Chapter 4

THE FORGING OF QUEER IDENTITIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF HETEROSEXUALITY IN MIDDLE-CLASS CULTURE

THE EFFEMINATE "FAIRY," PUT ON STAGE AT THE BOWERY RESORTS IN THE 1890s and at massive drag balls in the 1910s, '20s, and '30s, and highly visible on the streets of New York throughout this period, came to represent all homosexuals in the public mind. "Any mention of the subject [of sexual intermediacy]," one doctor observed in 1918, "usually conjures up visions of 'fairies'—the male prostitute of the streets, about whom is centered a whole jargon unknown to many sexologists."[1] The same point was made by the gay author of a 1933 novel, *Better Angel,* which offered one of the decade's few wholly sympathetic depictions of a gay character. The protagonist, a musician and teacher, "sensitive" but not otherwise "feminine," protests "the strange vindictiveness the normal man has toward our sort. We're all, to him, like the street corner 'fairy' of Times Square—rouged, lisping, mincing . . . [a] streetwalker."[2]

As his lament suggests, not all gay men in the prewar era thought of themselves as "flaming faggots" or "third-sexers," nor did all of them adopt the fairies' highly visible style. The fairy represented the primary role model available to men forming a gay identity, and many men found in it both a way of understanding themselves and a set of guidelines for organizing their self-presentation and relations with other men. But while the culture of the fairies provided remarkable support to men who rejected the gender persona and sexual roles prescribed to them by the dominant culture, it also alienated many others who were repelled by the fairy's flamboyant style and his loss of manly status. "By the time I was eighteen I began to think I was different from other boys," recalled one

office clerk in the mid-1930s. "I had heard about fairies and I began to be alarmed. I would cringe at the thought that I was one of them, although there was always some man I desired. . . Men who speak with an effeminate voice, who refer to each other as 'she' or who make feminine gestures, are repugnant to me."[3]

In a culture in which becoming a fairy meant assuming the status of a woman or even a prostitute, many men, like the clerk, simply refused to do so. Some of them restricted themselves to the role of "trade," becoming the nominally "normal" partners of "queers" (although this did not account for most such men). Many others simply "did it," without naming it, freed from having to label themselves by the certainty that, at least, they were not fairies. But many men aware of sexual desires for other men, like the clerk, struggled to forge an alternative identity and cultural stance, one that would distinguish them from fairies and "normal" men alike. Even their efforts, however, were profoundly shaped by the cultural presumption that sexual desire for men was inherently a feminine desire. That presumption made the identity they sought to construct a queer one indeed: unwilling to become virtual women, they sought to remain men who nonetheless loved other men.

The efforts of such men marked the growing differentiation and isolation of sexuality from gender in middle-class American culture. Whereas fairies' desire for men was thought to follow inevitably from their gender persona, queers maintained that their desire for men revealed only their "sexuality" (their "homosexuality"), a distinct domain of personality independent of gender. Their homosexuality, they argued, revealed nothing abnormal in their gender persona. The effort to forge a new kind of homosexual identity was predominantly a middle-class phenomenon, and the emergence of "homosexuals" in middle-class culture was inextricably linked to the emergence of "heterosexuals" in that culture as well. If many workingmen thought they demonstrated their sexual virility by playing the "man's part" in sexual encounters with either women or men, normal middle-class men increasingly believed that their virility depended on their exclusive sexual interest in women. Even as queer men began to define their difference from other men on the basis of their homosexuality, "normal" men began to define their difference from queers on the basis of their renunciation of any sentiments or behavior that might be marked as homosexual. Only when they did so did "normal men" become "heterosexual men." As Jonathan Katz has suggested, heterosexuality was an invention of the late nineteenth century.[4] The "heterosexual" and the "homosexual" emerged in tandem at the turn of the century as powerful new ways of conceptualizing human sexual practices.

Forging a Queer Identity

By the 1910s and 1920s, men who identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status usually called themselves "queer." "Queer wasn't derogatory," one man active in New York's gay world in the 1920s recalled. "It wasn't like kike or nigger. . . . It just meant you were different."[5] While some men regretted the supposed aberration in their character that *queer* denoted, others regarded their difference positively and took pleasure in being different from the norm. (As one associate of the writer Carl Van Vechten quipped, "Who wanted to be 'normal' and *boring?*")[6] Many queers considered *faggot* and *fairy* to be more derogatory terms, but they usually used them only to refer to men who openly carried themselves in an unmanly way. It was the effeminacy and flagrancy, not the homosexuality, of the "fairies," "faggots," or "queens" that earned them the disapprobation of queers.

While less visible than the fairies on the streets of New York, queer men constituted the majority of gay-identified men in New York in the early decades of the century. This chapter seeks to introduce some of the ways queer men saw themselves in relation to (and distinguished themselves from) the predominant images of male sexual abnormality in their culture, particularly the fairy, as well as the "normal" men of the working and middle classes, in ways that subsequent chapters will explore more fully.

Some men, like the clerk quoted above, refused from the beginning to accept the loss of dignity and self-respect that identifying themselves as fairies would entail. As one man who moved to New York from Germany in 1927 remembered, *fairy* and *queer* were the words he most commonly heard used for and by homosexual New Yorkers, but "I used 'homosexual' about myself." He found the ubiquity of fairy styles in New York's gay world deeply troubling: "I resented 'fairy' . . . and men speaking of another man as 'Mary' or 'she.' I resent that. I'm a *male.*"[7]

Jeb Alexander, another, more charitable young gay man, wrote in 1927:

> [Effeminacy] is one thing that I do not like in a man. Of course I am not narrow-minded about it in any way. I realize that effeminacy was born with [some men] and sympathize with [their] handicap. I like gentleness, love it in a youth or man, but effeminacy repels me. Thank God I have been spared that. Homosexuality may be curse enough (though it has its wonderful compensations and noble joys) but it is a double curse when one has effeminate ways of walking, talking, or acting.[8]

But many other queer men embraced the style of the fairies before rejecting it: becoming a fairy was the first step many men took in the process of making sense of their apparent sexual and gender difference and reconstructing their image of themselves. A disproportionate number of the most flamboyant fairies, by most accounts, were young men; most of the men who attended the city's drag balls in women's clothes, for instance, were only in their twenties or early thirties.[9] Given the sexual culture of the Bowery, some of them believed that behaving like a fairy was the only way to be gay and to attract men. Others found in the style of the fairy a way to express dramatically the "feminine side" they had long suppressed. "Coming out flaming" by becoming a fairy allowed men to break decisively with their old ways of life and to reconstruct their self-image and social relations. Some men sustained the difficult project of being a fairy throughout their lives, but for many it represented only a transitional stage in the project of self-reconstruction. Many young fairies became more circumspect as they grew older. Some did so because once they entered the gay world they discovered there were other ways of being gay and more satisfying ways of negotiating their social and sexual relations. Others did so because they realized that their professional advancement depended on their giving up the styles associated with fairies, or at least restricting their expression to gay settings. One man recalled in the mid-1930s that for many years he had fought his attraction to other men and acceded to his family's wishes that he continue his father's work as a banker, but at age twenty-seven he broke with the conventional structures that bound him. He "went to the other extreme," as he put it, "designing dresses and associating constantly with obvious homosexuals. As a result, I was socially ostracized by my former friends and alienated from my family," but also "happier than I had ever been in my life." After about a year he moved to New York to begin yet another life, in which he continued to work as a designer and to have homosexual liaisons, but kept those liaisons hidden from his "conventional friends" and reestablished relations with his family. He had made a decisive break with his old life, but his interest in leading a less "messy" life eventually led him to become more discreet.[10]

In general, then, the style of the fairy was more likely to be adopted by young men and poorer men who had relatively little at stake in the straight middle-class world, where the loss of respect the fairy style entailed could be costly indeed. Most men who were more involved in that world sought to pass in it by adopting the style of queers, who typically displayed their homosexuality only in more private settings or by using signals that were less easily recognized by outsiders than those of the fairy. While they rejected the flamboyance of the fairy as a strategy for positioning themselves in relation to the dominant society, however,

they, too, had to come to terms with the status assigned to them by the dominant culture as non-men or pseudo-women because of their desire for men.

The fact that the fairy constituted the dominant public image of the male homosexual during this period had ambiguous consequences for other gay men. On the one hand, the flamboyant stereotype diverted attention from other, more guarded men, and made it relatively easy for them to pass as straight. As a result of the straight world's ignorance of the existence of a hidden middle-class gay world—a world that did not fit the fairy stereotype—police harassment posed considerably less threat to that world than it did to the fairy resorts. As the writer and tattoo artist Samuel M. Steward recalled of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, "Those of us who could maintain our secret lived under an extraordinary protective umbrella: the ignorance and naiveté of the American public. . We existed under the shadow and cover of such naiveté."[11] A man who interviewed numerous homosexuals in the late 1930s about their lives in the 1910s and 1920s reported that "everybody gave me the feeling that they were not haunted by the police, that there was a thriving subculture. [The public] didn't realize much was going on, [gay] things were not suspected [of being gay], and so people didn't get in trouble."[12]

Nonetheless, many queers not only refused to endure the indignities suffered by fairies, but resented the men who did, for they believed it was the flagrant behavior of the fairies on the streets that had given the public its negative impression of all homosexuals. "I don't object to being known as homosexual," insisted one man, an artist, in the mid-1930s, "but I detest the obvious, blatant, made-up boys whose public appearance and behavior provoke onerous criticism." With the fairy as the homosexual's representative, he added, "I don't begrudge normal people their feeling against homosexuals."[13]

If the image of the fairy was so powerful that it normally blinded people to the presence of other gay men, it also threatened to overwhelm the other images people had of men whom they discovered to be homosexual.[14] A young middle-class man living in Washington, D.C., Jeb Alexander often confessed his fear that casual observers might identify him as "a fairy." "Then, out on the streets, the old trouble," he wrote in his diary one day in 1924. "I was seized with that hideous feeling that every person I passed was inwardly mocking me, saying, There goes a fairy, or something worse. It started from the tiniest of things—a look, a gesture—in fact I don't know how it started." A year later he wrote: "Walking out of the store I saw a handsome boy and girl. . . The girl looked at me calmly and impersonally, as she might have glanced at a lamp-post, and said audibly, 'That's a fairy. . ' If I weren't so sensitive. But I struggled and didn't suffer from it as I might."[15]

The resentment many gay men felt toward the fairies, though, may have resulted as much from the *affinity* they felt with them as from the *difference* in their styles. The fact that many men referred to "flaming faggots" or "swishes" as "obvious types" or "extreme homosexuals" suggests the extent to which they saw themselves as part of a continuum linking them to the public stereotype, a continuum on which they represented merely a "less extreme" form of the fairy.[16] The clerk who refused as a youth to become a fairy did so with such vehemence only because he recognized the possibility of such an identification. His comment "I would cringe at the thought that I was one of them, although there was always some man I desired" indicates he initially feared he *must* be one since this was the only way he knew how to interpret his desires. While most men could elaborate the ways in which they were *different* from the fairies, they needed to do so only because the similarities seemed so frighteningly apparent.

Indeed, the cultural system of gender emblematized by the fairy had enormous influence on the way even most queers understood themselves and structured their encounters. Most significantly, the belief that desire for a man was inherently a woman's desire led even many of those queers who regarded themselves as normally masculine in all other respects to regard their homosexual desire as a reflection of a feminine element in their character. In 1925, when F. O. Matthiessen, the noted Harvard literary historian and critic, was still a graduate student at Oxford, he wrote to his lover, the painter Russell Cheney, "We are complex—both of us—in that we are neither wholly man, woman, or child." In another letter he noted: "Just as there are energetic active women and sensitive delicate men, so also there are . men, like us, who appear to be masculine but have a female sex element."[17] Matthiessen's self-conception was thus different from that of many fairies, because he distinguished the sexual "element" from other elements of his gender persona and did not believe that the inversion of his sexual desire meant his entire gender character was inverted. Nonetheless, he did believe that his love for Cheney, as the sexological treatises written by Havelock Ellis explained and his grounding in his culture affirmed, must be a "female" love, even if he otherwise appeared to be masculine.

Other men rejected this reasoning altogether, however, and argued that their love for men was more *masculine* than love for women. Walt Whitman was heralded as a prophetic spokesman by many such men, who regarded Whitman's celebration of "the manly love of comrades" as an affirmation of the nobility of their love. As a young man living in Washington in the 1920s, Jeb Alexander frequently invoked Whitman in his diary and in his conversations with other gay men. When a former lover confessed to pursuing women as well as men, Alexander reacted

negatively. "I don't like his interest in girls," he noted in his diary. "The 'manly love of comrades' is nobler and sweeter and ought to be sufficient." After reading the Calamus poems in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, he added: "What a noble, lovable man old Walt was! Often I yearn toward Walt as toward a father, look up at his picture, then close my eyes and feel him beside me, rugged and strong with his gentle hands caressing and comforting me." Whitman stood for a noneffeminate gentleness, a love for other men that was unquestionably masculine.[18]

From the perspective of outsiders, though, many of the gay men who rejected the "crude" effeminacy of the fairies would hardly have seemed "masculine" in their interests or demeanor, as some queers realized all too well. The boundaries between the styles of fairies and queers were permeable, not only because both groups sometimes engaged in similar forms of behavior but also because queer culture encouraged a style of dress and demeanor and an interest in the arts, decor, fashion, and manners that were often regarded by outsiders as effete, if not downright effeminate. Many queers liked to behave in ways not so different from those of the fairies when they were in secure settings—adopting feminine camp names, using feminine pronouns, and burlesquing gender conventions with a sharp and often sardonic camp wit. Although queers sometimes viewed the fairies' effeminacy as a sign of their constitutional makeup and of their biological difference from themselves—as "a handicap" that some men were "born with," as Jeb Alexander put it in 1927—they were equally capable of viewing it as merely a style that a man could adopt or discard at will. But almost all queers agreed with the artist quoted previously that it was the fairy's *public* display of the most "extreme forms" of gay cultural style that violated the social conventions of hetero-normativity and thus antagonized "normal" people.

Many middle-class queers blamed anti-gay hostility on the failure of fairies to abide by straight middle-class conventions of decorum in their dress and style. In their censure, they were not unlike the many German-American Jews who believed that the "foreignness" (or reluctance to assimilate) of the eastern European Orthodox Jews who immigrated to the United States in large numbers at the turn of the century had provoked American anti-Semitism, or the many middle-class African-American residents of Northern cities who blamed the resurgence of Northern white racism on the "backwardness" of the uneducated rural black Southerners who migrated north a few years later.[19] Some gay men drew the parallel explicitly, associating themselves with the "assimilated" middle-class members of other stigmatized groups. "As the cultured, distinguished, conservative Jew or Negro loathes and deplores his vulgar, socially unacceptable stereotype, plenty of whom unfortunately are all too visible," wrote one man who had begun to identify himself as

queer in the 1930s, "so does their homosexual counterpart resent *his* caricature in the flaming faggot. . . . The general public [makes no distinction], and the one is penalized and ostracized for the grossness and excesses of the other."[20]

As this man's remarkable comment implies, the queers' antagonism toward the fairies was in large part a *class* antagonism. Not all queers were middle class, by any means, just as not all fairies were of the working class. But if the fairy as a cultural "type" was rooted in the working-class culture of the Bowery, the waterfront, and parts of Harlem, the queer was rooted in the middle-class culture of the Village and the prosperous sections of Harlem and Times Square, as the following chapters will show. Many working-class men defined themselves as queers and eschewed the style of the fairy because they found such styles inexpressive or objectionable or because they simply refused to suffer the indignities of being a fairy. But the cultural stance of the queer embodied the general middle-class preference for privacy, self-restraint, and lack of self-disclosure, and for many men this constituted part of its appeal. Similarly, one source of middle-class gay men's distaste for the fairy's style of self-presentation was that its very brashness marked it in their minds as lower class—and its display automatically preempted social advancement.

Given the heightened sensitivity that marginalization sometimes fosters, queers often had an acute perception of the degree to which gender and class status were interdependent and mutually constituted in their culture—of the degree to which gender styles were taken as markers of class status, and class styles were read in gendered terms. Forms of speech, dress, or demeanor that might be ridiculed as womanly, effeminate, or inappropriate to a "real" man in one cultural group might be valued as manly, worldly, or appropriate to a "cultured" (or "sensitive") man in another. This made it possible for men to try to recast gay cultural styles that might be read as signs of effeminacy as signs instead of upper-class sophistication.

Thus while many fairies created a place for themselves in working-class culture by constructing a highly effeminate persona, many other gay men created a place in middle-class culture by constructing a persona of highly mannered—and ambiguous—sophistication. One element of this persona was the pronounced Anglophilia (which, more precisely, was a reverence of the elegance and wit attributed to the English gentry) that became a significant tendency in portions of middle-class gay male culture.[21] While the fairy intended his style to mark him as a sexual invert, however, the queer intended his style to deflect such suspicions. The adoption of such styles did not entirely protect queers from ridicule for gender nonconformity, but it did allow them to recast, denigrate, and

dismiss such ridicule as a sign of lower-class brutishness. "In no way [did] anything indicat[e] his intimate life was other than the so-called normal," one friend commented in 1938 about the manner of Charles Tomlinson Griffes, a noted modernist composer of the 1910s, whom he knew to be gay. He added immediately, though, "Of course [Griffes] was refined and had the manners of a man of cultural development," in an implicit acknowledgment of the relationship often presumed to exist between effete styles and effeminacy, between cultural development and sexual degeneracy. "In the army," Griffes's friend continued, at once acknowledging and seeking to dismiss such presumptions, "I have often seen [such manners] taken by those [men] of the lower classes as 'sissy.' Charles had none of this."[22]

Such styles gave some gay men a place in middle-class culture, but only so long as they exploited them to disguise their homosexuality. They needed to do so because as queers they suffered far more social hostility from middle-class men than fairies faced from working-class men. Griffes, for instance, felt no shame in his homosexuality but decided that as a struggling young composer he should hide it from his professional associates in the music world and from many of his friends as well. As a music student in Berlin from 1903 to 1907, he had learned of the German homosexual emancipation movement led by Magnus Hirschfeld and had read the work of gay intellectuals such as Edward Carpenter, André Gide, and Oscar Wilde. He came to believe strongly that his homosexuality was "natural" and that anti-homosexual prejudice was unjust. When he moved to the New York area in the 1910s he developed a small circle of gay friends. Nonetheless, he took care not to let most of his "normal" friends know that he was homosexual, even going so far as to use coded expressions and shift into German when recording gay-related experiences in his diary, to make it more difficult for the casual snoop to understand their significance. When he finally told one close friend that he was gay, the man later recalled, he "expressed a fear of losing me." While "Charles had the belief that he was in every way natural," the friend noted, his fear of rejection led him to keep his homosexuality a secret from all of their acquaintances.[23]

Griffes found more casual acceptance in the world of workingmen; he also found workingmen more open to his sexual advances. Queers as a group were more likely than fairies to seek relationships with queer men like themselves, in part because they were more likely to regard themselves as manly and thus to believe that the queers they desired were manly as well. (In practice, fairies often had relationships with other fairies, but they were *expected*—and often themselves expected—to seek "men.") Some queers, however, like fairies, were attracted to men they regarded as their opposites, highly masculine "normal" men whose sex-

ual partners were usually women, a phenomenon the gay writer Glenway Wescott referred to in the 1930s as the "cult of the normal young man of the people, that is, of the lower classes."[24] As Wescott's wry observation suggests, gay men typically looked for such men in the working class, both because they regarded workingmen's class status as a sign of their masculinity and because they found that "normal" workingmen were more likely than "normal" middle-class men to respond favorably to their approaches.

Griffes, for one, was infatuated with "normal" workingmen, even though he also had relationships with other middle-class gay men. As he repeatedly noted, it was the masculinity of such men that attracted him, a masculinity constituted as much by emblems of their class status, such as work uniforms, as by their physical appearance. On one occasion he even discovered that "I was rather disappointed with [a train conductor] in civilian clothes" after meeting him at a lunch he had arranged; while he still had a "masculine . . . demeanor," Griffes thought, "he doesn't look nearly as attractive *this way.*" A bit taken aback by the experience, Griffes remarked: "One can see by that how certain clothes, a uniform matter."[25] But in the eyes of most middle-class gay men it was not just the workingman's clothes that made the man. The same gendering of class styles that made the cultivated manners of some middle-class men seem "sissy" made the "rough" styles of speech, demeanor, and physicality of some workingmen seem emblems of their manliness.

Like many other middle-class queer men, Griffes was attracted to workingmen not just because he thought they were masculine but because he found them more responsive to his advances than "normal" middle-class men would have been, as the extraordinary diary he kept reveals. Griffes spent several summers in the 1910s in New York City, where he shared an apartment with a singing teacher. During the school year he visited the city as frequently as his duties as a music teacher at a private school in nearby Tarrytown, New York, would permit. He usually occupied himself on his trips into the city by striking up conversations with the train conductors and trying to make dates with them;[26] but he was particularly interested in pursuing the Irish policemen he met in the city. In the years before electric traffic lights were installed, policemen were to be found at major intersections directing traffic, and Griffes took every opportunity to approach them, seeking to become familiar enough with them to be able to make a date. He tracked the shifting stations of his favorites and filled his diary with the record of his efforts to approach them.

"I . . . spoke to 43-5 for a few minutes," Griffes reported one day in the spring of 1914, referring to the officer stationed at the corner of Forty-third Street and Fifth Avenue, whose name he did not yet know,

"and was very pleased with it because he seemed very friendly again and said 'good-bye' so pleasantly when I left." He stopped by 43-5's corner twice again on a single day two weeks later, and was pleased that the man "smiled so pleasantly and friendly." He continued to pass by the man's station, often while on his way to visit other policemen he was cultivating, and four months later he reported that "43-5 greeted me of his own accord," a milestone in such pursuits. Two days later "43-5 said hello of his own accord [again] and talked a bit to me. Later I walked by him again and he very nicely said 'good-night,' with a warm smile. . . . Now he really recognizes me." The following year, Griffes reported passing the next milestone with another policeman: "I talked for about 20 minutes with the policeman stationed at 42-5 in the evenings," a man he had been approaching for weeks. "He remembers me this time and was so responsive I asked him to go to the theater with me." Not only did the man agree to do so, but he and Griffes finally exchanged names, a turning point of almost equal significance. Judging the responsiveness of policemen was, however, a delicate process, fraught with anxiety. "This morning I talked to 39-5," Griffes noted worriedly one day in April 1914, "and maybe went too far because I asked him to go to the theater with me some evening. He didn't say no, but he told me that next week would be better. I felt that I had made a fool of myself and left. Did I make an error? He is always so friendly, but maybe he's like that with everybody." Despite his embarrassment, Griffes talked to the man again several weeks later and was relieved to discover "he isn't angry, as I had been afraid of. However," he added, "I was probably too hasty about the theater matter."[27]

Griffes found a remarkable number of policemen and train conductors, most of them Irish, some of them married, to be responsive to his advances. A good number of them, like the train conductor who showed up for lunch in civilian clothes, were lured by his queer charms. He eventually developed a long-term relationship with a married Irish policeman, who frequently visited Griffes at the West Forty-sixth Street apartment the composer maintained in the summer and occasionally even invited Griffes out to his home in Corona, Queens, to dine with his family. After one such dinner, Griffes commented that the wife "was very cordial and urged me to come out again." "He is a very dear man," Griffes once commented of his companion; "it was a perfectly beautiful time with [him] from beginning to end."[28]

Griffes was not the only gay man interested in policemen, nor was he the only one to succeed in pursuing them. On one occasion in the summer of 1916 he talked with his Corona companion about "the *many* invitations he gets that he doesn't accept and why he always accepted mine." Griffes also discussed the matter with other gay men who shared

his attraction to policemen and sometimes passed on tips about particularly receptive ones. "F. told me about Policeman M. whom I then went to see on his beat at 6 o'clock," Griffes noted Thanksgiving week in 1914. "He seemed very responsive and open to the idea [*entgegendkommend und bereit*]." He was also, apparently, familiar with the rituals of courtship: "I was pleased with how he at once followed and understood." The next year, Griffes talked with another man, who claimed to have "had the greatest luck with policemen and knows, in New York alone, 53 in a homosexual way." Based on his more limited experience with the force, Griffes found the man's claim astonishing but plausible: "He appears to be *able* to do what I *want* to do."[29] The man's boast hardly provides definitive evidence of his success, but it does indicate that such pursuits were part of the folklore—and everyday practices—of more than one gay man.

Charles Griffes, Ralph Werther, and the newspapermen reporting on the Bowery resorts were not the only observers to remark that straight working-class men, including some of New York's finest, were more likely than straight middle-class men to tolerate gay men and respond to their advances. After interviewing thousands of men in the 1930s and 1940s, Alfred Kinsey was surprised to reach a similar conclusion. Men at the highest and lowest social strata, he found, were more likely than those in the middle classes to tolerate other men's homosexual activity. Even those men in the lower-status group who did not engage in homosexual activity themselves rarely tried to prevent other men from doing so. Kinsey attributed the tolerance of better educated men to the greater sophistication about human nature he also attributed to them, but was less sure how to explain the lower-status group's tolerance, except to note that many of them accepted homosexuality "simply as one more form of sex," which they, as a group, tended to consider simply a "natural" and therefore acceptable human need, not to be frustrated by moral injunctions.[30]

Even middle-class opinion was divided on the subject of homosexuality: while "many broad-minded, intelligent professional men and laymen" became "utterly disgusted . . . at [its] very mention," as one psychiatrist reported in 1913,[31] many others took little note of the phenomenon, and homosexuality rarely became a major public issue or special target of scrutiny before the 1930s (as chapter 12 will show). Nonetheless, it is clear that by the turn of the century, middle-class men as a group were more hostile and anxious about homosexuality than workingmen were.

Why should this have been the case? Why were most "normal" middle-class men less willing to respond to the advances of Griffes and other gay men than many workingmen were? What was the source of middle-class

men's greater hostility toward men who violated the social conventions governing gender style and who expressed sexual desire for men? The relative hostility of middle-class men needs to be explained as much as the relative tolerance of working-class men, since neither is an "obvious" response. Addressing such questions requires an examination of the broader context of the changes in masculinity and sexuality in middle-class culture at the turn of the century.

The Emergence of Heterosexuality in Middle-Class Culture

The growing antipathy of middle-class men toward both fairies and queers at the turn of the century was closely tied to their growing concern that the gender arrangements of their culture were in crisis. Their hostility was part of their response to the growing threats they perceived to their very status and prerogatives as men. On every front, it seemed, the social patterns and cultural expectations that had formed middle-class men's sense of themselves as men were being challenged or undermined.

Changes in the social organization and meaning of work were particularly significant. Men's participation in what they regarded as the male sphere of productive work, their ability to support families on the basis of that work, and, above all, their skill as entrepreneurs and their independence from other men had long been critical to their sense of themselves both as men and as members of the middle class. But the reorganization and centralization of the American economy in the late nineteenth century with the rise of large corporations transformed the character and meaning of the work performed by many middle-class men. Increasing numbers of men lost their economic independence as they became the salaried employees of other men; the number of salaried, nonpropertied workers grew eight times between 1870 and 1910.

In the new order, as the historian Anthony Rotundo puts it, "every businessman had to submit [to another man]—the successful one was the man who submitted to the fewest others." The great majority of middle-level employees working in the new corporate bureaucracies had little prospect of significant advancement, and much of the work they performed was fragmented and sedentary. "More important," as the historian Jackson Lears notes, "it isolated them from the hard, substantial reality of things."[32] More and more women began working at such firms as well, and although they took on different, and usually subordinate, tasks, their very presence in offices, as Rotundo observes, seemed to feminize the culture of the corporate workplace and to diminish its status as a masculine domain.

Many men believed that women were threatening the sanctity of other male domains as well and were trying to take control of the nation's cul-

ture. The women's suffrage campaign seemed the most direct challenge, for many men interpreted women's demand for the vote as a renunciation of men's prerogative to represent the women in their families in the (male) public sphere. But they regarded women's challenge to extend far beyond that single demand. As women came to dominate the ranks of elementary and secondary school teachers, they seemed to have eliminated the role of men in the socialization of youth and threatened to produce a generation of sissified boys. Even more strikingly, women seemed to be trying to control the lives of adult men as well. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1874, represented the best-known attempt; it had identified alcohol as a male vice and campaigned to shut down the saloons and private clubs where men gathered to socialize and drink. Other women's groups waged well-organized campaigns against men's rights to manly entertainments in the nation's boxing rings and red-light districts. On every front, women seemed to be breaching the division between the sexes' proper spheres and to be claiming or challenging the prerogatives of men.*

Threats to the masculinity of middle-class men came from other men as well as from women. As the "captains of industry" were reducing these men's independence, workingmen—who, increasingly, were immigrants who enacted their manliness in sometimes foreign ways—also seemed to be bringing middle-class men's masculinity into question. If middle-class men exerted power over the lives of workingmen (and claimed a degree of superiority) because they worked with their heads, not their hands, they recognized, as well, that the very physicality of workingmen's labor afforded them a seemingly elemental basis for establishing their manliness. Working-class men and boys regularly challenged the authority of middle-class men by verbally questioning the manliness of middle-class supervisors or physically attacking middle-class boys. As Charles Griffes's friend recalled, he had "often seen [middle-class cultivation] taken by those [men] of the lower classes as 'sissy.'"[33] The increasingly militant labor movement, the growing power of immigrant voters in urban politics, and the relatively high birthrate of certain immigrant groups established a worrisome context for such personal affronts and in themselves constituted direct challenges to the authority of Anglo-American men as a self-conceived class, race, and gender.

As middle-class men's anxieties about their manliness intensified, a

*I do not mean to sketch the lines of debate too starkly. Many middle-class men supported temperance as a way to control the immigrant working class, and many working-class organizers supported it as well because they thought the enticements of the saloon served to divert men from the workers' struggle. Nonetheless, many middle-class men regarded women's leadership of the campaign with suspicion and were opposed to its extension to middle-class clubs.

preoccupation with threats to manhood and with proving one's manhood became central to the rhetoric of national purpose. Theodore Roosevelt epitomized this tendency; the quest for manhood became the central metaphorical image in his speeches, which cast the struggle for national revitalization and international supremacy as a struggle for manhood itself. "If we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at hazard of their lives," he declared in one famous 1899 address, "then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world. Let us therefore . . . [resolve] to do our duty well and manfully."[34] Roosevelt's effort to frame the national challenge as a manly one served both to mobilize male citizens by using some of the era's most effective and resonant rhetoric and to reinforce the claim that the public sphere of civic action was a distinctly male sphere.

In a similar vein, politicians, businessmen, educators, and sportsmen alike protested the dangers of "overcivilization" to American manhood and thus to American culture, in a not very oblique reference to the dangers of women's civilizing influence and the effeminization of men. The Spanish-American War of 1898 and the spirit of militarism it engendered were widely celebrated as the savior of American manhood. "The greatest danger that a long period of profound peace offers to a nation," one man wrote in the wake of "the short and glorious little war," was that it encouraged "effeminate tendencies in young men . especially in a country where the advancement of civilized methods of living has reached the point now touched by it in the United States."[35]

The growing concern about the danger of the overcivilization and feminization of American men had manifold practical ramifications for men's everyday lives—and for their attitude toward fairies and queers. In response to the threat they thought women posed to the manliness of the nation's boys, men organized a host of groups designed to restore the role of men in the socialization of youth: the Knights of King Arthur, the Sons of Daniel Boone, and, in 1912, the Boy Scouts of America. As work began to fail to confirm men's sense of themselves as manly, growing numbers of them turned to "strenuous recreation, spectator sports, adventure novels, and a growing cult of the wilderness" as a means of proving their manhood.[36] Theodore Roosevelt was the most famous advocate of the "strenuous life" of muscularity, rough sports, prizefighting, and hunting as an antidote to the overcivilization of American men, but the cause was taken up in newspapers, boys' clubs, and backyard lots throughout the nation. Rough sports became popular on college campuses, endorsed by educators and students alike as the optimal way to build character. Prizefighters, cowboys, soldiers, and sailors became popular heroes, heralded as paragons of virility. "Leave the close air of the office, the library, or the

club and go out into the streets and the highway," insisted one writer in 1897. "Consult the teamster, the farmer, . . . or the drover. . . . From his loins, and not from those of the dilettante, will spring the man of the future."[37]

The glorification of the prizefighter and the workingman bespoke the ambivalence of middle-class men about their own gender status, for it suggested that they, too, regarded such men as more manly than themselves—more physical, less civilized, less effeminate. It also suggests that when middle-class gay men celebrated such workingmen as paragons of masculinity, they only followed the lead of other men of their class.

As the boundaries between men's and women's spheres seemed to blur, many men also tried to reinforce those boundaries by reconstructing their bodies in ways that would heighten their physical differences from women. What the historian Elliot Gorn has called a "cult of muscularity" took root in turn-of-the-century middle-class culture. Bodybuilding and prizefighting became immensely popular activities: one let boys and men develop their muscles, while the other let them express their admiration for men who literally embodied the new manly ideal of muscularity. Professional bodybuilders such as Eugene Sandow, who in the 1890s became the first professional to pose in the nude rather than in revealing classical costume, also became objects of adulation by middle-class men and boys.[38] Boys and young men displayed a growing concern about the development of their muscles as if in reaction to the threats posed by a muscular working class and loss of power elsewhere in their lives. Just as important, building manly bodies and focusing on the physical basis of manliness allowed men to emphasize their difference from women at a time when women seemed to be insisting on the similarity of the sexes. Indeed, descriptions of manly character in turn-of-the-century popular men's fiction increasingly focused on the physical attributes of manliness, as if men sought to root their difference from women in the supposedly immutable differences of the body at a time when other kinds of difference no longer seemed so certain.[39]

The attack on women's influence on American culture led to an attack on men who seemed to have accepted that influence by becoming "overcivilized," and men who did not do their part to uphold the manly ideal were subject to growing ridicule. Earlier in the nineteenth century, men had tended to constitute themselves as men by distinguishing themselves from boys: to become a man was to assume the responsibilities and maturity of an adult. To call someone a "boy"—as whites regularly addressed African-American men—was an insult. But in the late nineteenth century, middle-class men began to define themselves more centrally on the basis of their difference from women. As the historian John Higham has noted, *sissy, pussy-foot,* and other gender-based terms of derision became increasingly prominent in late-nineteenth-century

American culture, as men began to define themselves in opposition to all that was "soft" and womanlike.[40]

The scorn heaped on overcivilized men established the context for the emergence of the fairy as the primary pejorative category against which male normativity was measured. The fairy was not invented as a cultural type by fin de siècle male angst, but that angst—as well as the growth of the gay subculture—made the fairy a much more potent cultural figure, and one so prominent that it could serve to mark the boundaries of acceptable male behavior. As Rotundo has noted, the sexual implications of "Miss Nancy," "she-men," and other epithets became more pronounced around the turn of the century.[41] The frequency of such epithets suggests the degree to which men had come to define themselves in opposition to the fairy as well as to the woman. It also indicates the virulence with which they policed the gender performances of other men who, like the fairy, seemed to subvert the new masculine ideal.

The meanings ascribed to the figure of the fairy were, however, more complex than this. The fairy became one of the most prominent and volatile signs of the fragility of the gender order, at once a source of reassurance to other men and the repository of their deepest fears. On the one hand, men could use their difference from the fairy to reassure themselves of their own masculinity. The spectacle of the Bowery fairies became popular in the closing years of the century in part because the very extremity of the fairy's violation of gender conventions served to confirm the relative "normality" of other men.

But the fairy also provoked a high degree of anxiety and scorn among middle-class men because he embodied the very things middle-class men most feared about their gender status. His effeminacy represented in extreme form the loss of manhood middle-class men most feared in themselves, and his style seemed to undermine their efforts to shore up their manly status. His womanlike manner challenged the supposed immutability of gender differences by demonstrating that anatomical males did not inevitably become men and were not inevitably different from women. The fairy's feminization of his body seemed to ridicule and highlight the artificiality of the efforts of other men to masculinize theirs. Being called a fairy became a serious threat to middle-class men precisely because the boundaries between the she-man and the middle-class man seemed so permeable, despite men's best efforts to develop manly bodies and cultural styles.

The overtness of the fairy's sexual interest in men was even more unsettling, because it raised the possibility of a sexual component in other men's interactions. Once that possibility was raised, the very celebration of male bodies and manly sociability initially precipitated by the masculinity crisis required a new policing of male intimacy and exclusion

of sexual desire for other men. Claiming that the fairy was different from normal men allowed normal men to claim that the fairy alone experienced sexual desire for men and thus to preclude the possibility that the normal man's gaze at the working-class male body had a sexual component. But the very existence of the fairy made manifest and drew attention to the potential sexual meaning of that gaze. To put this in the terms usefully suggested by Eve Sedgwick, middle-class men subscribed to both minoritizing and universalizing conceptions of gender inversion and homosexuality.[42] They simultaneously regarded each condition, that is, as safely contained in particular groups of people (a minority) but also as already present in, or capable of rapidly infecting, an entire population (and thus having a universalizing propensity).

Thus the fairy served to contain the threat of gender nonconformity and to free other men from any taint of it, for he alone was a real invert, but any man risked being stigmatized as a fairy if he displayed any of the signs of inversion. Similarly, the personality of the fairy or the queer served to contain the threat of homosexuality—by suggesting that it was limited to a deviant minority of men—but it also made it possible to conceive of men's solidarity as having a sexual component. Given the crisis in middle-class masculinity, many middle-class men felt compelled to insist—in a way that many working-class men did not—that there was no sexual element in their relations with other men.

Bernarr Macfadden, advocate of physical culture and publisher of bodybuilding magazines treasured by straight and gay men alike, could barely contain his loathing of the men who sexualized and perverted the male gaze at male bodies. His insistence that there could be no relationship between the healthy youngster's adoration of a barely clad exemplar of manly muscularity and the depraved sexual desires of a degenerate—and the fear that some might think there were a relationship—hovered behind his 1904 denunciation of "painted, perfumed, . . . mincing youths . . . ogling every man that passes." He praised the men who attacked such youths, but the very severity of his response to them betrayed his fear that he might somehow be identified with them. "There is nothing nasty, . . . vulgar, . . . [or] immodest in the nude," he regularly insisted in the pages of *Physical Culture,* a magazine he published that was full of male nudes. "The nastiness exists in the minds of those who view it, and those who possess such vulgar minds are the enemies of everything clean, wholesome, and elevating." The overt sexual interest of the fairy in men made the possibility that normal men's admiration of manly bodies might have a sexual component inescapable. It required men whose manliness was already suspect to assert their exclusive sexual interest in women in order to show they were not queer.[43]

The insistence on exclusive heterosexuality emerged in part, then, in

response to the crisis in middle-class masculinity precipitated by the manly comportment of working-class men and the subversion of manly ideals and sexualization of male social relations by the fairy. But heterosexuality became even more important to middle-class men because it provided them with a new, more positive way to demonstrate their manhood. Sexual style had long been a crucial aspect of gender style; both sexual aggressiveness and sexual self-control—as well as the ability to propagate and support children—had served as markers of manliness among different groups of men. But by the late nineteenth century, sexual personality—or "sexuality"—had emerged as a distinct domain of personhood and an independent basis for the assertion of manliness. Middle-class men increasingly conceived of their sexuality—their heterosexuality, or exclusive desire for women—as one of the hallmarks of a real man. It was as if they had decided that no matter how much their gender comportment might be challenged as unmanly, they were normal men because they were heterosexual.

The growing heterosexual and heterosocial imperatives were, in any case, evident throughout middle-class culture in the first third of the century. In the 1910s and 1920s, as numerous historians have shown, older patterns of gender segregation among American youth (and their elders) gave way to a new emphasis on heterosocial—and often dyadic—relations. Single-sex (or homosocial) gave way to mixed-sex (or heterosocial) socializing, as the number of commercial amusements where young men and women could gather proliferated: amusement parks, movie theaters, cabarets, cafés, late-night restaurants, dance halls, and the like. The dance craze of the 1910s, which encouraged men and women to hold each other and move their bodies in more or less salacious ways, was one of the great markers of the "new freedom in morals and manners." The culture of the speakeasies in the Prohibition era of the 1920s, as we shall see, encouraged an even more casual atmosphere for mixed-sex socializing. Numerous observers suggested that unchaperoned dating had become a significant part of young people's lives in the 1910s and 1920s, and had, to some extent, replaced the single-sex group. The change affected young married men and women as well as young singles. Marriage manuals of the 1910s and 1920s, according to the historian Christina Simmons, asserted the need for men to develop "companionate marriages" to make marriage more attractive and satisfying to women. While the ability to support a family had been central to middle-class men's gender and class identities since the formation of the American middle class in the nineteenth century, the families of the early twentieth century put new emphasis on both the emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction of husband and wife.[44]

The growing insistence on heterosociability and stigmatization of single-

sex institutions was a response to women's autonomy as much as to peculiarly male anxieties, and it had dramatic effects on the lives of middle-class women. A generation of women in the late nineteenth century had forsworn marriage in order to pursue careers and work for social reform. Many women activists remained devoted to women and unmarried to men; as many as 50 percent of the graduates of some women's colleges in the late nineteenth century never married. Heterosexual marriage and motherhood, as constituted in their society, would have left them little opportunity to pursue their chosen work. But in the 1920s the age of first marriage dropped, the percentage of women who married increased, and many women left autonomous women's organizations to join the dominant (and male-dominated) political and professional organizations of their day.

The shifting patterns of women's sociability and women's political choices had many sources, as feminist historians such as Nancy Cott have shown. Many "new women" of the 1920s embraced the new possibilities of sexual subjectivity and joined in the attack on the older generation of women as "sexless spinsters" and prudes; many professional women thought that in order to advance women's cause it was important to work in the dominant professional organizations of their day, rather than in separate and unequal women's organizations. But the increasing stigmatization of women who lived without men undermined the middle-class women's culture that had sustained a generation of challenges to the male-dominated professions and social order. Given its effects on the women's movement, the sexual revolution of the 1910s and 1920s could equally be viewed as a heterosexual counterrevolution.[45]

Although there were increasing opportunities for men and women to socialize across gender lines in both middle- and working-class culture, heterosexuality became more important to middle-class than to working-class men. The establishment of heterosexuality as a precondition of male normativity in middle-class culture, as well as its continued absence in much of working-class culture, is strongly suggested by one of Kinsey's most striking—if virtually unnoticed—findings. His analysis of the way men's participation in homosexual activity varied along class lines in the 1910s, '20s, and '30s offers startling confirmation of the observation made by Griffes, Werther, and numerous other gay men of the era that working-men were more willing than middle-class men to engage in sexual practices with other men. Although Kinsey's methods did not produce accurate estimates of the aggregate frequency of sexual practices, they probably did produce a roughly accurate gauge of the differences in sexual patterns among different social groups. Common day laborers, he reported, engaged in more homosexual activity than any other group of men, followed by semi-skilled workers and men in low-status white-collar jobs,

such as clerks in banks, offices, and stores, secretaries, and small entrepreneurs. The men he grouped together as having higher-status white-collar jobs, ranging from clergymen, actors, artists, and musicians to bank officials and owners of large stores, were less likely to engage in homosexual activity. Men in the professions, such as college teachers, physicians, and lawyers, were the least likely of all men to do so.[46]

Significantly, the class variations in the rate of participation in homosexual activity were consistent with a more general class pattern. Common laborers and semi-skilled workers engaged in the most nonmarital *heterosexual* intercourse as well as in the most homosexual, and professionals in the least. Several generations of middle-class men had considered sexual self-control to be crucial to their image as middle-class gentlemen and a means of distinguishing themselves from lower-class men. Kinsey's findings suggest that, as numerous historians have argued, middle-class men were more observant of the moral injunctions against nonmarital sexual behavior propagated by their class than working-class men were.[47]

But the reluctance of middle-class men to engage in sexual relations with other men also resulted, I would suggest, from their growing belief that anyone who engaged in homosexual activity was implicated as "being" a homosexual. It was easier for workingmen to engage in such activity because the conventions of their sexual culture tended to categorize only one of the men involved as "queer." This interpretation is supported by two of Kinsey's other findings, which he reported without commentary. First, while men at the lowest educational and class levels were more likely than other men to engage in homosexual activity throughout their lives, even after marriage, they were also *less likely* than men at higher class levels to be *exclusively* homosexual in their behavior. Second, they were also more likely to restrict the role they played in homosexual relations. While homosexually active middle-class men were almost equally likely to play either the active or passive role in fellation, a much higher percentage of lower-status men restricted their participation to the "masculine" role.[48] Common laborers, in other words, found it easier than middle-class men to alternate between sexual relations with men and relations with women (apparently without feeling that one precluded the other), so long as they played the "man's part" with both of them. Middle-class men, on the other hand, were more likely to organize their sexual practices—and to identify themselves—as "homosexuals," who engaged in a variety of sexual relations with men exclusively, or "heterosexuals," who avoided sexual encounters of any sort with men.

Two dramatic changes in middle-class culture between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century show that the division of the sexual world into heterosexuals and homosexuals was a new development: the decline of romantic friendships between men as they began to be stigmatized

as homosexual and the emergence of the hetero–homosexual binarism in middle-class medical discourse.

The growing insistence in middle-class culture that, to be considered normal, men eschew any homosexual contact is particularly evident in the increased scrutiny middle-class men gave male friendships. As a number of historians have recently shown, young men in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century frequently slept together and felt free to express their passionate love for each other. "Warmth [sometimes] turned into tender attachment, and closeness became romance," writes Anthony Rotundo, who has studied the diaries of dozens of nineteenth-century middle-class men. "These ardent relationships were common" and "socially acceptable." Devoted male friends opened letters to each other with greetings like "Lovely Boy" and "Dearly Beloved"; they kissed and caressed one another; and, as in the case of Joshua Stead and the bachelor lawyer Abraham Lincoln, they sometimes shared the same bed for years. Some men explicitly commented that they felt the same sort of love for both men and women. "All I know," wrote one man quoted by Rotundo, "is that there are three persons in this world whom I have loved, and those are, Julia, John, and Anthony. Dear, beloved trio." It was only in the late nineteenth century that such love for other men became suspect, as men began to worry that it contained an unwholesome, distinctly homosexual element.[49]

As Rotundo, Donald Yacovone, and other historians have argued, the men involved in such same-sex relationships should not retrospectively be classified as homosexual, since no concept of the homosexual existed in their culture and they did not organize their emotional lives *as* homosexuals; many of them were also on intimate terms with women and went on to marry. Nonetheless, the same historians persist in calling such men heterosexual, as if that concept *did* exist in the early nineteenth century.[50] In doing so they mistake the fact that men who passionately and physically expressed their love for other men were considered *normal* for their having been considered *heterosexual,* as if it were not the very inconsistency of their emotional lives with contemporary models of heterosexuality that made them seem curious to historians in the first place. If homosexuality did not exist in the early nineteenth century, then neither did heterosexuality, for each category depends for its existence on the other. The very capacity of men to shift between male and female love objects demonstrates that a different sexual regime governed their emotions. "Normal" men only became "heterosexual" men in the late nineteenth century, when they began to make their "normalcy" contingent on their renunciation of such intimacies with men. They became heterosexuals, that is, only when they defined themselves and organized their affective and

physical relations to exclude any sentiments or behavior that might be marked as homosexual.

A second sign of the emergence of heterosexuality in middle-class culture at the turn of the century was its appearance in middle-class medical discourse. Doctors approached the issue of sexual inversion as members of a profession still struggling to secure a measure of cultural authority and power, and one that often sought to do so by claiming special expertise in the management of "problems" that had been defined by middle-class men as a whole, including the problem of gender. They also approached the issue as members of a professional class whose manliness seemed increasingly in question and for whom such problems were palpable. Although they claimed a unique, dispassionate perspective on the problem of sexual inversion and their thought had a distinct disciplinary cast, they shared the basic presumptions and anxieties of their gender and class.

Most of the doctors writing about inversion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adhered to the popular conceptualization of fairies as "inverts" whose desire for people of the—apparent—same sex was simply one feature of a more thoroughgoing gender inversion (see chapter 2). Their manner of explaining the character of "she-men" also adhered to the dominant popular conceptions of sex and gender as well as the dominant currents of scientific thought. Scientific writers regularly sought to reinforce existing social arrangements of race, class, and gender by asserting their biological determination and consequent inevitability. As the historians Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg have argued, "Would-be scientific arguments were used in the rationalization and legitimization of almost every aspect of Victorian life, with particular vehemence in those areas in which social change implied stress in existing social arrangements."[51] It was thus incumbent upon such writers to search for a gender-based biological explanation that would account for the behavior of "inverts" in a way that confirmed the naturalness and consequent immutability of the gender arrangements their unmanly or unwomanly behavior threatened to call into question. Like legions of young bodybuilders, in other words, they sought to defend a particular social arrangement of gender by investing it with the timeless authority of the body itself. Thus one widely accepted medical theory argued that men who desired men simply were not the sex they first appeared to be, but were hermaphrodites, incorporating biological elements of both sexes.[52]

Women who challenged the sanctity of the male sphere were subject to particular scorn by physicians, who stigmatized them as biological misfits and inverts. In a direct attack on women who sought to curtail male sexual prerogatives, one doctor characterized them in 1916 as lesbian predators. "The androphobia [fear and hatred of men], so to speak, of the

deeply ingrained sex invert has led to her leadership in social purity movements and a failure to recognize inversion," he warned. "Such inverts see no harm in [the] seduction of young girls while dilating on the impurity of even marital coitus."[53] The same doctor's comments on the work of another doctor suggest how frequently a link between sexual inversion and women's activism was proposed. "As might be expected," he wrote in 1914, "Claiborne does not finish his paper [nominally on unusual hair growth in women] without touching upon the influence of defective sexuality in women upon political questions. While, of course, he does not think every suffragist an invert, yet he does believe that the very fact that women in general of today are more and more deeply invading man's sphere is indicative of a certain impelling force within them."[54] Other doctors were less restrained in proposing a literally organic relationship between the women's movement and lesbianism. Dr. William Lee Howard warned in 1900 that

> the female possessed of masculine ideas of independence; the viragint who would sit in the public highways and lift up her pseudo-virile voice, proclaiming her sole right to decide questions of war or religion, or the value of celibacy and the curse of women's impurity, and that disgusting anti-social being, the female sexual pervert, are simply different degrees of the same class—degenerates.

By this account, the woman who "invaded man's sphere" was likely to want the vote, have excessive, malelike body hair, smoke cigars, be able to whistle, and take female lovers.[55]

Doctors' analysis of the character of men involved in same-sex relations was somewhat more complex. They sought to explain—and at once stigmatize and contain—the unmanly behavior of some men by pointing to biological defects that made those men literally less than men. They were less sure how to deal with manly men who had sex with other men, however. While many of them reproduced the popular distinction between fairies and trade, they also displayed a distinctly middle-class hostility toward men in the trade category. Many doctors writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarded the fairy as an "intermediate sex" between men and women, but they also believed that many men engaged in homosexual activity without being inverts. A "fairy," they thought, like a woman, was "naturally" attracted to his opposite, a conventionally masculine "normal" man, and weak-willed "normal" men were capable of responding to his advances. They frequently distinguished the two participants in such a relationship as "inverts" (who, as feminine in character, were naturally attracted to men) and "perverts" (who, as conventionally masculine men, perverted their normal sexual drive when they

responded to the advances of someone who appeared anatomically to be another man, even if that person was actually an invert). While working-class sexual ideology tended to regard men who were trade neutrally, middle-class physicians were more likely to condemn the fairy's masculine partner as morally—if not physiologically—deficient, as the very term *pervert* implies.

In 1921, for instance, Dr. Perry Lichtenstein drew such distinctions in a report based on his study of hundreds of men segregated in the homosexual ward of the New York City penitentiary, where he worked as a physician. The fairies he dealt with there were "freak[s] of nature who in every way attempt to imitate woman," he explained. "They take feminine names, use perfume and dainty stationery which frequently is scented, and in many instances wear women's apparel." Lichtenstein implied that the fairies did not solicit sex with other fairies, but instead sought "normal" men, who responded to their advances not because of congenital need but because of willful perversity. He demeaned the effeminate fairies as "degenerates," but also evinced a certain proprietary sympathy for them, urging that treatment, rather than punishment, be attempted, in an effort to cure them of their malady, over which they surely had no control. But he showed no mercy at all toward the "normal" men with whom the fairies had sex and made no effort to argue that the medical profession should take over their management from the prisons: "Let us punish most severely the man who yields to the advances of these individuals," he insisted, "for such as he are worse than the pervert [the men most doctors called an 'invert'] and deserve no sympathy."[56]

The commentaries written by other doctors point to the emergence of an even more striking class difference in conceptions of male–male sexual relations. A growing number of doctors began to conceive of the inverts' sexual partners not just as morally lax but as tainted by homosexual desire. In 1913, for instance, A. A. Brill, the chief of the Clinic of Psychiatry at Columbia University, argued that homosexuality was not a sign of somatic or psychic hermaphroditism or bisexualism. While "in a great many cases" the invert "would feel like a woman and look for the man," he conceded, this did not "indicate the general character of inversion," which, he argued, had to account for *any* man who had sex with another man. In sharp contrast to popular working-class thought, he explicitly classified the "masculine" men who had sex with transvestite prostitutes and other effeminate men as "homosexuals," who "retain their virility and look for feminine psychic features in their sexual object." Citing Freud, he even classed men who "resorted to homosexuality [only] under certain conditions," such as prisoners with no access to women, as "occasional inverts" who were a distinct class of men, different from normal men, because of their capacity "to obtain sexual

gratification from a person of the same sex."[57] Marking a sharp break with both working-class and earlier middle-class thought, Brill's grouping of fairies and trade together in the single category of the homosexual was predicated on the emerging notion that male normality depended not on a man's masculine comportment but on his exclusive heterosexuality. For all its allusions to psychological complexity, Brill's psychoanalytic article ignored the complex symbolic system of power and imaginary gender that governed the meaning of sexual penetration and the classification of sexual actors in working-class culture. It made the sex of the body with whom a man had sex the arbiter of his heterosexual normality or homosexual abnormality.

Freud was a key figure in the reconceptualization of male sexual actors. In the first of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), he introduced the concepts of sexual aim and object. *Sexual aim,* in his view, referred to a person's preferred mode of sexual behavior, such as genital or oral sex, or passive or active roles. *Sexual object* referred to the object of sexual desire; children, animals, and persons of the same sex were "deviations in respect of the sexual object" rather than of sexual aim. Many earlier theories had not focused on sexual object or had viewed it as subordinate to sexual aim in the classification of men's sexuality. They maintained that a man who wished to play an inverted, passive sexual role would logically seek a male to play the active role, whereas a man who wished to play the active role was not "inverted" even if his passive partner were male instead of female. But in Freud's scheme, sexual object existed independently of sexual aim and became even more significant to sexual classification. "The most complete mental masculinity," he argued, "can be combined with male inversion [same-sex desire]."[58]

Freud was not the only theorist to distinguish homosexual desire from gender inversion. His sometime antagonist, the prominent British sexologist Havelock Ellis, also argued that sexual inversion, in the case of men, should be distinguished from transvestism and other forms of gender inversion, which he claimed were often practiced by heterosexual men. While he generally characterized female inverts as masculine, he told a meeting of the Chicago Academy of Medicine in 1913 that sexual inversion correctly referred "exclusively [to] such a change in a person's sexual impulses . . . that the impulse is turned towards individuals of the same sex, while all the other impulses and tastes may remain those of the sex to which the person by anatomical configuration belongs."[59] The homosexual man, defined solely by his capacity to find sexual satisfaction with another male, began to emerge as a distinct figure in medical discourse, different from the invert, who was still defined by a more thoroughgoing inversion of gender conventions, and from the heterosexual man, who could find sexual satisfaction only with a female.

The writings of doctors help explicate the shifting terms of sexual ideology in the early twentieth century. But such writers did not *create* the social category of the "invert" or the "homosexual," as some recent theories have proposed.[60] As Lichtenstein's description of the men he had encountered in the city jail demonstrates particularly clearly, their writings represent little more than an (often unsuccessful) effort to make sense of the male sexual culture they had observed or of which they were a part. The medical analysis of the different character of "inverts," "perverts," and "normal people" reflected a set of classificatory distinctions already widely recognized in the broader culture. The fairy, regarded as a "third-sexer," more womanly than manly, was a pivotal cultural figure in the streets of New York before he appeared in the pages of medical journals. The effeminacy doctors ascribed to the invert was emphasized by the common terms people already used for fairies, such as *buttercup, nance, pansy,* and *sissy;* and the gender-based distinction some doctors drew between "normal" (that is, conventionally masculine) men and "inverts" only reproduced the distinction drawn in the vernacular between "he-men" and "she-men."[61] Similarly, the new division of the sexual world by medical discourse into homosexuals and heterosexuals reflected a shift already evident more broadly in middle-class culture. The fairy and the queer, not the medical profession, forced middle-class men to consider the possibility of a sexual element in their relations with other men.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the medical discourse on homosexuality had only a limited effect on most individuals. While a few boys were diagnosed as homosexuals by doctors, many more were denounced as queers by the other boys on their street. Most men who escaped such denunciations did not begin to think they were fairies because they read about them in articles published in obscure medical journals, but because they met fairies in the streets and were confronted every day by the inconsistency between their desires and those proclaimed by the men and women around them. The fairy's position in the sex–gender system made sense to them not because it had been constructed (or explained) so carefully by elite writers, but because it seemed reasonable in terms of the social practices that constituted and reconstituted gender on an everyday basis. While doctors sometimes succeeded in articulating the cultural assumptions underlying those practices with exceptional clarity, they still had relatively little influence over them at the turn of the century.*

*Medical professionals had played a key role in the criminalization of abortion in the mid-nineteenth century and played a growing role in the regulation of prostitution and venereal disease in the early twentieth, but they did not play a major role in the state regulation of homosexuality until World War II.[62]

"Normal" middle-class men's growing resistance to any physical or affective ties redolent of homosexuality, and the insistence of middle-class "queer" men that it was their sexual desire, not gender inversion, that distinguished them from other men, mark the emergence of the "heterosexual" and the "homosexual" in middle-class culture. The emergence of each signals the consolidation of sexuality itself as a central component of identity in middle-class culture and tends to confirm Michel Foucault's insight that the construction of sexuality as a distinct field of personhood, linking affective desires and physiological responses in a matrix that was central to the definition of one's personhood, was initially a distinctly bourgeois production.[63]

The broad class differences discernible in early-twentieth-century gender and sexual ideology were never absolute differences. There were significant differences between "respectable" and "rough" working-class men, among workingmen from different ethnic subcultures, between established middle-class businessmen and professionals and the new middle class of white-collar clerks. Moreover, as the anthropologist Richard Parker has observed in a different context, any given individual was aware, to one degree or another, of the variety of competing sexual ideologies available in his culture, which gave him some room for maneuvering among them.[64] Some working-class men eschewed all sexual contact with other men as "perverse" and "abnormal," and others identified themselves as "queers" and insisted that their difference from other men resided not in their gender persona but in their sexuality alone. Some middle-class men experimented with sex with other men without believing that it ineluctably marked them as homosexual, while almost all self-identified middle-class gay men considered themselves marked, to some degree, as gender deviants as well as sexual deviants, even if they tried to recast that gender difference in terms of cultural sophistication or sensitivity.

Still, it would be wrong to imagine that each ideological system was free-floating and easily appropriated by any man, regardless of his social location. Every man had to position himself in relation to the ideology prevailing in the social worlds in which he was raised and lived. Every man had constantly to negotiate his relations with the men and women around him, that is, as well as with the legal, religious, and medical authorities who sought to enforce, with varying degrees of consistency and effectiveness, particular ideological positions. The predominant class locations of the queer, the fairy, the heterosexual, and trade illuminate the shifting relationship of sex, gender, and sexuality in different class cultures. The association of the homosexual and heterosexual with middle-class culture highlights the degree to which "sexuality" and the rooting of gender in anatomy were bourgeois productions, and the association of the

fairy and trade with working-class culture highlights the degree to which gender governed the interpretation of sexual practices and manliness was self-consciously performative in that culture.

The transition from the world of fairies and men to the world of homosexuals and heterosexuals was a complex, uneven process, marked by substantial class and ethnic differences. Sex, gender, and sexuality continued to stand in volatile relationship to one another throughout the twentieth century, the very boundaries between them contested. It was in the context of this volatile matrix—the variety of modes of sexual categorization, and the complex mixture of fascination, revulsion, and desire evoked by the fairy and the homosexual—that a gay world took shape. It is to the making of that world that we now turn.

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