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## **CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD OR SEXUAL PERVERSION? HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUAL BOUNDARIES IN THE WORLD WAR ONE ERA<sup>1</sup>**

In the spring of 1919, officers at the Newport (Rhode Island) Naval Training Station dispatched a squad of young enlisted men into the community to investigate the “immoral conditions” obtaining there. The decoys sought out and associated with suspected “sexual perverts,” had sex with them, and learned all they could about homosexual activity in Newport. On the basis of the evidence they gathered, naval and municipal authorities arrested more than 20 sailors in April and 16 civilians in July, and the decoys testified against them at a naval court of inquiry and several civilian trials. The entire investigation received little attention before the navy accused a prominent Episcopal clergyman who worked at the Y.M.C.A. of soliciting homosexual contacts there. But when civilian and then naval officials took the minister to trial on charges of being a “lewd and wanton person,” a major controversy developed. Protests by the Newport Ministerial Union and the Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island and a vigorous editorial campaign by the *Providence Journal* forced the navy to conduct a second inquiry in 1920 into the methods used in the first investigation. When that inquiry criticized the methods but essentially exonerated the senior naval officials who had instituted them, the ministers asked the Republican-controlled Senate Naval Affairs Committee to conduct its own investigation. The Committee agreed and issued a report in 1921 that vindicated the ministers’ original charges and condemned the conduct of the highest naval officials involved, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, President Wilson’s Assistant Secretary of the Navy and the 1920 Democratic vice-presidential candidate.<sup>2</sup>

The legacy of this controversy is a rich collection of evidence about the organization and phenomenology of homosexual relations among white working class and middle class men and about the changing nature of sexual discourse in the World War I era. The two naval courts of inquiry and the minister’s second civilian trial produced some 3,500 pages of testimony from the decoys, suspected “perverts,” ministers, and town and naval officials about their relations with men, their often conflicting understandings of sexuality, and their reactions to the investigation itself.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this evidence it is possible to reconstruct the organization of a homosexual subculture during this period, how its participants understood their behavior, and how they were viewed by the larger community, thus providing a benchmark for generalizations about the historical development of homosexual identities and communities. The evidence also enables us to reassess current hypotheses concerning the relative significance of medical discourse, religious doctrine, and folk tradition in the shaping of popular understandings of sexual behavior and character. Most importantly, analysis of the testimony of the government’s witnesses and the accused churchmen and sailors offers new insights into the relationship between homosexual behavior and identity in the cultural construction of sexuality. Even when witnesses agreed that two men had engaged in homosexual relations with each other, they disagreed about whether both men or only the one playing the “woman’s part” should be labelled as “queer.” More profoundly, they disagreed about how to distinguish between a “sexual” and a “nonsexual” relationship; the navy defined certain relationships as homosexual and perverted which the ministers claimed were merely brotherly and Christian. Because disagreement over

the boundary between homosexuality and homosociality lay at the heart of the Newport controversy, its records allow us to explore the cultural construction of sexual categories in unusual depth.

### **The Social Organization of Homosexual Relations**

The investigation found evidence of a highly-developed and varied gay subculture in this small seaport community, and a strong sense of collective identity on the part of many of its participants. Cruising areas, where gay men and "straight" sailors<sup>4</sup> alike knew that sexual encounters were to be had, included the beach during the summer and the fashionable Bellevue Avenue close to it, the area along Cliff Walk, a cemetery, and a bridge. Many men's homosexual experiences consisted entirely (and irregularly) of visits to such areas for anonymous sexual encounters, but some men organized a group life with others who shared their inclinations. The navy's witnesses alluded to groups of servants who worked in the exclusive "cottages" on Bellevue Avenue and of civilians who met at places such as Jim's Restaurant on Long Wharf<sup>5</sup>. But they focused on a tightly-knit group of sailors who referred to themselves as "the gang,"<sup>6</sup> and it is this group whose social organization the first section of this paper will analyze.

The best known rendezvous of gang members and of other gay sailors was neither dark nor secret: "The Army and Navy Y.M.C.A. was the headquarters of all cocksuckers [in] the early part of the evening," commented one investigator, and, added another, "everybody who sat around there in the evening . . . knew it."<sup>7</sup> The Y.M.C.A. was one of the central institutions of gay male life; some gay sailors lived there, others occasionally rented its rooms for the evening so that they would have a place to entertain men, and the Black elevator operators were said to direct interested sailors to the gay men's rooms.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Y.M.C.A. was a social center, where gay men often had dinner together before moving to the lobby to continue conversation and meet the sailors visiting the Y.M.C.A. in the evening.<sup>9</sup> The ties which they maintained through such daily interactions were reinforced by a dizzying array of parties; within the space of three weeks, investigators were invited to four "fagott part[ies]" and heard of others<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the men who had developed a collective life in Newport recognized themselves as part of a subculture extending beyond a single town; they knew of places in New York and other cities "where the 'queens' hung out," made frequent visits to New York, Providence, and Fall River, and were visited by gay men from those cities. An apprentice machinist working in Providence, for instance, spent "week-ends in Newport for the purpose of associating with his 'dear friends,' the 'girls,'" and a third of the civilians arrested during the raids conducted in the summer were New York City residents working as servants in the grand houses of Newport. Only two of the arrested civilians were local residents.<sup>11</sup>

Within and sustained by this community, a complex system of personal identities and structured relationships took shape, in which homosexual behavior per se did not play a determining part. Relatively few of the men who engaged in homosexual activity, whether as casual participants in anonymous encounters or as partners in ongoing relationships, identified themselves or were labelled by others as sexually different from other men on that basis alone. Most observers recognized that many "straight" sailors (their term) had sex with members of the gang, but, as I will explain below, few believed that this alone meant such sailors were homosexual. The determining criterion in labelling a man as "straight" or "queer" was not the extent of his homosexual activity, but the gender role he assumed. The only men who sharply differentiated themselves from other men, labelling themselves as "queer," were those who assumed the sexual and other cultural roles ascribed to women; they might have been termed "inverts" in the early twentieth-century medical literature, because they not only

expressed homosexual desire but “inverted” (or reversed) their gender role.<sup>12</sup>

The most prominent queers in Newport were effeminate men who sometimes donned women’s clothes – when not in uniform – including some who became locally famous female impersonators. Sometimes referred to as “queens,” these men dominated the social activities of the gang and frequently organized parties at their off-base apartments to which gay and “straight” sailors alike were invited. At these “drags” gang members could relax, be openly gay, and entertain straight sailors from the base with their theatrics and their sexual favors. One gay man described a party held in honor of some men from the USS Baltimore in the following terms:

I went in and they were singing and playing. Some were coked up that wasn’t drunk. And there was two of the fellows, ‘Beckie’ Goldstein and Richard that was in drags, they call it, in costume. They had on some kind of ball gowns, dancing costumes. They had on some ladies’ underwear and ladies’ drawers and everything and wigs. . . . I saw them playing and singing and dancing and somebody was playing the piano. . . . Every once in a while ‘Beckie’ (Goldstein) would go out of the room with a fellow and . . . some would come back buttoning up their pants.<sup>13</sup>

Female impersonation was an unexceptional part of navy culture during the World War I years, sufficiently legitimate – if curious – for the *Providence Journal* and the navy’s own magazine, *Newport Recruit*, to run lengthy stories and photo essays about the many theatrical productions at the navy base in which men took the female roles.<sup>14</sup> The ubiquity of such drag shows and the fact that numerous “straight”-identified men took part in them sometimes served to protect gay female impersonators from suspicion. The landlord of one of the gay men arrested by the navy cited the sailor’s stage roles in order to explain why he hadn’t regarded the man’s wearing women’s clothes as “peculiar,” and presumably the wife of the training station’s commandant, who loaned the man “corsets, stockings, shirt waists, [and] women’s pumps” for his use in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, did not realize that he also wore them at private parties.<sup>15</sup>

But if in some circles the men’s stage roles served to legitimate their wearing drag, for most sailors such roles only confirmed the impersonators’ identities as queer. Many sailors, after all, had seen or heard of the queens’ appearing in drag at parties where its homosexual significance was inescapable. According to the navy’s investigators, for instance, numerous sailors in uniform and “three prize fighters in civilian clothes” attended one “fagott party” given in honor of a female impersonator visiting Newport to perform at the Opera House. Not only were some of the men at the party – and presumably the guest of honor – in drag, but two men made out on a bed in full view of the others, who “remarked about their affection for each other.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, while sailors commonly gave each other nicknames indicating ethnic origin (e.g., “Wop” Bianchia and “Frenchman” La Favor) or other personal characteristics (e.g., “Lucky” and “Pick-axe”), many of them knew the most prominent queers *only* by their “ladies’ names,” camp nicknames they had adopted from the opera such as “Salome,” “Theda Bara,” and “Galli Curci.”<sup>17</sup>

Female impersonation was only the most extreme form of the effeminacy that queers and straights alike considered to be the basis for labelling a man as an invert. Several of the navy’s witnesses described other signs of effeminacy one might look for in a queer. A straight investigator explained that “it was common knowledge that if a man was walking along the street in an effeminate manner, with his lips rouged, his face powdered and his eye-brows pencilled, that in the majority of cases you could form a pretty good opinion of what kind of a man he was, . . . a ‘fairy.’”<sup>18</sup>

One gay man, when pressed by the court to explain how he identified someone as “queer,” pointed to more subtle indicators: “He acted sort of peculiar; walking around with his hands on his hips. . . . [H]is manner was not masculine. . . . The expression

with the eyes and the gestures. . . . If a man was walking around and did not act real masculine, I would think he was a cocksucker."<sup>19</sup> A sailor, who later agreed to be a decoy, recalled that upon noticing "a number of fellows. . . of effeminate characters" shortly after his arrival at Newport, he decided to look "into the crowd to see what kind of fellows they were and found they were perverts."<sup>20</sup> Effeminacy had been the first sign of a deeper perversion.

Although a man's effeminacy was regarded as the outward sign of his being queer, his distinctively *sexual* tastes were equally important in the construction of his social role and identity. The inverts grouped themselves together as "queers" on the basis of their effeminate gender behavior,<sup>21</sup> and they all played roles culturally defined as feminine in sexual contacts. But they distinguished among themselves on the basis of the "feminine" sexual behavior they preferred, categorizing themselves as "fairies" (also called "cocksuckers"), "pogues" (men who liked to be "brownd," or anally penetrated), and "two-way artists" (who enjoyed both). The ubiquity of these distinctions and their importance to personal self-identification cannot be overemphasized. Witnesses at the naval inquiries explicitly drew the distinctions as a matter of course and incorporated them into their descriptions of the gay subculture. One "pogue" who cooperated with the investigation, for instance, used such categories to label his friends in the gang with no prompting from the court: "Hughes said he was a pogue; Richard said he was a cocksucker; Fred Hoage said he was a two-way artist. . ." While there were some men about whom he "had to draw my own conclusions; they never said directly what they was or wasn't," his remarks made it clear he was sure they fit into one category or another.<sup>22</sup>

A second group of sailors who engaged in homosexual relations and participated in the group life of the gang nonetheless occupied a more ambiguous sexual category because they, unlike the queers, conformed to masculine gender norms. Some of them were heterosexually married. None of them behaved effeminately or took the "woman's part" in sexual relations, they took no feminine nicknames, and they did not label themselves — nor were they labelled by others — as queer. Instead, gang members, who reproduced the highly genderized sexual relations of their culture, described the second group of men as playing the "husbands" to the "ladies" of the "inverted set." Some husbands entered into steady, loving relationships with individual men known as queer; witnesses spoke of couples who took trips together and maintained monogomous relationships.<sup>23</sup> It was on the basis of the husbands' sexual — and sometimes explicitly romantic — interest in men that the queers distinguished them from other men: one gay man explained to the court that he believed the rumor about one man being the husband of another must have "some truth in it because [the first man] seems to be very fond of him, more so than the average man would be for a boy."<sup>24</sup> But the ambiguity of the sexual category such men occupied was reflected in the difficulty observers found in labelling them. The navy, which sometimes grouped such men with the queers as "perverts," found it could only satisfactorily identify them by describing what they *did*, rather than naming what they *were*. One investigator, for instance, provided the navy with a list of suspects in which he carefully labelled some men as "pogues" and others as "fairies," but he could only identify one man by noting that he "went out with all the above named men at various times and had himself sucked off or screwed them through the rectum."<sup>25</sup> Even the queers' terms for such men — "friends" and "husbands" — identified the men only *in relation to* the queers, rather than according them an autonomous sexual identity. Despite the uncertain definition of their sexual identity, however, most observers recognized these men as regular — if relatively marginal — members of the gang.

The social organization of the gang was deeply embedded in that of the larger culture;

as we have seen, its members reproduced many of the social forms of genderized heterosexuality, with some men playing “the woman’s part” in relationships with conventionally masculine “husbands.” But the gang also helped men depart from the social roles ascribed to them as biological males by that larger culture. Many of the “queers” interrogated by the navy recalled having felt effeminate or otherwise “different” most of their lives. But it was the existence of sexual subcultures – of which the gang was one – that provided them a means of structuring their vague feelings of sexual and gender difference into distinctive personal identities. Such groups facilitated people’s exploration and organization of their homosexuality by offering them support in the face of social opprobrium and providing them with guidelines for how to organize their feelings of difference into a particular social form of homosexuality, a coherent identity and way of life. The gang offered men a means of assuming social roles which they perceived to be more congruent with their inner natures than those prescribed by the dominant culture, and sometimes gave them remarkable strength to publicly defy social convention.

At the same time, the weight of social disapprobation led people within the gang to insist on a form of solidarity which required conformity to its own standards even as it offered release from the behavioral imperatives of the dominant culture. To be accepted by the gang, for instance, one had to assume the role of pogue, fairy, two-way artist, or husband, and present oneself publicly in a manner consistent with that labelling. But while men chose to assume one or another role on the basis of which most closely approximated their sexual preferences, they appear to have maintained a critical perspective on the significance of the role for their personal identities. Even while assuming one role for the purpose of interaction in the gang, at least some continued to explore their sexual interests when the full range of those interests was not expressed in the norms for that role. Frederick Hoage, for instance, was known as a “brilliant woman” and a “French artist” (or “fairy”), but he was also reported surreptitiously to have tried to “brown” another member of the gang – behavior inappropriate to a “queer” as defined by the gang.<sup>26</sup>

Gang members, who believed they could identify men as pogues or fairies even if the men themselves had not yet recognized their true natures, sometimes intervened to accelerate the process of self-discovery. The gang scrutinized newly arrived recruits at the Y.M.C.A. for likely sexual partners and “queers,” and at least one case is recorded of their approaching an effeminate but “straight”-identified man named Rogers in order to bring him out as a pogue. While he recalled always having been somewhat effeminate, after he joined the gang Rogers began using make-up “because the others did,” assumed the name “Kitty Gordon,” and developed a steady relationship with another man (his “husband”).<sup>27</sup> What is striking to the contemporary reader is not only that gang members were so confident of their ability to detect Rogers’ homosexual interests that they were willing to intervene in the normal pattern of his life, but that they believed they could identify him so precisely as a “latent” (not their word) pogue.

Many witnesses indicated they had at least heard of “fairies” before joining the service, but military mobilization, by removing men like Rogers from family and neighborhood supervision and placing them in a single-sex environment, increased the chances that they would encounter gay-identified men and be able to explore new sexual possibilities. Both the opportunities offered by military mobilization and the constraints of hometown family supervision were poignantly reflected in Rogers’ plea to the court of inquiry after his arrest. After claiming that he had met gay men and had homosexual experiences only after joining the navy, he added:

I got in their company. I don't know why; but I used to go out with them. I would like to say here that these people were doing this all their lives. I never met one until I came in the Navy. . . . I would like to add that I would not care for my folks to learn anything about this; that I would suffer everything, because I want them to know me as they think I am. This is something that I never did until I came in the Navy.<sup>28</sup>

Straight witnesses at the naval inquiry demonstrated remarkable familiarity with homosexual activity in Newport; like gay men, they believed that "queers" constituted a distinct group of people, "a certain class of people called 'fairies.'" <sup>29</sup> Furthermore, almost all of them agreed that one could identify certain men as queer by their mannerisms and carriage. At the second court of inquiry, a naval official ridiculed the Bishop of Rhode Island's assertions that it was impossible to recognize "fairies" and that he had never even heard of the term as if claiming such naïveté were preposterous:

Then you don't know whether or not it is common to hear in any hotel lobby the remark, when a certain man will go by, and somebody will say, 'There goes a fairy.' You have never heard that expression used in that way?<sup>30</sup>

Not only did most people recognize the existence of individual "fairies," but they knew that such men had organized a collective life, even if they were unfamiliar with its details. As we have seen, many sailors at the naval training station knew that the Y.M.C.A. was a "headquarters" for such people, and Newport's mayor recalled that "it was information that was common . . . in times gone by, summer after summer," that men called "floaters" who appeared in town "had followed the fleet up from Norfolk."<sup>31</sup> In a comment which reveals more about straight perceptions than gay realities, a navy officer described gay men to the Newport Chief of Police as "a gang who were stronger than the Masons . . . [and who] had signals and a lot of other stuff. . . [T]hey were perverts and well organized."<sup>32</sup>

"Straight" people's familiarity with the homosexual subculture resulted from the openness with which some gay men rejected the cultural norms of heterosexuality. Several servicemen, for instance, mentioned having encountered openly homosexual men at the naval hospital, where they saw patients and staff wear make-up and publicly discuss their romances and homosexual experiences.<sup>33</sup> The story of two gang members assigned to the Melville coaling station near Newport indicates the extent to which individual "queers," with the support of the gang, were willing to make their presence known by defying social convention, even at the cost of hostile reactions. "From the time that they arrived at the station they were both the topic of conversation because of their effeminate habits," testified several sailors stationed at Melville. Because the men refused to conform to masculine norms they suffered constant harassment; many sailors refused to associate with them or abused them physically and verbally, while their officers assigned them especially heavy work loads and ordered their subordinates to "try to get [one of them] with the goods."<sup>34</sup> Straight sailors reacted with such vigor because the gay men flaunted their difference rather than trying to conceal it, addressing each other with "feminine names," witnesses complained, and "publish[ing] the fact that they were prostitutes and such stuff as that."<sup>35</sup> At times they were deliberately provocative; one astounded sailor reported that he had "seen Richard lying in his bunk take one leg and, putting it up in the air, ask everyone within range of his voice and within range of this place how they would like to take it in this position."<sup>36</sup>

Even before the naval inquiry began, Newport's servicemen and civilians alike were well aware of the queers in their midst. They tolerated them in many settings and brutalized them in others, but they thought they knew what they were dealing with: perverts were men who behaved like women. But as the inquiry progressed, it inadvertently brought the neat boundaries separating queers from the rest of men into question.

### Disputing the Boundaries of the “Sexual”

The testimony generated by the navy investigation provided unusually detailed information about the social organization of men who identified themselves as “queer.” But it also revealed that many more men than the queers were regularly engaging in some form of homosexual activity. Initially the navy expressed little concern about such men’s behavior, for it did not believe that straight sailors’ occasional liaisons with queers raised any questions about their sexual character. But the authorities’ decision to prosecute men not normally labelled as queer ignited a controversy which ultimately forced the navy and its opponents to define more precisely what they believed constituted a homosexual act and to defend the basis upon which they categorized people participating in such acts. Because the controversy brought so many groups of people – working- and middle-class gay and straight-identified enlisted men, middle-class naval officers, ministers, and town officials – into conflict, it revealed how differently those groups interpreted sexuality. A multiplicity of sexual discourses co-existed at a single moment in the civilian and naval seaport communities.

The gang itself loosely described the male population beyond the borders of its inner circle of “queers” and “husbands” as “straight,” but its members further divided the straight population into two different groups: those who would reject their sexual advances, and those who would accept them. A man was “trade,” according to one fairy, if he “would stand to have ‘queer’ persons fool around [with] him in any way, shape or manner.”<sup>37</sup> Even among “trade,” gay men realized that some men would participate more actively than others in sexual encounters. Once they had confirmed a straight sailor’s sexual availability, gay men who were so inclined felt free to indicate their own interests, even though the sailor clearly set the limits. Most gay men were said to prefer men who were strictly “straight and [would] not reciprocate in any way,” but at least one fairy, as a decoy recorded, “wanted to kiss me and love me [and] . . . insisted and begged for it.”<sup>38</sup> The etymology of the term, which was widely used by gay men in the United States from the turn of the century until the 1960s, is unclear, but “trade” accurately described a common pattern of interaction between gay men and their straight sexual partners. In Newport, a gay man might take a sailor to a show or to dinner, offer him small gifts, or provide him with a place to stay when he was on overnight leave; in exchange, the sailor allowed his host to have sex with him that night, within whatever limits the sailor cared to set. The exchange was not always so elaborate: the navy’s detectives reported several instances of gay men meeting and sexually servicing numerous sailors at the Y.M.C.A. in a single evening. Men who were “trade” normally did not expect or demand direct payment for their services, although gay men did sometimes lend their partners small amounts of money without expecting it to be returned, and they used “trade” to refer to some civilians who, in contrast to the sailors, paid *them* for sexual services. “Trade” normally referred to straight-identified men who played the “masculine” role in sexual encounters solicited by “queers.”<sup>39</sup>

The boundary separating trade from the rest of men was easy to cross. As we have seen, there were locations in Newport, such as the Y.M.C.A., a bridge, and sections of Bellevue Avenue, where straight men knew they could present themselves in order to be solicited. One decoy testified that to infiltrate the gang he merely sat with its members in the Y.M.C.A. lobby one evening. As the decoy had already been in Newport for some time, presumably without expressing any interest in the gang, a gang member named Kreisberg said

he was surprised to see me in such company. I finally told him that I belonged to the gang and very soon after that Kreisberg . . . said ‘So we can consider you trade?’ I replied

that he could. Very soon Kreisberg requested that I remove my gloves as he, Kreisberg, wanted to hold my hands. Kreisberg acknowledged that he was abnormal and wanted to spend the night with me.<sup>40</sup>

Almost all straight sailors agreed that the effeminate members of the gang should be labelled "queer," but they disagreed about the sexual character of a straight man who accepted the sexual advances of a queer. Many straight men accepted it as a matter of course that young recruits would accept the sexual solicitations of the perverts. "It was a shame to let these kids come in and run in to that kind of stuff," remarked one decoy; but his remarks indicate he did not think a boy was "queer" just because he let a queer have sex with him.<sup>41</sup> The nonchalance with which many sailors regarded such sexual encounters was strikingly revealed by the ways in which they defined "queers" to the court of inquiry. Most pogues defined themselves as "men who like to be browned," but straight men casually defined pogues as "[people] *that you can brown*" and as men who "offered themselves in the same manner which women do."<sup>42</sup> Both remarks imply that "normal" men could take advantage of the pogues' availability without questioning their own identities as "straight;" the fact that the sailors made such potentially incriminating statements before the naval court indicates that this was an assumption they fully expected the board to share (as in fact it did). That lonesome men could unreservedly take advantage of a fairy's availability is perhaps also the implication, no matter how veiled in humor, of the remark made by a sailor stationed at the Melville coaling station near Newport: "it was common talk around that the Navy Department was getting good. They were sending a couple of 'fairies' up there for the 'sailors in Siberia.' As we used to call ourselves. . . meaning that we were all alone."<sup>43</sup> The strongest evidence of the social acceptability of trade was that the enlisted men who served as decoys volunteered to take on the role of trade for the purpose of infiltrating the gang, but were never even asked to consider assuming the role of queer. Becoming trade, unlike becoming a queer, posed no threat to the decoys' self-image or social status.

While many straight men took the sexual advances of gay men in stride, most engaged in certain ritual behavior designed to reinforce the distinction between themselves and the "queers." Most importantly, they played only the "masculine" sex role in their encounters with gay men — or at least claimed that they did — and observed the norms of masculinity in their own demeanor. They also ridiculed gay men and sometimes beat them up after sexual encounters in order to distance themselves from them. Other men, who feared it brought their manhood into question simply to be approached by a "pervert," were even more likely to attack gay men. Gang members recognized that they had to be careful about whom they approached: some men might respond violently to the mere suggestion of a sexual encounter, and others to the fact of its consummation. They all knew friends who had received severe beatings upon approaching the wrong man.<sup>44</sup> The more militant of the queers even played on straight men's fears in order to taunt them. One of the queers at the Melville coaling station "made a remark that 'half the world is queer and the other half trade,' " recalled a straight sailor, who then described the harassment the queer suffered in retribution.<sup>45</sup>

It is now impossible to determine how many straight sailors had such sexual experiences with the queers, although Alfred Kinsey's research suggests the number might have been large. Kinsey found that 37% of the men he interviewed in the 1930s and 1940s had engaged in some homosexual activity, and that a quarter of them had had "more than incidental homosexual experience or reactions" for at least three years between the ages 16 and 55, even though only 4% were exclusively homosexual throughout their lives.<sup>46</sup> Whatever the precise figures at Newport, naval officials and queers alike believed that very many men were involved. Members of the court of

inquiry never challenged the veracity of the numerous reports given them of straight sailors having sex with the queers; their chief investigator informed them on the first day of testimony that one suspected pervert had felled “something like fifteen or twenty young recruits from the Naval Training Station” in a single night. As the investigation progressed, however, even the court of inquiry became concerned about the extent of homosexual activity uncovered. The chief investigator later claimed that the chairman of the first court had ordered him to curtail the investigation because “ ‘If your men [the decoys] do not knock off, they will hang the whole state of Rhode Island.’ ”<sup>47</sup>

While straight sailors disagreed about the boundaries between “friends,” “trade,” and “straights,” naval officials sought to distinguish the actively “perverted” from the merely complicit in their own way. As we have seen, they were aware of the number of sailors whom engaged in occasional homosexual activity at Newport. But they never considered prosecuting the many sailors who they fully realized were being serviced by the fairies each year, because they did not believe that the sailors’ willingness to allow such acts “to be performed upon them” in any way implicated their sexual character as homosexual.

Instead, the navy chose to prosecute only those men who were intimately involved in the gang, or otherwise demonstrated (as the navy tried to prove in court) that homosexual desire was a persistent, constituent element of their personalities, whether or not it manifested itself in effeminate behavior. The fact that naval and civilian authorities could prosecute men only for the commission of specific acts of sodomy should not be construed to mean that they viewed homosexuality simply as an act rather than as a condition characteristic of certain individuals; the whole organization of their investigation suggests otherwise. At the January 1920 trial of Rev. Kent the prosecution contended that

we may offer evidence of other occurrences similar to the ones the indictment is based on for the purpose of proving the disposition on the part of this man. I submit that it is a well known principle of evidence that in a crime of this nature where disposition, inclination, is an element, that we are not confined to the specific conduct which we have complained of in the indictment, that the other incidents are gone into for their corroborative value as to intent, as to disposition, inclination.<sup>48</sup>

As the investigation and trials proceeded, however, the men prosecuted by the navy made it increasingly difficult for the navy to maintain standards which categorized certain men as “straight” even though they had engaged in homosexual acts with the defendants. This was doubtless particularly troubling to the navy because, while its opponents focused their questions on the character of the decoys in particular, by doing so they implicitly questioned the character of *any* man who had sex with a “pervert.” The decoys testified that they had submitted to the queers’ sexual advances only in order to rid the navy of their presence, and the navy, initially at least, guaranteed their legal immunity. But the defendants readily charged that the decoys themselves were tainted by homosexual interest and had taken abnormal pleasure in their work. Rev. Kent’s lawyers were particularly forceful in questioning the character of any man who would volunteer to work as a decoy. As one decoy after another helplessly answered each question with a quiescent “Yes, sir,” the lawyers pressed them:

Q. You volunteered for this work?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. You knew what kind of work it was before you volunteered, didn’t you?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. You knew it involved sucking and that sort of thing, didn’t you?

A. I knew that we had to deal with that, yes, sir.

- Q. You knew it included sodomy and that sort of thing, didn't you?  
 A. Yes, sir.  
 Q. And you were quite willing to get into that sort of work?  
 A. I was willing to do it, yes, sir.  
 Q. And so willing that you volunteered for it, is that right?  
 A. Yes, sir. I volunteered for it, yes, sir.  
 Q. You knew it included bugging fellows, didn't you?<sup>49</sup>

Such questions about the decoys' character were reinforced when members of the gang claimed that the decoys had sometimes taken the initiative in sexual encounters.

The defendants raised questions about the character not only of men who volunteered to be decoys but of any man capable of responding to the advances of a pervert. Such questions forced the navy to reexamine its standards for distinguishing "straight" from "perverted" sexuality. At the second naval court of inquiry, even the navy's judge advocate asked the men about how much sexual pleasure they had experienced during their contacts with the suspects. As the boundaries distinguishing acceptable from perverted sexual response began to crumble, the decoys recognized their vulnerability and tried to protect themselves. Some simply refused to answer any further questions about the sexual encounters they had described in graphic detail to the first court. One decoy protested that he had never responded to a pervert's advances: "I am a man. . . The thing was so horrible in my sight that naturally I could not become passionate and there was no erection," but was immediately asked, "Weren't [the other decoys] men, too?" Another, less fortunate decoy had to plead:

Of course, a great deal of that was involuntary inasmuch as a man placing his hand on my penis would cause an erection and subsequent emission. That was uncontrollable on my part. . . .  
 Probably I would have had it [the emission] when I got back in bed anyway. . . . It is a physiological fact.<sup>50</sup>

But if a decoy could be suspected of perversion simply because he had a certain physiological response to a pervert's sexual advances, then the character of countless other sailors came under question. Many more men than the inner circle of queers and husbands would have to be investigated. In 1920, the navy was unprepared to take that step. The decision of the Dunn Inquiry to condemn the original investigation and the navy's decision to offer clemency to some of the men imprisoned as a result of it may be interpreted, in part, as a quiet retreat from that prospect.

### Christian Brotherhood under Suspicion

The navy investigation revealed that even when two men engaged in what was generally regarded as a "sexual" relationship, whether both or only one of them should be labelled a sexual pervert was still disputed. But the investigation raised even more fundamental questions — concerning the definition of a "sexual relationship" itself — when it reached beyond the largely working-class milieu of the military to label a prominent local Episcopal clergyman, Samuel Kent, and a Y.M.C.A. volunteer and churchman, Arthur Leslie Green, as homosexual. When Kent fled the city, the navy tracked him down and brought him to trial on sodomy charges. Two courts acquitted him despite the fact that five decoys claimed to have had sex with him, because the denials of the respected minister and of the numerous clergymen and educators who defended him seemed more credible. Soon after Kent's second acquittal in early 1920, the Bishop of Rhode Island and the Newport Ministerial Union went on the offensive against the navy. The clergymen charged that the navy had used immoral methods in its investigation, by instructing young enlisted men "in the details of a nameless vice" and sending them into the community to entrap innocent citizens. They wrote

letters of protest to the Secretary of the Navy and the President, condemned the investigation in the press, and forced the navy to convene a second court of inquiry into the methods used in the first inquiry. When it exculpated senior naval officials and failed to endorse all of the ministers' criticisms, the ministers persuaded the Republican-controlled Senate Naval Affairs Committee to undertake its own investigation, which eventually endorsed all of the ministers' charges.<sup>51</sup>

The simple fact that one of their own had been attacked did not provoke the fervor of the ministers' response to the navy investigation, nor did they oppose the investigation simply because of its "immoral" methods. Close examination of the navy's allegations and of the ministers' countercharges suggests that the ministers feared that the navy's charges against the two churchmen threatened to implicate them all. Both Green and Kent were highly regarded local churchmen; Kent had been asked to preach weekly during Lent, had received praise for his work at the Naval Hospital during the influenza epidemic, and at the time of the investigation was expected to be named Superintendent of a planned Seaman's Church Institute.<sup>52</sup> Their behavior had not differed markedly from that of the many other men who ministered to the needs of the thousands of boys brought to Newport by the war. When the Navy charged that Kent's and Green's behavior and motives were perverted, many ministers feared that they could also be accused of perversion, and, more broadly, that the inquiry had questioned the ideology of nonsexual Christian brotherhood that had heretofore explained their devotion to other men. The confrontation between the two groups represented fundamentally a dispute over the norms for masculine gender behavior and over the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality in the relations of men.

The investigation threatened Newport's ministers precisely because it repudiated those conventions that had justified and institutionalized a mode of behavior for men of the cloth or of the upper class that would have been perceived as effeminate in other men. The ministers' perception of this threat is reflected in their repeated criticism of the navy operatives' claim that they could detect perverts by their "looks and actions."<sup>53</sup> Almost all sailors and townspeople, as we have seen, endorsed this claim, but it put the ministers as a group in an extremely awkward position, for the major sign of a man's perversion according to most sailors was his being effeminate. As the ministers' consternation indicated, there was no single norm for masculine behavior at Newport; many forms of behavior considered effeminate on the part of working-class men were regarded as appropriate to the status of upper-class men or to the ministerial duties of the clergy. Perhaps if the navy had accused only working-class sailors, among whom "effeminacy" was more clearly deviant from group norms, of perversion, the ministers might have been content to let this claim stand. But when the naval inquiry also identified churchmen associated with such an upper-class institution as the Episcopal Church of Newport as perverted because of their perceived effeminacy, it challenged the norms which had heretofore shielded men of their background from such suspicions.

One witness tried to defend Kent's "peculiar" behavior on the basis of the conventional norms when he contended that "I don't know whether you would call it abnormal. He was a minister."<sup>54</sup> But the navy refused to accept this as a defense, and witnesses repeatedly described Kent and Green to the court as "peculiar," "sissyfied," and "effeminate." During his daily visits to patients at the hospital, according to a witness named Brunelle, Green held the patients' hands and "didn't talk like a man — he talk[ed] like a woman to me."<sup>55</sup> Since there is no evidence that Green had a high-pitched or otherwise "effeminate" *voice*, Brunelle probably meant Green addressed men with greater affection than he expected of a man. But all ministers visited with patients and spoke quiet, healing words to them; their position as ministers had permitted them to engage in such conventionally "feminine" behavior. When the navy and ordinary

sailors labelled this behavior “effeminate” in the case of Green and Kent, and further claimed that such effeminacy was a sign of sexual perversion, they challenged the legitimacy of many Christian social workers’ behavior.

Even more disturbing to the ministers was the navy’s charge that perverted sexual interest had motivated Kent’s and Green’s ministry to young enlisted men. During the war, Newport’s clergymen had done all they could to minister to the needs of the thousands of boys brought to the Naval Training Station. They believed they had acted in the spirit of Christian brotherhood, but the naval inquiry seemed to suggest that less lofty motives were at work. Ministers had loaned sailors money, but during the inquiry they heard Green accused of buying sex. They had visited boys in the hospital and now heard witnesses insinuate that this was abnormal: “I don’t know what [Kent’s] duties were, but he was always talking to some boys. It seems though he would have special boys to talk to. He would go to certain fellows [patients] and probably spend the afternoon with them.”<sup>56</sup> They had given boys drives and taken them out to dinner and to the theater, and now heard Kent accused of lavishing such favors on young men in order to further his salacious purposes. They had opened their homes to the young enlisted men but now heard Kent accused of inviting boys home in order to seduce them.<sup>57</sup> When one witness at the first court of inquiry tried to argue that Green’s work at the Y.M.C.A. was inspired by purely “charitable” motives, the court repudiated his interpretation and questioned the motives of *any* man who engaged in such work:

Do you think a normal active man would peddle stamps and paper around a Hospital and at the Y.M.C.A.? . . .

Do you think that a man who had no interest in young boys would voluntarily offer his services and work in the Y.M.C.A. where he is constantly associated with young boys?<sup>58</sup>

To question the motives of Green in this manner was to raise questions about the motives of all the men who had worked with him during the war, and this posed personal and professional dangers of the greatest magnitude. Rev. Deming of the Ministerial Union reported that numerous ministers shared the fear of one man who was “frantic after all he had done for the Navy:”

When this thing [the investigation] occurred, it threw some of my personal friends into a panic. For they knew that in the course of their work they had had relations with boys in various ways; they had been alone with them in some cases. As one boy [a friend] said, frequently boys had slept in the room with him. But he had never thought of the impropriety of sleeping alone with a navy boy. He thought probably he would be accused.<sup>59</sup>

The ministers sought to defend Kent – and themselves – from the navy’s insinuations by reaffirming the cultural interpretation of ministerial behavior as Christian and praiseworthy. While they denied the navy’s charge that Kent had had genital contact with sailors, they did not deny his devotion to young men, for to have done so would have implicitly conceded the navy’s interpretation of such behavior as salacious – and thus have left all ministers who had demonstrated similar devotion open to suspicion. Rather than deny the government’s claim that Kent had sought intimate relationships with sailors and devoted unusual attention to them, therefore, Kent and his supporters depicted such behavior as an honorable part of the man’s ministry. Indeed, demonstrating just how much attention Kent had lavished on boys became as central to the strategy of the ministers as it was to that of the government, but the ministers offered a radically different interpretation of it. Their preoccupation with validating ministerial behavior turned Kent’s trial and the second naval inquiry into an implicit public debate over the cultural definition of the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality in the relations of men. The navy had defined Kent’s behavior as

sexual and perverted; the ministers sought to reaffirm that it was brotherly and Christian.

Kent himself interpreted his relations with sailors as “[t]rying to be friends with them, urging them to come to my quarters and see me if they wanted to, telling them – I think, perhaps, I can best express it by saying ‘Big Brotherhood.’” He quoted a letter from another minister commending his “brotherly assistance” during the influenza epidemic, and he pointed out that the Episcopal War Commission provided him with funds with which to take servicemen to the theater “at least once a week” and to maintain his automobile in order to give boys drives “and get acquainted with them.”<sup>60</sup> He described in detail his efforts to minister to the men who had testified against him, explaining that he had offered them counsel, a place to sleep, and other services just as he had to hundreds of other enlisted men. But he denied that any genital contact had taken place, and in some cases claimed he had broken off the relationships when he realized that the *decoys* wanted sexual contact.

Kent’s lawyers produced a succession of defense witnesses – respected clergymen, educators, and businesspeople who had known Kent at every stage of his career – to testify to his obvious affection for boys, even though by emphasizing this aspect of his character they risked substantiating the navy’s case. The main point of their testimony was that Kent was devoted to boys and young men and had demonstrated such talent in working with them that they had encouraged him to focus his ministry on them. Kent’s lawyers prompted a former employer from Kent’s hometown of Lynn, Massachusetts, to recall that Kent, a “friend of [his] family, and especially [his] sons and sons’ associates,” had “[taken] charge of twelve or fourteen boys [from Lynn] and [taken] them down to Sebago Lake,” where they camped for several weeks “under his charge.”<sup>61</sup> The Bishop of Pennsylvania recalled that, as Kent’s teacher at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge in 1908, he had asked Kent to help him develop a ministry to Harvard men, “because [Kent] seemed peculiarly fitted for it in temperament and in experience, and in general knowledge of how to approach young men and influence them for good.”<sup>62</sup> The rector of the Holy Church of the Communion in New York, where Kent had served as assistant minister from 1913-1915, testified that he had also assigned Kent to youth work because of his obvious talents and called Kent “a perfectly splendid manly man among men and boys.”<sup>63</sup> The sentiments of Kent’s character witnesses were perhaps best summarized by a judge who sat on the Episcopal War Commission which employed Kent. The judge assured the court that Kent’s reputation was “excellent; I think he was looked upon as an earnest Christian man [who] was much interested in young men.”<sup>64</sup>

The extent to which Kent’s supporters were willing to interpret his intimacy with young men as brotherly rather than sexual is perhaps best illustrated by the effort of Kent’s defense lawyer to show how Kent’s inviting a decoy named Charles Zipf to sleep with him was only another aspect of his ministering to the boy’s needs. Hadn’t the decoy told Kent he was “lonely” and had no place to sleep that night, the defense attorney pressed Zipf in cross-examination, before Kent invited him to spend the night in his parish house? And after Kent had set up a cot for Zipf in the living room, hadn’t Zipf told Kent that he was “cold” before Kent pulled back the covers and invited him to join him in his bed?<sup>65</sup> The attorney counted on the presumption of Christian brotherhood to protect the minister’s behavior from the suspicion of homosexual perversion, even though the same evidence would have seemed irrefutably incriminating in the case of another man.

Kent’s defense strategy worked. Arguments based on assumptions about ministerial conduct persuaded the jury to acquit Kent of the government’s charges. But Newport’s ministers launched their campaign against the navy probe as soon as Kent was acquitted

because they recognized that it had succeeded in putting their devotion to men under suspicion. It had raised questions about the cultural boundaries distinguishing homosexuality from homosociality that the ministers were determined to lay to rest.

But while it is evident that Newport's ministers feared the consequences of the investigation for their public reputations, two of their charges against the navy suggest that they may also have feared that its allegations contained some element of truth. The charges reflect the difference between the ministers' and the navy's understanding of sexuality and human sinfulness, but the very difference may have made the navy's accusations seem plausible in a way that the navy could not have foreseen. First, the ministers condemned the navy for having instructed young enlisted men – the decoys – “in the details of a nameless vice,” and having ordered them to use that knowledge. The naval authorities had been willing to let their agents engage in sexual acts with the “queers” because they were primarily concerned about people manifesting a homosexual disposition rather than those engaging occasionally in homosexual acts. The navy asserted that the decoys' investigative purpose rendered them immune from criminal prosecution even though they had committed illegal sexual acts. But the ministers viewed the decoys' culpability as “a moral question . . . not a technical question at all;” when the decoys had sex with other men, they had “scars placed on their souls,” because, inescapably, “having immoral relations with men is an immoral act.”<sup>66</sup> The sin was in the act, not the motive or the disposition. In addition, the ministers charged that the navy had directed the decoys to entrap designated individuals and that no one, no matter how innocent, could avoid entrapment by a skillful decoy. According to Bishop Perry, the decoys operated by putting men “into compromising positions, where they might be suspected of guilt, [even though they were] guiltless persons.” Anyone could be entrapped because an “innocent advance might be made by the person operated upon and he might be ensnared against his will.”<sup>67</sup> Implicitly, any clergyman could have done what Kent was accused of doing. Anyone's defenses could fall.

The ministers' preoccupation with the moral significance of genital sexual activity and their fear that anyone could be entrapped may reflect the continued saliency for them of the Christian precept that *all* people, including the clergy, were sinners subject to a variety of sexual temptations, including those of homosexual desire.<sup>68</sup> According to this tradition, Christians had to resist homosexual temptations, as they resisted others, but simply to desire a homosexual liaison was neither a singular failing nor an indication of perverted character. The fact that the ministers never clearly elucidated this perspective and were forced increasingly to use the navy's own terms while contesting the navy's conclusions may reflect both the ministers' uncertainty about it and their recognition that such a perspective was no longer shared by the public whose opinion they wished to influence.

In any case, making the commission of specified physical acts the distinguishing characteristic of a moral pervert made it definitionally impossible to interpret the ministers' relationships with sailors – no matter how intimate and emotionally moving – as having a “sexual” element, so long as they involved no such acts. Defining the sexual element in men's relationships in this narrow manner enabled the ministers to develop a bipartate defense of Kent which simultaneously denied he had had sexual relationships with other men and yet celebrated his profound emotional devotion to them. It legitimized (nonphysical) intimacy between men by precluding the possibility that such intimacy could be defined as sexual. Reaffirming the boundaries between Christian brotherhood and perverted sexuality in this manner was a central objective of the ministers' very public debate with the navy. But it may also have been of private significance to churchmen forced by the navy investigation to reflect on the nature of their brotherhood with other men.

## Conclusion

The richly textured evidence provided by the Newport controversy makes it possible to reexamine certain tenets of recent work in the history of sexuality, especially the history interactionism and the labelling theory of deviance, has argued that the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a major reconceptualization of homosexuality. Before the last century, homosexual-as-person; they regarded homosexuality as simply another form of sinful behavior in which anyone might choose to engage. The turn of the century witnessed the “invention of the homosexual,” that is, the new determination that homosexual desire was limited to certain identifiable individuals for whom it was an involuntary sexual orientation of some biological or psychological origin. The most prominent advocates of this thesis have argued that the medical discourse on homosexuality that emerged in the late nineteenth century played the determinative role in this process, by creating and popularizing this new model of homosexual behavior (which, in order to emphasize the centrality of medical discourse in its development, they have termed the “medical model” of homosexuality). It was on the basis of the new medical models, they argue, that homosexually-active individuals came to be labelled in popular culture — and to assume an identity — as sexual deviants different in nature from other people, rather than as sinners whose sinful nature was the common lot of humanity.<sup>69</sup>

The Newport evidence indicates that the role of medical discourse has been exaggerated in this thesis, and it also suggests how we might begin to refine our analysis of the relationship between homosexual behavior and identity. First, and most clearly, the Newport evidence indicates that medical discourse still played little or no role in the shaping of working-class homosexual identities and categories by World War I, more than thirty years after the discourse had begun. There would be no logical reason to expect that discussions carried on in elite journals whose distribution was limited to members of the medical and legal professions would have had any immediate effect on the larger culture, particularly the working class. In the Newport evidence, only one fairy even mentioned the favored medical term “invert,” using it as a synonym for the already existing and widely-recognized popular term “queer.” Moreover, while “invert” was commonly used in the medical literature there is no reason to assume that it originated there, and the Newport witness specified that he had first heard it in theater circles and not through reading any “literature.” The culture of the sexual underground, always in a complex relationship with the dominant culture, played a more important role in the shaping and sustaining of sexual identities.

More remarkably, medical discourse appears to have had as little influence on the military hierarchy as on the people of Newport.<sup>70</sup> Throughout the two years of navy investigations related to Newport, which involved the highest naval officials, not a single medical expert was invited to present the medical perspective on the issues at stake. The only member of the original board of inquiry who even alluded to the published literature (and this on only one occasion during the Foster hearings, and once more at the second inquiry) was Dr. E.M. Hudson, the welfare officer at the naval hospital and one of the decoys’ supervisors. Hudson played a prominent role in the original investigation not because of his medical expertise, but because it was the flagrantly displayed (and normally tolerated) effeminacy and homosexuality of hospital staff and patients that first made naval officials consider undertaking an investigation. As the decoys’ supervisor, Hudson drew on his training in fingerprinting and detective work considerably more than his medical background. Only after he became concerned that the decoys might be held legally culpable for their homosexual activity did he “read several medical books on the subject and read everything that

I could find out as to what legal decisions there were on these cases."<sup>71</sup> But he never became very familiar with the medical discourse on sexual nonconformity; after his reading he still thought that the term "invert," which had first appeared in U.S. medical journals almost 40 years earlier, was "practically a new term," less than two years old.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, Hudson only accepted those aspects of the medical analysis of homosexuality that confirmed the common beliefs about "queers" he already shared with other, non-medical naval officials. Thus he accepted as authoritative the distinction that medical writers drew between "congenital pervers" (called "queers" in common parlance) and "normal people submitting to acts of perversion, as a great many normal people do, [who] do not become pervers themselves," such as men isolated from women at a military base. He accepted this "scientific" distinction because it only confirmed what he and other naval officials already believed: that many sailors had sex with the queers without being "queer" themselves. But when the medical literature differed from the assumptions he shared with most navy men, he ignored it. Rather than adopting the medical viewpoint that homosexuals were biological anomalies who should be treated medically rather than willful criminals who should be deterred from homosexuality by severe legal penalties, for instance, he agreed with his colleagues that "these conditions existed and should be eradicated and the men guilty of offenses should be rounded up and punished."<sup>75</sup> In the course of 109 days of hearings, Dr. Hudson referred to medical authorities only twice, and then only when they confirmed the assumptions of popular culture.

It thus appears more plausible to describe the medical discourse as a "reverse discourse," to use Michel Foucault's term, rather than as the central force in the creation of new sexual categories around which individuals shaped their personal identities. Rather than creating such categories as "the invert" and "the homosexual," the turn-of-the-century medical investigators whom Hudson read were trying to describe, classify, and explain a preexisting sexual underground whose outlines they only vaguely perceived. Their scientific categories largely reproduced those of popular culture, with "queers" becoming "inverts" in medical parlance but retaining the characteristic cross-gender behavior already attributed to them in popular culture. Doctors developed generalizations about homosexuals based on their idiosyncratic observations of particular individuals and admitted from the beginning that they were responding to the existence of communities of such people whose mysterious behavior and social organization they wished to explore. As one of the first American medical commentators observed in 1889, in explaining the need to study sexual perversion, "[t]here is in every community of any size a colony of male sexual pervers; they are usually known to each other, and are likely to congregate together."<sup>74</sup> By the time of the Newport investigation, medical researchers had developed an elaborate system of sexual classification and numerous explanations for individual cases of homosexuality, but they still had little comprehension of the complex social and cultural structure of gay life. One of the country's most prominent and best-informed medical investigators asserted in 1916 that

Chicago has not developed a euphemism yet for these male pervers. In New York they are known as 'fairies' and wear a red necktie (inverts are generally said to prefer green). In Philadelphia they are known as 'Brownies.'<sup>75</sup>

That gay men in a single city might use the terms "fairy" and "Brownie" (or "pogue") to refer to two different kinds of "inverts" had not even occurred to him.

The Newport evidence helps put the significance of the medical discourse in perspective; it also offers new insights into the relationship between homosexual behavior and identity. Recent studies which have established the need to distinguish between homosexual behavior (presumably a transhistorically evident phenomenon)

and the historically specific concept of homosexual identity have tended to focus on the evolution of people whose *primary* personal and political “ethnic” identification is as gay, and who have organized a multidimensional way of life on the basis of their homosexuality. The high visibility of such people in contemporary Western societies and their growing political significance make analysis of the historical development of their community of particular scholarly interest and importance.<sup>76</sup> But the Newport evidence indicates that we need to begin paying more attention to *other* social forms of homosexuality – other ways in which homosexual relations have been organized and understood, differentiated, named, and left deliberately unnamed. We need to specify the *particularity* of various modes of homosexual behavior and the relationships between those modes and particular configurations of sexual identity.

For even when we find evidence that a culture has labelled people who were homosexually active as sexually deviant, we should not assume *a priori* that their homosexual activity was the determinative criterion in the labelling process. As in Newport, where many men engaged in certain kinds of homosexual behavior yet continued to be regarded as “normal,” the assumption of particular sexual roles and deviance from gender norms may have been more important than the coincidence of male or female sexual partners in the classification of sexual character. “Fairies,” “pogues,” “husbands,” and “trade” might all be labelled “homosexuals” in our own time, but they were labelled – and understood themselves – as fundamentally different kinds of people in WWI-era Newport. They all engaged in what we would define as homosexual behavior, but they and the people who observed them were more careful than we to draw distinctions between different modes of such behavior. To classify their behavior and character using the simple polarities of “homosexual” and “heterosexual” would be to misunderstand the complexity of their sexual system. Indeed, the very terms “homosexual behavior” and “identity,” because of their tendency to conflate phenomena that other cultures may have regarded as quite distinct, appear to be insufficiently precise to denote the variety of social forms of sexuality we wish to analyze.<sup>77</sup>

The problems that arise when different forms of homosexual activity and identity are conflated are evidenced in the current debate over the consequences of the development of a medical model of homosexuality. Recent studies, especially in lesbian history, have argued that the creation and stigmatization of the public image of the homosexual at the turn of the century served to restrict the possibilities for intimacy between all women and all men, by making it possible to associate such intimacy with the despised social category of the homosexual. This thesis rightly observes that the definition of deviance serves to establish behavioral norms for everyone, not just for the deviant. But it overlooks the corollary of this observation, that the definition of deviance serves to legitimize some social relations even as it stigmatizes others; and it assumes that the turn-of-the-century definition of “sexual inversion” codified the same configuration of sexual and gender phenomena which “homosexuality” does today. But many early twentieth-century romantic friendships between women, for instance, appear to have been unaffected by the development of a public lesbian persona, in part because that image characterized the lesbian primarily as a “mannish woman,” which had the effect of excluding from its stigmatizing purview all conventionally feminine women, no matter how intimate their friendships.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, even though Newport residents were familiar with a particular image of “queers,” they did not classify ministers who were intimate as Christian brothers with other men or sailors who had sex with effeminate men as “queer,” because the character of neither group fully corresponded to the public’s image of what a queer should be like. Moreover, both the sailors and clergymen defined sexual behavior and perversion

in ways which excluded their own behavior from being labelled as either, no matter how suspect their behavior might seem from another perspective. The sailors legitimized their physical sexual contact with the queers by restricting the form of that contact and by proscribing effeminate behavior and emotional intimacy with their partners. The ministers interpreted the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable male relations in precisely the opposite manner: for they defended their apparent effeminacy and emotional intimacy with men by defining sexuality as physical contact, which their moral code proscribed.

At the heart of the controversy provoked and revealed by the Newport investigation was a confrontation between several such definitional systems, a series of disputes over the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality in the relations of men and over the standards by which their masculinity would be judged. The investigation became controversial when it verged on suggesting that the homosocial world of the navy and the relationships between sailors and their Christian brothers in the Newport ministry were permeated by homosexual desire. Newport's ministers and leading citizens, the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, and to some extent even the navy itself repudiated the Newport inquiry because they found such a suggestion intolerable. Although numerous cultural interpretations of sexuality were allowed to confront each other at the inquiry, ultimately certain cultural boundaries had to be reaffirmed in order to protect certain relations as "nonsexual," even as the sexual nature of others was declared and condemned. The Newport evidence reveals much about the social organization and self-understanding of men who identified themselves as "queer." But it also provides a remarkable illustration of the social nature of the boundaries established between the "sexual" and the "nonsexual" in human relations and reminds us that cultural struggles over the demarcation of those boundaries are a central aspect of the history of sexuality.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. This is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the conference, "Among Men, Among Women: Sociological and Historical Recognition of Homosocial Arrangements," held at the University of Amsterdam, June 22-26, 1983. I am grateful to Allan Bérubé, John Boswell, Nancy Cott, Steven Dubin, James Schultz, Anthony Stellato, James Taylor, and my colleagues at the Amsterdam conference for their comments on earlier versions.
2. The Newport investigation was brought to the attention of historians by Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Ordeal* (Boston, 1954), 41, 46-47, 96-97, and Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: A Documentary* (New York, 1976), 579n. Katz reprinted the Senate report in *Government Versus Homosexuals* (New York, 1975), a volume in the Arno Press series on homosexuality he edited. A useful narrative account of the naval investigation is provided by Lawrence R. Murphy, "Cleaning Up Newport: The U.S. Navy's Prosecution of Homosexuals After World War I," *Journal of American Culture* 7 (Fall, 1984): 57-64.
3. Murphy J. Foster presided over the first Court of Inquiry, which began its work in Newport on March 13, 1919 and heard 406 pages of testimony in the course of 23 days (its records are hereafter cited as *Foster Testimony*). The second court of inquiry, convened in 1920 "to inquire into the methods employed . . . in the investigation of moral and other conditions existing in the Naval Service; [and] to ascertain and inquire into the scope of and authority for said investigation."

was presided over by Rear Admiral Herbert O. Dunn and heard 2500 pages of testimony in the course of 86 days (hereinafter cited as *Dunn Testimony*). The second trial of Rev. Kent, *U.S. v. Samuel Neal Kent*, heard in Rhode Island District Court in Providence beginning January 20, 1920, heard 532 pages of evidence (hereinafter cited as *Kent Trial*). The records are held at the National Archives, Modern Military Field Branch, Suitland, Maryland, R.G. 125.

4. I have used “gay” in this essay to refer to men who identified themselves as sexually different from other men – and who labelled themselves and were labelled by others as “queer” – because of their assumption of “feminine” sexual and other social roles. As I explain below, not all men who were homosexually active labelled themselves in this manner, including men, known as “husbands,” who were involved in long-term homosexual relationships but nonetheless maintained a masculine identity.

5. *Foster Testimony*, Ervin Arnold, 5; F.T. Brittain, 12, Thomas Brunelle, 21; *Dunn Testimony*, Albert Viehl, 307; Dudley Marriott, 1737.

6. Frederick Hoage, using a somewhat different construction than most, referred to them as “the inverted gang” (*Foster Testimony*, 255).

7. *Foster Testimony*, Arnold, 5; *Dunn Testimony*, Clyde Rudy, 1783. For a few of the many other comments by “straight” sailors on the presence of gay men at the Y.M.C.A., see *Dunn Testimony*, Claude McQuillin, 1759, and Preston Paul, 1836.

8. A man named Temple, for instance, had a room at the Y where he frequently took pick-ups (*Foster Testimony*, Brunelle, 207-8); on the role of the elevator operators, see William McCoy, 20, and Samuel Rogers, 61.

9. *Foster Testimony*, Arnold, 27; Frederick Hoage, 271; Harrison Rideout, 292.

10. *Ibid.*, Hoage, 267; Rogers, 50; Brunelle, 185.

11. *Ibid.*, Gregory A. Cunningham, 30; Arnold, 6; *Dunn Testimony*, John S. Tobin, 720-21.

12. For an elaboration of the conceptual distinction between “inversion” and “homosexuality” in the contemporary medical literature, see my article, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983): 114-46.

13. *Foster Testimony*, Rogers, 50-51.

14. E.g., an article which included the following caption beneath a photograph of Hughes dressed in women’s clothes: “This is Billy Hughes, Yeo. 2c. It’s a shame to break the news like that, but enough of the men who saw ‘Pinafore’ fell in love with Bill, without adding to their number. ‘Little Highesy,’ as he is affectionately known, dances like a Ziegfeld chorus girl. . . .” (“We Sail the Ocean Blue: ‘H.M.S. Pinafore’ as Produced by the Navy,” *Newport Recruit*, 6 [August 1918]: 9). See also, e.g., “Mayor Will Greet Navy Show Troupe: Official Welcome Arranged for ‘Jack and Beanstalk’ Boys,” which quoted an admiral saying, “ ‘It is a corker. I have never in my life seen a prettier ‘girl’ [a man] than ‘Princess Mary.’ She is the daintiest little thing I ever laid eyes on’ ” (*Providence Journal* [26 May 1919]: 9). I am grateful to Lawrence Murphy for supplying me with copies of these articles.

15. *Dunn Testimony*, John S. Tobin, 716; *Foster Testimony*, Charles Zipf, 377; confirmed by Hoage, 289, and Arnold (*Dunn Testimony*, 1405). The man who received the women’s clothes was the Billy Hughes mentioned in the newspaper article cited in the previous note. I am grateful to Allan Bérubé for informing me of the regularity with which female impersonators appeared in navy shows during and immediately following World War I.

16. *Ibid.*, Hoage called it a “faggot party” and “a general congregation of inverts” (267); Brunelle, who claimed to have attended the party for only 15 minutes, noted the presence of the sailors and fighters; he also said only one person was in drag, but mentioned at least two (194, 206); John E. McCormick observed the lovers (332).

17. For the straight sailors' nicknames, see *Foster Testimony*, William Nelson Gorham, 349. On the ubiquity of nicknames and the origins of some of them, see Hoage, 253, 271; Whitney Delmore Rosenszweig, 397.

18. *Dunn Testimony*, Hudson, 1663.

19. *Foster Testimony*, Rideout, 76-77.

20. *Ibid.*, Cunningham, 29. For other examples, see Wade Stuart Harvey, 366; and *Dunn Testimony*, Tobin, 715.

21. *Foster Testimony*, George Richard, 143; Hoage, 298.

22. *Ibid.*, Rideout, 69; see also Rogers, 63; Viehl, 175; Arnold, 3; and *passim*.

23. An investigator told the navy that one gay man had declined to make a date with him because “he did not like to ‘play with fire’ . . . [and] was afraid Chief Brugs would beat him up” (*Foster Testimony*, Arnold, 36); the same gay man told the court he had travelled to Providence with Brugs two weekends in a row and gone to shows with him (Rogers, 53-54). Speaking of another couple, Hoage admitted he had heard “that Hughes has travelled with Brunelle separately for two months or so” and that “they were lovers.” He added that “of course that does not indicate anything but friendship,” but that “naturally I would suspect that something else was taking place” (Hoage, 268).

24. *Ibid.*, Hoage, 313.

25. *Ibid.*, Arnold, 5.

26. *Ibid.*, Viehl, 175; Brunelle, 235; Rideout, 93. Hoage, when cross-examined by Rosenszweig, denied another witness's charge that he, Hoage, had *boasted* of browning Rosenszweig, but he did not deny the act itself – nor did Rosenszweig ask him to do so (p. 396).

27. *Ibid.*, Hoage, 271; Rogers, 131-36.

28. *Ibid.*, Rogers, 39-40; other evidence tends to confirm Rogers' contention that he had not known openly gay men or women before joining the navy. For other examples of the role of the war in introducing men to gays, see Brunelle, 211; and in the *Dunn Testimony*, Rudy, 1764. For extended discussions of the similar impact of military mobilization on many people's lives during World War II, see Allan Bérubé, “Marching to a Different Drummer,” in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York, 1983), 88-99; and John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago, 1983), 23-39.

29. *Foster Testimony*, Rideout, 78.

30. *Dunn Testimony*, E.M. Hudson questioning Bishop James De Wolf Perry, 609 (my emphasis).

31. *Ibid.*, Jeremiah Mahoney, 698.

32. *Ibid.*, Tobin, 717.

33. Witnesses who encountered gay men at the hospital or commented on the presence of homosexuals there included Gregory Cunningham, *Foster Testimony*, 29; Brunelle, 210; John McCormick, *Dunn Testimony*, 1780; and Paul, 1841. Paul also described some of the open homosexual joking engaged in by patients, *Foster Testimony*, 393-94.

34. *Foster Testimony*, Hervey, 366; Johnson, 153, 155, 165, 167; Smith, 221.

35. *Ibid.*, Johnson, 153; Smith, 169.

36. *Ibid.*, Smith, 171.

37. *Ibid.*, Hoage, 272. Hoage added that “[t]rade is a word that is only used among people temperamental [i.e., gay],” although this does not appear to have been entirely the case.

38. *Ibid.*, Hoage, 269, 314; Rudy, 14. The decoy further noted that, despite the fairy’s pleas, “I insisted that he do his work below my chest.”

39. Frederick Hoage provided an example of this pattern when he described how a gay civilian had taken him to a show and dinner, let him stay in his room, and then “attempted to do what they call ‘browning.’” But he devoted much of his testimony to *denying* that his “tak[ing] boys to dinner and to a show,” offering to share his bed with sailors who had nowhere else to stay, and giving them small gifts and loans had the sexual implications that the court obviously suspected (*Foster Testimony*, Hoage, 261, 256, 262, 281-82). For other examples of solicitation patterns, see Maurice Kreisberg, 12; Arnold, 26; *Dunn Testimony*, Paul, 1843. Edward Stevenson described the “trade” involved in military prostitution in *The Intersexes: A History of Semisexualism* (privately printed, 1908), 214. For an early sociological description of “trade,” see Albert Reiss, Jr., “The Social Integration of Queers and Peers,” *Social Problems* 9 (1961): 102-20. It is possible that “trade” originally took on sexual connotations because of the frequency with which boys and young men who were engaged in “street trades” such as newspaper hawking earned extra money by having sex with older men (see Helen Kitchen Branson, “‘Street Trades’ and Their Sex Knowledge,” *Sexology* (April 1949): 568-71).

40. *Foster Testimony*, Rudy, 13.

41. *Dunn Testimony*, Paul, 1836; see also, e.g., Mayor Mahoney’s comments, 703.

42. *Foster Testimony*, James Daniel Chase, 119 (my emphasis); Zipf, 375.

43. *Ibid.*, Walter F. Smith, 169.

44. See, e.g., the accounts of Hoage, *Foster Testimony*, 271-72, and Rideout, 87.

45. *Foster Testimony*, Smith, 169.

46. Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, and Clyde Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, 1948), 650-51.

47. *Foster Testimony*, Arnold, 6; *Dunn Testimony*, Arnold, 1495.

48. *Kent Trial*, 21.

49. *Ibid.*, defense attorney’s interrogation of Charles McKinney, 66-67. See also, e.g., the examination of Zipf, esp. pp. 27-28.

50. *Ibid.*, Zipf, 2113, 2131 (the court repeatedly turned to the subject). The “manly” decoy was Clyde Rudy, 1793.

51. The ministers' efforts are reviewed and their charges affirmed in the Senate report, 67th Congress, 1st session, Committee on Naval Affairs, *Alleged Immoral Conditions of Newport (R.I.) Naval Training Station* (Washington, D.C., 1921), and in the testimony of Bishop Perry and Reverend Hughes before the Dunn Inquiry.

52. *Dunn Testimony*, Rev. Deming, 30; Rev. Forster, 303.

53. Hudson quoted in the Senate report, *Alleged Immoral Conditions*, 8; see also *Dunn Testimony*, Tobin, 723, cf. Arnold, 1712. For the ministers' criticism, see, e.g., Bishop Perry, 529, 607.

54. *Foster Testimony*, Hoage, 319.

55. *Ibid.*, Brunelle, 216. He says the same of Kent on p. 217.

56. *Kent Trial*, cross-examination of Howard Rider, 296.

57. *Ibid.*, Malcolm C. Crawford, 220-23; Dostalík, 57-71.

58. *Foster Testimony*, interrogation of Hoage, 315, 318.

59. *Dunn Testimony*, Deming, 43.

60. *Kent Trial*, Kent, 396, 419, 403.

61. *Ibid.*, Herbert Walker, 318-20.

62. *Ibid.*, Bishop Philip Rhineland, 261-62.

63. *Ibid.*, Rev. Henry Motett, 145-49, 151.

64. *Ibid.*, Judge Darius Baker, 277.

65. *Ibid.*, interrogation of C.B. Zipf, 37-38.

66. *Dunn Testimony*, Rev. Deming, 42; Bishop Perry, 507.

67. *Ibid.*, Perry, 678.

68. Jonathan Katz argues that such a perspective was central to Puritan concepts of homosexuality, "The Age of Sodomitical Sin, 1607-1740," in his *Gay/Lesbian Almanac* (New York, 1983), 23-65. But see also John Boswell, "Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories," *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983): 89-113.

69. This argument was first introduced by Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role," *Social Problems* 16 (1968): 182-92, and has been developed and modified by Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, transl. by Robert Hurley (New York, 1978); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendships and Love Between Women From the Renaissance to the Present* (New York, 1981); Kenneth Plummer, ed., *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (London, 1981); and Jonathan Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York, 1983). Although these historians and sociologists subscribe to the same general model, they disagree over the timing and details of the emergence of a homosexual role, and McIntosh's original essay did not attribute a key role in that process to medical discourse.

70. The situation had changed considerably by World War II, when psychiatrists occupied a more influential position in the military, which used them to help select and manage the more than 15 million men and women it mobilized for the war. See, for instance, the role of psychiatrists

in the records of courts-martial conducted from 1941-43 held at the National Archives (Army A.G. 250.1) and the 1944 investigation of lesbianism at the Third WAC Training Center, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia (National Archives, Modern Military Field Branch, Suitland, Maryland, R.G. 159, Entry 26F). Allan Bérubé's important forthcoming study, *Coming Out Under Fire*, will discuss at length the role of psychiatrists in the development and implementation of WWII-era military policies.

71. *Dunn Testimony*, Hudson, 1630.

72. *Ibid.*, 300. The transcript does not identify the speaker, but the context strongly suggests it was Hudson.

73. *Ibid.*, 1628, 1514.

74. George Frank Lydston, "Sexual Perversion, Satyriasis, and Nymphomania," *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 61 (1889): 254. See also Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality," 142-43.

75. James Kiernan, "Classification of Homosexuality," *Urologic and Cutaneous Review* 20 (1916): 350.

76. John D'Emilio has provided the most sophisticated analysis of this process in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago, 1983). See also Toby Moratta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston, 1981), and the pioneering studies by Jeffrey Weeks and Lillian Faderman cited above.

77. One would also hesitate to assert that a single definition of homosexuality obtains in our own culture. Jonathan Katz has made a similar argument about the need to specify the meaning of homosexual behavior and identity in his *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, although our analyses differ in a number of respects (see my review in *The Body Politic*, no. 97 (1983): 33-34).

78. Lillian Faderman, in "The Mordification of Love Between Women by 19th-Century Sexologists," *Journal of Homosexuality* 4 (1978): 73-90, and *Surpassing the Love of Men*, is the major proponent of the argument that the medical discourse stigmatized romantic friendships. Alternative analyses of the role of the medical literature and of the timing and nature of the process of stigmatization having been proposed by Martha Vicinus, "Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (1984): 600-22, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985), 245-96, and Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality." On the apparent ubiquity of the early twentieth-century public image of the lesbian as a "mannish woman," see Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," *Signs* 9 (1984): 557-575. Nineteenth-century medical articles and newspaper accounts of lesbian couples stigmatized only the partner who played "the man's part" by dressing like a man and seeking male employment, but found the "womanly" partner unremarkable, as if it did not matter that her "husband" was another female so long as she played the conventionally wifely role (see Chauncey, 125ff). The medical reconceptualization of female deviance as homosexual object choice rather than gender role inversion was underway by the 1920s, but it is difficult to date any such transition in popular images, in part because they remained so inconsistent.