only (deceptively) simpler, it lends gayness a mediocre quality, one that is less empowering:

Organizing around the notion that there is a fixed, definable gay or lesbian identity is far more convenient than organizing around the notion that homosexual desire is a potential in every person. It is also far less threatening to straight America. We are certainly more comprehensible when we speak and act as if there is such a thing as a gay gene than when we attempt to argue that

¹³⁴Ibid, footnote, 587.

¹³⁵Vaid, 287.

we seek to liberate the homosexual potential in all people! Science may well prove that we are gay or straight because of genetic reasons. But even biology does not limit its expression to one form of being. The fact that homosexual people are as multifaceted as humankind itself means that our effort to organize around one gay or lesbian identity will inevitably fail. We will always be lead to the fractured reality of gay and lesbian diversity.¹³⁶

Escoffier's notion of gay people's "commitments to other arenas and communities" is directly related to my discussion of gay isolation in chapter one: Escoffier writes that "As homosexuals...we join gay and lesbian communities *only as adults*, after powerful socialization experiences have made a deep impression, binding us to many other communities." (my italics). The irony is clear: "...our relation to community, created by a politics of authenticity, was often one of inauthenticity."¹³⁷ The kind of "closure" necessary to create a "community of 'authentic' and exclusive homosexual selves" requires, or would require, gay people to isolate themselves again, this time not from their homosexuality, but from everything else: "the complex web of affiliations with families and other groups." Should this not occur, the utopia of the gay community crumbles: "the loyalties of ethnicity, religion, and social class will reassert themselves and disrupt the sense of community."¹³⁸

HOW DIFFERENT IS GAY?

If nothing else, the term "queer" describes a sentiment which has been important to many gay people for some time: to be gay means to be different. Hollister Barnes (Dorr Legg), an early Mattachine activist, writes that she is "proud of being a homosexual" because it signifies her break with the tyranny of the majority:

The male homosexual is both relieved and glad to discover that, unlike the heterosexual who is forever seeking 'completion' and fulfillment in his supposed opposite-- a woman, he seeks his fulfillment in the very highest development of his own maleness, in love for another male. The lesbian also is relieved and glad not to have to attempt two readjustments of her selfhood, 1st to some male; 2nd, to her children, 'fruit of her womb,' which, in most cases lead her with fatal accuracy to the Curse of Eve, 'in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.' She learns, and what a

¹³⁶Ibid, 289.

¹³⁷Escoffier, 18.

¹³⁸Ibid, 18.

happy release it is, that it is possible for her to find fulfillment otherwise, to heighten her womanliness through love and sexual union with another woman.¹³⁹

Urvashi Vaid believes that gays should focus on their different-ness; however, her reason is not to distinguish ourselves from heterosexual society, but from the myths of normalcy (“...the new political paradigm we need requires us to shed the binding hold that the idea of normality has, to leave 'normal' behind, as if we did not care.”¹⁴⁰) David Thomas writes that: “To assert queer is to assert difference. That difference is in the term, the style, and the tactics.”¹⁴¹ The reason homosexuals were/are the victims of intolerance is that we act differently from the rest of society. To affirm this fact, to come out as gay, means “owning” this difference. Vaid further criticizes conservative gays who refuse to admit that this difference is more than just about sexuality:

Conservative gay leaders have long argued that we are 'just like straight people.' While true to the extent that we are all human, the statement rings hollow to straights and gays alike, but for different reasons. Straight society quickly dismisses our earnest attempts at 'straight-acting' as just that-- acting. This dismissal is reinforced in the propaganda campaigns of the right, whose aim it is to convince America how fundamentally different and depraved gay people are. Likewise, the significant number of gay people who accept the definition of queer as not normal find this argument too assimilationist and unappealing— we do not resemble the status quo and some of us do not accept it.¹⁴²

In some ways, this difference can be seen as a source for camaraderie. Harry Hay believed that the key to organizing homosexuals was to accentuate their similarities to one another; he predicted that Gay Studies would be the “body of knowledge that would mean aid and progression,” that it would “show that Homosexuals, as a group, have much in common and that they are not unique cases.”¹⁴³ But how different are gay people from straight people, and what are the ramifications of this difference? Such a question is the topic of much discussion among gay activists and scholars. While Hay recognized the

¹³⁹Legg, Dorr. “I am Glad I am a Homosexual,” 326.

¹⁴⁰Vaid, 206.

¹⁴¹Thomas, 70-86.

¹⁴² Vaid, 181.

¹⁴³Hay, Harry. “Social Directions of the Homosexual.” Dated October 4, 1951. Delivered at a Mattachine discussion group. Appears in *Radically Gay*, 83.

commonality of gay people, writing that gays were a “people” hidden in a heterosexual society, it is unclear how he conceived this difference. He writes:

Should we be considered individuals or be considered a group? We essentially are a group of individuals that have been forced together by society. Society attacks the Homosexuals for their non-conformity in sexual desire and objects completely on the basis of this one characteristic. This attitude would change if society could see the positive side and realize the potential ability to offer a worthwhile contribution.¹⁴⁴

An inherent difference is quite distinctive from a difference which is “forced.” It is difficult to determine if Hay is inferring that gays need only band together to work for liberation, or if this commonality and community should continue on after liberation has been attained. In chapter one, I mentioned Hay’s notion of a “ethical homosexual culture”; this only confounds analysis.

Historically, gay activists have disagreed about the inherent different-ness of gays. In his famous essay “Gay is Good,” Franklin Kameny writes that “We differ not at all from you except in our choice of whom we love and with whom we relate intimately-- in those ways, in their narrowest sense, but in no other ways.”¹⁴⁵ Yet in 1953, David Freeman, corresponding secretary of the Mattachine Foundation, wrote that homosexual culture includes those individuals who express their homosexuality in an exclusive manner.¹⁴⁶

Consider the homosexual culture (and here I mean the pure, 100% homosexual culture which is somewhat hypothetical) in which perhaps only a few of the 1,500,000 ‘absolute’ American homosexuals participate. Who are the participants? What do they do? They are the homosexuals who visit the homosexual bars, who walk or talk or gesticulate in the universally-recognized homosexual manner. They are the homosexuals who admit (at least to themselves) they are, indeed, homosexual and that their lives, plans, hopes, and prospects must, accordingly, be different. A small minority of this small minority recognizes the existence of an emergent, homosexual culture-- a way of life, a striving and a hope for a world in which they will not be hounded, degraded, ostracized. And some of them look toward the development of a homosexual ethic.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Kameny, Franklin. “Gay is Good.” (1969). Appears in *We Are Everywhere*, 375.

¹⁴⁶Freeman, David. “The Homosexual Culture,” 312.

¹⁴⁷Ibid, 314.

Freeman believed that a homosexual is defined by his way of life; being a homosexual must be a significant and binding part of everyday living. Freeman illustrates this by making a distinction between one who is a homosexual and one who occasionally participates in homosexual culture:

White, Protestant bisexuals and heterosexuals participate in the homosexual culture at some time and to some extent. They also participate in the Negro, Jewish, and Mexican-American culture at the same time and to some extent. But this does not make them homosexuals, Negroes, Jews or Mexican-Americans.”¹⁴⁸

Wolfson focuses on the fact that gay people are forced into minority status, inferring that, given the opportunity, gays would consider themselves similar to straights:

Gay people are, in this culture, a minority. Our sexual orientation, our romantic attractions, our affectional preference appear to most of us, as to most humans, to be immutable, deeply rooted, beyond our conscious choice, part of our natural identity. None of us created our fundamental sexual 'inwardness.' But because we are different from the present dominant heterosexist culture, we gay people have experienced discrimination, disenfranchisement, disfigurement, and dehumanization. And, of course, in holding us down, our society has also held itself down, harming millions of lives, gay and non-gay, for nothing. All Americans are injured by, and need protection against, sexual orientation discrimination and demands for gender and sexual community.¹⁴⁹

GAY CONSERVATIVES: CUTTING INTO *DE FACTO* GAY RADICALISM

As I will examine further in chapter three, the Stonewall riots and the resulting gay liberation movement were intensely radical in nature. The political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the intense social stigma against open homosexuality made it nearly impossible to be gay and not be radical; in fact, many gay liberationists were radical feminists, radical antiwar protesters, and radical civil rights leaders. This tradition remained widely intact until only the past 5 or 10 years, when the gay conservative movement appeared on the scene. Some scholars and politicians began to criticize the generally liberal-left nature of gay politics; *The Economist* notes that

Several gay writers contend that, like radical feminists, the left-wing activists are obsessed by political correctness and the image of gay people as victims. Some gay conservatives even blame

¹⁴⁸Ibid, 314-315.

¹⁴⁹Wolfson, Evan. "Civil Rights, Human Rights, Gay Rights: Minorities and the Humanity of the Different," 36-37.

the leftists for the enduring image of homosexual men-- in the minds of some people-- as effeminate, louche, odd-balls who wear leather jockstraps.¹⁵⁰

Conservative gay organizations like the Log Cabin Republicans (LCR) began to challenge the notion that gay necessarily means radical. LCR's literature announces their position as the home for "mainstream gay and lesbian Americans who want to make a difference in their country." Their frustration with the de-facto liberalism and sharply drawn expectations of gay political organizations is clear; they write: "No longer will we be told where we must live, how we must dress, and how we must vote." Their mission statement states their firm beliefs in "limited government, individual liberty, individual responsibility, free markets and a strong national defense."¹⁵¹

Popular gay response to gay conservatives by radical gays tends to be humorous yet illustrates great fears and contempt surrounding these differences of opinion. Many queers don't believe that gay conservatives truly reflect a movement applicable to or supported by all gay people. In Alison Bechdel's lesbian cartoon series *Dykes to Watch Out For*, the stereotypical lesbian-feminist-Marxist Mo describes "gay neocons" as "A bunch of white gay men trying to convince the homophobes to like them because they're just normal, sexist, racist, god-fearing, profit-driven boys next door!" She continues:

Mo: "The question is, would these Log Cabin types ever have come out at **all** if **leftist** queers hadn't been fighting for their rights in the streets for the past **25 years**? I think **not**."

Ellen: "I dunno, Mo. Street activists and Dykes on Bikes are great, but it takes all kinds! If some starched, straight-acting gay men and lesbians want to suck up to the republican party, it can only help!"

Ginger: "Yeah...help **them**. They'll sell the **rest** of us down the river just to get their wingtips in the door! They're anti-choice, anti-affirmative action, pro-big business..."¹⁵²
(all original bold type)

Bechdel's characters are very true to real life: radical gays feel that conservatives who preach assimilation and freedom of ideas are ignoring the fact that it was gay radicalism

¹⁵⁰Staff writer. "Now for a queer question about gay culture." *The Economist*, July 12, 1997 v344 n8025 p75(2).

¹⁵¹ Accessed at <http://www.lcr.org>.

¹⁵² *Dykes to Watch Out For*, episode 196: "Let them eat cake." Appears in *Unnatural Dykes to Watch Out For*, by Alison Bechdel. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1995.

that created the space for gay conservatism. On the other hand, conservative gays seek a space in the movement not necessarily dominated by leftist ideology.

A major issue of contention between gay radicals and gay conservatives is over one of the three defining characteristics of “gay”: being “out.” Since many of the characteristics of gayness and homosexuality are unseen, many gay people and homosexuals have the choice to remain relatively undetected or at least ignored. Wolfson writes that, unlike other minorities, “Our community (or communities) is shaped...by the corollary notion that most gay people can ‘pass’ and thus need not partake in gay identity on an all-or-nothing basis.”¹⁵³ Andrew Sullivan reminds us that “the option of self-concealment” is always available: “Gay people are not uniformly discriminated against; openly gay people are.” This ability to disassociate oneself from homosexuality (and also transgenderism) has come to be known as “passing.”

In some ways, “passing” is a luxury. Other minorities, defined by physical characteristics like the color of their skin or their daily religious garb, cannot hide their different-ness. A proper example is the harsh ramifications of society’s “straight until proven queer.” A gay man can come to work in a business suit, sans earrings and pink triangle jewelry, and “pass” as a straight person. Liberal culture provides a society in which a woman can wear her hair short and never don a dress and still be considered heterosexual. As I have stated in chapter one, gay people grow up in a unique isolation, unaware that there are others who share an important part of their identity, and who share the ramifications of this difference. The invisibility of passing is a vicious circle.

Yet there are many that believe that “passing” is not so simplistic. Tony Kushner disagrees with Sullivan’s idea of the “optional” nature being out: “To need to be invisible, or to feel that you need to be, is to be discriminated against.”¹⁵⁴ Vaid notes that

Most gay republicans prominent in the movement today-- like Bruce Bawer, Marvin Liebman, Rich Tafel, and David Brock-- were not out of the closet in 1988...Ironically, the person most

¹⁵³Wolfson, “Crossing the Threshold...” 586.

¹⁵⁴Kushner, Tony, “A Socialism of the Skin,” 12. Appears in *The Nation*, July 4, 1994, (9-14).

willing to serve as a national gay Republican spokesperson in 1988 turned out to be using a pseudonym. I'm still not sure of his real name.¹⁵⁵

Escoffier criticizes gay conservative Bruce Bawer's *A Place at the Table* for failing to recognize "coming out" as "a useful building block for the community of lesbians and gay men, writing instead that marriage should be the "political centerpiece of gay and lesbian lives," because it allows gays to "blend in."

The irony is that, in this book, Bawer discusses his own coming out, which was clearly an important and necessary step for him in developing self-respect. This act would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, without the precedent or presence of the community of which he so vehemently disapproves. Even such a vigorous defender of assimilation need the distinctive community (and niche in the book marketplace) that continues to exist partly outside the mainstream.¹⁵⁶

Much of this argument is generalized when it really cannot be; the decisions and behaviors of "passing" are quite different for each individual. A gay neocon might question a very butch lesbian or a drag queen's decision to dress with cross-gendered clothing, which creates much tension. On one hand, the question of intent is paramount: is the individual dressing in this manner to shock or to convey themselves in the most accurate manner? The next question: does that even matter? And what about physical features of the body which might be cross-gendered but are natural nonetheless, as in the case of a very androgynous person, or a naturally butch woman or a naturally femme man? The conservative social values of gay neocons makes them less obviously gay and less threatening to a heteronormative society; therefore, they have less reason to protest homophobia, and less reason to fear it.

Both radical and conservative gays claim to speak for many gay people: is this true, in either case? One can easily argue that gay culture since Stonewall has been immersed in politics. Since "gay" is political, it can be argued that an average gay person is more interested in or aware of politics than the average nongay person. But surely, not every person who calls her or himself "gay" is out to the whole world; certainly the

¹⁵⁵Vaid, 119.

¹⁵⁶Escoffier, 21.

majority of gay people are not politically radical or avidly follow each gay political and legal battle. Many people today, heterosexual and homosexual, use the word “gay” to describe any and all homosexuals; this further clouds the original and true meaning.

Yet while semantics and politics may be crucial to some, it is not clear that the majority of persons who identify as “gay,” care so passionately about such matters. In Wolfson's argument that most gay people view the right to marry as a “fundamental choice they wish to make for themselves as a basic part of their life plan together,” he mentions a comment by Daniel Foley, his co-counsel in the recently rebuffed Hawaii same-sex marriage case *Baehr v. Anderson*:

You get your intellectuals, scholars, and activists in debate. It's a good debate, and it has to take place. But most people out there, their concerns are health benefits, security, better lives for their partners and children. They're not interested in politics-- gay, straight, or any other kind.¹⁵⁷

Foley's comment is certainly not meant as a belittlement; on the contrary, Wolfson notes that the activists and scholars who argue over such esoteric issues may be missing the point altogether:

Many people engaged in this and other marriage debates, such as Nan Hunter, Bill Eskridge, and Mary Dunlap, have been involved in both academic and activist advocacy. However, while academic articles usefully explore gaps and idealizations in legal and strategic thinking, they may also be somewhat removed from the actual possibilities, challenges, and work at hand.¹⁵⁸

John D'Emilio marvels at the change in the gay movement since Stonewall, as it becomes more diverse and yet, more mainstream:

Today, gay and lesbian organizations include a host of constituencies-- men and women, black, Hispanic, Asian and white, young and old, entrepreneurs, middle-class professional, and unionized workers. Homosexuals have formed political clubs, churches, synagogues, health centers, and theater companies. Although no unified vision or political strategy animates these constituencies, we can say that as Stonewall has receded into the past, the movement as a whole has become less politically and socially radical. Its portrayal by the media, the statements of many movement leaders, and the program of action of individuals and organizations convey an image of the gay movement as one in quest of equal rights. That evolution, from gay liberation to gay rights, places the political and social struggles of lesbians and gay men in a familiar, well-established equal rights framework, deeply rooted in American history. This history has provided gay men and lesbians with several modes of struggle employed by minorities in search of

¹⁵⁷Griffin, Kimberly. “To Have and To Hold: Gay Marriage, The Next Frontier.” Windy City Times, June 2, 1994, 1, 32. Qtd in Wolfson, “Crossing the Threshold...” footnote, 586.

¹⁵⁸Wolfson, “Threshold...”, footnote, 601.

equality. Blacks, women, ethnic groups, and religious minorities seek this equality through social movements, legislative agendas, and litigation.¹⁵⁹

POST-GAY

As I have stated before, many people use the label “gay” without subscribing to or understanding the complex set of values or strategies which the term implies (at any given time.) However, it has become more common for some homosexual people to reject many of the tenets of gay politics; the term “post-gay” has recently surfaced to describe not on a personal system of being, but perhaps, a vision of a new society in general.¹⁶⁰ As the world becomes a safer and more accepting place for gays, has the term become obsolete? If “gay” is used to describe a subset of the population that is different and isolated from the general population, what happens when difference is offset, and isolation diminishes?

James Collard writes that the basic tenets of “post-gay” (a word still in the process of being defined) are based upon the notion that homosexuals should no longer define themselves solely in terms of sexuality.¹⁶¹ Collard chronicles the use of “post-gay” as early as 1994 by British journalist and activist Paul Burston. Collard reports that he began to think about the idea of post-gay upon finding that he preferred the “social variety” of mixed clubs rather than the “more homogenous” gay clubs. He writes that the gay perspective, which emphasizes struggle and oppression within a homophobic world,

¹⁵⁹D’Emilio, *Making Trouble*, 182.

¹⁶⁰ I would be remiss if I failed to mention one way in which the term “postgay” is used: within the literature of ex-gay ministries. Ex-gay ministries are religiously-based (usually Christian) organizations that seek to “convert” gays to heterosexuality, basing their work on an environmentally-based notion of sexual preference. Sometimes using the term “postgay,” proponents argue that gay culture is morally wrong and endeavor to convince individuals to cease their homosexual behavior and create a heterosexual life. Much evidence has surfaced recently suggesting that attempting to “convert” homosexuals is ineffectual and harmful, including the major 1997 report by the American Psychological Association. In contrast, most of those using the term “post-gay” use these critiques to suggest a new mindset without condemning homosexual behavior. James Collard writes that “post-gay” is “simply a critique of gay politics of gay politics and gay culture - by gay people, for gay people” and that it “doesn’t refer to someone who’s simply switched sexuality.”

¹⁶¹Collard, James. “Leaving the Gay Ghetto.” Appears in *Newsweek*, Aug 17, 1998 p.53. Appears on <http://www.npiec.on.ca/~scalver1/ex-gay.htm#why>

is outdated and stifling; that the new struggle is finding one's way through the straight world, which has only recently been accessible:

Post-gay doesn't mean "The struggle's over, so let's shop!" The struggle isn't over, and neither is the health crisis. But there's a pressure to conform within gay-activist politics, one that ultimately weakens its fighting strength by excluding the many gay people who no longer see their lives solely in terms of struggle.¹⁶²

Collard writes that the very diverse nature of the gay population necessarily promotes a new sense of mainstream identity, leaving the "angry" mentality of the radical in the past:

...anger no longer has the power to unite us. Much has been achieved in the short time since the gay-rights movement leapt out of the closet--and onto the streets--in the Stonewall Riots of 1969. The movement survived the conservative backlash of the '80s, organized itself to fight the AIDS epidemic and won numerous battles for equality and acceptance. In the aftermath many gay people--because of their economic position, where they work or where they live--feel they can live their lives freely and openly. Many others cannot, and there is also a new generation of young gay people emerging who have grown up in a different climate, at a different stage of the health crisis. These disparate groups are unlikely to be united by the orthodox tactics of angry veterans from earlier battles."¹⁶³

Y2k is not 1969: the fervor and inspiration of the sixties movements have given way to a society where the problems are not black-and-white any longer. Morgan Burton Johnson writes that the nature of the revolution has changed:

The change in our fight for freedom has evolved from front-page news and united protest to its next logical step, the one where it can do the most to change the bigotry against us: our individual communities. I sense Kramer misses the galvanizing events of the original freedom movement, but I feel the real work is now occurring in the trenches with those we meet and deal with day to day. We've learned that legislation can't give us what we must give ourselves; laws may protect us from some but not until everyone knows who those laws speak about. That is why the next step in our revolution is coming out in quiet, unpublicized moments to our straight communities.¹⁶⁴

The Economist writers reason that post-gay describes the new generation of gay people living in areas of the country where gays are respected:

..in these enlightened places, the first members of a unique new class are emerging: young gay people (those who came of age after the late 1980s) who have almost never feared abuse or assault; to whom coming out is a relatively easy rite of passage rather than a step over a cliff; and to whom AIDS means not the terrifying deaths of friends and the hate of puritans, but the same thing it means to their straight contemporaries: merely the need to use annoying bits of rubber

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid..

¹⁶⁴"Culture wars" (reader forum). *The Advocate*, April 27, 1999 p6(1).

during sex. They (this author is among them) are the front edge of a generation that might be called "post-gay": one that may grow up wondering what all the fuss was about.¹⁶⁵

All this talk of the imminent end of gay politics seems a bit hasty. Peter Galvin wonders if perhaps many of those holding this conviction live in areas traditionally tolerant toward queer people. In an article about photographer David LaChapelle, he quotes LaChapelle: "It's easy for people to talk about being post-gay when they're living in New York or L.A.," he says. "Talk to someone in the Midwest about being post-gay; they've got to deal with the realities of small-town gossip, judgment, and condemnation. That's an everyday fact." Galvin writes that LaChapelle believes that a post-gay mentality "ignores the realities of the present and blots out our gay past: 'What you're, saying is that our culture doesn't exist, that we're just part of the mainstream. I'd rather think of myself as special or different.'"¹⁶⁶ This sentiment might be taken even further: Miriam Horn quotes playwright Paul Rudnick about the essence of gayness within the New York subculture:

'In a city made up of "underdogs and loudmouths and people who just couldn't stand their small towns for one more second,' wrote Rudnick in New York, there is ample support for a gathering of society's outsiders. 'In a sense, even straight people come to New York to be gay.'¹⁶⁷

If post-gay becomes the accepted form of homosexuality in modern culture, "gayness" and, along with it, Gay History, dies. Yet some do not believe this will occur. John McCalla criticizes Collard's ideas, writing that the shortcomings of gay culture do not merit a totally new conception of homosexuality:

Gay ghettoization, looksism and mainstreaming seem to be the phenomena Collard wants to talk about, but a new school of thought need not be invented for such discussions. Some of my best friends are straight, but it doesn't mean I approve of their lifestyles. Case in point: my poor, wretched, married sister, an overworked mother of three who admittedly gets her vicarious kicks through me.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵Staff writer. "Now for a queer question about gay culture." *The Economist*, July 12, 1997 v344 n8025 p75(2).

¹⁶⁶Galvin, "Shoot to thrill."

¹⁶⁷Horn, Miriam. "New York's week to be gay." (Gay Games IV and gay pride celebrations. Appears in U.S. News & World Report, June 27, 1994 v116 n25 p18(1).

¹⁶⁸McCalla, John. "Beyond the fruit loop: too gay, post-gay, whose life is this, anyway?" Appears on <http://tech1.dccs.upenn.edu/xconnect/v4/i2/g/mccalla.html>

Yet as times change, gay political strategy must evolve: *The Economist* correctly reasons that the impact of pride marches may very well accomplish less than “homophobes discovering that friends are gay, and still normal.”

The uncounted masses of ordinary homosexuals already live as close as they can (though, outside the West, that is not close) to the “conservative” ideal, concentrating on making their sexuality a non-issue and waiting quietly for legal equality. The small and privileged class of gays that feels confident in maintaining a distinctive identity-- and which tends to thrive in more open-minded professions such as the media-- will continue to do so.¹⁶⁹

However, Vaid also agrees that this dualism will continue, and that it will remain a thorn in the side of gay politics:

As a formal political movement, gay and lesbian liberation was short-lived. Having emerged in the post-Stonewall period, it had largely disappeared as a national force by the early 1980s. But the ideas, values, and criticisms made by gay and lesbian liberationists survived and flourished in queer culture. The dissonance between a gay culture that embodies values more radical than the political movement that defends it continues to be a source of tension within the contemporary gay and lesbian movement.¹⁷⁰

The intra-community debate over authenticity, difference, and politics illustrates another part of “gay,” a part beyond the three tenets. The fluctuating nature of this part does not mean that these issues are insignificant or flighty; gay identity, even when considered from the standpoint of a group, a politic, is not 100% constant. Escoffier highlights the significance of ambivalence in this issue:

Identity politics is permeated by ambivalence. We *are* members of the dominant society and yet we *are not really* members. The contradiction is our fate. We face a constant challenge to develop a political strategy that nourishes and protects the many ways of being homosexual. It may be easy to recognize what is inauthentic in this twilight zone of ambivalence and contradiction, but slowly it dawns on us that there may be no 'authentic' solution after all.¹⁷¹

CONCLUSION

The nature of “gay” is a fundamental question within the study of Gay History. Indeed, Boswell writes:

¹⁶⁹Staff writer. “Now for a queer question about gay culture.” *The Economist*, July 12, 1997 v344 n8025 p75(2).

¹⁷⁰Vaid, 38.

¹⁷¹Escoffier, 27-28.

If the categories 'homosexual/heterosexual' and 'gay/straight' are the inventions of particular societies rather than real aspects of the human psyche, there is no gay history. If 'homosexuality' exists only when and where people are persuaded to believe in it, 'homosexual' persons will have a history only in those particular societies and cultures.¹⁷²

Boswell is incorrect in this assumption. Gay History is more than just the history of gay people; it is the history of all the components of gayness, including homosexuality, same-sex sexual behavior, effeminacy, sodomy/paederasty, male friendship and love, sexual inversion. Gay people, and the rest of humanity as well, can significantly benefit from the study of these characteristics within the framework of a modern conception of "gay." Halperin writes:

The sort of history that will result from this procedure will no longer be gay history as John Boswell tends to conceptualize it (i.e., as the history of gay people), but it will not fail to be gay history in a different, and perhaps more relevant, sense: for it will be history written from the perspective of contemporary gay interests—just as feminist history is not, properly speaking, the history of women but history that reflects the concerns of contemporary feminism.¹⁷³

¹⁷²Boswell, "Revolutions...", 20.

¹⁷³ Halperin, *100 years*, 29.

CHAPTER THREE: STONEWALL

The following appeared in a press release from the renowned queer media watchdog group Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), dated June 21, 1999:

STONEWALL INN TO BE LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES: The Stonewall rebellion, regarded as one of the most important events in the history of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender civil rights movement in America, will mark its 30th anniversary next week. The uprising, which took place June 28-July 3, 1969, galvanized the community and led to the formation of thousands of gay, lesbian and bisexual civil rights organizations around the world. To commemorate this historic watershed, the U.S. Department of the Interior will hold a ceremony today, June 21, recognizing the Stonewall Inn, as well as its environs, with a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Policy, Management and Budget John Berry will appear at a special Gay and Lesbian Pride Month ceremony at The New York Lesbian and Gay Center...¹⁷⁴

As this release testifies, more than just gay people think the 1969 Stonewall "Rebellion" is a significant event in the history of gay liberation. In addition, as I have noted in my first chapter, Stonewall was, in a sense, the beginning of gay history. The acts of radical defiance at the Stonewall Inn lead to political movement larger and more radical than previous efforts. This movement created an atmosphere in which activists realized the absence of same-sex sexual behaviors and unions in historical record, and recognized the value of history to a movement based on the strategy of visibility.

"Stonewall" is a deeply engrained conception within contemporary gay life; for many, the very word conjures up images of action, solidarity, and justice. Around the world, "Pride Day," an annual celebration of the gay movement and of gay communities, is almost unilaterally scheduled circa the anniversary of Stonewall. References to "Stonewall" are commonplace in contemporary queer society during the rest of the year as well: Stonewall has been dubbed "the Year Zero for gay politics"¹⁷⁵; "the riot that

¹⁷⁴ Accessed at the GLAAD website at <http://www.glaad.org/glaad/glaad-lines/990621/04.html> on June 23, 1999.

¹⁷⁵ Romney, 37.

changed every gay American's life"¹⁷⁶; "the anniversary of the gay movement"¹⁷⁷; "the international symbol of gay resistance"¹⁷⁸; the night that "gay people fought back"¹⁷⁹; "the first gay riot in history"¹⁸⁰; "the emblematic event in modern lesbian and gay history."¹⁸¹ Besides the extensive "Stonewall 25" celebration in 1994 (discussed later in this chapter), countless other groups have incorporated the allusion into their name. For example, "Stonewall Cincinnati" a Midwestern American gay organization; "The Stonewall Alliance of Chico" in California; "Stonewall Columbus," in Ohio. "Stonewall" is also a London-based queer political organization that has spearheaded the fight against the epidemic of gay bar bombings in 1999. The National Stonewall Democratic Federation is a network of local gay and lesbian Democratic clubs set up by Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), perhaps the best-known of the out-gay congresspeople.¹⁸² The Stonewall Center is the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay & Transgender Educational Resource Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Ironically, the concept of Stonewall is so prevalent that there is an "ex-gay"¹⁸³ group called "Stonewall Revisited."¹⁸⁴ Of course, the word has not escaped the business world: The Stonewall Inn web site is dedicated to the gay/lesbian interest books and authors published by St. Martin's Press/Stonewall Inn Editions. And, of course, the Stonewall coffee shop in Los Angeles

¹⁷⁶ Timmons, 98.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Duberman, *Stonewall*, xx.

¹⁷⁹ Timmons, 228.

¹⁸⁰ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 232.

¹⁸¹ Duberman, *Stonewall*, xv.

¹⁸² Zeller, 1241.

¹⁸³ Similar to other (mostly religious) "ex-gay" groups, Stonewall Revisited distributes "the personal stories of people who have found a more fulfilling life outside of homosexuality," as well as articles by both professional and private individuals which criticize "gay theology," Gender Identity Disorder, and analyze the challenges which face persons who wish to "choose to change" their sexual orientation.

¹⁸⁴ Accessed on the Web on July 7, 1999 at <http://206.160.206.77/menus/issues.html>.

is currently stealing Starbucks customers.¹⁸⁵ I could go on, but at the risk of overstating my point...

In many ways, Stonewall has served as a unifying force in the queer community. However, a deeper examination reveals several problems with our modern “myth” of Stonewall. A lack of accurate details paired with a blurring of certain aspects of the event has propelled many to believe that Stonewall was the *beginning* of the modern gay movement. While Stonewall was a pivotal event in gay and lesbian political activity, treating the Stonewall riots as the beginning of the movement obscures important political actions and organizing which occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, memories of “the night gay people fought back” become suspect when confronted with a lack of evidence about the involvement of people of color and of women in the riots. Further, there is confusion as to the nature of transgender inclusion in Stonewall.

Oddly enough, despite its obvious significance to gay and lesbian politics, radical politics, and Gay History in general, Stonewall is a particularly problematic example of Gay History. Unlike examples from ancient periods or from non-Western cultures, it is an event that took place within the current period of gay and lesbian political history. Therefore, there will be no “guessing” whether or not Sylvia Rivera was a drag queen; no postulating whether or not the Stonewall Inn *really* was a gay bar; no wondering if those taking part in the riots possessed a similar dichotomy and definition of homosexuality as we do today. Stonewall is not a piece of gay history that needs to be *discovered*, teased out of centuries of homophobic obfuscation or cultural morés: if a gay person knows one piece of Gay History, it is likely to be Stonewall. And yet, this very fact of historical continuity creates a new problem: it is not *discovering* Stonewall which is necessary, but stripping back the lore that has accumulated around it to reveal the “truth,” sans idealistic fiction, sans inspirational myth. There is no question that Stonewall should be a

¹⁸⁵ Stodder, 119.

“chapter” in Gay History; the question is: how should that chapter be written? Have we commemorated fact out of Stonewall?

TELLING THE STORY: DUBERMAN'S *STONEWALL*

In 1993, Martin Duberman published *Stonewall*, the first work to devote itself to the riots themselves; besides a detailed retelling of the event, Duberman deeply analyzes both the events leading up to the riots, and the circumstances afterward. *Stonewall*, while including a variety of different sources, focuses mainly on the lives of six individuals representative of the various sexual and political communities most affected by Stonewall; it is through these perspectives that Duberman is able to begin to account for the many forces which came together that night in 1969. The book was a triumph for gay history in two aspects. First, it provided a full recounting of the event; surprisingly, the quantity of work on Stonewall, historical or otherwise, has been small, even as it remains perhaps the most important event in Gay History. Many works exist which document homophile political activity before Stonewall, and likewise, many scholars have studied the subsequent waves of political action which were direct results of Stonewall. Even Katz's *Gay American History*, published in 1976 and obviously inspired by Stonewall, briefly mentions Stonewall only 3 times, and only in sections dedicated to other topics. Duberman reminds us that, "We have, since 1969, been trading the same few tales about the riots from the same few accounts-- trading them for so long that they have transmogrified into simplistic myth...The time is overdue for grounding the symbolic Stonewall in empirical reality and placing the events of 1969 in historical context."¹⁸⁶ Secondly, Duberman's method of including the personal memories and experiences of those who experienced Stonewall made for a highly accessible book, and many non-scholars have picked *Stonewall* as their first voyage into the world of Gay History. Duberman writes that his “unconventional narrative approach” was not intended to create

¹⁸⁶Duberman, i.

a work of “popularized” history, but to “help to ensure that the speculation will reflect the actual disparities of individual experience.”¹⁸⁷

STONEWALL: THE STORY

The Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, was raided by police during the night of June 27-28, 1969. According to Duberman, such raids of gay bars were commonplace during the 1960s. The Stonewall was owned by the Mafia, who paid out hefty payoffs to local police to “overlook” the habits of its patrons. Raids occurred regardless, to put both the Mafia and the gay patrons in their place, but the bar management knew about such events in advance. Duberman writes that raids occurred at the Stonewall Inn on the average of once a month, sometimes consisting only of the police storming through the bar and leaving without hassles or arrests. In addition, the raids were usually “staged” early enough in the night to allow for a post-commotion reopening. As Duberman points out, “Given the size of the weekly payoff, the police had an understandable stake in keeping the golden calf alive.”¹⁸⁸

However, the raid on the night of June 27-28 was unlike the norm. Instead of a small number of local policemen, eight detectives from the First Division¹⁸⁹, seven in plainclothes, two of whom were women, controlled the operation and; several policemen in the Sixth Precinct were asked to come along only at the last minute. Although there are several possible explanations for this discrepancy, Duberman finds that the most convincing story comes from a source who was present in the apartment above the Stonewall Inn the day after the first riots. The source overheard one of Stonewall’s Mafia

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, xvi-xvii.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 193.

¹⁸⁹ Ellen: You asked if the BATF agents took part in the raid, and I can’t figure it out. Duberman mentions “First Division” agents as part of the raid: if they are part of BATF, then the answer is yes. But perhaps these agents were not BATF, and the BATF only planned the raid. This is actually a very important detail, as I get the idea that the ongoing violence during the night and during subsequent nights was with local police, the same cops who did the monthly raids and harassed queer in general. What should I do about this?

contingent complaining about the lack of warning; it appears that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had discovered the lack of federal stamps on liquor bottles from the Stonewall, pointing to bootlegging. Upon further surveillance, the agents learned of the police payoff, and had therefore refrained from clueing in the local cops until the last minute.¹⁹⁰

Another anomaly was that the raid occurred at 1:20 AM, at “the height of the merriment.” Those inside the Stonewall, who would usually expect raids earlier in the evening, were caught completely by surprise and were perhaps in a more boisterous mood than earlier. The scene was tense: “The strong front door bought needed time until the white lights had a chance to do their warning work: Patrons instantly stopped dancing and touching; and the bartenders quickly took the money from the cigar boxes that served as cash registers,” and patrons fixed their outfits to make sure they were wearing at least three pieces of clothing “appropriate to one’s gender,” as the New York statute mandated.¹⁹¹ Most of the Stonewall staff escaped through the back door or with the crowd. Most of the patrons showed their IDs and left through the front door, only to meet a curious crowd which had accumulated outside the bar on Christopher Street.¹⁹² A few of Duberman’s sources mention this crowd beginning to form before the police entered the building, but nobody offers any concrete reason; perhaps it was the larger number of policemen or the “strangely quiet, expectant air” which seemed to be the prevalent attitude of those in the crowd. Regardless, Duberman quotes Jim Fouratt, who remarked that the existence of the crowd was “somewhat surprising,” because “the first sign of a raid usually led to an immediate scattering; typically, gays fled rather than loitered, and fled as quietly and as quickly as possible, grateful not to be implicated in the scene of the ‘crime.’”¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Duberman, 194.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 196.

¹⁹² Ibid, 195.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 191.

As police loaded the paddy wagon with their arrestees, which included the doorman and at least three drag queens, the crowd, which had swelled both with ejected patrons and passers-by, became upset. Duberman quotes Sylvia Rivera: “You could feel the electricity going through people. You could actually feel it. People were getting really, really pissed and uptight.”¹⁹⁴ The actual moment when the riot started is contested even by those who were there. Sylvia Rivera remembers that a drag queen was shoved by a cop and began to fight back. Jim Fouratt claims that it was when a “a dyke dressed in man’s clothing,” started to “act up” on her way to the paddy wagon:

...the queens were acting like queens, throwing their charge and giving lots of attitude and lip. But the dyke had to be more butch than the queens. So when the police moved her into the wagon, she got out the other side and started to rock it.

Harry Beard, a waiter, says that the riot started when a dyke, who had been arrested for transvestitism, complained that the handcuffs were too tight and was slapped in the head with a cop’s nightstick: “Seeing the cops hit her, people standing immediately outside the door started throwing coins at the police,” he recalls.¹⁹⁵ Craig Rodwell, one of Duberman’s main sources, disagrees, arguing that if a lesbian had started the Stonewall riots, it is odd that her identity was never known. Rodwell goes on to posit a more complex explanation: “A number of incidents were happening simultaneously. There was no one thing that happened or one person, there was just...a flash of group—of mass—anger.”

The crowd began to throw any objects they could find and attempted to help people out of the wagon; soon, they became too much for the police, who retreated into the now-empty bar to call for backup. The mob continued to heave objects at the building’s façade, breaking windows and damaging the door. At some point, a parking meter was used as a battering ram against the barricaded door. After many attempts, lighter fluid and matches came together inside the bar and a blaze began.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 196

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

At this point, it was two-fifty-five in the morning, and the Tactical Patrol Force (TPF), a riot-control unit, arrived on the scene: “They were a formidable sight as, linked arm in arm, they came up Christopher Street in a wedge formation that resembled (by design) a Roman legion.” As the TPF moved ahead, the crowd began a pattern of dispersing, running through side streets, and doubling back on the TPF. After this occurred several times, the cops whirled around to find “their worst nightmare”: “a chorus line of mocking queens, their arms clasped around each other, kicking their heels in the air Rockettes-style and singing at the tops of their sardonic voices:

‘We are the Stonewall girls / We wear our hair in curls
We wear no underwear / We show our pubic hair...
We wear our dungarees / Above our nelly knees!’¹⁹⁶

Duberman writes, “It was a deliciously witty, contemptuous counterpoint to the TPF’s brute force, a tactic that transformed an otherwise traditionally macho eye-for-an-eye combat and that provided at least the glimpse of a different and revelatory kind of consciousness.”¹⁹⁷ The cops managed to clear the streets by three-forty-five AM, and an “uneasy calm” settled over the neighborhood. Although the rioters had held out for quite some time, they were not without casualties. Unfortunately, there is no record of arrests or of those sent to the hospital. The cops seemed to have singled out “effeminate young men,” and drag queens. Four police officers sustained minor abrasions and one broken wrist.

The boarded-up shell of the Stonewall was covered in graffiti by the next afternoon, some reading “They invaded our rights,” “There is all college boys and girls in here,” “Legalize gay bars,” “Support gay power.”¹⁹⁸ By that night, thousands of people, both those who had been there the night before and many new, curious individuals, assembled in front of the bar and down the street. The police were ready, with the TPF. All streets around the Stonewall were blocked off by rioters or police. Rioters abandoned

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 201.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid 200-201.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 202.

coins for bottles and bricks, injuring some of the protesters. The police finally left the area by four AM, but not before rushing the crowd several times. By Sunday, Craig Rodwell was simultaneously handing out flyers reading “Get the Mafia and the cops out of gay bars” and erecting signs on the Stonewall façade which read: “We homosexuals plead with our people to please help maintain peaceful and quiet conduct on the streets of the village— Mattachine.” Confrontations between gays and police continued on Sunday night, but to a lesser extent. With Wednesday came two front page *Village Voice* articles about the initial riots, which attracted more rioters that night: at least a thousand by Duberman’s estimation.

Scott Bravmann is one of the only scholars to critique Duberman's work. In a nutshell, he believes that Duberman fails to escape contemporary conceptions of Stonewall., that he was “unable to escape” the very first sentence in the his own preface: “‘Stonewall is *the* emblematic event of modern lesbian and gay history.’” Bravmann believes that the significance of Stonewall is hopelessly intertwined and misinformed: he writes, “‘Stonewall’ always already means more in gay and lesbian historical imaginations than a mere bar, a routine police raid, and even the exceptional riots of several nights’ duration that followed the raid.”¹⁹⁹ Any gay or lesbian, like Duberman, not be able to escape the mythology of Stonewall, even though the actual significance is difficult to pin down:

In contemporary gay and lesbian cultures, ‘Stonewall’ signifies much beyond the “empirical reality” and “historical context” of 1969, though precisely what it signifies has always been a site of contestation. The current value of the “events,” even— or especially— the degree of the urgency of their narration as a complete and actual story, is precisely their mythic proportions, their non-actuality, their partiality.²⁰⁰

Stuart Timmons writes, “The Stonewall riot acquired the aura of a mythic battle and tended to eclipse all previous gay activism. It marked a new public consciousness about

¹⁹⁹ Bravmann, 71.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

gay people...”²⁰¹ Likewise, Bravmann reasons that the way that each person considers and remembers Stonewall is illustrative of that person's attitude about gay politics in general:

Queer fictions of Stonewall—the meanings ‘we’ attach to or find in the riots, the sense ‘we’ make of them—are not isolated social/cultural texts about some singular essence and autonomy of gay and lesbian identity, community, and history. Rather, these sense-making project locate in the riots in the larger historical field whose own contours they (implicitly) map as well.²⁰²

Through celebrations and namesakes, queer people reinforce their meaning of Stonewall over the years:

Literally through annual public celebrations that bring ‘the community’ together’ and symbolically through various naming strategies and institutional structures, representations of Stonewall help to assert the queer nation of the late-twentieth century. Despite their shared point of departure, however, queer fictions of Stonewall draw on open-ended questions representational possibilities that also suggest the problematic and contested nature of claims about community and identity.²⁰³

Bravmann believes that Duberman, despite his efforts to create an unbiased, or at least, well-represented, version of Stonewall, neglects to consider how his narrators came to their conclusions about their actions, and the events at large:

Neglected in this construction of “reality” and “context” are questions of how and when “Stonewall” has been located within “other” historical accounts, trajectories, ruptures, projects, and locations. Not only do we need to regard the multiple and different histories that inform our locations in the world as integral to the construction of our “reality” and “context” but also how (dominant) representations of “reality” and “context” construct silences, gaps, and discontinuities.²⁰⁴

In addition, Bravmann points out that Duberman’s recording of the six peoples’ narration of events “occurred only after the significant interval of nearly twenty-five years in which the riots have become legendary, invested with political significance, and as Duberman himself acknowledges, ‘transmogrified into...myth’ (p. xv).”²⁰⁵ And yet, Bravmann is suspicious of the acts of Stonewall’s survivors during the event: he questions Jim

²⁰¹Timmons, 228.

²⁰²Bravmann, 68.

²⁰³Ibid, 68-69.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 71

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 74

Fouratt's calls to newspapers and his (failed) attempts at recruiting his (heterosexual) radical friends to come and join in the upheaval, "fighting the cops." He questions the media operatives who, upon arriving at the riot scene the next day, took photographs of the, as Duberman writes, "stars" of the riot:

...this notion of 'stars' posing to be photographed belies the ostensibly unmediated truth' of mass media's photographic representation of the 'news' and raises questions about who was photographed: who wanted to be photographed, who could 'afford' such possible publicity, whom did the photographers target as suitable or 'representative' subjects, what was their role in or relationship to the riots?²⁰⁶

Bravmann's points pertaining to the mythologizing of Stonewall are valid; Gay History has left intact pieces of Stonewall History that are false, and not taken into consideration the 25 years of commemoration which has colored each and every account of Stonewall. Yet, are these not the problems encountered by any historian who endeavors to undertake a topic occurring since mass media began its campaign of mass commemoration, since the political movements of the 1960s realized the fundamental significance of social change? We cannot expect individuals to refrain from judging events as historically significant; the problems arise only when others go along with this theme blindly and without their own analysis.

BEFORE STONEWALL: HOMOPHILE AND SIXTIES RADICALISM

The most common misconception about Stonewall is that it marks the beginning of the gay and lesbian emancipation movement. In actual fact, as Clifton Hood writes, the riots were "more consequence than cause." He writes that "by crystallizing an evolving gay and lesbian consciousness and organizational structure, Stonewall gave meaning and coherence to a struggle that was already underway."²⁰⁷ D'Emilio and Freedman write that although the rioting was climactic, it wasn't adequate to initiate a country-wide grass-roots movement.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Hood, 785.

The speed with which gay liberation grew testified to equally profound changes in the structure of gay life and the consciousness of homosexuals in the preceding years. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a gay subculture had been growing, providing the setting in which homosexuals might develop a group consciousness. The weakening of taboos against the public discussion of homosexuality, the pervasive police harassment of the era, and the persistent work of pre-Stonewall activists combined to make many lesbians and gay men receptive to the message of 'gay power'.²⁰⁸

The 1950s and 60s were the birthplace of the New Left, as movements concerned with civil rights for racial minorities, freedom of speech, women's rights and oppression, and the war in Southeast Asia swept up a particularly well-educated and increasingly disillusioned generation of students. Gay people, of course, were every bit as inspired and caught up in these movements, although most of them were not able to publicly acknowledge their homosexuality. Vaid mentions the lesbian and gay individuals who were the "unnoticed ingredient" in these movements: Bayard Rustin, chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, who kept his sexuality a secret to most, afraid of the scandal it would cause; Carl Wittman, one of the national presidents of SDS, who wrote 'A Gay Manifesto' in 1970 and was active in the progressive gay movement until his death from AIDS, in 1985; Robin Morgan, Charlotte Bunch, and Leslie Cagan, lesbian activists involved in the women's movement.²⁰⁹ These activists, and many others like them, began to realize a pattern of oppression and inequality; this pattern would lead to Gay Liberation.

Rustin's fears of gay scandal wrecking havoc on his larger political agenda, were not unfounded. Homophobia was, ironically, a component of the New Left culture. However, resistance to this sentiment began before Stonewall. In *Gay American History*, Jonathan Katz interviews Barbara Gittings, one of the founders of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), one of the first major lesbian organizations and certainly the most widely known. In a section where Gittings speaks about *The Ladder*, the organization's journal and newsletter, she indicates that even "militancy" among gays began before Stonewall:

²⁰⁸ D'Emilio and Freedman, 319.

²⁰⁹ Vaid, 56.

Gittings: "Just to be mentioned, no matter what they said, was important at first. It broke the taboo of silence about homosexuality...When somebody with professional credentials came to address your meetings, that legitimized the existence of your organization. And then when you went out and approached other people, you could say that Dr. So and So or the Rev. So and So had addressed you; that made you less pariahlike to these other people whom you needed."

Katz: "When did that change? Only after the Stonewall resistance in 1969 when Gay people fought back against police harassment?"

Gittings: "Oh no, the changes, all these consciousness changes were definitely forming [sic?] in the sixties, well before Stonewall. The one thing that Stonewall represents, in my view, is a sudden burgeoning of grass-roots activity. It doesn't represent a distinctly changed consciousness in the movement. The militancy-- the 'we are the experts, not these non-Gays'-- all that developed well before Stonewall, thanks largely to Frank Kameny; he was the first one who articulated a complete, coherent philosophy for the Gay movement."²¹⁰

D'Emilio, however, writes that the methods of gay activists weren't quite as radical as others:

In San Francisco, members of SIR and DOB sat through candidates' night and registered voters while the hippie counterculture—the heirs of the beats—staged colorful, flamboyant be-ins in Golden Gate Park...The gay movement continued to pursue equality through the courts at a time when militant civil rights workers were shifting toward a strategy of community organizing and an ideology of black power. As homophile activists marched with neatly lettered placards in front of federal buildings, urban ghettos burst into flame, bombs exploded in banks and military-connected university facilities, and Black Panthers and Weathermen called for an 'armed struggle' against American imperialism. A generation of blacks and whites, men and women, was rising in revolt, but for the most part homophile activists remained curiously detached from the rebellions that were rocking the nation.²¹¹

Early gay activists responded to the persecution of gays and lesbians that was prevalent during the Cold War. Poindexter writes that anti-homosexual attitudes were "a byproduct of the anticommunist scare." She notes that Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) "thought that gay and lesbian citizens were highly susceptible to blackmail and thus had a propensity to betray military secrets or to join the Communist Party." Ironically, leftist attitudes toward homosexuality were not much better: Stuart Timmons notes that Josef Stalin's recriminalization of homosexuality in 1934 led to a "righteous, puritanical ethic" for Soviet Communists, and, in turn, for many Communists in the United States.²¹²

²¹⁰Katz, 427.

²¹¹ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 224

²¹² Timmons, 69, 96.

This situation of simultaneous oppression from Leftist groups and from the conservative establishment is perhaps best illustrated by Harry Hay's experience. Hay, known for his role as founding member of the Mattachine society in the early 50s and for many other accomplishments in gay political thought and culture, gave two decades of loyal service to the Los Angeles section of the CPUSA; this service included marriage to a woman and the raising of children, based on the advice of party-affiliated psychiatrists. This service ended when he resigned, stating that his affiliation as founder of the Mattachine Society would further harm the Party's position during the 1950s Red Scare.²¹³ A story in a sensationalist newspaper mentioned Hay's involvement with gay politics, so he was sure that HUAC would ask him about both his communist and his homophile involvement. Katz that Harry said that he "couldn't stand up there with the other fifty people being called before HUAC at the same time—all of whom I knew intimately or whom I had known in the past." Consequently, Hay refused to let the lawyers representing his colleagues represent him (and who were being funded by common donations) and instead tried to find his own. However, upon consulting one of the aforementioned lawyers for advice about his next step, the lawyer told him that they "weren't going to condone queers," and refused to help him. Hay then sought the help of several other lawyers, all of whom shied away from him.²¹⁴ Finally, Frank Pestina, a lawyer known for his gallant representation of Latinos, helped him prepare for the ordeal. Pestina told Timmons that "The Party was told that they should not deal with these people, not because of homophobia but because the people were too vulnerable to police and FBI penetration."²¹⁵

According to Poindexter, Hay's experience of testifying as a homosexual was not singular:

²¹³ Ironically, the Mattachine Society was as afraid of being labeled communist as the Communist Party was of being labeled gay (Timmons, 175).

²¹⁴ Katz, 106-107.

²¹⁵ Timmons, 185.

During the McCarthyism of the 1950s, the antihomosexual hearings in the Senate began as a byproduct of the Communist scare. Ironically, the strongest argument presented to HUAC was the military's continued success in emotionally breaking gay and lesbian people during and after World War II (Berube, 1991). This systemic persecution served to break the public silence about the topic and to begin to unite those who felt the effects of the oppression (D'Emilio, 1983).²¹⁶

D'Emilio writes that "the founding of the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles in 1951 marked the beginning of what would grow into a nationwide effort."²¹⁷ While several other homosexual emancipation groups existed before this time, he notes, Mattachine is the beginning of an "unbroken history of homosexual and lesbian organizing."²¹⁸ D'Emilio credits Hay as "the man most responsible" for Mattachine, with the significant help of 4 other men. Hay's inspiration was sparked when he unexpectedly ended up at an all-gay party during the summer of 1948; the joke of the evening was "Bachelors for Wallace," a method for engaging homosexual men for support of the Progressive Party and the Wallace Presidential campaign. Over the next few months, Hay contemplated this idea; when he conferred with heterosexual contacts, D'Emilio writes, "their tepid response convinced him that a campaign on behalf of homosexuals would have to be initiated by the oppressed themselves."²¹⁹

Upon his proposal of a homosexual rights organization to Bob Hull and Chuck Rowland, two men whom he suspected were also homosexual, he not only confirmed his suspicions but learned that both men had been involved with the Communist Party. In November 1950, the three men plus two other recruits began to map out their plans the organization.²²⁰ D'Emilio writes that the early Mattachine "reflected the leftist organization of its founders" in its secret, cell-oriented, hierarchical design.²²¹ The requirement of secrecy was due to not only to the risk of being identified as a homosexual, but also because of growing anti-radical sentiment in the United States.

²¹⁶ Poindexter, 611.

²¹⁷ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 58.

²¹⁸ Ibid, footnote, 58.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 60.

²²⁰ Ibid, 62.

²²¹ Ibid, 63.

While the 1960s boasts significant gay organization, the other battles and movements going on during this highly charged period of history were also influential to gays. D'Emilio writes that gay liberationists "took advantage" of the almost daily political events that young radicals were staging across the country²²², and Duberman recalls how the sixties movements ignited the spirits of many gay people:

Many of us sensed at the time that these sixties rebels were exploring and articulating views central to our liberation as gay people. But it was quite another matter to be able to mobilize ourselves quickly in behalf of our own issues. Too many of us had been taught for too long that we were second-rate and second-class to discard those notions overnight; indeed, many of us had to undergo a protracted struggle against our own ingrained previous assumption before we could begin to activate ourselves politically. I myself wrote a series of passionate articles in defense of the countercultural rebels, yet could not quite—not yet—fully articulate the relevance of their views to my own plight.²²³

Thus, D'Emilio and Faderman write that 60s radicalism created a "radicalized gay cohort.":

When black power advocates proclaimed that 'black is beautiful,' they provided the model of an oppressed group that inverted the negative values of the society. The student movement spread skepticism toward middle-class values among white college youths and led to an alienation from mainstream America that encouraged a cavalier disregard for social respectability. The hippie counterculture urged the young to drop out and 'do your own thing.' Finally, the women's liberation movement launched an ideological attack on sex-role constructs while popularizing the slogan 'the personal is political.' Taken together, these movements offered another lens through which radical gay youth, who were keeping their homosexuality secret, might view their sexual preferences. After the Stonewall riot of 1969, when some of them gathered to form a Gay Liberation Front in New York City, they were well-situated to launch a major social movement.²²⁴

The Stonewall Inn's location in New York City was key to its significant position in gay history. Other gay protests occurred in other parts of the country before Stonewall, but were not considered significant: for example, in early 1967 many demonstrators protested police entrapment of homosexuals outside the Black Cat bar in Los Angeles. In 1968, Lee Glaze, co-owner of the Los Angeles bar Patch, led a pseudo sit-in at a Los Angeles police station to protest two arrests that night at the bar; Glaze

²²²Ibid, 23.

²²³ Duberman, qtd. in Thompson, 3.

²²⁴ D'Emilio and Freedman, 320-321.

bought a whole shop's worth of flowers with which they adorned the station.²²⁵

Although one cannot dismiss the significance of GLF and GAA, the overshadowing of West Coast developments by events on the East Coast has been a pattern in American history. Interestingly, Hay, whose work was centered in California, was disdainful of Stonewall: "I wasn't very impressed by Stonewall, because of all the open gay projects we had done throughout the sixties in Los Angeles. As far as we were concerned, Stonewall meant that the East Coast was finally catching up."²²⁶ If we are concerned about recalling the brave work done by early homophile organizations like Mattachine and DOB, we must also be aware of this geographical paradigm in our construction of gay history.

While there is quite a difference between such a "radicalized gay cohort" and a larger Gay Liberation movement, it is incorrect to assume that Stonewall was the *genesis* of the gay political movement. While this may seem to be a small detail, the struggles and thoughts of these pre-Stonewall activists are quite significant; without them, Stonewall would not have been possible. Purveyors of Gay History should reflect and explore this issue further, and in greater detail.

AFTER STONEWALL: DIRECT ACTION

In this analysis, it is important to affirm the fact that Stonewall did have quite an effect on gay politics. Urvashi Vaid writes in the aftermath of the stonewall riots, gay activists were faced with three problems "how to motivate masses of politically inert people into activism; how to define a coherent political theory and practice for a diverse people; and how to coordinate the activities of a decentralized and personally oriented movement."²²⁷ Soon after the Stonewall riots, two new major gay organizations formed, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). The GLF was a

²²⁵ Thompson, 6.

²²⁶ Poindexter, 608.

²²⁷Vaid, 57.

“a self-proclaimed revolutionary organization in the style of the New Left.” The GAA declared itself a single-issue group almost immediately, using “confrontation, political activity, and education” to bring forward its five demands: “repeal of sodomy laws, end of police harassment and entrapment, passage of a fair employment law, assurance of bonds to homosexuals, and an end to police and state harassment to gays.”²²⁸

Subsequently, in 1973, The National Gay Task Force and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund formed separately, institutions that remain strong organizations today.²²⁹

Vaid writes that the gay and lesbian liberation movement introduced into the homophile movement four new concepts: first, the importance of coming out and queer visibility; second, that queer freedom necessarily meant changes in the way society considered “gender roles, sexism, and heterosexual institutions like the family”; third, that gay, lesbian and bisexual people were a part of the movement for social change and required a broader philosophical base “that made connections to race, gender, and economic issues”; and finally that a gay and lesbian counterculture was an imperative part of forming a gay identity. Such ideas were challenged by some homophile leaders, especially those who were politically conservative; the intersections of queer liberation with progressive ideas of race, class, and gender were highly contested areas.

Vaid writes that the Stonewall generation “built the frame of the gay and lesbian movement of the 1990s.”:

Out of nothing, and with a fraction of money at the disposal of the movement today, the members of that generation founded institutions that served the broad spectrum of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; they started publications; they created literature and culture; they made access to political leaders; and they started the lesbian and gay self-help health and social service organizations that allowed us to respond so quickly to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s.²³⁰

²²⁸ Vaid, 60.

²²⁹ Of course, the National Gay Task Force is now the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, whose mission statement includes gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people.

²³⁰ Vaid, 57.

Stonewall seems to be the moment when homosexuals fought back; the years of secret meetings, discussion groups, and peaceful demonstrations gave way to direct action. D'Emilio quotes Alan Ginsberg, famous both for his identity as a gay man and as an inspiration of the New Left, who stopped by the riots on the third night: "You know, the guys there were so beautiful," he told a reporter. "They've lost that wounded look that fags all had ten years ago."²³¹

UNIFICATION?: RACE, GENDER, AND STONEWALL.

Stonewall symbolizes the beginning of a large gay movement; queers unified by their common oppression and empowered to change the way society considered and treated homosexuals. While such an idea is certainly useful, inspiring, and idealistic, the actual case may not be so rosy or so ideal. Bravmann argues that the role of lesbians and people of color at Stonewall is questionable. Bravmann asserts that Duberman's *Stonewall* holds a "barely concealed wish for diversity in gay and lesbian historical representations." He argues that Duberman and others try to describe a gay political atmosphere during and immediately after Stonewall that is based on a collective consciousness²³²; he argues that this was not the case.

First of all, Bravmann argues that "race matters" for Stonewall, and that the matter has been glossed over:

...the race of the rioters, the location of the riots at the tail-end of a decade defined by racial struggles, the complex racial makeup of New York City, the ways the police and the press dealt with the riots, the view of the riots as a point of rupture, and the organizations that quickly emerged after the riots—have received only minimal critical attention.²³³

Bravmann draws attention to the widely used photograph by *The Village Voice* photographer Fred McDarrah which went along with coverage of the riots in the week after. The photo shows thirteen young men, racially mixed, one in drag, standing, at

²³¹ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 232.

²³² Bravmann, 71-72.

²³³ Ibid, 75-76.

night, in front of the “boarded-up, graffiti-covered bar.” The caption read “in front of the Stonewall.”; supposedly, these men were the “stars” of the riots. Bravmann points out that although this shot is clearly posed, it is “the closest approximation of an on-the-scene visual image of the riots. This photo is puzzling, writes Bravmann, because of the stunning reality of gay organizations. “...McDarrah’s *Voice* photograph provokes consideration of, on the one hand, how narratives of queer history are radicalized and, on the other, how critical attention to racial specificity and (feigned) racial neutrality erodes under the weight of ‘gay identity’ politics or emerges in light of complex current situations.”²³⁴ He notes the absence of this photograph from Duberman’s *Stonewall*, which contained many other photos, especially when the photo is the “only...compelling documentary evidence for their claims regarding the racial makeup of the bar’s clientele and the rioters.”²³⁵ Likewise, he criticizes D’Emilio and Faderman for relying only on speculative sources when describing the racial makeup of Stonewall: D’Emilio writes that Stonewall patrons were “young and nonwhite...Rioting continued far into the night, with Puerto Rican transvestites and young street people leading the charges against rows of uniformed police officers.” Indeed, Jeremiah Newton, an eyewitness during the riots, claims that the Stonewall wasn’t racially mixed: “People want to forget that the Stonewall Inn wouldn’t allow blacks or Puerto Ricans in, that it was a Mafia-owned white-boy bar. Today when activists talk about Stonewall, it’s always this romantic, upright political scene.”²³⁶ Bravmann points out that while photographs of pre-Stonewall homophile groups and post-Stonewall Gay Liberation groups show a marked difference in their appearance, there is an “overwhelming, not to say exclusive, whiteness of the groups.

Another problem in our remembrance of Stonewall is the existence of women at the Stonewall riots. Bravmann notes that Duberman writes that “very few women ever appeared in Stonewall.” Sacha L., a bouncer, remembers only the occasional “fag hag” or

²³⁴ Ibid, 77.

²³⁵ Ibid, 77.

²³⁶ Pela, 52.

“one or two dykes who looked almost like boys.” Chuck Shaheen, a regular at Stonewall, recalls more lesbians than Sacha, a few of them “decidedly femme”; he labeled the bar “98 percent male.” Duberman also quotes a lesbian who went to Stonewall more than once with a few gay male friends; she remembers feeling “like a visitor.”²³⁷ Bravmann mentions Stonewall eyewitness Richard Savin’s report that “The bartenders and bouncers were big dykes who beat us up when we got out of line,” and that most of the lesbians at the riot assisted the police: “The women were used to keeping us in line, and they didn’t see this riot as a political statement. To them it was a barroom brawl, and they were just doing their jobs.”

Bravmann’s point is quite important: although Duberman’s “wish” for a diverse gay community, both in past and in present, is surely genuine and ideal, the way that he has portrayed Stonewall simply supports a myth of diversity which is not true to fact. Certainly, the idea of Stonewall has fueled much activism and has brought thousands of gay people together, thousands of gay people with different views about gay “authenticity,” different priorities for general political change. However, to believe that Stonewall was the beginning of a diverse, nonsexist, nonracist gay liberation movement simply supports this same myth which dogs the gay movement today. If we are to address issues of sexism, racism, and classism in the gay community and in the gay political movement, we must realize the fact that these issues run deep, run even to our precious Stonewall.

BACK IN NEW YORK: STONEWALL 25

Skip ahead 25 years from the fiery nights of Stonewall. Skip through 25 years of gay and lesbian political history: radical lesbian separatism, the anti-pornography debates, AIDS... Skip to 1994, where New York City was once again, the center of an event called “Stonewall.” Stonewall 25 was the title of the 25th anniversary of Stonewall, an

²³⁷ Duberman, 190.

event of Big Apple proportions and international attendance. The event, which was plagued by both financial woes and political misgivings²³⁸, nevertheless attracted an estimated 1.1million people to Manhattan and, combined with the concurrently scheduled Gay Games, attracted \$400 million to the city's economy.

Although Stonewall 25 will be remembered by many as one of the largest and most significant gay pride events, it was the target of opposition on a wide variety of levels. Stonewall 25's main component, *The International March on the United Nations to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People*, which began at the U.N. building, differed from the usual annual Gay Pride parade; such features as "risqué floats, disco music, drag queens, and dancers" were banned from the march; the organizers explained that their aim was to "create a serious political tone."²³⁹ An alternative march, which included the presence of such figures as Allen Ginsberg, Harry Hay, and Camille Paglia, was organized by organizations with included ACT-UP and the newly formed Spirit of Stonewall (SOS) group. Opposition to the main march was chiefly a result of Stonewall 25's decision to ban NAMBLA, a political group which advocates abolition of age-of-consent laws²⁴⁰ Tom Reeves, a member of SOS who is also a NAMBLA cofounder,

²³⁸ The event's budget dropped from \$4 million to \$2 million during the last few months before the event. The financial turmoil has been attributed to poor management.

²³⁹ *The Advocate*, July 26, 1994 n660 p17.

²⁴⁰ NAMBLA stands for the North American Man-Boy Love Association. The group has long since been widely ostracized by the gay community, both because of intense disagreement concerning the ethics of children and sex, as well as fear resulting from the longstanding assumed association between homosexuality and pederasty. However, there have been a small number of activists who remain outraged by the censorship of this group, including the founder of the Mattachine Society Harry Hay. The fact that Hay, Ginsberg, and Paglia all supported SOS is notable; however, one wonders if they were overly concerned with censorship.

Please note that pederasty in this case refers to our contemporary notion of adults having sexual relations with children under the age of 18; this is quite different from classical paederasty, as explained in my chapter on the Greeks. According to the "Stonewall shuffle" article also cited here, the decision to bar NAMBLA was consistently voted multiple times by a steering committee of 150 activists.

Children, sex, homosexuality, and the fear of "recruitment" of children by homosexuals are all complex issues by themselves; to consider them all

reported SOS's complaint of Stonewall 25: "We criticize the Stonewall committee and gay and lesbian leadership for falling away from the original purpose of sexual liberation as experienced in the Stonewall riots."²⁴¹ In addition, groups such as the Lesbian Avengers and various transsexual rights advocates (many of whom were upset at the lack of trans inclusion in the march's name) launched similar unauthorized demonstrations.

The Advocate quotes Bill Dobbs, a founding member of the new group Spirit of Stonewall, who claimed that Stonewall 25's organizers had lost sight of the original significance of the Stonewall riots:

The Stonewall 25 march organizers have tried to whitewash what actually happened in the Stonewall bar. There were boy-lovers, there were drag-queens, there were prostitutes. Queers have been getting thrown out of things for years by straight people, and now gay people are getting on their high horses and throwing some gay people out of the movement.²⁴²

The Advocate also quotes Duberman, who said that while the increased discussion of drag queens at Stonewall has fixed some historical inaccuracies, it has "gone too far." He points out, "The Stonewall was my bar of choice, and I'm certainly not a drag queen, hustler, or drug dealer. There was a wonderful mix of people there, and using what went on there for your own partisan agenda is bad politics and bad history."²⁴³

Besides the alternative march, there was other criticism of the event itself. Mary Breslauer wrote that an "extravagant New York City block party" is inappropriate while gay activists are "getting our clocks cleaned" by conservative and conservative-Christian groups. In addition, she challenged the overall vision of Stonewall 25: "What good does a

simultaneously is a formidable task indeed. It is clear that much work concerning the nature of children's sexuality is necessary. I certainly believe that censorship tends to lead only to further problems, and that children and youth do have sexual feelings (and, on occasion, have consensual sexual relations.) However, the lack of knowledge in these subjects combined with the alarming numbers of reported cases of child sexual abuse leads me to believe that much caution should be taken when considering groups advocating sexual relations between young boys and adult men, "consensual" or otherwise.

²⁴¹ Gallagher, *The Advocate*, May 3, 1994.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

U.N. resolution do when the Christian right is placing candidates in elections from school boards to the U.S. Senate and is overturning even our small civil rights advances?"²⁴⁴ The editors of the *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* write that the pressures to universalize Stonewall comes not only from community political necessity, but from the marketplace as well:

Focusing on the pressures to make Stonewall a 'universal' symbol...misses the very political nature of its dilution. An accurate description of the riots at the Stonewall Inn might appeal to a liberationist drag queen or a militant lesbian separatist. However, corporate marketers are not trying to reach everyone; they are targeting a market. If the gay dollar lies primarily in the pockets of professional gay white men, it may be more savvy to recast Stonewall in their image and to make the message celebration rather than liberation.²⁴⁵

Gay Historians have an obligation to dig deeper into the circumstances surrounding Stonewall. Indeed, it is the fact that Stonewall is so revered that has caused its mythologization; it will be difficult to unravel the complex meanings that we have attached to these riots, and to figure out how true these moments were. Unseating Stonewall as the most significant gay historical event in the 20th century is not necessary; perhaps the fact that we remember it that way is enough to prove the certainty of this position. But it is the details themselves of the Stonewall which need to be re-examined and considered in this context.

²⁴⁴ Breslauer, *The Advocate*, February 22, 1994.

²⁴⁵ *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, Summer 1994 29 n2 p278

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ANCIENT GREEKS

In many cases, the society of the Ancient Greeks has been described as a culture without homophobia, a culture in which same-sex sexual behavior was accepted and/or tolerated, or as a culture which revered romantic love between men. Should Ancient Greece be considered a chapter of “Gay History”? Answering this question requires us to step outside of our own contemporary ideas about sexuality and gender, and take into consideration the Greeks’²⁴⁶ method of conceiving sexual behavior. In considering the complex (and sometimes opposing) forms of sexuality in two major sources, Plato’s *Symposium* and evidence describing the institution of paederasty, we learn that the Greeks had a very different conception of sexual attraction, sexual relations, and gender than our contemporary notions.

The Greeks question is significant because of the highly influential nature of classical studies. For those who study and appreciate Western Civilization as an institution, classical civilization remains the center, the starting point, the ultimate model. Since Ancient Rome, Western thinkers and leaders have revered Ancient Greek society as a model for civilization. Today, our concept of the Western university, the American political and legal system, and our approach to art all contain major components of Ancient Greek culture and their worldview. If one subscribes to the notion that contemporary culture is plagued by homophobia, it is not difficult to understand why evidence of same-sex sexual behavior has been covered up, both consciously and subconsciously, by scholars. Kenneth Dover begins *Greek Homosexuality* with some examples of historians and classicists who have reported false conclusions about the nature of homosexuality in Greek culture. He asserts that J.A.K. Thompson has ignored the evidence of homosexuality in Greek visual arts when he concludes that homosexual

²⁴⁶I should add that when I refer to “The Greeks” in this chapter, I am referring, as is customary, to the male citizen elite minority who ran the Greek state.

relations were “a Dorian sin, cultivated by a tiny minority at Athens.” He writes that A.E. Taylor missed the implications of a footnote when he concluded that homosexuals were “regarded as disgraceful both by law and...by general opinion.” Dover attributes these misguided conclusions to a “combination of love of Athens with hatred of homosexuality.” He agrees with Erich Bethe that moral judgment (“the deadly enemy of science”) has soured the study of Greek homosexuality, and the scholarship of those who have pursued it:

“I know of no topic in classical studies in which a scholar’s normal ability to perceive differences and draw inferences is so easily impaired; and none in which a writer is so likely to be thought to have said what he has not said or to be changed with omitting to say something which he has said several times.”²⁴⁷

Similarly, David Halperin writes that when he began to study the classics as an undergraduate in the early 1970s, one’s chances of learning “the truth” about the Greeks were dependent upon the political views of one’s professors: terms for the “less mentionable sexual acts” were defined in Latin if originally in Greek, and vice versa. Other passages were omitted from the Loeb Classical Library texts if they were “judged to be obscene.” Halperin writes that “lexical knowledge” of male love in Ancient Greece was mostly “circulated informally among classical scholars and was communicated from the like-minded professor to student in the course of private conversations outside the classroom.”²⁴⁸ In an interview last January, Halperin noted that it was common to consider a student mature enough to hear of the forbidden acts only upon reaching an advanced level of Latin or Greek.

Perhaps the scholars were correct in their assumption of the immaturity of the general public. Ironically, after the publication of such texts as *Greek Homosexuality*, the fact that the Greeks did, at least to some extent, practice and condone male-male sexual behavior, many antigay groups began their own campaigns. Louis Crompton reports that “University administrators...United States senators, and Mormon churchwomen” as well

²⁴⁷Dover, Kenneth. *Greek Homosexuality*, vii.

²⁴⁸Halperin, David. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 12.

as individuals in the mass media attest that “our own civilization will perish like those of Greece and Rome if lesbians and gay men are as accepted on an equal basis with heterosexuals,” that “...gay people were responsible for the destruction of the ancient world’s two greatest civilizations.” Crompton also says that the main contributor to the this argument is the “Sacred Band” of Thebes, a regiment of 150 pairs of male lovers who, after defeating the Spartans on two occasions (the battle of Tegrae in 375 BC and the battle of Leuctra in 371 BC) was “annihilated” at Chaeronea, “proving that an army of lovers *can* lose.”²⁴⁹

But evidence of male sexual love makes the ancients prototypical homosexuals: Ancient Greece has been frequently used by gay liberationists from Weimar Germany through the present as an optimistic model. Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson write that “Since the beginnings of the homosexual rights movement in the late nineteenth century, the example of ancient Greece...has served as a model of a nonhomophobic society.”²⁵⁰ Today, it would seem that the academy and, perhaps, the public, have eased their grip on the Greeks’ “sexuality”; Halperin writes that political movements in academia have created the current atmosphere of tolerance and curiosity of “Greek love.”²⁵¹ However, the exact nature of the Greeks’ sexual morality is still inconclusive.

THE ORIGIN OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY: PLATO’S *SYMPOSIUM*

Aristophanes’ famous myth, recounted in Plato’s *Symposium*, is one of the earliest and most cited origin-myths about homosexuality. In the work, Aristophanes explains the origins of gender and sexual attraction. Humans, he explains, were not always two genders, but three: male, female, and “the union of the two,” best described as “androgynous.” According to Aristophanes, primeval humans looked quite different from

²⁴⁹Compton, Louis. “What do you say to someone who claims that homosexuality caused the fall of Rome and Greece?”, p. 112. (original italics).

²⁵⁰Dynes, Wayne and Donaldson, Stephen. *Homosexuality in the Ancient World*, p. ix.

²⁵¹Halperin, 2.

their current appearance, being “round” with “four hands and four feet, back and sides forming a circle, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond.” Such a configuration made for a powerful presence; in fact, the humans’ ability and power were so great that they attempted to “scale to heaven” and attack the gods. At this, the gods faced a difficult decision: such behavior could not be tolerated, but to destroy the humans would be to lose the “sacrifice and worship that men offered to them.” Zeus decided to cut each human in two, this creating the double bonus of paring their power while increasing the number of god-worshippers. Upon this division, each human “desiring the other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another, eager to grow into one.” These were the first romantic relationships, and explains one’s attraction to men or women (apparently, this myth leaves no room for bisexuality): “...so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man...”²⁵²

Scholars are at odds concerning the point of this myth. John Boswell writes that the point of this myth is to “explain why humans are divided into groups predominately homosexual or heterosexual interest”; in other words, the story is proof that the concept of homosexuality existed in ancient times, proof that such proclivities are “exclusive and innate.”²⁵³ However, Halperin believe that Aristophanes in fact “stops short” of making a distinction between homo- and heterosexuality. He reasons that Aristophanes has generated three very distinct sexualities; there is no indication that there are any similarities between the sexual acts or preferences of an original female and those of an original male. Further, there is no suggestion that the halves of original males and the halves of original females should be considered in a category which is then opposed to the original androgyne. If anything, says Halperin, the myth makes the desire of every

²⁵²Plato. *The Symposium*, p. 123.

²⁵³Boswell, John. “Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories,” p 34.

human “formally identical”: “...we are all looking for the same thing in a sexual partner...namely, a symbolic substitute for an imaginary object once loved and subsequently lost in an archaic trauma. In that respect, we all share the same ‘sexuality’.”²⁵⁴

In addition, Halperin points out that Aristophanes makes a qualification within the category of original males not made for the other two types: the fact that sexual desire changes for these men depending on their age. After explaining the origins of gender and sexual attraction, Aristophanes continues to speak about the idea of male-male love. He writes that “the men who are a section of the male follow the male, and while they are young, being a piece of the man, they hang about him and embrace him.” Then, when they grow up, “they are lovers of youth.” Aristophanes claims that these men are “the best of boys and youths” because of their “manly nature,” that they and they alone become the statesmen of society.²⁵⁵ Halperin writes that

...what Aristophanes is describing here is not a single, homogeneous sexual orientation common to all those who descend from an original male but rather a set of distinct and incommensurable behaviors which such persons exhibit in different periods of their lives; although his genetic explanation of the diversity of sexual object-choice among human beings would seem to require that there be some adult males who are attracted to other adult males. Aristophanes appears to be wholly unaware of such a possibility, and in any case he has left no room for it in his taxonomic scheme.²⁵⁶

In response, Boswell reasons that the age of the two halves would have to be the same, considering that they were once the same being; therefore, Aristophanes is describing homosexuality as it is in today’s world. He writes that Aristophanes clearly “does not imagine a populace undifferentiated in experience or desire, responding circumstantially to individuals of either gender, but persons with lifelong preferences arising from innate character (or a mythic prehistory).”²⁵⁷ Halperin, in turn, argues that the myth is not intended to explain mutual same-sex desire among men in post-Platonic

²⁵⁴Halperin, 20.

²⁵⁵Plato, 124.

²⁵⁶Halperin, 20-21.

²⁵⁷Boswell, “Revolutions...”, 25 (footnote).

classical Athens; his evidence is that Aristophanes also does not account for “what has perhaps the most widely shared sexual taste among his fellow Athenians,”: that is, the undifferentiated liking for good-looking women and boys. He writes, “Such a lacuna should warn us not to treat Aristophanes’ myth...as a simply description of contemporary experience.”²⁵⁸

“HOMOSEXUALITY PRESUPPOSES SEXUALITY”: FOUCAULDIAN SEXUAL MORALITIES

The Uses of Pleasure is the second volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* series; it has remained one of Foucault’s most famous and highly influential projects. The main thrust of *The Uses of Pleasure* was to suggest that the Greeks had a conception of sexual morality far different from ours today. He outlines four basic themes within this conception: “dialectics,” “economics,” “erotics,” and the will to find truth. He argues that some ancient beliefs concerning these themes differ from modern conceptions. Instead of a single notion of “sexuality,” Foucault argues that the Greeks’ conception of sexual conduct could be best broken down into four main categories: *aprodisia*, the “ethical substance” of sexual behavior; *cheresis*, the notion of “use”; *enkrateia*, “self-mastery”; and *sophrosyne*, the “ethical subject...in fulfillment.”²⁵⁹

Foucault’s discussion of diatetics first focuses on the idea of regimen. Ancient doctors supposed that humans were “set apart from animals by some sort of dietary disjunction”; that is, in a noncivilized or “rough” state, the natural body reached a perfect balance of intakes. Doctors supposed that a proper “diet” or regimen, of intakes could restore health to civilized men, used to “softer” subsistence.²⁶⁰ Foucault writes that such a regimen was established early and became quite a convention: he quotes a list from the *Epidemics* which includes “exercises [*ponoi*], foods [*sitia*], drinks [*pota*], sleep [*hypnoi*],

²⁵⁸Halperin, 23.

²⁵⁹Foucault, Michel. *The Uses of Pleasure*, p. 37.

²⁶⁰Ibid, 99.

and sexual relations [aphrodisia]-- everything that needed to be ‘measured.’”²⁶¹ “The right measure” of these things leads to proper regimen, says one of the interlocutors in the Platonic dialogue *The Lovers*; this was accomplished by an “essential moral firmness,” as Foucault puts it.²⁶² Foucault quotes Socrates in Plato’s *Republic* as asserting that the judicious man will “not abandon his body to the irrational pleasure of the beast.” An individual was responsible, after hearing the advice of those wise about regimen, to establish and maintain a regimen according to his own personal peculiarities.²⁶³

Foucault explains that while the sexual act was not “perceived by the Greeks as an evil,” nevertheless, they possessed an “anxiety” about it.²⁶⁴ Because of its “violent” nature²⁶⁵, sex drained the strength of those involved and ironically, hastened death on to the individual while assuring the survival of the species.²⁶⁶ Many ancient doctors believed that semen was the froth from agitated blood²⁶⁷; each ejaculation donated a life-giving substance for posterity yet robbed men of “elements that were valuable for their own existence.”²⁶⁸ Foucault points out several times that the Greeks did not associate sex or the excess of sexual behavior as evil, but instead as an unwise and unhealthy practice which predicated a “regimen of pleasures.”²⁶⁹ Foucault attests that this is a main difference between ancient culture and more modern Christian-oriented culture; he posits that Saint Augustine was able to see within sex one of the “main stigmata” of The Fall, because, among other aspects, “involuntary movement reproduced in the human body man’s rebellion against God.”²⁷⁰ Such qualifications of sex were not inherent in Greek attitudes.

²⁶¹Ibid, 101.

²⁶²Ibid, 102-103.

²⁶³Ibid, 105.

²⁶⁴Ibid, 125.

²⁶⁵Ibid, 127.

²⁶⁶Ibid, 125.

²⁶⁷Ibid, 126-127.

²⁶⁸Ibid, 135.

²⁶⁹Ibid, 125, 136.

²⁷⁰Ibid, 138.

Although Foucault touches on the women's role in ancient doctors' conceptions of sex, he does not mention how to interpret such a "heterosexual" or "procreative" attitude in the sexual act. We can only assume that such ideas about frugality and mortality held true for cases in which procreation was not at stake. However, under these circumstances, it would seem that male-male sexual behavior would be even more risky than female-male; it is likely that the Greeks would have considered the sex between two men to be even more "violent" than that between a woman and a man, and the life-giving semen would be wasted on another man while simultaneously robbing the insertor of his own life-giving essence.

Sexual relations fit into a different sphere of life for the Greeks, the sphere of diatetics. To label what the Greeks did "gay," is incorrect because they did not possess a notion of "sexuality." Halperin submits that "homosexuality presupposed sexuality, and sexuality itself is a modern convention." He writes that the very concept of homosexuality necessarily implies "a specifically sexual dimension to the human personality, a characterological seat within the individual of sexual acts, desires and pleasures-- a determinant source from which all sexual expression proceeds." For Halperin, "sexuality" is less a portrayal than a method:

Whether or not a distinct and unified psychophysical entity actually exists, homosexuality (like heterosexuality, in this respect) necessarily assumes that it does; it posits sexuality as a constitutive principle of the self. Sexuality in this sense is not a purely descriptive term, a neutral representation of some objective state of affairs. Rather it serves to interpret and to organize human experience, and it performs quite a lot of conceptual work.²⁷¹

Halperin reasons that the very definition of sexuality places it as a "separate, sexual domain within a larger field of man's psychophysical nature." Further, the concept of sexuality includes within itself other areas, such as "carnality, libertinism, virility, passion, amorousness, eroticism, intimacy, love, affection, appetite and desire," which were before considered separate and independent behaviors and emotions. To describe the nature of these behaviors, Halperin cites an article by Robert Padgug:

²⁷¹ Halperin, 24.

...what we consider 'sexuality' was, in the pre-bourgeoisie world, a group of acts and institutions not necessarily linked to one another, or, if they were linked, combined in ways very different from our own. Intercourse, kinship and the family, and gender, did not form anything like a 'field' of sexuality. Rather, each group of sexual acts was connected directly or indirectly...that is, formed part of institutions and thought patterns which we tend to view as political, economic, or social in nature, and the connections cut across our idea of sexuality as a thing, detachable from other things, and as a separate sphere of private existence.²⁷²

Halperin adds that to call sexual categories and identities "objectivated fictions" is not to imply that they are unreal, but only that they are not "positive, natural, or essential features of the world, outside of history and culture."²⁷³ He believes that the point is not obtained by "the problematics of reference," but

...it cannot be innocently reformulated as the issue of whether or not we can accurately apply our concept of homosexuality to the ancients-- whether or not, that is, we can discover in the historical record of classical antiquity evidence of behaviors or psychologies that are amenable to classification in our own terms (obviously, we can, given the supposedly descriptive, trans-historical nature of those terms)...

Halperin believes that the issue is not whether or not the Greeks were able to express something like what we call "homosexuality" in their own scheme. The real issue ("confronting any historian of antiquity," Halperin notes) concerns finding a method which can "recover the terms in which the experiences of individuals belonging to past societies were actually constituted," and which also can appraise the variances between those terms and those of contemporary culture.²⁷⁴

Halperin writes that this discussion about the "scope and applicability" of sexual categories illustrates that "concepts in the human sciences (such as gravity)...do not merely describe reality but, at least partly, constitute it."²⁷⁵ Just because there have always been individuals in different periods and locations who have sought and obtained sexual relations with persons of a similar sex does not mean that "homosexuals" existed

²⁷²Padgug, Robert. "Sexual Matters: Rethinking Sexuality in History." Qtd. in Halperin, *One Hundred Years...*, 25-26.

²⁷³Halperin, x.

²⁷⁴Ibid, 28.

²⁷⁵Ibid, 29.

before the last century.²⁷⁶ He argues for the Foucauldian idea that sexuality is not necessarily a universal part of human personality. While sexual behavior is a natural and universal fact, sexuality is a “cultural production” which “represents the appropriation of the human body and of its erogenous zones by an ideological discourse,” a “peculiar turn in conceptualizing, experiencing, and institutionalizing human nature.”²⁷⁷

Boswell claims that while it is true that no terms in “common use” by the Greeks describe categories of sexual preference, this does not necessarily mean that these terms were completely unknown: “Plato, Athenaeus, and other writers who dealt with the subject at length developed terms to describe predominant or exclusive interest in the apposite gender. Many writers, moreover, found it possible to characterize homosexuality as a distinct mode of erotic expression without naming it.”²⁷⁸ He posits as an example the idea of “gravity”: although the concept did not exist before Newton’s discovery, its results were still observed by the ancients. He is quick to say that the Greek notion of *gravitas*, meaning “heaviness,” is not the same thing as an understanding of the characteristics and operations of gravity; however, gravity still existed in the past, even if ancient peoples did not understand it. This point would be well taken if it were not for Foucault’s work, which describes a system with a very different notion of sexual morality.²⁷⁹ In addition, we must ask whether physical laws like gravity are directly comparable to social meanings like sexual personhood?

In the postscript to “Revolutions,” Boswell notes that while he first defined “gay persons” in his influential book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* as those “conscious of erotic inclination toward their own gender as a distinguishing characteristic,”²⁸⁰ he now defines “gay persons” more simply: “...those whose erotic

²⁷⁶Please refer to chapter 2, where I speak about the history of the terms “homosexual” and “gay.”

²⁷⁷Halperin, 25.

²⁷⁸Boswell, “Revolutions,” 22.

²⁷⁹Ibid, 23.

²⁸⁰Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, p. 44.

interest is predominantly directed toward their own gender (i.e. regardless of how conscious they are of this as a distinguishing characteristic..)” He writes

This is the sense in which, I believe, it is used by most American speakers, and although experts in a field may well wish to use specialized language, when communicating with the public it seems to me counterproductive to use common words in sense different from or opposed to their ordinary meanings.²⁸¹

I believe Boswell is actually describing “homosexuality” here, a state which does not require consciousness. In addition, as I maintain in Chapter 2, “gay” is more than simply being conscious of one’s homosexual desires; “gay” necessarily includes the political dimension of being “out.” I find it interesting that Boswell chooses an American term to describe the worldwide phenomenon of sexuality. It is equally suspect to use our modern-day vocabulary (a tool we use to create reality, as Halperin argues) rather than one particular to the period studied. As far as “same-sex attraction as a distinguishing characteristic” is concerned, it seems that Foucault has proven that because of the different conceptions by the ancients of things like ‘attraction” and “sex,” same-sex attraction could not be a distinguishing characteristic through the eyes of the Greeks in the same way we consider it today. While I agree that it is crucial to write for the public in Gay History, in Chapter I point out that many people use the term “gay” to refer to individuals or groups which should not be considered gay (e.g., the person is not conscious of homosexuality, not self-labelled, not out).

THE MEN FROM THE BOYS: CLASSICAL PAEDERASTY

The Greek institution of pederasty is different from the romantic ideals of modern gay culture. For the male elite in Greece, pederasty was a sharply defined model which took into account far more than simply individualistic desires. One’s position in the sexual act was of paramount importance; Foucault writes that, for the Greeks, there was a similarity between social and sexual relations. Sexual relations, “always seen in

²⁸¹Boswell, “Revolutions...” 35.

terms of the model act of penetration, assuming a polarity that opposed activity and passivity,” were construed in a relationship between a “superior and a subordinate.” In the ancient world, the consequences of sexual relations were very much linked to the public sphere: Foucault writes, “When one played the role of subordinate partner in the game of pleasure relations, one could not be truly dominant in the game of civic and political activity.”²⁸² Halperin writes that “what a citizen does in bed reflects the differential in status that distinguishes him from his sexual partner: the citizen’s superior prestige and authority express themselves in his sexual precedence.”²⁸³ Sex, for classical Athenians, is a “deeply polarizing experience,” hierarchical in nature. The cohesion between sexual norms and social practices were so uncompromising that any inquiry into Athenian “sexuality” would be meaningless:

...such an inquiry could only obscure the phenomenon it was intended to elucidate, for by isolating sexual norms from social practices it would conceal the sole context in which the sexual protocols of the classical Athenians make any sense-- namely, the structure of Athenian polity.²⁸⁴

Dover writes that sexual relationships were defined on the basis of sexual role (active/passive) rather than gender, namely “the distinction between the bodily activity of the one who has fallen in love and the body passivity of the one with whom he has fallen in love...” The passive partner in the Greek language is *pais*, which means “boy,” also used to mean “child,” “girl,” “son,” “daughter,” and “slave.” He derives two terms for the roles in paederasty which are used almost unilaterally in subsequent works on Greek homosexuality: *eromenos*²⁸⁵ is the passive, usually younger partner, and *erastes*²⁸⁶ is the senior, active partner. The *erastes* was a full citizen of the state; ancient sources conflict about the exact age requirements of the *eromenos*: some indicate the end of adolescence as the disqualifying mark, others allow up to 28 years of age. Foucault and Halperin believe

²⁸²Foucault, 220.

²⁸³Halperin, 30-31.

²⁸⁴Ibid.

²⁸⁵This is the masculine passive particle of *eran*, “to be in love with,” “to have a passionate desire for.” (Dover, 16).

²⁸⁶“Lover,” also derived from *eran* (Dover, 16).

that the most common barrier was created by the beginning of facial hair: “As we know, the first beard was believed to be that fateful mark, and it was said that the razor that shaved it must sever the ties of love.”²⁸⁷

Although seemingly accepting of such relationships, the Greeks were quite concerned with the consequences of a future citizen being placed in a passive role. The reason for the *erastes*’ attraction to the *eromenos* is sexual in nature; however, the reason for the *eromenos*’ allowance of the relationship was more complicated. According to Dover, the *eromenos* was not supposed to reciprocate the *eros* of the *erastes*, and not receive bodily pleasure from his submission to the *erastes*.²⁸⁸ The *eromenos* was expected to admire and respect the *erastes*, and to be flattered enough by the “satisfaction of being desired and admired” to submit to the *erastes*.²⁸⁹ Foucault cites a passage from Xenophon’s *Symposium*, which reads: “A youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does, but looks on, sober, at another in love’s intoxication.”²⁹⁰ However, this does not mean the boy is to submit in a cold manner; instead, the reason for yielding is for feelings of “admiration, gratitude and affection for his lover, which made him want to please the latter.”²⁹¹

Halperin notes here that the polarity of this system reflected the “marked division” existence in Athens: a small group of male citizens controlled all others. “Sex between members of the superordinate group was virtually inconceivable, whereas sex between a member of the superordinate group and a member of any other one mirrored the details of its hierarchical arrangement.”²⁹² The issue inherent in this system, then, was avoiding harm to a boy’s masculinity to the extent that it would permanently affect his ability to be a citizen, an issue not important in the consideration of women, slaves, or

²⁸⁷Foucault, 199.

²⁸⁸Dover, 52.

²⁸⁹Ibid, 53.

²⁹⁰Foucault, 223.

²⁹¹Ibid.

²⁹²Halperin, 31.

foreigners as sexual objects. Foucault paraphrases Aristotle, who says that governing slaves is “not like governing free beings,” and that governing a wife is a “political authority in which relations are “permanently unequal.” However, “the governing of children can be called royal because it is based on affection and seniority.”²⁹³ The only reason a boy is a subordinate in the eyes of the state is that his development is “incomplete,” a feature which is likely to change. Foucault posits that the boy therefore has a “special position” among the various legitimate sexual objects:

...there was a sort of intrinsic difficulty in this role: something that simultaneously makes it hard to define clearly and specify exactly what the role implied in the sexual relations, and nonetheless drew attention to this point and made people attach much importance and value to what should or should not occur in that regard...The role of the boy was a focus of a good deal of uncertainty, combined with an intense respect.²⁹⁴

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE: A GENDER-BASED SYSTEM

Thus, for the Greeks, the world of sexual relations was based on a *gendered* system, as opposed to one of *sexual orientation*. Halperin argues that sexuality creates for the individual a sexual identity, a “personal essence” defined (at least in part) in specifically sexual terms. However, he writes that not only sexual identity be considered different from gender identity, but that sexuality *functions primarily* as a means to distinguish sexual identity from gender issues, “to decouple...kinds of sexual predilection from degrees of masculinity and femininity.”²⁹⁵ Halperin discusses the testimony of Calius Aurelianus, a writer included in a work on chronic diseases by the Greek physician Soranus during the early part of the second century AD. The topic of the chapter which Halperin cites is on *malthakoi*, which is translated as *molles*, or “soft or unmasculine men who depart from the cultural norm of manliness insofar as they actively desire to be subjected by other men to a ‘feminine’ (i.e. receptive) role in sexual intercourse.” They adopt the dress, gait, and other characteristic of women”; for this reason, Calius deduces

²⁹³Foucault, 216.

²⁹⁴Ibid, 217.

²⁹⁵Halperin, 25.

that they are affected by a mental, and not a physical, disease. He treats as a pathological problem not their desire for sexual contact with persons of the same sex, but their desire to be penetrated by a male. In addition, he treats their pathological desire as *satyriasis*, “a state of abnormally elevated sexual desire accompanied by itching or tension in the genitals.”²⁹⁶

The language used by the Greeks to describe boys is often associated with feminine beauty. Dover mentions the gymnasium and wrestling-school as a “social centre” where males could congregate, and where older men could view and ogle at younger men.²⁹⁷ He cites a passage from Plato about Socrates in which a certain Kritias watches youth: “I marveled at his stature and beauty, and I felt everyone else in the room was in love with him; they were thrown into such amazement and confusion when he came in, and there were many other *erasti* following after him too.”²⁹⁸ On one hand, Foucault reminds us that the Greeks did not necessarily deny the beauty of the adult male body, citing as examples Greek figure sculpture, which focused more on the adult body than the youth’s, and the passage in Xenophon’s *Symposium* which records that men selected to be garland-bearers of Athena were to be the most beautiful of old men. However, Foucault writes that it is the young body, possessing a “peculiar charm,” that is the “right object” of pleasure; the attributes of “developing virility” such as “strength, endurance and spirit,” in combination with feminine beauty, were key parts of the Greek appreciation of boys. Foucault writes:

Among the Greeks there was a whole moral aesthetics of the boy’s body; it told of his personal merit and that of the love one felt for him. Virility as a physical mark should be absent from it; but it should be present as a precocious form and as a promise of future behavior; already to conduct oneself as the man one has not become.²⁹⁹

Much of the language used to describe positive features in boys was also used to describe the same features in women. Dover discussed the Greek language in many cases,

²⁹⁶Ibid, 22.

²⁹⁷Dover, 54.

²⁹⁸Ibid, 55.

²⁹⁹Foucault, 200.

in order to highlight the origins of important words and also to relate the significance of words which refer to male-male sexual behavior. He notes the word *kalos*, which in Greek means “beautiful,” “handsome,” “pretty,” “attractive,” or “lovely,” when applied to a human being. The Greeks had no gender distinction between “handsome” and “beautiful” as in modern English: young men and boys were similar to women in this way.³⁰⁰

Dover also recounts the story from the fourth century B.C. by Xenophon where Episthenes comes across a “handsome boy just in the first years of maturity” about to be executed. Episthenes displays a jocular attitude when he declares that he is willing to die in place of the youth, but his tone is tender as he says, “Strike, if the boy says so and if he is going to be grateful.” At the end of the story, Episthenes hugs the boy close to him and tells the executor (an acquaintance of his) that he must fight for the boy “because I won’t let him go!” The executioner laughs and the boy is saved. Dover attests that Episthenes’ appeal is not on moral grounds, but “upon the awfulness of destroying a beautiful object.”³⁰¹ Dover contends that “boys” were grouped together with women as objects of desire. He quotes Xenophon in a passage where the commanders have decreed that the captives be released: “the soldiers obeyed, except for the individual misappropriations through desire for a boy or woman among the beautiful (sc. captives).”³⁰²

A QUESTION OF REALITY: CLASSICAL PAEDERASTY AND MODERN HOMOSEXUALITY COMPARED

The Greeks’ system of pederasty was certainly different from our modern conception of homosexuality; the differences and similarities tend to be an important issue for those scholars studying this topic. Harald Patzer wrote *Die griechische Knabenliebe* in 1982; his main objective was to explain how ancient pederasty and

³⁰⁰Dover, 15.

³⁰¹Ibid, 51.

³⁰²Ibid, 65.

contemporary homosexuality differed, developing 5 distinguishing features: (1) classical paederasty is necessarily between an older and a younger partner, while modern homosexuality tends to be between men of similar ages.³⁰³ (2) A paederastic relationship does not last beyond the youth of the younger partner. (3) The *erastes* is not motivated by a sexual inclination which excludes relations with women, as many *erastes* were married or had regular intercourse with women as well as boys. (4) Intercrural copulation was the only kind allowed under the Greeks' system, because it preserves the "effeminizing humiliation" of being penetrated. (5) The *eromenos*' lack of desire and enjoyment.³⁰⁴

Although he generally agrees with Patzer's analysis, Halperin takes exception to several of these points. He writes that although age is a factor in paederasty, the actual upper limit was debated much throughout classical times; he does admit that "most agree" with Foucault's statement about the beard signifying the end of desirability. In addition, he points out that the "ready availability" of male prostitutes and slaves provided Greek men with older men with whom to have sexual experiences. Halperin writes that most of the men taking part in the *erastes* role were between the ages of twenty and thirty and were therefore unmarried or married to a woman much younger than themselves (e.g. an arranged marriage with a woman too young to have sexual relations). In addition, he mentions the explicit preferences in Plato's *Symposium*, where humans desire their "other half." Finally, he suggests that the avoidance of anal intercourse was only an ideal, not necessarily a reality.³⁰⁵

There are points in Halperin's reasoning where he seems to stray from the point at hand. Although slaves and male prostitutes may have been available, it is important to

³⁰³Both cultures seem to have an ideal which is accompanied by exceptions. Certainly there must have been some Greek men who enjoyed sexual relations with men of their same age, even though it seems that the norm was *erastes-eromenos*. Today, there is a standard of age-peer as partners, while some men prefer trans-generational relationships.

³⁰⁴Patzer, qtd. in Halperin, 55.

³⁰⁵Halperin, 55-56.

mention that Halperin has departed here from a discussion of classical paederasty. This brings up the problem of ideal institution vs. actual practice. When is it important to know what the Greeks' *conception* of paederasty was, and when is it necessary to know more details about *what actually happened*? In this case, I believe that it is the recorded evidence of the institution of paederasty which wins out; it is this accepted and widespread model to which we should compare contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

Ancient Greek society was not gay. Foucault writes that the Greeks' concern with the paederastic relationship was not about "the desire that might incline an individual to this kind of relationship," nor was it about "the subject of this desire." Instead, they were most interested in "the object of pleasure," more exactly, "that object insofar as he would have to become to turn the master in the pleasure that was enjoyed with others and in the power that was exercised over oneself."³⁰⁶ This "power executed over oneself" harkens back to Foucault's discussion of aphrodisia and regimen in *The Uses of Pleasure*.

However, Ancient Greek society should certainly be considered a chapter in Gay History, because it is a key point in the evolution toward our current notion of homosexuality. Both the similarities and differences between Ancient Greek and modern society provide a model for analyzing modern homosexuality. Halperin believes that study of same-sex behavior in Ancient Greece will undoubtedly lead to a greater self-understanding of our own sexual identity. Notably, he includes a section from E.M. Forster's novel *Maurice*, in which the "finest classical scholar" in a Cambridge Dean's translation class is so drawn to study of the classics because of the "temperate and exquisite expression" which the ancient Greeks endowed to homoerotic sentiments, sentiments which that student shared. "Study of the Greeks, especially Plato, has

³⁰⁶Foucault, 225.

enabled this young man gradually to accept himself and his desires as he had never been able to do in the course of his religious upbringing,” writes Halperin. “The Greeks provided an ideological weapon against the condemnatory reflexes of his own Christian conscience, offering him, in its place, ‘a new guide for life.’”³⁰⁷ Finally, Halperin writes that

...the Greeks are hardly lost to us. They are, on the contrary, all about us-- not because we are (allegedly) their inheritors, not because we may expect to find vestiges of them buried within ourselves, faintly discernible beneath layers of historical encrustation, transformation, and displacement. Rather, the Greeks are all about us insofar as they represent one of the codes in which we transact our own cultural business: we use our ‘truths’ about the Greeks to explain ourselves and to construct our own experiences, including our sexual experiences.³⁰⁸

Gay history includes all gay aspects of the world: the Greeks help us create a contemporary gay reality.

³⁰⁷Halperin, 34.

³⁰⁸Ibid, 20.

CHAPTER FIVE: NOTIONS OF BERDACHES

For the same reason as the Ancient Greeks, berdaches of American Indians tribes should be considered a part of Gay History. Components of berdachism are similar to modern gayness, although there are many differences between the two. There is much debate about the proper sexual category for these people; some scholars fervently call berdaches "gay" or "homosexual," while others prefer variations on a dual-gendered description. Such arguments highlight the importance of understanding the relationship between gender identity. Other discourses which consider the nature of choice in berdache status, husbands of berdaches, non-berdache sexual relations between men, and the modern Gay American Indians movement provide an appropriately complex model in which to examine the relationship between sexuality and gender. Generally, existence of berdaches showed the gay people, or at least people with a non-heteronormative pattern, existed in a nonwestern environment.

Berdaches³⁰⁹ have been the object of examination of scholars of American Indian³¹⁰ history and culture, gay history, and the history of gender. Berdaches, also known as "Two-Spirit People," "he-she's," "half-men half-women," and by a variety of names in native languages, were American Indians who, generally, wore women's clothes, performed women's work and married non-berdache men as their wives. Sixteenth century Europeans first came into contact with berdaches upon their exploration of the

³⁰⁹Many studies refer to these people as "The Berdache." However, after writing this topic, I have come to the conclusion that referring to them as a group denotes a relationship that does not exist: berdaches had different roles in different Native cultures. I feel more correct in referring to them as "berdaches." (Even this common name can be disputed, as it is of Western origin).

³¹⁰ I have heard from several sources that "Native Americans" hailing from the continental United States prefer to be called "American Indians," because the term "Native American" would include Hawaiians. Hawaiians, who have a very different culture than natives of North America, make up the largest group within the group "Native Americans"; therefore, in matters of governmental assistance and agency, they control the politics.

territories of North America. Spanish explorer Cabeza da Vaca reported during his first five years among the Timucua Indians in Florida that “During the time I was thus among these people I saw a devilish thing, and it is that I saw one man married to another.”³¹¹

Walter Williams and Williams Roscoe characterize berdache status as highly spiritual and write that berdaches were highly revered in their culture; such ideas by their society are contested by other scholars. Williams writes that “Sprituality, androgyny, women’s work, and sex with men are equally important indicators of berdache status.”³¹²

Sabine Lang alludes to studies by Angelino and Shedd, who report that the term *berdache* was used originally by eighteenth-century French travelers, who applied the term to American Indian males thought to be “passive homosexuals.” Lang writes that “fulfilled the culturally defined role of a woman.” Lang explains that over the course of time, a wider set of attributes and behaviors became accountable under the term “berdache,” including “transvestitism (cross dressing), effeminacy, the carrying out of female tasks and activities, entering into homosexual relationships, and intersexuality [also referred to as hermaphroditism].”³¹³ Generally, studies report that upon receiving berdache status (the actual methods of receiving this status vary from tribe to tribe; scholars also disagree about this subject), a biological male dressed in women's clothes, participated in women's work, such as weaving, washing, and cooking, and often married non-berdache men as their wives.

Berdaches have been included in gay historical studies from the very beginning; they seemed to be a perfect historical example of homosexuality in a premodern nonwestern culture. Before the post-Stonewall gay historians movement, a “nonjudgmental” account of berdaches appeared in a chapter of a book by University of London anthropology professor Edward Westermarck in 1908.³¹⁴ In 1911, Ferdinand

³¹¹Vaca, qtd. in Williams, Walter. *The Spirit and the Flesh*, 110.

³¹²Williams, 127.

³¹³ Lang, Sabine. *Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American cultures*, 7

³¹⁴Williams, 201.

Karsh-Haack, a professor at the University of Berlin and a member of Magnus Hirschfeld's homosexual emancipation organization, published *Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker*, which included "source materials on same-sex relations among the peoples of Native America, Oceania, Southwest Asia, and Africa."³¹⁵

Ideas about berdachism played an important role in the pre-Stonewall Homophile Movement. Harry Hay, considered by many to be "the founder of the modern gay movement,"³¹⁶ grew up in the deserts of southeastern California, New Mexico, and Nevada. Hay spent significant time with native tribes from these areas, and is considered by many to be a formidable expert on berdaches; both Will Roscoe and Ramon Gutiérrez (both cited later) mention Hay in their respective works, describing him as a major resource in their studies of berdaches. Hay also presented several papers on berdachism at various venues. Williams writes that Hay's motivations for founding the Mattachine Society in 1951, one of the first modern American gay rights groups,

Hay recalled that he wanted to found the group on 'a great transcendent dream of what being Gay was all about...Organizing the Mattachine was a call to me deeper than the innermost reaches of spirit, a vision-quest more important than life.' Williams argues that Hay's emphasis on spirituality was "likely a reflection of the impact of American Indian thought on the formulation of his identity as well as his language."³¹⁷

Hay encouraged Jim Kepner, a writer in ONE magazine³¹⁸ to teach anthropology classes which would "emphasize berdachism." In 1956 Hay began to visit the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, where he established contact with gay Indians there.³¹⁹ Williams reports that activists at ONE used the issues surrounding the berdache to formulate new questions: "Does this androgyny give us a different vision, a double vision, that enables

³¹⁵Ibid.

³¹⁶ Timmons, Stuart. *The Trouble with Harry Hay*, cover.

³¹⁷Williams, 203.

³¹⁸ ONE Magazine came into existence when Hay and others left the Mattachine Society because it wasn't radical enough. Those involved soon formed the ONE Institute at UCLA, a Queer resources center which is still one of the most significant centers of its kind today.

³¹⁹Williams, 203.

us to see things differently and creatively? Do we have special talents? How can we best contribute these talents to society? Are the gay contributions in art and creative thought similar to those of the berdaches to their societies?”³²⁰

Chapter four of Jonathan Katz’s *Gay American History* is titled “Native Americans / Gay Americans: 1528-1976.” The chapter is fifty pages in length and includes primary source documents from “military men, missionaries, explorers, trappers, traders, settlers, and later medical doctors, anthropologists, and homosexual emancipationists; in a few rare instances the voices of Gay Indians are heard.”³²¹ Katz argues that homosexuality in Native American cultures is inherently linked to that of Western Gays and Lesbians. He writes: “The existence of homosexuality among the people who originally inhabited the United States will no doubt hold a certain fascination for those Lesbians and Gay men who are today beginning to repossess the national and world history of their people—part of their struggle for social change and to win control over their own lives.” He characterizes the attempts of Christian and western cultural forces to eliminate “various forms of Indian homosexuality” as “cultural genocide involving both Native Americans and Gay people.” Further, he claims that the recovery of the history of Native American homosexuality is “a task in which both Gay and Native peoples have a common interest.”³²²

The sexuality and gender-identification of berdaches have been interpreted in a number of ways, including “homosexual,” “gay,” “two-spirited,” “third-gendered,” “sexually diverse,” and “transgendered.” Katz refers to berdaches as “homosexuals,” and notes that while documents not written in English have been translated, the foreign word for homosexuality has been included. Katz considers the “reversal of the customary sex

³²⁰Hay, qtd. in Williams, 204.

³²¹Katz, 281.

³²²Ibid, 284.

roles—cross-dressing, cross-working, cross-speaking,” as part of “American Indian homosexualities,” which also includes homosexual activity.³²³

Pat Califia writes that “It is indisputable that the berdaches had sex with other biological males, and for this reason, it makes sense to discuss at least certain aspects of their lives in terms of gay male paradigms.”³²⁴ However, she explores “...how native Americans themselves perceived the berdache, her sexual partners, ‘special friendships,’ and paederasty.” She writes that if these things were not seen as being related,

...if for example, the sexual partner was seen as a heterosexual man because the berdache was not socially recognized as fully male; if pairs of male friends were not generally perceived to be deviant because the friendship did not interfere with marriage and procreation, and instead reified the social expectation that men excel as hunters and warriors; or if paederasty was seen as a ceremony that all adult men and youth participated in to assist the boy in making his transition to manhood—it seems important to say that, rather than distort these phenomenon by insisting on seeing them through the paradigm of modern Western male homosexuality.³²⁵

Califia notes Katz’s statement that the sexual partners of berdache “would resent being called *elxa* or *kwérhame*’ (synonyms for berdache³²⁶), even though coupling with a berdache was ‘not considered objectionable.’” She writes,

If Native American people saw the berdache and her partner as being similar, as being members of the same class of people, why would separate terms exist for one of the members of this couple? And why would one member of that couple insist that he was not like his partner, and be offended by any suggestion that he was like her?³²⁷

She states that this fact alone proves that Native Americans did not possess an “umbrella concept like ‘homosexuality,’ which would include both the berdache and her partner.”³²⁸

Williams considers using the term ‘transvestite’ to describe the berdache, but decides against it because “If we define transvestism as dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex, then we find (in cases where the dress is explicitly described) that berdaches wore all women’s clothing no more often than they wore a mixture of female and male

³²³Ibid, 282.

³²⁴Califia, Pat. *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*, 136.

³²⁵Ibid, 125.

³²⁶ Ellen: I’m still looking for the languages these two words are from...

³²⁷Ibid.

³²⁸Ibid.

dress.”³²⁹ Califia responds to this by pointing out that modern transvestites often do not wear a complete female outfit:

It is the presence of even one item of female clothing that defines someone, despite male morphology, as ‘unmanly.’ It would be entirely possible for an anthropologist with a different take on gender to read the same evidence that Williams read and come to a very different conclusion about how completely the berdaches in various tribes were garbed as women.³³⁰

Califia reasons that

Memories of the berdaches do serve as a useful political tool for gay and lesbian Native Americans who want to reclaim space for themselves in their own families and tribal communities. But it is clear that the two roles, that of the berdache and that of the homosexual, are not seen as identical by either gay or straight native Americans.³³¹

She also points out Williams’ comments pertaining to the chronology of the concept of homosexuality:

How we see other cultures in the past has much to do with our attitudes toward the future. If we study only the ‘modern homosexual,’ what about those growing numbers of people who dislike fitting their sexuality into either/or boxes of gay or straight? Homosexual identity will surely change in the future. The modern Western gay role has not been, nor will be, the only role which see individuals as distinctly different on the basis of same-sex attraction and androgynous character.³³²

Will Roscoe, in his study of the Zuni *lhamana* (vernacular for berdache) refers to berdachism as a “traditional gay role.” He argues that the Zuni knew that *lhamanas* were biologically male and underwent one of two male initiation rights; such evidence points to an idea of berdache as “bridging or combining the social roles of men and women.”³³³ Roscoe admits that the term “homosexual” should not be used to describe berdaches because “there are simply no Zuni equivalents for our single-dimensional categories of homosexual and heterosexual.”³³⁴³³⁵ Califia takes this a step further by adding that it is

³²⁹Williams, 71-72.

³³⁰Califia, 133.

³³¹Ibid, 138.

³³²Williams, 274.

³³³Roscoe, Will. *The Zuni Man-Woman*, 59.

³³⁴Ibid, 64.

³³⁵Some might question Roscoe's description of homosexual and heterosexual as "one-dimensional." Indeed, such a description is harsh when one considers the depth of experiences in which those calling themselves homosexuals and heterosexuals participate. I believe that in this case, Roscoe is alluding to the need for a more complex system of labelling sexualites; surely, it is true that

possible that berdaches were accepted because they were viewed as “an acceptable variation on heterosexuality.” She goes on, “If the berdaches were perceived as men, it is quite possible that other Zunis would have been scandalized by them seeking sexual pleasure from nonberdache males.”³³⁶

A closer look at studies of the berdache reveals disagreements and controversies concerning many aspects of our knowledge of berdaches. The grand majority of primary sources are white Christian men who did not understand Native American culture (and were consistently appalled by its “barbarism,” and were disgusted by transvestism and same-sex unions. Some studies portray American Indian cultures who respected and valued berdaches, while others assert that berdaches had low status. Widely different explanations concerning the method used to identify or choose berdaches have been posited. Evidence of berdaches being “teased” has lead to several different conceptions of the extent of the acceptance of berdaches in Native cultures.

A major issue of general contention among scholars of berdaches concerns whether or not they were respected in tribal society. An important aspect of this debate centers around the identification of an individual’s innate berdache status. Some believe berdaches were chosen as children through a combination of individual awareness and parental guidance, while others believe that berdaches were war prisoners pressed into service as berdaches. This information is significant in this chapter because knowing this process also assists us in studying a berdache’s personal identity. In general, Williams and Roscoe argue from the supposition that berdache status was revered in society. Williams quotes a Mojave elder who claims that a child’s “tendencies” to become a berdache are apparent early, perhaps around the ages of nine and eleven. Further, the elder reports that when a child is about ten years old, his relatives begin discussing his

sexuality and gnder expresison is far more complicated than simply hetero or homo.

³³⁶Califia, 141.

"strange ways." Williams says that the boy's relatives prepare for the berdache initiation ceremony without his knowledge:

It is meant to take him by surprise, to be both an initiation and a test of his true inclinations...On the day of the ceremony, the shamen explained, the boy is led into a circle: 'If the boy showed a willingness to remain standing in the circle, exposed to the public eye, it was almost certain that he would go through the ceremony.' If the boy is unwilling to assume *alyha* status, he would refuse to dance. But if his character-- his spirit-- is *alyha*, 'the song goes right to his heart and he will dance with much intensity. He cannot help it.'³³⁷

Similarly, Williams notes that among the Yuman tribes of the Southwest, a boy's parents would "test him if they noticed he preferred female pursuits." Overall, Williams argues that berdache status was chosen by a child, not forced upon him:

What is important to recognize in all of those practices is that the assumption of the berdache role was not forced upon the boy by others. When adults have their suspicions, it was only when the child made the proper move that he was considered a berdache. By doing woman's dancing, preparing a meal, or taking the woman's basket he was making an important symbolic gesture.³³⁸

In sharp contrast, Ramon Gutiérrez³³⁹, a southwest history scholar who completed ten years of study on the berdache, believes that berdaches status was a humiliating punishment, "principally ascribed to defeated enemies."³⁴⁰ Gutiérrez argues that American Indians have a history of assigning feminine gender roles to their defeated. He cites Richard Trexler's arguments about the longstanding universal "gender representation of conquest" for cultures in both the Old World and the New. "...victors on vanquishing their enemies asserted their virility by transforming losers into effeminates."³⁴¹ Gutiérrez states that berdache status is a part of male ritual, an expression of dominance by winners over losers:

We certainly know that heterosexual rape was a common habit of war. What we are only now starting to admit is that losing men were similarly treated and were forced to perform what were considered demeaning forms of sexual service. Thus, it does not matter much whether we examine male prisoners of war among the Zuni and the Arawaks, Aztecs and Inca male temple slaves, or those figures on pre-Columbians Moche pottery jars from northern Peru depicting male slaves in women's clothes being passively penetrated in homosexual intercourse, to see the status inversion marked through gender symbols that were so frequently associated with defeated men.³⁴²

³³⁷Williams, 23-24.

³³⁸Ibid, 24.

³³⁹Gutiérrez, Ramon. "Must We Deracinate Indians to Find Gay Roots?", 61.

³⁴⁰Ibid, 62.

³⁴¹Trexler, qtd. in Gutiérrez, 62.

³⁴²Gutiérrez, 62.

Gutiérrez considers conquest narratives, traveler's accounts and ethnographies to arrive at the conclusion that the berdache did not choose their roles: "Berdaches were reported as being under male ownership. They were frequently found in male social spaces performing activities associated with females during male rituals: fellating powerful men or being anally mounted by them."³⁴³ He cites Pedro de Casteñeda, who in 1540 claims to have seen a "berdache initiation" in an unnamed tribe in New Mexico:

...after the berdache had been cloaked in female garb, 'the dignitaries came in to make use of her one at a time, and after them all the others who cared to. From then on she was not only to deny herself to any one, as she was paid a certain established amount for the service. And even though she might take a husband later on, she was not thereby free to deny herself to any one who offered her pay.'³⁴⁴

Gutiérrez does not mention if the berdache described chose this role, but his evidence indicates that once the role had been taken, the berdache had little autonomy. He quotes William Hammond, a U.S. Surgeon General in 1852, who observed that once a man became a berdache, "...if he is a man occupying a prominent place in the councils of the pueblo, he is at once relieved of all power and responsibility, and his influence is at an end. If he is married, his wife and children pass from under his control..."³⁴⁵ He writes that "the men who were pressed into berdache status were there primarily to service and delight the chiefs."³⁴⁶

However, Williams claims further that

The military demands of the times, however, did not alter traditional Zuni Attitudes regarding a child like We'Wha, even though inclinations of such a youth veered away from the life of the hunter and warrior. Berdache tendencies merely indicated, in Zuni terms, a different 'life road' or '*onnane*.' Zuni families adapted their child-rearing practices accordingly. Berdaches enjoyed a certain place in the community, the support of their families, appropriate education and training, adult role models, mythological precedents, and the possibility of achieving prestige and respect.³⁴⁷

Such a statement conflicts with Gutierrez's interpretation of the "violent masculine world" of Pueblo Indians. In general, Gutierrez's ideas are in direct opposition

³⁴³Ibid.

³⁴⁴Ibid.

³⁴⁵Hammond, qtd. in Gutiérrez, 63.

³⁴⁶Gutiérrez, 63.

³⁴⁷Williams, 32.

to Roscoe's and Williams' portrayal of berdache status. Roscoe states on numerous occasions that berdaches were respected in their societies: "In traditional native societies berdaches were not anomalous. They were integral, productive, and valued members of their communities." Williams claims that berdaches were often considered to be shamans because of their "spiritual connection."

Among the Navajos, *nadle* shamans are considered particularly excellent as chanters. They have special chants for curing illness and insanity, and for aiding childbirth. The same talents are ascribed to *winktes* among the Lakotas...Some have more than others, but every *winkte* has at least some sacred powers to doctor illnesses...Cheyenne war parties almost always had a skilled berdache curer along to care for the wounded. An elderly Cheyenne man remembers his grandfather telling him about how he got shot in the leg, and a berdache shaman put the leg together and it never hurt after that.³⁴⁸

However, after writing that berdaches are "often" considered shamans, Williams goes on to write that "many times" this is not the case ("Many times, however, berdaches are not shamans, but are the special people from whom shamans request advice.")³⁴⁹ He goes on to describe important ceremonial roles of *winktes*, such as the preparation of ceremonial food, overseeing funeral rites, the blessing of objects used in ceremonies, and the offering of sacred names to (nonberdache) boys as "spiritual protection."³⁵⁰

Confusing as his "often...many" combination³⁵¹ might be, Williams is clear in his belief that berdaches were respected. He writes:

There was a place for the special contributions of the berdache in the society generally, as represented ritually by his special role in the ceremonies. People would try to gain the spiritual assistance of the berdache in all sorts of matters, from the grandness of the Sun Dance to the mundaneness of minor ritual behavior. Among the Potawatomi, women normally groomed the men's hair before they left on a hunt. But if a berdache did this, then it would provide a special spiritual advantage and protection for the hunter.³⁵²

Williams does not qualify this finding, so we are left wondering if, as Gutiérrez might argue, if the hair grooming ritual was really an act of submission rather than one of

³⁴⁸Ibid, 35.

³⁴⁹Ibid, 36.

³⁵⁰Ibid, 36, 38.

³⁵¹I would use, perhaps, "often...some times..." to more clearly denote numbers...

³⁵²Williams, 37.

spirituality. The same logic could hold for Williams' mention of berdaches preparing spiritual meals: shamanic chefs or wretched scullery maids?

Hay criticizes Williams for not taking the time necessary to thoroughly master the "nonverbal values of the day-in-day-out life of Spirit that characterizes Native American Village and Pueblo life-processes," an appreciation which, Hay attests, might take several years of intimate day-by-day confrontation. The results of this are uninformed assumption about sexuality:

Dr. Williams wants to call every Gay Indian he meets, whether in the Dance Plaza or in the pages of Edmund White's *States of Desire*, either a "Berdache" or by the particular name of this Ceremonial function sacred to a given tribe. In Native American values this is not permissible.³⁵³

Along this same vein, Hay problematizes Williams' use of evidence collected by Western explorers, reasoning that they, too, were not sufficiently versed in the native cultures to correctly discern berdaches:

...it was the ritual life-processes being observed and evaluated by the sixteenth-seventeenth-eighteenth-nineteenth century God-driven Explorers that gave rise to the categorical epithets of sodomite, hermaphrodite, and Berdache in the first place. When Coronado came to Zuni in 1540, his Franciscans didn't see Gay men, they saw *lhaman-ona* (i.e., the one who is being *ilhaman*, which is translated in the 1950s as "being like a woman." Since "woman" in Zuni is *okya*, we'd give a pretty penny to know what the respondent really said. There is no possibility of a word in Zuni for "transvestite" and obviously *lhaman* has to do with something quite other than "woman," or even "woman-like." Similarly, La Salle and Marquette weren't seeing Gay men when they observed *ikoueta* among the Illinois or *ayaikwa* among the Fox. They saw Ceremonial persons, who [sic] they categorized as Berdache, performing the life-process invocations of ritually lived days.³⁵⁴

Gutiérrez advises future scholars of berdaches not to succumb to "romantic obfuscations." He writes: "By finding gay models where they do not exist, let us not penetrate on We'Wha or U'k yet another level of humiliation with our pens."³⁵⁵ Another badly written passage, this statement, along with Gutiérrez's entire argument, can be read as quite homophobic: it may be incorrect to "claim" berdaches as "gay," but is this really such a terrible *humiliation*? If we are to give him the benefit of the doubt (which seems somewhat necessary considering he is the only informed objector to major concepts developed about the berdache), the "humiliation" denoted in this passage could be

³⁵³Hay, Harry. "Sacred Persons," 280

³⁵⁴Ibid, 279.

³⁵⁵Gutiérrez, 67.

interpreted as simply the stultifying effect of being labeled with a description that does not begin to describe one's full experience.

Although he brings up many valid points about Pueblo culture, Gutiérrez does not directly address the vast amount of evidence that Williams and Roscoe present about the initiation of berdaches as children, as well as the evidence of spiritual significance of the berdaches. He allows his portrayal of the sexual slave berdache to be considered as the only possible form of berdachism. Just as Williams and Roscoe need to keep their comments about berdaches confined to specific tribes, Gutiérrez needs to allow for the possibility that in some cultures, there is evidence supporting an interpretation of a respected, free berdache.

Immediately following his strong argument for the conception of the humiliated and enslaved berdache, Gutiérrez quickly goes on to add "...they gradually came to be regarded as temple experts or shamans who fulfilled magical and cosmological functions."³⁵⁶ Are we to believe that his entire argument occurs many years before Roscoe's and William's collected evidence? Such a tiny statement confirming William's work casts a major shadow upon the rest of Gutiérrez's work, and makes one curious about his motivations. If berdaches were, in actuality, sexual slaves, what does this say about their sexuality? These concepts harken back to chapter two, where I discuss the need for consciousness of homosexual predilection to signify "gay." Certainly, one who consciousness of homosexual acts occurring on his person, yet who is not consenting to these acts, should not be considered "gay"; however, homosexual conquest is surely an aspect of the history of homosexuality.

A very important problem in research is that scholars of the berdache have not sufficiently acknowledged differences between tribes. David Bowen problematizes the balance of scholarly work on berdache studies:

³⁵⁶Ibid, 62.

Another important objection to the term 'two-spirited', is that the creation of a pseudo-Indian terms implies that transgenderism was a universal phenomenon among the tribes, when it was not. Approximately one third of North American tribes have been documented as having visible transgendered customs, which means it was far from a universal phenomenon. Further, it completely ignores Native Americans of Central and South American, about whom little is known to English-speakers, as well as non-Indian Native Americans, such as the Inuit of the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.³⁵⁷

Bowen goes on to point out that the Plains and Pueblo people have been studied more thoroughly than other tribes. He argues that the distinctive qualities and circumstances of these tribes has colored our view of berdaches:

It is important to clarify the arena of transgendered discussion: most, though not all, of the tribes exhibiting transgenderism were located in the Canadian and American West, especially the Plains Peoples and the Pueblo Peoples. Plains images dominate thinking about Native Americans, and it is important to understand that the following discussion does not apply to Woodland Tribes east of the Mississippi, the northern reaches of Canada and Alaska, and numerous other places.³⁵⁸

Bowen also points out major differences between the Plains and the Pueblo cultures:

Plains culture was extremely free, in that Plains Peoples were generally prosperous enough that very small units could support themselves, coming together in large communities only for Sundance and winter camp. Thus idiosyncrasies in individuals were much more easily tolerated as they didn't constantly rub elbows with other people who might object. If a Plains person didn't like his neighbor, he could always pack his tipi and leave. Pueblo Peoples, being agrarian, had much more tight knit, ritualistic, and formal organizations and traditions, as a result of which transgendered behavior was carefully channeled in socially approved ways, as compared to transgendered Plains People who were free to express themselves pretty much however they liked--within certain limits.³⁵⁹

Bowen's comment may resolve differences between the conclusions of Gutierrez and those of Roscoe and Williams; it certainly supports Gutierrez's idea of "violent, male" Pueblo cultures while allowing room for other cultures in which berdachism was a more spiritual state of being. In addition, in his preface to *The Zuni Man-Woman*, Roscoe says that Zunis (part of Pueblo tribes) are one of the most studied tribes in the world; he tells of a joke which describes the typical Zuni household as "...a mother, a father, children, and an anthropologist."³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ Bowen, David. "Transgendered Native Americans." Appears online: <http://www.netgsi.com/~fcowboy/native.html> (December 4, 1998).

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Roscoe, x.

It is necessary to explore American Indian views towards the sexuality of the husband of a berdache. Williams notes a “massive survey” of northern California Indian cultures conducted in the 1930s, in which all but one of the groups who recognized a berdache status also recognized his marriage to a ‘normal man.’ “Next to doing women’s work and acting androgynously, sexual behavior with a man is the most commonly noted characteristic of berdache status. This aspect is even more widespread among berdaches than a special ceremonial role.”³⁶¹ Williams notes a Southern Maidus tribesperson who explains “in a respectful manner,” that berdaches “...just grew that way, being half-man and half-woman.”³⁶² Williams then concludes that “The berdache’s sexuality is accepted in the same way as his androgyny; both are seen as reflections of his spirit, his basic nature.”³⁶³ However, this seems to infer that “half-man half-woman” describes a berdache’s sexuality when in actuality it stops short at describing gender identity.

According to Williams, marriage between a berdache and a man existed in the context of the common position of marriage in aboriginal American Indian culture. He notes a “division of labor by *gender*” (my italics) in these cultures (e.g. “men’s work” and “women’s work”) because ‘...people can take on a gender role that is divergent from their genital sex.’³⁶⁴ There were economic and familial advantages of being married in American Indian society; marrying a berdache wife did not erode these benefits to a significant degree:

While it is true that a berdache wife cannot produce, many of the reports of such marriages mention that the husband already had children, either through a previous marriage or by taking a berdache as a second or third wife. But with adoption being so commonly accepted, children may even be gained by the berdache.³⁶⁵

Williams mentions that among the Mohave tribe, the favorite method of sex for Mohave men are as “...insertion in anal intercourse and receiving fellatio.” Of course, then,

³⁶¹Williams, 110.

³⁶²Ibid.

³⁶³Ibid, 110-111.

³⁶⁴Ibid, 111.

³⁶⁵Ibid, 112.

such acts can be performed with either a woman or a *alyha* (Mohave word equivalent for *berdache*). Williams writes that “Some men become so used to having *alyha* spouses that they show no interest in women.” Further, Williams reports that certain men develop a preference for berdaches for either or both sexual and economic advantages: “They become less attracted to women, or they may in fact enjoy the prosperity of the productive berdache.”³⁶⁶ Williams writes that it is “pointless” to attempt to excuse the homosexual component of such a man:

Unlike the berdache, he is not androgynous, and he does not identify himself as different from other husbands. We cannot account for his sexuality by psychoanalytic theories of ‘inversion’ or ‘deviancy.’ His preference is simply evidence of the potential within many ‘normal’ men for sexual enjoyment with another male.³⁶⁷

Katz and Williams both liken berdaches to modern-day gay culture’s drag queens, “those gender-mixing males.”

Like berdaches, ‘drag queens’ are known to dress like women, or with a mixture of male and female clothing, but they are still queens even if they dress like men. They often have special occupational choices seldom associated with men, and (most importantly) have androgynous character traits. Masculine gay men are not queens, any more than the berdaches’s husband is a berdache. In terms of sexual behavior, there might be queens who are celibate, or even involved in some heterosexual behavior, but as a group they are usually homosexual. They are socially defined as gay. Even in Western Society, with its rigid sexual distinctions, a man might have sex with a woman and still retain the gay label.³⁶⁸

Williams says that the main difference between drag queens and berdaches is the berdache religious spiritual tradition. However, he adds that “...even in Western culture, which at least until recently has systematically denied a respected role for androgynous males, drag queens often exhibit a sense of mystery and theatricality that is close to the religious role of sacred people.”³⁶⁹

For part of his study, Williams interviewed non-Indian males who “opted against transsexual surgery, but who prefer to dress and live their daily lives as women.”³⁷⁰ Williams reports that these individuals do not identify as “gay,” but more as “androgynes,” or, as one says, “like a woman, but not a woman.” In telling about

³⁶⁶Ibid, 115.

³⁶⁷Ibid.

³⁶⁸Ibid, 125-126.

³⁶⁹Ibid, 126.

revealing his biological gender to male suitors, one of the “androgynes” argues that these men are not homosexual: “None of these men identify as gay, or even bisexual. They have been attracted to me entirely as to a woman. But after a period of surprise, I would say nine out of ten do not break it off. They will go ahead and develop a sexual relationship with me, with them taking the usual man’s role.”³⁷¹

I am skeptical of this subject’s “nine out of ten” statistic; this is a very high number indeed. It is common to hear stories about the boyfriends of post-operation transsexual male-to-females (MTF’s) who promptly end their relationship upon learning of the sex change operation and previous gender identity. In such a situation, the boyfriend’s aversion is not to homosexuality as much as to transgenderism itself; the MTF usually has full female genitalia. In contrast, Williams’ pre-op subject’s puts the “straight” man into a situation where a vagina does not exist. In another case, the husband a pre-op MTF does not identify himself as gay or homosexual although his relationship was monogamous.³⁷² It is also important to note that Williams’ selected subjects do not outwardly proclaim their transvestism, unlike berdaches, whose alternative gender identity was recognizable by others.

In his discussion concerning the greater society’s acceptance of berdaches, Williams further compares berdache culture to modern gay culture:

Having the best-decorated tipi or being noted for one’s cleanliness and neatness is amazingly similar to the emphasis on personal looks, clothing style, and interior decoration in the contemporary urban gay subculture. Both trends manifest a sense of individual pride in oneself for doing well in a cultural system where one is not typical. The difference is that Anglo-American society and family structure gives not only a grudging tolerance to the nonmasculine male, at best, while in American Indian cultures, to use the words of a Lakota, ‘If a *winkte* is in a family, that family would feel fortunate.’³⁷³

This brings up the classic transgender paradigm: when is a woman “really” a woman? If a “normal” man has intercourse with an individual who has full male genitalia yet presents him/herself as a woman, western society will still define this act as homosexual. Williams writes that sexual preference and gender identity are “two different independent variables,” in which the distinction between berdaches and their husbands “shows quite clearly.” He writes:

³⁷⁰Ibid.

³⁷¹Ibid, 116.

³⁷²Ibid, 157.

³⁷³Ibid, 162.

One can be homosexual in behavior without being gender nonconformist, and without having an identity different from other men's. American Indian values recognize these differences, which Western culture confuses by labeling anyone who participates in same-sex relations as 'a homosexual.' By socially constructing only the berdache as different, with their partners as 'normal,' Indian cultures avoid categorizing people into two opposed categories based on sexual behavior.³⁷⁴

Williams believes that the ability of men who identify as heterosexual to adapt to sex with a morphological male "demonstrates a fluidity in sexuality not accounted for in theories of 'homosexual orientation' or heterosexual orientation." He writes that the men who stay with their pre-op M2F girlfriends are responding to "the femininity of their partner," and that "the partner's genital equipment is not crucial." Whether or not genitals are crucial is immaterial when attempting to define these men along the lines of homosexuality; I am not convinced that these men are not finding pleasure in their girlfriends male genitalia. Roscoe argues that non-berdache men who slept with berdaches were not "psuedo-heterosexual" because the Zunis "did not deny the biological gender of the berdaches."³⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

The difference in sexual and gender dichotomy between American Indians (all the many tribes) and modern Western society is even more fundamental than the difference between the latter and the Ancient Greeks. Even Boswell's concept that there have always been certain behaviors which are considered "homosexual" without a specific or lingual category falls short when considering the intensely diverse ideas of gender within American Indian cultures. It would be incorrect to call berdaches "homosexuals," because, depending on which expert one believes and which tribe you speak of, they fall more cleanly under our category of "transgendered," or "sex slave," or, most likely, a third-gender which we do not recognize. However, berdaches, like the Ancient Greeks, help us

³⁷⁴Ibid, 115.

³⁷⁵Roscoe, 64.

to put modern gay culture in context, and to consider the future of gender within our conception of sexuality.

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS GAY HISTORY (FOR)?

Gay History is about the gay politic and “others like us.”³⁷⁶ The purpose of Gay History is to obtain a greater understanding of modern gay culture, modern gay identity, and modern gay oppression through analysis of other historical periods. This understanding does not only assist gays, but also pre-gays; reinstating gay themes in history counters the isolation of “the accidents of birth and history” and supports individuals who are having difficulty imagining how they can indulge their “desire to live honestly”³⁷⁷ as gays.

Cases like the Ancient Greeks and American Indian berdaches can tell us much about the many permutations and associations of ideas like sexuality, sexual relations, same-sex orientation, gender, and sexual appetite. Gay Historians must remember that people in other cultures and in other historical periods did not conceive of same-sex in the same way that we consider the modern “gay.” In our rush to “out” these cultures and periods, we must remember to consider each culture in its own right. Knowledge of alternative methods of perceiving the components of “gay” can only aid in our understanding of it, as well provide constructive input about new methods for conceptualizing ourselves and our community.

The inherent truth of the “accidents of birth and history” is only half the problem: we also need to forge a gay community that can transcend generations. Even beyond unsupportive families and oppressive societies, gay people lack a community that is able to transcend many generations. Many queers, young and old, complain about the lack of relations between the older generation of gay people and the younger. Others bemoan the gay communities' shallow and dangerous repercussions of the extreme commodification of

³⁷⁶ Wolfson, Evan. “Civil Rights, Human Rights, Gay Rights: Minorities and the Humanity of the Different,” 31.

³⁷⁷ Escoffier, *American Homo*, 1-2.

and obsession with youth. These problems are necessarily the problems of a culture which has no history, a culture which has no transhistorical identity.

Harry Hay's visionary ideas were decades ahead of his time and still ring true today. One of his most important concerns was the creation of an "ethical homosexual culture," a system of ethics which would strike down the homosexual-as-immoral concept prevalent in heterosexual-dominant culture, and simultaneously serve as a foundation for a supportive, sustainable gay sphere. He wrote in 1950 that homosexuals do not fully comprehend themselves or the significance of their particular position in society:

Homosexuals do not understand themselves and thus it is not surprising that heterosexuals do not understand them either. Because of pent-up frustrations and resentments the Homosexual psychologically rebels and becomes catty and takes on the other characteristics of instability. Each person considers himself terribly maladjusted and peculiar. There is now no positive body of information from well-adjusted people. Rather we find case histories of psychopathic and extreme cases that are negative and retrogressive.³⁷⁸

Hay believed that homosexuals needed "a body of knowledge" which would allow them to better understand their situation, and which would illustrate "that Homosexuals, as a group, have much in common and that they are not unique cases."³⁷⁹

This thesis is an extension of Hay's theory of an "ethical homosexual culture," Ethics cannot exist without history. Stonewall may well become the beginning of this ethical homosexual culture, but it is up to Gay Historians to produce history in a way that is simultaneously academically rigorous and accessible to the public. Urvashi Vaid reminds us that it is time for the gay community to become proactive about preserving itself, instead of simply reactive:

Gay and lesbian history reveals that abstract notions of liberation do not inspire large numbers of gay people to do anything; terror, fear, danger, and threats do. The periods of growth in gay and lesbian activism have come in moments of grave danger or upheaval. Thus, Mattachine was born in a climate of police repression and antigay witch hunts. Stonewall was the reaction to decades of police harassment and a cultural shift in the credibility of state authority. The gay rights movement grew its first adolescent spurt in the late 1970s as the right-wing crusades of Anita Bryant and the Moral Majority targeted gay people. The movement grew exponentially when the AIDS crisis politicized gay men. Today, as the right-wing assault on our civil freedom

³⁷⁸ Hay, Harry. "Social Directions of the Homosexual." Dated October 4, 1951. Delivered at a Mattachine discussion group. Appears in *Radically Gay*, 82.

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 83.

intensifies, another wave of gay and lesbian activism is being born. But to wait around for this terror to inspire activism is to accept that we are passive, that our movement's fate is to be reactive. Co-opting that which co-opts us surely presents a more exciting alternative.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰Vaid, 209.

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