Gay Rights and Moral Panic

The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality

Fred Fejes

palgrave
macmillan

2008

CHAPTER 2

THE STRANGE MEDIA CAREER OF THE HOMOSEXUAL

PRIOR TO THE LATE 1940S, the most prevalent media image of the male homosexual and the one most familiar to the American public was the "fairy." It drew upon both the turn-of-the-century scientific notions of homosexuals as sexual inverts and, more significantly for media representations, upon the experience of the emerging urban area–based homosexual communities such as Greenwich Village, where many male homosexuals affected female mannerisms, dressed in an effeminate style, and often gave themselves female names. While effeminacy was no means typical of all homosexual men, it clearly marked a man as homosexual.[1]

In the Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s, the industry's Production Code prohibited the explicit representation of homosexuality. The fairy was thus represented by the "sissy," an effeminate man with ambiguous sexuality generally playing a comic, secondary, or minor role. Famous Hollywood sissies such as Franklin Pangborn, Grady Sutton, and Edward Everett Horton depicted characters who swished, oozed, and were unmistakably nonmasculine. For the national film audience, such characters served also as signifiers of urban culture, mixing sophistication and foppishness. For example, in the 1934 Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers's film *The Gay Divorce*, a sophisticated comedy that won an Oscar as Best Film, Horton played Astaire's effeminate friend who had a passion for toy dolls, was known to his friends as Aunt Egbert, and reluctantly admitted that his boyhood nickname was Pinky.[2]

In the mainstream press any discussion of homosexuality was considered beyond the bounds of respectable reporting. While big city gossip sheets and tabloids sometimes reported on the activities of openly effeminate homosexuals in places like Greenwich Village, the reputable press avoided the topic. Even in the murder trial of Nathan Leopold

and Richard Loeb, perhaps the most famous and sensationalized murder trial of the first half of the twentieth century, the press left unexamined their homoerotic relationship, which was detailed in a confidential report by court psychologists. Rather than being a story of homosexual crime, the cold-blooded murder of a fourteen-year-old neighbor boy by two young men from rich, prominent families was framed in the press as part of a larger morality tale about the waywardness of youth in the 1920s Jazz Age.[3]

On radio, the most popular entertainment medium of the 1930s and 1940s, the portrayal of homosexuality was even more muted. The medium reached almost all American homes, and network standards were strict. As with film, the male homosexual was represented by the "sissy." Radio's most popular "sissy" was Jack Benny, whose effeminate manner and speech were his show's trademark. Explicit allusions to his sexuality were rare, and the show's content was open to multiple interpretations; his character could easily be read as a milquetoast. However when Benny performed at military bases during World War II, he was often more direct, reflecting the fact that during World War II, as explored by gay historian Allan Berube, elements of urban homosexual culture, particularly the persona of the fairy, found their way into almost all areas of military entertainment and was popular among the all male audiences. One of Benny's jokes was based on his own service as a sailor during World War I. Commenting on the military practice of trying to match new recruits' military assignments to their civilian jobs, he told his audience, "If you were a mailman, you were put in the infantry: if you were a cowboy, you went into the cavalry, and if you were a mechanic, you became an engineer. How I ever ended up on a ferry [*sic*] boat, I'll never know."[4]

In general, the fairy—effeminate, weak and soft, neither physically aggressive nor openly sexual—posed little threat. As media scholar Alexander Doty noted, such characters worked "comfortably and conventionally within long-established Western cultural traditions that tried to neutralize and contain the threat of the unmasculine or feminine man by making him the butt of homophobic laughter."[5] Moreover, given the fairy's exotic character, there was no need to explain its origins. In contrast to later portrayals of male homosexuality, one was not "recruited," "seduced," or "made" into being a fairy. Similarly, the fairy was not portrayed as being "sick," "perverted," or as a "criminal."

A more ominous public figure—and one portrayed with less frequency—was the lesbian. While a man abandoning his masculine role to take on the weakness and softness of the female role was seen as comic, a

woman assuming a man's role, with all its power, was regarded as threatening, explicitly raising the issue of sexual deviance and transgression. Lesbians were often portrayed as murderers and perverted seducers of innocent young women. Cultural historian Lisa Duggan's study of tabloid press narratives of lesbianism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals the popularity of stories involving lesbian love crimes in which a mannish woman falls in love with a feminine heterosexual female and in turn murders her in a fit of jealous rage when rejected. The image of the murderous mannish lesbian carried over into the movies. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940)—his only picture to win an Academy Award for Best Picture—the villainous mannish housekeeper Mrs. Danvers, in pain over her unrequited passion for the deceased mistress of the manor, plots the undoing of the new mistress. An alternative but equally negative image was the lesbian vampire found in films such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), in which the female vampire's lust for blood focused on young women.[6]

The profound social impact of World War II changed both the presence of homosexuals in society and their public image. World War II accelerated the development of a homosexual subculture in the United States. For many young men and women, service in the military and war industries gave them their first opportunity to move away from home and out of the routine and rules of daily life, allowing them to explore previously secret same-sex desires. After the war many of them chose to remain in the larger cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, and other major cities that were training bases, ports of embarkation, or war industry sites. Here they could continue to live as homosexuals.[7]

Additionally, the war resulted in the first major effort to define and examine homosexuality as a "problem." Prior to the war a small number of psychiatrists, sociologists, and law enforcement officials, often using psychologically disturbed patients or jailed criminals as their subjects, attempted to explore, understand, but more typically regulate and restrict the homosexual world. However, during the war the U.S. government undertook, by comparison, a massive effort to develop its knowledge of homosexuality. Homosexuals were defined as poor military risks, and military psychiatrists were charged with developing methods of detecting homosexuals among the incoming draftees. At least fifteen psychiatric studies of male homosexual soldiers were conducted, involving more than two thousands subjects (none were done on lesbians).[8] Ironically the research done by some military psychiatrists disproved the assumption

that homosexuals were unfit for military service. The research showed they performed their military duties beyond reproach, and there was no reason for discharge; however, these views were ignored. Overall this wartime effort created an understanding of the homosexual not only as a military "problem" but also as a problem posing a danger to national interests and security.

More significantly, the disruptive effects of World War II vastly accelerated the changes that were already occurring at least since the turn of the century in the structure of American gender and sexual roles and identities. The postwar period was characterized by large scale attempts to return American culture back to more traditional notions of family, sex, and gender. However, it was quickly evident that America's sexual landscape had been profoundly and irreversibly altered, and any prewar reticence about public discussion regarding sexual matters gave way to a highly publicized national debate about America's sexual character. The controversy over the findings reported in 1948 by Alfred Kinsey in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was only part of the larger debate occurring in America about sexuality.[9] These debates were inextricably tied to growing public doubts and anxieties over the American family, gender relations, social change, national identity, and this country's ability to face the challenges of the Cold War. The postwar period was often characterized as a time when heterosexual roles and norms ruled unchallenged. However this postwar hyperheterosexuality was, in fact, a response to the changes and confusion in sex roles and norms. The line between hetero- and homosexuality was becoming blurred, and many feared it was collapsing altogether.[10] These postwar sexuality debates gave exposure to sexual matters that were taboo before the war. It was now necessary to create rules and boundaries on activities and identities previously only vaguely visible and laxly regulated. It was in the context of this paradoxical climate of sexual openness and anxiety that the image of the homosexual as "pervert" emerged.

Both the military research and the Kinsey report found that homosexuality was not a rare psychiatric phenomenon but relatively widespread. The Kinsey report was typically read as stating that one in ten men were homosexuals. Moreover, as Kinsey argued with his continuum of sexual behavior, there were degrees of homosexual behavior, with many heterosexual men engaging in homosexual acts or experiencing homosexual desire. Furthermore the public was no longer sure how to recognize a homosexual. According to the military research and Kinsey, in contrast to the prewar persona of the effeminate fairy, most male homosexuals

exhibited "normal" masculine behavior. Effeminacy was not a reliable marker of homosexuality. In 1953 Kinsey published findings on female sexuality, where he reported similar conclusions about the nature and extent of female homosexuality. His work on both male and female sexuality confounded the easy stereotypes of the male homosexual as the sissyman and the lesbian as the butch-woman and helped in the development of a new public profile of the homosexual in which gender inversion was not the primary characteristic.[11]

For the public, the knowledge of the widespread occurrence of homosexuality was disturbing, as was the knowledge that one could no longer easily recognize homosexuals by their effeminate or butch behavior. But what was even more disturbing were the answers psychologists were beginning to offer to the question of what caused homosexuality. The genesis of the prewar fairy did not require a popular explanation, given it assumed rare occurrence. However, the seemingly large number of postwar homosexuals demanded an explanation. In the postwar popular and scientific literature about the causes of homosexuality, few scientists offered a genetic explanation or viewed homosexuality as something within the normal range of sexual expression. Rather, most explanations defined it as a pathological condition. In 1952 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) issued its first comprehensive listing of mental disorders—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I)*. Homosexuality was listed among the sociopathic personality deviations characterized by an absence of distress or anxiety despite the presence of a profound pathology. Under this rubric, the homosexual's comfort and acceptance of his or her homosexuality was a certain sign of mental illness.

In trying to explain its causes, individual psychological causes focused on poor parenting or individual maladjustment. Much attention was given to various social causes. Many pointed to the vast disruption of family life caused by the Depression and the wartime experience of soldiers in a same-sex environment. Some blamed the change in gender roles, the decline of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and, for male homosexuals, the perceived dominance of emasculating mothers and wives. Conversely, others saw male homosexuality as a flight from the high demands of masculinity imposed by a heavily masculine culture. To some it was explained by the overall increase in the stress and complexity of modern life, which drove men and women to seek refuge in sexual aberrations. And finally some authorities blamed Kinsey and others who wrote on the topic for encouraging it by discussing it so openly.[12]

As varied as these explanations may be, they shared the assumption that heterosexuality was the normal expression of human sexuality and that homosexuality was a perverted aberration. Moreover, homosexuality was not innate but caused by exogenous factors. In other words, one became a homosexual. All of this had a very disturbing implication: *Given the right situation or set of factors, most anyone was susceptible of becoming a homosexual.*

The postwar anxieties about sexual roles and practices were further intensified by the growing attention given to another heavily emotionally laden sexual topic: child sex crimes. As noted by Philip Jenkins in his history of child molestation in America, in the postwar period, with its high birth rate and the creation of many new families with young children, media attention to sex crimes and children accelerated. During the late 1940s and first half of the 1950s a "sex crime panic" swept the United States, drawing public attention to crimes of a sexual nature, particularly those in which young children were victims. National magazines ran stories about sex crimes involving children, with peaks in coverage in 1947–50 and 1953–54. The increased focus was not the result of any large increase in such crimes but more often due to a small number of high-profile cases of child molestation, kidnapping, or murder. Typically such crimes were not defined as the work of ordinary criminals to be prosecuted under existing laws, but the actions of "sexual psychopaths" who were to be treated differently. Legislators responded. Between 1947 and 1955 twenty-one states and the District of Columbia enacted new laws dealing with sexual psychopaths. These laws often did not name specific criminal acts, nor did they differentiate between felonies or misdemeanors, violent and nonviolent crimes, or consensual or nonconsensual behavior.

For homosexuals, who were already considered criminals under various state sodomy laws, these laws and the general climate of a panic about sex crimes represented an additional major repressive threat. As historian Estelle Freedman noted, many of the sexual psychopath laws were written so broadly that they easily applied to private, consensual same-sex behavior between adults. In the legal and psychiatric literature, there was frequent overlap between the terms sex criminal, pervert, psychopath, and homosexual. "Psychopath" served as a code word for homosexual at a time of heightened public awareness of homosexuality. Whereas in the prewar years the male homosexual was the easily identified effeminate and harmless "fairy," in the postwar years, he was the sick, threatening, abnormal,

difficult-to-detect sex pervert, a criminal on the prowl to seduce impressionable young children into a perverted lifestyle.[13]

Adding to the powerful stigmatization of homosexuality was the development in the early 1950s of what historian David K. Johnson describes as the lavender scare, where the federal government conflated the threat of homosexuality with the threat of communist subversion. Starting in 1950, the same year that Senator Joseph McCarthy raised his infamous charge of communists in the State Department, congressional investigators began uncovering what they viewed as a massive network of homosexuals employed throughout the government. The charge was not typically that homosexuals were communists, rather that homosexuals because of their secret perverted sexual needs were vulnerable to being compromised and blackmailed by communist agents. In the eyes of the government, they were major security risks. Both Republican and Democratic administrations instituted security clearance investigations in which any evidence of homosexuality was cause for dismissal. Furthermore homosexuality entered into the political lexicon. In the 1952 campaign the Republicans promised to bring "morality" back to government and made thinly veiled references to Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson's supposed effeminacy. Although there is no exact count, Johnson estimates that the number of employees who resigned or were discharged from government service over the years ran into the thousands. Although homosexuality was never found to be the cause of any security breach in the United States, homosexuals were now portrayed as a weak link in America's defense against communism.[14]

Thus by the early 1950s, doctors, lawmakers and politicians had created what media scholar Gaye Tuchman termed a "web of facticity" about homosexuality. Relying on what authoritative institutions and figures defined as the "facts" about homosexuality, the media portrayed it as a sickness, a crime, and a source of national subversion. Mass circulation magazines ran articles with titles like "New Moral Menace to Our Youth" and "Let's be Honest about Homosexuals," which portrayed homosexuality as an increasingly dangerous phenomenon and homosexual men as sick, deranged, and inclined to prey on youth. Fearful media stories began to describe the existence of the "homintern," the network of homosexuals comparable to the Communist Comintern, that had a stranglehold on American cultural institutions and was plotting the corruption of American society.[15]

One consequence of this powerful web of facticity was the minimizing of the existence and experience of lesbians. In the fields of both law

and medicine the predominant focus was on male homosexual; the bulk of the scientific evidence on homosexuality was based on the experience of this group. It was male homosexuals—with a more public sex culture than lesbians—who were typically arrested for solicitation, indecency, and engaging in sex in public places and whose names appeared in news stories of bar raids and other arrests. Additionally, stories about male homosexual murders—either homosexuals who were murderers or were themselves murdered—were given prominent play in the mainstream press in the 1950s. In the 1950s the construction of the threat of homosexuality assumed a heavy masculine inflection that would characterize its discussion for decades to come.

A good example of the media accounts of homosexuality in this period was the nine-part news report written by Max Lerner, a prominent liberal scholar (one of the founding faculty of Brandeis University), writer, and social commentator, which ran in early 1954 in the popular (and then liberal) *New York Post*. Lerner was a prominent foe of McCarthyism and four years earlier wrote a twelve-part series of daily columns highly critical of the congressional investigations of homosexuals in the federal government. He argued that the problem was not so much the presence of homosexuals in government but how they had become victims and scapegoats of a politically motivated "neofascist" campaign. "While the homosexuals are sick people, the ruthless campaign against them is symptomatic of an even more dangerous sickness in the social atmosphere."[16]

Four years later his tone and attitude had changed dramatically. The 1954 series, entitled "The Tragedy of the Gay," was an attempt to educate the public about homosexuality; however, now homosexuals were no longer viewed as vulnerable victims of totalitarian governments but as pathological individuals prone to crime and tragic lives. According to Lerner, homosexuality most likely was due both to bad parenting and seduction and molestation by older homosexuals. Focusing solely on male homosexuals, he noted that many homosexuals led lives of amoral dissipation and often crime. He opened the series with a retelling of the 1921 Leopold and Loeb murder (whose homoerotic element was now public knowledge) and an account of a recent New York murder in which a young man assisted by his male companion poisoned his wealthy parents and then spent their money on "lavish living, cars and parties which were clearly of the kind that homosexuals call 'gay.'" The emotional lives of other homosexuals were pervaded by a sense of loneliness and sadness. They were vulnerable both to prosecution by the law and to other more

predatory homosexuals and hustlers who abused them. With guarded optimism he concluded that there might be a cure for homosexuality.[17]

Lerner's views reflected the intensifying demonization and pathologizing in the media of homosexuals and homosexuality. A content analysis study of forty-eight articles dealing with homosexuality appearing in *Time* and *Newsweek* during the period 1946 and 1968 revealed that the majority depicted homosexuals as either "sick" (79 percent) or as "predators" (52 percent), or both. The predator depiction often was conflated with the portrayal of the homosexual as a murderous "monster." A 1949 editorial in *Newsweek* entitled "Queer People" argued that "the sex pervert, whether a homosexual, an exhibitionist, or even a dangerous sadist, is too often regarded merely as a 'queer' person who never hurts anyone but himself. Then the mangled form of some victim focuses public attention on the degenerate's work. . . . The sex pervert must be treated not as a coddled patient, but as a particularly virulent type of criminal."[18]

By the early 1950s the dominant media frame of homosexuality was one of sickness, crime and perversion. More significantly, the reporting was concentrated in periods of *moral panics* about homosexuality. As defined by sociologists such as Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, moral panics were situations of high generalized social anxiety where a condition, behavior, person, or group emerged and became the focal point of the anxiety. The target was defined by the media as a threat to the larger moral order of society. The reporting was all out of proportion to the actual threat. Further media coverage expanded on this threat and, often in response, some government action was taken to "solve the problem" and the panic dissipated.[19]

Thus, much of what the American public learned about homosexuality typically occurred during moral panics, or periods of high anxiety in which homosexuals were the target of intense media attention and government crackdowns. This was particularly true in local press reporting. During the 1950s and 1960s intense and heavy media reporting about the homosexual threat occurred in cities throughout the nation, typically accompanied by police arrests of homosexuals. Such moral panics were not restricted to major cities with large concentrations of homosexuals like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. The kidnap and murder of young boy in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1954 led to the state enacting a sexual psychopath law under which the following year twenty men in the city, engaging in private consensual same-sex activity, were arrested and sent to a state mental hospital. In Boise, Idaho, in the summer of 1955, the media report of a fictitious homosexual recruitment ring led

to a major campaign against homosexuals that resulted in the arrest of a number of men. From 1953 to 1955 a series of well-publicized arrests of homosexuals in Atlanta led the *Atlanta Constitution* to report that police viewed increasing sex crimes as the number one social problem of the day: "A great majority of the deviates are homosexual. . . . Experts here say that evidence indicates that otherwise normal children sometimes come under the influence of molesters and are actually converted to a life of sex perversion."[20]

The movie industry was quick to pick up on the new image of the homosexual, and the prewar comic, harmless "sissy" was replaced with a far more dark and sinister figure. Although still bound by the Production Code's ban on the explicit portrayal of homosexuality, thinly disguised homosexual characters were now used to portray sickness and evil. Alfred Hitchcock used homosexuality as a marker for evil, as evident in his movies *Strangers on a Train* (1951) and *Rope* (1948). The latter was loosely based on the 1921 Leopold and Loeb murder case, which was becoming a popular trope in the depiction of homosexual psychopathic criminality and perversion. In 1958 Meyer Levin's best-selling book *Compulsion*, a fictional account of the Leopold-Loeb case that clearly painted their homoerotic relationship, became a major film. It received highly laudatory reviews in the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine, which made note of the young men's "abnormal" relationship based on a "private world of post-Nietzschean fantasy and homosexual practice." The apogee of this type of film depiction was reached in the movie version of Tennessee's William's *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959), starring Katherine Hepburn, Montgomery Clift, and Elizabeth Taylor. To the depiction of homosexuality as evil and sickness was added the concluding cannibalistic murder of the unseen homosexual character by the young boys he pursued.[21]

Although not as frequent, lesbians were similarly depicted, particularly in B-movies. The 1950 film *Caged*, set in a female prison, depicted brutal lesbian characters bullying a new young inmate. One warns her, "If you stay in here too long, you don't think of guys at all. You get out of the habit." Films like *Women's Prison* (1955) and *Reform School Girl* (1957) continued the theme of criminally hardened lesbians. Prisons were not the only settings for lesbian depictions. The 1950 film *Young Man with a Horn* attributed the downfall of a talented young trumpet player to his marriage to a sophisticated, masculine socialite who found diversions with other women, driving her husband to drink. The *New York Times* review described the character as "the confused, mentally sick wife." The film ended with the husband spitting on her, shouting, "You're sick. . . . You'd better see a doctor."[22]

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This emerging image of the homosexual as sick and perverted, however, did not go unchallenged. Within the growing postwar homosexual communities there were small numbers of socially and politically aware young homosexuals. Many had been in military service and after the war came to live in the growing urban centers such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., New York, Miami, and Chicago. To them this image of the homosexual as threat and pervert was both inaccurate and destructive. The publication in 1948 of Kinsey's report, which viewed homosexuality as part of the normal continuum of sexual behavior, provided a powerful response to the popular negative assumptions about homosexuality. In 1951 the appearance of Donald Webster Cory's *The Homosexual in America* provided the first modern sympathetic and personal account the lives of male homosexuals, as well as a new perspective on the "problem" of homosexuality. Cory, the pseudonym for Columbia University graduate student Edward Sagarin, argued that the major problem of homosexuality was not the homosexuals themselves but society's phobic attitudes toward them. Viewing them as a caste-like minority, he described the hostility, persecution, and discrimination gay men faced.[23]

In 1951 a small group of Los Angeles homosexuals who had been active in various progressive political causes organized the Mattachine Society. The organization sought to gain acceptance by greater communication between homosexuals and the heterosexual society and emphasized the positive contributions homosexuals were making to society, a perspective reflected in their magazine *Mattachine Review*. In January 1953, a group of Mattachine members dissatisfied with this strategy created their own magazine, *ONE*, which spoke out openly and more aggressively on behalf of the rights and interests of homosexuals, printing accounts of police harassment and persecution from cities all across the nation based on newspaper reports sent in by its readers. Although only having a printed circulation in the low four digits (as did the *Mattachine Review*), its impact was far greater, for it was the only publication that dared speak positively of homosexuality and advocate equal legal and social status for homosexuals. It was responsible for the first legal victory on behalf of homosexuals. It successfully challenged before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1958 a lower court ruling upholding the postmaster's seizure of copies

of *ONE* as obscene. In 1955 a small group of lesbians in San Francisco formed the Daughters of Bilitis, which focused primarily of the issues of lesbians and started its own publication *The Ladder*, offering a "feminine viewpoint." Although the tensions between the two organizations reflected a divide between men and women in the gay rights movement that would only become more pronounced in time, there was a developing awareness common among many of the members of both organizations that they were not psychologically sick individuals but people who maintained healthy lives and relationships and contributed to society. A number of the members saw themselves as members of an oppressed minority and looked to the quickly developing black civil rights movement for both definition and guidance in strategy. The activities and viewpoints of all these organizations were rarely visible beyond a small group of people. Although small in numbers (in 1960 the membership of the Mattachine Society stood at 230 and the Daughters of Bilitis at 110), members of this new homophile movement, as they began to call themselves, represented a self-conscious and growing movement among homosexuals that challenged their oppressed status in society.[24]

Challenges to the view of homosexuality as perversion also appeared in the realm of popular postwar literature. Popular writer Gore Vidal's best-selling 1948 novel *The City and the Pillar* depicted homosexual males as masculine, leading normal lives and searching for love from each other (and not "recruiting" susceptible teenagers). James Baldwin, another highly regarded young postwar author, incorporated his own experiences as a homosexual and a black man in his auto-biographically based novels *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and *Giovanni's Room* (1956). Eschewing the idea of homosexuals as an oppressed minority, they depicted same-sex attraction as a complex and not easily categorized expression of human experience and desire. Nonetheless, there was a strong reaction and both writers paid professionally for their defiance of the accepted view of the subject.[25]

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The activity of the homophile organizations and the work of such writers as Baldwin and Vidal, however, represented only a very small stream flowing against a growing torrent of negative images of homosexuality. With the liberalization of obscenity laws by a series of Supreme Court decisions in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Hollywood films became

far more explicit in their portrayal of homosexuals as perverts and moral and social threats. Movies such as the *Children's Hour* (1961), *Advice and Consent* (1962), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Lilith* (1964), *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), *The Sergeant* (1968), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), and *Boston Strangler* (1968) depicted lesbians and gay men as pathetic, sick, sometimes murderous deviants who preyed upon "normal" society. As a January 1969 issue of *Variety* noted, "Homo 'n' Lesbo Films at Peak: Deviate Theme Now Box Office." As shown in the detective movie *P.J.* (1969), the homosexual fairy, the dominant symbol of the 1930s and 1940s had now become the murderous faggot.[26]

A similar kind of explicitness and openness was emerging in the news media. In the 1940s and 1950s typical media news accounts of homosexuality, when not describing it as criminal perversion, depicted it as an individual psychological problem. In the 1960s, however, with the increasing growth and visibility of the urban gay culture in New York, San Francisco, and other cities, homosexuals were no longer considered isolated sick or criminal individuals but members of a growing underground community. This new depiction was conflated with the growing sense of anxiety about the condition of America's major cities. The growing presence of homosexual bars, bathhouses, and cruising areas in run-down parts of the city was seen, along with racial tension, prostitution, drugs, and crime, as one more marker of urban crisis and decay.

Initially provoking this new concern was a December 1963 *New York Times* front page article, "Growth of Overt Homosexuality in City Provokes Wide Concern." It was written on the command of Abe Rosenthal, the newspaper's new metropolitan editor, who had just returned to the city after a long stint abroad and was shocked at increasing visibility of homosexuals in the city. Describing New York's homosexual community as "the city's most sensitive open secret," the story described how "the city's homosexual community acts as a lodestar, attracting others from all over the county. More than a thousand inverts are arrested here annually for public misdeeds." The story went on to quote the police, psychiatrists and other "experts" about the growing problem homosexuality posed for the city. The story had such an impact that the national news magazine *Newsweek* ran a story about it, noting that the *Times* reporter had received "anxious mail and phone calls from homosexuals and their families" and was surprised that he had "rocked so many people back on their heels" with his story.[27]

Given the status of the *New York Times* status as the national newspaper of record and its power in setting the reporting agenda and news frames, "the problem of urban homosexual community" quickly became a "legitimate" story for the nation's news media. In 1964 the nation's print media carried more stories about homosexuals than in the previous three years combined, with even more stories appearing in 1965 and 1966.[28] Over the next two years, major newspapers in cities such as Chicago, Denver, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta ran multipart investigative series on the local homosexual communities in those cities with titles like "'Militant Minority' Poses Serious Problem for Society," "Atlanta's Lonely 'Gay' World," and "The Homosexuals—A Growing Problem."[29] *Life*, the national news-photo magazine with a circulation of over six million, ran a fourteen-page article in June 1964 on the homosexual community entitled "The 'Gay' World Takes to the City Streets" with photos from Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Miami of leather-clad men standing in crowded, smoke-filled bars, homosexuals cruising the streets, and men being led off in handcuffs by the police.[30] Later that year *Look*, *Life*'s major competitor, ran a twelve thousand–word photo article on the squalid conditions of New York's Times Square, painting the presence of homosexuals as one of the major factors in the decline of the area.[31]

In a January 1966 editorial essay entitled "The Homosexual in America," *Time* magazine concluded that homosexuality was "a pathetic little second-rate substitute for reality, a pitiable flight from life. As such it deserves fairness, compassion, understanding, and when possible, treatment. But it deserves no encouragement, no glamorization, no rationalization, no fake status as a minority group, no sophistry about simple differences in taste—and, above all, no pretense that it is anything but a pernicious sickness." A year later *Look*, in a major article entitled "The Sad 'Gay' Life," described homosexuality as "a distorted mirror image of heterosexual life."[32]

The *New York Times* added to the anxiety with a May 1964 front page article headlined "Homosexuals Proud of Deviancy, Medical Study Finds." The story reported on a newly released study by the prestigious New York Academy of Medicine that declared homosexuality "an 'illness' that can be treated successfully in 'some cases' but is more easily dealt with by early preventive measures." The article noted that the study contradicted the "contention of spokesmen for homosexuals that their aberration makes them merely 'a different kind of people leading an acceptable

way of life.'" It emphasized that parents' "neglect, rejection, overprotection, [and]over indulgence" was most often the cause of a young child becoming a homosexual. Parents' anxiety over their children becoming homosexual was further amplified the following August when the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* published an article by psychiatrist Irving Bieber that explored the parents' role in making their children homosexual. Based on his own research he argued that mothers were largely responsible for a child becoming a homosexual through the excessive pampering of their sons and the unconscious envy and open criticism of their daughters. He concluded, "Much can be done to prevent the chronic suffering of homosexuality, but science can do nothing unless parents look searchingly and honestly within themselves and into their relationships with their youngsters."[33] As with the issue of the growth of the gay community, the *Times* articles spawned additional articles on homosexuality in children and adolescence in magazines such as the popular *Parents' Magazine*, the *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Seventeen* on how parents could cope, and hopefully prevent it.[34]

Following the lead of the national print media, the national television network CBS produced the first network documentary on the topic in the spring of 1967. The show was part of CBS's award-winning documentary series *CBS Reports*, which covered controversial issues like abortion, drug abuse, and integration. Three years in the planning and production and narrated by Mike Wallace, the show reiterated the images of homosexuality that previous print news coverage had constructed. While two of the homosexuals interviewed expressed positive feelings about their sexuality, the bulk of the show was given over to experts like Bieber who doubted that any father who is "warm, good, [and] supportive" can have a son as a homosexual. At the end of the show Wallace summarized: "The dilemma of the homosexual: Told by the medical profession he is sick, by the law he is a criminal. Shunned by employers, rejected by heterosexual society, incapable of a fulfilling relationship with a woman or, for that matter, with a man. At the center of his life, he remains anonymous."[35] Almost forty million Americans watched the show. For many it was their first exposure to any professionally produced information about homosexuality depicted as being objective and factual.

To the small but active homophile rights movement, the increased media attention represented both a threat and an opportunity. These media reports typically broadcast and further detailed the images and accounts of homosexuals as psychologically sick perverts contributing to

urban decay and threatening the social and moral order. However reporters working the stories often turned to homophile rights organizations and activists for information about the local homosexual community, giving homophile organizations like Mattachine and their arguments on behalf of homosexual rights their first media publicity. Often in the news accounts there would be mention of homosexuals who lived normal, quiet lives, typically concluding that such "healthy homosexuals" had, at best, a "strange and ambivalent" attitude toward themselves.[36] Often these stories made note of the existence of the Mattachine Society along with a description of its activities and goal "to promote the acceptance of homosexuality by society."[37]

Homosexual activists also made use of the newly emerging media of locally produced radio and television talk shows. Given the growing attention being paid to homosexuality in the press, homosexuality became a frequent topic on these programs. The general format was to have recognized experts and authorities such as psychiatrists, social counselors, and law enforcement personnel describe the accepted view of "homosexuality as sickness/crime" and then one or two "healthy homosexuals" present the alternative viewpoint, typically framed as controversial and marginal. There were exceptions. Pacifica Network, a chain of listener-supported radio stations with progressive programming, produced a two-hour program in 1958 entitled "The Homosexual in Society" featuring homophile activists and homophile-friendly lawyers, psychologists, and sociologists. The program was taped and re-aired on Pacifica stations over the following years. When the program was aired in New York in 1962, it was followed by studio discussion by local homosexuals who talked about their lives, touching on police harassment, promiscuity, and their careers. It was the first broadcast program in which homosexuals presented their lives and problems not through the prism of homosexuality as psychopathology or social problem but from the perspective of relatively healthy people living ordinary, real lives.[38]

While media reporting through the mid-1960s predominantly painted homosexuality as a sickness and crime, the public who read these stories or heard the television and radio programs were becoming slowly aware of a different perspective on the issue. Typically most audience members gave little credence to the comments by Mattachine members and other "healthy" homosexuals. Still, for many of the closeted homosexuals living throughout the country, these media reports often were their first knowledge of homophile rights activists and the idea that homosexuality was not a sickness nor were homosexuals criminal and perverts. For

them, such accounts provided a new understanding of their situation and a new hope.

* * *

Beyond the efforts of homophile rights activists, the whole notion of homosexuality as a sickness and crime was being challenged by a far more powerful series of events, developments, and large-scale political and social changes that have come to be known collectively in the media as the Sixties. The decade of the 1960s was a period of political and social upheaval in which many established legal, cultural, and social regulations and norms were being challenged from a variety of sources. One of the major areas of conflict was sexuality. Attempts in the 1950s to reestablish a traditional sexual and gender conformity upset by the social impact of World War II were proving to be unsuccessful. In the 1960s the dominant view of sex as primarily a means of reproduction within the relationship of marriage was being replaced view of sex as a means of individual pleasure, intimacy, and self-fulfillment. The development and marketing of the birth control pill in 1960, along with the Supreme Court's overturning laws restricting its availability, removed a potent barrier to greater sexual activity and exploration. Supreme Court rulings also liberalized the production and sales of pornography and opened a whole new and very public venue for erotic material. *Playboy* magazine, one of the first major mainstream erotic magazines, not only had pictures of nude women but promoted a lifestyle for men based on erotic freedom and pleasure. Its explosive popularity in the 1960s—by 1969 it had 4.5 million readers—showed that many men, and not a few women, were eager to explore sexuality outside the boundaries of marriage and family. Advertisers across all media were realizing that sex was a potent sales tool, and by the end of the decade airlines advertisements featured sexy stewardesses telling customers, "Fly me."[39]

What *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and other media were terming the "sexual revolution" in 1963 and 1964 was really a series of broad changes over a long period of time. Much of the media coverage involved the large, postwar "baby boom" generation reaching young adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s. Along with the use of drugs and the popularity of a new style of music with aggressive rhythms and sexually explicit lyrics, greater sexual freedom was seen as a major part of the rejection of the society's traditional morals and values. Moreover, this greater sexual freedom developed in tandem with the culture of political

protest emerging over civil rights and the war in Vietnam. Such sexual rebellion, however, was typically restricted to college campuses and a few major urban centers noted for cultural innovation such as Greenwich Village in New York and San Francisco. While many of the legal changes and social innovations occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s, the larger changes in social attitudes and greater acceptance of sexual freedom were a slower process, and it was only in the 1970s that such changes began to appear in national polls on sexual attitudes and values. Nonetheless, in the mid-1960s the challenging of dominant sexual values and norms was a popular media theme appearing not only in the news media but in film and music.[40]

While images of the homosexual as sick pervert and moral threat still dominated the popular media and mind, changes were occurring that were beginning to undermine such images. One area was the laws criminalizing homosexual behavior. A major target of the culture of protest of the 1960s and 1970s—from the civil rights and draft protests to protests against the War in Vietnam—was government policies and laws deemed repressive and morally unjust. Using the "unjust law" analogy, homosexual activists argued that laws against homosexuality were not just the result of ignorance but, like the laws on segregation, were unjust and repressive. In fact, the American Law Institute, recognizing that laws criminalizing private consensual sexual behavior were increasingly outmoded and unenforceable, voted in 1955 to decriminalize consensual sodomy in its Model Penal Code used by many states as a guide in writing or revising their own criminal laws. In 1961 Illinois adopted that recommendation and decriminalized it, and other states began to follow. Great Britain, upon whose legal tradition American law was founded, was, along with the United States, one of the few Western countries that criminalized homosexuality. However, the release of the 1957 Wolfendon Report recommending decriminalization of private consensual sexual acts initiated a lively debate in Britain about homosexuality that culminated in the repeal of its sodomy statue in 1966. Both the debate and the repeal were publicized in the United States and were of particular value to homophile activists. Articles and editorials questioning the criminal status of homosexuality, while typically still viewing it as a tragic sickness, appeared in a wide range of popular media in America during the mid-1960s, including the *New York Times Sunday Magazine, Nation, Saturday Review, America* (a Catholic magazine), and *The Christian Century*. In 1969 Canada decriminalized sodomy, and in 1971 the U.S. National Commission on Reform of Federal Criminal Laws recommended repealing all federal laws

criminalizing homosexual behavior. While homosexual behavior was still criminal in many states, by the early 1970s such laws were increasingly being regarded in the media as questionable if not unjust.[41]

Another major area of change was in the area of psychiatry. Just as homosexuals were viewed as criminals, they were also viewed as psychologically sick. Much of the psychiatric definition of homosexuality was based on individuals who either sought psychiatric treatment or who were jailed under the various sexual psychopath laws. There was relatively little data based on homosexuals who did not seek therapy, were not in jail, and were otherwise mentally healthy and leading productive lives. In the climate of questioning in the 1960s, this discrepancy began to become more troublesome. In the 1950s the research of Alfred Kinsey on American sexual behavior and anthropologists Cleland Ford and Frank Beach on cross-cultural sexual patterns presented homosexuality as a minor, but totally normal expression of sexuality. But such research was initially dismissed by psychiatrists as either methodologically flawed or inapplicable to the field of psychiatry. Far more challenging was the 1957 research report of Evelyn Hooker that directly addressed the psychiatric concerns. Using matched samples of homosexual and heterosexual men who were not in therapy and were leading otherwise healthy, productive lives, she showed that there was no difference in terms of psychological health between the groups of men based on a blind evaluation of psychiatric tests administered to them. Her research confounded the psychiatric consensus about homosexuality. In revising the authoritative *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1968 *(DSM-II)*, the APA moved homosexuality from the category of sociopathic personality disorder and listed it together with other sexual deviations such as fetishism, pedophilia, and voyeurism. This change reflected both a lessening of its severity as a mental disorder and a growing confusion among psychiatrists as to exact nature, cause, and cure.[42]

The challenge of Hooker's research was amplified in the 1960s by the work of radical psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, who questioned the whole notion of mental illness and psychiatry. He argued that the equation of homosexuality with disease was typical of the practice of psychiatry to use labels to repress and exploit people. Within the mental health profession, his ideas had very limited credence. However in the climate of radical politics of the 1960s, they were given wide public reception, reflecting the questioning of established sources of authority that was the hallmark of 1960s cultural politics. Articles by and about him appeared in magazines like the *Nation, Atlantic Monthly*, and the *National Review*. Within this

climate, psychiatry's continued pathologizing of homosexuality became less credible as the decade wore on.[43]

In addition to the questioning of the standard psychological view of homosexuality as sickness was a similar questioning of the standard views on child molestation and the laws dealing with sexual psychopaths passed during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the context of the expanding civil rights movement, there was growing national media attention to how sex crime laws were used, particularly in the American South, against blacks. Many of the media accounts typically involved not crimes against children but the rape of a white woman by a black man; the punishment often meted out was death. Such media coverage stressed themes of official overreaction and racial injustice and the use of sex crime laws to oppress. These concerns began to shape perception of the laws dealing with child sex crimes. Within the psychological community, efforts were made to distinguish between true pedophiles and perpetrators of sexually violent crimes against children and persons who engaged in only seemingly minor or casual sexual infractions with children. The term child molester, as opposed to sexual criminal, was increasingly used to describe the latter person, and his or her crime was seen as far less serious. The child molester was seen as one more deserving of pity and treatment than punishment. Regarding the child, some psychologists questioned whether or not there were predisposing factors such as seductive behavior that made children prone to participate in sexual acts with adults. Some also questioned official intervention in cases of molestation of psychologically healthy children, arguing that it often did more harm than good. A less harsh view of child molestation, along with a depiction of children as being more sexually active, was also beginning to appear in the entertainment media throughout the 1960s and early 1970s in movies such as the 1962 Oscar nominated British film *The Mark* (1961), the popular and violent 1971 movie *Straw Dogs*, *The Exorcist* (1973), *Night Moves* (1975), and *Taxi Driver* (1976). On the legal front, the concern was raised about the overcriminalization of sexual crimes, and throughout the 1960s and early 1970s a series of challenges to the laws effectively limited their scope and application.[44]

* * *

Thus by the late 1960s and early 1970s, with challenges in the area of the medical sciences and the law, together with the increasing activism of homophile activists, the journalistic "web of facticity" defining

the homosexual was beginning to unravel, and the 1950s media frame of homosexuality as sickness and crime began to lose power and credibility. As a result, media reports and images of homosexuality became less harsh and condemning. However, if the old media narratives of homosexuality were increasingly seen as being outmoded, it was not clear what new ones would replace them as a definition of homosexuality and the homosexual community. While homophile activists stressed their position as an oppressed minority group and drew attention to their similarities to blacks and the civil rights movement, no recognized civil rights leader acknowledged or granted legitimacy to their struggle. The media were reluctant to regard them as totally healthy and grant them the status of a "minority." As a result, media reporting on homosexuality began to reflect both a questioning of previous understandings of homosexuality and a confusion about the nature and place of homosexuals in American society.

A good example of this critical but confused view was the five-thousand-word article appearing in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* in fall 1967 entitled "Civil Rights and the Homosexual: A 4-Million Minority Asks for Civil Rights." Although the title and the accompanying half-page picture of a picket line protest of job discrimination against homosexuals placed the story squarely within the civil rights frame, and sections of the article could easily have been taken from *ONE* or the *Mattachine Review*, the overall article was more ambiguous. The author, a self-identified heterosexual white male, argued this country was moving toward "a detente, if not a peace treaty, with its homosexuals." The homosexual wanted "to be free to pursue homosexual love, free to serve in the armed forces, free to hold a job or advance in his profession, free to champion the cause of homosexuality." The author supported full civil rights for all homosexuals. Nonetheless he concluded that the root cause of homosexuality was the overall social repression of sex in general and that in a fully nonrepressive sexual society, there would be no homosexual problem. People would engage in homosexual behavior, either as a complement to their basic heterosexual activities or as children exploring their sexuality. Thus there would be few homosexuals. The author concluded, "Whenever a culture is restrictive and rigid it produces aberrations. . . . If we want integration instead of burning cities, Negroes must live next door. If we want heterosexuals instead of deviates, we must grow them early."[45]

This confusion in media accounts about homosexuality was heightened by developments occurring in the homosexual community itself. Beginning in the mid-1950s homophile activists had followed a strategy

of assimilation and incorporation into American society. The goal was to show that, except for what they did in the bedroom, homosexuals were no different from anyone else. In the early 1960s activists in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York began modeling themselves after civil rights protesters and in 1965 began public picketing to protest discrimination. In their protests, however, they sought to distance themselves and their organizations from the bar, drag, and public sex scenes—the parts of the homosexual world that had received the majority of press coverage—and attempted to portray the typical homosexual as a quiet, respectful, conservatively dressed, law-abiding, middle-class person posing no threat to the moral and gender norms of society. They eschewed any image of radicalism or connection to the growing countercultural movement and the increasingly radicalized protests against the war in Vietnam. In contrast to the protests against the military draft organized by antiwar activists, homophile activists carried signs reading, "WE DON'T DODGE THE DRAFT . . . THE DRAFT DODGES US."[46]

Yet the accommodationist goals and conservative style of protest of the homophile organizations was becoming increasingly out of step with both the tenor of the period and the experience of many in the homosexual community. The outlook of many of the homophile activists was shaped by the experience of mostly East Coast middle-class homosexuals, who defined their movement in terms of the civil rights struggle of the late 1950s and 1960s. However in comparison to the increasing radicalization—in terms of tactics and goals—of both the civil rights movement and the antiwar movement, the homophile strategy appeared timid and outmoded. The growth of the counterculture, with its rejection of middle-class goals and morality and its emphasis on sexual freedom and personal exploration, suggested greater possibilities for the expression of same-sex desire and affection. By the second half of the 1960s the politics of nonviolent social protests that marked both the civil rights movement and antiwar movement had begun to be replaced by a radical politics of liberation as symbolized by the Black Power movement, the radical antiwar organizations, and the women's movement. In this climate of political radicalism, which called into question the legitimacy and power of authority, like the government and the police, many homosexuals who had no contact or even knowledge of the various homophile organizations began to regard radical protest and resistance as a possible and necessary response to the repression they experienced. For homosexuals one very visible and immediate form of the repression experienced by all was police harassment. Through bar raids and other kinds of arrests and

harassments, homosexuals were reminded of their stigmatized status, their lack of any safe, private space, and the unquestioned power of the state. Major campaigns of police harassment and bar raids in San Francisco and Los Angeles led to large, angry protests and demonstrations, which were totally out of character with the homophile activists' strategy.[47]

Another development was the growing visibility of young lesbian and gay students on college campuses who felt a greater affinity to a youth culture radicalized by the antiwar movement and counterculture politics than to the closeted world of many of the members of the homophile organizations. Starting in 1967 student groups began to be formed at a number of the major East Coast universities. Although some of these groups often had nominal ties with local homophile organizations, they often pursued a more radical program of protest. With the growth of major radical student protests throughout the country in 1968 and 1969, these groups quickly eschewed the tame politics of the homophile movement. The student group at Cornell University changed its name to the Gay Liberation Front, for example, following the takeover of the campus administration building by a student black power group in April 1969. They formed an alliance with the radical Students for a Democratic Society and began organizing protests against the Vietnam War and on behalf of gay rights.[48]

These more radical energies soon coalesced into a political form very different from the homophile movement. One event marked the symbolic break with the past and the beginning of a new movement. On the evening of Friday, June 27, 1969, police conducted what they assumed would be a typical raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar, the Stonewall. However, instead of meekly submitting to police arrests, bar patrons fought back, and the episode quickly escalated into two nights of riotous protests involving four hundred police and over two thousand gay protesters. Inspired by the riots, gay radical activists in Greenwich Village began organizing. One month later over three hundred people rallied in Washington Square Park, where "the homosexual revolution" was proclaimed. Identifying with the Algerian revolutionaries fighting the French in the early 1960s and the Vietcong then fighting American forces in Vietnam, they organized themselves into the Gay Liberation Front (GLF).[49]

While a number of older members of the New York Mattachine Society at first participated in the organizing activities after the Stonewall riots, they quickly felt estranged from the new movement, and a deep split emerged between the homophile activists and the radicals, not only in New York but across the nation. Over the next six months both sides

made attempts to form a joint effort but were only able to agree in establishing the June Stonewall riots as the national event commemorating the struggle of the lesbian and gay movement. Afterwards the homophile organizations went into deep decline and were soon relegated to a dim fading memory, replaced by gay liberation organizations and a new activist strategy.[50]

Gay liberation represented a fundamental shift in the politics of homosexual rights. In addition to a far more confrontational form of politics and its identification with other radical political movements, it rejected the strong division between the private and the public that characterized the homophile outlook. It argued that the personal was political. "Coming out," or being open with one's sexuality, was regarded as both a political act and a personal affirmation of one's identity. The word *homosexual* was now regarded as a marker of an oppressed identity, much the same way *colored* was regarded by Black Power activists. Instead the words *gay* and *lesbian* were seen as marking a new liberated identity, and *gay pride* and *gay power* the political goals. Most of the new activists, many in college, shared little either with the homophile organizations and outlook or with the closeted world of bars, bathhouses and tearooms. They saw a commonality between their struggle against oppression with the Black Power movement, the women's movement and the counterculture. Activists also saw themselves as part of the large, student-dominated antiwar movement, which in the fall of 1969 began organizing massive national and regional protests against the war. Campus chapters of Gay Liberation Fronts were organized at universities across the country. Throughout the 1970s, outside major cities with large lesbian and gay communities, much of the political activity was based in campus organizations.[51]

The activist politics of gay liberation, the significance of Stonewall, and the overall radicalizing trend in homosexual politics spread quickly, assisted by the emergence in the late 1960s of a lively and colorful lesbian-gay community press. The earliest lesbian-gay newspaper—Philadelphia's *Drum* and New York's *Homosexual*—were started in the early 1960s. In Los Angeles a small group of activists started publication of the *Advocate* in 1967 as part of a crusade against the tactics of the Los Angeles Police Department.[52] But after the Stonewall riots, community publications with names like *Gaypower, Comeout, Gay Liberator, Killer Dyke*, and *Gay Rights* quickly appeared, explicitly incorporating the politics of gay liberation. By 1972 over 150 lesbian and gay–oriented publications were being published, ranging from small newsletters and community publications

to larger circulation publications like the *Advocate* and Boston's *Gay Community News*, which were emerging as national gay news publications.[53]

In the mainstream press the Stonewall riots and the resulting radicalization of the gay activism received little immediate attention. However, in the months following Stonewall, stories began to appear in the national media that took notice of a new culture of assertiveness and openness growing in the lesbian and gay community and questioned the standard views of homosexuality. In December 1969 *Look* magazine offered a reexamination of the gay world in an editorial essay "A Changing View of Homosexuality?" It noted that many homosexuals were law-abiding, respected individuals and argued that society should become more accepting of the homosexuals in its presence. But it cautioned that understanding and accepting the homosexual did not mean that "homosexuality should be glorified or made preferable to heterosexuality" or that such acceptance should not include "accepting antisocial behavior such as child-molesting, assault or aggressive seduction."[54]

However, attracting far more notice was *Time* magazine's eight-thousand-word cover story in October on "The Homosexual: Newly Visible, Newly Understood." It noted the increasing visibility of the lesbian and gay community, the growth of lesbian and gay community organizations and the attitude of "Gay Pride." With the tone of an anthropologist's report describing a newly discovered tribe, it presented capsule descriptions of what it termed the major homosexual types: "The Blatant Homosexual," "The Secret Lifer," "The Desperate," "The Adjuster," "The Bisexual," and the "Situational Experimental." It addressed a number of major beliefs about homosexuality: "Despite the popular belief, [the number of homosexuals is] not substantially increased by seduction; most experts now believe that an individual's sex drives are firmly fixed in childhood." Care was taken to note that many homosexuals were well-adjusted, successful professionals. It presented an inconclusive discussion among gay activists and psychiatrists, including Charles Socarides, on the question, "Are Homosexuals Sick?" The article concluded, "While homosexuality is a serious and sometimes crippling maladjustment, research has made clear that it is no longer necessary or morally justifiable to treat all inverts as outcasts. The challenge to American society is simultaneously to devise civilized ways of discouraging the condition and to alleviate the anguish of those who cannot be helped, or do not wish to be helped."[55]

Such reporting reflected the growing confusion about the media framing of homosexuality and homosexuals. The previous perspectives and knowledge about homosexuality were becoming less credible, but there

was now uncertainty in the media on how to frame the issue. Statements about "healthy" and visible lesbian and gay professionals alternated with statements about homosexuality being "an affliction"; the growing visibility of the lesbian and gay community and its growing activism was contrasted with the need for therapy for homosexuals who wanted to change. While society's role in the oppression of homosexuals was tacitly acknowledged, such acknowledgment did not grant them minority status akin to American blacks or Native Americans.

This kind of confusion and an attempt to create a new media frame for homosexuality was perhaps best reflected both in the film *Boys in the Band*, released in early 1970, and the media response. Based on a successful 1968 off-Broadway play by Matt Crowley, the film was the first major motion picture about homosexuals to reach the general audience. Representing gay life in the early 1960s, it centered on the lives of a small group of New York gay men who, during the course of an evening's birthday celebration, exposed their innermost fears and vulnerabilities. As Vito Russo noted, both the movie and the play "presented a perfunctory compendium of easily acceptable stereotypes": the Nellie sissy; the self-hating "faggot"; the hardened, cynical, aging queen; and the young, macho hustler. While the characters' homosexuality was not presented as an illness or threat to society, it nonetheless was a personal affliction made painful both by society's hostility and the individual's own tortured and often unsuccessful attempts to find, if not happiness, at least peace and self-respect in the antagonistic environment. These characters were framed as "sad young men," occupying a very difficult, ambiguous, and ultimately tragic relationship to heterosexual's society's dominant cultural norms.[56]

In a major photo-essay devoted to the film, *Look* magazine hailed *Boys in the Band* as "the most touching and honest portrayal of homosexual life ever to come to the screen. . . . Instead of being repelled by a bunch of cavorting faggots, [heterosexual audiences are responding] to fellow human beings caught in a web of self-destruction and self-loathing." The magazine presented the major characters as reflecting the different types of people in the homosexual world. The Nellie sissy's character represented "the sad vulnerability of man's love for man." The cynical queen was speaking to the whole "gay" world when he said to another character, "You are a sad and pathetic young man. You're a homosexual and you don't want to be." Readers' response to the magazine story was strong. Some commended the magazine for helping "clear the air" of the misconceptions and hostile feelings toward homosexuals. Others, however,

suggested that "these people spend time thinking about something worthwhile like God and their souls."[57] Overall the new media narrative of "the sad young man," while not demonizing homosexuals, still saw them marginal to society. The best the homosexual could hope for from society was sympathy and a degree of stigmatized tolerance.

To many lesbians and gay men, the movie was insulting. The gay press uniformly panned it. Younger radicalized lesbian and gay men were particularly outraged. The negative reaction was best summed up by a gay college student in a letter to *Look*: "The whimpering, bitching, sadomasochistic psychopaths [portrayed in the movie] are the last surviving members of a dying breed. . . . The new breed of homosexuals of which I am proud to call myself a member is not laden with the burden of societal guilt that created the pathetic caricatures of human beings Crowley portrays. The new homosexual looks and feels no different from the rest of American youth. He, too, is sick of being ruled by Victorian or any other kind of deranged moralities that use guilt to keep a nation from freely expressing its love, be it a man's love for a woman or a man's love for another man. You will find us at demonstrations for peace, in marches for freedom, in communes, and someday, Mr. Crowley, you may be able to see our faces in the crowd that is pushing you up against the wall."[58]

* * *

As predicted, the image of the homosexual as a "sad young man" had a very short media life. The same month of the *Look* article on *Boys in the Band*, *Esquire*, the prominent upscale national magazine aimed at young, affluent, culturally sophisticated mainly heterosexual readers, declared, "Pity, just when Middle America finally discovered the homosexual, he died." The "sad young man" of *Boys in the Band* had been replaced by "The New Homosexual," "an unfettered guiltless male child of the new morality in a Zapata mustache and an outlaw hat, who couldn't care less for establishment approval." For the new homosexual, sex was "a guiltless, casual, fluid experience." In politics the "new homosexual" was equally at odds with the older generation of activists. When at a meeting an older gay man suggested that a planned protest be peaceful and polite, a young activist angrily replied, "There's the stereotype homo again, man. Soft, weak sensitive! Bullshit! That's the role society has been forcing these queens to play and they just sit and accept it. We have got to radicalize it."[59]

Esquire's "New Homosexual" fit very well into the media's new master narrative *the Sixties*, a major new cultural and social framework. As reflected in end-of-decade special issues of *Life*, *Look*, and *Newsweek*, events as disparate as the introduction of the miniskirt, the riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention, San Francisco's 1967 Summer of Love, the assassination of the Kennedys, the Beatles, the moon landing, the campus antiwar protests, Woodstock, and the New York Mets' 1969 World Series baseball championship were all seen as part of a grand discourse of radical disruption, change, and exciting new youth-inflected possibilities.[60] It was present in all major media forms, particularly music, fashion, films, and television. The homosexual was no longer sick nor afflicted but a harbinger of a new cultural order. The terms *gay*, *gay rights*, *gay revolution*, and *gay liberation* began to appear in the news media, reflecting both the actions of a small groups of lesbian and gay political activists and the larger process of homosexuals being transformed into one of the iconic figures of the Sixties.[61]

One event marked the "coming out" of the gay movement as a Sixties phenomenon to the nation. In June 1970 activists in New York marked the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall riots with a march down Sixth Avenue and a rally in Central Park. The rally drew thousands (estimates ranged from three thousand to twenty thousand) who carried signs reading, "HOMOSEXUAL IS NOT A FOUR LETTER WORD," and "BETTER BLATANT THAN LATENT" and shouted chants: "Two, four, six, eight, gay is just as good as straight," "Two, four, six, eight, gays united to smash the state" and "Say it loud! Gay is proud!" Although the rally in Central Park was organized as a political event, it was marked more by a relaxed, comfortable, picnic-like atmosphere, where for the first time thousands of openly homosexual people gathered. Smaller marches were held in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago.[62] The march was the first of what would become the annual commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall riots, which would mark late June as a period of celebrating gay pride in various cities across the nation.

Just as significantly, however, the event marked the definite new framing of homosexuality by the major news media. *The New York Times* ran its report as a front-page story under the headline "Thousands of Homosexuals Hold a Protest Rally in Central Park" and quoted one marcher: "We're probably the most harassed, persecuted minority group in history, but we'll never have the freedom and civil rights we deserve unless we stop hiding in closets and in the shelter of anonymity." The story also gave a brief account of the Stonewall riots the previous year. Both Associated

Press and United Press International carried the story, and newspapers across the country ran accounts of the march. *Time* magazine ran a story along with a picture on the march in its national section, and *The New Yorker* ran a twelve-hundred-word essay dealing with the march. Even. *Mademoiselle*, a magazine targeting young women and noted more for its articles and advice on romances and beauty, ran a feature article about the march in its September issue. In contrast to past news accounts that defined homosexuality as a "problem," either for society or for the homosexuals themselves, and offered "balance" by counterposing statements by gay activists with pronouncements from psychiatrists and police, these accounts offered a narrative in which lesbian and gay activism and visibility was presented in a unquestioning manner. Homosexuals, in the words of *Time*, were "one of the last minorities," following "hard on the heels of Women's Liberation and the Black Power Movement."[63]

These media reports of events in these few major urban centers acted as models for political and community activism for the lesbian and gay communities just emerging into visibility in cities and towns across the country. In many cities, particularly on college campuses, gay organizations were formed, modeled on either New York's Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which emphasized coalition building with other minority groups and political causes, or the newly emerging Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), which focused primarily on gay rights issues, using tactics of protest, lobbying, and public confrontation.[64]

One of the last major media articles arguing "gay is sick" was an eleven-thousand-word article in the September 1970 issue of *Harper's* by Joseph Epstein entitled "Homo/Hetero: The Struggle for Sexual Identity," in which he analyzed homosexuality an "anathema" and as a "curse." Soon after the publication of the article, over forty GAA protesting activists, accompanied by television reporters, entered the offices of *Harper's*. The protest had an impact. Two months later the magazine printed six letters from readers totaling thirty-five hundred words—one-third the length of the original article—which either questioned or outright condemned the article. No reader letters supporting the article's homophobic arguments were run.[65]

By 1971 the new narrative about homosexuality shaped media accounts. In January noted writer and emerging gay public figure Merle Miller (who would later write best-selling biographies of Henry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Lyndon Johnson) authored an eleven-thousand-word article in the *New York Times Magazine* that surveyed the history of oppression of homosexuals and the recent development of gay rights

activism, seeing it as a sign of hope and progress. Based on his own experience as a previously closeted gay man, he argued that homosexuality be accepted as a natural expression of physical and emotional love and all discrimination against homosexuals end. Over two thousand letters from all parts of the world came in response to the article, most of them positive, from letters of self-confession from closeted homosexuals to letters of thanks from younger lesbians and gay men just coming out to expressions of support from heterosexual readers. Miller wrote a second article, in which he discussed the letters and expanded this article into a popular selling book *On Being Different: What It Means to Be a Homosexual*, which was published that fall and was the subject of a glowing review in *Publisher's Weekly*, the trade magazine for the book industry.[66]

Two months after Miller's article the *New York Times Magazine* published "The Disciples of Sappho, Updated," which examined the lesbian movement through an account of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Given prominence in the article was an account of the pioneering role of the DOB as the first lesbian organization and the growing tensions between the members of the DOB and both the younger lesbians of the Gay Liberation Front and heterosexual members of the women's movement. Also in January 1971, *Look* magazine did a special issue on "Family '71," which presented an account of young gay male couple as one example of America's families.[67]

In spring 1971 the book *Gay Militants* by Donn Teal came out; it presented a history of the gay rights movement, giving emphasis to gay liberation organizations and minimizing the efforts of the previous homophile organizations. It received a good deal of attention both in the lesbian and gay community and the mainstream press, being reviewed favorably twice in the *New York Times Book Review*. Also appearing in the fall of 1971 was Dennis Altman's *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, which gave a detailed and lucid analysis of the political premises, goals, and philosophy of the gay liberation movement and received major reviews in *Time* and the *New York Times Book Review*.[68]

The gay rights movement was being framed as the quintessential Sixties movement. However, by mid-1971 the media discourse about the decade and its "legacies" itself was beginning to shift, with the optimism and media enthusiasm about social change being replaced with an attitude of weariness and alarm. The youthful exuberance and "radical chic" of the Sixties culture was now regarded with derision, if not suspicion. In 1970 Thomas Wolfe, in his best-selling satirical book *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*, effectively skewed the fascination

of wealthy liberals with the culture of radical politics. Soon the disenchantment took on a darker tone. In the summer of 1970 the murder trial of Charles Manson was held and accounts of drug crazed "hippies" sadistically murdering five people—including actress Sharon Tate, who had been eight months pregnant—dominated the press. With the assassination of Martin Luther King, the civil rights movement lost a powerful voice on behalf of nonviolent change, and the Black Panthers and other black power advocates of militant force and resistance began to shape the media image of minority politics. The antiwar protests of the decade, previously regarded as a sign of youthful idealism, involvement, and hope were now seen as threatening the social fabric. In April and May 1971 a coalition of groups against the war in Vietnam organized a massive national protest in major cities across the nation. In Washington, D.C., over two hundred thousand protestors took part in a series of protests against the war; over seven thousand were arrested. Media images of the clean-cut, young crusaders of Eugene McCarthy's 1968 anti-war presidential campaign were now replaced by long-haired members of the radical Weather Underground who planted bombs both in the U.S. Capitol and headquarters of major corporations.[69]

With this change came a new image of the gay rights movement. In August 1971 *Newsweek* ran a major cover story on "The Gay Militants" that gave an alarmist account of a militant gay rights movement, a product of "an America grown increasingly permissive in matters sexual and supersensitive to any charge of discrimination." The article declared, "Today's militant homosexuals are demanding not merely acceptance, with the full legal, social and economic equality that goes with it; they want approval as well." They noted that homosexuals as a whole shared similarities to other minority groups and "like the Black Panthers and the more extreme women's liberationists," the militant activists actually constituted only a tiny percentage within their own minority group. But one thing set homosexuals apart from other minorities: "a set of attitudes that many medical authorities regard as literally sick." The article reviewed the medical status of homosexuality as a psychiatric illness and described the tensions in the movement between activists and nonactivists, between men and woman, and between those who urge "coming out" and those who feel "people just aren't ready." It concluded that the central problem about gay liberation was that if the movement succeeds in creating an image of "normality" for homosexuals, "would it encourage more homosexually inclined people—particularly young people—to follow their urges without hesitation."[70]

Four months later, in December 1971, *Life* magazine ran a major photo essay entitled "Homosexuals in Revolt: The Year That One Liberation Movement Turned Militant." Most of the photos of protests were from New York Gay's Activists Alliance efforts to have New York City pass an antidiscrimination ordinance, which was described as being a "direct assault on laws and customs." Following the story was an editorial essay asking, "Is homosexuality normal or not?" which discussed the debate over the status of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder. The standard arguments for and against were reviewed with no conclusion, but the essay ended, "The basic stumbling block to acceptance (of homosexuals) remains the same: heterosexual antipathy to homosexuality."[71]

One of the first television stories about the lesbian and gay movement on national television network news was a series of reports in October and November 1970 on NBC about a gay "invasion" of isolated Alpine County (population 430) in California's Sierra Nevada mountains. It started out as a bemused, humorous story on the attempts of a small number of Bay Area gay activists to move enough lesbian and gay residents into the county, have them register to vote, and take over the county government, establishing a "gay mecca" and "a national refuge for persecuted homosexuals." However, over the next few weeks the story quickly morphed into one of threat and danger. *Time* ran a story that focused on the county residents' fears of the "militant homosexuals of the Gay Liberation Front" and their attempts to "repel the onslaught." Three weeks later NBC ran a follow-up that similarly focused on the fearful response of the residents. Local groups, from mothers' clubs to Americans Natives, saw this as a threat to the "public as a whole." Citing the opposition of local residents and businesses in Alpine County who began an informal "embargo of sale to homosexuals" and the coming winter with high snows, the gay activists called off the project.[72] In the media image that emerged, both the Sixties narrative of chaos and disruption and the older arguments about homosexuality as a sickness and threat merged to construct an understanding of the gay rights movement as one of the more extreme and threatening products of the 1960s. While such media stories noted the claim by gay activists of minority status, such a claim was typically presented as highly questionable.

By late 1972 the radical energies that characterized the 1960s as a decade of "tumult and change" had begun to dissipate. That year American troops were withdrawn from Vietnam, removing the war as a major focus of American political debate and activism. The landslide reelection victory of Richard Nixon over George McGovern, who ran as the candidate

of the nation's progressive forces, was viewed as a strong national rebuke to what was now depicted as the political extremism of the Sixties. Many of the radical and progressive political groups and movements began to disintegrate. The Arab oil embargo the next year marked the end of America's uncontested economic global superiority and led to a national economic crisis of inflation and unemployment that would mark the rest of the decade. Nixon's agenda of social and cultural retrenchment, however, was aborted by the presidential crisis brought about by the Watergate scandals. In the absence of national political leadership, the predicted conservative resurgence in national politics was deferred. However, many of the political and social changes of the 1960s, from civil rights to environmentalism to shifts in attitudes about sexual behavior, continued to be diffused within American society as new laws were being implemented on state and local levels. Many people who remained distant from the politics of the 1960s began to feel the innovations of that decade; resistance, particularly on a local level, began to appear. The antiwar protests spawned a strong reaction, with veterans, conservative religious fundamentalists, and other groups holding rallies to proclaim that, outside the liberal cities on the coast and college campuses, patriotism was still very much alive in the heart of America. School busing protests began to erupt both in the South and in the North. Battles erupted over the introduction of sex education into public schools, mobilizing thousands of parents of school-aged children and presaging the culture wars that were to come. In 1972, a few months after Congress overwhelmingly approved the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution, Phyllis Schlafly, a midwestern conservative activist, began organizing what was to become a successful national movement to stop its ratification by the states. Her success was largely based on defining the ERA as a product of Sixties sexual and social radicalism. If the 1960s were dominated by the politics of change, the politics of the 1970s were coming to be marked by confusion, anxiety, and a growing defiance.[73]

* * *

Although the gay rights movement was founded in the liberationist politics of the late 1960s, with the quick decline of radical politics in the early 1970s the movement took on a more reformist political cast. By 1971 New York's Gay Liberation Front was defunct, replaced by the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), which focused on changing laws and policies that discriminated against lesbian and gay men. The reformist trend was

further accelerated by the creation of the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) in 1973 as a professional advocacy organization similar to the National Organization of Women and the American Civil Liberties Union. It had a paid professional staff and two executive codirectors: Bruce Voeller, formerly a researcher at Rockefeller University and Jean O'Leary, an ex-nun and ardent lesbian feminist. In contrast to GAA's radical political tactics and leftist appeal, the NGTF defined itself as a mainstream national organization. It attempted to appeal to all segments of the lesbian and gay community and to work with organizations such as the Democratic Party and the unions for a change in laws discriminating against lesbians and gay men. Given the size and diversity of the national lesbian and gay community, and also the fact that the overwhelming majority of lesbians and gay men led closeted lives, its membership remained in the low four digits throughout the decade, compromising its ability to act as a national advocate for the lesbian and gay community.[74]

Still, groups like the GAA and the NGTF worked to achieve whatever limited goals they could. One of their major areas of activism was challenging homophobic portrayals of lesbian and gay people in the media. "Media zaps"—or attention-grabbing protests—were conducted against such publications as the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *New York Daily News, Harper's* and numerous local television and radio stations. The most successful zap occurred in December 1973 when an activist darted in front of the cameras of the live airing of *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* holding a sign reading, "GAYS PROTEST CBS BIGOTRY." The intrusion made the *New York Times* the next day. The zapper was arrested and charged with trespassing. The trial was used a platform for gay rights, with Cronkite called as a defense witness. Soon after the trial CBS aired a major segment on gay rights, with Cronkite introducing it: "Part of the new morality of the 60s and 70s is a new attitude toward homosexuality. The homosexual men and women have organized to fight for acceptance and respectability." He then went on to report about the passage of antidiscrimination laws in a number of communities across the country.[75]

Such media activism was part of a larger strategy by activists to change the public definition of homosexuality. Although by 1973 the laws against homosexuality were now framed as outmoded, the psychiatric classification in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of homosexuality as a mental illness still stood as a powerful stigma that the news media, drawing on its "web of facticity" and dependent on professional validation for its reporting frames, could not ignore. However,

within the American Psychiatric Association (APA) criticism of the designation was growing, aided by protests by gay activists at professional meetings. Finally, in December 1973, the APA committee responsible for DSM classifications voted to no longer term homosexuality as a mental disorder. The vote made front page headlines across the country with the *New York Times* proclaiming, "Psychiatrists in a Shift Declare Homosexuality No Mental Illness." *Time* reported the change as an "Instant Cure." A group of psychiatrists led by Charles Socarides, who had made his reputation treating homosexuality as a pathology, vehemently disagreed and forced a vote of the entire APA on this issue. In preparation for the vote the NGTF organized a campaign and paid for mailings to the APA membership arguing for the change. By a vote of 58 to 37 percent, the membership upheld the committee's decision.[76]

Prior to the APA membership vote, the *New York Times Magazine* ran a major six-thousand-word article written by psychiatrist Robert Gould. Although entitled "What We Don't Know about Homosexuality," it rejected previous medical understandings of homosexuality as an illness and argued that it was a normal expression of sexuality and that it "exists to a certain degree in all people . . . [but] is repressed by cultural forces in favor of heterosexuality." The American Psychological Association followed suit in depathologizing homosexuality. With this change, the news media could no longer frame homosexuality as an illness or psychological disturbance, and psychiatrists like Socarides who still held to that medical model could no longer be cited as an authority. Evidence of this change quickly appeared throughout the media. Even the major publication *Parents' Magazine* began publishing articles that noted "Homosexuality in itself merely represents a varied sexual preference which our society does not approve of but which does not constitute mental illness." With the removal of homosexuality from the *DSM*, no authoritative secular body of knowledge justified the continued stigmatization of homosexuality. But while the core of postwar negative secular and scientific beliefs about homosexuality were eviscerated, the strong emotional and cultural shadows remained.[77]

Popular media in the 1970s continued to reflect this confusion and tension of whether gays were a minority or sick deviants. The emergence and visibility of the gay community was reflected in movies such as *Some of My Best Friends* (1971) and *A Very Natural Thing* (1974), which presented images of self-affirming gay men as main characters who were part of a larger, vibrant community. However, such gay-themed movies were

rarely successful with the general audience. It was more the casting of lesbians and gay men as secondary characters in commercial mainstream movies that the typical heterosexual moviegoer saw homosexuals. Familiar stereotypes continued. Movies such as *J. W. Coop* (1972), *Save the Tiger* (1973), *Magnum Force* (1973), *Busting* (1974), and *Sheila Levine Is Dead and Living in New York* (1975) showed lesbians and gay men as either temperamental sissies, drag queens, stalkers, sex-hungry perverts, or murderers.[78]

Yet, even films that offered derogatory or highly stereotypical images presented homosexuality in more complex ways. The 1971 film *Fortune and Men's Eyes* was a sensationalistic depiction of homosexual prison sex, yet it was the film's openly gay drag queen inmate character who recognized the dehumanizing condition of prison life and provided the moral compass for the movie. The film *The Laughing Policeman* (1973), with Walther Matthau and Bruce Dern, used antigay bigotry as a minor plot device.[79] In a number of comedies stereotypical images were often mixed with more progressive tropes. The high point in the 1976 comedy *Car Wash* occurred when a black drag queen, taunted by a black militant, defiantly responds, "Honey, I'm more man than you'll ever be and more woman than you'll ever get."[80]

Arthur Bell, one of the founders of the Gay Activists Alliance and a popular writer for the *Village Voice* and other periodicals, was a constant critic in the 1970s of screen images of homosexuality. His criticism was now reaching a mainstream audience. In a 1973 essay in the *New York Times* (entitled "Let the Boys in the Band Die") he drew comparisons between the depiction of lesbians and gay men in film and the racist depiction of blacks in films of the 1920s to the 1950s. In another *New York Times* essay the following year, he noted that he preferred films like *The Laughing Policemen* where "gay people [are depicted] as active and accurate parts of a script which deals with matters outside of homosexuality," rather than films in which "two-bit psychologists" engage endlessly in a drawing-room drama talk about the sad but noble lives of homosexuals.[81]

Another important area of media that reflected this change was television entertainment. Although in the 1960s prime-time network television typically avoided explicit references to homosexuality, by the end of the decade homosexual topics and characters were beginning to appear. As in the movies, the presentation was conflicted. Homosexuals were the target of frequent jokes on the popular self-consciously Sixties-styled *Laugh-In* comedy show, which ran from 1968 through 1973. In 1969 both NBC's police drama *The Bold Ones* and ABC's *N.Y.P.D.* had plots revolving around murderous homosexuals. Alternatively, *N.Y.P.D.* also had an episode dealing with antigay harassment, which portrayed successful, diverse gay characters and compared antigay prejudice to racism. In 1971 the extremely popular comedy *All in the Family* had a sympathetic episode about a gay retired football player. In 1972 the short-lived comedy series *The Corner Bar*, whose characters reflected popular ethnic stereotypes, introduced a regular gay character—an effeminate male. Also in 1972 a major breakthrough was achieved when ABC presented a made-for-television movie *That Certain Summer* depicting a divorced father's coming out to his young son. Although the show presented homosexuality in a very cautious manner—the father and his lover never physically touched, and the father acknowledged that homosexuality may be a "sickness"—it was an overall sympathetic portrayal.[82]

Television portrayals of homosexuality became a target of gay activists, who used both quiet negotiations and public demonstrations. While attempting to influence network officials in New York, the NGTF created a Gay Media Task Force centered in Los Angeles, which allowed closer access to the actual production of entertainment television. Media activists objected to a 1973 episode of the popular show *Marcus Welby, M.D.* on ABC about a homosexual teacher molesting a boy and began a campaign to protest its airing. The campaign targeted both national sponsors of the show and local network affiliate stations that ran it. Seven major sponsors withdrew their advertising, and seventeen affiliates dropped that episode. A month later NBC broadcast an episode of *Police Woman* depicting a stereotypical murderous lesbian. A loud protest by lesbians in front of NBC headquarters made national news. And both networks dropped the objectionable shows from reruns and syndicated episodes of the show.[83]

The NGTF continued to make television media portrayals a major focus of their activism. In addition to working directly with the networks, they urged their national membership to monitor local media, publishing a detailed guide to dealing with objectionable local programming. "Bad" images included depictions of lesbians and gay men as murderers, child molesters, prostitutes, mentally disturbed, promiscuous, unhappy, and overly effeminate (men) or overly masculine (lesbians). "Good" images included the depiction of lesbians or gay men as being professionals or other mainstream individuals, having loving relationships, or being in

situations in which their gayness is just incidental. By 1976 gay characters appeared in at least seven situation comedies and several television movies, and in each case the television producers had consulted with NGTF. But there were limits. Most of the series characters only appeared in one episode and left. Most of the plots involved the discomfort and problems heterosexuals faced in accepting lesbians and gay men. Very few gay couples or scenes of a lesbian or gay community were shown, and displays of physical affection were prohibited.[84]

In attempting to ensure that lesbians and gay men continued to receive satisfactory treatment in television entertainment, the NGTF not only worked with the networks but also went to Washington, D.C. In August 1976 NGTF representatives appeared before a U.S. House subcommittee hearing on sex and violence on television and called for more positive representations of lesbians and gay men in television and inclusion of lesbian and gay characters during television's early evening prime time "family hour." Congressmen Henry Waxman from San Francisco offered to propose legislation including lesbians and gay men among those minority groups whose television portrayals the Federal Communication Commission monitored for defamatory presentations.[85] Even the hint of proposed additional government regulation of broadcasting was enough to ensure a hospitable environment for lesbian and gay concerns at the networks.

* * *

Overall by 1976 the media representations of homosexuality bore little resemblance to the tropes and images of crime and sickness that shaped media narratives in the 1940s, 1950s and most of the 1960s. For the news media the web of facticity that had defined homosexuality had indeed unraveled. By declassifying homosexuality as a psychiatric disturbance in 1973, the APA removed any grounds to frame homosexuality as an illness. A whole range of legal changes, recommendations, and innovations, from the repeal of sodomy laws in a number of states and countries to the passage of antidiscrimination laws in a number of cities to the recommendations of highly respected legal professional associations, removed most grounds to frame homosexuality as a crime. After the whole experience in the 1960s regarding racial laws, the laws and policies continuing to stigmatize homosexuality could easily be regarded as outmoded, if not outright expressions of backward prejudice. Furthermore, by the

mid-1970s news stories about lesbian and gay issues and topics moved away from the tone of threat and disruption that characterized the stories of the early 1970s. What emerged were news accounts that de-emphasized gay and lesbian issues as a militant expression of Sixties radicalism and instead were organized around "discovering" or "uncovering" individual lesbian and gay men in all areas of society from college campuses to the military. Typically in such stories, the open existence of such individuals was explained as part of the "new morality of the sixties and seventies," in which gay and lesbian people were trying to win acceptance as "just another minority group." Such reporting was generally neutral, and opposition, with few exceptions, was presented as minor and unorganized.[86]

This was exemplified by the major lesbian and gay news story of the mid-1970s, the unsuccessful attempt in 1975 by Air Force Sergeant Leonard Matlovich to fight his discharge after revealing to his commanding office that he was gay. With an exemplary military record and service in Vietnam, Matlovich presented the perfect counterpoint to the counterculture images of lesbian and gay men as disruptive, gender-bending, threatening, unruly elements in society. Moreover, Matlovich was not asking for the overturning of the military prohibition against homosexuals serving but rather that an exception be made in his case given his exemplary record and strong desire to continue serving. The story received major coverage, both in press and on television, and as the process of the discharge and appeal continued over a period of months, the news media continued to follow the story until he was officially discharged in September. The network television news produced eight major stories. *Time* put Matlovich on its cover and reported on the case as part of a major story that reassessed the position of lesbian and gay people in America. A six-thousand-word article on the case by noted gay academic Martin Duberman was published in the *New York Times Magazine*. The overall tone of the coverage was respectful and balanced. Rather than reporting the Matlovich case as a major threat to the social fabric, national security, and civic morality, the media depicted this case as the struggle of one homosexual for the individual rights enjoyed by all citizens. Matlovich was reframed as an example of the kind of normal and ordinary lives most lesbian and gay individuals led. In introducing the story, the *Time* magazine publisher contrasted it with the magazine's earlier coverage of lesbian and gay stories in the 1960s. He noted that many of the lesbian and gay men interviewed were proud to be openly quoted and that the story assignment took correspondents to "gay bars, once noted for their

gamy ambience. Many have now become clean, well-lighted places where straights feel unthreatened."[87]

While the negative portrayals of homosexuals had been muted, the situation still reflected confusion and ambiguity. *Time*'s respectful account of Matlovich was embedded in a longer story about the progress lesbians and gays were making in society, which highlighted in exposé fashion the hypersexuality of gay male culture, where bathhouses were popular and "male prostitutes, who are teen-age or younger, are greatly in demand." It noted that most religions condemned homosexuality and there were still reservations among psychiatrists about the health of homosexuality. While the previous dominant narrative about homosexuality lost legitimacy in the mainstream media, no major new narrative about homosexuality replaced it. The frame "homosexuals as a 'minority'" similar to other minorities was treated with ambivalence and skepticism. Rather, homosexuals were typically described as trying to "win acceptance as a minority."[88] A 1975 *Newsweek* story about the local press coverage of lesbians and gay men noted that although the coverage was improving, particularly when contrasted to earlier coverage, the news media still had a long way to go in "the sometimes frivolous, often perfunctory handling of homosexual issues in their news and feature stories." Most newspapers still refused to editorially take a position in favor of allowing homosexuals on police forces, in fire departments, and in schools.[89] Furthermore, as the battle over the Equal Rights Amendment—a measure giving women constitutional recognition as a minority—intensified in the mid-1970s, Amendment advocates took great care to stress in the media that its passage would in no way affect the as-yet-undetermined status of homosexuals, an argument that implicitly, if not explicitly, questioned any claims by homosexuals as a minority.[90]

One media trope that began to be used in the mid-1970s was to frame lesbians and gay men as living a "lifestyle." The concept emerged in the mid-1960s in marketing as a way of targeting new groups based on common interests, activities, opinions, and consumption patterns. Its broad amorphous meaning became a popular way of capturing the cultural changes occurring in that decade. Many newspapers, for example, began to change their traditional "women's section" to a "lifestyle section." *Playboy* magazine appropriated the term to describe the life of sexual pleasure and consumption it sold to its male readers. In 1974 the *Advocate*, the major national gay magazine, in revamping itself with an eye toward making itself more mainstream both in advertising and politics, adopted as its cover slogan "touching your lifestyle," thus giving its imprimatur to the

term "gay lifestyle." For some in the gay media, "lifestyle" was a convenient compromise, but many activists, particularly lesbian feminists, were not comfortable with the term with its connotations of sophistication, consumption, leisure, and an apolitical eroticism. Furthermore, with the use of the term "lifestyle," being a lesbian or gay man was depicted not as a result of nature or genetics, but of conscious choice.[91]

While the media environment of the mid-1970s suggested a relatively benign and tolerant attitude toward lesbians and gay men, particularly in contrast to earlier media depictions, this calm was deceptive. Public attitudes toward homosexuality as reflected in a small number of opinion polls on homosexuality taken in the 1970s still reflected the image of the homosexual shaped by the 1940s and 1950s media. A 1970 Institute for Sex Research poll showed that 62 percent of the American public felt that homosexuality was a sickness that could be cured. A 1973 Harris poll showed that half the American public felt that homosexuals did more harm than good for the country. Only one percent of women and three percent of men said they would find it acceptable for their children to be homosexual. In a 1974 National Opinion Research Center poll 72 percent of the respondents felt that homosexual behavior was "always wrong." The respondents were evenly split as to whether a homosexual should be allowed to teach college.[92]

These attitudes were reiterated in the responses by some readers to the relatively neutral or benign lesbian- or gay-themed stories appearing in national magazines. A number of *Look*'s readers strongly objected to its 1969 story on *Boys in the Band*. "I resent any magazine coming into my home condoning what is, and always has been PERVERSION [*sic*] in the worst manner," wrote one reader. Another bemoaned the lack of any cure for homosexuality and that "the only solution is to isolate [them], prevent them from practicing their perversion, and direct their energies into some form of compulsory labor." In response to the 1975 *Time* magazine cover story on Sergeant Leonard Matlovich, one reader wrote, "From time immemorial we have recognized yellow fever, malaria, syphilis, leprosy, perversion, degeneracy, garbage and homosexuality in that order. There need be no change." Another responded, "Disgusting, repulsive, lowbrow, nauseating. I'm no Victorian, [but] those individuals should crawl into a hole and pull it in after them."[93]

For almost three decades homosexual and lesbian and gay rights activists had worked to remove the legal, medical, and media stigma from homosexuality. If one compared the state of medical knowledge, media representations and laws about homosexuality in 1957 to 1977, it was

evident that the activists had achieved a good deal. What was not as evident was whether the "public knowledge" about homosexuality—the images, ideas, opinions, attitudes, and stories about homosexuality created by the media during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s that comprised the public's "common sense" understanding of homosexuality—had appreciably changed. While the older view of homosexuality as a sickness, perversion, and crime was no longer given credibility in the media, it was never really challenged or corrected the way America's racist and sexist attitudes and stereotypes were being challenged. No national liberal leader spoke on behalf of their interests. Nor was the public given a coherent or plausible new account of homosexuality with which they could make sense of the increasingly visible lesbian and gay community. While many lesbian and gay men now saw themselves as one of America's minority groups and their struggle as part of the larger struggle of America's minorities, no recognized minority leader or organization acknowledged their claim. It was little wonder that the majority of Americans also found it difficult to accept their claims.

The best that could be said was that by 1977, lesbian and gay men had won a very tenuous position of public acceptance in America. That position would soon be put to the test.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. The name of Dade County was formally changed to Miami-Dade County in 1957, when the county adapted a two-tier form of county-city management and the county government assumed many of the responsibilities of local city governments. At the time of the 1977 events, the county government was referred to as "Metro-Dade" in local press accounts. However, for clarity and consistency, it will be referred to as the Dade County Commission, the name often used in national press reporting. "Metro in the Right on 'Gays' Decision," *Miami Herald*, January 20, 1977.
2. Metro-Dade County Commission, Commission Meeting (taped transcript), January 18, 1977, Miami, FL.
3. "The Anti-Gay Vote's Impact in California," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 10, 1977.
4. John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
5. Ibid., 20.
6. Ibid., 91, 93, 96–100, 265–75.
7. Ibid., 315.
8. Ibid., 325–26.
9. Seymour Kleinberg, *Alienated Affections: Being Gay in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 70–71; Alan Yang, "Trends: Attitudes Towards Homosexuals," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 477–507.
10. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed., s.v., "HOMOSEXUALITY."
11. John J. Rumbarger, *Profits, Power, and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America, 1800–1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

Chapter 2

1. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Gay Male World 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 47–64.
2. Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 5–59; James Robert Parish, *Gays and Lesbians in Mainstream Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993), 153–54.
3. Edward Alwood, *Straight News: Gays, Lesbian and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Pres, 1996), 19–21; Paula S. Fass, "Making and Remaking

an Event: The Leopold and Loeb Case in American Culture," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 3 (December 1993): 919–51; Hal Higdon, *The Crime of the Century: The Leopold and Loeb Case* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1975).

4. Alexander Doty, "The Gay Straight Man: Jack Benny and the Jack Benny Show," in *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 71; Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: Plume, 1990), 67–97; Irving Fein, *Jack Benny: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1976), 24.
5. Doty, "The Gay Straight Man," 64.
6. Lynda Hunt, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–28; George Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality," *Salmagundi* 58–59 (Fall 1982–Winter 1983): 28–31; Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 3–22; Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 53–54.
7. Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 24–33.
8. Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 152.
9. Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948).
10. Miriam Grace Reumann, "American Sexual Character in the Age of Kinsey, 1946–1964" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1998), 376.
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CHAPTER 3

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