THE TRANSFORMATION OF GAY LIFE FROM THE CLOSET TO LIBERATION,
1948-1980: NEW YORK CITY’S GAY MARKETS AS A STUDY IN LATE
CAPITALISM

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Transformation of Gay Life from the Closet to Liberation, 1948-1980: New York City’s Gay Markets as a Study in Late Capitalism

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James Livingston

This dissertation argues for the historical significance of markets, information, and the politics of queer consumption to the transformation of queer subjectivity and social life in the postwar era from the closet to Gay Liberation in New York City. My dissertation situates this history of transformation and mobilization within a period of broad shifts from a manufacturing, industrial-based economy to a service and information economy based on cultural production. In this context, I argue that the queer economy’s provision of social space, information (including new forms of cultural representation), and identities should be understood as an exemplary feature of late capitalism. Using the frameworks of institutional economics and economic history, urban history, and queer theory, this dissertation explores two distinct phases of the queer economy and the ways in which legal regulations and cultural norms convened and constrained queer markets, consumer culture, and the politics of identity. The first phase of the queer economy, from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, was essentially organized as an illicit and stigmatized market, to which queer consumers responded with cultural patterns based on concealment and evasion, or what Jeffrey Escoffier refers to as the segregation of public and private
information characteristic of the “double life.” The second phase of the queer economy, from the late 1960s until about 1980, was characterized by decriminalization and destigmatization of queer markets, consumer and entrepreneurial activism and direct engagement with local politics, and the dynamics of gentrification. Central to the transition from the closet economy to the economy of Gay Liberation was the cultural production of information, including pop psychology and sociology, pulp novels, gossip columns and tabloid literature, Homophile publications, gay guides, and records of gay businesses and gay business associations. This dissertation explores this archive in order to show both the quantitative increase in information (and therefore public knowledge) about homosexuality and queer social life, as well as the qualitative shift in information, much of it produced by queers themselves, that repudiated the logic of criminalization and stigmatization and anticipated the mass “coming out” and political demands of Gay Liberation.
Acknowledgments

Dissertations are notoriously thankless and lonely projects. At the outset, there is no guarantee that the work, which in my case took several years, can or will be completed. There is even less security in the job market that awaits those of us who complete dissertations, which makes the encouragement of friends and colleagues all the more valuable. As unpaid and sometimes thankless work, writers of dissertation incur enormous debts. I have drawn on a vast network of friends, family members, and colleagues in order to complete this project, and my thanks goes out to many people who are not included in the following acknowledgments.

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books have provided the intellectual template for my thinking about the interaction of cultural and economic forms. He has encouraged me to think expansively and creatively when faced with problems, and I could not have asked for a more encouraging or enthusiastic dissertation director. His ability to think beyond the conventional boundaries of what constitutes history have pressed and challenged me to think more carefully and critically about the story of queer markets, identity, and people. His commitments to social justice and intellectual honesty in historical research and writing have shaped what, I hope, is a humane and just vision of the queer past.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Jeffrey’s mentorship and friendship, his groundbreaking scholarship, and his continuing influence as the dean of queer economic history—a field he single-handedly invented and continues to reinvent and shape. I know that this dissertation has many flaws, unanswered questions, and problems—all of which are my own. Going forward, it is also dedication to continue to work these ideas out in the course of my intellectual career with the hope that I can live up to Jeffrey’s commitment to social justice and our community. It is my hope that this dissertation will mark the beginning of a long and productive friendship.
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Introduction: Markets, Subjectivity, and Liberation:
Queer Economic History in New York City

I. Closing Time at the Oscar Wilde: The Life and Death of Queer Markets

My reaction to the Oscar Wilde’s closing was total incredulity. I could not imagine that the world’s oldest lesbian and gay bookstore—a bookstore whose opening in 1967 predated the Stonewall Riots by two years—would close. In the spring of 2009, as we prepared to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Riots, it was the only truly “queer” bookstore in the city, with sections for gay, lesbian, trans*, and even a small section for bisexual readers.

So when Kim, the owner, gave me the news that we were in bad shape, I thought she just meant that we were going through a rough patch. I thought perhaps she was just warning me that she was going to have to cut my hours or even lay me off. It was worrisome, but the personal costs of a slump were nothing next to the loss of a community institution.

It was hard to take Kim’s warnings seriously at first because we always seemed to be in a state of financial triage, and this was not the first time that the management predicted a closing if things did not turn around. The Oscar Wilde had weathered plenty of recessions and downturns before, not to mention the death of one owner and a change of hands through three others before the store’s long-time manager, Kim Brinster and her girlfriend (and now wife) Janet, had saved it from closing a few years before I was hired in 2006.
Aside from the recession (and in part, no doubt, because of it), it had been an otherwise good couple of months: Obama had just been elected to the profound joy and relief of virtually every person I knew north of the Mason-Dixon line, especially to queer people fatigued from the unending procession of homophobic and transphobic policies trotted out following Bush v. Gore. I figured that the financial clouds would roll by once sanity was restored to government and our customers would come back. Obama was the first president in my lifetime that was openly skeptical about the neoliberal gospel of deregulation and, for one bright shining moment my lefty friends and I chattered about the possibilities of a new New Deal. (I fantasized about Kim hanging a blue eagle poster next to the placard that proclaimed the Oscar Wilde to be the oldest LGBT bookstore in the world, never mind that the Roberts Court is even more hostile to government programs than Charles Evans Hughes’). Besides, we had been in operation for decades at a time in the red until Kim took over, and we had been in the black for each of the three years I worked there. We had certainly had many close calls, though none in my time, and I clung to the dim hope that a new owner or a miraculous infusion of cash could bail us out. Kim and Janet had already bought the store under similar circumstances and the recession placed them in the precarious position of gambling away their retirement on the store.

I returned to my old job, teaching history as an adjunct, to compensate for the hours that were harder to come by as we slid into insolvency in the winter of 2008 and 2009. Black Friday was abysmal, and then it just seemed like the hits kept coming through the December of 2008, just before the financial crisis crested and settled into a permanent if more tolerable misery. Our regulars came into tell us that they had had to
cut this or that part of their holiday shopping budget: used books and remainders instead of the new release, just “Pink Flamingos” or “Hairspray” instead of the Waters box set—that sort of thing. Many of them had lost work or housing, and a couple had lost small fortunes. Our international customers stopped coming as Latin America and the Eurozone imploded. On top of that, we had the same problems that all small businesses face. We were unable to get some of the big books we had counted on to get us through the season because our distributor had oversold its stock to other stores. I conspiratorially imagined was the now-closed mammoth Barnes & Noble across Sixth Avenue, where last summer Mark Carson was murdered for daring to challenge the homophobia of his murder. “Milk” had just come out and it was a massive hit, and it seemed like we couldn’t even get the most recent run of Randy Shilts’ biography until almost six weeks after it opened. Ironically, it was one of those books that Kim had made sure was part of our stock, so we had a handful of out-of-print copies in our used section. Rent would eventually have to go up. We had an unusually generous landlady, who had tried to hold down our rent as much as possible in previous years; but, the recession had also taken a bite out of her finances and she had to do what she had to do. A perennial and universal problem in all of New York City, it was an existential crisis in the astronomically priced Greenwich Village, where the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, the oldest lesbian and gay bookstore in the world, had hung its shutter for just over forty years. We were going to die of a thousand cuts, like many small businesses in the early years of the recession.

I remember suggesting grants or moving to a cheaper location, applications to be declared a historic location, loans, fundraisers with the Stonewall—anything to keep it open. The community could never let an institution like the Oscar Wilde go so easily. But
there were no potential buyers, and the Oscar Wilde was not an institution. Institutions lasted, and they set into motion processes that ensured their longevity. Institutions write rules that insulate them from risk, and even their own bad decisions. By the winter of 2009, it seemed like our government had decided that GM was an institution, AIG was an institution, and Bank of America was an institution.

The Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, was just a piddling little business faced with rising prices, existing competition from big box stores and expanding competition from e-books, a cutthroat real estate market, and a loyal if dwindling customer base—one of thousands sacrificed to the greed and selfishness programmed into the market. There would be no rallies or grants or appeals or slogans. There would certainly be no bailout. We would liquidate our stock and try to sell off the shelves and the office equipment. If we were lucky we might have one last rager on the unopened stock of Yellow Tail we kept for the book signings and release parties that would never happen.

Around the time we closed and for a long time after, I heard people toss around the truism that Oscar Wilde had “died of success.” When Craig Rodwell founded it in 1967, it was the only supplier of any kind of literature, information, or any other kind of good that identified and affirmed anything other than strictly cisgender heterosexuality. It had cultivated a devoted following of queer readers for more than four decades and, along with it, a steady market of readers and writers. Hundreds of small and medium-sized queer presses, not to mention the big mainstream presses, had begun to publish titles by queer authors or with queer positive themes. When people visited New York City, they often stopped at the Oscar Wilde first for Damron and other travel guides, bar rags, books for the subway, and eventually even clothing and jewelry. Now, though,
thanks to pioneering retailers like the Oscar Wilde, those items could be found in a Barnes & Noble or, increasingly, the Internet. Soon, nobody was going to be reading books, anyway. So, we had died of success.

It struck me, then, how important economics were to queer life and especially to the queer life I had constructed for myself. I had imbibed enough Marxism by that point in my life to be bothered by the implications. I had come to my own personal politics of sexuality via traditions of sexuality that were animated by Marxist critiques of power and exploitation. Though there is plenty of queer and feminist theory that moves beyond and complicates Marxist paradigms of gender and sexuality, few thinkers—maybe Camille Paglia or Andrew Sullivan—have moved beyond the basic assumption that the systemic abuses and inequalities of capitalism negatively impacted queer people, enervated and coopted our politics, and strengthened the interests of conservative ideologues. And yet here I was, mourning a retail institution in the heart of one of the wealthiest neighborhoods on the planet.

What remained were the homeless feelings, acquaintances, friendships, and community that the Oscar Wilde housed. While any range of economic theories might explain its demise, neither Marxism nor the cold formulae of capitalist competition could explain away the personal and interpersonal transformation that books, reading, and the exchange of information seemed to nurture. It was into this affective economy that young teenagers wandered when school let out early, openly browsing the young adult section before furtively but obviously angling for the erotica; where former clones gathered after brunch to chat about old times, catch up on the latest Michael Tolliver novel, or pre-order the newest Bruce Weber photobook; where tourists stopped before they hit the bars;
where seniors took advantage of a vintage craze and bought up all the reprints of *Odd Girl Out*, *The Price of Salt*, and *Giovanni’s Room*; where enchanted, middle-aged lesbians bought used editions of Starhawk and Marion Zimmer Bradley novels and dropped off a third-hand copy of the *Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*; or where less frivolous ones bought up armfuls of Bella murder mysteries.

It was not at all unusual to see famous authors wandering in off the street. Edward Albee—or “Mr. Albee,” as I was instructed to call him—regularly picked up his magazines there and occasionally bought one of our more highbrow titles (naturally). Christopher Bram, who would later write a book about Albee and other gay writers, had been a regular for decades. When she was in town, Ann Weldy, who had been famous in the 1950s and 1960s as Ann Bannon, came in and signed her books, which we were always careful to stock. Leslie Feinberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt came in several times, inspiring quiet and worshipful stares from every person in the store. Once, Samuel Delaney—who everybody called “Chip”—came in, although not during my shift, as did Edmund White and Mark Doty. Most of the time, authors were generous and friendly, happy to sign copies of their books and chat up our customers.

It was an honor to work there, although sometimes it felt like I spent all my time trying to keep my jaw from hanging open or betraying my Texas accent. It was not a perfect place. As the management insisted, we were a “gay and lesbian” (not queer or trans*) bookstore, even though we had a dedicated trans* section and many trans* customers. (“Queer” would have been the kiss of death with our older customers, who hated the term).
It would take too long to explain how I got to the Oscar Wilde, but it was a journey that was typical of many of our customers. It had been my first stop when I first moved to New York City in the spring of 2003. After a brief period “out of the closet” in Lubbock, Texas, and having been active in queer politics on the Texas Tech campus, I felt as though I had escaped to Oz. I had been physically threatened as was my brother, ostracized by many former friends, and told not to return to the church where I had sung as a choir scholarship singer for the first three years of my college career. To be sure, I had found an incredible, vibrant community in West Texas, but it was the kind of place where we offered rides to our friends because they did not want to be seen going into the Luxor, the only gay place for hundreds of miles. (And the threat was real. Administrators at the local Church of Christ-affiliated university, Lubbock Christian, supposedly wrote down license plates to check against L.C.U.’s database. Students who went to the Luxor could be expelled for violating the student code of conduct.) My parents, who worked as administrators for a small school district in West Texas, worried about what it would mean for my dad’s potential promotion from an assistant supe to the superintendent of schools—a promotion he never got for reasons that probably had nothing to do with his queer kid. The Oscar Wilde was where I bought guides to the queer scene in New York City. It was where I obtained much of my reading list for my comprehensive exams. And finally, it was where I sought to make a queer life for myself, cobbling together role models and alternatives to the homophobia I had imbibed and internalized as a well-behaved, good-old-boy, church-going son of Texas. Well before I began work as a bookseller, I had begun to think of myself as part of the loose knit community of readers and writers who gathered there.
Many of our regulars were elderly or sick and the Oscar Wilde might be the one place they visited once a week. Sometimes folks came in with boxes of books for the used section, for which we gave generous store credit. Old friends or lovers would bump into one another after thirty or forty years, and the staff would try to disappear into the stock in the midst of these teary reunions. Once in a blue moon, an insistently “straight” person might come in because he or she had heard about this book or that book on coming out or bisexuality—much to the chagrin of bisexuals, who have always resented having a gateway identity. The staff might give each other a knowing glance before trotting off to the self-help section, hoping that the right book would get this person out of the closet once and for all, or at least ease the transition. The Oscar Wilde, in the end, was not only a storehouse of community, but also of the knowledge of how to be queer, how to affirm ourselves through literary expression, and how to nurture those who, like ourselves, had been ostracized or ignored. A few years after the store closed, David Halperin published a book called How to Be Gay, whose primary text may well have been the film, photography, and biography sections of the Oscar Wilde. Writing on gay men, Halperin wrote that we do not seem to belong to a ‘culture’ in any robust sense of that term. Unlike, say, Americans, they do not constitute a social group that continually renews itself across the generations by means of sexual reproduction and primary socialization. According to those criteria, the kind of gay male culture that is acquired only in later life would hardly qualify as culture at all.1

When I first read Halperin’s book I realized that the Oscar Wilde was how I had acquired these characteristics, and that the store was as central to the formation of my queer

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identity as the United Methodist Church, my cowboy-roots family, the Boy Scouts, and the marching band had been to my “normal” identity: where I had learned to be Christian, middle-class, white, and—at least until I finally rebelled—straight. The difference, of course, is that I entered one world by virtue of being born into it, and the other one I entered more or less voluntarily. These were all the ways that we partook of a culture, contributed to a culture, and made it our own.

In any case, that was all gone now. There might be literary salons in the Williamsburg apartments of Sarah Lawrence and NYU alums, and I heard that Chris Bram taught a fabulous creative writing class for Gallatin at NYU. The more enthusiastic fan could still find readings at the rapidly closing libraries, or the even more rapidly closing Barnes & Noble stores. But there was now no regular place where queer readers could avail themselves of the informational pathways to gay life, or where queer readers and writers could interact. My lamentations for the Oscar Wilde aside, the communities fostered within markets proved more durable than one single business, proof of the continuing power of markets to nurture and animate new senses of self and community. That there is now a queer bookstore of sorts operating out of the LGBT Center is testament to how important this little market was and is, even if its birthplace is gone. Understanding that history, however, requires a broader and more comprehensive analysis of the history of the underlying structures and processes that made the establishment of places like Oscar Wilde possible in the first place: markets.

II. Toward a History of Gay or Queer² Markets

² Gay” and “queer” here stand in for all non-heterosexual and non-cissexual persons, or “sexual minorities” as a class apart. At different times, both of these terms have carried these broad meanings. While “queer”
To understand the significance of markets to queer history, I want to move beyond the abstractions of the price system or the supply and demand curve. Instead, I want to argue that markets are really linguistic, or rather semiotic, since their products, agents, and exchanges are always imbued with meaning and subjective value. Goods or services are produced because they have qualitative as well as quantitative value. Indeed, money is always already a sign or a signifier of some other value (gold, for example) that serves as a more or less arbitrary substitute that can be meted out and measured. Since 1973, when the United States abandoned the Bretton-Woods gold standard, money is purely a sign, whose meaning rules with the same fiat—the consent of the people who submit to its use and value in their daily lives—as the agreed upon meanings of words.

For historians who want to understand the material basis of human culture and society, or who wish to understand the actual role of markets in the organization of a given human culture or society, using only the definitions of professional economists can be particularly tricky and, to use a word more often used in the history of sexuality, “essentialist” or ahistorical. Sometimes this essentialism results in a misreading of exchange and production as “natural” features of human existence—the fact that sites and patterns of exchange are as endemic as, and even embedded in, language, more on that later—although more often than not this oversight arises because of the assumption among many neoclassical economists that market phenomena are universal, or at least

has come into vogue because of the significance of queer theory, a critical practice inaugurated in the late 1980s, the word “gay” was historically used in this general and inclusive way until its close association with gay male culture in the 1970s. Because this study examines the period before 1980, I tend to use the word “gay” in deference to the subjects of my study, who historically (and in many cases presently) view the word “queer” as unequivocally pejorative. I only use the psychiatric vocabulary of “homosexuality” when necessary if only to stress the importance of a culture that originated in the bars and streets rather than the psychiatric literature. For a summary of some of the historical and present debates over the uses of the terms “gay” and “queer,” see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 72-126.
have universal applications, and, in a related way, that the utilitarian and atomistic behavior promoted by markets can be applied in non-market contexts. In his later lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault refers to these assumptions as central to the “epistemological transformation” of “neo-liberal analyses” from “the study of mechanisms of production, the mechanisms of exchange, and the data of consumption within a given social structure, along with the interconnections between these three mechanisms” to a study of the “nature and consequences of what they call substitutable choices, that is to say, the study and analysis of the way in which scarce means are allocated to competing ends, that is to say, to alternative ends which cannot be superimposed on each other.” For Foucault, “this definition of economics does not identify its task as the analysis of a relational mechanism between things or processes…but as] analyzing a form of human behavior and the internal rationality of this human behavior.” This analytical obscurantism not only elides the importance of labor—except “inserted only as a cog”—but fails to grapple with the ways in which markets are instituted, convened, and guaranteed (or regulated) for specific ends.³

In addition to the ways in which conservative or neoclassical (or “neo-liberal”) economic analyses obscure processes, many leftist analyses (especially those strains to which queer history and studies is indebted) have too often reduced neo-liberal explanations of markets as another ideological tool of capitalist exploitation. The sometimes polemical nature of queer critiques and popular protest has too often resulted

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in the equivocation of all markets within capitalism as well as the conflation of all
markets as a conspiracy of the wealthy and powerful. Such an analysis makes it difficult
to differentiate between “The Market” and markets: between, say, markets for junk bonds
or foreign oil, or markets—like independent feminist, queer, or African-American
bookstores—that are not only adjunctive but sometimes essential to so-called progressive
movements. What might it mean, then, if the so-called “commodity fetish” is liberation?

The polemical dismissal of markets ultimately obscures the diversity and
historicity of markets in the history of capitalism and mass culture, especially but not
only the United States. Indeed, a characteristic of twentieth century markets in the United
States is the sheer class, race, ethnic and gender diversity of its buyers or customers, and
the willingness of suppliers or entrepreneurs to capitalize on those demands—sometimes
regardless of how small. To name just one example, Lizbeth Cohen’s empirical test of
Adorno and Horkheimer’s notion of “the culture industry”⁴ against consumers in interwar
Chicago revealed the ways in which working-class immigrants and African-Americans
could and did appropriate forms of the allegedly homogenizing mass market to
emphasize and even deepen their differences from more “mainstream” (i.e., white,
native-born, and bourgeois) consumers.⁵ To be sure, my intervention does not to deny the
exploitative effects of markets, but I do wish to break the necessary link between markets
and exploitation in order to explore the range of cultural and political forms and effects
encompassed by a history of gay or queer markets.

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⁵ Lizabeth Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in
What follows, then, is a history of queer or gay markets as an economic as well as cultural process, drawn from a synthesis of cultural and social history, Marxist (or at least Marxoid) analyses of capitalism, as well as the insights of professional economists. I also confront queer or gay markets as an under-theorized and un-problematized feature of the history of sexuality and capitalism in the specific context of the twentieth century United States. This means not only considering the history of capitalism, but the larger political context—liberalism—that has historically framed and instituted these markets. Critically, Gay Liberation has coincided and overlapped significantly with neoliberalism, a resurgence or revival in an almost absolute faith in the market. Although its emphases on privatization and the maximization of profit have unleashed significant damage, the logic of neoliberalism has also provided the moral neutrality and emphasis on personal freedom upon which queer people have staked their fortunes. As Foucault asserted,

American liberalism is not—as it is in France at present, or as it was in Germany immediately after the war—just an economic and political choice formed and formulated by those who govern and within the governmental milieu. Liberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking. It is a type of relation between the governors and the governed much more than a technique of governors with regard to the governed. Let’s say…that whereas in a country like France disputes between individuals and the state turn on the problem of service, of public service, [in the United States] disputes between individuals and government look like the problem of freedoms.6

Foucault’s claims seem especially relevant to a history of gay communities and the markets it inhabited in the 1960s and 1970s, where the “freedom” to associate and

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purchase formerly forbidden goods confronted the conservative desire for “freedom” from the moral contamination of perversity of big city sexuality.

Framed in this way, major episodes in the history of LGBT/queer movements in the United States are contestations over the mantle of “freedom” that often overlapped with specific economic freedoms. Take, for example, the campaigns in 1977-1978 between pro- and anti-gay and lesbian activists that marked a watershed moment for the national movement. The Anita Bryant-Moral Majority “Save Our Children” campaign against municipal lesbian and gay civil rights ordinances represented their case as an attempt to restore freedom from the intervention of governments in employment and housing markets. For lesbian and gay activists, Bryant’s campaign represented an attack on individual sexual freedoms and bigotry decked out in Sunday clothes. This dispute was not adjudicated in any court of law, but fought out in a series of protracted campaigns to win the hearts and minds of different constituencies of consumers: the cultural warfare that preceded and empowered the more famous “culture warriors” like Pat Buchanan, Pat Robertson, Jesse Helms, and the conservative superstars who remade the Republican Party and redefined the social policy of federal, state, and local governments in the 1980s and 1990s. Initially, the Save Our Children campaign began as a series of local recall efforts in municipalities—Miami-Dade County, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Eugene, Wichita, and Seattle—that had passed lesbian and gay rights ordinances against housing and employment discrimination. The effects of the campaign were not simply local, as the Department of Housing and Urban Development suspended a rule allowing unmarried and same-sex couples access to federal financing. 7 Bryant’s

campaign essentially won the first round of the battle for the loyalties of a local electorate, who, following Lizabeth Cohen’s description of the “consumer’s republic” in her eponymous book, might be understood as citizen-consumers of government services. When Save Our Children brought its campaign to California with the notoriously discriminatory Briggs Initiative, Harvey Milk and other lesbian and gay rights activists in San Francisco and Los Angeles fired back with a boycott of Florida orange juice—Anita Bryant was a national spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Commission—even persuading some local Democratic Party clubs to sign on to the national boycott. As a result, the Florida Citrus Commission declined to renew her contract in 1979 and the loss of other endorsements soon followed. Following a divorce in 1980—a major transgression among her Evangelical base—Bryant found herself dumped by the movement she had helped to found. In the short run, Bryant won, though in the long run she has become the George Wallace or Phyllis Schlafly of the LGBT/queer movement: a useful idiot for the political battle for the various movements for LGBT/queer (or at least lesbian and gay) rights. I bring up this fabular episode not to point out the inevitable, teleological success of the LGBT/queer movement—the notion that, to quote Martin Luther King, Jr., the “arc of the moral universe…bends toward justice”—but because the “moral universe” in queer history, and in the broader history of the United States, is bent not by the teleology of social justice but contorted according to competing claims of “freedom,” most of which play out in the market rather than in the politically elite and socially insulated world of formal politics.

III. Methodological Synthesis: Economics and Identity
Because the history of queer or gay markets occurred as the confluence of so many complex processes and events, it has been necessary to draw on a range of sources in order to theorize the discrete processes of the queer or gay market, the institutional context of market society, the ways in which markets operate under capitalism, and the social interactions and intersubjective relations central to the making of queer or gay communities or cultures. As such, my admittedly intellectually promiscuous methodology has attempted to fuse together economic, cultural, and social analysis in order to understand this complex process. These broad influences include: 1) the influence of Marxian political economy, Gramscian ideas of cultural hegemony, and the intervention of institutional economic analysis; 2) the economics of information, behavioral economics, and game theory, most of which might be described (or stigmatized) as neo-classical or neo-liberal; 3) anthropological and epistemological theories of information and institutionality; 4) cultural and economic geography; and 5) queer theories of identity.

The most immediate influence on this study is queer economic historian Jeffrey Escoffier. An early activist in the Gay Activists Alliance, a founding member of the Gay Academic Union, and formally trained economic historian, Escoffier’s work represents a unique synthesis of economic and cultural analysis and activism. Indeed, Escoffier is not only the earliest, but to date, remains one of the very few queer scholars to point out the significance of and take seriously the history markets to LGBT/queer cultures, communities, and political and social movements. For Escoffier, markets played a central role in queer or gay social and political movements in the 1960s and 1970s, especially as they were organized around bars and restaurants, sex work, books, pornography,
bathhouses, theaters, and other retail businesses that catered explicitly to queer or gay consumers.

In many ways, my study is an extended meditation on two of Escoffier’s essays from *American Homo*, “Homosexuality and the Sociological Imagination” and “The Political Economy of the Closet.” In “Homosexuality and the Sociological Imagination,” Escoffier argues that sociological studies helped to shift the hegemonic discourse on homosexuality away from pathology, calling into question the social basis for conformity to heterosexuality and diffusing an alternative discourse that profoundly affected both heterosexual and non-heterosexual readers. In this way, Escoffier’s is one of the more important historical analyses of the link between readership and identity, or the “marketplace of ideas” as a laboratory for the creation of new selves. More substantially, my study follows up on implications of his sweeping essay, “The Political Economy of the Closet,” in which the progression of the Closet Economy (1950s and 1960s), the Liberation Economy (late 1960s to early 1970s), and the Territorial Economy (1970s) witnessed the evolution of gay life in and through the diversification and growth of gay cultural and market geographies. Following Escoffier, my study identifies three primary interlocking features of this culture of everyday life: 1) the information that both comprised and was required to access queer social life, 2) the cultural patterns of exchange that comprised gay markets, and 3) the legal and cultural institutions that disciplined, constrained, and ultimately consolidated this shared culture of work, leisure, and sex into an increasingly integrated set of identities. I argue that Gay Liberation

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entailed a process in which these three features moved from the outside to the inside of gay life or, rather, by “coming out” gay people negotiated and reconfigured the boundaries of the gay life consumers, entrepreneurs, and activists gained access and then gained control of information, markets, and institutions.

In addition to Escoffier, the economic thinkers central to my study are an eclectic group whose primary intervention has been to suggest the various ways in which economic activity and markets are instituted legally, culturally, and socially rather than the products of the “natural” process of exchange between “free” buyers and sellers. These influences include Marx and Gramsci,9 who, in different but intersecting ways, argued for the social and interactional relations between people as the effects of economic and political institutions of power;10 Karl Polanyí, who argued that market phenomena could not be universalized but were embedded in other (cultural, social, familial, etc.) relations as part of an “instituted process;”11 and most importantly, Douglass North, whose theory of formal (state) and informal (cultural or non-state) institutions reframes the neoclassical analysis of markets from problems of supply and demand to problems of instituted rules that convene, incentivize, and constrain behavior in economic systems, especially but only through the establishment of private property

and the negotiation of transaction costs imposed by the exchange of private property. I also borrow extensively from the work of economist Thomas Schelling, whose attention to communication networks under informal and illicit market conditions shows how the institution of markets inheres in the communicative behaviors and motives of economic actors. The framework of my project builds on this diverse set of economic thinkers for the following reasons: first, the fulcrum of queer or gay history from the conclusion of the Second World War to the advent of HIV/AIDS were contests over stigmatization and criminalization of homosexuality and gender transgression that occurred primarily in the context of a queer or gay consumer market; secondly, the effects of institutionalization of stigmatization and criminalization on a subset of consumers consolidated not only an illicit market but a “gay ghetto” that served as the primary battlefield of Gay Liberation and a gay identity that supplied Gay Liberation with both ammunition and its raison d’etre; and third, these cultural and legal constraints instituted particular conditions of scarcity that distorted the economic dynamics of supply and demand of queer or gay commercial culture and framed the antagonism between predominantly queer or gay

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12 Although North’s analysis is often lumped in with other “neo-classical” economists (especially Robert Fogel and others associated with the cliometric “revolution”), North frames his analysis as a conceptual refinement of Polanyi’s argument in The Great Transformation, which, according to North, suffers from vagueness and abstraction because Polanyi does not offer a strong enough theory of the state or of ideology, or culture. “He emphasizes that it was the state that created the impersonal markets; but nowhere does he provide a theory of the state which accounts either for its creation of the body of property rights or for the way that groups influenced the state to bring about the demise of the ‘self-regulating market’; he graphically describes the destruction of the social fabric of society without providing a theory of ideology; and he continually identifies non-market forms of resource allocation with social, that is, non-economic objectives when in fact they frequently stemmed from efforts to reduce transaction costs…” North, Structure and Change in Economic History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 181. See also North, Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance, 28th printing (1990; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); Understanding the Process of Economic Change (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

consumers, on the one hand, and predominantly straight sellers and their corrupt sponsors (especially but not only the police) on the other.

In addition to these theorists of the economy as a process of social relations and shared cultural practices and meanings, my analysis relies on more conventional economists of information and behavioral economists like Gary Becker, Thomas Schilling, George Akerlof, and Rachel Kranton, as one means to understand the ways in which information is construed and used within market systems. Without weighing on any one dispute between these mainstream economists and some of the previously mentioned theorists (especially Marx and Gramsci), my methodology makes use of these theorists if for no other reason than that their analyses abstract patterns and cycles endemic to markets that are difficult to refute, even if I readily admit that these patterns work only under the institution of the economy according to the rules of capitalism. The underlying cultural patterns that emerged within the institutional matrix of queer or gay markets were ultimately central to the transition from the closet economy to the territorial economy.

By broadening the frame of economic analysis to include the broader institutions, especially but not only legal and cultural institutions, I also draw on a range of theorists and social scientists who point to the ways in which subjective identities, cultural expressions, and social interactions are maintained and transformed through institutional practices. Foucault and Sedgwick, I have already mentioned extensively, are also especially important influences, since his work establishes the epistemological (or informational) organization of contemporary institutions as central to categorical and hierarchical divisions of sexuality. Additionally, anthropologist Mary Douglas provides
insights about institutions and the ways in which they operate that are central to my argument, especially with regards to the distribution or diffusion of culture as a public good created by institutions as well as the ways in which institutions confer identities.\footnote{Mary Douglas, \textit{How Institutions Think} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 41-42, 47.} Because my examination of markets is an attempt to understand the kinds of historical interactions that accrued as identity with a community, I also draw extensively on the work of Erving Goffman, who not only outlines both the significance of performative interactions between individuals in a given context as well as one of the earliest theories of “stigma” or the significance of norms and standards to the construction of “deviance.”\footnote{Erving Goffman, \textit{Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity}, 1st Touchstone ed. (1963; New York: Touchstone Books, 1986), 3; see also Goffman, \textit{The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life} (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).} This analysis also links the institutional production of knowledge to the diffusion of information, drawing out the implications of media and mass communications in the diffusion of information about sexuality, especially ideas related to the idea of “media ecology,” or the technological and cultural context of mass communication, in the foundational work of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman and in more recent work by rhetoric scholar Richard Lanham and literary scholar Franco Moretti.\footnote{Richard Lanham, \textit{The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Marshall McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man} (Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2013) Kindle Edition; Franco Moretti, \textit{Distant Reading} (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2013); Neil Postman, \textit{Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business} (1985; New York: Penguin Books, 2005).} In this regard, my work builds on the Martin Meeker’s groundbreaking study of how Homophile publication and information politicized gay identity and fomented a national gay movement in the 1950s and 1960s.\footnote{Martin Meeker, \textit{Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s} (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); see also Marcia M. Gallo, \textit{Different Daughters: A History of the Daughter of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement} (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006).}
Finally, my work draws on the interventions of queer theorists and social scientists who, following Sedgwick, Foucault, and Judith Butler, point to the significance of knowledge and performativity\textsuperscript{18} in the making of identities, especially the ways in which identities build on “queer” or alternative modes of knowledge and performance as self-making. To be sure, these early queer or gay economies and economic histories were for the most part dominated by gay, white men, I take seriously the claim that whiteness and white privilege represented an important constitutive element of queer or gay economies, communities, and organizations in the historical period covered by this study. Indeed, in a study that emphasizes the significance of transaction costs imposed by the institutionalization of queer or gay economies, I also want to be aware of the race- and class-specific transaction costs that often accounted for well-documented racism and discrimination, both purposeful and inadvertent, from gay or queer markets, communities, and organizations.

Putting these broad and at times contradictory discourses into dialogue with one another has produced a discord with which it is difficult to grapple, let alone resolve. This is especially true for the contradictions that emerge between institutional analyses and neo-liberal micro-economists, or between economic theories of information as utilitarian data and linguistic or cultural theories of information as meaning. The trick, in many ways, has been to incorporate the “supply and demand” models that assume economic scarcity within an institutional or political-economic framework that describes how such conditions are instituted by the state or cultural institutions; or to understand the cultural limitations and embeddedness of “data” in various contexts. In a number of ways, I have

\textsuperscript{18} Although it may be unnecessarily to explain this often-used term, by “performativity” I am simply referring to Butler’s appropriation of J.L.A. Austen’s notion that language, gestures, and other signs “perform” or activate the construction of individual and collective subjects.
had to simply readjust my own scholarly expectations to the Tristan chord that this methodological combination has sounded, and putting aside some of these unresolved and unresolvable questions for other projects.

IV. A Historiography of Gay Markets from Closet to Gay Liberation

“The Political Economy of the Closet”

Historians have yet to fully grapple with the implications of Escoffier’s broadly sketched chronology in “The Political Economy of the Closet.” Escoffier describes a series of historical phases defined by distinctive types of businesses and institutional (legal and cultural) patterns. He points to an economy that, at least in New York City, was largely formed on the cultural and commercial ruins of the gay social world of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s described in historical works already mentioned by Bérubé and Chauncey as well as classic and contemporary works by Eric Garber, Lillian Faderman, Kevin Mumford, Andrea Barnet, Shane Vogel, and James Wilson. Although these cultures suffered through waves of repression, their openness also suggests a surprising degree of tolerance from local authorities. The inauguration of the economic closet described by Escoffier occurred at the confluence of events and trends that redefined postwar life, including Cold War era “lavender scares,” the aggressive promotion of marriage and the “Baby Boom,” and a political and cultural consensus that stressed social...

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control and conformity in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As Margot Canaday has recently argued, Escoffier’s chronology also coincided with the making of the “Straight State” at a federal level a thesis that has enormous implications for a reading of queer or gay markets as instituted, in part, by law. In another context, the gay markets of the United States emerged within a similar chronology and set of institutional patterns as what Matt Houlbrook calls the logic of the “pink schilling” in *Queer London*, one of the few queer histories to take up an explicit economic analysis and an important precedent for this study.

Escoffier’s chronology can be summarized as follows: 1) the Closet Economy of the late 1960s, defined by criminalization, the segregation of personal information between gay and straight social lives (i.e. the “double life”), and the “protection rackets” in the bars, pornographic book shops and theaters, and bathhouses where gay sociability took place; 2) the Liberation Economy that briefly existed from the Stonewall Riots to the early seventies, defined by a “mass coming out,” militant and direct forms of activism, attempts to dismantle the institutional requirements of the “double life” (especially in the legal bias, psychiatric practice, and cultural representations that perpetuated anti-gay stigma), and the creation of alternative markets in the form of organizationally administered spaces like the Gay Activists’ Alliance Firehouse (a forerunner to contemporary LGBT community centers); and 3) the Territorial Economy, marked by the

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geographic and economic establishment of gay businesses and institutions and
gentrification.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to Escoffier, a number of important historical works directly and
indirectly address the history of gay life in New York City during the same time period
and are especially relevant to my study, notably Toby Marotta’s \textit{The Politics of
Homosexuality}, John D’Emilio’s \textit{Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a
Homosexual Minority in the U.S.}, Alice Echols’ \textit{Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in
America, 1967-1975}, Martin Duberman’s \textit{Stonewall}, Gayle Rubin’s “The valley of the
Revolution}, David Eisenbach’s \textit{Gay Power: An American Revolution}, Susan Stryker’s
\textit{Transgender History}, Stephan Cohen’s \textit{The Gay Liberation Youth Movement in New
York: An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail}, Christina Hanhardt’s \textit{Safe Space: Gay
Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence}, and Amin Ghaziani’s \textit{There Goes the
Gayborhood}?.\textsuperscript{24} These works chronicle the critical cultural, intellectual, and political
trends and events that have defined the history of New York City’s gay or queer life

\textsuperscript{23} Escoffier, \textit{American Homo: Community and Perversity}, 66.

\textsuperscript{24} The following, which include now canonical studies and some of the newer scholarship, are listed in
order of publication: Marotta, \textit{The Politics of Homosexuality} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981); D’Emilio,
\textit{Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-
1970, 2nd ed.} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Echols, \textit{Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in
America, 1967-1975} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Duberman, \textit{Stonewall} (New
York: Plume, 1994); Rubin, “The Valley of the Kings” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1994); Kissack,
\textit{Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004); Eisenbach,
\textit{Gay Power: An American Revolution} (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006); Cohen, \textit{The Gay Liberation Youth
Movement in New York: An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail} (New York: Routledge, 2008); Hanhardt, \textit{Safe
Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence} (Durham, NC and London: Duke University
during a remarkable period of almost fearless sociocultural innovation and community formation, from the late 1940s until the abrupt and catastrophic appearance of HIV/AIDS in 1981: the growth of gay bars and the emergence of Homophile politics in the 1950s, the politics of visibility and criminality in the 1960s, and the emergence of Gay, Lesbian-Feminist, and Trans Liberation as a neighborhood-based and community-oriented political movement in New York City politics in the 1970s. For the purposes of my argument, these authors suggest the ways in which queer or gay markets were instituted as they passed through Escoffier’s phases of queer economic history from the closet to the territorial economy, first, the legal and informal constraints that shaped the demographic concentration and geographic patterns of gay commercial life as the only viable alternative to silence and self-denial and secondly, the ways in which formal organizations and informal cultural patterns worked to alter those rules through the recreation of gay or queer space in the urban landscape of a radically changing New York City.\textsuperscript{25} These radical changes were in turn reflected by the broader federal, state, and municipal policies as well as the local political and cultural currents that remade the city’s architecture, economy, and cultural identity in three broad phases from the late 1940s to the 1970s: first, an era of competing political machines and domination by bureaucrats best equipped to negotiate the politics of post-New Deal federal funding when massive postwar “slum clearance” and building projects of the late 1940s and early 1950s dominated the city, described in Robert Caro’s biography of Robert Moses, \textit{The Power Broker} and more recently in Samuel Zipp’s \textit{Manhattan}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{25}{Escoffier, \textit{American Homo: Community and Perversity}, 66-70.}
\end{footnotes}
Projects; second, an era defined by redlining and white flight to the suburbs, the deterioration of the urban manufacturing economy, the resurgence of artistic and political non-conformity in the downtown arts scene, and the municipal reform movements that pit neighborhood activists and anti-corruption politicians against the city’s traditional political machines and powerful real estate interests, as described in a thematically diverse historiography of the 1960s suggested by Vincent Cannato’s *The Ungovernable City*, Roberta Brandes Gratz’ *The Battle for Gotham*, Anthony Flint’s *Wrestling with Moses*, the Museum of the City of New York’s *America’s Mayor*, Sally Banes’ *Greenwich Village 1963*, and the recent anthology *Summer in the City*; and third, a decade marked by the contradictions of, on the one hand, cultural and political innovation

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and experimentation driven by African-American Civil Rights, post-Civil Rights racial liberation movements, the Women’s movement, and Gay Liberation, and, on the other hand, the horrific decline of public infrastructure, safety, and political credibility as the city’s economy shifted from manufacturing to services, a historiography suggested by Jonathan Soffer’s *Ed Koch and the Rebuilding of New York City*, Jonathan Mahler’s *Ladies and Gentleman, the Bronx is Burning*, Suleiman Osman’s *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, Jefferson Cowie’s *Stayin’ Alive*, Judith Stein’s *Pivotal Decade*, and Peter Bronstein’s “‘Adults Only’: The Construction of an Erotic City in New York City during the 1970s.”

Although this historiography suggests the radical socioeconomic, cultural, and political changes that coincided with (and as I argue, created the conditions for) the emergence and politicization of gay or queer communities around the dense commercial core of most major cities, gay or queer agents are generally absent from most mainstream *(or in this case “straight”)* accounts of this process. In part, this omission makes sense. Until the 1970s, gay or queer people were largely invisible to politicians, urban planners, and pundits, who saw the emergence of visibly queer cultures as but one of many symptoms of urban blight and decline without a positive role to play in civic politics.

As Nan Boyd, Susan Stryker, and others have argued, San Francisco’s history in the

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30 There was one exception. As Nan Boyd’s *Wide Open Town* suggests, San Francisco’s powerful Tavern Guild and other local Homophile organizations gave gay or queer residents political clout in the early 1960s that would come to New York City and other major urban areas like Philadelphia, Seattle, and Los Angeles only in the 1970s and later.
1950s and early 1960s suggests an important exception. Though equally exceptional—from the 1940s through the 1970s New York City’s population was more than twice that of country’s the next largest city, Chicago, and Greenwich Village was arguably the best known queer or gay neighborhood in the western hemisphere—the municipal consensus against “homosexuality” in public life was more typical of attitudes in most other large cities at the time. Synthesizing these histories helps to elucidate the institutional contours of places like Greenwich Village, in which the choice engendered in markets was inhibited by the legal and cultural constraints of the market. The longer history of gay markets is not only a history of consolidation, but decriminalization and liberalization.

“Late Capitalism”

Thus, until the explosion of Gay Liberation after Stonewall, historians of this period (including queer historians) have tended to view the gradual expansion of gay or queer markets from the late 1940s to the 1970s as marginal to the macroeconomic and macrocultural processes that set the preconditions of its emergence. In that regard, the endpoint of my study is as significant as the beginning. Well before contemporary historians began to write about this period, the socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic upheavals of the 1970s had already served as important material for theorists of what this study situates, in a nebulous system and an even more nebulous periodization of “late capitalism.” Aware of its teleological meanings, I use it somewhat polemically and, perhaps a little too faithfully. However much cultural capitalism may have replaced industrial capitalism in the core, it would be naïve not to see an ever-larger periphery whose people and resources are consumed by the worst ravages of capital. There may be little similarity between a handful of bars and bookstores in Greenwich Village, on the
one hand, and a rubber plant in the Amazon, a diamond mine in Gauteng, or a fracking
operation on the Llano Estacado; but it would be absurd not to reckon with the
unsustainability and upward limit that this latest form of capitalism has unleashed in an
era of eminent and increasingly unavoidable ecological catastrophe. If we can still
imagine a future with capitalism, it may be that the best the queer movement can hope for
is a bar with enough gas masks for everybody. Although clunky, I use the term “late
capitalism” for several important reasons. I use the term simply because it is more
convenient than the other trends that my study identifies, the fairly well understood post-
industrialism, and the more contested term, postmodernity. Though teleological, “late
capitalism” also represented one of the most commonly used modifiers for the type of
capitalism that emerged in the 1970s, at the same time that queer communities were
blossoming in New York City, San Francisco, London, Amsterdam, Paris, and other post-
industrial, postmodern cities in North America and Europe. I use the term not only
because of its contemporaneity with the time under consideration, but because the
cultural processes I ascribe to queer markets are still at work. Although the Internet has
provided a technology that has greatly exceeded the cultural base of the economy that
emerged in the 1970s, the modes and objects of exchange and value—information and
images—remain much the same. It is no coincidence that one of the most cited figures of
“late capitalism,” Andy Warhol, emerged exactly in the milieu I historicize in this study.

31 It is not the point of this project to define postmodernism or even to contribute to postmodernist theory.
Instead, I am interested in the synchronous emergence of post-odernity and queer or gay politics or, rather,
the shared conditions of postmodernity and queer or gay politics. Those conditions are geographic or
architectural as well as economic, especially as they relate to market phenomena. These observations are
drawn principally from the arguments of Frederic Jameson (via Henri Lefebvre) and David Harvey. See
Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, NC and London: Duke
University Press, 1991), 97-130, 260-278; Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the
Although postmodernist theory has been central to queer scholarship in the last three decades, queer theory and scholarship has tended to overlook these architectural and economic critiques of postmodernist theory and instead emphasize the fracturing of the subject or the dissolution of grand narratives (and especially Freudian psychoanalysis). As Halberstam argues, this is because of the exclusion of sexuality from the work of postmodern conceptions of space and the economy, “precisely because desire has been cast by neo-Marxists as part of a ludic body politics that obstructs the ‘real’ work of activism.” However, the ways in which postmodernism represented a reaction to modern hyper-rationalized urban planning as well as the modernist obsession with managing mass consumption (especially but not only regarding sex) were central to the making of queer or gay neighborhoods in commercialized entertainment districts, the politicization of queer or gay consumer identities, and the ways in which Gay Liberation remade the urban space of the queer or gay neighborhood primarily through markets. More importantly, the politicization of the personal—to borrow an oft-cited phrase—was one of the conditions and effects of postmodernity that made sex and sexuality as effective in transforming the politics, culture, and economy of New York City as what Soja, Harvey, and Jameson (at least in Halberstam’s formulation) considered the “real” work of activism: envelope stuffing, demonstrating, organizing, etc. In the context of

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queer or gay activism, it seems more or less impossible to understand conventional or “real” activism without sex and sexuality. Indeed, that mistake was what doomed much of Homophile activism (and all movements that attempt to ground queer or gay life in the politics of respectability), even as it has led to the trivialization or even erasure of sexuality (not to mention the gay or queer movement) from much of the foundational literature on postmodernism. If Harvey and Jameson have located no signs of political oxygen in the cavern of postmodernity, it is because they have largely ignored the canaries that have managed to find the oxygen in its crevices.

Perhaps this is because the crumbling infrastructure and falling tax receipts that characterized the post-industrial landscape of Lindsay-era New York City also anticipated “neo-liberalism,” a combination of policies whose focus on privatization helped shape the marketization of virtually every aspect of public life in the city and created the conditions for gentrification, a process that has been somewhat beneficial for middle- and upper-class (and predominantly white and male) queer or gay consumers while pricing lower-income queer or gay consumers out. Moreover, such largely local stories seem trivial compared to, or have been trivialized because of the ways in which gay or queer infiltration of mass culture has radically transformed a rag-tag, neighborhood-based activist movement into an entertainment industry juggernaut and a geographically diffused national and international political movement (or, more appropriately, lobby) that rivals almost any other in contemporary politics. (Who cares

34 “Privatization” or “marketization” may well be misleading when considering, for example, the history of bathhouses and other sexual businesses in New York City, or the fate of the many pornographic and all-night theaters and bookstores in Times Square in the 1990s. In many ways, the process is more akin to gentrification, or the displacement of cheap markets that cater to poor and working-class consumers to cost prohibitive markets that cater primarily to higher income consumers. See especially Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism, ed. Dangerous Bedfellows (Boston: South End Press, 1996); Samuel Delaney, Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
about the street kids on the peers, or the sex workers in the Tenderloin? You can get married in Dubuque, and Ellen’s on daytime television.) But whatever complex and contradictory history that followed the 1970s—including the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS—the decade represented a watershed in the local history of the city, one whose iconography, if not actual conditions, continues to define the cultural identities of many of New York City’s neighborhoods, especially the queer and artistic neighborhoods of Manhattan like SoHo, TriBeCa, Greenwich Village, Chelsea, and Hell’s Kitchen.

In the final instance, the transition to a post-industrial economy seems as central to any of the other “posts” that define queer or gay community history from the closet to Gay Liberation. The politicization of economic identities—especially as consumers but also as cultural producers—occurred within a complex set of overlapping economic and cultural processes, especially the development of consumer culture and consumer-based politics in the twentieth century. My dissertation therefore situates the history of Lesbian-Feminist, Gay, and Trans Liberation in the context of what sociologist Daniel Bell diagnoses as a shift away from industrialism in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Anticipating the analysis of Richard Florida’s “creative class” (of which queer people form an important constituency) by more than two decades, it is no accident that the transition away from manufacturing and toward a technology- and knowledge-based service economy in the 1970s supported the creation of new types of knowledges and information about the sex/gender system and individuals’ identities within that system.35 Indeed, at least in the case of New York City,

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the service- and knowledge-oriented class of cultural producers and intellectual laborers—a class that in many ways dominated and certainly benefited most from Gay Liberation—largely displaced the manufacturing and physical workers that formerly ran the factories and docks of the now fashionable SoHo and Tribeca and, since the 1990s, even the Meatpacking District.

More central to my argument, Bell argues that the post-industrial society inaugurated a new cultural system that “insist[s] on the autonomy of the aesthetic from moral norms;…valu[es]…the new and experimental; and by tak[es] the self (in its quest for originality and uniqueness) as the touchstone of cultural judgment.” The idiosyncratic and highly subjective shaping of Bell’s notion of the “modern self” holds particularly rich implications for the study of gender and sexuality in the twentieth century, particularly considering the ways in which gender and sexual identity contribute to the notion of the “self…as the touchstone of cultural judgment.” He continues, as “the legitimations of social behavior passed from religion to modernist culture[,]…[t]here was a shift in emphasis from ‘character,’ which is the unity of moral codes and disciplined purpose, to an emphasis on ‘personality,’ which is the enhancement of self through the compulsive search for individual differentiation.” Although Bell does not tease out these specific implications for gay or queer subjects, the shift from “character” to “personality” also preempted the shift from being true to a standard of behavior (i.e. sexual and gender conformity) to being true to oneself. He does, through a reading of Susan Sontag, point

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37 Although Bell spends little time on homosexuality, his analysis does link homosexuality to some of the most important currents in American consumer society, particularly the linkage of sexuality and liberation in the bohemian heyday of early twentieth century Greenwich Village as well as his totally questionable and vaguely homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic conclusions of the “obsessive preoccupation with
out the ways in which the transitional period of the 1960s offered up camp as a specific mode of homosexual taste that, like post-war mass markets in general, demolishes the distinctions between high and low forms of culture. That shift seems like an indispensable, if missing, explanation for the ways in which gay or queer people justified “coming out.” Indeed, under the older codes of (hetero)sexual propriety, “coming out” amounts to little more than a confession. However, within the “compulsive search for individual differentiation,” “coming out” meant not only a direct challenge to the cultural prestige of heterosexuality but also the creation of a new kind of self. As Bell suggests, in the modern era “not work but the ‘life style’ became the source of satisfaction and criterion for desirable behavior in the society.”

The Gay “Lifestyle” and Consumer Citizenship

Conservative talking points about homosexuality notwithstanding, “lifestyle” as a category of consumption suggests a vital point of inquiry to understanding the political effects that followed the intersection of consumer identity and queer identities. Using the definition of Richard Fox and Jackson Lears, I understand consumer culture as “an ethic, a standard of living, and a power structure” in which consumers are not simply purchasers, but “recipients of professional advice, marketing strategies, government

homosexuality, transvestitism, [and] buggery” which “seemed to represent a flight from heterosexual life, perhaps in response to the release of aggressive female sexuality which was becoming evident at the end of the decade [of the 1960s].” Ibid., 62, 122.

38 Ibid., 312.

39 Ibid., xxiv. In order to avoid opening the ideological can of worms of the word “life style,” I wish to reemphasize John D’Emilio’s point—indeed, it is the crux of his argument about the relationship between lesbians and gay men and capitalism—that “gay men and lesbians have not always existed...[T]hey are a product of history, and have come into existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism; it has been the historical development of capitalism...that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late nineteenth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity.” Missing from D’Emilio’s historical analysis is an account of queer cultures, but his larger points about the socially and historically constructed nature of gay and lesbian identity speak to Bell’s analyses of new styles of self in the twentieth century. D’Emilio, Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University, 4-5.
programs, and advertisers’ images of happiness.” This broad interpretation consumption helps to account for the connectedness of gay political, cultural, and economic activities in the context of the market. More importantly, Fox’ and Lears’ analysis suggests the connectedness between the individual consumer and the community. However, in this final sense, the example of gay culture and consumer identity challenges their contention that “[a]lthough the dominant institutions of our culture have purported to be offering the consumer culture a fulfilling participation in the life of the community, they have to a large extent presented the empty prospect of taking part in the marketplace of personal exchange.” However, because gay identity emerged in part from the reaction to the criminalization of consumption in the “marketplace of personal exchange,” the prospect of taking part in that marketplace, far from “empty,” represented the fulfillment of Gay Liberation. The authors note, “While the few make decisions about managing society, the many are left to manage their appearance, aided by trained counselors in personal cosmetics.” However, Fox’ and Lears’ analysis also suggests the limitations to gay consumption as a political program, and begs the critical question: Was Gay Liberation premised on the cession of larger struggles over the management of society in favor of appearance? If the first part of that statement is true, the second part overlooks the vital components of autonomy and self-making that Lesbian-Feminist, Gay, and Trans Liberation insisted on. Given the critical importance of “personal appearance” and “cosmetics” to gay visibility—the most critical cultural aspect of Lesbian-Feminist, Gay, and Trans Liberation—queer historians would be remiss in trivializing the significance of “personal appearance” and “cosmetics.” For one thing, personal appearance was critical

to cruising, a mode of signaling that arguably developed so that queer or gay people could identify potential sex partners. Few aspects of gay culture offered a greater challenge to traditional sexual and gender norms than the refashioning of “personal appearance” and “cosmetics” to create new gay selves. The example of Gay Liberation offers an important counterweight to the devaluation of the seemingly frivolous or excessive aspects of consumer culture, a critical move that forecloses a number of political possibilities within the one of the most potentially dynamic and individually liberating aspects of contemporary consumer culture. Indeed, the most important products of gay markets are arguably gay identities themselves.\(^1\)

These highly idiosyncratic and personal aspects of gay consumption thus offered one of the most significant political challenges to a regime of compulsory heterosexuality. More often than not, political change occurred less dramatically, if more substantively, as the gradual effects of accumulated monetary, social, and cultural capital. If the transition from a manufacturing to a services economy resonated in American culture, it resonated just as deeply in U.S. politics. Few works in the historiography of consumer culture study the political implications of this shift as deeply as Lizabeth Cohen’s *A Consumer’s Republic*, a study of post-war America that covers, almost encyclopedically, the policy shifts, advertisement, changing residential patterns, and the

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racialization and sexualization of consumption fundamental to the rise of consumer-based politics. She argues that in the post-war order, the “purchaser as citizen” (rather than the “worker as citizen”) represented a political ideal in which “the consumer satisfying personal material wants actually served the national interest.” The ideological shift from production to consumption valorized the consumer and conflated citizenship and consumption. According to Cohen, the “consumer/citizen/taxpayer/voter” represented the “self-interested citizens” that “increasingly view government policies like market transactions, judging them by how well served they feel personally.”

Although Cohen focuses primarily on race, class, and gender, the peak years of the “Consumer’s Republic” coincides with the years of Gay Liberation. Indeed, the rise of Gay Liberation should be an important part of any discussion about the history of consumption in the sixties and seventies. Despite the absence of explicit economic analysis from most accounts of queer history, boycotts and conspicuous consumption were central to the emergence and success of the post-Liberation Economy, a point recently made by David K. Johnson in his insistence that consumer culture was central to gay life well before the emergence of an explicitly gay consumer culture. Gay people abandoned Mafia establishments and other shadowy enterprises for bars run by gay or gay-friendly management and owners. Boycotts and raucous demonstrations rankled large companies and small businesses alike, threatening economic consequences for homophobia and transphobia. The Stonewall Riots—the “hairpin drop heard ‘round the

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43 Ibid, 387.
44 Johnson’s argument is especially important because it demonstrates the ways in which gay consumers forged a shared culture from materials that were marketed to “normal” or “straight consumers.” Johnson, “Physique Pioneers: The Politics of 1960s Gay Consumer Culture,” *The Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 868-869.
world”—occurred in the wake of a gay consumer revolt. Gay people also developed advertising and marketing strategies, which both incentivized conspicuous consumption and visibly raised the profile of gay consumers. Gay consumers and entrepreneurs developed collective strategies both to pool capital investment and to alleviate the burdens of living in the city, establishing gay business associations, political groups and government contacts, and non-profit organizations devoted to almost every conceivable social issue from gay homelessness and joblessness to drug addiction and disease management. In the unimpeachable terms of property rights offered by the Consumers’ Republic, the material gains of the late sixties and seventies meant that more and more gay people had property and access to it. As gay “purchasers as citizens” played their roles as consumers, taxpayers, and voters in the Consumers’ Republic, politicians had had to more seriously consider gay exceptions to free expression, association, and assembly; access to housing and employment markets; and tax equality (i.e. “gay marriage”). Furthermore, the acquisition of cultural, social, and economic capital provided the queer community the resources it needed to withstand the vicious onslaught of reactionary anti-gay activism that began in 1977. Even if queer protections were rolled back by reactionaries and bigots—and they often were in the post-Liberation era—opponents of Gay Liberation never successfully folded the bars, bookstores, bathhouses, cafés, theaters, boutiques, and publishing houses, not to mention the sociability and cultural vibrancy that such spaces fostered. More importantly, such spaces seem to have institutionalized liberated, “out” gay or queer subjects such that Gay Liberation has become a permanent revolution.

45 Jenkins, Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 121-123.
V. Scope of Study and Chapter Outline

Although this analysis animates my project, the narrative that emerges is not about how LGBT/queer politics or economic organization has contributed to “capitalism” or “neoliberalism,” but rather how markets and the kinds of agency markets delimit have been central to the anchorage and consolidation of LGBT/queer life in the twentieth century. In many ways, mine is a study of how entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial agency created the possibility not just of a queer identity but a positive (or at least morally neutral) queer identity and community. This “choice” has been both the most positive effect of markets for LGBT/queer life and, I would argue, was necessary for the emergence of Gay Liberation in the United States. These entrepreneurial activities consisted principally of supplying not only a greater volume of information about same-sex sexuality and eroticism, gender transgression, and sexual sociability; but also new types of information that departed from both the pathological model of “homosexuality” and “inversion” and the older, ecclesiastical model of “sodomy” and sexual sin. My definition of entrepreneurship is a fairly straightforward adoption of Joseph Schumpeter’s model of the entrepreneur as a social actor, “to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, but opening up a new source of supply materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on.”

The forms of entrepreneurship are not necessarily technological, though new technologies of information certainly disseminated queer identities,

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information about how to access queer communities, and knowledge to construct a distinctly queer life.

My study explores three distinct phases of entrepreneurial activity, each of which were accompanied by new institutional and geographic patterns in what I refer to as “gay markets” as well as an increasing consolidation and even specialization of gay or queer identities. My study begins with the postwar situation of gay commercial life in a handful of clandestine bars, scattered and largely unaffiliated across the country. During the immediate postwar years, “homosexuality” (and even the mention of sex) was subject to taboos and misinformation. The idea of “coming out” of the closet was an absurd and insane proposition, although the “coming out” into the gay world would have been possible in the gay bars of medium and large-sized cities. The most important entrepreneurial activity of the late 1940s and early 1950s was the provision of new forms of information about homosexuality and gay life. Although principally associated with Alfred Kinsey and his enormously popular studies of male and female sexuality, published respectively in 1948 and 1953, the informational explosion of the late 1940s and 1950s saw an unprecedented outpouring of publications from thousands of psychologists, social scientists, and journalists on the subject of sexuality and especially homosexuality. Although much of this information described “homosexuals” as pathological or criminal, the Kinsey Reports themselves presented a completely benign picture of same-sex sexuality and gender transgression. This innovation proved extremely important for queer or gay people in the 1950s, who used Kinsey’s findings to extrapolate new ideas about the existence and prevalence of gay or queer identities in U.S. society. Because Kinsey emphasized the social situation of sexuality, he also provides an implicit
map of the otherwise hidden gay commercial culture growing up in U.S. cities at the
time, especially in New York City. This early phase of the gay economy also saw new
narratives and information about homosexuality and gender transgression driven by
scandal and the desire to sell copies in the larger context of the Cold War era lavender
scare. By using studies of tabloid publications and gossip columnists, I have tried to
reconstruct a map to the bars and commercial zones of New York City in order to
demonstrate the consolidation of both a market and an urban identity. I try to pay special
attention to the ways in which this information also helped readers and potential
consumers to navigate the most important dynamics of emerging gay markets:
criminalization, stigmatization, and the negotiation of illicit and informal markets that
promoted blackmail and exploitation. Thus, the economic structure of the closet is
essentially framed by the dynamic of falling search or information costs—the time and
money spent finding other individuals or networks, or information about how to access
gay commercial zones—and rising protection costs—costs paid to blackmailers,
exploitative cover charges, and the psychic and financial costs of living a “double life.”

The second major entrepreneurial phase under discussion is the production of
information by gay or queer people themselves in the 1950s and 1960s, especially the
pioneering works of Donald Webster Cory and Ann Aldrich. However, because the
information of most publications at the time was so negative, new forms of gay-authored
information also brought the possibility surveillance, scrutiny, and even violence. Gay
and lesbian writers during the period produced information using pseudonyms and
evasions commonly associated with the closet, though they also anticipated a positive
identity for gay men and lesbians as well as the dissolution of the stigmatizing and
criminalizing regime of the closet. Publications by gay and lesbian writers explored the
dynamics of gay life in the United States, and few places served as important a case study
as New York City, and especially Greenwich Village. My investigation of this period
explores the ways in which gay men and lesbians created increasingly specialized
communities vis-à-vis the gendered (and to a lesser extent class and race) segmentation
of the market. I conclude my study of this section with an examination of Caffe Cino, a
Greenwich Village café-theater often cited as the first gay theater and, as I demonstrate,
pioneered new forms of identity, cultural expression, and ways of doing business that
anticipated and, by many accounts directly inspired, the positive and unapologetic
affirmation of queer identities and cultural expressions associated with “coming out of
the closet” and Gay Liberation. In this phase of what I refer to as the “late closet
economy,” not only did gay or queer identities become more formal and therefore
recognizable, but the anchorage of gay markets in Greenwich Village produced the
geographic and political dynamic of what contemporary activists called a “gay ghetto.”

The final and briefest part of my study investigates a third entrepreneurial phase,
in which political activists and organizations took over the entrepreneurial roles formerly
played by artists and writers. Activists and organizations promoted a “liberated”—that is
“out”—identity as a political imperative and cultural prerequisite for participation in gay
life. Framed by the decriminalization of gay commercial life in New York City in 1966
and events like the Stonewall Riots and Gay Liberation zaps of the late 1960s and early
1970s, this final phase of entrepreneurial activity saw the open dissemination of
information about gay commercial life through gay guides, promotion of particular kinds
of businesses, agitation against exploitation by straight “outsiders,” demands for an end
to police harassment in gay businesses, and the promotion of gay business organizations. This final phase saw the transition of an exploited, quasi-criminal, and stigmatized “gay ghetto” to an important political constituency and economic and cultural zone in New York City.

What follows is an unusual and, in a related way, limited study. It is unusual—I will not say *queer* to avoid confusion—simply because it relates two histories that are generally not considered in tandem: capitalism and queer or gay social life. It is limited because it only discusses a single, largely peripheral market or set of markets—those at the geographic, cultural, and social core of queer or gay communities in New York City—markets that existed in the much larger local, national, and international order of a global market society.

My general approach is unusual here, weaving from the bird’s eye view of the Village and its place within a larger regional and even national queer culture to a more intimate view inside the bars and businesses that comprised the gay economy. Following these streams of information from the emergence and consolidation of gay or queer identities, cultures, and spaces has required both the skills of a social scientist and the flexibility and emotional acuity of a flâneur, willing to abandon my own prejudicial grand theories in order to encounter the individuals, networks, exchanges, and institutions who comprise gay or queer social life. New York City is an intimidating study, if only because it is so large, its historical record so disorganized, and because of the number of people who have so expertly contributed to the historiography of the city. In particular, George Chauncey’s much anticipated follow-up to the foundational, magisterial *Gay New York* has had a chilling effect on my circle of queer researchers and intellectuals, with more
than a few people discouraging me from even pursuing this project. However, as a member of this community and its economy, I do at least have the advantages (as well as disadvantages) of a first-hand participant, and especially a strong emotional investment in and attachment to the subject matter. New York City also seems like the starting point for understanding the dynamics of the gay or queer economy in the United States, not only because of its sheer size but because the narrative of Gay Liberation in the U.S. begins with a rebellion fomented by the dissatisfied patrons of the Stonewall Inn.

There are a number of areas where I did not have sufficient time or sources to cover. I have been especially disappointed in my research around the question of race. While race is a sometimes remarked upon feature, I was surprised by the amount of erasure and downright hostility toward people of color from within the community. I had expected to find people of color as entrepreneurs of information and community. While I have documented the participation of people of color, I have uncovered little that is new except perhaps a contribution to an understanding of the ways in which whiteness and homosexuality have, unfortunately, become mutually constitutive definitions. Many of the exclusions of my study can be explained by its object of study, markets, and the ways in which markets have a tendency to striate and exclude. In addition to people of color, women have also been difficult to locate, although I have dedicated a chapter to the lesbian segment of gay markets. Because of my focus on organizations that promoted gay markets, I have not had the time or material to explore alternatives formulated by lesbian-separatists, or the ways in which Women’s Liberation complicated the idea of gay markets. Trans* people, because such identities were in flux, have also been relegated to minor players in my study. While I have considered restructuring this study around the
principle consumers and beneficiaries of markets—gay, middle-class, and white men—to do so fails to grapple with the actual diversity of experiences and contributions within gay or queer markets. By focusing on information, I have also tended to focus on information about gay commercial and social life rather than the more complex kinds of information represented in film, art, and literature. Although I have a brief discussion of the importance of theater and the arts, I did not explore some of the more important artistic productions of the time like the films of Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger, the novels and essays of James Baldwin, or lesbian involvement in the Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee. It is my hope that a book project (or projects) will be able to explore these important if excluded themes and historical figures. In other ways, too, the new articulations and strategies of identity politics that came out of the African-American Civil Rights and Black Power movement were essential to the making of queer identity. Indeed, in the writings of Homophile and Gay Liberation activists, one of the most common political analogies—and arguably cause for the erasure of more intersectional experiences—is one that likens racial and sexual oppression.

Chapter outline

The first chapter of my study, entitled “Notes on queer markets and the queer way of life,” is a largely theoretical attempt to understand how and why markets and information are central to the emergence of gay or queer identity. In this chapter, I attempt to bring out the latent economic dynamics of queer theory and historiography. Presented as a loosely connected set of notes, this chapter is somewhat unconventional for a dissertation in history, although I use this chapter to address an on-going interest to
historicize and specify the emergence of queer identities and subjectivities in relation to the market.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, a period I refer to as the “early closet economy.” This period was so significant because the increase in published information about deviant gender, sexuality, and its social forms totally reordered the public sphere, or “media ecology” with regard to gender and sexuality. Chapter 2: “The Kinsey Effect: The Information of Demography and the Making of a Gay ‘Way of Life’ in the Early Closet Economy, 1948-1953”; and Chapter 3: “Stigmatizing Information, Organized Crime, and Finding Illicit Markets in the Early Closet Economy, 1948-1960,” each focus on two informational streams central to the larger cultural framework of the closet economy. Chapter 2 focuses primarily on the effects of “expert” information, particularly in response to the Kinsey Reports. In many ways, the growth of this information occurred in the wake of the sensational Kinsey Reports in 1948 and 1953, both of which fueled public interest in homosexuality and presented an empirical case not just for a shadowy subculture but a demographic subset of sexual minorities. Chapter 3 focuses on the “true crime” and tabloid literature of the late 1940s and 1950s, particularly the ways in which tabloid journalists like Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer made use of the spectacle of gay life to draw attention to the seedy underbelly of the post-war United States. In this early phase of the closet economy, discussions of gender and sexual deviance became both more widespread and more distinct, appearing in the popular press and finding their way into public consciousness. Except perhaps within the rarefied bohemian milieu of the intellectual and artistic vanguard, the term “homosexual” and its attendant lexicon was barely uttered and even
less understood before the Second World War. Though too often referenced in moral outrage or social anxiety, the topic became commonplace among journalists, writers, filmmakers, songwriters, and other makers of mass culture, not to mention politicians, pundits, and moral entrepreneurs. The publication of information led to a decrease in search costs, but the negative context in which such information became available also brought surveillance and violence from which queer or gay consumers had to be protected, thus raising protection costs. Despite rising protection costs, queer or gay subculture seemed to grow not in spite of but because of all the moral outrage and social anxiety, feeding a cycle that would eventually give American culture the paradoxical legacies of both Gay Liberation and, of course, Anita Bryant, Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell, and George W. Bush, to name only the most familiar useful idiots of the movement they have inadvertently served.

The reordering of the informational context of the early closet economy just after the Second World War carried a number of contradictory effects that fed directly into the consolidation of the “double life” as a strategy for evading the consequences of stigmatization and criminalization (i.e., legal persecution, social ostracism, and popular violence). The expansion of published information represented new forms of knowledge that drew the queer and the curious into gay bars and other commercial institutions. Indeed, even the exposition that such a world existed must have provided an irresistible lure for many of those who lived in relative isolation, spearing what sociologists have described as a migration to the cities—one made all the more exceptional by the simultaneous white, middle- and upper-class flight from the city.47 At the same time, the

47 It is impossible to retrieve the demographic information from this period, since the metrics for sexual orientation and gender identity hardly existed in a period when those concepts were still only murky
growth of this printed information also alerted the ostensibly “straight” public and its
moral entrepreneurs to the presence of such deviant individuals and cultures, thus
intensifying police and popular reprisals against “deviance” and unleashing a wave of
local anti-homosexual panics, police drives, and a national security “Lavender Scare” that
gripped the entire nation during the 1950s. Some of this information—notably the Kinsey
Reports and the “subjective” publications of gay or queer people themselves (many of
them part of the Homophile movement)—challenged the discursive hegemony of anti-
homosexual criminalization and stigmatization. However, such challenges were by and
large considered eccentric, and the ameliorative impact of such information on queer or
gay life only became apparent in the longer term.

For participants in queer or gay commercial life, the increase in such printed and
widely available information in the 1950s represented ideological alternatives to
stigmatization and criminalization (i.e., pleasure without guilt) and the expansion of
opportunities for cultural expression as well as social and erotic interaction.

Simultaneously, the unwanted attention from the “straight” public also promoted
blackmail and incentivized individual and collective strategies of the “double life” (i.e.,
the segregation of personal information between “gay” and “straight” social worlds).

Chapter 4: “‘New and Wider Circles’: Endogenous Communication Networks and Gay
Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Early Closet Economy, 1951-1960;” and Chapter 5:
“‘Worlds Created with Very Little’: Constructing a Lesbian Way of Life in the Closet

defined. However, research of later periods by sociologists and research centers like the Williams Institute
at UCLA confirm these migratory patterns. Anecdotally, this certainly seems to be the case in New York
City in the 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, as later chapters indicate, terms like “Greenwich Village” had almost
become synonymous with sexual and gender deviance by the end of the 1940s, often the only such
geography that people could identity with a queer or gay subculture. Kath Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City:
Sexual imaginary and the Great Gay Migration,” GLQ 2 (1995): 253-277; The Williams Institute at UCLA,
Economy, 1950s-1963” focuses on this stream of “subjective” information produced by people who pioneered and largely lived the “double life.” Chapter 4 examines the work and experiences of Edward Sagarin who, as Donald Webster Cory, wrote one of the first insider accounts of gay life in the United States, *The Homosexual in America*, published in 1951. Chapter 5 examines the work of lesbian writers in the 1950s, with special attention to Marijane Meaker, who, writing as Ann Aldrich, showed the social and cultural divisions and overlaps of the gay market into male and female (or gay male and lesbian) segments and the particular institutional contours of lesbian life.

The final part of my study focuses on the “late closet economy” and the emergence of the Gay Liberation and territorial economies from the 1960s to about 1980. Because of police campaigns and popular violence, many of the public spaces of what Hay called the “twilight world” (especially parks) became increasingly dangerous, totally reorganizing the public and private dynamics of the queer or gay social world. The drive to eradicate queer or gay life from public spaces encouraged the patronage of bars and other businesses in vice districts “protected” by organized crime and vice, especially but not only in Greenwich Village and the West Side theater district. This was not a complete innovation, since bars and theaters had catered to queer or gay clientele going back at least to the 1890s in New York City. However, the combination of social tolerance on New York City’s west side, the sophistication of organized crime, and the willingness of the police to collude with organized crime all colluded to make this system a more or less functional illicit market. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the changes to gender and sexual culture promoted by the emergence of a “bohemian” revival especially but not only in Greenwich Village—Beatnik, avant-garde, “counterculture,” etc.—also
encouraged the commercialization of openly gay or queer artistic networks in theater and art. Chapter Six: “From Black Market Bohemia to Gay Ghetto: Caffe Cino as a Case Study of Entrepreneurship in the Late Closet Economy, 1959-1968,” focuses on one particular enterprise, the Caffe Cino, and the role it played in gay life in the 1960s and 1970s. The conclusion of my study, Chapter 7: “Making the Gay Market in the Liberation and Territorial Economies: Organizational Entrepreneurship and the Territorialization of Gay Liberation, 1966-1980,” focuses on the period between 1966 and the late 1970s as a revolution in the ways in which queer or gay markets were instituted. My chronology slightly revises Escoffier’s chronology of the “liberation” and “territorial economies” by arguing that both of these periods were more or less defined by similar institutional patterns. In many ways, both Gay Liberation and the more internally oriented community politics that defined gentrification followed on the heels of decriminalization. Apart from sodomy statutes, the two most significant reasons for the criminalization of “homosexuality” and gay sociability came from the State Liquor Authority and from local police departments, which inconsistently enforced decency and morals laws primarily at the behest of mayors and appointed police commissioners. Though police entrapment was a significant problem, it was the State Liquor Authority that held the most responsibility for the making of a gay market. According to Section 106, Section 6A of the New York State Alcoholic Beverage Control laws, “No person licensed to sell alcoholic beverages shall suffer or permit any gambling on the licensed premises, or suffer or permit such premises to become disorderly.”\footnote{Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, “‘I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to That Bar’: Lesbian Bar Culture in Buffalo in the 1930s and 1940s,” in Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 40, 70 (fn. 25).} In the 1960s, the code was
further amended to stipulate that “‘sufferance’ implies knowledge or opportunity through reasonable diligence to acquire knowledge, which presupposes in most cases a fair measure at least of continuity and permanence.” It also elaborated that “Regular resort by homosexuals to licensed premises is a sufficient basis for finding licensed premises ‘disorderly’…” Furthermore, even without evidence of solicitation for sex an establishment could be declared disorderly “on the basis of frequent repetition of a pattern of acts, freely observable from the bar and based on acts indicating overt homosexual tendencies of patrons.” 49 This effectively meant that the State Liquor Authority had the power to police and punish establishments in which the basic styles of dress, gestures, and even lingo associated with gay or queer sociability could be used to revoke liquor licenses.

1966 marked an especially important turning point in New York City following the Mattachine Society’s successful challenge to the State Liquor Authority’s ban on serving homosexuals. Although the State Liquor Authority continued to revoke liquor licenses for “disorderly conduct” in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, its power to single out gay and lesbian bars was undercut by court challenges throughout the period. Just as significantly, the same year the leadership of the Mattachine Society under Dick Leitsch and Julian Hodges also extracted a promise from newly elected Mayor John Lindsay to end the practice of police entrapment. After 1966, scene guides began to appear and gay markets expanded rapidly, with bars increasingly catering to the various classes, genders, and (to a lesser extent) races that converged in the queer or gay commercial world.

Because of the costs to enter this world and various forms racist and sexist exclusion, gay

men benefited the most from these expanding markets, although lesbians, trans people, and queer people of color built important institutions—not all of them within the increasingly distinct gay market—during the same time period. The Stonewall Riots of 1969, which often serve as a starting point in the historiography of Gay Liberation, were significant not because they represented widespread resistance to an anti-gay raid. In fact, the gay patrons arrested on the night of the raid were collateral damage of an investigation that targeted the Stonewall’s management for blackmail, bribery, and fraud. Public demonstrations afterward tended to attack the mafia and, as a result post-Stonewall protests of mob and police exploitation was often inflected with the anti-capitalist and anti-corruption rhetoric of the New Left and the counter-culture. The most significant local impact of early Gay Liberation organizations were activities and institutions that can only be described as entrepreneurial: “liberations” of exploitative and/or unfriendly spaces by popular protest; gay newspapers; dances and parties hosted as alternatives to gay bars; businesses and boutiques owned and operated by and marketed to gay people; hotlines and switchboard dispensing advice on employment, housing, where to locate gay bars and other gathering spots, and names of “non-judgmental” psychotherapists; and housing collectives, addiction centers, and other non-profit community services; not to mention. In addition, the ideological injunction to “come out” created a snowballing, critical mass effect that made queer or gay life more radically visible in the cultural and commercial geography of the city while also accelerating the dynamics now recognized as gentrification.

VI. Conclusion
A few months after the store closed, as I ambled past what looked like a high-end furniture boutique in the old Oscar Wilde. I walked on the opposite side because I the last thing I wanted was to break down crying on Christopher Street. To be completely frank, I wanted nothing more than to hurl a brick through the window.

Just two or three years before my brief career as a bookseller ended, I sat in one of Joan Scott’s seminars with a simple, provocatively mysterious title: “Critique.” We discussed the different ways in which a critique could be rendered, the responsibility critique required, and the responsibility that activist-intellectuals had to render a critique—not so much to speak truth to power, but to question the assertions and manifestations that power proclaimed the truth. It was one of those heady classes that appealed to lefty intellectuals, where we read Kant and Marx and Derrida and Irigaray and, of course, Foucault. It was more “theory” than “history,” but—as Scott helped us to discover—a history that failed to render a critique was not only methodologically naive. The seminar was packed with veteran activists who had been involved in some form or fashion with a number of social justice movements: the uprising in Chiapas, AIDS activism, abortion rights, prison abolition, the W.T.O. Protests in Seattle, and, of course, the protests against the Bush era wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I had cut my own activist teeth on a campaign to repeal Texas’ sodomy law—ruled unconstitutional just three months after I moved away—and I spent much of my off time in graduate school riding the train into Manhattan to scream myself hoarse in front of the UN building. It was a sobering class because, with very few exceptions, most of us came from campaigns and movements that had failed to achieve their specific goals, even if we had the consolation prize of “raising awareness.” At one point we discussed the seeming division between
language and action that “mere” critique seemed to imply, and we wondered if a brick through the window of a Seattle Starbuck’s during the W.T.O. protests contained the same significance (and effectiveness) of Kant, Marx, Derrida, Irigaray, or Foucault.

“The brick” became a kind of shorthand for this debate, a capacious symbol for critique, and its ability to destroy and to build, but also the seeming disconnect between theory and strategy, or “words” and “action.” Sometimes, as in the Seattle protests of 1998, the critical destruction could be unfocused, ineffectual, and even counter-productive. A brick through a window could easily become “just another brick in the wall.” What follows is, in many ways, my brick. It has taken me a long time to grapple with what the archive has told me, not to mention build a larger critical edifice of what this brick could presumably be a part. Critique, as we learned with Scott, is as practical, in many ways, as a physical object like a brick. (According to my notes, Scott preferred the more subtle metaphor of the scalpel and it must be admitted that subtlety is not a strength of mine.) Critique should help us to understand and ultimately move through an impasse. The ambivalence and ambiguities of this dissertation are my “brick” problem, and its great failure is that instead of an actual critique I have only managed a problem (or set of problems): it is not possible to throw a brick through the window of the storefront of capitalism while maintaining the social and cultural edifice that markets have provided LGBT/queer people.

I do not have the solution to this impasse, even if I have the embittered pessimism of the left at the dawn of the Twenty-First Century and the timid optimism of a handful of brilliant eccentrics who have been willing to think past the Twentieth Century dichotomy of social democracy versus capitalism, the doleful failures of neo-liberalism and the
Third Way. Having refrained from tossing it through the window of the Oscar Wilde’s architectural corpse, I am even more leery of laying another brick in what seems to be queer culture’s uncritical retreat into the short-term Epicureanism of consumer capitalism—an Epicureanism that, if we are truly honest, is only available to small and, thanks in part to the Great Recession, probably shrinking numbers of queer people. It does seem that many of the solutions to the problems of queer markets, and queer people’s existence in a market-driven society, is more a matter of macroeconomic conditions and policies and less in the hand of consumers or entrepreneurs. What such a problem seems to require is neither the destruction of markets nor their uncritical embrace. What we need now, as James Livingston suggests, is to begin from a politics of abundance—not scarcity or austerity—and an economic ethos that more carefully attends to the conditions in which sexual identities and freedoms were formulated as central to democracy, in which the “politics of ‘more’ defined autonomy…as a collective result of association with others…”

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Chapter 1: Notes on queer markets and the queer way of life

I. Introduction: Markets and the Genealogy of the Closet

“…a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation that has swirled around issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century, in Europe and the United States, has been impelled by the distinctively indicative relation of homosexuality to wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and public, that were and are critically problematical for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large, mappings whose enabling but dangerous inherence has become oppressively, durably condensed in certain figures of homosexuality. ‘The closet’ and ‘coming out,’ now verging on all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation, have been the gravest and most magnetic of those representations.” — Eve Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet

Sedgwick’s refinement of concepts of “the closet” and “coming out,” now more than two decades old, have animated new ways of thinking and writing about not solely the history of homosexuality, but a more expansively and historically specific queer past. Typically, terms like “the closet” and “coming out” imply a simpler, oppositional definition: polar experiences of homosexual repression and the liberation of the individual’s psyche and social identity through a public declaration. The definition Sedgwick implies, however, links the closet and coming out, the institution and the practices formulated by those subjected to the institution: a queer subjectivity. The closet, following a line of Foucauldian logic, marks the beginning of the queer subject and

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delimits the boundaries of that subject’s self-creation. This Sedgwickian-Foucauldian formulation helps explain the cultural transformation (or deformation) of the queer and the curious into the “homosexual.”

Despite the axiomatic significance of these arguments to the study of gender and sexuality studies, historians and other scholars of the LGBT/queer past tend to fall into two camps. The first and most significant camp falls primarily into lesbian and gay history, directly refuting or simply evading the larger theoretical questions of identity and subjectivity. The second camp, while following the theoretical lines established by queer theory, tends to do so by focusing primarily on the ways in which official and expert discourse—and especially state and medical institutions—defined difference. In the first camp, the account leaves us with agents who were secretly queer and then publicly queer; in the second, agency is totally subsumed by the institutions that invented, authorized, and demanded the speech that constituted the queer subject.

However, the long, geographically nebulous and temporally sweeping era of the closet—bookended by the “invention” of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century and the Stonewall Riots and other quintessential events of Gay Liberation—suggests a considerably more complex process, including the constant negotiation and renegotiation of secrecy and disclosure within many social and kinship networks, associations, and communities; the crossings of multiple boundaries crisscrossing the private, quasi-public, and public, quasi-public spaces that define modern and contemporary urban geography; and the improvisational use of multiple and contradictory official and unofficial, expert and vernacular discourses of sexuality and gender. While terms like “the closet” and “coming out” reduce these processes and practices to the individual scope of isolation
and liberation, the larger social structure of the closet argue the importance of the
collective, rather than the individual, scale of gay or queer life as the most important site
of contestation, liberation, and historical change. Despite the numerous histories of gay
bars and other businesses, queer historians and other scholars have more or less
overlooked the process that this study places at the center of queer history: markets.

The changing context and meaning of “coming out” and the genealogy of the
“closet” are important cases in point. Looking through the lens of the earliest generations
to view themselves through the cultural templates of “homosexuality” from the end of the
nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, “coming out” almost always
meant “coming out” into the rarefied and clandestine social world of the bar (i.e.,
markets), a cultural practice that mimicked, mocked, and paid tribute to the rarefied but
much more public comings out of upper-class debutantes. “Coming out” signified
initiation into narrow social networks protected by a nocturnal world of shaded parks and
seedy bars and nightclubs, a meaning it carried through the 1960s, after which “coming
out” meant publicly disclosing one’s homosexuality.\textsuperscript{52} In the case of the United States, at
least, George Chauncey argues that “the closet”—as both a term with considerable social
currency and as a social structure—emerged only after the post-Prohibition crackdown of
gay life in New York City and other major American cities.\textsuperscript{53} For indirectly related
reasons, a similar if more severe wave of repression decimated the commercial centers of
queer or gay life in Western Europe after 1930, particularly in Berlin.\textsuperscript{54} In the meantime

\textsuperscript{52} Donald Webster Cory and John P. LeRoy, “A Lexicon of Homosexual Slang” in \textit{The Homosexual and
\textsuperscript{53} George Chauncey, \textit{Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World,
\textsuperscript{54} In Europe, there seems to be a more concerted effort to drive “homosexuals” and other so-called deviants
from public life. Many police departments kept dossiers on known homosexuals prior to the 1930s, but
encroaching nationalism expanded pronatalist policies and criminalized and stigmatized non-procreative
in the U.S., wartime measures and the near-universal promulgation of military codes of
conduct accelerated this process, even as the influence of psychiatric experts on military
policy spread ideas about homosexuality that, at least in the United States, prompted what
Allan Bérubé called a “national coming out.” Although the genealogy of the closet
owed much to the ideas and policies of ostensibly heterosexual experts and enforcers, the
nexus of gay life and the space most resistant to such social controls was the gay bar, or
markets. Indeed, as crackdowns in parks and other public spaces drove the queer and the
curious indoors, they most often found sanctuary in bars and taverns, whose presence
marked the burgeoning markets that would anchor gay or queer life until the present.

Historians and other scholars rarely if ever address the ways in which markets
undergird gay or queer history, though the commercial milieu at the center of gay life
seems to assume the presence and primacy of markets. For much of the twentieth century
in the United States, queer history (and, indeed, much of the history of sexuality) was
driven by the antiphony of the state and the market. Few places gave this antiphony as
expansive a chancel as New York City, where the presence of illicit markets grew the
“gay social world” in the context of Prohibition and its effects on organized crime.
Indeed, as Chauncey shows, in the 1920s and early 1930s gay life was a highly visible
part of New York City’s illicit speakeasy culture, which even came to include quasi-legal
public performances like drag balls and even Broadway productions that reflected gay
social life. Nonetheless, obscenity and public indecency laws and public outcry from

sexuality across the political spectrum, a regime whose murderous apogee was reached with National
Socialist and fascist purges. What little was left of the gay and lesbian commercial world of the interwar
period was totally destroyed by the upheavals of the Second World War. See Heinz Heger, The Men with
David Fernbach (New York: Alyson, 1994); Richard Plant, The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against
55 Allan Bérubé, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New
experts prohibited gay social life from gaining much more than temporary traction in the licit commercial culture of the city. 56

To be sure, this process was not only legal and economic, since the infusion of new ideas about sexuality—especially gleaned from European sexology and the literature of high modernism 57—profundly affected the collective sense of the queer or gay self cultivated within these illicit commercial spaces. The heyday of pre-Stonewall gay life in New York City occurred a period in which the ideas of European sexology began to seep into American culture and in which Prohibition expanded and reorganized forbidden goods in immense networks of illicit markets and criminal entrepreneurs. Thus, in defining gay markets, historians must account for both actual spaces of commodity exchange as well as the more figurative marketplace of ideas and information.

But ultimately, it was the repeal of Prohibition and the onset of economic catastrophe that commenced what Chauncey, invoking C. Vann Woodward, called the “strange career of the closet,” a set of social and legal constraints that, to invoke Sedgwick, mapped and remapped the boundaries of public and private and, by extension, secrecy and exposure. The 1930s brought not only economic but also sexual austerity to the United States, and the Second World War introduced the military discipline of sexuality that imposed new prohibitions and restrictions on sexual representation. 58 As the epilogue to Gay New York argues, the destruction and suppression of the gay social worlds that grew out of Prohibition era speakeasy culture introduced what Jeffrey

56 Chauncey, 7-8.
58 Chauncey, 331-354.
Escoffier defines as the social segregation, legal criminalization, and cultural stigmatization central to the “closet economy.” This was not the product of what John D’Emilio called the myth of eternal “silence, invisibility, and isolation…projected onto an image of an abysmal past…[in which] lesbians, and gay men were always the victims of systematic, undifferentiated oppression.” Rather, as Chauncey argues, the repression unleashed by the repeal of Prohibition, Depression, and wartime mobilization was essentially a reaction to the visible cultures that had briefly flourished in the libertine speakeasy culture of the 1920s and early 1930s. This was the historical crucible in which the closet economy, or the earliest traces of the gay market, emerged: the bars, bookstores, and other businesses that provided gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities the venue for the exchange of affection and ideas at or beyond the margins of illegality.

As the language of “the closet” emerged in the argot of gay life in the 1940s and 1950s, the closet economy and its markets represented not the site of repression, but a protective cocoon against the growth of anti-homosexual surveillance, the strengthening of anti-homosexual legal codes, and popular and highly public reactions of revulsion, suspicion, and ostracism. Until the end of the 1960s, “coming out” continued to mean “coming out” to gay society. Those unfortunate few who were arrested and exposed—often dragged out of the closet kicking and screaming—found themselves exposed to tremendous social harm: loss of employment and housing, social and familial ostracism, and considerable risks to personal security. Even “to be accused is to be guilty,” wrote an

early contributor to the Homophile publication, *ONE Magazine*, in a gesture toward the logic of guilt-by-association that branded those unfortunate enough to be swept up in bar raids or entrapped by plainclothes police. Only those who were brave, foolhardy, and/or wealthy enough to bear those costs, or those outcasts with nothing left to lose, identified themselves voluntarily and publicly as gay. In most cases, however, formal arrests and rumors assigned such identities as a form of guilt that pervaded all but the most eccentric and tolerant sectors of culture and society. The “closet” formed at the confluence of the cultural and legal regulation of sexuality and the social and economic structure of markets. The history of gay life in the twentieth century thus demands not only understanding the construction categories of gender and sexual norms and deviance—definitions largely formulated by medical, sociological, and criminological experts—but also the ways in which such “deviants” congregated and constructed a counter-culture through the stabilization of gay markets.

I argue that, in the era of the closet, these markets provided the most significant sites of community and self-development, not to mention resistance against police surveillance and persecution as well as a collective defense against the internalization of homophobic ideologies. From about the 1920s through the 1960s, such markets were instituted by criminalization and, for the most part, highly disorganized and isolated from one another by a rule of silence demanded not only by the authorities but from those gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities who wished to shield themselves from the

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demand, in the words of Michel Foucault, to “transform…desire…into discourse” or from “[a] policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses.” As such, these were not simply “gay markets,” but markets whose gay brand or identity was still inchoate, defined as much by their criminal status as by the cultural forms of gay life, cultural forms that developed primarily to negotiate the criminalization of the markets in which they emerged and crystallized. Although Foucault asserts that the “transformation of desire into discourse” occurred in the quasi-confessional space of modern psychiatry, the presence of a counter-discourse in gay markets suggests a more substantial presence of a subterranean commercial world teeming with sexual outlaws. Contemporary gay social life, and with it Gay Liberation, emerged from the confluence of these factors, distinct from the cultures of sexual and gender deviance of the past by virtue of their demographic scale and cultural scope opened up by markets.

The expanding scale and scope of gay life emerged from the much less organized, nebulous milieu of what Harry Hay called the “twilight world”:

the gay world or the world of the demimonde or the world of the twilight. The world of night. And so all the people that had to do with that area were considered people who were totally disrespectable and therefore of very questionable morals. This would be the world of dance, the world of artists, the world of artists, the people who flitted around in the parks and forests at night…the waterfront, for example, or Hyde Park In London, or along the rivers, both the Thames and the Seine. The people who would be out at night wandering around loose

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63 Ibid., 25.
In order to understand queer history in the United States—or, indeed, almost any urban, industrial society—we must attend to the implications of this moment of transition and reorganization as the denizens of the “twilight world” moved into the nocturnal and illicit markets of bars and other businesses catering to those deviants who had been more or less systematically driven from the parks and waterfronts that had formerly served as havens for surreptitious and forbidden trysts. Concentrated and reorganized within these markets, queer or gay life began to move along an unlikely, meandering trajectory that would ultimately remake these isolated members of a universally despised minority into one of the most successful social and political movements in the history of the United States.

“Stonewall was a riot,” lesbian activist Merle Woo admonishes a young, radical queer activist. But, what we do not always remember—or what, as an anti-capitalist movement (or at least a movement critical of capitalism), we conveniently omit—is that the Stonewall Inn was a business, that the rioters were consumers, and that the world they opened up to us was and is no more than the various markets that, for better and worse, constitute queer social and cultural life both before and after Gay Liberation. Until we grapple with the problematic nature of this history, it will be impossible to fully understand and manage contemporary and future problems of queer gender and sexuality, including the contradictions of affluence and poverty, the profound and continuing economic and social consequences of racism and sexism, the economic and social gulf

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64 Before Stonewall, directed by Greta Schiller (1985; New York: First Run Features, 2000), DVD.
65 Merle Woo, “Stonewall Was a Riot—Now We Need a Revolution,” Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation, ed. Tommi Avicolli Mecca (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), 282-294.
between homosexuality and transsexuality, or the local and global dynamics of homophobia and transphobia in a world characterized by the many catastrophes of neocolonialism and neo-liberalism. Not coincidentally, these problems are in many ways fundamentally economic and directly related to the history of gay or queer markets.

II. A Million Menocchios: Markets, Mentalities, and Communities

Notions of gender and sexuality—understandings of the gendered and erotic self, or sexual subjectivity—grow out of a complex mosaic of cultural norms and expectations, the vast majority of which, at least until the more frank representations of sexuality in mass culture, were filtered through family and community lore about sex and reproduction: the “birds and the bees,” the “facts of life,” or “the talk” are among the most familiar terms for this stock of knowledge. The popular beliefs and practices that comprise this body of knowledge can hardly be called a “discourse,” “episteme,” or “paradigm” of sexuality, at least not in the technical and expert sense developed by Foucault in the *History of Sexuality* or implied by historians of science like Howard Kuhn.66 Prior to the twentieth century, only a very small cadre of elite, highly educated people—almost all of whom were middle- and upper-class white men—had access to the learned discourse of sexuality, and medical experts on sexuality who produced this

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66 Foucault famously describes sexuality as a technique of “incitement to discourse,” a technique with roots in the Christian pastoral (confession and repentance) but with added intensity with the development of a secular “public interest.” “Not a collective curiosity or sensibility; not a new mentality; but power mechanisms that functioned in such a way that discourse on sex—for reasons that will have to be examined—became essential. Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex. And not so much in the form of a general theory of sexuality as in the form of analysis, stocktaking, classification, and quantitative or causal studies. This need to take sex ‘into account,’ to pronounce a discourse on sex that would not derive from morality alone but from rationality as well, was sufficiently new that at first it wondered at itself and sought apologies for its own existence.” Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, 23-24; Howard Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
knowledge—at least up until Freud—bowdlerized or Latinized many of their findings in order to protect common people from the dangers of its diffusion. And even then, the state often intervened when the authorities determined that medical literature threatened public morality, as they did when they targeted family planners like Margaret Sanger and Estelle Griswold.

The effects of the transition from vernacular to expert knowledge held dizzying implications for ordinary people who many times found the changes bewildering and traumatic. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* illustrates the transition from the frank and pragmatic popular knowledge or lore of sex to a formal discourse of sexuality, using a famously disturbing anecdote to describe how the “inconsequential bucolic pleasures” of a game called “curdled milk” became “the object…of a collective intolerance… [and] a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.” Without delving into the implications of what, today, we would describe as the sexual abuse of a child (a notion developed, in some sense, from what Foucault describes as the sexual discourse of childhood), the episode presents an important illustration of lore and practices not yet organized by the expert, scientific discourse of sexuality. The intellectually disabled man at the center of Foucault’s anecdote suggests an exemplary figure for those individuals who stood on the threshold of this broad, epochal transition from a vernacular tradition of sex and gender to the

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classifications introduced by the formalization of sexual discourse by medical and other experts at the end of the nineteenth century.

Another illustration, although less directly related chronologically or topically, is Carlo Ginzburg’s classic study of the cosmology of Friulian miller Domenico Scandella, or Menocchio, in *The Cheese and the Worms*. Though not an expert, or formally trained, Menocchio’s ability to read at a time of both rising literacy and intense intellectual debates over the cosmos (debates that emerged from an intersected with the warring dynamic of Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation) provide a window into the disorganized and sometimes contradictory streams of knowledge and popular belief that congealed in his heretical teachings. Menocchio eventually came to trial, where he was ultimately sentenced to burn for, among other things, calling into question the idea of the trinity and asserting that in the beginning “all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels.”

Menocchio’s belief system suggests the limits of interpreting culture or belief as an absolutely organized system and the stubbornness and idiosyncrasy (one might be tempted to say “agency”) of individual belief. In this sense, Menocchio also provides an exemplary analogy for the random bits of knowledge pieced together by those “queer” sexual subjects in an era and social strata in which knowledge about (homo)sexuality was neither uniform nor hegemonic. The analogy ultimately calls into question Foucault’s argument—often taken literally—that the “invention” of “homosexuality” occurred in 1869, with the introduction of a new term and scientific concept that transformed the

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“temporary aberration” of the sodomite into a “species.” Mine is not necessarily a new intervention; Chauncey’s assertion that most of the working-class participants in the gay social world of the 1920s had no access to psychoanalytic institutions or concepts serves as the cornerstone of a study of gay vernacular culture. Even so, historians have only begun to scratch the surface of a complex world of beliefs and feelings—not necessarily the more rigidly organized “episteme” defined by Foucault or Jean Piaget, but more along the lines of the “mentalité,” a group in which Ginzburg includes “the inert, the obscure, unconscious elements in a given world view,” not to mention the “survivals, archaisms, the emotional, the irrational…”

Appending the idea of mentalities to Antonio Gramsci’s class-specific idea of “vernacular culture,” we can begin to ask the kinds of questions that might allow us to understand sexuality and gender not simply as discursive productions, but as instantiations of different kinds of subjects. Evidence for these cobbled-together belief systems abound, and nowhere else more dramatically than among those sexual minorities

71 Ibid., xxiii. To be sure, Ginzburg rejects the history of mentalities as a proper analysis for Menocchio, preferring the class specificity of “popular culture” to “collective mentalities” and insisting on Menocchio’s rationality. “One should not deny the legitimacy of this kind of research, but the risk of reaching unwarranted conclusions with it is very real.”

lumped into pathological categories of “inversion” and “homosexuality.” The different kinds of knowledge produced within these subjects were not trivial but, like Menocchio’s cosmological view, foundational and even existential. Indeed, Jonathan Ned Katz’s mammoth anthologies read like catalogues of what today read like fantastical and strange beliefs. In the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman famously disavowed pathological categories of sexuality in favor of the language of “manly love” and romantic friendship. The “Boston marriages” between unmarried women remain such rife sources of speculation precisely because of the absence of explicitly sexual language, or language that can be incorporated into the discursive rubric of sexuality. In Autobiography of an Androgyne, a piece of sexual arcana secretly begun in 1899 and published in Amsterdam in 1918, author Earl Lind (aka Ralph Werther and Jennie June) asked “Why am I a sexual invert? I have an explanation to offer, which is perhaps more fanciful than scientific.” Raised in a middle-class home in the New York suburbs, Lind’s knowledge is cobbled together from visits to medical experts, voracious reading, and experience in “fairy resorts” like Paresis Hall. The result is a theory that makes Menocchio look the equal of Neil DeGrasse Tyson:

According to the author’s theory,—whether any individual shall be a male or a female depends on the result of a battle in the embryo between the male corpuscles or germs of the egg and the male of the spermatozoa. For some cause, perhaps the relative state of vitality of the secretory sexual glands at the time of the formation of the particular egg and spermatozoon, either the female germs or the male germs happen to be the more vigorous, and determine the sex of the unborn. If the fetus develops into a female, it is because the female

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73 For a discussion on the evolution of these concepts and the implications for expressions of gender vis-à-vis sexual orientation, see George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” Salmagundi 58/59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983): 114-146.
germs have devoured the male. For some reason, in exceptional cases, the more vigorous set of cells have not succeeded in devouring the other set entirely, and both kinds coexist in different parts of the same individual throughout his existence.\(^74\)

Even into the 1950s, when Homophile activists began to assert a politics and a community on the basis of gay (or “homophile”) identity, medical experts continued to betray a baffling array theories. Blanche Baker, a medical doctor and a frequent guest speaker and writer for Homophile organizations and publications, wrote,

> it might be well to at least suggest the consideration of a new theory..., the reincarnation theory. She suggests that if man is a soul which lives many, many times in both male and female bodies, then this theory may shed considerably more light on the problem of homosexuality. If such sexual alterations do occur, it would certainly wipe out the absoluteness of cleavage between men and women...My own research in deep psychotherapy with many homosexuals—using a type of meditation, not hypnosis—verifies this...[M]any of the behavior patterns of [homosexual men] may be explained by their having been women in former lives.\(^75\)

Despite their differences, these etiological musings (or disavowal in the case of Whitman) suggest various responses to the discursive invention of homosexuality as a kind of subject in the nineteenth century—or, to use Foucault’s phrase: “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”\(^76\)

However, the invention of this new species was not simply an innovation internal to discourse, but a product of markets themselves. In the first place, this “species” or,


more appropriately, subject, was diffused through a marketplace of ideas, in which readers encountered information about sexuality and gender through medical textbooks and a handful of studies. In the United States, the exemplary figures were almost all European sexologists and medical experts: Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Freud, to name only a few. In the 1920s and 1930s, many of these ideas diffused further into public culture through fiction, plays, and occasionally even film. Even so, such works were hard to come by and largely inaccessible (many times by design) to the lay reader.

A more important and chronologically prior source for the production of these cultural practices—some historians use the term “identity”—lay in more physical marketplaces of commercial establishments, especially brothels and taverns. Indeed, centuries before Károly Mária Kertbeny published the term “homosexual” for the first time in 1869, brothels and taverns had occupied the center of non-normative sexual subcultures in Western Europe and North America.\(^77\) The 1726 scandal at Mother Clap’s brothel in London introduced the public to “mollies,” or effeminate and cross-dressing men who had sex with men, more than a hundred years before medical researchers and clinical psychologists began to investigate the etiologies of such social phenomena.\(^78\) Hundreds of years earlier, in fourteenth and fifteenth century Florence, brothels and sex workers catering to men who had sex with men were so numerous that the local authorities set up special courts to prosecute sodomy. Moreover, each of these subcultures correlate chronologically to the historical development of capital and


capitalism: the emergence of mercantile banking in Renaissance Florence (indeed, contemporary popes referred to the twin vices of Florence as sodomy and usury) and the cusp of liberalism and Industrial Revolution in eighteenth-century London. The case of twentieth century New York City is even more dramatic, with the early emergence and growth of gay commercial sub-cultures in the financial, industrial, and cultural center of the world economy.\textsuperscript{79}

Whatever the differences between the sexual subjectivities—sodomites, mollies, homosexuals—that inhabited these commercial cultures, the fact remains that the opportunities to create shared cultures and identities within the spaces of these commercial cultures were as significant to these queer sub-cultures as the kinds of sexual knowledge that shaped interpretations about the objective and subjective meanings of deviance. Whether these practices represented resulted from a “collective subjectivity” or identity remains a matter of contestation among scholars of European Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment sexualities.\textsuperscript{80}


\textsuperscript{80} It is not the project of my dissertation, to intervene in this hairsplitting exercise between the meanings of erotic practices that were clearly cultural and the broader meanings of “sub-culture” and “collective subjectivity” or identity in both a broad sociological and more historically defined context. My own inclination is to read these cultural practices and the networks that engender them as, if not “sub-cultural,” then inchoate sub-cultural forms that depended radically on the commercial context of a distinctive subset of brothels and taverns (or markets). However, I would point out the following passage as an important caveat to the idea that mollies or sodomites represented a distinctive sub-culture or collective subjectivity like those of the twentieth century. According to a study of eighteenth century molly tracts by Thomas A. King, “It would be a mistake (and a sentimentalization) to take this publication of undomesticated pleasures as evidence of the emergence of a collective subjectivity, or… ‘a coherent social milieu’ or ‘subculture’ of men who identified exclusively as mollies. This would be to read extant print texts in the same sentimental terms used within those very texts to discover, publicize, and contain alternative and resistant practices. Rather than a social history of homosexual identity, satires and trial records offer traces of practices lacking identity: promiscuity, prostitution, masquerade, expenditure without capitalization, and repetition without an ethics of consolidation.” While an important contextualization of eighteenth century literature on mollies, I am not totally convinced by King’s argument, although, again, my knowledge of eighteenth century history is shallow, at best. However, I will raise an interpretive qualification of the idea that the definition of a sub-culture or collective subjectivity requires an “ethics” of consolidation. Indeed, my argument about sub-cultures and collective subjectivities (or identities) relies on an argument that
And, to be clear, I am not arguing that these sub-cultures of represented some continuous and unbroken, “essentialist” history of deviant identities in European (and by extension Euro-American) history. Molly culture was organized around practices of gender transgression (i.e. cross-dressing and effeminacy); Florentine sodomy, like ancient Mediterranean pederasty, was organized by differences in age and class that corresponded dominant and submissive partners. Boundaries and ideological definitions of “public” and “private” information, so central to the making of contemporary sexual deviance, were different in Renaissance Florence or early Enlightenment London from the present, despite the existence of widespread commercialization and the development of a print culture. Nevertheless, brothels, taverns, and the commercial matrix to which they belonged certainly allowed for the growth of cultural and erotic practices that were relatively difficult to police and, after the mid-nineteenth century, highly resistant to the consolidation was an inadvertent effect of commercialization rather than an intentional ethic of a shared culture. Indeed, my issue with King is the way he deploys the concepts of both “subculture” and “identity” as dependent on an “ethics of consolidation,” a notion absent from much of the sociological literature on subcultures and identities. Sociologist Sarah Thornton demonstrates this unsettled ground, asking “What is a “subculture”? What distinguishes it from a “community”? And what differentiates these two social formations from the “masses”, the “public”, “society”, “culture”? These are obstinate questions to which there is no agreed answer, but rather a debate – the problem at the root of which is about how scholars imagine and make sense of people, not as individuals, but as members of discrete populations or social groups. Studies of subcultures are attempts to map the social world and, as such, they are exercises in representation.” Contrasting “subcultures” with the terms listed above, Thornton concludes that “[s]ubcultures have generally been seen to be informal and organic, whether participants congregate by choice or through the forced fraternities of the prison or the asylum.” Moreover, “culture, as a pattern of beliefs and values or even ideologies, cannot be separated from action and social organization. Culture and society are both “ways of life”. The defining attribute of “subcultures”, then, lies with the way the accent is put on the distinction between a particular cultural/social group and the larger culture/society. The emphasis is on variance from a larger collectivity who are invariably, but not unproblematically, positioned as normal, average and dominant. Subcultures, in other words, are condemned to and/or enjoy a consciousness of “otherness” or difference. According to this definition, “collective subjectivities” or identities based on subcultures cannot be neatly separated from “practice” and need not be strictly and purposely consolidated into discrete and oppositional categories in order to suffer or enjoy a consciousness of “otherness.” Marcos Becquer and José Gatti, for example, point to the hybridity of various practices and articulations in the consolidation of identities among vogueing subcultures, which, they point out, “traverse sexualities, genders, races and classes in performance” that require “more nuanced understanding of resistant processes and strategies.” Thomas A. King, The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750, Vol. 2: Queer Articulations (Madison, WI: Wisconsin University Press, 2008), 145; Sarah Thornton, “General Introduction,” The Subcultures Reader, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 1, 4, 5; Marcos Becquer and José Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” ibid., 446-447.
prejudice and stigma that accompanied the growth of expert information that claimed homosexuality as pathology. Even so, markets hardly account for the only historical experiences of sexual and gender deviance, especially among those, especially women, whose access to commercial spaces was strictly constrained by law and custom.81

In any case, markets were incubators for various mentalities (and arguably identities) of deviance well before as well as after the medical or expert discourse of sexuality reorganized knowledge about gender and desire into the narrow and technical framework of a Foucauldian episteme. Just as Ginzburg’s microhistorical investigation of Menocchio’s heresies illuminates the broader reorganization of cosmology in the context of Renaissance science and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, so do the various sexual and gender heresies of twentieth century queer or gay culture suggest popular resistance to the consolidation of pathological homosexuality as the model of deviance and discipline. But unlike Menocchio’s counter-discourse, which was more or less isolated to a single individual, the participants in queer or gay commercial cultures interacted with one another and built a collective counter-culture that provided a sustainable alternative to the police persecutions and popular violence that confronted these “deviants” as individuals. Indeed, as Jonathan Dollimore and Didier Eribon argue, resistance to and subversion of the insult of stigmatization, criminalization, and pathologization was

81 Inspired by the work of Jürgen Habermas, many scholars have worked out these historical distinctions by examining both the different ways in which the “public” and “private” were fundamentally gendered as well as the significance of print technology, literacy, and commercialization in the transformation of these spheres. Habermas points to the origins of these categories in the sixteenth century as the ways in which “the traffic in news…developed alongside the traffic in commodities.” The historiography of the “public” and “private” is much too complex and diverse to summarize here, but I would briefly point out the following foundational works. Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, 6th printing, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 16; Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988); Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990); Warner, Publics and Counterpublics (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Press, 2002).
central to the making of the “perverse dynamic” at the center of gay individual and collective selves.\textsuperscript{82}

The collective protection afforded by markets—sometimes extracted at extraordinary cost—also suggest a story of social and cultural survival through economic reproduction despite the overarching and overwhelming social, cultural, and legal resources devoted to its destruction. This history of survival contrasts dramatically with the story of Menocchio, who burned at the stake and took with him his heresies. The social and cultural heresies incubated by gay or queer markets, on the other hand, provided the raw material for one of the most rapidly successful political and social movements of our time, a fact made all the more puzzling given the simultaneous success of LGBT/queer activists and the range of legal, political, and socioeconomic setbacks for women and people of color. One of the most obvious questions in the historiography of sexuality—how a universally despised and condemned minority became not only accepted but embraced in such a brief period of time—can be answered, at least in part, by looking to the ways in which commercial establishments like bars helped to consolidate a Gramscian “historic bloc.”\textsuperscript{83} As a “historic bloc,” the constituency that emerged from the gay world was constructed similarly to the Marxist notion of class; but, instead of being organized by shared economic interests as workers, its members were organized by—or “consented to,” in Gramscian language—a shared consumer culture of


gender and sexual deviance. The market-based consolidation of this historic bloc thus cauterized—indeed, assimilated—millions of Menocchios into a community.

The central claim of this study is that markets were central to the process of collective self-making, or community building. By providing the matrix for the exchange of a broad range of information about gender and sexuality as well as the space for concrete social and erotic interactions, markets represented the most stable sites for the creation and diffusion of queer or gay cultures that, at first indirectly and then more directly, challenged anti-gay stigmatization and legal persecution from the post-war era through the 1970s. Again, markets were by no means the sole site of cultural creation and diffusion, as attested to by the significance of parks and other public places as well as domestic networks forged outside of the commercial, urban core of queer or gay life. However, the ability of markets to provide both a queer or gay counter-culture and spaces for safe or at least protected socialization as public (or quasi-public) goods set the preconditions for first, the remaking of queer or gay subjects as new kinds of mass subjects, and secondly, a broadly-based social and political movement.

In this sense, markets offer one of the most important historical vantage points for queer or gay community building: the making of the closet as the pre-conditions for Gay Liberation, which I characterize as a movement organized principally (though not solely) by a demand for access to markets. My argument rests on the claim that queer or gay markets were comprised of three following essential features: information, space, and consumer organization. The most ideologically significant aspect of the queer or gay economy was a “marketplace of ideas,” which represented a common stock of knowledge deployed in queer or gay social life as information about individual participants and
ideological information about the meanings of gender and sexuality. Space and
geography represented the most significant and essential raw material of queer or gay
economies. As numerous historians and scholars have suggested, urbanization was a
critical factor in the development of queer or gay communities in no small part because
the commercial enterprises that grew up in urban “vice” districts served as the geographic
and cultural matrix of the queer or gay social world. Moreover, the demand for relatively
safe spaces for social interaction and cultural expression almost always drove the supply
of the tangible aspects of queer or gay markets, whether those were services, like food
and drink or access to baths; performances, especially but not only plays and film; or
literal goods like books, clothing, and sexual paraphernalia. Finally, queer or gay identity
was essentially organized in relation to consumption, and the organization of queer or gay
consumer blocs was an essential feature of queer or gay social and political movements in
the period after the Second World War. Additionally, I argue that the most significant
aspect of queer or gay political organizations following the Second World War was a
fundamental shift in the way that queer or gay economies were instituted (i.e., in the way
that queer or gay commercial establishments were criminalized and stigmatized as well as
the ways in which queer or gay organizations helped to decriminalize and de-stigmatize
queer or gay commercial life. In other words, Gay Liberation was in many ways an effect
of gay liberalization.

Ginzburg’s micro-historical framework is central to my project, since I consider
the larger epochal changes through the lens of a peripheral participant (or set of
participants) in this market. Like Menocchio, gay people scavenged the chaotic,
incoherent, and conflicting discourse of gender and sexuality, giving meaning to their
difference through the orthodoxies and heresies of twentieth century sexuality. Unlike Menocchio, however, they survived and more successfully challenged their confessors, whether they were psychiatrists, judges, or cops. The difference was the institutional framework of segmented and sequestered markets, which provided the space and material and intellectual resources for daring new forms of subjectivity, cultural meaning, social interaction, and political organization.

**III. Conclusion: Economics and Culture**

My project attempts to understand the particular forms of same-sex desire and gender transgression in one of the few societies to mobilize identities based on same-sex desire and gender transgression as a political movement that demands cultural recognition and collective and individual self-determination. As such, my argument relies on a comparative view, much of which has been shaped by the larger historical and anthropological evidence of the ways in which same-sex desire, gender transgression, and the subjectivities and identities that have historically marked the crystallization of these phenomena as states of social being vary across time and space. The inherently unstable cultural meanings of these desires and modes of expression have meant that different societies have institutionalized same-sex desire and gender transgression in an almost infinite variety of ways. To give just a few examples, non-binary and cross-gender expressions as well as same-sex desire are variously expressed as sacrosanct, like the “two-spirits” in some Native American societies or the hijras of South Asia; as damned, like the “sodomites” of Western Europe (and those societies shaped by European colonization); and as mundane, like the “natural” or “scientific” descriptions of
homosexuality and transsexuality that have defined the emergence of sexual discourse and communities of sexual minorities since the nineteenth century.

Although gay and lesbian identities represented discrete categories for a sexual personality type since the early twentieth century, only a minority of participants in gay life actually used those specific terms to self-identify—especially prior to the 1970s. This makes contemporary descriptions difficult, especially considering the expanding range and diversity of sexual identities in the twenty-first century. In order to avoid overstating the identities of the subjects of my study, I have used the phrases “queer or gay” to describe spaces, people, and objects that were marked as non-normative and homosexual. I have used the terms “queer and the curious” to describe those people who sought out such spaces, people, and objects, especially in cases where subjects are not initiated and simply do not have the knowledge that might enable an explicitly homosexual orientation.

The specific legal, technical, epistemological, and social patterns that shape and instantiate these different forms are so variable and complex that any attempt to link their similarity seems analytically naïve. Indeed, this basic error of “essentialism” is what has prompted the emergence of various traditions of social construction—a range of analyses that has by no means been limited to discussions of sex and sexuality. As with so many categories of identity and subjectivity in U.S. history, gender and sexuality have largely been constructed on the literal and social edifice of the market. Although classical (and contemporary) formulations of Marxist analysis point out the ways in which the historical relations of production have constructed class, race, and gender, they have largely

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overlooked queer or gay identities because, with a few exceptions, queer or gay identities have largely crystallized outside of production as it is conventionally conceived. According to Roderick Ferguson, the analytic flaw of classical Marxism is built on the assumptions of heterosexual reproduction and “heteropatriarchy” built into the logic of class and race. For Ferguson, the exemplary figure of his queer of color critique is the “black drag-queen prostitute” who “sashays along a waterfront” in Marlon Riggs’ *Tongues Untied*: a “fixture of urban capitalism” that “represent[s] the socially disorganizing effects of capital.” Expanding on this point, Marx largely trivializes and dismisses the site of social and cultural production, the site occupied by the marginalized black drag queen sex worker and, arguably, all “queer figures.” That site of production is the market, not simply the free market, but also the illicit and informal markets exemplified by the cultural transgression and criminalization of sex work as well as the cultural marketplace of images and ideas of which Riggs’ “Tongues Untied” was a part. The relations of consumption that historically defined the emergence of queer or gay identities from the context of prohibition and taboo helps to explain both the centrality of commercial institutions and the cultural marketplace of images and ideas to queer history.

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87 Ibid., 1.

88 *Tongues Untied*, directed by Marlon Riggs (1989; New York: Strand Releasing, 2006), DVD.
in the United States, as well as the ways in which decriminalization and de-stigmatization of gay or queer consumption have largely animated queer politics. This is true whether from the perspective of the most “radical” queer political battles over sex work, sex in public, and sexually explicit imagery, or from the more pedestrian perspective of marriage activists, for whom the legal and political battlefield has largely shifted from city hall to the bakeries, caterers, and dress shops at the core of the country’s wedding industry.

Despite the apparent and enduring problems of capitalism, a number of questions remain: Why is it that gay or queer political movements emerge only in states characterized by liberal democracy? What does it mean that the earliest sites of struggle were not the organization and city hall but the bar and the bookstore? Why is it that movements for sexual freedom have emerged in market-oriented societies—not all of them—but only in them? How does the cultural form follow the economic one? In what way is the economic form, i.e., markets, actually just masking a cultural system? These questions echo one of the central contentions of Charles E. Lindblom, that “we understand liberal democracy so poorly that we do not know…why it is that liberal democracy has arisen only in nations that are market-oriented, not in all of them but only in them. The tie between market and democracy is on many counts an astonishing historical fact. We understand neither market nor democracy well if we cannot explain it.”

The same thing could be said of gay or queer life, which has only achieved legal and political toleration and recognition—at least in the contemporary world—not all but only in those societies where the market provides a relatively stable site of social and

cultural reproduction and in which the state has been forced to recognize the right of consumers to inhabit those markets.

To be clear, an analysis that locates gay or queer life in the history of markets does not necessarily suggest that Gay Liberation can simply be achieved through incorporation into markets, or by circuiting queer or gay life into to the corporate machinery of capitalism, or the market. Markets also marginalize those without sufficient financial and social capital to enter the space of the market, especially queer youths or poor queer people who cannot afford the bars and boutiques at the core of queer or gay markets, women and transgender people turned away from gay male-dominated spaces, or people of color who are harassed and discriminated against in spaces dominated by gay men. Markets also represent sites of exploitation for workers, especially but not only for sex workers and the other “illegal” inhabitants of queer or gay worlds, as well as those exploited in more familiar ways through overwork, low pay, and the lack of benefits that can make gay or queer life precarious for so many. Moreover, as Putin’s Russia suggests, the presence of markets hardly portends political and legal acceptance.

However, given the agency enabled by the market, the idea that the solution to these problems can be solved through the abjuration or abolition of the market is not simply naïve utopianism, but a kind of political nihilism that works against the very foundations of gay or queer life. As Gayle Rubin argues:

Progressives tend to discuss capitalist commerce as though socialism is the sole alternative. They often fail to compare capitalism with less salutary systems of economic extraction and political domination: for example, the many varieties of feudalism and premodern despotism. Marx himself considered the capitalist market a revolutionary, if limited, force. He argued that capitalism was
progressive in its dissolution of precapitalist superstition, prejudice, and the bonds of traditional modes of life. “Hence the great civilizing influence of capital, its production of a state of society compared with which all earlier stages appear to be merely local progress and idolatry of nature.” Keeping sex from realizing the positive effects of the market economy hardly makes it socialist. Rather, legal marginality tends to push sexual commerce in the opposite direction: closer to the despotic and the feudal.  

Understanding how markets and sexuality interact ultimately requires a synthesis of economic and cultural analysis rather than a dismissal of economics as over-determined or of cultural analysis as too theoretically dense. What we need, instead, is a better vocabulary to describe the ways in which the economic and cultural elements of twentieth-century markets interpenetrated to foment a distinctly queer way of life, identity, and social movement.

Terms

Because I have framed queer history as a study of the history of markets and knowledge, I want to spend a little time explaining these sometimes ambiguous terms. Expressing this argument clearly requires that I address the meaning of the words “market,” “capitalism,” and “information,” the last of which might be described as economists’ analogue for “knowledge.” The meanings of these terms can be can be contentious, misleading, and vague—deliberately so in the case of some political ideologies, though perhaps less intentionally in the case of neoclassical or utilitarian economics. The problem of defining these terms is essentially a historical problem, since these terms are too often taken to mean the same thing across vast expanses of time,

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90 Rubin, Deviations, 160-161.
geography, and culture, when, in fact, each carries a number of subtle and not-so-subtle continuities and breaks from different chronological, geographical, and cultural contexts. In the following section, I will briefly outline first the definitions of these terms in conventional economic practice as well as my own specific repurposing of these terms in the context of the late twentieth century in the United States.

For conventional, disciplinary economics, these terms are understood in more or less straightforward and transparent ways according the principles of utilitarian maximization and scarcity. Markets are mechanisms that allow individuals to rationally maximize profit (for the producer) and satisfaction (for the consumer) through the organization of prices according to the curve of supply and demand.91 The *Oxford Dictionary of Economics* further defines a “market economy” as “one in which markets play a dominant role in coordinating decisions. The prices formed in markets convey information and provide motivation for decision-takers. Market forces are the supply and demand factors which determine prices and quantities in a market economy.”92

A market society or market economy is also typically described as a society driven by capital, which the *Oxford Dictionary of Economics* defines as “[m]an-made means of production.” In a capitalist society, “[c]apital goods are goods designed to be used in production…[like] machinery” and in which “human capital refers to skills and experience which enhance a worker’s productivity” as well as “material capital” that can be “bought or sold…and…used as collateral for loans.” The Dictionary also describes capital as “a stock of financial assets,” and capitalists as “the social class of those who

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derive most of their income from owning property."^93 Although working from a fundamentally different starting point than scarcity (i.e. the alienation of capitalist production and the exploitation represented by the capitalist’s profit), Marx offers a similar definition in his exposition of “the general formula for capital” in Chapter 4.\(^94\)

Information can mean both the signals of the market (including but certainly not limited to price) as well as the available data used to calculate, or make economic decisions by buyers or sellers. Following George Akerlof’s paper, “The Market in Lemons,”\(^95\) almost all economic theories of information assume that information is incomplete and asymmetric, and that the better-informed agent carries an advantage. According to Jack Hirshleifer, “Suppliers usually know more about their product than do buyers. A patient may not know which physician or dentist is the best qualified, a prospective buyer may not know that a used car has a broken transmission, an employer cannot be certain how well an applicant will perform on the job.”\(^96\)

This interlocking set of terms is also fundamental to understanding the markets at the core of the queer or gay social world for the following reasons, with the following caveats. First, “markets” designate not only the exchange of goods and services (alcohol, for example) but also the sites where the most valuable or sought-after “commodities” were not really commodities at all, but intangible public (or quasi-public) goods:

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\(^93\) Ibid., 46.
\(^94\) The first distinction between money as money and money as capital is nothing more than a difference in their form of circulation. The direct form of the circulation of commodities is C-M-C, the transformation of commodities into money and the re-conversion of money into commodities: selling in order to buy. But alongside this form we find another form, which is quite distinct from the first: M-C-M, the transformation of money into commodities, and the re-conversion of commodities into money: buying in order to sell. Money which describes the latter course in its movement is transformed into capital, becomes capital, and, from the point of view of its function, already is capital.” Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 247-248.
association and cultural expression based on non-normative eroticism and gender. This intervention claims that the goods and services consumed within these markets were secondary to the social and cultural production and reproduction of desire and subjectivity, or identity. Moreover, markets are not at all universal. As Karl Polanyí argues, not all exchange can be equated with “markets”—gift-based or reciprocal exchanges, to name only one example. Nonetheless, markets are still embedded with values that are not strictly economic in a formal sense (i.e., as a calculation based on scarcity, or supply-and-demand economics) even if market societies tend to elide or “alienate” those embedded cultural and social features.97

Related to my use of the term “market,” the “capital” produced and exchanged within the markets of the queer or gay social world was not typically understood in conventional terms as money or commodities. Rather, following Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the various non-financial forms of capital,98 the social and cultural values that accrued to individual participants as “identity” organized the social interactions and cultural signs that constituted queer or gay social life, particularly distinctions of class and race. Markets were even more complicated by the particular value of what Catherine Hakim calls “erotic capital,” a “complex but crucial combination of beauty, sex appeal, skills of self-presentation, and social skills—a combination of physical and social attractiveness that makes some men and women agreeable company and colleagues, attractive to all members of society and especially to the opposite sex.”99 Hakim’s

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analysis largely ignores queer or gay populations, though she does note, somewhat stereotypically, that “[h]omosexual communities present possibly the most classic examples of the hedonistic libertine sexual lifestyle, with greater emphasis on casual sex than on long-term partnerships. As a result, homosexuals invest much greater effort in keeping fit to attract partners.”\textsuperscript{100} Of course, this analysis fails to take into account the variety of ways in which different communities have dealt with “fitness,” particularly the ways in which lesbians and many trans communities have consciously attempted to construct alternatives to conventionally understood beauty standards as well as critiques of the ways in which the relative conformity enforced by gay male erotic capital excludes people based on race, body type, physical ability, penis size, and age. To be sure, literal capital as money, goods, and services circulated, but only and always as adjunctive to social, cultural, and erotic capital.

“Information” proves to be much more complex than either of the idea of markets or capital in the economic history of queer or gay life. Information as knowledge about the meanings of products and agents defined the larger cultural significance and ideological framework of markets for its participants. Secondly, more technical kinds of information represented the social and cultural capital that enabled access to and signaling within a clandestine and illicit (or quasi-illicit) market defined insiders and initiated outsiders. In the first sense—as a stock of knowledge—information about same-sex desire and gender transgression could be alienating and discouraging, leading to self-hatred and isolation, or it could be affirming and encouraging, providing a pathway from a newsstand or a library directly into the bars and other businesses that defined gay life. The second sense of information as technical knowledge was significantly more difficult,

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., chap. 2.
since it involved a complex learning process of patiently watching, learning, and relying on members of the in-group to extend the necessary confidence required to join gay life. As the first part of my study argues, the boom in publications about homosexuality and gender transgression in the post-war era radically transformed both of these forms of information. Indeed, print sustained and expanded this gender and sexual heresies of gay life in much the same way that the print revolution of mid-fifteenth century Europe laid the groundwork for the various survivals, revivals, and crystallizations that connected the Cathars, Lollards, and Hussites to the Protestant movement. For queer or gay people in the post-war era, exemplary figures like Wilde, Whitman, Gide, and Stein, or more apocryphal figures like Socrates and Sappho served as an important antidote to Leopold and Loeb.

Critically, however, buyers and sellers within an illicit and stigmatized market deployed information as data in order to negotiate the rules of the underworld. What Sedgwick identifies as the “mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and public, that were and are critically problematical for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large” should also be understood as what Jeffrey Escoffier calls the “segregation of information” between the gay world and the straight world, or the “double life.”\footnote{Escoffier, \textit{American Homo}, 69-71.} Of course, “coming out” is nothing more than the disclosure of potentially damaging personal information, an act that—at least until after Stonewall—was negotiated on an ad hoc basis rather than demanded by political necessity. Until the 1960s, “coming out” almost always meant disclosure within the gay world itself rather than exposure to the violence meted out by police or in the hypermasculine code of the streets. Although a few exceptional individuals may have
lived a “singular life”—or what Esther Newton and others have referred to as “overts”—such individuals could either afford the high costs of criminalization and stigmatization, often through the purchase of private space, or had so little to lose that they simply found work in gay commercial institutions. As Newton argues, the interaction between these two groups and their management of information largely defined the dynamic of gay community life in the era of the closet economy. Critically, “[n]ot all self-defined homosexuals belong to the homosexual community…The community is an on-going social reality in, around, and against which people align themselves according to their own self-definitions.” As Newton’s use of the word “definition” suggests, the content of such information was key to the formation of community. So, too, does the use of the verb “align” suggest the ways in which such individuals managed, exchanged, and protected such information in a variety of social contexts. According to Newton, this information essentially the basic elements of the community, especially the “gay world” and “gay life.”

The community centers around formal voluntary associations (Mattachine Society, Daughters of Bilitis, etc.), informal institutions (bars, baths, parks) and…informal social groups…, which have their most characteristic expression in parties and living arrangements. All of these institutions and groupings collectively are called “the gay world,” and participation in them is termed “gay life.” The separation of the gay world and its inclusiveness as a mode of existence were much emphasized by my informants who stated that it was a “walk of life”; that one is not a “homosexual” but that one “lives homosexuality.”

As Newton argues, the divisions between gay life was not who was (or who identified as) a “homosexual” or not—but the division of life between the work and play, or the
segregation of information between the site of production and consumption. Again, though, Newton’s emphasis is on relations of consumption.

[Both overt and covert homosexuals were found to “live homosexuality.”] The overts live their entire lives within the context of the community; the coverts live their entire nonworking lives within it. That is, the coverts are “straight” during working hours, but most social activities are conducted with and with reference to other homosexuals. These overts and coverts together form the core of the homosexual community…Homosexual communities are entirely urban and suburban phenomena. They depend on the anonymity and segmentation of metropolitan life. 102

Thus, Escoffier and Newton explain how in the historical framework of the queer or gay social world, information was largely negotiated in the context of work and play, the diurnal and nocturnal, and light and shadow. Over time, urban markets provided the context for the transition from the older, modern divisions of public and private to what Michael Warner dubs (straight) “public” and (queer) “counter-public.” 103 The management of such information included both personal information (i.e., identity), as well as information as knowledge and information as publicity or attention. 104 As knowledge, the body of information that grew out of the context of gay markets provided a powerful ideological alternative to models of pathology, sin, and stigma, primarily through the affirmation of queer or gay identities as either neutral (and therefore natural) or positive. The definition of information as knowledge is particularly fraught because, at

103 Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, 56-57.
104 “A public is constituted through mere attention. Most social classes and groups are understood to encompass their members all the time, no matter what. A nation, for example, includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk, sane or deranged, alert or comatose. Publics are different. Because a public exists only by virtue of address, it must predicate some degree of attention, however notional, from its members.” Warner, ibid., 87.
least until after Gay Liberation, many participants held conflicting and contradictory views at once, or perambulated between the poles of self-recrimination and self-affirmation.

Information as publicity or attention was even more significant because of its ability to persuade, dissuade, and exclude certain ideas as acceptable or unacceptable (i.e., hegemonic or non-hegemonic). Debates among psychiatrists about the pathology of homosexuality or among jurists about the legal basis of sodomy laws represented the most well known but by no means only instances in which one hegemonic ideal was displaced another, at least by the experts represented by the American Psychological Association or the members of the American Bar Association. Information as attention also reveals the formal distinctions and significance of information as private speech (i.e., gossip) or public speech (especially as published material or representations in film, television, radio, and other forms of mass culture). As a common stock of popular knowledge, information also organized (and continues to organize) any and all salient divisions between straight and gay or queer markets, cultures, and communities. It was ultimately through information, its formalization, and exchange that led to the “branding” not only of gay markets, but of their central “product”: identity. This meant not only the formulation “coming out” as the political imperative of Gay Liberation, it also displaced and repressed the possibilities of the “double life” under the closet economy. Indeed, the history of gay markets is not simply about the displacement of one cultural style with another, but of an enduring set of conflicts over the individual and collective complexities of secrecy and disclosure. What follows, then, is my account of that history.

I. Introduction: The Informational Context of the Closet Economy and Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Kinsey Reports

With very few exceptions, there was almost no knowledge of what we might think of as a “gay economy” in the postwar era. There were no explicit images or representations in film and other forms of popular culture, and only veiled references in a handful of novels and scientific studies. The digital archive of printed material from the period reveals a deep poverty of sexual language. The sexual vernacular that did exist consisted mostly of indirect epithets and euphemisms. “Gay” still meant happy to the overwhelming majority of English speakers, and even the most explicit extant term—“homosexuality”—was neither commonly used nor widely understood. Seldom spoken and even more rarely printed, “homosexuality” seemed to require a tone of righteous indignation at the mention of an act considered either sinful—an “abomination” according to Scripture—or utterly pathological. Not even rumors that some of the most important composers, artists, writers, scientists, and even politicians might be homosexual could redeem this twisted and perverse impulse; indeed, the proclivities of their creators opened question the taint and influence of perversion in otherwise admirable works of music, art, literature, discovery, or policy. The vast majority of the people living in the United States might have understood homosexuality sex between two men or two women, but even those definitions were murky and contested. Was the term just for the unmentionable acts between members of the same sex, or was there a personality type that might predict such criminal and immoral behavior? Did it apply to
casual encounters or to one-time flings? What about youthful indiscretions? What about acts that seemingly arose from the necessity of homosocial institutions, like the sex had by hobos, prisoners, or sailors? In some sections and in some cities, women in tuxedoes or men in drag put on extravagant performances. Occasionally, depictions of sissies and mannish viragos in Hollywood hinted at what was universally considered the detestable act of homosexuality. A handful of less scientific-sounding words than *homosexuality* conjured a menagerie of perverted stereotypes: *fag, fairy, dyke*, and, of course the catch-all term, *queer*.

It was into this highly combustible stew of vernacular knowledge and bowdlerized pseudo-science that the first Kinsey Report, or *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, appeared in 1948. A former zoologist, Alfred Kinsey’s studies seized on the virtual vacuum in public information about sexuality, in general, having been first inspired to sexual research by the outdated and dishonest “sexual hygiene” curriculum at Indiana University. His work helped to revive and make available for a large public audience a candid discourse of sexuality more commonly associated with Europe, especially Freudian psychoanalysis. With its institutions in Austria and Germany, much of the European psychoanalytic movement was destroyed or coopted by National Socialism, and the brand that reemerged after the war seemed much more conservative than Freud on questions of sexuality. Kinsey offered a clear alternative not only in the dispassionate descriptions he proffered but also in his approach. Psychoanalysts had individual case files; Kinsey came armed with demography.

If people knew anything at all of the enormous detail packed into the first Kinsey Report, it was typically the shocking statistic that approximately 37% of the men interviewed “has at least some overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm between adolescence and old age” and that 10% “are more or less exclusively homosexual.”

If that statistic inspired revulsion and fear from mainstream readers, the response was significantly more complex for those whose proclivities and activities seemed to fall outside the rigid heterosexual boundaries on the extreme end of the “Kinsey scale.” Homophile founder Harry Hay cited the latter statistic as the founding basis for the International Bachelors Fraternal Order for Peace and Social Dignity, the idea of which evolved into the Mattachine Foundation, the first sustained gay rights organization in U.S. history.

Riffing off The Communist Manifesto, Hay transforms Kinsey’s anodyne numbers into a political platform for modern queer social movements:

WE, THE ANDROGYNES OF THE WORLD, HAVE FORMED THIS RESPONSIBLE CORPORATE BODY TO DEMONSTRATE BY OUR EFFORTS THAT OUR PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HANDICAPS NEED BE NO DETERRENT IN INTEGRATING 10% OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION TOWARDS THE CONSTRUCTIVE SOCIAL PROGRESS OF MANKIND.

Although the language of physiological and psychological “handicap” genuflects as much to the medical and psychiatric establishment as to the radical potential of Kinsey’s findings, the real historical gravity of Hay’s pronouncement lay in the provocative

suggestion that fully one out of ten people in the world harbored such a secret. The “10%” number has proven to be such a culturally enduring myth that, if they know little else about queer life or human sexuality, my students know it as scientific gospel. But, as their endurance shows, Kinsey’s statistics and the debate that raged over them ignited a public fascination with sex and sexuality, one that ultimately consumed greater attention—not to mention public and private resources—as its subject matter ballooned into a full-blown sexual revolution.¹⁰⁹

At the time of publication during the height of Cold War purges, however, Kinsey’s findings more often invited outraged disbelief and opprobrium than the delight betrayed by Cole Porter, the measured endorsement of Erich Fromm, or the exuberant utopianism of Harry Hay. In 1950, Esther Emerson Sweeney, director of community services for the American Social Hygiene Association claimed that the “Kinsey Report is endangering relations in the home instead of improving them….Our own future strength as fathers and mothers [is] threatened if moral standards are not high and based on conviction.” Following Sweeney’s indictment, the National Council of Women of the United States passed a resolution that the “Kinsey Report has weakened moral standards,” an unsurprising conclusion for an organization co-founded by Frances

¹⁰⁹ The term “Sexual Revolution” is, of course, a contested term, although Jeffrey Escoffier describes as the culmination of several historical processes in the 1960s, including changes in popular culture (like the introduction of rock ‘n roll), changing legal definitions of obscenity, and changing conceptions of both female sexual desire and homosexuality. Escoffier claims that Wilhelm Reich “theorized the possibility of sexual revolution and identified the orgasm as the supreme achievement of sexual liberation” while Kinsey documented and quantified the “actual behavior” of Americans—thus suggesting the erotic capital required of such a Sexual Revolution. See Jeffrey Escoffier, “Introduction,” in Sexual Revolution, edited by Jeffrey Escoffier (New York: Thunder’s Mouth, 2003), xx. Although sociologists tend to focus more on questions about the “Sexual Revolution,” if it occurred, and what it entailed, a handful of historians have broached the implications of the “Sexual Revolution” by examining popular culture and medical technology, all of which address the centrality of Kinsey’s influence to mid-century pop culture. See David Allyn, Make Love, Not War (New York: Routledge, 2001); Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1989) and Sex in the Heartland (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Joanne Meyerowitz, How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).
When *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was published in 1953, it revealed that anywhere from 2-6% of the female population was exclusively homosexual. The year it was released, Brooklyn Congressman Louis Heller had attempted to have the book declared obscene by the postal service and the U.S. Army successfully banned *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* from its libraries.

The claim that as much as ten percent of the male population and six percent of the female population was secretly homosexual also sounded a familiar alarm in the popular folklore of spies and secret fellow travelers who threatened national security and tempted the hearts and minds of the young. Neighbors, co-workers, friends, and even family members might be living a double life; indeed, at least according to Kinsey’s statistics, chances were pretty good that at least one of them was a secret queer. Published at a time when politicians like Joseph McCarthy made their bones on fears about “homosexuals” and communists in the State Department and the Armed Forces, Kinsey’s findings ignited a national obsession with sexuality, especially homosexuality, which resulted in a critical mass of information about the subject in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Although he rejected homosexuality and heterosexuality as meaningful criteria for social identity or pathology, Kinsey’s findings arguably contributed more to the construction of

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“homosexual” (and arguably “transsexual”\textsuperscript{114}) identity than any other expert in the cultural history of the United States.

The numerical and statistical findings of the Kinsey Report were the key to understand the making of gay consumption through both the demographic construction of an inchoate gay market as well as the basis for what social scientists and experts began to recognize as a gay “way of life.” In some ways, the Kinsey Reports were to the gay “way of life” and the gay market what Arnold Mitchell and his widely touted Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles (VALS) Survey would be to the “lifestyle” revolution of the late 1970s and early 1980s.\textsuperscript{115} Its significance to gay life and the making of the gay lifestyle in the United States simply cannot be overstated. As the basis of community, political organization, and even a shared culture, Kinsey had drawn especially on the barflies, hustlers, and johns who loitered in the streets and thoroughfares of Manhattan, exposing their lives to the broader public through the lens of post-war demography and providing the most important source of information—however inaccurate—to consumers and would-be consumers of this emerging lifestyle. Of course, published at the dawn of the Cold War, the Kinsey Report represents one of the earliest artifacts from an economy defined by stigma, i.e., the closet economy. Thus, the information produced in the Kinsey Reports was not simply neutral or benign, as Kinsey insisted it was. Instead, it was


\textsuperscript{115} See Donald E. Vinson, et al., “The Role of Personal Values in Marketing and Consumer Behavior,” \textit{Journal of Marketing} 41, no. 2 (April 1977), 44-50; Mitchell, \textit{The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We’re Going} (New York: Scribner, 1983). For a discussion of the implications of VALS research for churches (and implicitly, the linkage between belief, membership, and markets, a connection that I have argued is in many ways analogous to the linkages between gay or queer subjectivity, community, and markets), see Philip Amerson, “Lifestyle Research: A Review of Resources,” \textit{Review of Religious Research} 20, no. 3 (Summer, 1979), 350-356.
interpreted according to the prevailing moral and scientific consensus that homosexuality represented a serious mental illness or a personal shortcoming on par with drug addiction.

Nonetheless, Kinsey’s demography supplied a form of capital necessary for the making of a gay market: the idea of a gay population. Both his findings and his popularity place him as the most important entrepreneur of a postwar gay economy, however inchoate. Kinsey supplied not only the information needed to access gay life, he also the most important “products” of a distinctly gay market: identity and community. Not only that, but the information Kinsey supplied bore the stamp of expertise. This was not rumor or innuendo, or even deliberately indirect scientific information. These were the facts of life laid out in black and white, distributed in millions of copies and endorsed and debated by all the leading experts.

Kinsey and the larger, contested conversation about sexuality represented what Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan, and other pioneers of communications studies and media theory might refer to as the “media ecology” of the closet, or what Richard Lanham calls the “economics of attention” that constituted the closet economy. Lanham’s economic model gestures toward the relatively recent phenomenon of the “information economy” in which “we might locate ‘capital’ in this new economy in the literary and artistic”—and, I would also insist, scientific and sociological—“imagination, the powers

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116 The phrase “media ecology” is Postman’s, although my idea of the closet economy borrows more from McLuhan, who argues that the medium (in this case print) determines the content. This seems especially true when considering the ways in which gay or queer visibility represented both the innovative form and content of sub-cultures whose existence was ostensibly taboo and formerly premised on the evasion of visibility and surveillance. McLuhan argues that the “psychic and social consequences of…designs or patterns…amplify or accelerate existing processes…the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.” McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Kindle Edition, chap. 1. Postman’s use of the term ecology is a more explicit attempt to link cultural signs to the natural, or to the ways in which “physical characteristics and symbolic code” as well as “the conditions we normally attend to” become “taken for granted, accepted as natural.” Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Kindle Edition, chap. 5.
that...spin...new patterns for how to live and to think about how we live. Capital, in this view, lies in the cultural conversation.”117 And, indeed, the expansion of information about homosexuality in media like film, television, and especially print posed serious consequences for people and businesses whose primary challenges came from the stigmatization and surveillance that such visible information symptomatized, substantiated, and expanded.

The following chapter uses Kinsey’s research and the responses he provoked in order to argue for the stream of “expert” information central to the construction of the early closet economy. This chapter draws on a broad archive of primary material, using both a “close reading” approach attending to the qualitative elements of an expert discourse of sexuality, as well as a “distant reading” method, suggested by literary historian Franco Moretti, to measure the quantity of information produced in the wake of the Kinsey Reports.

The first approach analyzes the content of expert information by attending to the specific findings of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and, to a lesser extent Sexual Behavior in the Human Female. My close reading of expert information focuses on one of the most widely read expert rebuttals to Kinsey from New York City psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler, the preeminent authority homosexuality in the late 1940s and early 1950s and one of the first experts to address and describe a gay “way of life”—a term that predated the more indigenous use of “gay lifestyle” more than a decade later.

Although presented from the perspectives of medical and scientific experts, the information sampled in this chapter introduced into the vernacular terms like “psychopath,” “invert,” “homosexuality,” “masochism,” and other words that provided a

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scientific (or scientific-sounding) alternative to the vulgar slang used by both gay insiders and presumably straight outsiders. As a symptom of postwar anxiety about unconventional forms of sexuality, the introduction of sexual science into popular culture represented an attempt to transform and discipline a vaguely defined set of erotic subcultures via what Foucault describes as a *scientia sexualis*:

We are dealing not nearly so much with a negative mechanism of exclusion as with the operation of a subtle network of discourses, special knowledges, pleasures, and powers. At issue is not a movement bent on pushing rude sex back into some obscure and inaccessible region, but on the contrary, a process that spreads it over the surface of things and bodies, arouses it, draws it out and bids it speak, implants it in reality and enjoins it to tell the truth: an entire glittering sexual array, reflected in a myriad of discourses, the obstination of powers, and the interplay of knowledge and pleasure.\(^{118}\)

Bergler, like so many of the pop psychologists contributing to the whole Kinsey Industrial Complex, was an exemplary writer in this hodgepodge category of Cold War literature on homosexuality and gay life. To be sure, the “scientific” aspects of this discourse was not so much the rigor of the methods, but the ways in which scientific language was relayed to a non-expert readership and the hard-to-dispute truth-effects such discourse conveyed.

The enormous popularity and influence of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*—and especially the explosive revelation of so many queers hiding in plain sight—represented not just any kind of sexual science. It was part of a larger field of popular psychology and even sociological literature that Jeffrey Escoffier calls the “homosexualizing discourses” of the post-war era. According to Escoffier, the new

\(^{118}\) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 72.
homosexualizing discourses “provided new categories and interpretations of social knowledge about gay life, as well as new categories of self-interpretation and presentation of an individual’s identity.”

Drawing on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Escoffier points to the pivotal role played by psychologists and sociologists with the “capacity ‘to make explicit, to publish, and make public,’” which “makes it possible to forge collective identity and make social groups. ‘Knowledge of the social world,’ [Bourdieu] writes, ‘and more precisely, the categories that make it possible, are the stakes, par excellence, of political struggle.’”

Sociological explanations were not necessarily written by trained sociologists; instead, as Escoffier claims, “popular sociology…refashioned homosexuality as a social phenomenon, rather than a purely psychological or individual one.” Thus, Kinsey the zoologist represented the most important early salvo of the sociological explanation against the hegemonic concepts of homosexual pathology and aberrance. Kinsey’s methods, statistical evidence drawn on observations of the gay social world itself, demonstrated both the mind-boggling frequency of homosexuality (and other supposedly “aberrant” sexual acts) and provided an almost unassailable logic that emphasized social opportunities over psychological etiology in the making of “homosexuality.” Even the most vocal of Kinsey’s opponents, like Bergler, had to contend with the gay “way of life,” a social and more importantly economic phenomenon that made it difficult if not impossible to “cure” homosexuality. The gay “way of life,” an individual manifestation of the closet economy, ultimately met a demand that psychotherapy vainly tried to

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121 Escoffier, ibid.
eliminate. It also fueled the inchoate markets of bars and other businesses with which psychotherapy competed both ideologically and economically. Indeed, from the purely economic perspective of the closet economy, a few drinks in gay company or even money exchanged for sex provided a cheaper source of relief than a painful and protracted period of psychoanalysis.

The second, “distant reading” approach uses culturomic methods to explore the digital archive in Googlebooks, which represents the most complete database of published material, as well as the ProQuest database of the New York Times. As the journal of record both for New York City and the United States, the Times’ digital archive provides important testimony to the fracturing consensus of sexuality among experts and the dramatic increase in information about homosexuality. Both of these qualitative and quantitative transformations exposed homosexuality and gay life as salient features of American society, establishing the cultural preconditions of the emerging gay markets that characterized the closet economy. In many ways, this “distant reading” method examines what Moretti calls the “slaughter of literature” in which the butchers—readers…who read novel A (but not B, C, D, E, F, G, H …) and so keep A “alive” into the next generation, when other readers may keep it alive into the following one, and so on until eventually A becomes canonized. Readers, not professors, make canons: academic decisions are mere echoes of a process that unfolds fundamentally outside the school: reluctant rubber-stamping, not much more…A space outside the school, where the canon is selected: the market.  

Following Moretti, my analysis simply replaces the “novel” with the “idea” (specifically the concept of homosexuality) and “canon” with “authority” or “expert hegemony.”

122 Moretti, Distant Reading, 67-68.
Indeed, in some ways, this chapter explores the ways in which readers, as consumers of information, absorbed and reacted to the canonical, authoritative, and now-hegemonic qualities of the sociological explanation over the psychopathological explanation, i.e., that the identification of homosexuality with “deviance” is a social convention rather than a symptom of bodily or mental sickness. Indeed, this chapter explores the early symptoms of how, vis-à-vis the market, this idea became canonical, authoritative, and hegemonic within the (secular, scientific) academy and, indeed, much of society. This chapter documents nothing less than the mass production of gay identity.

As de Beauvoir, Sartre, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty grappled with the heady questions of existence in a shattered, post-war world across the Atlantic Ocean, Kinsey solved a more literal formulation of the problem for perhaps millions of sexual subjects in the United States. Hay’s manifesto suggested the specter awakened by the Kinsey study and its initial, exuberant affirmation posed a revolutionary fact: we exist. It was ultimately this information and its dissemination that created the possibility of a gay market in an era otherwise marked by brutal repression.

II. Background: Prohibition, the Commercialization of Gay and Lesbian Life, and the Grounding of the Gay Market

It would be an overstatement to solely attribute the Kinsey Reports to the making of the gay economy. Indeed, much of Kinsey’s research came directly from the vestiges of a once vibrant gay commercial scene that had flourished during Prohibition. Prohibition had revolutionized queer sociability by providing it a relatively safe, stable, and socially tolerant venue in the milieu of the illicit speakeasy. As one of the most
successful illicit business models in the history of the United States, the speakeasy also represented the first space that was more or less immune to the cycles of anti-queer policing and moral entrepreneurship that had plagued gay life in earlier periods. The criminalization of a widely popular pastime and the ensuing credibility gap between the law and its citizen-subjects provided queer or gay life unprecedented cultural cover.

Although queer bars and other commercial institutions were hardly invented by bootleggers, the widespread toleration of bootlegging certainly translated into toleration for other kinds of transgressions, especially around sexuality and gender, and lay the groundwork for the reinvention of queer or gay culture in the quasi-public urban establishments of commercial entertainment. Before Prohibition, Columbia or “Paresis” Hall and other boy brothels and resorts for “perverts” were part of a culture of legally and morally questionable establishments, hidden in the plain sight of the Bowery’s homosocial world of commercial vice since at least the 1890s.\textsuperscript{123} Though these were subject to fines and visits from antagonistic do-gooders like the Saloon League and the Committees of Fourteen and Fifteen after 1900, they had represented the ways in which commercialization could provide cover and protection for queer social and erotic networks within a broader illicit market of vice.\textsuperscript{124} While such establishments operated similarly to Prohibition-era speakeasies, it would be more appropriate to describe these as brothels or houses of assignation attached to bars.\textsuperscript{125} One similarity, however, was that in both the period from about 1890 to 1918 and from 1920 to 1933, queer or gay cultures

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 130-134.
\textsuperscript{125} In New York State, such establishments were typically built in response to the Raines Law, an 1896 ordinance meant to curtail alcohol by banning its sale on Sunday except in hotels. See Chad Heap, \textit{Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), Kindle Edition, “Into the Slums: The Spatial Organization, Cultural Geography, and Regulation of a New Urban Pastime.”
overlapped with and were largely subdivisions of larger illicit or informal markets. In the first era, gay commercial institutions were subsidiaries of brothels and in the second, of speakeasies. While both regulatory regimes were difficult to enforce, anti-prostitution campaigns and regulations enjoyed widespread popular and political support. Prohibition was a different matter altogether.

In boozy New York City, where Drys had never been more than a nuisance, police and civilians alike confronted a host of federal regulations that were neither easy nor popular to enforce. Prohibition promoted a speakeasy culture that was so brazen and widespread—gangsters, Broadway stars, jazz musicians, and elected officials openly rubbed elbows in speakeasies—that it made queer or gay establishments all the less remarkable. Prohibition likely reinvented and revitalized gay or queer culture, giving it both increased geographic space and a business model that would allow it to reproduce its culture and social networks from one drunken and depraved night to the next.

Prohibition era regulations weakened the restrictive cultural and social mores that pervaded the pre-Prohibition saloon, particularly with regard to gender. While “disorderly” from a temperance perspective, pre-Prohibition saloons were nonetheless regulated by strictly enforced rules of “manly” sociability, which simultaneously excluded women altogether and relegated to the fringes those establishments that allowed “effeminate” and gender transgressive behavior associated with same-sex sexuality. In many ways, the illicit business model made it difficult to regulate establishments that served alcohol, including ejecting patrons without reprisal. As a result, the speakeasy had

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a somewhat democratizing effect on the social and commercial public (or counter-public or quasi-public) culture of New York City.

From the early twentieth century to the first years of Prohibition, gay or queer saloons, brothels, and speakeasies were significant not because queer or gay culture or identity were explicit and recognizable, but, as Kevin Mumford argues, because they were ambiguous. Indeed, many of the patrons were straight tourists engaging in a fairly established pattern of white and middle- and upper-class “slumming,” a practice that dated to the previous century and took on an even more thrilling aura in the Prohibition era. Mumford argues that these ambiguous spaces, or “interzones,” were constituted by the tensions within a broader illicit framework of interracial sociability and sexuality, especially in African-American neighborhoods where speakeasy culture overlapped with prostitution and other forms of “vice.” “Simultaneously marginal and central, interzones were located in African-American neighborhoods, unique because their (often transient) inhabitants were black and white, heterosexual and homosexual, prostitute and customer.” This mixture may have provoked hand-wringing diagnoses of “disorderliness” from the perspective of moral entrepreneurs and reformers. Nonetheless, such spaces were still organized by race, class, and gender hierarchies, anticipating many of the divisions that characterize queer commercial and cultural geography into the present day. Indeed, at times it seems as though class and racial segregation represented more obvious signs of division than those of sexuality and gender. White patronization, appropriation, exploitation, and exoticization of queer or gay Black cultural practices were not simply incidental to queer or gay commercial culture in the Prohibition era, but

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127 Mumford, ibid.,133-134.
128 Ibid., 20.
constitutive of it.\footnote{Ibid., 73-92, 116.} As a result, “African-American gays and lesbians, living on the borders between margins, experienced both sides of the social history of black/white homosexuality. They suffered numerous exclusions based on prejudice but continued to survive at the cultural and institutional intersections of race and sexuality.”\footnote{Ibid., 91-92.}

The popularity of the speakeasy in New York City and other major urban areas was just one of the many paradoxes of Prohibition, which introduced a number of “tolerated illegalities” as well as social and cultural transgressions.\footnote{This phrase is lifted from Foucault’s \textit{Discipline and Punish}, referring to “tolerated illegality: the non-application of the rule, the non-observance of the innumerable edicts or ordinances…[as] a condition of the political an economic functioning of society.” Michel Foucault, 82, \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison}, trans. Robert Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).} For women, it meant the ability to move into these new quasi-public and counter-public spheres and the opportunity to forge public lesbian cultures, a more or less unknown phenomenon up until Prohibition.\footnote{Lillian Faderman, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America}, 62-63; see also Barnet, \textit{All-Night Party: The Women of Bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem, 1913-1930}.} Moreover, the presence of gay men and lesbians also provided an exciting and curious lure for ostensibly straight “slummers.” In many places, gay men and lesbians were not simply customers, but part of the spectacle of the speakeasy, evidence of the ways in which the speakeasy was not simply a market for the distribution of bootleg liquor but of a forbidden emporia that included all kinds of illicit sex and substances. Speakeasy culture destabilized the “normal” (or at least unmarked) same-sex eroticism that existed in previously all-male homosocial spaces. Though an explicitly queer or gay sensibility had existed in the boy brothels that predated Prohibition, “normal” men continued to have sex with effeminate men or “fairies” without losing masculine status or calling into question their sexual credentials. The spectacle of gay and
lesbian life in speakeasy culture cemented an explicitly queer or gay sensibility to the personal identities of those who participated in queer or gay speakeasies and social networks. This was especially apparent in changes to the cultural arrangements that had permitted sex between effeminate and sexually receptive “fairies” and masculine and sexually insertive “trade,” for example, or simply between drinking buddies who “fooled around” without understanding or acknowledging the cultural significance of such erotic acts. Though these features did not disappear entirely, the speakeasy had fundamentally reorganized the significance of these acts by cementing them to the cultural templates of the “fairy” and the “dyke,” as well as less conspicuous but no less “abnormal” people who came to identify as gay men and lesbians.

On a larger cultural and geographic scale, gay and lesbian culture developed within the complex market processes of nightlife amusements at a time of massive demographic changes drive by the larger processes of industrial capitalism, including urbanization, foreign (primarily European) immigration, the emigration of southern African-Americans to Northerneastern and Midwestern cities (especially New York, Chicago, and Detroit), and the conscription of working-class women into the industrial workforce and (to a lesser extent) the professionalization of a small number of middle- and upper-class women. Nightclubs and cabarets represented radical new possibilities for interactions between and among these different groups of people, and the mainstreaming of such commercialized amusement in the early 20th century provoked numerous anxieties about perversions and disorders of which the apparent growth of homosexuality was but one symptom. It also served as a convenient proxy for other anxieties, like
interracial and interethnic sociability and the coarsening of formerly respectable (i.e., white, upper- and middle-class) women’s behavior.

As a result, an almost dialectic process between the commercialization and regulation of sociability created spaces in which transgressive interaction became transgressive ritual, and transgressive ritual became transgressive culture. As Shane Vogel argues, this was neither a simple nor straightforward process, since it disrupted the conventional hierarchies of class, race, and gender as well as the credibility of the law itself. This was particularly true after the introduction of the Volstead Act.

Commercialized nightlife had already become “respectable” in the 1910s because it “traded on a carefully managed and organized notion of transgression and a manufactured experience of intimacy, retaining the allure of the underclass but within highly scripted social scenes. Upscale cabarets were less often an expression of the city’s carnivalesque inversion of morality than they were a staging of it for visitors looking for bohemian experience.” For Vogel, cabarets and other similar spaces fused drinking, dancing, performance, and transgressive spectacles into “more complex systems of contradiction and disavowal” that were “exacerbated” by Prohibition.  

By the late 1920s, gay and lesbian speakeasy culture had begun to trickle into mass culture and popular entertainment. In the early 1930s, this fad had become a national phenomenon, with drag balls in major cities across the country and the entry of gay and lesbian stereotypes into the iconography of mass culture, especially print (including books and sheet music), the stage, and even a handful of Hollywood films. In a

133 Vogel, The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, and Performance, 55.
pre-code Clara Bow vehicle, 1932’s *Call Her Savage*,\(^{134}\) the central characters visit a “bohemian” bar where the scene opens on a pair of singing “pansy” waiters, decked incongruously in tuxedos and French maid headpieces, singing about working on a “great big battleship” as chamber maids.\(^{135}\) Though words like *fairy, pansy, dyke,* and *lesbian* predated Prohibition, they increasingly branded queer or gay speakeasies and their primary constituents, a begrudgingly tolerated segment of a larger and pervasive illegal commercial world. *Gay,* a word associated with female sex workers, crept into the queer lexicon around this time as a designation for both men and women even as the language of European sexology and psychoanalysis introduced terms like *homosexual, inversion,* *bisexual,* and *transvestite* into popular culture. The cultural popularity of the word *gay* suggests the commercial and social milieu in which it originated, and which gay men and lesbians shared. As a term of affectionate identification and self-designation, its use also suggests the contemporary reorganization of gendered sociability from the pre-Prohibition gender divisions of male and female homosociability into heterosocial if more explicitly homosexual and heterosexual (or gay and straight) scenes.\(^{136}\) The sub-cultural lingo, dress, and gestures of queer or gay consumers and performers also initiated a fad among straight or “normal” consumers, who viewed gay and lesbian life as a curiosity and a spectacle. As already mentioned, “straight” clientage was probably as crucial to the success of queer or gay speakeasies as queer consumers, who found in

\(^{134}\) *Call Her Savage,* dir. John Francis Dillon (1932; Los Angeles: 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox Corporation, 2014), DVD.


\(^{136}\) For a more comprehensive discussion of the terminology of identity, see Chauncey, *Gay New York,* 12-13, 15-16.
queer speakeasies the opportunity to express forbidden desires and socialize with other outcasts.\textsuperscript{137}

Even so, it would be a mistake to see these fads as uncontroversial productions of mass culture and mass markets. Playwrights, filmmakers, and authors who dared expose the commercial underworld of gay and lesbian life faced arrest for obscenity and indecency, not to mention the howls of public outrage from pundits and reformers. Mae West’s arrest for \textit{The Drag},\textsuperscript{138} Radclyffe Hall’s spectacular obscenity trials over \textit{The Well of Loneliness},\textsuperscript{139} and the formation of the prohibitively censorious Production Code Administration by Hollywood in 1934 were only the most sensational examples. In many ways, the regulation of mass culture reflected the broader the dialectic between regulation and commercialization that had redefined gay or queer sociability within the speakeasy.

As a kind of counter-public, quasi-public sphere of sexually eccentric ideas and cultural concepts, gay or queer speakeasies forged and consolidated a culture with knowledge gleaned informally from psychoanalysis and the police, a sensibility that encouraged gender and sexual experimentation and openness, and the ritualization of certain gestures, words, practices, and performances, especially drag. The fact that these spaces were relatively diverse with regard to class and race also lent credence to the idea of “homosexuality” and non-binary gender as natural and universal phenomena.

Geographically and economically, Prohibition had also cemented queer or gay life to the architecture of the city itself, especially in neighborhoods with extensive and popular entertainment districts where theater and speakeasy cultures overlapped and fed off one

\textsuperscript{138} Chauncey, ibid., 313.
another. Harlem, Greenwich Village, and the west Midtown theater district (New York City’s “Tenderloin”) represented the local bastions of speakeasy culture and, with the exception of Harlem, served as the geographic and economic anchors of queer life from the late 1920s to the present. Queer or gay speakeasies in Prohibition-era Harlem and Greenwich Village had marked a departure from earlier commercial institutions catering to sexual and social “deviates” in their expansiveness, visibility, evasion (or negotiation) of legal prosecution, and subversive repurposing by entertainers and customers, and served as the template for illicit queer or gay bars and other businesses as they developed from the end of the forties to the era of Gay Liberation.

In many ways, the illicit markets and widespread toleration and even embrace of the pansy and lesbian craze of the 1920s and early 1930s suggest a political economy almost identical to the closet economy described by Escoffier. The major difference, however, is that information about transgressive gender and sexuality—especially the disorganized and contradictory etiologies of identity, the unstable meanings of sexual acts and rituals, and the lack of public and easily available information about queer or gay spaces—had yet to consolidate a discrete and stable market.

There are two very significant differences between the speakeasy economy and the closet economy of the 1950s and 1960s. The first and most obvious is the absence of any retail businesses (i.e., bookstores, clothing boutiques, pornography shops, etc) that catered to a queer or gay clientele, forming a cultural periphery around the socially and culturally interactive core represented by bars and bathhouses. The second is more complex, but even more important, since it relates more directly to the explicit theatricality of the Prohibition-era speakeasy economy. While straight tourists
occasionally wandered into gay bars in the post-World War II closet economy, much (if not most) of the clientele at queer or gay speakeasies were ostensibly straight. They tended to view themselves not so much as participants in gay or queer culture as audience members in a queer or gay spectacle, a pattern that fit almost seamlessly into the older practice of “slumming.” As Vogel, Mumford, and Heap have all suggested, this practice reaffirmed the “normal” status of the spectator even as it cast the racial or sexual difference of the spectacle in an exotic light.\footnote{Of course, a number of the more curious spectators “crossed over” into the queer or gay social world, and even came to identify themselves with it. This experience, while uncommon, seems to have worked its way into one of the narrative tropes of the day, as evidenced by the novels of Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, and Blair Niles. See A.B. Christa Schwarz, \textit{Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance} (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2003).}

When Kinsey arrived in New York City for his earliest round of interviews, little of this world remained. Harlem’s pansy and lesbian clubs—like nearly all its clubs—had suffered from the economic catastrophes of the Great Depression and competition from downtown establishments. Racism and economic discrimination only deepened the misery for Harlem’s many African-American residents, and police violence and rioting brought more literal kinds of destruction to the neighborhood. Kinsey’s surveys, like the most visible elements of New York City’s gay life, reflected these conditions and, presented through the deracinated lens of demography, tended to reinforce identification of homosexuals and homosexuality with whiteness. Although the white-dominated Greenwich Village fared better than Harlem, the most visible manifestations of homosexuality were the hustlers who haunted mid-town Manhattan between Times Square and Bryant Park, further cementing the identification of homosexuality with men. The Kinsey Reports certainly spoke to and about more than just white men, but because of the disintegration of gay life following Prohibition, they were better positioned to take
advantage of the gay “way of life”—a way of life organized around same-sex desire and/or gender transgression—toward which Kinsey’s demography gestured.

III. Homosexualizing Discourses: Kinsey and the Making of a Gay Way of Living

Because psychotherapy was a predominantly urban phenomenon, “homosexualizing discourses” represented by medical knowledge had been influential in the gay social world of New York City and a handful of other major cities since the early twentieth century because psychotherapy was a predominantly urban phenomenon. Even so, psychotherapy was generally offered only to middle- and upper-class patients. Although Kinsey challenged psychologists, he nonetheless spoke their idiom—or spoke to it—and psychologists and medical experts certainly spoke back. Kinsey thus provided the most important source of “homosexualizing discourse” in the 1940s and 1950s.

Kinsey’s work and the extensive commentary on it helped to popularize the terms of sexual identity. The ways in which published material “homosexualized” its readers was one of the central ironies of the publishing market of the early closet economy, a veritable Kinsey industrial complex. Kinsey had actually rejected the idea of homo/heterosexual identity—or a distinct personality type—in favor of a model that emphasized same-sex sexual behavior. Kinsey’s critique nonetheless popularized the

141 Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 124-127. Indeed, Chauncey argues that the introduction of Freud’s definition of “inversion” (which suggested that “normal” masculinity could be paired with same-sex desire) created the conditions for the “masculinization” of middle- and upper-class gay identity while affixing effeminacy (and corresponding identities like “fairies” and “pansies”) to working-class queer identities. While an interesting thesis, it does not explain why the reverse seems to be true in the 1950s and 1960s: specifically, that effeminacy and camp are more associated with middle- and upper-class gay men (who could often afford the private space to do so) while working-class participants in the gay world tended to exhibit the hard-edged masculinity of “trade” that ultimately spawned leather and S&M cultures. A more complex discussion of masculinity and the “trade” phenomenon (including an analysis of Chauncey’s study of a homosexual scandal in 1919 Newport) is discussed in Gayle Rubin’s dissertation. Gayle S. Rubin, “The valley of the kings: Leathermen in San Francisco, 1960-1990,” 81-85.
terms of “homosexuality” as an identity for a broad national audience, a model that he argued was mostly the result of unscientific methods in psychology. Kinsey’s perspective reflected an uncommonly critical stance toward the interpretive problems of applying the prescriptive language of psychological or physiological diagnosis to gender and sexual behavior considered deviant or aberrant. To be sure, Kinsey’s rejection of psychopathological identities imposed on so-called deviants and perverts was in no way an embrace of the kinds of identities they shaped for themselves. “The term homosexual has had an endless list of synonyms in the technical vocabularies and a still greater list in the vernaculars,” he complained.

The terms homogenic love, contrasexuality, homerotism, similisexualism, uranism, and others have been used in English…The terms sexual inversion, intersexuality, transsexuality, the third sex, psychosexual hermaphroditism, and others have been applied not merely to designate the nature of the partner involved in the sexual relation, but to emphasize the general opinion that individuals engaging in homosexual activity are neither male nor female, but persons of mixed sex. These latter terms are, however, most unfortunate, for they provide an interpretation in anticipation of any sufficient demonstration of the fact; and consequently they prejudice investigations of the nature and origins of homosexual activity.  

But, “[i]f the term is restricted as it should be, the homosexuality or heterosexuality of any activity becomes apparent by determining the sexes of the two individuals involved in the relationship.” The Kinsey Reports argued for a more “objective,” scientifically measurable understanding of human sexuality, one that took in its many differences and diversities that more reflected the training of a zoologist rather than a psychiatrist.

The Kinsey Reports reorganized the basic assumptions about sexual abnormality and normality, but not the way that he had intended. For one thing, the logic of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male presented “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” in easily definable and clearly defined terms—that is, as unalterable and self-evident biological facts of sexual relations between cisgender males and females.

By doing so, he also provided strong evidence for the presence of a considerable percentage of people who had engaged in activities against which a virtually universal consensus of medical and legal professionals, not to mention much of popular culture, stood. Although this behavior (and the resulting outrage) was certainly not confined to same-sex behavior—widespread evidence of fornication, adultery, and especially masturbation elicited similarly indignant howls—homosexuality emerged as the most significant, identifiable subjectivity to so dramatically emerge from the Kinsey Reports. Though perhaps unintentionally, Kinsey provided the kind of positivist evidence for what Eve Sedgwick referred to as a “minoritizing” view of homosexuality, one that would have significant economic and political implications. The link between the statistic, the public stereotype, and the personal sensibilities of participants in gay life merged into being as a subject with a new kind of social, cultural, and even political potential. Kinsey’s statistical model, however legitimately flawed or unrepresentative, provided evidence for a scientifically measurable and statistically significant demographic. Using a statistical method and a scale of measurement, Kinsey’s statistics reframed sexual

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143 As if referring to Kinsey, Sedgwick calls attention to what Foucault refers to as the “entomologization” of “sexological categories such as zoophiles zooerasts, auto-monoexualists, and gynecomasts, as typifying the new sexual taxonomies...True as his notation is, it suggests without beginning to answer the further question: why the category of ‘the masturbator,’ to choose only one example, should by now have entirely lost its diacritical potential for specifying a particular kind of person, and identity, at the same time as it continues to be true—becomes increasingly true—that, for a crucial strain of Western discourse, in Foucault’s words ‘the homosexual was now a species.’ So, as a result, is the heterosexual, and between these species the world has come to be more divided. Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 9.
difference on a positivist, demographic basis—rejecting the moralism underlying
contemporary psychopathology and providing considerable ammunition for those few
who had dared to criticize this moral consensus in public or defy it privately.

Although his book argues against the ideas of identity, this behavioral model
reified the dichotomy between “homosexual” and “heterosexual” identity based on other
axes, especially those of legal permissibility and social acceptability. What had counted
for Kinsey was simply the physiological behavior, the scale, and the larger set of statistics
into which it could be classified. The subjective identification with or against a specific
term could vary so widely—especially in an era in which sexuality was little understood,
seldom discussed (certainly in print), and widely speculated on—that using the language
of identity might distort his findings. Kinsey used an ambiguous example to make his
point: “mouth-genital contacts between males and females are certainly heterosexual,
even though some persons may think of them as homosexual.” However, “the
homosexuality of certain relationships between individuals of the same sex may be
denied by some persons, because the situation does not fulfill other criteria that they think
should be attached to the definition. Mutual masturbation between two males might be
dismissed…as not homosexual, because oral or anal relations or particular levels of
psychic response are not required.”

Trained as a zoologist, Kinsey had little patience
for the ambiguous and contradictory ways people felt when identifying themselves with a
stigmatized, illicit culture. As Joanne Meyerowitz states, “when Kinsey worked with gall
wasps, he had classified them however he chose without the wasps’ objecting.” But
“[w]hen he worked with human subjects[,]…he learned that they talked back: they
engaged with the scientific discourse and sometimes tried to change it.”

Regardless of Kinsey’s subtleties, most readers simply accepted the polarity of homosexual and heterosexual behavior as evidence of queer identities—well-known social fixtures of vernacular culture like the “sissy,” “pansy,” and, less often, “tomboy” that could be retrofitted, supplanted, and to some extent homogenized within the scientific vocabulary of sexuality. Kinsey completely resisted the idea of identity—instead preferring seven-point spectrum\textsuperscript{145}—stating, “It would encourage clearer thinking on these matters if persons were not characterized as heterosexual or homosexual, but as individuals who have had certain amounts of heterosexual experience and certain amounts of homosexual experience.”\textsuperscript{146} Or, as he more succinctly and famously stated, “The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats.”\textsuperscript{147} In distinguishing between behavior as a “natural” fact and its interpretation as a social or cultural fact, Kinsey also anticipated the sociological understanding of homosexuality and constructed an understanding of identity through its manifestation in social patterns. Ultimately, by showing the relative frequency, and therefore “naturalness” of behaviors and acts considered both infrequent and “unnatural” aberrations, Kinsey completely upended assumptions about sexual “normality” and the actual sexual lives of people living in the U.S.—though perhaps not in the ways he had anticipated.

Kinsey’s conclusions triggered a deluge of ink on the subject. An alternative crosscurrent to the hegemonic view of homosexual pathology, the controversy spurred an endless conversation. As the following sections argue, the Kinsey Reports created an enormous, statistically measurable increase in printed and publicly available information about homosexuality while simultaneously calling into question the standardization of

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., “Figure 161. Heterosexual-homosexual rating scale,” 638.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 617.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 639.
married, heterosexual sex and as the only legally and socially acceptable form of
sexuality. Though Kinsey’s findings were immediately criticized and provoked a
reactionary war of words defending pathological definitions of sexual “deviance,” he had
also created inroads for a scientifically based refutation. A volley of public rebukes from
the medical establishment and Kinsey’s defenders helped democratize a debate
previously cloistered in clinics and elite universities by placing it squarely in the
figurative marketplace of ideas—or the literal marketplace of the publishing industry.

The information boom of the Kinsey Reports suggests a greater degree of increase
in published information on homosexuality than at any point until then, a point visibly
discernible on a yearly survey of the GoogleBooks N-gram. Kinsey and the war of
words he ignited suggest the single most important informational innovation that
prefigured the consolidation of the post-war closet economy. More than any other source
of knowledge in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the stream of information defined by
scientific methods and authorities expanded knowledge that affirmed both a gay
subjectivity and, indirectly, any network or social world with the capacity to draw these
newly aware subjects out of isolation. The discovery by millions of readers of a
demographic basis for a “gay community” inspired or tempted an inestimable number of
participants into the gay world from where Kinsey culled his data. The “homosexualizing
discourse” that Kinsey challenged and to which he contributed held enormous
consequences for ordinary readers, who increasingly interpreted and recreated themselves
according to the terms introduced by experts. Although this stream of information
indirectly led to the gay social world of the emerging closet economy, it still presented

148 See Appendix A, Figures 8-12.
visions of gay life through the fuzziness of statistics or clinical observations rather than rich descriptions of life inside the bars and other businesses in the closet economy.

Kinsey’s research had a seismic effect in both expert opinion and popular culture, revealing in the damning consensus deep fault lines that opened up more debate on whether hostility toward homosexuality was truly reasonable. Increasingly, this debate pitted a sociological explanation suggested by Kinsey against the individual explanations of aberrant psychopathology posited by an array of psychiatrists and psychological experts.

For the queer and the curious readers, the post-Kinsey boom in information about homosexuality must have been dizzying in its tantalizing implications, and Kinsey was especially indicative of this. Kinsey confirmed that there were a sizable number of like-minded people who could provide one another satisfying sexual and emotional partnerships, not to mention social networks and cultural sensibilities that affirmed homosexuality and gender transgression. However, there was little specific information about where such a collective life could be found or created. This meant that, for the uninitiated—those outside the purview of the urban core of gay social life—the answers to the tantalizing questions raised by Kinsey could lead to baffling and sometimes fruitless journeys through libraries and bookstores could just as easily lead to a psychotherapist as to a gay bar.

Kinsey’s informants, many of whom were drawn directly from the gay social world of bars and street hustling, demonstrated both the unexpected frequency of homosexuality as well as the ways in which the frequency of behavior resulted directly from the erotic and expressive opportunities accrued to a distinctly gay way of living. As
a result, many gay readers often found their key to the doors of the gay social worlds of New York City, Chicago, or San Francisco in the pages of the Kinsey Reports.

Kinsey justified his non-moralistic approach to sexuality by appeal to the scientific method, which, he claimed, psychologists and psychoanalysts abandoned in treating their homosexual patients. “Each person who reads this report will want to make interpretations in accordance with his understanding of moral values and social significances; but that is not part of the scientific method, and, indeed, scientists have no special capacities for making such claims,” he claimed.149 Interested more in the frequency of occurrence of, rather than the than the etiological motivations for homosexuality, Kinsey presented an almost exhaustive list of tables arranged according to race, education level, rural/urban populations, marital status, and types of practices, partners, or “sexual outlets.” Although Kinsey interviewed over 12,000 subjects, he insisted that his conclusions were hypothetical, particularly with regard to factory and manual workers, large swaths of the country in the south and west, older unmarried men and previously married men, and African-American men.150 Kinsey’s self-critique of his unrepresentative sample gives a prescient view of the dynamics of gender, age, race, and class visibility that would later tilt toward a portrayal of gay communities as dominated by younger, middle-class, and white men.

New York City played a particularly important role in the collection of Kinsey’s data and the formulation of his alternative theories. He recorded over 2,000 interviews in New York State alone, most of them in New York City. Indeed, of the states surveyed only Indiana, where the Institute for Sexual Research was located, included more

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150Ibid., 6.
interviewees than New York. Although he does not break down his statistics to include New York City versus the rest of the state, his presence in the city, especially the popular gay cruising area around Times Square, is well documented. In the documentary Before Stonewall, Allen Ginsberg—citing the enormous influence of Kinsey—claimed to be a part of Kinsey’s studies along with Herbert Huncke, William Burroughs, and others who would become associated with the Beat movement. The Kinsey reports thus reflected the ways in which gay social life was directly incorporated into the information and knowledge about homosexuality that circulated in the post-war era. In these observations, Kinsey was among the earliest observer to point out the connection between the situation of gay social life in the economic patterns of the large city and the significance of shared culture and sociability—as opposed to individual sexual proclivity—to identity. A long description bears repeating here:

Large cities have taverns, night clubs, restaurants, and baths which may become frequented almost exclusively by persons interested in meeting homosexual friends, or interested in finding opportunities for discussions with others who do not object to the known homosexuality of their companions. In this city group, the development of an elaborate argot gives the sense of belonging which may defend a minority group against the rest of society; but it also intensified a feeling which the group has that it stands apart from the rest of the population. Moreover, it is this city group which exhibits all the affectations, mannerisms, the dress, and the other displays which the rest of the population take to be distinctive of all homosexual persons, even though it is only a small fraction of the males with homosexual histories who ever display such characteristics. None of these city-bred homosexual institutions is known in rural areas, and

151 Ibid., 5.
this may well account for a somewhat lower rate of the homosexual among farm boys. The existence of “institutions” or businesses, the division between gay and straight sociability, the distinctiveness of cultural expression, and a critical mass of participants each represent the basic hallmark of the emerging closet economy. Indeed, Kinsey’s analysis of urban and rural sexuality may very well represent the earliest scientific documentation of what we might call the gay market and the cultural characteristics that made it so vital to the continuing existence of gay sociability and culture. Thus, more than any other so-called expert, Kinsey helped to establish the idea of the “gay lifestyle” as both a demographic phenomenon and a social fact of gay existence.

As one particularly indignant patient declared, “I know a lot of fellows who turned to homosexuality because Kinsey convinced them.”

IV. “Disease or way of life?”. Psychiatrists React to Kinsey

Inspired by largely Kinsey, the information produced by experts deepened the basic contradictions of the closet economy by increasing in the volume of information about homosexuality, information that was supplied and attended by surveillance. The post-Kinsey flood of information totally reorganized the queer or gay economics of attention and induced participation in the bars and businesses of the closet economy, even as it foreshadowed the new risks that gay social life in the 1950s entailed. If information

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153 Ibid., 457.
154 This brief overview of Kinsey’s research omits much, including the importance of the Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, published in 1953, and the major statistical differences between the two regarding homosexuality, a discussion of which I take up in chapter four of this work. That said, more than any other set of published works, Kinsey’s publication of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male in 1948 and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female in 1953 undeniably contributed to, if not outright caused, the increase in public interest about homosexuality (and sexuality in general) and gender non-conformity. The impact was particularly profound on readers who saw in the book a reflection of their own desires and, more importantly, evidence of a potential collective gay life.
155 Bergler, Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?, 46.
about homosexuality invited surveillance and discipline, it also served as a form of
advertisement and eliminated the distance between uninitiated readers and the gay
businesses that formed the urban core of gay social life and culture. Indeed, this was
precisely how information like the Kinsey Reports “homosexualized” gay subjects and
incorporated them into the inchoate markets of the early closet economy.

Psychiatry and psychology epitomized the informational base of the closet
economy, which centered primarily around intangible services like sociability and
cultural expression and the physical goods whose value came from their repurposing or
rebranding by gay consumers. In this economy, the information produced by psychiatry
and psychology represented the most abundantly available “good,” one that was more or
less a public (or at least relatively low cost) good with little ideological competition from
other sources of information aside from intellectual eccentrics like Kinsey. If it was
abstract and indirect, the subjective effects of the post-Kinsey flood of information also
provided new sources of resistance and defiance. Indeed, the very existential terms posed
by the Kinsey Report reframed the question of homosexuality from a handful of isolated
cases to a question that opened up major puzzles for the sexual and gender organization
of society and, more importantly, the kinds of sexual freedoms such a society might
accommodate. A kind of dual movement emerged from Kinsey’s work that, as Harry
Hay’s citation of Kinsey suggests, drew battle lines between an ossified sexual (and
gender) order and one reinforced with a new and potentially massive social group. (And
it was precisely on that basis Marcuse could claim homosexuals on the vanguard of
sexual liberation). Although it would eventually play out in electoral politics, in the late
1940s and early 1950s it played out in the marketplace of ideas—in some form or fashion
between the competing ideas of a benign, gay self forged in relation to other gay sexual partners and friends and, on the other hand, a negative, pathological self implanted on a psychiatrist’s couch.

Although psychiatrists never framed their practice in economic terms, gay people themselves often referred to psychiatry as a scam. Whatever psychiatrists thought of them, the Kinsey Reports provided an important ideological link between the world of bars and streets and the seemingly endless, futile search for a cure. Celebrated psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler dedicated the last decade of his life refuting Kinsey’s “statistical fairy tales based on preconceived prejudices,” fairy tales that inspired gay men, lesbians, and other so-called perverts to abandon the shame and remorse that Bergler identified as the first prerequisite for effective treatment and cure. Instead of seeking a cure, the “typical homosexual” instead turned to what Bergler described as a pathological “way of life,” though one he recognized as having more in common with drug addiction or compulsion than the consumer lifestyles developing in bars, restaurants, and other businesses across the city.

The typical homosexual is perpetually on the prowl; his “cruising” (the homosexual term for seeking two-minute or, at best, short-term partners) is more extensive than that of the heterosexual neurotic who specializes in “one-night stands.” According to homosexuals, this proves that they crave variety, and have insatiable sexual appetites. In inner reality, it proves only that homosexuality is a poor and unsatisfying sexual diet. It also proves the existence of a constant masochistic craving for danger; every time a homosexual ‘cruises’ he is running the often

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157 Ibid., 183.
underestimated risk of a beating, an extortion attempt, venereal disease, or jail.\textsuperscript{158}

Kinsey’s study represented a new kind of forbidden fruit, offered from a tree of scientific knowledge, which observed neither good nor evil, at least not as it had been defined vis-à-vis human sexuality, and thus opened up a dangerous path to a “way of life” that foreclosed the confession and penitence of psychiatric treatment. More than a secular religion, the Kinsey Reports’ statistics were 95 Theses nailed to the door of the church of Freud. While the old religion led to the clinic, the new one led to the bar. From an economic perspective, the effects of the Kinsey Report anticipated a shift in consumption patterns for “homosexuals,” who could reprioritize their spending as consumers in an increasingly vibrant gay economy, forsaking their role as consumers of medical services. The title of Bergler’s subsequent book, \textit{1,000 Homosexuals: Conspiracy of Silence, or Curing and Deglamorizing Homosexuals?}, referred to the number of homosexual clients treated by Bergler but more provocatively suggests the number of potential consumers in the closet economy should they defect from medical to leisure markets.

Despite Kinsey’s popularity, the most widely read and published pre-Stonewall authorities on homosexuality were psychologists and psychoanalysts who largely upheld the psychopathological foundations of homosexuality, and even then such information was scarce in bookstores and libraries relative to the 1970s and after. In contrast to Kinsey’s “non-judgmental” view, most of the information about homosexuality was published by a handful of popular psychiatrists. Gay Liberation Front activist Allen Young listed several “Shrink Pigs,” which, he argued, should be placed among “the ranks of the worst war criminals”: Edmund Bergler, Irving Bieber, Albert Ellis, Socarides,

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 19-20.
Lionel Oversey, and Lawrence Hatterer. Of these, only Bergler and Ellis were truly contemporary with Kinsey. But Ellis had largely departed from psychoanalytic orthodoxy in the early 1950s in order to develop a cognitive-behavioral approach, one in which he framed homosexuality as a behavioral problem rather than a distinct personality disorder. Despite his prescription of a behavioral “cure,” Ellis’s comparatively benign statements on homosexuality mean that he became the preferred psychological of the Homophile movement, thanks in no small part to his long association with Edward Sagarin (aka Donald Webster Cory), author of the Homophile bible, *The Homosexual in America*. His articles were reprinted in *ONE*, and, in the early 1960s, he regularly spoke at meetins and events hosted by New York Mattachine. Bergler, however, published within the mainstream of the psychoanalytic movement, representing the more conservative position of the medical establishment and earning the ire of Homophile activists.

In the 1950s, no other author set himself up as such a serious challenger to Kinsey as Bergler. Although most popular psychology authors rejected Kinsey’s statistics or his interpretations of sexual pathology, they had to take Kinsey seriously, even if, as Bergler did, they vehemently disagreed with him. Furthermore, even if he decried the “statistical fairy tale” of the Kinsey Report, discussions of his case studies reveal how many of his patients had turned to him for explanations of behavior described in the Kinsey Reports. Rebutting Kinsey became Bergler’s great project for the final decade of his life, in the process bringing him to greater fame as a popular psychology writer than he had ever achieved as an analyst.

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Kinsey and the entire Kinsey publishing complex built on the public consciousness of psychiatric concepts inculcated during the Second World War through the draft process and the notorious Section 8 discharges. Allan Bérubé’s *Coming Out Under Fire* argues that the military’s introduction of psychiatric diagnoses for sexual pathologies transformed the sexual culture of the U.S., precipitating a “national coming out.” The technical application of psychiatry through the draft procedures of the Selective Service Act and stricter disciplinary restrictions of homosexuality was instrumental in introducing the language of homosexuality to millions of inductees. Incidentally, many of these procedures were developed by Henry Stack Sullivan, a practitioner now widely regarded as living a double life in a romantic relationship with James Inscoe, a man he adopted as his foster son. The fact that dishonorable discharges for homosexuality followed veterans was, in part, the inspiration for the Veterans’ Benevolent Society in New York City, arguably the first “gay rights” organization established on the East Coast.

During and after the war, psychiatry and psychology had provided both national and local politicians and bureaucrats innovative ways and means to satisfy an almost singular obsession with policing the peripheries of heterosexual respectability. Although in favor of transferring the authority of these police duties from the state to medical practice, psychiatrists and psychologists were among the most conservative voices to emerge in Kinsey’s wake. That homosexuality represented a mental pathology was so

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162 Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire*, 249; Edward Sagarin, *Structure and Ideology in an Association of Deviants* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 64-66. To be sure, the four founders of the VBA were, according to Sagarin, honorably discharged, though they advocated for veterans dishonorably discharged for homosexuality and several members of the organization, which folded in 1954, were themselves dishonorably discharged.
unquestioned among psychoanalysts that, according to her biographer, Anna Freud tried to discourage from publication a sympathetic letter sent from her father to the mother of a homosexual assuring her that her son’s attractions were little more than a normal variation.\textsuperscript{163} Most experts—and especially those from the Freudian school—recommended psychotherapy as a cure for homosexuality, although, in some cases, civil commitments of individuals by parents, husbands, and other family members could result in treatments as inhumane as electroshock therapy, a hormonal treatment referred to as “chemical castration,” and lobotomy.\textsuperscript{164}

Just following the Second World War, psychiatry reached its zenith in cultural influence and social authority in the United States, consolidating and shaping behavioral norms in virtually every aspect of public and private life including school, the boardroom, the shop floor, entertainment, and the bedroom. Psychiatry and psychology, perhaps more than any other single feature, shaped the cultural and legal boundaries of the closet economy, first, by creating a socio-sexual taxonomy for “homosexuals,” and secondly, by generating a pathological theory that justified the institutionalization of individuals defined as such and legal attempts to discourage such activity in public and private. As a result, psychology helped to carve out the juridical subject of sodomy, indecent exposure, disorderly conduct, and a host of other Byzantine blue laws as a type of pathological personality fit for institutionalization in a state mental hospital.

Psychiatric authority was still by no means complete. The mental hospital continued to compete with the penitentiary for institutional control of the queer or gay subject, sharing the same goals if not the same methods as the state.\textsuperscript{165}

By virtue of their role in the wartime and Cold War security state, few other experts or authorities received as much adulation and deference as psychiatrists and psychologists—many of them trained in the psychoanalytic techniques of, or at least familiar with the psychoanalytic vocabulary developed by, Sigmund Freud and his disciples. In part, the prestige of psychoanalytic theory within psychiatry—a distinction that only a very few, highly educated Americans made—was fueled by an influx of psychoanalysts fleeing Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.\textsuperscript{166}

Spurred by the popularity of their writings, the jargon of pop psychology had fully entered the vocabulary of U.S. popular culture and granted anybody with access to a television set or the latest Hitchcock film the credentials of a proper armchair psychologist. Self-help, a growing non-fiction genre that made many psychologists household names, traded in words like “superego,” “fixation,” “complex,” and

\textsuperscript{165} To be sure, many laws against sexual contact between members of the same sex and strict adherence to cissexual gender norms dated from European medieval common law (if not earlier). In the nineteenth century, psychiatry transformed the murderousness of medieval erotic austerity into a modern, “enlightened” rationalization of a pathological or criminological diagnosis and a new set of techniques, ranging from the banal to the brutal, to ferret such individuals out and discipline them accordingly. This broad sweep of history appears in a number of places, but the most historically specific descriptions, aside from Foucault’s three-volume \textit{History of Sexuality}, can be found in David F. Greenberg, \textit{The Construction of Homosexuality} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 301-433. See also Regina Kunzel, \textit{Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality} (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 9-11.

National socialists labeled psychoanalysis a “Jewish science” and, of course, many of its most famous practitioners and its founder were Jews who fled from or suffered and perished under Nazi persecution. To be sure, Eli Zaretsky argues that in the U.S. the relationship between psychiatry and psychology, as institutions, and psychoanalysis, as a particular school or practice, was characterized by “marginality and absorption.” The skepticism and resistance of psychoanalysis, while important, is more or less immaterial to the present discussion because of the consensus of the pathological theory among virtually all psychiatrists and psychologists whether they were trained in psychoanalysis or not. See Zaretsky, \textit{Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis}, 66-67.
“compulsion”—not to mention “homosexual” and, at least following Christine Jorgensen’s 1952 front page spread in the Daily News, “transsexual.” Among many ordinary Americans, the sexual vocabulary of psychology became a fixture of gossip and speculation as well as an endless source of amusement and anxiety.

In no other place in the country was psychiatry’s cultural authority crystallized as dramatically as in New York, where psychoanalysis reigned as the dominant practice after the 1920s. Eli Zaretsky writes that “the most extensive engagement between psychoanalysis and modern culture took place in New York. Uniquely cosmopolitan due to its location, its number and variety of immigrants, and its role as the center for the new, globally organized culture industries—such as publishing, and film distribution—New York was also the capital of Black America, the mother lode of “primitive” aesthetics, sexuality, and music. Housing the commingled intelligentsias of Greenwich Village and the Harlem Renaissance, it boasted more analysts than any other city in the world. Freudianism was, and would remain central to its identity.

Not coincidentally, Harlem and Greenwich Village also occupied the epicenters of gay commercial life in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s.

Psychiatry was more than a feature of the national imaginary; its practitioners and techniques were embedded in the literal geography of New York City. In the post-war era, two of the most famous propagandists of psychoanalytic theories of homosexuality maintained offices in the geographic heart of the New York City’s gay world: Frederic Wertham and Edmund Bergler. As the previous chapter notes, Frederick Wertham

maintained a psychiatric program that served as a kind of deferred adjudication for “juvenile delinquents” and other offenders arrested for cruising for or engaging in public sex. Wertham ran his operations out of a basement in St. Phillip’s Church in Harlem and the Quaker Emergency Readjustment Center on East 57th Street near the Queensboro Bridge.  

Wertham was hired by the Society of Friends to replace George W. Henry, author of *Sex Variants*, one of the few books published by an American author in the subject of homosexuality in the pre-war era. According to Sagarin, Henry took the bulk of the staff and board members of the Quaker Emergency Services and formed the Henry W. George Foundation, which operated under George’s leadership until his death in 1964. “Thus,” according to Edward Sagarin’s doctoral thesis, “New York City had the unique distinction of two social agencies handling homosexuals in trouble, at a time when no other city in the country had even one.”  

Bergler, one of the few authors whose published output on homosexuality exceeded that of Wertham and George, had treated at least over a thousand homosexuals in his Upper West Side home office in the 1940s and 1950s. For the cruisers under the Third Avenue El and in Harlem near Wertham’s clinics, or on the west side of Central Park near Bergler’s practice, psychiatric clinics intersected with and disciplined the criminalized and stigmatized territory of bars and cruising spots that constituted the gay social world.

A former assistant director at Freud’s Vienna clinic, Bergler achieved status as an authority on the subject of homosexuality unmatched among psychologists except,

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170 Sagarin, qtd. 62, 59-63.

perhaps, by Albert Ellis, the authority most frequently on hand at Homophile meetings and conferences,\textsuperscript{172} and Wertham, who achieved brief fame for creating a minor panic over the latent homosexuality and sadomasochism in \textit{Batman} and \textit{Wonder Woman}.\textsuperscript{173}

Analyzed by Wilhelm Reich and Helene Deutsch, Bergler immigrated to France following the Nazi purges before settling in New York City in 1940. Bergler briefly taught a course on homosexuality at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute before retiring from academia in 1943, after which he maintained a practice at 251 Central Park West and published regularly on topics ranging from homosexuality, masochism, and marriage to writer’s block (a term he coined) and gambling. Although Bergler is more or less neglected today, a number of his works were bestsellers in the burgeoning self-help genre. Tapping into the Cold War zeitgeist of moral panic, Bergler’s books on homosexuality defined the medical consensus of the time. He pled for tolerance and sympathy from the general public and a therapeutic cure for those who, in Bergler’s view, were undoubtedly suffering from a neurosis. (Given the scale of legal and extralegal persecution in the fifties, Bergler’s views were positively humanitarian.)

Although Bergler had written on other topics, his writings on homosexuality reached a level of urgency befitting a genuine social crisis in the 1950s, largely in reaction to Alfred Kinsey. Bergler had occasionally written on homosexuality, but his


first book devoted solely to the topic appeared in 1951 under the ambiguous (and
dubious) title, *Neurotic and Counterfeit Sex*, a book written in somewhat obtuse
psychoanalytic argot. His two subsequent books on homosexuality, however, were
written in more popular language. Best-sellers, they were essentially naked attacks on
Kinsey and his research team at the University of Indiana who, to the chagrin of
psychiatrists and psychologists throughout the country, represented the most widely read
authority on sexuality (homo- or heterosexuality) in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Some
of Bergler’s unhinged titles included *Kinsey’s Myth of Female Sexuality: The Medical
Facts*, co-authored with gynecologist William Kroger in 1954, was followed by the more
nakedly explicit *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?* in 1956, the unoriginal but tried
and true *Counterfeit Sex* in 1958, and *One Thousand One Homosexuals: A Conspiracy of
Silence* in 1959.174 The *Time* magazine review of *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of
Life?* led: “What is homosexuality? Is it curable? Some recent misleading propaganda
alleges that homosexuality is an incurable, hereditary condition, and that the homosexual
way of life is therefore ‘normal’ for an unspecified proportion of the population. This
view has had an assist from Kinsey statistics on the frequency of homosexual acts in
youth.”175 If Bergler hated the Kinsey Reports, they nonetheless provided him not only a
convenient straw man but a public platform from which to attack them.

In *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?*, Bergler lamented that “perversion
has become more widespread through the artificial recruits as a result of the
dissemination of misleading statistics” and “the existence of information previously

174 Reppen, 1-19.
175 “Medicine: Curable Disease?,” *Time Magazine* (December 10, 1956),
http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,808760,00.html.
suppressed. This information, Bergler’s book argued, was contributing to a pernicious myth that homosexuality represented a “way of life”—that is, that individuals could carve out a homosexual existence in the social and economic worlds of work, play, and all the other aspects of daily life in the United States. The dissemination of Kinsey’s statistics was directly fueling the growth of a homosexual “way of life,” evidenced, no doubt in the sessions of his patients who frequented the Upper West Side men’s bars or who cruised Central Park West a stone’s throw from Bergler’s office. Although he does not say it in such exact language, he may well have complained about participation in the inchoate markets of gay bars and other gathering spots whose persistence defied and puzzled both the police and the good counsel of Bergler and his colleagues.

Ultimately, Bergler played an important if indirect role in the complex history of markets in the emerging closet economy. This inchoate market of bars, bookstores, and bathhouses hardly resembled an organized market when Bergler was at the height of his fame and influence. Indeed, Bergler’s “cure” required his patients to abstain from frequenting such businesses altogether. The publication of “information previously suppressed” made Bergler’s job more difficult both because it offered an alternative theory of identity—one that relied not on etiology but behavior—as well as because it offered the possibility of a community. Additionally, Bergler’s practice was located in Manhattan along with the densest concentration of gay bars and gathering spots between the Mississippi River and the Atlantic Ocean. Although it would be unfair to paint Bergler (or any other practitioner) as a cynical profiteer, it takes little intuition to draw the conclusion that medical services represented a lucrative market of eager consumers that competed directly with the bars and other businesses that essentially normalized the...

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176 Bergler, Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?, 7.
very sexual desires Bergler and his ilk were trying to cure. The “information previously suppressed” referred, of course, to the Kinsey reports of 1948 and 1953. Bergler feared that the shift in the popular perception of homosexuality from etiology to “way of life” would undermine attempts to treat and cure homosexuality, a testament to the centrality of the gay economy to gay identity and community.

Bergler, like the larger stream of expert information on homosexuality, drew much more heavily from and therefore likely impacted men more than women, simply because of the gendered focus of the first Kinsey Report and because *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* listed a much lower percentage of women—only six percent—who could be identified as exclusively homosexual. Kinsey’s findings may well have reflected the social conditions of a sub-culture whose emergence largely occurred within the homosocial public sphere of working-class masculinity, as well as the stereotype of “failed” masculinity signaled by the “pansy” and the “sissy.” “Tomboys,” by contrast, were largely viewed as unthreatening, although as Michelle Ann Abate argues, the linkage of tomboys and adult homosexuality in the Cold War era led to the “taming” or outright erasure of the tomboy in popular culture during the time when the Kinsey Reports were published. Furthermore, as Chapter 5 of this dissertation documents, lesbians occupied less cultural and actual space within the gay world and faced a number of institutional constraints—notably prohibitions against “unescorted” women—that never seriously threatened male sociability, gay or otherwise. In any case, the fact that

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177 This is true not only of Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, but of most histories of gay sociability and especially their consolidation as part of a larger culture in which homosocial, working-class cultures were transformed by the commercialization of leisure in the urban industrial economies of Europe and North America.

Sexual Behavior in the Human Female contains significantly less information on lesbianism and virtually nothing on lesbian culture suggests both the extent to which public (or semi-public) sociability shaped the erotic and expressive possibilities of gay life in the post-war era.

A perfect foil for Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis,” Bergler naively suggested than an education campaign would stunt the growth of the “lifestyle.” But, as information about homosexuality spread in the 1950s, much of it began to focus on the expansion of gay neighborhoods and the visibility of gay life in urban cities, particularly in New York City. The “way of life” from which Bergler had wanted to cure so many homosexuals seemed to feed off the hysteria and contempt of the post-war publishing frenzy. Both of these processes—informational and geographic expansion—fueled one another until a critical (and political) mass demanded and won the decriminalization of gay markets and, with more limited success, the de-stigmatization of queer identities and legal and civil rights based on those identities.

That Kinsey drew directly on the gay geography of New York City for his informants also reveals the circuitous path of information out of gay neighborhoods and into the national public, leading right back into the economic and geographic core whose inhabitants had prompted Kinsey’s shocking conclusions. The frank and mostly non-judgmental assessments of sexual variety in the Kinsey Reports provoked wide discussion of topics that had formerly been taboo, causing an outpouring of published material and public debates either attacking or praising Kinsey for everything from his indiscreet subject matter to his unorthodox methodology.179 Edmund Bergler argued that

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179 With perhaps the exception of Donald Webster Cory, Kinsey’s name is one of the most frequently cited in Homophile publications. Kinsey’s name became a popular culture phenomenon after the publication of
the Kinsey Reports had effectively acted as recruitment, stating that “Kinsey may be held responsible for the creation of a new category of young homosexuals: the ‘statistically induced’ type.” Indeed, Kinsey’s demographic conclusions certainly helped to establish the idea of the “gay lifestyle” as a social (and by extension economic) alternative to the pathological theories of homosexuality dominant in the 1940s and 1950s. Although Kinsey never stated his analysis in specific economic terms, the gay men he identified in large cities were identifiable precisely because as consumers they shared a world within the clandestine markets of gay bars and other businesses.

Even more importantly, unlike the institutionalized patients who informed Bergler’s studies, Kinsey’s research subjects were out in the street, more often than not participating in the social world of the closet economy. Kinsey differed from Bergler and the vast majority of psychiatrists not only with regard to the interpretive criteria of homosexual psychopathology, but because the form of his research took him into the real world of social interaction and shared meaning. Bergler, by contrast, drew solely on the “sick” and penitent patients who came to his office for a cure for the “madness” that Kinsey’s research debunked. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari state in _The Anti-Oedipus_, “A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world.” My analysis might adapt this phrase to assert that a queer out for a walk is a better subject for the history of sexuality than the “homosexual” lying on the couch. In response to the criticism that he drew his subjects disproportionately from unsavory and unrespectable

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*Sexual Behavior in the Human Name*, and his study became particularly associated with homosexuality. Incidentally, much of his evidence was culled from gay men hustling around Times Square. See James H. Jones, _Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life_, 564-699, 701-737. 

180 Bergler, _Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?_, 174.
corners of the U.S., Kinsey’s conclusions were at least drawn from the interaction with the “outside world” rather than the sequestered and solitary confrontation of the self in the funhouse reflections of psychiatric discourse.

V. Conclusion: The Kinsey Effect and the McCarthy Effect: Cold War Politics and Anti-Gay Stigma

The Kinsey Reports played a near foundational role in the early closet economy. The information contained within them provided the two basic ingredients for the making of a more or less new gay market: the idea of a widely known population with similar tastes and proclivities, as well as a rough guide to the places in which such a population might congregate. Their timing, coincident with the so-called “Lavender Scare,” also ensured a political dynamic shaped by criminalization and stigmatization. Though the information published in the Kinsey Reports certainly helped to shape a gay identity and locate a gay population for a national audience, but they did ultimately so in a politically toxic atmosphere.

An increase in visibility almost certainly meant an increase in surveillance and exposure to public shame and embarrassment. As John D’Emilio argues, the Kinsey Reports ultimately “had contradictory effects upon attitudes toward homosexuality…At the time, …the information served not to ameliorate hostility toward gay men and women, but to magnify suddenly the proportions of the danger they allegedly posed.”

As Whitney Strub’s recent study of obscenity details, Kinsey’s Sexual Behavior in the Human Female came under attack from Brooklyn Congressman Louis Frank, who asked the U.S. Post Office to censor it at a time when new erotic materials radically challenged federal obscenity statutes. The Post Office declined, since Kinsey’s dense prose, “charts,

181 D’Emilio, 37.
graphs, and data put the book well within the protected class of nonprurient scientific work, notwithstanding its undeniably titillating uses by readers and the press…”

Furthermore, as Kinsey’s biographer James H. Jones suggests, “[i]n the poisonous political atmosphere of the early 1950s, it was inevitable that Kinsey would be smeared with a red brush.” Led by Tennessee Republican Congressman B. Carroll Reece, a congressional committee singled out the Kinsey Reports for weakening the morality of the country through a subversive plot, attacking not only Kinsey but the private foundations and public institutions that funded and sponsored his work. For people who participated in gay life, however, most saw in Kinsey’s statistics seeds for companionship and community, formal political organization, and gay voting blocs—a critical mass that, I would argue, originated in the politically and culturally fertile soil of the gay economy.

Both of the celebrated Kinsey studies were bestsellers, more so than any other books on the subject (sexuality or homosexuality) before or during the same period. Publisher’s Weekly listed Sexual Behavior in the Human Male as the fourth best-selling nonfiction title in 1948, and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female as the third best-selling nonfiction title in 1953. The books also had a profound impact on publishing in the United States, the effect of which played directly into the increased attention garnered by the gay social world and the people who frequented it. Exerting an influence on popular culture unrivaled by almost any other scientific expert at the time except perhaps

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184 Ibid., 722-724.
the makers of the atom bomb, he also captured an ever-larger market share of readers, vaulting him from the rural backwater of Bloomington, Indiana and into American mass culture. Stand-up comedians, popular writers, and composers made hay from the Kinsey Reports throughout the late forties and early fifties, though they typically reduced to a naughty caricature the complex graphs, charts, and jargon of sex and sexuality cobbled together from Kinsey’s zoological studies and his psychology-trained co-author, Wardell Pomeroy. Kinsey’s name became an innuendo—almost a brand—for sex in U.S. popular culture. As Susan Stryker’s *Queer Pulp* documents, the Kinsey Report inspired a flood of pulp fiction and non-fiction paperbacks that bore the zoologist’s name for decades.\footnote{Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 10-14.}

The Kinsey Reports also inspired hundreds (if not thousands) of psychologists, pastors, politicians, and moralists to offer support, rebuttal, or qualifications to Kinsey’s findings. In May 1948, less than six months after the book’s first publication, Signet issued a special paperback anthology of reactions from psychiatrists, social scientists, legal experts, physicians, as well as the preeminent Erich Fromm who, along with Harry Stack Sullivan, represented the most important neo-Freudian public intellectuals in the United States. Fromm wrote, “the Kinsey Report with its wealth of data on sexual behavior constitutes an invaluable source of information for the student of social psychology and particularly of character.”\footnote{Eric Fromm, 51, “Sex and Character: the Kinsey Report Viewed from the Standpoint of Psychoanalysis,” in Donald Porter Geddes and Enid Curie, eds., *About the Kinsey Report: Observations by 11 Experts On “Sexual Behavior in the Human Male”* (New York: Signet, 1948). At the time, though, Fromm’s was a minority view. The mere mention of Kinsey’s name could provoke either hysterical laughter or simply hysteria from a post-war popular culture besotted with the scandal and conspiracy that hyper-conformism seemed to breed.

Nearly every register of information in the 1950s records this increase, though perhaps none so dramatically as the digital reorganization of the archive through databases like Googlebooks and ProQuest. Graphs of information culled from the ProQuest *New York Times* database and the Googlebooks Ngram, which appear in the first three appendices to this dissertation, attest to the rising frequency of homosexuality and related terms over the course of the twentieth century. The gradual and then sharp post-war increase in these terms corresponds roughly to information printed both in the enormous database of books and publications digitized by Googlebooks. The numerical interpretations that this new information technology allows suggest a positive correlation to the Kinsey reports, although that view is obviously complicated by the many other people, ideas, and occurrences that leave behind a trace in these published works. A more limited search (not to mention manual calculation) of the *New York Times*, at the center of the largest media market in the world and the one that arguably provided Kinsey a conduit to that market, reveals a more immediate picture of many of Kinsey’s research subjects and the larger world they inhabited.

A ProQuest search of the *New York Times* for the terms *homosexual* and *lesbian* reveals the second highest number of hits for those terms in 1948, at 16 and nine, respectively. Although the number of hits was higher in 1947, the number of hits for *homosexual* never fell below the threshold of 1948 for the remainder of the century. The term *bisexual* hits an all time high of just three, but none of those stories relate to the Kinsey Reports. The term *lesbian* actually decreases from 13 in 1952 to nine in 1953, the year *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was published. The term *bisexual* drops to
zero, although the term *homosexual* increases from 38 to 43. This clearly suggests that the word *homosexual* was more popular than *lesbian* to refer to women, or perhaps the revelations in the second volume were less shocking than statistics about female masturbation or premarital sex. The Ngram Viewer is more telling, with a visible spike in the frequency of the term *homosexual* in 1948 and a more modest incline from 1952 to 1953.

The digitization of information in the past two decades has revolutionized the empirical examination of the past. Most recently and prominently, technicians at Google created an n-gram calculator that uses algorithms derived from probability theory and computational linguistics in order to track the frequency of characters, words, and phrases as a percentage of its massive Googlebooks archive, the largest of its kind. In addition to Google’s sophisticated metadata tools, complete databases like ProQuest *New York Times* collection, allow for the mining and calculation of information through the coordination of simple Boolean searches.

In the initial years following the publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, information about homosexuality and, to a lesser extent transsexuality, grew in frequency both in the published material represented by the Google Books archive as well as the *New York Times*. The picture that emerges from these two digitized archives is fairly telling. From 1940 to the present, each decade yields more and more information from using the key terms for gay identities, especially the keywords (and inflections) of

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188 See Appendix A (Raw Data).
189 Barring some unforeseen event, this technological revolution will likely advance as more information is digitized, and as agents like Google, ProQuest, and other metadata entities expand their technological capabilities. Arguably the biggest danger in analyzing metadata right now is not technological and methodological, but arguably political and ethical. My study began well before the revelations by Edward Snowden and Glenn Greenwald that metadata have been used for unconstitutional purposes by the National Security Agency, marking the chilling possibility that “some unforeseen event” may be more easily identifiable than not.
homosexual, lesbian, transsexual, transvestite, and bisexual. The New York Times ProQuest database, which covers a considerably smaller archive than Googlebooks, documents even more dramatic inclines, evidence of the ways in which the dominant paper of record for New York City covered more and more news about the topic as homosexuality, gender transgression, and gay life increasingly represented local stories. In addition to the purely quantitative increase, deeper investigations—especially of the ProQuest archive—reveal a qualitative shift, as well.\textsuperscript{190} The few hits from the early 1940s typically covered criminal cases and wartime and Cold War era purges from the military and federal employment rolls. But, by the 1950s, search results reveal a greater proportion of reviews of books and advertisements for books relative to actual news stories, evidence of the increase in published information about homosexuality and evidence for a growing market of readers on the subject. By the late 1950s and 1960s, search hits increasingly return news features and front page articles about gay life in New York City itself, a suggestion that the news beat on homosexuality was moving from the macrocultural meanings of homosexuality to the sub-cultural, microsocial workings of gay life in what was arguably the most densely populated and visible urban gay social world in the Western hemisphere.

The picture that emerges from the New York Times and the Google Ngram Viewer are like Monet’s paintings of Westminster Palace, similar forms that shift in the contrasting shade and light of variously assembled cultural terms. As distorted and distant representations of the gay social world and its participants, they can only provide us the perspective of the uninitiated. But in order to understand how the uninitiated came to

\textsuperscript{190} Cf. Appendix A. Figures 1-7 represent the New York Times, Figures 8-12 represent the Googlebooks Ngram.
discover the gay social world and their own subjectivity, such information provides an
important link between the isolation that so many gay subjects recorded and the
community that allowed them to read back on their lack of information a primordial and
foundational sense of repression.

But the knowledge that emerges in Kinsey, Bergler, and the entire informational
explosion of the Kinsey publishing complex was hardly reflective of the complex ideas
that circulated within the gay world itself. For all of the wind blown by Bergler and his
intellectual cohort in defense of the old theories and terms of psychopathology,
“homosexuals,” “transsexuals,” and those linked by the growing sexual criminalization
and stigmatization of the post-war era rarely disclosed their identities, let alone on their
own behalf. Like the closet economy of bars and other businesses over which they had
little control and virtually no ownership, participants of the early closet economy were,
with a few exceptions, outsiders in and incidental to the discourse that shone the klieg
lights of mass culture into their lives. As a result, the distorted picture of the era changes
radically with the addition, subtraction, and comparison of the different signifiers for
homosexuality, gender non-conformity, and gay social life. These perspectives seemed to
fall on a spectrum between the hateful invective and mockery of popular culture or the
ambiguously phrased, occasionally sympathetic, but always concerned euphemisms
invoked by experts and authorities. These linguistic pictures ultimately reveal how
contemporary queer identities became routinized and reified in what were essentially the
intellectual markets comprised of the Times’ readership of the New York Times and the
buyers of books scanned by the Googlebooks database.
Like Monet’s Houses of Parliament, the technique obscures the minutiae like the follies and embellishments of Westminster Palace obscured by Monet’s smudges. The Ngram Viewer and the ProQuest database rarely reveal the specific names of bars, particularly if they evaded prosecution, nor do they show the inner-workings of gay culture or sociability, except as they happened to be captured in stories about urban blight and crime. The data suggests a narrative in which information about the psychology and etiology of homosexuality and gender non-conformity shifted to the sociological information about gay life itself and the economic and political potential of Kinsey’s highly contested demographic assertions. The history of publication in the post-war period suggests the extent to which “mainstream” or straight information shaped, disciplined, and incorporated the sub-cultural elements of gay life into post-war society. More importantly, such information inevitably drew curious and queer readers from the “mainstream” into the gay world, reshaping gay subjectivity on a radically new collective basis.

In the long term, the *New York Times*’ coverage of homosexuality and gender non-conformity follows the emergence and acceleration of the gay political movement closely. Transitioning from book reviews, discussions of sodomy law reform, and the rationale for Cold War era persecutions in the immediate post-war years, the *Times*’ coverage moves from the abstractions of “homosexuality” (and to a lesser extent gender transgression) to a more literal map of a newly visible social phenomenon—the gay neighborhood—that affected everything in New York City from film, theater, literature, and fashion. In the later 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, local interest stories—often focused on the Village—often focused on the territorial battles that pitted the gay world against
police and urban reformers as well as the politicization of the neighborhood that became a haven for gay life in a period otherwise marked by intense persecution. The shapes ultimately reveal the an expanding and consolidating gay economy, outlined against the discourse that cast light onto the images of a formerly shadowy demimonde, initially buttressing and but ultimately anticipating the destruction of the double life at the center of closet economy.

A decade-by-decade model of the information published in the twentieth century suggests a steady increase in all the terms for identities most commonly associated with the gay world. Although inconsistent for the first four decades of the twentieth century, the late forties and early fifties, which coincided with the publication of the Kinsey Reports, suggest an informational threshold after which published information on homosexuality and gay life increased yearly, sometimes exponentially so.
The smoother curve revealed in a year-by-year survey suggests an even more complex picture. The two names most commonly associated with the increase in information about homosexuality, gender non-conformity, and gay life in the late 1940s and early 1950s are Alfred Kinsey and Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, whose baseless accusations and unwitting employment of Roy Cohn, a closeted homosexual, led to a gay panic unprecedented in scope and national scale. Examining the uptick in information during the years in which these actors published books or made the news—1948 and 1953 for the Kinsey Reports, and 1950 to 1954 for the period of McCarthy’s meteoric rise and equally rapid fall—demonstrates the importance of Cold War sensationalism in driving the news cycle, even for the staid *Times*. More importantly, it demonstrates how the cultural taboo on homosexuality and gender non-conformity was like the invisible ignition of what can only be described as an explosion of information about gay life after the 1950s.
McCarthy’s influence on the increase in information seems, at first, inadvertent—a side-show to his relentless hunt to weed out communists, would-be communists, and fellow travelers from public life and government employment. McCarthy began his career by making baseless and inconsistent accusations about the number of suspected communists in federal employment at a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1950. More than anyone else, McCarthy conflated communism and homosexuality, presenting both as an equal threat and suggesting that evidence of one implicated evidence of the other.  

As McCarthy’s star rose following the sensational reaction to these revelations in the press, McCarthy wielded unusual power for a freshman senator and moved to the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations, where he chaired highly publicized and sometimes televised hearings in which words like “fairy,” a “close relation to a pixie,” were heard by U.S. viewers for the first time.  

A cross search of “mccarthy” and “homosexual” reveals six articles between 1948 and 1955 while a cross search of “kinsey” and “homosexual” reveals only two articles from the same period. The comparison is revealing: homosexuality was much more connected to the scandals that gripped a paranoid journalism culture than the growing skepticism of expert claims about the pathology of sexuality. The expansion of information related to homosexuality, transsexuality, and gay life hardly occurred in a neutral context. Indeed, it seemed to fuel a frightening medical obsession within a political-military-psychiatric-industrial complex.  

Thus, the Kinsey Reports, on the one hand, and the McCarthy hearings, on the other, represent two informational streams about homosexuality, the first an ameliorative strain of information about homosexuality and gender non-conformity, and the second a

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192 *Point of Order*, directed by Emile de Antonio (1964; New York: New Yorker Films, 2005), DVD.
highly pejorative strain of information about homosexuality, gender non-conformity, and threats to social cohesion and national security. In both cases, the dynamic is one of increased information and greater cultural visibility both about and within gay life: a contradictory set of circumstances that simultaneously induced both disclosure and discretion, ultimately enabling the emergence of blackmail as a fairly reliable and efficient economic system. Indeed, it is impossible to understand how blackmail functioned at an interpersonal level without understanding the broader macrocultural meanings of, and increase in, information about homosexuality, gender transgression, and ultimately gay life in the late forties and early fifties. Perhaps the most telling piece of metadata is that the ProQuest engine reveals 3,142 occurrences of the word homosexual and its inflections, 1,409 (or approximately 45%) of which also contain the word blackmail. If nothing else, the metadata analyses in both the Google Ngram Viewer and ProQuest’s New York Times database suggest an informational threshold in the late forties and early fifties at the instant before the political, cultural, and economic deluge that culminated in Gay Liberation.

Regardless, another statistic demonstrates the deadly precarity of gay social life in the early years of the closet economy. Just as information about homosexuality, transsexuality, and gay life was on the increase in the 1940s, police crackdowns on the community reached an explosive level. According to William Eskridge, 1944 witnessed the first year when arrests of “degenerates” numbered above 1,000 since 1933, a number that would not fall below 1,000 until 1960. That number climbed from 1,072 in 1944 to 2,146 in 1945, 2,473 in 1946, 3,105 in 1947, and peaking at 3,289 in the red-letter year of
1948. Kinsey may have demonstrated the importance of gay life; but if there were any commercial gay life to be had after Kinsey blew its cover, more so than ever it would have to be in an illicit market.


I. Introduction: Stigmatizing Information, Protection Costs, and Illicit Entrepreneurship in the Closet Economy

Now we’ll throw a haymaker: the entire nation is going queer! …All fairy nightclubs and gathering places are illegal, and operate only through payoffs to the authorities. They are organized into a national circuit, controlled by the Mafia which also finds unique opportunity to sell dope in such dives…Aside from the criminality and immorality, such behavior is so contrary to normal standards that persons who engage in it are regarded as outcasts by society generally. The stigma is so sinister that many perverts go great lengths to conceal their tendencies. Thus they are frequently victimized by blackmailers who threaten exposure. Gangs make a regular practice of preying on homos…When we first read Kinsey, we thought he went off half-cocked. He did err, but toward conservatism. The extent of homosexuality is much greater than even psychiatrists can know. It exists in all walks of life.

—Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*¹⁹⁴

Finding complete and reliable evidence for New York City’s gay and lesbian bars and other businesses in the late 1940s and early 1950s is not simply a matter of searching for a needle in a haystack, but locating a haystack in which such a needle might be found. The Kinsey Reports and the Lavender Scare contributed to a minor explosion in publications about homosexuality,¹⁹⁵ though, as the previous chapters argues, such

¹⁹⁵ I exclude transsexuality here primarily because I am addressing the collective and social aspects of queer life. While transsexuality gained cultural traction in the 1950s, especially after Christine Jorgensen’s story became national news in 1952. Gay social and commercial life certainly included radically gender
information rarely yielded much direct information about gay life. Information like the demography of sexual behavior or veiled references to “security threats,” while important in providing the raw materials of identity and community, were less reliable when it came to searching for other gay men and lesbians and the establishments where they gathered.

In the context of the early closet economy, such information could be profoundly stigmatizing for the establishments and individuals named or even implicated. Visibility increased surveillance and the potential for the loss of employment, housing, familial, and other social contacts. Businesses that catered to such individuals faced raids and closure, and their questionable illegality promoted a lucrative side business in shakedowns and extortion. The bars and taverns named in Kinsey’s study had grown up by accident, luck, and the discretionary codes and gestures associated with the closet. The difficulty with which contemporary consumers expressed when locating such establishments suggests the success of bar owners, management, and patrons in insulating their institutions from exposure to police crackdowns.

Unfortunately, however, stigmatizing information proved to be big business for gossip columnists and shady journalists, whose vicious tone and witch-baiting aims more typically reflected McCarthy more than Kinsey. Aside from the Kinsey Reports and a handful of other difficult-to-access scientific publications, information about the non-conforming people, including a number of people who ultimately identified as transsexuals and underwent some kind of process of gender transformation. However, any such community that existed undoubtedly did so as part of larger spaces that tolerated or somehow protected gender as well as non-conformity. Joanne Meyerowitz writes that “mutual tolerance [among transsexuals and other gender/sexual minorities prevailed. From the 1950s on, sporadic border skirmishes between sexual and gender minorities did not preclude friendships and cooperation. To some extent, the overlapping social circles of the sexual subcultures belied the avowed divisions among the various groups. In the 1950s and 1960s the social lives of transsexuals were invisible to the general public…Nonetheless, we have enough evidence to know that people who came to call themselves transsexuals did not necessarily live in isolation from or engage in battles with other sexual minorities. Meyerowitz, How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 185.
collective or social aspects of sexual and gender non-conformity could typically be found only in sources whose authors did not share the interests of gay men and lesbians in concealing their gathering spots and cultural patterns. In some sense, this feature of this period helps to explain the closet as a more or less self-conscious strategy of evasion and concealment— one that could be more easily achieved in the cloister of a bar.

The informational conditions of the early closet economy were more or less the reverse of those that would emerge with Gay Liberation: namely, gay men and lesbians cultivated secrecy and discretion in order to survive while the state and its moral entrepreneurs demanded visibility, accountability, and a penitential cure. The necessity to conceal from authorities and reveal to identify oneself to others presented the central paradox of the early closet. As search costs fell with the informational explosion that followed Kinsey, the price of protecting one’s identity seemed to rise with the stakes of being recognized and punished.

Few forms of information argue for the falling search costs and rising protection costs of the early closet economy like the stigmatizing information revealed in gossip columns and tabloid literature. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the “queer beat” in New York City was virtually dominated by gossip columnists Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, whose lurid moralism barely covered a desperate desire to sell copies. Despite the discretionary codes that concealed gay life from hostile surveillance and repression, New York City’s gay life was so densely and visibly embedded in its vast commercial culture that it was next to impossible to conceal— particularly from local scandal-mongers like Lait and Mortimer. Not only that, but the city’s prominence and its sheer size— in 1950 the city was more than double the size of Chicago, the next largest city— made it a
magnet and a haven for sexual and gender misfits. If the Kinsey Reports had described a national problem, its descriptions about the concentrations of gay men and lesbians in the city’s major cities provided a solution. “The fairy situation is a pronounced problem,” Lait and Mortimer complained of New York in 1952. “[T]he more so because, in addition to our own, we get the pick of the nation’s pansy crop.”

While gay men and lesbians who lived in or close to gay enclaves may have discovered bars and other establishments through a combination of personal contacts and the dumb luck of exploration, the vast majority of people who lived in the suburban and rural areas of the United States faced enormous challenges in accessing information about gay and lesbian social and commercial life or even information that confirmed the existence of that life. Gossip columns and tabloid literature suggest some of the possible linkages between the national identities indirectly suggested by the Kinsey Reports to the stigmatizing information of local reporters like Lait and Mortimer. This local and national media ecology would have supplied both a form of consciousness via identity, as well as a road map that led into gay bars themselves. New York City’s size and physical features made it a good fit for the closet economy, both because of the relative anonymity of the city as well as the larger illicit and informal market patterns that made the city’s businesses difficult to police.

In this context, concrete information about gay bars—names, addresses, and descriptions of businesses—was so significant in part because it was rare. In other cities, such information was typically printed in the case of raids, by which point the bar would have probably shuttered its doors and its clientele decamped for greener pastures. Even so, in a city of nearly eight million with hundreds of thousands of small and large

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196 Lait and Mortimer, U.S.A. Confidential, 313.
businesses, even that information was rarely scandalous enough to print. After all, local police and city, state, and sometimes even federal bureaucrats could shutter a bar for a combination of reasons in addition to serving homosexual patrons, like tolerating prostitution, allowing unescorted women into certain bars, allowing dancing without a cabaret license, violating rules against games and gambling, allowing narcotics, and a host of others. Bar closures were so frequent that editors typically buried such reports deep within the pages of tabloids like the *Post* or the *Daily News*; the more respectable *Times* barely remarked on them at all.

Unlike raids of gay bars in other cities around the country in which local newspapers printed the names of arrestees, patronizing such establishments in New York City carried comparatively fewer risks—at least until one of Lait and Mortimer’s dishy books or columns hit the presses. Moreover, as Lait and Mortimer claimed, gay and lesbian life represented a threat to both public morality and, because its links to organized crime, public safety. They repeatedly claimed that organized crime had saturated New York City’s (and, indeed, the entire nation’s) police precincts, courts, and bureaucracies, successfully shielding or “protecting” a community of “perverts” and turning a mighty profit in the process. Though Lait and Mortimer claimed the interests of the public good in breaking the gay underworld’s code of silence, their real purpose was to sell copies. Lait and Mortimer’s accusations were typically loud and colorful, egging on the police and the local population with each bar and address printed in one of their books or columns.

Though *U.S.A. Confidential* established a national map of the economy, Lait and Mortimer’s interest in gay social life in New York City had emerged several years earlier,
with 1948’s *New York: Confidential!*, the first *Confidential* book in a series of exposés published on the underworlds in Chicago (1950) and Washington, DC (1951). Though *Chicago Confidential* has only a handful of references to gay life and *Washington Confidential* focuses primarily on homosexuals in government employment, both the detailed descriptions in *New York: Confidential!* and its sequel, *U.S.A. Confidential*, provide the only extant map of a queer or gay urban economy before the 1960s, even if it is written from the limited purview of ostensibly straight tabloid journalists.

By the time Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer published *New York: Confidential!* to mixed if wide-eyed reviews in 1948, the two were well known as beat reporters, gossip columnists, tabloid editors, and radio personalities. Jack Lait had been known to the New York City theater world as early as 1914, when his office comedy “Help Wanted” appeared at Maxine Elliott Theater. But the *Confidential* series brought unmatched success. Each of the *Confidential* titles went through multiple printings, and both *New York: Confidential!* and *Chicago Confidential*
Confidential were loosely adapted into Hollywood films. Washington Confidential and U.S.A. Confidential were listed as the third-best non-fiction bestsellers in 1951 and 1952, respectively. U.S.A. Confidential came in only behind only the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and A Man Called Peter, a schmaltzy biography of recently deceased Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall—a suggestion of the era’s appetite for salvation and sensation in more or less equal measure.

An unintended consequence of the emerging “true crime” genre, the book reads like a fence’s guide to the country’s organized and not so organized crime, with juicy tidbits about perverted celebrities and corrupt politicians. Anti-labor, anti-communist, and more or less nativist, its popularity can only be understood in the reactionary context of Cold War culture. It certainly played to the most bigoted and paranoid impulses of the American public, with long and blustery passages trading in racist and xenophobic stereotypes of ambitionless and dangerous African-Americans and immigrants, especially from Puerto Rico, Italy, and countries in East Asia. Its description of lesbians and gay men, or “he-women” and “she-men,” are particularly mean-spirited. At a time when women’s participation in the workforce and higher education was increasing, they claimed that women were being seduced and recruited by lesbian classmates, teachers, and co-workers. The section on New York City provided an unusually detailed description of Manhattan’s gay enclaves, reading more like a Baedeker for sex tourists than a scandalous exposé. They continually linked sexual unorthodoxy with political progressivism. The notion that “the whole nation is going queer” was one of many signs of the country’s corruption. The entrenchment of gay life was to be expected as long as

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New Dealers and Fair Dealers, communist infiltrators and fellow travelers, labor leaders, and organized crime continued to drive the politics, economy, and culture of the United States; indeed, these other signs of corruption aided and abetted the most serious sign of social dissolution and decay.

However hateful, their books and columns also suggest the utility of such printed information about gay life to the uninitiated queer and curious readers at the time. Their descriptions of their seeming ubiquity coupled with the risks gay men and lesbians incurred, reveal the basic conditions endemic to gay life in the late 1940s and 1950s. Their assessments are especially telling of the ways in which an emerging identity and “way of life” consolidated within the context of illicit and informal markets. Ironically, the expansion of gay commercial life seemed to occur not in spite of, but because of the publicity and information generated by the witch hunts, police crackdowns, and the tocsins of Lait, Mortimer, and other public campaigners against the supposed moral, political, and hygiene hazards of homosexuality.

Given the context of the broader discursive explosion of which Lait and Mortimer were a part, their homophobia seems secondary to the general stock of knowledge about homosexuality and gay social life to which they contributed. Indeed, while Kinsey and a handful of others may have begun to question to the hegemonic view of experts, it the most homophobic sources of information in gossip columns and exposes that actually revealed the most concrete information about how to access and initiate oneself into gay life. The Kinsey Reports concealed the names of specific places and his informants to protect the clandestine strategies that shielded gay social networks from police and popular violence. Lait and Mortimer, on the other hand, detailed the cultural codes and
even names of establishments and neighborhoods, providing the uninitiated a map of the gay underworld and an unintentional advertisement for its illicit businesses and pleasures.

Again, from the standpoint of an actual or potential gay or lesbian participant in the early 1950s, the media ecology of the closet economy presents an immediate paradox. In part because of the stigmatizing and diffusive effect of the Cold War publications on homosexuality and gay life, protection and enforcement costs were rising, even as books and other media decreased information and search costs. This curve essentially describes the paradox of the postwar closet economy more generally, as well as the process by which gay collective life became indebted to the economic structure of informal and illicit markets. It was also within this context that markets helped to reconstruct queer or gay subjectivities or, rather, participants in the early closet economy seized on the opportunities of the market—the means of consumption—to create queer or gay identities as alternatives to pathology, criminality, and stigma. Few works represented this ambiguous potential as clearly as Lait and Mortimer’s series of Confidential titles. As the following three chapters argue, collective gay life was essentially founded on the base of the emerging closet economy, marked by two interrelated processes: 1) the geographic concentration and cultural consolidation of illicit markets with implicitly and explicitly marked or “branded” gay clientele, a process that resulted in the earliest recognizably gay markets through accumulated interactions in the cultural and commercial context of bars and a handful of other businesses, and 2) the reconstruction and recuperation of “homosexual” and other psychopathological activities and identities as “gay” identities, a process that occurred as published information and public knowledge (i.e., a marketplace
of ideas) about homosexuality and collective gay life became commonplace after the late 1940s.

The information published by gossip columnists and tabloid reporters emerged exogenously and independently of gay markets themselves, inadvertently fueled the rise of the very institutions and practices that psychiatrists, reformers, and moral entrepreneurs had hoped to stamp out, or at the very least contain. Such information often provided the most immediate and useful source of information about finding gay commercial institutions because it was the only genre that described the commercial geography of gay life and named names of businesses and occasionally even participants. The irony is that despite their homophobia, the bestselling Confidential series nonetheless provides the first and most comprehensive guide to the geography and culture of gay life in the United States.

In many ways, the approach to this chapter pieces together an important part of closet economy’s media ecology by examining it through what Jack Judith Halberstam describes as a “scavenger methodology” which “uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other…” Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 13.

The overall significance of this archive of exogenous information to the gay economy is hard to grapple with and, indeed, many of the conclusions I reach are suggestive rather than definitive based on a reading of information about the pathological and the criminal, the only published and therefore publicly available source of data about gay life. There is simply no way to know how many gay readers encountered these works or how exactly
they put them together, if they did at all, in order to find gay bars and restaurants, or even the neighborhoods where they might find cruising grounds. However, by using Halberstam’s scavenger method, this chapter attempts to understand how a gay (or simply curious) audience might use such information to transform themselves from readers into flaneurs, actively engaged among other subjects and in the local establishments and conditions that made a collective gay life possible. As such, my exploration of gossip and tabloid literature requires two levels of analysis, one that explains the context of stigmatizing information and another that tries to reconstruct the ways in which a gay and lesbian readership might have read this body of information against the grain in order to enter the gay underworld itself.

II. “Confidential” Knowledge and Stigmatizing Information in the Scandalous Discourse of the Closet

To the author’s credit, Lait and Mortimer insisted in their introduction to New York: Confidential! that “[t]his tome has no message. It may be helpful, but never purposeful, though it attempts to offer much sound advice. But who ever followed sound advice? If folks did, there would be no more marriages, divorces, gambling, guzzling, dancing, romancing, chasing, cheating, slickers, suckers, hussies, hangmen or hangover—heaven forbid!” The introduction revealed a cautionary tone as much to preserve the innocent as to induct the guilty. In other words, this book was designed for the kind of people familiar with dirty novels imported from France and hand-printed Tijuana Bibles. “[T]his is not for Aunt Katie from Keokuk,” they warned, “but Uncle Dave the Deacon might find it of value the next time he attends a convention in New
York.” As an expose of organized crime, drug trafficking, gambling, and sexuality, *New York: Confidential!* represented a guidebook meant to appeal to the hard-boiled, cynical masculinity of the postwar world. In some ways, Lait and Mortimer offer a real-world counterpart to the underworlds of vice, illicit sexuality, and violence that saturated the contemporary crime novels of James M. Cain, Chester Himes, and Patricia Highsmith, or the films of Jules Dassin, Otto Preminger, and Billy Wilder.

The matrix of scandal and organized crime also promoted an inevitable interest in the ostensible salaciousness of the gay world, a set of social and sexual networks that represented an open secret ripe for exploitation in the early fifties. Books and articles published by gossip columnists were not primarily concerned with the exposure of gay life, but betrayed a fascination with the larger underworld of which gay life was a part. Unlike associations with gangsters, which seemed to help Hollywood stars—George Raft got his start as a driver for Owney Madden—associations with the gay part of the underworld, a rarity until the post-war era, represented a kiss of death. By the earliest years of the Cold War, the representation of homosexuality in gossip columns stood in for larger problems of political corruption, not only racketeering but, much more dangerously, communist subversion. Gossip columnists adopted the word *confidential* to give their columns, books, and broadcasts, the added moral weight of protecting the interests of national security.

Building on popular misperceptions of gay life, gossip columnists developed a Cold War formula that linked political and sexual unorthodoxy on at least three fronts: as a psychopathology that threatened the collective hygiene of the nation, as a moral discourse in which the corrupt were equally susceptible to communism and

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homosexuality and, third, as a national security problem in which homosexual conduct might lead to blackmail and enlistment in the KGB. Considering the information available to the American public, Cold War exposés represented a watershed in general knowledge about homosexuality and more specific knowledge about who was a homosexual, knowledge that linked the public to political figures and celebrities. Cold War scandals elevated the likes of Walter Winchell from the fast-talking dean of the Hollywood paparazzi to a McCarthy surrogate, though his shilling for the disgraced senator saw his own ratings decline in the late 1950s. But in 1953, Winchell’s support of a new tabloid called Confidential Magazine, founded the year before by Robert Harrison with just over a hundred thousand issues sold, prompted the magazine to circulate upwards of five million copies by 1955.203 Underground filmmaker and no stranger to the scandal press, himself, Kenneth Anger wrote in the famously banned Hollywood Babylon that Lait and Mortimer were responsible for many of the scoops in Harrison’s Confidential magazine, a publication notorious for its celebrity outings.204 Confidential, of course, leaked a number of gay stories in Hollywood—most prominently Liberace and the teen idol Tab Hunter205—decades before Michelangelo Signorile’s infamous “outings” exposed media mogul David Geffen, publisher Malcolm Forbes, and gossip columnist Liz Smith.

Lait and Mortimer’s exposé represented the explosion of spiteful material condemning gay social life, written from a straight point of view, which typically invoked the Cold War buzzword confidential. Lait and Mortimer were relatively famous

205 Ibid., “Chapter 22: Why Liberace’s Theme Song Should Be, ‘Mad About the Boy!’”
gossip columnists when the *Confidential* series hit the presses, perhaps second in reputation only to Hedda Hopper and Walter Winchell, whose syndicated columns and radio shows were among the most popular in the 1940s and 1950s. More importantly, however, Lait and Mortimer’s writings suggest a practice that, in a radically different context more than three decades later, has emerged as a controversial if tried-and-true activist tactic of “outing” closeted people who oppose and work against LGBT/queer politics. However, the cultural and social context of the late 1940s and 1950s suggests the ways in which the contradictions of the closet economy actually made silence, discretion, and the “double life”—strategies described as “internalized homophobia” and associated with political retrogression—the most important survival tactics in the 1940s and 1950s.

However cynical or malicious their intentions, gossip columnists did reveal the specific patterns of a gay social world that was much more expansive than the public could have imagined in an era whose cultural touchstones were “Father Knows Best” and Betty Crocker cookbooks. The dearth of information about gay life provided a ready-made audience comprised of gay people themselves—probably a much larger number than most writers expected—as well as those curious about gay life, whether or not they ultimately followed that curiosity beyond reading *Confidential Magazine* or one of Lait and Mortimer’s books.

Tabloid literature—essentially printed gossip—introduced a stream of information that disturbed the delicate discretionary shadow that concealed the illicit markets of gay life from the flash bulbs of publicity hounds like Lait and Mortimer. Though sensational journalism like the *National Police Gazette* and local rags like *Broadway Brevities* occasionally reported salacious sex scandals with gay undertones in

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the past, the otherwise inauspicious birth of gossip columns in the twenties and thirties marked a turning point as mass culture—especially in the context of the film and recording industries, where gossip columns acted as the third rail of the golden age of Hollywood and radio—began to trickle into the everyday lives of consumers. The genealogy of the gossip columns stretched back into the more anodyne “society pages” that tracked the goings-on of rich industrial families in the United States and, at least in Europe, the flotsam and jetsam of an older aristocratic order. These columns had concerned themselves primarily with marriages, graduation notices, and debutante balls that drag queens would appropriate in the twentieth century, where “coming out” into the gay world (and not out of the closet) resembled the cotillions where the Astors, Whitneys, and Vanderbilts introduced their daughters to high society. Gossip columns mentioned these celebutantes, but only if they could be connected to the standard currency of the gossip column: scandal. More interesting fodder were the private sexual exploits of the stars manufactured by the studio bosses and producers who dominated Hollywood, Broadway, and Tin Pan Alley—people whose backgrounds tended to be much more diverse than the Brahmins that peopled the society pages.207

The intentions of gossip columnists—to sell as many copies as possible—also made them the perennial serpents in a pop culture cosmogony of idolized and immortalized movie stars. But unlike the “society pages,” gossip columns after the 1920s had nothing if not a democratizing effect. In addition to the ingénues of Broadway and the parvenus of Newport, they included reportage of politicians and gangsters, whose lives—at least as exposed in the press—were often more intertwined than the public might have imagined. Prohibition had fueled this connection, literally through graft and

207 Wilkes, 247-248.
more figuratively by making gangsters heroes to throngs of Americans, who cheered bootleggers as the protagonists and antagonists in some of the most popular Hollywood movies before 1934—the year that Hollywood studios adopted “the Code” and a year after the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. However contemptible their motives, gossip columnists staked a claim on the democratic process by mixing high and low elements of society, cultivating Horatio Alger narratives for Hollywood stars and glorifying otherwise undistinguished criminals. Winchell used his column to popularize stories about Owney Madden, boosting the owner of the Cotton Club from his status as a West Side bootlegger to one of the most glamorous figures of Jazz Age Harlem. For his part, Jack Lait cemented his national reputation after a 1932 radio interview with Anna Hauptmann, who pled the innocence of her husband, Bruno, the kidnapper of the Lindbergh baby. Indeed, well before the federal government copped to the existence of La Cosa Nostra and other organized crime groups—J. Edgar Hoover had famously denied its existence and deprived the FBI of the resources to investigate organized crime—gossip columnists like Lait and Mortimer, especially in New York: Confidential! and U.S.A.: Confidential!, made Americans aware of underworld figures like Vito Genovese and Frank Costello, who represented the most powerful underworld figures in New York City.

The most astonishing aspect of Lait and Mortimer’s Confidential series is the unmatched breadth and depth of information revealed not only about organized crime and government conspiracies but about gay social life in the late 1940s and early 1950s. No other source offers as comprehensive a guide to gay bars, restaurants, and other entertainment venues as well as public parks and cruising grounds. Published when the
earliest non-fiction books on homosexuality and gay life were beginning to appear in the mass market, a student of any other sub-culture would expect to find information about the institutions central to its existence in the books and magazines written, edited, and published by this sub-culture’s ostensible boosters. But, given the extremely reactionary enforcement of legal and social sanctions against homosexuality, “insider” publications like ONE, Mattachine Review, and The Ladder, and even gay identified authors tended to avoid direct references to the besieged underworld that their readers inhabited. That task fell to attention-grabbing gossip columnists like Lait and Mortimer, who exposed them primarily to shutter them.

With their publishing megaphone, Lait and Mortimer were two of the most popular editors and gossip columnists in the country in the late 1940s and early 1950s, writing daily columns for the Mirror and appearing on radio spots where they dished out Hollywood dalliances and government corruption in Runyonesque language. Their columns and books are indicative of the easy sell of casual racism and sexism, Cold War paranoia, and the general reactionism of the late 1940s and early 1950s. While most of their columns trade in the usual celebrity and political gossip, Lait and Mortimer also had a particular interest in pointing out connections between post-war celebrity culture and the more salacious underworld of corruption and vice, an underworld that, if we were to believe Lait and Mortimer, permeated nearly every economic sector and political constituency of the United States.

The gay underworld was but a part of this underworld, although for Lait and Mortimer, it provoked the greatest disgust and the authors expected the reader to react similarly. They were disgusted especially by gay men, whose descriptions of effeminacy
and deception linked the generalized anxiety over the supposed waning of virile masculinity with a growing concern over spies and other “subversives” lurking among so-called “normal Americans.” Anticipating by nearly a decade Arthur Schlesinger’s more measured tone if no less hysterical message in “The Crisis of American Masculinity”—which blamed the so-called crisis on everything from homosexuality in the movies and popular culture to a new breed of “aggressive” women and the “Christine Jorgensen” phenomenon—Lait and Mortimer asserted in their chapter “Men Confidential” that “[c]onfidentially, man aren’t men. You may have thought all queers who aren’t on Broadway in Hollywood are in Washington. We found them in Milwaukee, Boston, Dallas, Honolulu and Des Moines. They pursued us in Minneapolis.” Though critical, Lait and Mortimer provide some fairly astute observations about the stigmatized and criminalized nature of gay commercial and social life, revealing that “[d]eviates are too obvious in their home towns; consequently they’ve got to get out where their unorthodox sexual activity will not interfere with earning a livelihood. We knew that the talented ones went to New York and Hollywood, where there were jobs for actors, designers, interior decorators. The others went to Washington, where they were lost in the anonymity of the civil service.” They add that “[t]he homosexual is likely to seek his own, because the pressures of society are such that he feels uncomfortable unless he is with homos. So he tends to surround himself with others of his kind in his social and business life.” Washington, Hollywood, and New York “explains three hives of queen bees,” but “[n]ow we’ll chuck a haymaker: the entire nation is going queer!” They claimed that the mayor of one of the largest cities was a “swish” before expounding that

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“queers” had, in fact, infiltrated “all the forty-eight states and the territories,” blaming the widespread prevalence of homosexuality on “masculinization of women,” the “feminization of men,” and the ways in which “[c]ommunism actively promotes and supports sex deviation to sap the strength of a new generation and make the birth of another problematical…” They also complain about the difficulty identifying “queers,” expressing particular anxiety about a new breed of “pansies” that were not “prancing nances with rouged lips and bleached hair” but “tough young kids, college football players, truck-drivers, and weather-bitten servicemen. An admiral tried to rape a young soldier on the street in Honolulu. Many queers are married, fathers of families. A particularly sanctimonious senator” apparently pursued “youths as young as his grandchildren” in public restrooms. “Another Eastern Senator, Democrat and left-wing, has a wife and a boyfriend.”

The connections among conspiracy, subversion, political progressivism, and sexuality laid bare, Lait and Mortimer provide a virtual blueprint for the political capital packed into homophobia. As the chapter on men suggests, Lait and Mortimer identify homosexuality primarily with gay men, expressing as much anxiety about those whose gender conformed to “normal” standards of masculinity as those who did not.

Their description suggests the degree to which U.S. popular culture identified homosexuality as principally a failure of masculinity, but it also suggests the degree to which gay men dominated the most visible commercial institutions and public cruising grounds that defined collective life. It also suggests the difficulty that lesbians had accessing such establishments and the networks that burrowed within them. “Men Confidential” is completely absorbed by the issue of homosexuality.

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The chapter “Women Confidential,” on the other hand, complains mostly that “women have been emancipated” to join “non-virgin clubs” among “high-school lassies” in every city “for every letter of the alphabet from “Albany, Albuquerque and Atlanta to Zaneville” or to become prostitutes. The “Women” chapter is divided into sections including “Company Girls,” “Glamor (And Not So Glamorous) Girls,” and “Amateurs” before alighting on “He-Women.” “The Sapphic lover, unless she goes to the extremes of wearing mannish habiliments and cutting her hair short, is seldom obvious.” Nonetheless, “[t]his form of perverted love is as ancient as male homosexuality…but women, because of their nature and the restrictions placed upon them by society, have not been so obvious about it. That is, not until 1952.” Their explanation for the “epidemic of homosexuality among the maidens” is similar to the “factors…responsible for the waves of swishes”: “[u]nder a matriarchy men grow soft and women masculine;” “Marxian teachings, the examples of women in high political and social places” (a likely jab at Eleanor Roosevelt, a frequent Lait and Mortimer target), and “propagandized knowledge that many of the movie set prefer it that way…”

However, while Lait and Mortimer single out cities as the locus of gay social life for men, they blame lesbianism largely on college and women’s employment in so-called masculine professions. “Homosexual cells” exist in “practically every college and university. Those at UCLA, Hunter, Barnard, Teacher’s College, University of Wisconsin and the University of Chicago are famous in the third-sex grapevine.” WACS, WAVES, and “other auxiliaries” are also “paradise for Lesbians.” Limited primarily to the public and quasi-public spaces the “underworld,” Lait and Mortimer seemed unable to access

210 Ibid., 38.
211 Ibid., 40-42.
212 Ibid., 42-43.
the broader networks of middle-class lesbians, many of whom were married and lived “double lives” within domestic spaces. At the same time, they also suggest the limited opportunities relative to men in many places, like New York City, where “unescorted” women were banned from establishments wearing alcohol. Moreover, at a time where women’s economic opportunities were limited and when public spaces were considered dangerous or off-limits for women, especially after dark, it makes sense that contemporary evidence focused primarily on men. Though the closet economy was certainly dominated by men, as chapter four of this work suggests, women could and did successfully carve out spaces alongside and within entertainment and commercial districts that catered primarily to gay male customers.

III. From Gossip to Guide: Mapping Gay Commercial Life in the Underworld

Because gossip journalism traded in unsubstantiated secrets and played to a logic of conservative reaction, they were free to print details that exposed illegal activity and revel in sexual non-conformity without officially endorsing it. In this sense, both the “Mafia” and the gay world represented easy targets for Lait and Mortimer, not to mention their colleagues in the scandal pages. Tabloid literature and gossip columns essentially acted as an advertisement for illicit markets, a point made abundantly clear with the publication of New York: Confidential!. Published the same year as the first Kinsey Report in 1948, New York: Confidential also appeared in an otherwise annus horribilis of Cold War scandal when the Alger Hiss fiasco propelled the Cold War from the cosmopolitan intrigue of Moscow and New York City to the domestic tranquility of a Carroll County pumpkin patch, launching the. For many reasons—its complaints about
mafia corruption, communist subversion, and sexual danger—*New York: Confidential!* resonated with readers and was an immediate bestseller, though it struck its critics as a distasteful if guiltily pleasurable piece of gossip. Reviewers recognized that it traded in more than malicious rumor; the information contained therein also posed a moral hazard to the reader. The reviewer in the *New York Times* complained “we sometimes see Pandora, but more often that of Circe.” Part-exposé, the book also functioned as a travel guide, and one with obviously gay undertones. Channeling the “authority of Baedeker [the preeminent publisher of travel guides] and the insight of Dr. Kinsey,” the book appealed not to the jaded residents of the city than to the “starry-eyed ladies and trusting gentlemen who come to New York with the pollen dust of alfalfa in their hair.”

The author’s review suggests what Lionel Trilling would two years later call the “Young Man from the Provinces,” a quintessential symptom of modern urban life and a title later adapted for the title of closet courtesan Alan Helms’ memoir. Although Trilling reserves his provincial archetype for men, his description could well apply to the women as well as men who escaped to New York City to remake themselves in the fifties and sixties. “[A] provincial birth and rearing suggest the simplicity and the high hopes he begins with—he starts with a great demand upon life and a great wonder about its complexity and promise….He is intelligent…but not at all shrewd in worldly matters.”

As if referring to Lait and Mortimer, Trilling claimed, “He must have acquired a certain

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amount of education, should have learned something about life from books, although not the truth.”

What ultimately set Lait and Mortimer’s books and columns apart was, again, the fact that they name neighborhoods and establishments. In an era where any establishment associated with a gay clientele could be shuttered, there are no reviews or even lists of gay establishments in any Homophile publication or in any of the early writings by gay authors attempting to shed greater light on their individual and social lives. In practical terms, this meant that bars, cafés, restaurants, and other businesses with a gay clientele could not advertise themselves as such. Instead, that information could only have been found in the damning gossip columns of moral alarmists like Lait and Mortimer. The irony of the early closet economy was that literal gossip—spoken, word-of-mouth communication and the networks it engendered—provided a protective mechanism against police surveillance and popular violence, while journalistic gossip eroded the effectiveness of that mechanism while simultaneously providing information to potential customers.

Historians and archivists of this period are generally experts at reading between the lines or filling in omissions of contemporary accounts published by gay people themselves, and most research consists, in part, of a hunting expedition through the anecdotal evidence of memoirs and occasionally interviews. I was surprised, then, to encounter several clubs listed in *U.S.A. Confidential*, their location, and in some cases even their owners, or at least their protectors from the local crime syndicate. Their interest in exposing the country’s gay undergrounds reveals some similarities and

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differences across geography, suggesting that New York City’s gay life owed its existence to a mix of the city’s sheer size and population density, as well as the unique economic culture, in which virtually anything was thought to be marketable or potentially marketable, and toleration for organized crime, which served as one of the most important providers of goods otherwise banned by local, state, and federal authorities.

The most visible and disturbing elements of the social underbelly of American life was represented most graphically in terms of the geography of sex work and homosexuality, which the authors divide into the public spaces like parks and squares and semi-public and private spaces like taverns, nightclubs, and even apartments. The streets, parks, and businesses that made up the patchwork of New York City’s underworld were also the thoroughfares of gay life, often shadowing the public and “straight” world of heterosexual sociability and commercialized leisure. Gay life tended to flourish in parts of the city that were too difficult to police or in neighborhoods where residents and business owners tolerated and even embraced gay life.

According to *New York: Confidential!,* Central Park occupied the epicenter of unregulated and disorderly conduct, drawing “degenerates, rapists, wolves.” “Friendly bushes…provide privacy…for a necking party[, b]ut those who stray too far from the well-lighted Mall invite serious danger. Lurking in the park are all manner of anti-social characters, from footpads to vicious sex-maniacs.” If the reader was unclear about just what defined a “sex-maniac,” Lait and Mortimer clarified that the police “at times…have had remarkable success in keeping crime at a minimum by dressing a couple of boyish detectives in women’s clothes and turning them loose on the scum.” Fusing the spectacle of interracial sociability and “sex-mania,” the authors claimed that “Columbus

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Circle…has been pre-empted by Negro homos,” an indication of the dual spectacle of racial and sexual difference as well as the racial segregation within the gay world.216 As Samuel Zipp’s *Manhattan Projects* suggests, racist stereotypes of Lincoln Square as a “slum” prompted a policy of removal and demolition in the highly contested Lincoln Square Slum Clearance Plan, carried out by Robert Moses under Title I of the 1949 Housing Act. Many poor, mostly African-American residents were displaced in the 1950s to make room for these new developments, like the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and Lait and Mortimer may well have been one of the few straight authors to document this African-American youth scene on the eve of its destruction.217 James Baldwin’s controversial novel *Another Country*, which explored the interracial relationships among gay and bisexual men living on Manhattan’s West Side about two dozen blocks south of Lincoln Center in Times Square, may have referenced vestiges of this world.218

Beyond parks, the authors also warned visitors from lingering too long in public restrooms. Hearkening back to a time with public facilities—before the ubiquity of Starbuck’s (and its restrooms)—Lait and Mortimer advised that “if you gotta, all subway stations have free comfort stations, usually filthy. Often,” they claimed, “degenerates and thugs lurk there,”219 though they make no mention of the undercover cops that struck fear into the heart of many cruising loiterers in the fifties and sixties.

Just a dozen blocks south in the theater district, they described the young actors packed around the Walgreen’s, where “the adolescents have been tinged with political

216 Ibid., 135.
radicalism and tainted with homosexuality.’”\(^{220}\) To the east on 52\(^{nd}\) Street, or “Swing Lane,” Lait and Mortimer asserted “the complexion is changing, as more swing spots have begun to specialize in Negro entertainers and bands…‘black and tan’ spots where whites and Negroes (of opposite sexes) mix, not furtively.” Pivoting from the dangerous spectacle of open, interracial flirting, they claimed that “[t]wo other developments in the street—said to be natural consequences of its jazz madness—are the presence of reefer (marijuana) addicts and homosexuals, of all races.” Emphasizing the criminal associations of gay life, they conclude, “sex perversions and narcotics run arm in arm.”

Their description of 52\(^{nd}\) Street also pointed to the difficulty business owners confronted in attempting to keep gay other questionable clientele out—they “have been helpless before the horde”—as well as the frequent raids carried out both by the local police and federal authorities. In addition to the interiors of bars, they claimed that “[o]ne corner of 52\(^{nd}\) and Sixth Avenue is particularly obnoxious a hangout for prostitutes and homos, dark and light.” However, they qualified, “don’t let that scare you from a trip to 52\(^{nd}\) Street. It is part of the spice, and you are completely safe…”\(^{221}\) Far from dissuading wary tourists, Lait and Mortimer paint a picture of interracial sociability, sex work, jazz, drug use, and the gay life more to allure than to alert.

Further east, “there are clubs…that get most of their trade from perverts.” They add, “When your guide points out a building as the scene of a particularly gory sex crime, you will invariably find it is on the East Side…”\(^{222}\) Between Lexington and Third Avenue—shadowed by the elevated tracks torn down the less than a decade later—Lait and Mortimer described “another malodorous phase,…the horde of homosexuals who

\(^{220}\) Ibid., 38.  
\(^{221}\) Ibid., 46.  
\(^{222}\) Ibid., 51.
adopted it as their midway. They parade with mincing steps in pairs and trios up both side of the avenue. Some are blondined, some act ‘masculine,’ Negroes mix with white ones, all on the make for strangers.”

The authors claimed that the menacing swarm of “misconceived creatures” on the East Side had overrun “Gotham’s hard-boiled and efficient, but sadly under-manned, police force” largely because of the density of bars and the cover of the elevated tracks, emphasizing the architectural features that fostered gay networks in the closet. Lait and Mortimer also associated gay space with the infiltration of the “so-called sophisticated set” in the “homey Irish” neighborhood, a pattern that sociologists would diagnose gentrification less than two decades later.

“[D]rinking shoulder to shoulder, are jaded sons and daughters of the rich, bohemians, musical comedy favorites, artists, and newspapermen, fairies, and lesbians. There’s no room for a plain, honest Irishman.”

As a result of its scandalous visibility, mid-town’s gay scene also came to the notice of the authorities. In 1948, the same year that New York: Confidential! was published, the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center opened in the mid-Manhattan Magistrates Court at 153 East 57th Street to deal with the clinic number of “sex crimes” assigned to the court’s docket. The founders claimed the court represented the first aimed specifically at treating rather than simply punishing those who “committed sexual offenses or showed marked sexual abnormalities.” A little more than half the patients admitted to the clinic identified as homosexuals. Coordinated through the court’s probation office, treatment at the center initially dealt with cases in deferred adjudication. However, the clinics administrators claimed that many admitted themselves of their own

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223 Ibid., 65.  
224 Ibid., 65.
free will, a sign of the conflicted emotions that accompanied homosexuality and gender transgression in the closet era. The director of the clinic, Dr. Frederic Wertham—better known for his anti-comic book crusade\(^ {225} \) and work at the Lafargue Mental Hygiene in Harlem, one of the first mental health clinics to service people of color—claimed that “many in this group have strong guilt feelings which may provoke them to murder or, more often, suicide,” thus reinforcing the link between uncontrollable violence and sexuality in psychiatric discourse. (And although Wertham proudly declared “We haven’t had a single suicide among our patients,” he made no claims about the murder rate of the clinic’s clients.)\(^ {226} \) Wertham became more famous in the 1950s when his book, *Seduction of the Innocent* suggested that Batman and Robin enjoyed a sexual relationship and that Wonder Woman promoted bondage and lesbianism. Many of these observations came from patient files from the LaFargue Clinic and the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center.\(^ {227} \)

Lait and Mortimer reserved their most extensive comments on the gay underworld for Greenwich Village, the most identifiable brand and concentration of queer or gay culture in either New York City or the United States. As mentioned in the introduction, Greenwich Village’s queer or gay reputation had entered mass culture in pre-Hays Code films like *Call Her Savage*, which, in addition to “fairies,” featured “poets” and “wild anarchists.” In the mid-1930s, Carolyn F. Ware documented the widespread presence of homosexuals, “fairies,” and “lesbians,” setting up one of the major conflicts between the


older, predominantly Italian and Irish immigrants and the new bohemian “Villagers” who flocked to the neighborhood in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The visibility of homosexuality was especially notable after the introduction of cabarets—spaces where not just drinking but dancing and performance were on offer—in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Linked to a “newly established, disreputable edition of Harlem,” these new cabarets were not only visibly queer, but dominated by a gay clientele. In contrast to drag balls and other venues where homosexuality and gender-crossing functioned largely as spectacle and entertainment, the focus of Village life seemed to have fallen on a gay and lesbian clientele. Ultimately, it was Ware’s contention that “[t]he cabaret…[brought] onto the Village streets a collection of irresponsible people whose effect upon the local youngsters was regarded by social workers and the crime prevention division of the police.” By the end of the 1920s, the visibility of bohemianism and sexual exoticism in the Village set up conflicts between older immigrant groups (including the local Catholic Church) and boosters associated with real estate and tourism.

This new phase corresponded with the burst of ‘flaming youth’ which made the elders’ hair rise on end in the mid-twenties. Because the most picturesque and most easily capitalized, the bohemian became the most tenacious of all the reputations which the Village acquired. The bohemians were conspicuous…Cabarets joined in the effort to make money out of the Village’s exotic flavor. The tea room or studio which had served in the last phase as a place featuring artistic atmosphere, now developed as a ‘pick-up joint.’ As sex taboos broke down all over the country, and sex experimentation found its way to the suburbs, the Village’s exoticism could no longer rest on so

commonplace a foundation. Again, the shift of current interest supplied a basis for a new phase in the Village’s reputation. When public attention had been called to homo-sexuality by the suppression of ‘The Captive’ and ‘The Well of Loneliness,’ the Village became noted as the home of ‘pansies’ and ‘Lesbians,’ and dives of all sorts featured this type.

As a result, according to Ware, the combination of this “exotic” reputation in a venue that had to get around Prohibition-era liquor laws brought gangsters to the area, and each of these successive characters was attributed to the Village by publicity agents backed by real estate men, restaurant-owners, and antique dealers…” However, by the beginning of the 1930s, an unnamed “taxpayers’ association” helped conduct a series of clean-ups that saw raids on the Village’s gay and lesbian cabarets, as well as the brothels south of Washington Square to be developed for “high-class residential use.”

As discussed in later chapters the term “bohemianism” and its application to particular people and institutions carried a reputation that linked sexual unorthodoxy (and especially homosexuality) to the aesthetic and anti-bourgeois culture of the artists and activists—the most radial of whom were communists and feminists—who settled in Greenwich Village and other so-called bohemian neighborhoods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As the *WPA Guide to New York City* claimed just four years later in 1939, the plans mentioned by Ware must have changed the reputation of the Village into that of a more conventional neighborhood. Tourism and white-collar workers had essentially normatized the neighborhood and made it too expensive for many so-called bohemians. “[T]here were more Greenwich Villagers than in the days preceding the war,” the *Guide* claimed.

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229 Ibid., 96.
but these young people were leading a life not greatly dissimilar to that of many of their contemporaries throughout the country. The Village tearooms and night clubs, for the most part no longer the haunts of the Bohemian, were patronized largely by out-of-town tourists and sensation seekers from outlying boroughs. Large apartment building and rents were rising as well-to-do and white-collar workers, attracted by the central location, by vastly improved transportation facilities, and, perhaps by the glamor associated with the address, moved in.\(^\text{230}\)

Whatever the political, social, and cultural realities of the Village, the *Guide* offered that Greenwich Village continued to represent a “symbol of revolt in the ferment of the postwar years,” the “center of the American Renaissance or of artiness, of political progress or of long-haired radical men and short-haired radical men, of sex freedom or of sex license—dependent upon the point of view.”\(^\text{231}\) Though the implications would have been obvious to the savviest readers, this bowdlerized image was as close as the *WPA Guide* got to identifying the most recognizably gay neighborhood in the country.

Lait and Mortimer captured the vestiges of this world in both *New York: Confidential!* and *U.S.A. Confidential*, similar in cultural content if less visible in its formal qualities than the Village described by Ware. Less visible and more clandestine than the commercial milieu described by Ware (and documented by Chauncey and Heap), Lait and Mortimer betray a sense of anxiety over the resurgence of gay life in the Village and repeat the *WPA Guide*’s claim about long-haired men and short-haired


\(^{231}\) Ibid., 124.
women, though Lait and Mortimer have no qualms about linking these figures to homosexuality. Like Ware, Lait and Mortimer’s reformist tone focuses on the Village’s bars and other local venues, as well as their fascination with rent parties and sex work, pointed to the distinctly commercial features of gay life in Greenwich Village.

For Lait and Mortimer, Greenwich Village was synonymous with homosexuality, a fact reflected in the title of their chapter “Where Men Wear Lace Lingerie.” “Not all who call their flats in Greenwich Village ‘studios’ are queer. Not all New York’s queer (or, as they say it, ‘gay’) people live in Greenwich Village. But most of those who advertise their oddities, the long-haired men, the short-haired women, those not sure exactly what they are, gravitate to the Village.”

Lait and Mortimer’s description suggests that, whatever the word gay might reveal about a person, the “long-haired men” and “short-haired women” identified a recognizable and visible brand in one of the most popular tourist neighborhoods in the most populous city in the country.

Though surely exaggerated, they described the Village as an extensively and almost exclusively gay neighborhood, which they attributed, in part, to police attempts to drive gay acts out of mid-town after the repeal of Prohibition and during the heavily policed era of the Second World War.

When the cops cracked down, the pouting queens and Lesbians took to Greenwich Village. There they remain unmolested by police if they remain in the district and don’t bother others, on the theory that you can’t do away with them, and as long as they’re with us, it’s better to segregate them in one section, where an eye can be kept on them.

233 Ibid., 75.
Greenwich Village represented a site of rapprochement between the authorities and gay people, although this uneven truce carried many more advantages for the police and other regulatory authorities. Unlike other areas of the city, gay people were visible if extremely cautious in the Village, and knew that visibility required a careful negotiation of official regulations against gay sociability and expression. Adjusting to the rhythm of bar crackdowns, gay taverns and clubs adapted speakeasy tactics to the operation of gay nightspots, employing bribery, backrooms, tinted windows, and careful discrimination of the clientele in order to limit the impact of bar raids. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, entrepreneurs and gay entertainers took advantage of the relative toleration in the Village in order to build a cultural scene that drew straight and gay tourists to a distinctly gay entertainment market that formed the cultural and economic basis of what later residents in the Village referred to as the “gay ghetto.”

Lait and Mortimer’s damning language notwithstanding, their choice to dedicate an entire chapter to Greenwich Village represented a clear intent to describe one of the most important nightlife districts in New York City. Moreover, their description suggests the extent to which gay life had hidden in plain sight within the nocturnal world of bars and nightclubs, making New York City a destination for pleasure seekers in the post-Prohibition era. As early as 1941, journalist Jane Cobb wrote in the New York Times that war and economic depression in Europe had made New York City the undisputed “greatest Night Life City” in the world. Owing to its proximity to the capital of American finance, high society, and entertainment, “any man who can save up enough money…has quite a variety of fleshpots at his disposal.” According to Cobb, nightclubs represented a new kind of business establishment that combined food and alcohol service with
entertainment. “Edible food, honest drinks and a decent dance band are not enough. There must be Atmosphere—a mood established. It may be a Gay Nineties atmosphere or a Hawaiian one, although”—owing no small part to Carmen Miranda’s rising star—“the chances are that it will be South American.”234 The combination of elaborate and colorful sets, ostentatious performances, flashy musical numbers, flowing booze, and vivacious sociability made nightclubs ideal spots in which gay men and lesbians might be able to let their hair down and mingle. (As subsequent chapters indicate, these elements also represented the raw materials of camp culture.)

More significantly, the three areas Cobb identifies as the core of New York City’s commercialized nightlife in the 1940s—Greenwich Village, the East Side (from East mid-town to the Upper East Side), and the West Side (encompassing Herald Square, Times Square, and the Upper West Side)—were widely recognized as the geographic and economic core of gay life. “Like everything else in New York,” Lait and Mortimer claimed in their much-touted sequel, U.S.A.: Confidential!, “our homosexuals are divided into three geographic strata—downtown, the West Side, and the East Side.”235 The cheapest of the three districts, Greenwich Village tended to attract younger and larger audiences than those drawn to the family-friendly tourist traps on the West Side or the celebrity-studded clubs on the East Side. In addition to several Greenwich Village haunts, Lait and Mortimer also list the Upper East Side bars El Morocco, the Golden Pheasant (part of the legendary “Bird Circuit”), and the Chandelle Bar on East 48th Street.236 For Lait and Mortimer, commercialized nightlife was linked explicitly to homosexuality. In

235 Lait and Mortimer, U.S.A. Confidential, 313.  
236 Ibid., 314.
an interview with *New York Times*, Harvey Breit described nightlife reporter Mortimer “as familiar with the monosyllables of gunsels”—a well-known slang term for homosexuals—“as with the beguiling tones of an Edith Piaf.”

*U.S.A.: Confidential!* featured even more salacious details about the gay underworlds of New York City, not to mention the criminal structures that undergirded them. Published in 1952, *U.S.A. Confidential* reverberated with the shockwaves of the U.S. Senate’s recent Special Committee to Investigate Interstate Commerce—informally known as the Kefauver Commission—a nationally televised spectacle that introduced Americans to words like “omertá” and “Cosa Nostra” as well as characters such as Meyer Lansky, Frank Costello, Joe Adonis (Joe Doto), and other notorious underworld figures.

Lait and Mortimer relished the details of labor racketeering among stevedores from the docks of New York City to the newly built gambling palaces of the Nevada desert, the syndicate’s corner on the narcotics trade, and the proprietorship of Alan Bono—supposedly Joe Adonis’ cousin—over “the fairy situation” in Greenwich Village.

Lait and Mortimer were among the first to document the buzz that gained legendary status over the following two decades: the Mafia’s patronage of New York City’s gay nightlife. Indeed, *U.S.A.: Confidential!*’s description of the “fairy situation” is arguably the earliest description of the black market economic institutions that enabled a recognizably gay market. “All fairy night clubs and gathering places are illegal, and operate only through pay-offs to the authorities. They are organized into a national circuit, controlled by the Mafia which also finds unique opportunity to sell dope in such dives.” Adding insult to injury, they claimed, “Many gangsters like it that way, too, after

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238 Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*, 313.
indoctrination in prison.”239 Significantly, at least according to Lait and Mortimer, the flourishing market of gay nightlife in New York City was not because the city was wide open. “Much that is not tolerated in New York is accepted as general custom in the Bible Belt.” They explained,

We do not legally permit strip-teasers or nudes in our clubs and we have banned burlesque. The few peelers who work New York keep on more than you see at the beaches. Our dicks are murder on B-girls. Few night clubs will even take the chance of letting legitimate performers sit out with male friends, including their husbands. Many bars will not permit unescorted women or any women even with men at the bar.

Rather, the right kind of criminal patronage guaranteed success for any illegal enterprise. “Regardless of election outcomes, the Mafia, which backs all parties, is solid, politically and financially.”240

Situated within New York City’s wider network of illicit and informal markets, gay life constituted just one province in a black market empire that included loan sharkering, counterfeiting, trade in stolen goods, labor racketeering, gambling, narcotics, and sex work. Indeed, a cultural comparison of organized crime and gay life suggest a number of similarities, especially regarding the informational economy in which organized crime operated. “Omertá,” a code of silence and honor that prohibited organized criminals from collaborating with investigative authorities, institutionalized the veil of secrecy between participants in organized crime and the state. As a code that relied heavily on Italian loanwords and euphemisms—la “cosa nostra” or “our thing” being the most prominent example—omertá bore more than a passing resemblance to gay

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239 Ibid., 45.
240 Ibid., 309.
strategies of code and evasion. Because crime syndicates did not keep records of their activities—a function of omertá—it is impossible to know how extensively the gay world and organized crime overlapped except from the gossip and innuendo of documents like *U.S.A. Confidential*. Furthermore, the hierarchy of organized crime also insulated syndicate bosses—many of whom attempted to go into legitimate business in the postwar era—from the most serious charges. As Lait and Mortimer suggested, “cheap chippies on the loose are bad for legitimate businesses like hotels, department stores, and many fine restaurants…Our silk-lined ace hoodlums are not flatnosed torpedoes with cauliflower ears, but conservatively groomed men, whom you would mistake for bankers, which many of them now are.”

Nevertheless, it would be remiss to undervalue the importance of a black market dependent on criminal patronage or the value of the gay world to criminal operators. In addition to overpriced and watered-down drinks and expensive cover charges, gay bars also offered rife opportunities for blackmail and protection money—a phenomenon that wove gay patrons tightly into the patchwork of criminal relationships that extended over New York City and much of the country at mid-century.

Unlike the gay scene on the East and West Side, which was composed of mostly anonymous gay men cruising surreptitiously for one-night stands in public places and ostensibly straight men’s bars, Lait and Mortimer described Greenwich Village as a community scene where the visibility of gender non-conformity functioned as an important cultural marker. The “she-males are supposed to be the artistic set in an esoteric bohemian colony where everyone knows everyone else.” *U.S.A.: Confidential!* also departed from its prequel by naming the names and locations of gay bars and

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hangouts, many of which were listed a dozen years later in The Lavender Baedeker, the earliest gay guide written by a gay man for gay tourists (primarily men). The bars they listed in Greenwich Village included the Moroccan Village on West 8th Street, Club 181 at 181 Second Avenue (which “City Hall was reluctantly forced to shutter”), the Rainbow Inn, and “almost every bar on Third Street, where Lesbians, too, foregather.”

IV. A “Confidential” Portrait of Upheaval: The Mid-1950s and the Transitions of the Closet Economy

The (mis)education represented by Lait and Mortimer provides a view of New York City in a period of major upheaval, one whose shifting patterns also reshuffled gay social life in the city. Despite or because of the exposés of Lait, Mortimer, and their ilk, the gay world of the 1950s seemed to be less and less visible in public. Police campaigns against public sex and cruising in parks and subway latrines led to the limitation of gay male places to only the hardest to police areas like Central Park and Times Square. The dismantling of architectural hiding places like the elevated trains, which provided a good deal of cover to cruisers, also led to a loss of public habitat for gay men (and, for that matter) sex workers. Written at the height of battles over public and private space, including the massive displacement of the Lincoln Center project in the early 1950s, the expansion of public housing projects across the city, and the decommissioning of the elevated train lines, the architecture of the city was changing dramatically and, along with it, the gay world. As Samuel Zipp argues, the “slum clearance” projects initiated by Robert Moses and others in city government precipitated greater racial segregation in the residential geography of the city, the effects of which effectively corralled most of

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242 Lait and Mortimer, U.S.A. Confidential, 313-314.
Manhattan’s African-American and Puerto Rican population above 110th Street (and away from the social and economic core of gay life consolidating in white dominated areas like Greenwich Village, Mid-town Manhattan, and the Upper East Side).243

As a result and in tandem with these larger processes, participants in gay social life were swept up by the de facto economic and racial segregation of New York City’s post-war geography, with the uneasy settlement of within the commercial districts hemmed in on the west side of Manhattan. As a result, gay identity became increasingly identified as middle-class and white as gay bars and other businesses displaced the class and racial diversity of public spaces associated with gay life, not to mention the decimation of Harlem’s interracial queer scene over the preceding decades. Most portentously, organized crime seemed more than willing to accommodate the interiorization of gay life by provisioning gay bars, inducing greater patronage of the closet economy. As the national spectacle of the Lavender Scare subsided, the responsibility for restraining homosexuality gay sociability increasingly fell to local government, which reached more directly into gay life itself and could be assuaged (or at least bribed) by graft and organized crime.

Like many successful Cold Warriors, Lait and Mortimer’s career burned out on the very scandals that fueled their incredible successes in the early 1950s. Throughout their career, they attempted to hedge against the inevitable threats of violence and legal action that followed so many of their unsubstantiated claims. Just after the publication of Washington Confidential, they emphasized that “[t]he result is serious, but the intent is to be entertaining as far as the truth permits. Otherwise we’d be murdered and sued from the

grave. We disclaim any purpose to reform or improve; we regard our function as complete when we make our report.”244 Just three years later, the authors were slapped with a defamation lawsuit by Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith for alleging in *Washington Confidential* that she was “an associate of and sympathizer with Communists and pro-Communists…and as an incompetent, irresponsible, and faithless public servant.”245 In April of 1954, Lait died at the age of 71, just as the Hollywood production of “New York Confidential” began casting.246 In 1955, as “New York Confidential” opened in theaters across the country, Lait’s estate and Mortimer publicly issued an apology and a retraction to settle a 7.4 million dollar libel suit brought by the Dallas-based Neiman-Marcus for a passage in *U.S.A. Confidential*247 that read, in part:

> Neiman’s was a woman’s specialty shop until the old biddies who patronized it decided to put in a men’s store…You wonder how all the faggots got to eh wild and woolly. You thought those with talent ended up in New York and Hollywood and the plodders got government jobs in Washington. Then you learn the nucleus of the Dallas fairy colony is composed of many Neiman dress and millinery designers, imported from New York and Paris, who send for their boy friends when the men’s store expanded. Now most of the sales staff are fairies, too.248

In 1956, Mortimer published *Around the World Confidential* without Lait, who, according to Mortimer “died of a broken heart…, a martyr to free and honest reporting” before adding, without a hint of irony, “a victim of an unprecedented conspiracy of

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248 Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*, 196.
vilification and abuse.”

Published two years after Joseph McCarthy’s downfall, Mortimer tried to link his and Lait’s legal troubles to what many conservatives had seen as a liberal betrayal of a patriotic crusader:

Lait and I were character assassins without equal…[but] the cold hard truth is that of some ten thousand facts, figures and names H-bombed in *U.S.A. Confidential* only eight serious challenges arose—after persons named in it were prodded by left-wing journalists all over the country…This is a proud record, if I must say so…The newspapers and magazines that greeted those settlements with glee, themselves settle, apologize or retract too; but with them it’s “the usual course of business”—not an admission of “character assassination,” which are words reserved by them only for Lait, Mortimer, and—oh, yes—McCarthy.”

Though *Around the World Confidential* included the typical cast of mobsters, sex workers, and “queers” in European cities, it sold poorly—another indication of the public’s fatigue with Red and Lavender Scare scandals—and by the end of the decade Mortimer was back to writing syndicated gossip columns.

**V. Conclusion: Cementing the Black Market Basis of Gay Life in the Late 1950s**

“We invented the Mafia,” Mortimer stated audaciously in 1960 in his syndicated column *New York Confidential*, a claim meant not to point out that such information owed its credence more to myth than fact but to dissuade NBC from using any of Lait and Mortimer’s copyrighted material for its anthology series, “New York Confidential,”

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250 Ibid., 15.
based on the earlier book and film.\textsuperscript{251} And, in fact, Mortimer seemed intent on using his syndicated column to expand his own credentials on the subject. Although most of Mortimer’s text is devoted to maligning organized labor and Italian-Americans, several of his columns also point to the extent to which organized crime had reshaped gay commercial life. Expanding on the links between organized crime and gay life established in \textit{U.S.A. Confidential}, he reported in 1959 that “[n]ot one of the joints in this town catering to the so-called ‘unfortunates’ is owned by one of the ‘unfortunates.’ It may be hard to believe that apes and goons like Tony Bender, Vito Genovese and all the other so-called tough guys, including imprisoned Frank Costello and exiled Joe Adonis collect tribute from the dainty hand-on-hippers, but they do.” He added, somewhat dubiously, “They’re the ones I’m gunning for, not the deviates who excuse their aberrations on the grounds of sickness…” According to the same article,

\begin{quote}
The corner of 78\textsuperscript{th} and B’way is a disgrace to New York with one of the largest gay concentrations on earth, attacked by the infamous Davi Club which, though it lost its liquor license for the usual reasons, (and is on the military off limits list) is in business bigger than ever selling ‘set-ups’ to an ‘all-boy’ clientele which stands bumper-to-bumper at the bar and out into 78\textsuperscript{th} causing a traffic hazard . . . If you wonder what happened to the queens and princesses after the Colony (W. 8\textsuperscript{th}) got knocked off, the customers moved around the corner to 15 Greenwich. No name on window or marquee, but it’s New Year’s Eve every night inside and on the pavement. A gorilla followed us out and around the corner, but we turned the tables and followed the hood right back into the place. NOW LET’S SEE: The Lion (W. 9\textsuperscript{th}) mentioned here recently, was put on the Armed Forces Police index, but it’s [sic] selling liquor and packed every night . . . Now
\end{quote}

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there’s a ‘Raided Premises’ sign in the window of Frank’s (E. 81st) immortalized here last week as the new haven of the old Grapeviners (both mixed-up sexes) but apparently it doesn’t interfere with business as usual.  

By the mid-1950s, organized crime more or less monopolized gay bars and, through the protection rackets, created the conditions in which bars represented the safest and most reliable site of gay sociability. True, gay bar raids occurred frequently in the period, but the people most likely to get caught in the flashbulbs of the tabloid press were more and more likely to be nabbed in subway toilets, public parks, and side streets rather than the taverns and nightclubs of the Village or around Times Square. A column published just a month later provides the most vivid detail of this process, one that Mortimer may have initiated:

HERE’S HOW IT WORKS: After I started the needling bit one queer dive was raided with seven arrests, but up until two days ago anyway it was still operating and serving liquor . . . Orders for a cleanup resulted in all kinds of inspectors giving summons for minor violations (most of which have been dumped by magistrates) but so far as I can determine none of the mob joints is being touched at all. It is the independent and legitimate operators who are being cracked down on for technicalities by various authorities to show they are on their toes . . . The average police officer is handcuffed. The way it stands now is that without a connection there is no place, no person to whom the helpless can go. The blind alley of gangdom-influence-pressure ends in a solid wall which none may crack or vault . . . These few paragraphs of mine may seem to be minor league stuff in face of the jungle of crime, murder, terror and fear that the streets of New York have become. But the conditions of which I write tie in with the other in the courts and the ‘pressures’ on

honest cops. Incidentally, everyone has ‘interviewed’ me except the D.A.’s office which still maintains its monumental indifference.\textsuperscript{253}

Mortimer’s claims were clearly exaggerated. The same week, the \textit{New York Times} reported a crime drive in which 63 were picked up on Central Park West, a well-known gay cruising spot, as well as in other parks, subway platforms, and even private parties throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{254} Most of those arrested were targeted in public, suggesting the difficulty of investigating bars and other businesses. Clearly, markets had an advantage over public space. But Mortimer’s claims seemed to overlook the fact that the administration of Mayor Robert F. Wagner was notorious for its crackdowns on gay life, a point even recognized by the California-based publishers of the \textit{Mattachine Review} in its third issue in May-June 1955, the cover of which featured a photograph of the mid-town skyline and a cover story about a police drive on “undesirables” reproduced from the \textit{Post}.\textsuperscript{255} Noting that the first such round-up had occurred the previous August, Wagner’s first year in office, the editors of \textit{Mattachine} began to discern a trend that would become clear to later historians. Warm months generally brought crackdowns.

The discursive explosion that followed in the wake of the Kinsey studies further argues for the ways in which the visibility and stigmatizing effects of publication simultaneously lowered information or search costs while raising protection costs. As Lait and Mortimer showed, these conditions played directly into the hands of organized crime, the only group with enough resources to protect such a despised minority and

against which the government seemed more or less powerless to act. In New York City, organized crime successfully controlled the core of gay commercial establishments, bars, until at least the 1970s.

The rising number of bars and other businesses that accommodated and protected same-sex desire and gay sociability suggests the ways in which bars and other businesses provided an alternative to the dangers of cruising in public while maintaining the variety and appetitive ethos of gay sexual culture in more or less private spaces (i.e., markets). Although businesses that catered to gay men and lesbians were certainly under siege, their interiors, criminal management and sponsorship, and endogenous codes of discretion offered safer social and sexual alternatives to the police lights and batons that awaited them in public parks and restrooms. More than any other aspect of gay life, these businesses provided the space and protection needed to reproduce the social bonds, cultural expressions, and sexual unions from one day—or night—to the next.

Despite the challenges of a tiny number of writers and scientists, the crumbling consensus over homosexual pathology and the need to eradicate gay sociability was by no means obvious in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The risks were all too real, and those who fell prey to them found themselves in a Kafkaesque complex of criminal and psychiatric institutions. The intense postwar criminalization of gay life cost nights, days, weeks, and years in jail for many. Through police intimidation and fear of further exposure, guilty pleas and information about others could easily be extracted from those arrested. Public antipathy, escalating to a hysterical hatred in the mid-fifties, provided convenient excuses for popular violence against “typical homosexuals,” who increasingly found themselves “rolled” and robbed by roving packs of angry young men. Lesbians
faced sexual assault. Death, while uncommon, was an additional risk. Blackmail and hush money were often paid by those who could afford it—and some who could not. There were less tangible costs, as well. Those who read Lait and Mortimer’s books, or most any contemporary writers on the subject, developed a tough hide or faced the psychic costs of guilt and shame reflected back through the distorted mirror of medical discourse and popular culture.

Even those who successfully evaded of detection by mastering the discretionary codes of the gay underworld paid significant costs. Cruising consumed hours and nights, leading to near-epic searches and journeys that took some from one end of the country to the other. These were not merely the psychic risks of self-loathing or the anxiety of exposure, but, reframed as economic problems of enforcement and information, the costs in time and money incurred by participating in almost any aspect of gay life in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Prohibitions on many kinds of public behavior, restrictions on serving alcohol to “homosexuals,” and the criminalization of “sodomy” among consenting adults, meant that participation in any aspect of gay life was akin to gambling or purchasing and selling fenced goods, bootleg liquor, illegal narcotics, or sex. Because of the illegality of gay sociability, cultural expression, and sexuality, participants and consumers of such loosely defined products had to depend on alternatives to the law to enforce basic rights to such commodities. Blackmail represented only the most visible of these costs, which protected participants and consumers from exposure and the potential loss of work, housing, social and familial connections, respectability, and even personal dignity.
As Lait and Mortimer described, protection costs extended to collective gay life, especially in vestigial and emerging gay markets. The very few bars and other businesses that did cater to an explicitly gay clientele—most of them concentrated only in the large urban centers where they could more easily evade detection—generally did so under conditions consistent with the broader informal and illicit market patterns that began to spill out of the various corruption and organized crime scandals of the 1950s. The “outing” of gay culture in the late 1940s and early 1950s reveals the larger informational effects of the Cold War, which effectively exposed all kinds of patterns that had been submerged for much of the 20th century. The Kinsey Report’s revelations occurred at approximately the same time as the even more dramatic “outing” of organized crime: the infamous Kefauver hearings of 1950-1951, the Appalachin Raid in 1957, and the revealing testimony of heroin trafficker and Genovese family foot soldier Joseph Valachi in the early 1963, the first informant to break the mafia’s code of silence, or “omertà,” and to openly admit to the existence of the mafia.\(^\text{256}\) Gay sociability and cultural

\(^{256}\) These were among the primary events that both proved the existence of organized crime to average U.S. citizens and contributed to what Joseph Albini and Jeffrey McIlwain call the “mafia mystique,” which overestimated the extent to which Italian-American organized crime (Cosa Nostra or “mafia,” a Sicilian term) controlled illicit markets on a national scale as well as the hierarchical discipline of criminal corporations or “families.” The earliest and most significant events included the televised Kefauver hearings (1950-1951), named for Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver, the first to introduce U.S. audiences to the Sicilian term “mafia.” In 1951, Kefauver expanded on the purported origins and expansion of the mafia in *Crime in America*. The hearings introduced U.S. audiences to terms like “Cosa Nostra” and “mafia,” deliberately ambiguous terms that many applied to all organized crime. However, as Albini and McIlwaine suggest, Italian-American organized crime, while dominant in many regions, was part of a patchwork of organizations that shaped and controlled illicit markets on a national scale. In addition to the Kefauver hearings, the so-called Apalachin raid in 1957 also contributed to negatives stereotypes that linked Italian-Americans to organized crime. The summit in Apalachin, New York brought together Italian-American syndicate leaders from New York City to Los Angeles. When New York State police raided the rural estate of Joseph Barbara, where the meeting was being held, 63 high-ranking members of organized crime were arrested, including New York City bosses Vito Genovese, Joseph Profaci, Carlo Gambino, and Joseph Ida. See Albini and McIlwain, *Deconstructing Organized Crime: A Historical and Theoretical Study* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., 2012, Kindle Edition, Three: “Searching for ‘Our Thing’”; Thomas Repetto, *American Mafia: A History of Its Rise to Power* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2004), 269-272; Peter Maas, *The Valachi Papers*, Bantam Edition (1968; New York: Bantam Books, 1969), 260-266.
expression—not to mention sexuality—was officially proscribed and could be privatized and repackaged as illicit commodities through bars and other businesses. Regarding the interests of free-market entrepreneurs, such establishments were a risky business. But, from the perspective of criminal entrepreneurs—whose influence cannot be underestimated in the postwar decades—such spaces could be enormously profitable. For one thing, the guilt-by-association homophobia of the period meant that bars and other gay businesses provided blackmailers with easy marks. Because criminalization limited the supply of such spaces, demand was always high and customers were more than willing to pay inflated cover charges and drink prices. In places like New York City, with sophisticated criminal corporations, gay bars could be vertically integrated into money laundering schemes as well as the larger black markets of illegal drugs and bootleg liquor.

The criminal entrepreneurship of organized crime provided a space for gay life to exist while preserving (and even reinforcing) the criminalization and stigmatization of gay life that made such a monopoly possible. Blackmail further supplemented the inflated cover charges and watered down drinks, making the protection rackets and increasingly lucrative enterprise. As subsequent chapters document, participants in gay life responded by forging and perfecting the routines of the “double life” and the closet, primarily through the compartmentalization of personal information and interpersonal networks into two increasingly divided worlds. By the end of the 1960, Mortimer’s columns suggest that the closet economy had more or less settled into a stable routine, one to which gay consumers had no choice but to acquiesce. By December of 1960, Lait reported, “Hoodlums opening private clubs for the Greenwich Village gay set, usually in
tenement and apartment houses. Plenty of protection required to keep them operating and to get away with selling booze without a license. It’s the same old mob and with the same blackmail and junk background…”

As sociologist Pino Arlacchi suggests, almost any analysis of organized crime and informal and illicit markets has to reckon with the arbitrariness of the distinctions between the so-called “free” and illicit market are largely legal and cultural constructions, distinctions that the presence of graft and corruption make even more difficult to parse. Moreover, the conventional entrepreneur and the criminal entrepreneur are linked by the same capitalist ethos. “[T]he adoption of modern capitalist values is expressed in terms of a religion of accumulation whose seriousness should not be underestimated: profit and power are regarded, not as means to the satisfaction of material needs, but as the goals of life.” Informal and illicit markets are simply those that provision goods and services unobtainable because of the force and violence monopolized by the state. Livingston’s reading of gangsters and violence in the U.S. film industry suggests the ways in which the disruptive and rapid cycles of the market are often driven by challenges to the legal restrictions and cultural mores, challenges that are just as easily framed as liberal market “freedoms” as they are in terms of illegal practices. Livingston writes, “The American fascination with crime runs deep because rapid change is normal…Kenneth Burke explained that ‘any incipient trend will first be felt as crime by reason of its conflict with established values.’ It’s hard to distinguish between criminals and heroes because they

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259 Ibid., 119.
both break the rules and point us beyond the status quo…” This is certainly true of the criminally defined consumers in the informal and illicit markets of the early closet economy, but even more so for the criminal entrepreneurs who made such markets possible and profitable. For both entrepreneurs and consumers, this formulation also exposes the basic fiction of the “free” market, one that, for Livingston, has a kind of moral and didactic value for American audiences. He states,

\[ \text{[C]rime…is as American as apple pie… [C]rime as committed at the movies became the origin and insignia of everything American. This is a useful notion, mind you. It forces us to acknowledge that the Western Hemisphere was not a ‘new world’ when Europeans invaded America…\]t lets us know that our country was not born free: it is no exception to the rules of history, no matter who…wrote them up as the laws of motion that regulate modernity.}^{260}

Or, as Eric Schlosser writes, “the invisible hand has also produced a largely invisible economy, secretive and well hidden, with its own labor demand, price structure, and set of commodities…\[A\]t its simplest the American underground is where economic activities remain off the books.”^{261} “Off the books” is a bit of a misnomer in the history of gay bars; it was not money but the meaning or cultural value of the commodity and the identity of consumers that was concealed.

Gay markets are an interesting if overlooked case in this apparently unexceptional history of capitalism in the U.S. We can hardly argue that informal or illicit markets or organized crime invented gay sociability. However, the role of these illegal economic elements is undeniable in descriptions of gay or queer “underworlds” at the turn-of-the-

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century, the speakeasy context of the lesbian and pansy craze, the criminal appropriation of public space for illicit sex and sex work (i.e., the “twilight world”), and the post-Prohibition organization of private (or market-based) queer or gay space in either “wide open” locations with weak enforcement or in locations that could be integrated into the larger illicit markets of vice controlled by organized and sometimes not-so-organized crime. Despite these apparent facts, much of the history of the interpenetration of gay and illicit networks has yet to be written. Indeed, even in my own research, the most concrete information comes third-hand from the tabloid journalism of Lait and Mortimer.

Even so, the extent to which the organized crime controlled gay life in the early closet economy is questionable and difficult to document, especially outside of New York City, where organized crime seems to have played a much less prominent role. However, the historiography of black markets and organized crimes suggests important connections between gay commercial life and informal and illicit markets and organized crime, especially in the more theoretically framed discussions of organized crime and informal and illicit markets by economists and sociologists. In New York City, home to the country’s largest gay population and most visible gay neighborhood, Greenwich Village, the consolidation of gay or queer markets was an economic process that unfolded—like so many aspects of the City’s underground economy—at the direction of organized crime and graft. Drawing on observations from economists Thomas Schelling and Peter Reuter, respectively, organized crime in New York City was both the “central

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decision-maker in the underworld” and “a non-coordinated group of firms mainly dealing with illegal markets.”

In Schelling’s definition of the term, organized crime works by establishing and monopolizing the right to tax and regulate legitimate as well as illegitimate businesses by monopolizing violence or the threat of violence over a given area. As economists Gianluca Fiorentini and Sam Peltzman suggest, Schelling’s theory of organized crime is actually “much closer to that of a government” or a shadow state. Though criminal sponsorship likely began during Prohibition, when organized crime reached its monopolistic zenith, by the early 1950s it was an open secret that most gay bars in the city operated under the protection of the mafia and especially the Genovese “family” or criminal corporation, which controlled historically gay Greenwich Village. There were, of course, exceptions, especially outside of the Genoveses’ home base on Manhattan’s West Side. The tony men’s bars of midtown and the Upper East Side were relatively well-known gay hangouts for middle- and upper-class men, though its well-heeled patrons adhered to codes of discretion that allowed them to hide in plain sight and, when necessary, maintain elaborate double lives. To the extent that middle- and upper-class people, and especially men, have always been able to afford privacy, such establishments were hardly new.

Using Reuter’s competitive model of organized crime, gay bars represented only one of the many enterprises of criminal organizations, which essentially operated as firms.

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263 Gianluca Fiorentini and Sam Peltzman, “Introduction,” *The Economics of Organized Crime*, 6. To be sure, Fiorentini and Peltzman emphasize the divergence of the “shadow states” and “competing firms” theories represented by Schelling and Reuter, respectively. My intention is not to adjudicate between these positions but merely to suggest, like Fiorentini and Peltzman, that both “have received some support from the existing evidence.” This is certainly true with regard to gay consumers and markets in New York City, which operated both within the structure of a kind of “shadow state” where the rules and costs of enforcement diverged from the free market of the legitimate or actual state, as well as the ways in which gay consumers and markets were roiled by the firm-like decisions of criminal organizations.
competing with one another, sometimes violently, for control over consumers, legitimate businesses, and illicit markets. This is reflected by the city’s many crime sagas: the internecine wars among the “Five Families” of Italian-American organized crime; the “ethnic succession” narratives of competition among Irish, Jewish, Italian, Polish, Russian, and other ethnically-based organized criminal organizations; and even smaller-scale, turf war violence among youth gangs. Gay bars were a minor subdivision in the larger black market empire of the Luciano-Costello-Genovese organization, which controlled organized crime on the West Side of Manhattan and parts of the Bronx. Although gay bars and other businesses outside of existed outside of Greenwich Village and the Times Square area, those in the Village and Times Square tellingly had the reputation for being the most openly, explicitly, and visibly gay.

Reuter’s theory of criminal enterprise models organized crime corporations as vertical markets, coordinated through territorial cartels “through the strengthening of vertical relationships between organisations specializing in the provision of different inputs needed to provide a given illegal service (e.g. violence, corruption, financial expertise).” As Martin Duberman and David Carter’s respective histories of the Stonewall Bar document, this could include using gay bars to sell bootlegger liquor, push illegal drugs and sex, blackmail customers (allegedly for insider information about the stock market), launder money, and even set up mafia-owned vending machines. The verticalization of the businesses of organized crime made gay bars profitable beyond the exorbitant cover-charges and inflated drink prices that made them such a racket in the more metaphorical sense of the word. Few sources explicitly link this market verticalization to gay bars as early as the 1950s, but the “true crime” publications of Lait

and Mortimer were the first to connect gay life to the shadow state of organized crime, making such information about that connection available to readers.

Though I do not have the time or space to sketch the synchronous emergence of this legal-cultural regime and economic system, a comparative view of Buffalo, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, DC reveal the contradictions central to the closet economy, especially the effects of intensification of anti-gay criminalization and stigmatization as well as the simultaneous increase in information about and attention paid to homosexuality and gay life. A comparative overview suggests that only “wide open” (or relatively tolerant) San Francisco rivaled New York City’s gay commercial life represented the most visible, with Greenwich Village, especially, occupying the symbolic and social center of gay life in the United States throughout much of the period. Most other cities had a smattering of bars and business establishments that operated under legal, political, and cultural conditions that were similar to those in New York City, conditions that made gay life illicit and stigmatized its participants. Little evidence suggests much more than informal, word-of-mouth links between these disparate geographies, and only New York City’s demonstrated extensive organized crime activity though virtually all implicitly and explicitly gay commercial activity in the United States faced a patchwork of inconsistent legal and cultural constraints.

In addition to raw population size, New York City’s commercial establishments were unmatched, again except perhaps in San Francisco, in terms of their the sheer diversity of bars and their clientele—leather, middle- and upper-class men’s bars, lesbian bars—not to mention cafés, restaurants, and theaters that also catered to, and in many
instances employed, gay men and lesbians. Furthermore, the city’s arts and entertainment industries fostered a middle- and upper-class milieu that tolerated sexual and gender non-conformity as long as it did not impede the ability to sell tickets or subscriptions. As Michael Sherry suggests, the anti-gay, Cold War-inflected rhetoric of a disproportionately influential and quasi-conspiratorial “Homintern” centered primarily on composers, artists, and playwrights working in the city. Despite the presence of these features, political organization in New York City tended to be anemic and slow moving compared to such phenomena in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The first sustained gay organization in the United States was founded in New York City in 1945, but the furtively named Veterans Benevolent Society mostly served as a social club, a venue for speakers on sex, and a loose network that facilitated, among other things, legal aid and employment opportunities. Although chapters of ONE, Mattachine, and the Daughters of Bilitis were founded in the 1950s, their activities were limited to hosting social meetings and guest speakers, oftentimes psychiatrists, most of whom advocated a therapeutic “cure.” In San Francisco, by contrast, Homophile organizations had begun to organize voter drives and even helped support the first openly gay candidate for public office, Jose Sarría, a drag entertainer at the famed Black Cat, in the early 1960s. Moreover, gay bar owners formed the Tavern Guild to fight police incursions and ensure protection for its consumers. In New York City, police raids continued unabated and, until 1966, the local Homophile leaders and rank-and-file members largely ignored the markets in their presence. Thus, New York City’s early closet economy was unique in its size, diversity, and its intense and onerous restrictions.

265 Sherry, Gay Artists in Modern Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1-2
While successful at staying in business in the short term, the practical problems of the black market of the closet economy proved to difficult to contain in the ensuing decade. The growth of information exogenous to the closet economy, whether in the high-minded prose of popular psychology or the small-minded snark of Lait and Mortimer, continued to draw people into the economic and geographic core of gay life—few places as visibly as Greenwich Village—and undermined the informational segregation that made the closet and the “double life” possible. As the third chapter demonstrates, it was the publication of information endogenous to gay life—literal gossip as the verbal and highly coded raw material—that did most to undermine the informational ecology and set up the cultural and political conflicts over visibility that would gripped gay social life until the final eruption of Gay Liberation in the late 1960s.


Despite the enormous influence of the Kinsey reports on the publication of popular psychology in the early 1950s, this stream of information about gay life rarely if ever constituted much practical advice, either as a guide to the commercial establishments of the gay underworld or the deeper psychic and subjective experiences negotiating the deadly pervasiveness of anti-gay stigma. Some gay readers must have stumbled across the Confidential series by Lait and Mortimer, or scanned the tabloids as a surreptitious guide to the underworld, but this stream of information probably discouraged participation in gay life as much as it emitted the “siren song of Circe,” as the Times reviewer described its tone.

However informative, all of the previous information originated from outside or exogenously to the queer or gay social networks, even if it was essentially an effect of the exposure of the gay underworld and homosexuality in mass media. The most important feature of gay life in the 1950s was the fact that most participants in queer or gay social life—especially in bars and other places that constituted an emerging gay market—wanted to avoid the kind of exposure represented by Lait and Mortimer, Bergler, and even Kinsey. Participants in these markets and the social world of which it was a part built on traditions of code and innuendo: a language that conveyed one set of meanings to the cognoscenti while evading the detection of authorities and experts.
Beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s, participants in the gay underworld began to recount their own experiences, typically through the veil of fiction but, increasingly, through the kinds of confessional writing that anticipated gay visibility and coming out—not into the gay world, but out of the closet that institutionalized its sequestered existence. This risky and conscious enterprise accomplished more in terms of cementing a gay community—especially its political, social, and economic organization—than any works by straight outsiders. Such writing carried enormous risks, since those who recounted participation in queer or gay life were in many cases also admitting to breaking the law, or at the very least flouting an almost universally held taboo against gender crossing and same-sex sexuality. But by the end of the 1940s, a number of participants may have felt they had no choice, compelled by the circumstances of the homosexual panics of the late 1940s and the early 1950s, not to mention the changing aesthetic standards of post-war U.S. culture. In 1948, for example, the same year that saw the publication of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male also witnessed the publication of Gore Vidal’s City and the Pillar and Truman Capote’s Other Voices, Other Rooms, both of which created a stir with their sympathetic portrayal of gay characters, anticipating an explosion of fictional titles about gay life in the 1950s and 1960s written both to satisfy and to stoke the seemingly inexhaustible demand for such material.\(^{266}\)

\(^{266}\) To be sure, these insider or subjective accounts of gay life were not completely innovative in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The mass publication of the earliest explicitly gay novels first appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, more often than not urban realist novels that depicted the flourishing gay commercial culture in New York City and other major Prohibition-era entertainment districts. The late 1920s and 1930s had ushered in the first run of “gay classics,” dog-eared copies of which lined the bookshelves of those aging participants of the Prohibition-era gay scene. Such books had described in explicit and atypically sympathetic terms the loves and lives of “queers” and “perverts,” often drawn from direct experience. Such gay-authored books included landmarks like Radclyffe Hall’s 1928 publication of The Well of Loneliness, a book whose publication prompted explosive obscenity trials in the U.K. and the U.S. in 1928 and 1929, respectively, no doubt boosting sales and interest in the novel; André Tellier’s account of the Paris and New York under worlds, Twilight Men and Blair Niles’ racial fantasy of Harlem Strange Brother, both of
Truman Capote’s debut *Other Voices, Other Rooms* featured a main character whose development could be seen as acceptance of a gay identity, although those implications are so muted as to be practically hidden. The many queer characters—tomboys, sissies, and narcissistic cross-dressers—seem damaged and pathological. More importantly, Capote’s novel was set in the Faulkneresque decay of Mississippi, not in the teeming gay underworlds of nearby New Orleans (or anywhere else for that matter).

*Other Voices, Other Rooms* is decidedly an account of the rural isolation, removed from the social and semi-public underworld—or closet economy—in which gay life was surreptitiously expanding in the late 1940s and early 1950s.²⁶⁷ Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar*, set in the barracks and bars central to gay life in the 1940s, came much closer to depicting gay social life outside of the isolated milieu of Capote’s novel. However, *The City and the Pillar* concludes with a literary trope that had become a damaging stereotype in the 1940s, with the protagonist of the novel murdering his lover. The *Times* described the novel as “the case history of a standard homosexual” that “adds little that is new to a groaning shelf,” an indication of the growing body of literature about homosexuality and gay life, even if the reviewer overstated its volume.²⁶⁸ (Vidal apparently changed the

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ending in 1965 to rape instead of homicide as an improvement.) And while the publication of frank depictions of gay life could represent an attempt to deal with challenging material, doing so carried tremendous risks for any author brave enough to do so. Capote built a hugely successful literary career on the publication of *Other Voices, Other Rooms; The City and the Pillar*, on the other hand, harmed Vidal’s reputation with the literary and publishing establishment for the next decade.269

In contrast to the cold and clinical abstraction represented by Kinsey and Bergler, writers brave enough to write down their own experiences revealed a level of social intimacy and cultural complexity that had been flattened by Kinsey’s data and the stereotypes of Lait, Mortimer, and Bergler. However, the publication of gay-authored works in the late 1940s and early 1950s was arguably driven by demand: a greater desire on the part of a gay (or curious) readership to read the details of a complex psychic and social world that queer or gay subjects inhabited or wanted to inhabit. The national distribution of these novels meant that gay culture circulated among a readership unfamiliar with the visible cues of gay life to which most urbanites had grown accustomed, if uneasily so. This new subjective literature suggested a path from the repressive humdrum of Capote’s Monroeville, Alabama to the gay underworlds of New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, or any of the other cities teeming with queer or gay life in the post-war United States. “The importance of these novels as educational, self-help, and how-to manuals cannot be underestimated,” writes Michael Bronski.

No one is brought up to be gay…Having sexual desires is one thing, finding people with whom to act on them is another, and finding a community is yet another step that is as liberating as it is fraught

with peril and utter confusion. These books were the maps and the signposts, the etiquette manuals and the foreign-books, for…entering the half-hidden world of homosexuality.\(^{270}\)

However, the most important informational trend of the early closet economy was not simply an increase in the amount of information published by people embedded within gay social and commercial life but a transition from fiction to non-fiction. At first glance, the terms of my analysis suggest an endogenous stream of information that contrasted with the exogenous information published by ostensibly straight authors outside the closet economy. But, indeed, the publication of a formerly oral source of information actually suggests the erosion of the informational boundaries between the “inside” and “outside” of gay or queer social life. Even so, the erosion of that boundary hardly meant that distinctions between gay and straight were falling away—if anything, the opposite seems to be true. However, the transition from fiction to non-fiction, or from fantasy to reality, also anticipates the paradigm shift from strategies of evasion to the production of identity. These broadly defined transitions from fantasy to reality and from oral to print culture grounded the construction of a discourse whose main appeal relied on the practical as well as ideological truths it revealed about gay social and commercial life.

In the 1950s, non-fictional representations of gay or queer people willing to discuss themselves in print represented the most important informational feature in a period marked by the consolidation of the early closet economy. By informing readers how different kinds of gay spaces—especially bars—were marked among the gay underworld, the books that addressed gay commercial life in a non-fictional way helped to brand a subset of the urban entertainment economy and, more importantly, helped the

queer and the curious to locate it. In the 1950s, such printed information represented the single most important public good in the consolidation of the closet economy. Participants in this inchoate market built on communicative strategies and codes that were designed to evade detection and allow the initiated to move through the gay underworld, but this stock of knowledge was strictly limited to those who had been initiated into the secretive networks that comprised gay social life and had never been published and widely distributed. Though some of the basic cues—the sissy, for example, or the mannish bull dyke—were known through popular culture, gay or queer culture represented a kind of arcane knowledge before the 1951 publication of The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach.

*The Homosexual in America* gained an instant following among gay readers and provided the single most influential set of ideas for the nascent Homophile movement. Published by Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* offered much greater detail of gay social life than Capote, Vidal, or any other contemporary fiction writer, and without the moralistic baggage required of authors who had to be self-conscious in a hostile publishing industry and critical establishment. Donald Webster Cory—a reference to André Gide’s defense of homosexuality, *Corydon*—was actually the pseudonym of Edward Sagarin, a married perfumer and amateur sociologist from New York City. Freed from the stigma attached to a book published in his real name, *The Homosexual in America* reads like a combination guide to the occult, a Gunar Myrdal-style sociological study of prejudice and discrimination, and a

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truly daring political manifesto. *The Homosexual in America* also offered an affecting riposte against the medical and legal establishment, providing both an ideological justification for participation in gay social life as well as a guide into the clandestine geography of the gay social world.

Cory’s remarkable “subjective approach” to gay life opened the floodgates of gay-authored information, ushering in the Homophile publishing boom described by Martin Meeker in *Contacts Desired*. As such, *The Homosexual in America* may offer the most important evidence of both “homosexualizing discourse” and direct information about life in the early closet economy, detailing both the inner psychic and the outer social worlds that together comprised a gay “way of life.” *The Homosexual in America* suggests a number of alternatives to the near-universal conscription into heterosexual courtship and marriage (and even the alternatives within heterosexual marriages through the double life, since *The Homosexual in America* claimed plenty of evidence for a “galaxy of gay husbands” populating the gay world). As a result, *The Homosexual in America* represents what is probably the most important example of gay cultural entrepreneurship in the 1950s, an attempt to create both a “product” in recognizable identities and communities, as well as initiate new groups of consumers into the market in which the “product” was forged and circulated. By disseminating information about gay culture, he promoted cultural forms like lingo, style of dress, gestures, and even erotic practices as a public (or quasi-public) good.

As his subtitle suggested, this slice-of-life pop sociology represented one of, if not the first subjective or “insider” accounts of gay life in the United States. Cory offered readers one of the most detailed accounts of a clandestine world within a larger

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underworld of vice and crime spattered across the country’s major cities, nowhere nearly as visible as the nation’s largest city and the emerging cultural, economic, and diplomatic center of the post-war order. For straight readers, it was a tour of a shadowy and often dangerous underworld. For straight readers, it was a tour of a shadowy and often dangerous underworld. For uninitiated readers, whether gay or simply curious, *The Homosexual in America* was an exploration of social worlds organized around sexual eccentricity. An alternative to the tried and true pathways of the psychiatrist’s office and the inevitable arrest of a chaise lounge (or a straitjacket) nor through the back entrance of one of Weegee’s “pie wagons,” *The Homosexual in America* offered a tour of the winding streets and foliage-dimmed parks that led to the gay bars, restaurants, and parties that comprised the gay social world.

What set *The Homosexual in America*’s “subjective approach” apart from other explorations of homosexuality was its emphasis on the social and cultural dynamics of gay interaction—the interpersonal relationships forged, often at great cost—and the precarious and clandestine social and economic institutions to which gay people clung in a period otherwise marked by surveillance and the guilt-by-association hysteria that often resembled a national witch hunt. Organized into six sections—sociology, psychology, patterns, culture, adjustments, outlook, and an extensive appendix with government documents on the employment (or non-employment of homosexuals), a list of statutes from all forty-eight states, and an over thirty page bibliography of expert and non-expert literature devoted to the topic—no other works from the 1950s suggest the breadth or depth of Cory’s study. Additionally, *The Homosexual in America* includes an extensive bibliography of hundreds of titles of gay and gay-themed books, spanning the canon of
Western literature from *The Satyricon* of Petronius to the brilliant, existentialist potboilers of Jean Genet.\(^{273}\)

The section on sociology described the legal and cultural norms that constricted gay life and criminalized gay individuals, the constraints of which instituted the closet economy as a distinctly gay and illicit market. The section on psychology critiques the professional reinforcement of negative stereotypes and confronts the demographic possibilities offered by the Kinsey report, provocatively offering a comparison between race and ethnicity in which homosexuals, as minorities, were analogous to American Jews and African-Americans—a controversial if far-reaching political and rhetorical strategy that has animated gay or queer social activism and arguments for civil rights into the present day.\(^{274}\) The final sections, which this chapter deals with most extensively, on “Patterns,” “Culture,” “Adjustments” and “Outlooks,” each detailed the economic and geographic center of gay life in a nameless city that is very clearly Manhattan, the effects of the “double life,” and the potential of building political and cultural capital from gay sociability.

Cory’s portrait of gay social and commercial life provided an important informational and cultural supplement to Kinsey’s depersonalized demography, Bergler’s mocking portrayals of sexual psychopaths, and Lait and Mortimer’s lurid descriptions of queer criminals. True, Cory’s book names no names and lists no specific sites, but, with sympathy and first-hand knowledge, Cory deftly constructed a psychologically and sociologically complex interpersonal world, in the process showing how it worked

\(^{274}\) Ibid., 78.
through the guilt, jealousy, love, lust, friendship, desire, and, at times, even pride that characterized the social dynamics of the gay world in the emerging closet economy.

The great innovation of *The Homosexual in America* is that it described the centrality of interaction and sociability to a new kind of homosexual identity, even envisioning a society in which such interactions were no longer subject to taboo and persecution. When it appeared in print, Cory’s book struck an immediate chord with many gay readers for the political implications of the social and commercial world he described. Frank Kameny, a pioneering Homophile activist and founder of the Washington, D.C. Mattachine Society, argued that the first Kinsey study and *The Homosexual in America* “were the two threads that came together, really, and triggered the gay movement in ’51.” Indeed, more than any other published work, Cory’s analysis linked the gay commercial economy to the persecutions of the Holocaust, the political witchhunts of the Cold War, and the resurgence of “minority” politics represented by the African-American Civil Rights Movement. In emphasizing the essentially social and cultural contours of the gay life, Cory also gestured toward the centrality of economics and economic considerations to the gay “lifestyle” and the political restrictions that accounted for its clandestine nature. According to Cory’s analysis, sodomy laws, police entrapment, and popular violence—in essence, stigmatization and criminalization—set a contradictory set of unavoidable, interrelated conditions: demand for physically safe and secure venues, the imposition of a kind of artificial scarcity on gay commercial life and a connection to the violence of organized crime, payment of blackmail for job security or housing, and what Jeffrey Escoffier calls

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the other psychic and social demands of the “double life.” What Escoffier calls “the strict segregation of information” was essentially organized by participation in the largely commercialized world of gay life, on the one hand, and putting on the “mask” of participating in the straight world.\footnote{Escoffier, American Homo: Community and Perversity, 69.} By linking these conditions to post-war political and social movements, Cory essentially constructed a political identity from the gay way of life,” a maneuver that exposed the long-range implications of participation in gay commercial life, or gay consumption. Indeed, if Kinsey had shown the potential of a gay critical mass, Cory underlined its political kinesis.

In doing so, Cory also supplied an ethic of erotic and social play and personal fulfillment—an ethos that shares much with what Jackson Lears’ defines as the “therapeutic ethos” of twentieth century advertising and consumer culture—as well as the centrality of this ethos and its attendant commercial institutions to the idea of a “homosexual community,” a “homosexual minority,” and the potential for a recognition of the fact that he is doing no one any harm. He wants to live and let live, to punish and be punished when there are transgressions, and to go about the ordinary and everyday pursuits of life, unhindered either by law or by an unwritten hostility which is even more effectual than the written law.\footnote{Cory, The Homosexual in America, 127.}

Cory may just as well have demanded the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of gayness. *The Homosexual in America* offers one of the most detailed documents of gay life in the early 1950s, particularly in the sections on the bars and other businesses that...
formed the economic base of this community, boldly hinting at the long-term political dividends of this economic core while simultaneously grappling with the immediate, short-term risks posed by the unveiling of this community. Consumer culture or not, jobs had to be maintained, rent had to be paid, and “straight” social relations and appearances had to be kept up in order to pay the costs necessary to maintain the “double life” and, by extension, the gay world. As an early source of information about gay social life, Cory’s study reflects the ambiguities of visibility and the precarity of the institutions inherent to the closet economy. It is difficult to find another single work of writing—fiction or non-fiction—as consequential as *The Homosexual in America*, or a single intellectual or political figure from the Homophile era as baffling as Donald Webster Cory, whose real name was Edward Sagarin. The following chapter explores Sagarin’s entrepreneurial role as the architect of the single most consequential and contradictory corpus of information about gay life in the early closet economy; consequential primarily because it emerged as “insider” knowledge of gay life, and contradictory because of its fraught negotiation of gay visibility.

This chapter proceeds in two broad sections, the first of which describes the larger form of information as a public good represented by the publication of *The Homosexual in America* and Cory/Sagarin’s own biography as an exemplar of the “double life.” The first part of my argument sketches out the informational context of insider information in the closet economy, as well as a biographical portrait of the enigmatic Donald Webster Cory/Edward Sagarin, whose own life closely mirrored the fraught agency of visibility and identity in the early closet economy. Rejecting the prevailing stereotypes of Cory/Sagarin as a “closet queen,” I argue for the resituation of Cory/Sagarin’s biography
in the context of the closet economy as a deft deployment of the “double life” as a strategy of resistance rather than capitulation, one that was ultimately undermined by Cory/Sagarin’s role as an entrepreneur of a public culture. As a writer, his influence was inestimable in the creation of a gay literary market as a public (or quasi-public) good in that it served as a storehouse of information about gay life and the gay “lifestyle.” *The Homosexual in America* reveals the crystallization of a gay “brand” as the most effective means of reducing the informational uncertainties and asymmetries that plagued the emerging markets of the closet economy, even though the “brand” ultimately created an untenable situation for Cory/Sagarin, who was marginalized in the Homophile movement he helped create and demonized by the Gay Liberation movement he anticipated. My exploration of Cory/Sagarin and *The Homosexual in America* points to the singular importance of insider information in an illicit market characterized by uncertainty, decreasing yet still high search costs, and increasing protection costs. Drawing on George Akerlof’s theory of information, I argue that Cory/Sagarin played a central role in navigating a “market for lemons,” in which the lemons were not used cars, but less than premium goods and services—in this case the exploitation, lack of security, unreliability, risks of exposure, and potential for blackmail represented by gay bars and other businesses in the closet economy.

The second major part of this essay uses *The Homosexual in America* to uncover the clandestine cultural patterns that forged the basis of gay life in the closet economy as well as an analysis of Cory’s descriptions of the businesses and institutions that constituted the economic and geographic core of gay social life. The second part of my argument essentially explores the content of this “insider” stream of information as a
social and cultural manual to the gay “way of life.” As an addendum to the previous two chapters, my exploration of *The Homosexual in America* as a source of information argues that the “subjective” or insider nature of Cory’s both drew attention to the segregation of information between the gay and straight world and simultaneously undermined the code of silence that insulated the gay social world from surveillance and persecution.

**II. Mr. Cory and Dr. Sagarin: The Art of the Double Life in the Closet Economy**

Edward Sagarin, or “Donald Webster Cory,” as he was known to both readers and his compatriots in the Homophile movement, remains one of the most enigmatic and controversial figures in U.S. queer history. Part of his mystery derives from the fact that he never voluntarily disclosed his identity, even to friends in the Homophile movement, and maintained a dual identity until his death in 1986, long after he ceased participating in gay politics. Aside from two encyclopedia articles authored by Stephen O. Murray and David K. Johnson and a brief *GLQ* article by Martin Duberman, Sagarin/Cory’s reputation owes more to legend than fact. That “legend” is almost a morality tale about the nature of progressive movements and the tendency of its original vanguard to appear more or less retrogressive in the hindsight of history. Kameny, while praising the importance of *The Homosexual in America* also referred to him as the “doddering

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grandfather” of the movement.\textsuperscript{279} Dick Leitsch, president of the New York Mattachine Society and a onetime political rival, called him “Auntie Donny.”\textsuperscript{280}

The legend goes something like this: As author of \emph{The Homosexual in America}, Donald Webster Cory represented the most important and widely read intellectual voice of the nascent Homophile movement. His participation in the Homophile movement was especially felt in One, Inc., more of a think tank than political organization, though Cory contributed articles to all of the major national Homophile magazines, including \emph{One Magazine}, \emph{The Mattachine Review}, and \emph{The Ladder}. \emph{The Homosexual in America} truly represented a radical break with most thinking on the subject of sexuality, surpassing even Kinsey’s clinical impartiality and prompting psychologist Albert Ellis, a frequent Sagarin/Cory collaborator and participant in Homophile meetings and conferences, to write in his foreword to \emph{The Homosexual in America} that “I cannot appreciate some of the alleged social, political, and other individual and societal advantages which Mr. Cory claims for homosexuality….I must also take issue with Mr. Cory’s pessimism concerning the possibility of adjusting homosexuals to more heterosexual modes of living.”\textsuperscript{281}

Relegated to a footnote in most histories of the period, Martin Duberman seems to be one of the few historians to give Sagarin focused attention, intending to write a book that stalled out as an article in a 1997 article for the \emph{Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review} entitled “Dr. Sagarin and Mr. Cory: The ‘Father’ of the Homophile Movement.” Duberman’s inverted “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” narrative has all but come to define Sagarin’s legacy as well as his even more ambiguous place within the history of the Homophile movement. Duberman solicited thirty interviews, which form the bulk of this

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\textsuperscript{279} Kameny Interview, Martin B. Duberman Papers.
\textsuperscript{280} Dick Leitsch Interview, Box 110, Martin P. Duberman Papers.
\textsuperscript{281} Albert Ellis, Introduction to \emph{The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach}, x.
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chapter’s primary sources, from key figures in the Homophile movement and Sagarin’s academic colleagues for a book that never came to fruition. On the one hand, as Duberman contends, as “Mr. Cory,” his thesis “that homosexuals were, like more established ethnic, racial, and subcultural groups, a distinct and legitimate minority” has informed the trajectory of queer politics for better or worse since 1951.\(^\text{282}\) On the other hand, as Dr. Sagarin, he wrote an “acid, sometimes trenchant essay” in which he “derided the emergent view that homosexuals ‘are healthy as anyone else’ [and] argued that ‘cure’ was both possible and desirable, and denied that social oppression was the primary cause of psychopathology as existed in the gay world.”\(^\text{283}\)

True to Duberman’s “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” narrative, Sagarin steadfastly maintained his double life, known as Cory within the movement and Sagarin in his professional career as a sociologist. (Sagarin completed a Ph.D. at N.Y.U. in sociology in the 1966 at the age of 53.) He even used his involvement in the Homophile movement as raw material for his research, citing “Donald Webster Cory” without ever revealing the name as a pseudonym for Edward Sagarin, a widely published sociologist of deviance with academic appointments at City College and Brooklyn College. He was married with a child and his wife, Gertrude, often performed social functions on her husband’s behalf, a role that was de rigueur for wives at a time when the academy was virtually dominated by men. Although his identity was something of an open secret in Homophile circles, in 1974 he was exposed once and for all as Donald Webster Cory by fellow sociologist and ardent supporter of Gay Liberation Laud Humphreys, when he repeatedly addressed him as such at a meeting of the American Sociological Association. Sagarin apparently


\(^{283}\) Ibid., 7.
collapsed in tears, admitting “I am my data” before leaving the panel. A year later, he threatened to sue Wiley Publishers after he read galley proofs of Vern Bullough’s *Sexual Variance in Society and Behavior*, which linked Cory’s and Sagarin’s names. Although, as Sagarin, he racked up a number of publications about homosexuality, he completely retreated from gay politics and died of a heart attack in 1986 at the age of 73. According to historian Jonathan Ned Katz, who called his colleague Marshall Berman following his death in 1986, Berman recalled confronting Sagarin over some particularly homophobic remarks made in the context of a faculty meeting. When told to “lighten up” by Berman, Sagarin admitted to being Cory and somewhat cryptically uttered “leading a double life is unbearable -- but in my case it’s a lot more than just two lives that I’m leading.”

When he died in 1986, few of Sagarin’s colleagues knew about his alter ego, though most of them were quite familiar with *The Homosexual in America*.

Taken as a whole, Sagarin’s biography and his various works on homosexuality under both the Cory and Sagarin name suggest a complex negotiation of an identity that, at times, seemed similar to other persecuted “minority” statuses (especially African-Americans and Jews) and, at others, seemed to be working from a deficit model, calling attention to the ways in which homosexuality represented a handicap. Sagarin’s biography is not atypical for many participants in early Homophile organizations, for whom homosexuality represented a disability rather than a political identity. But unlike most of the other major figures of the Homophile movement, including many directly inspired and influenced by Sagarin/Cory—Harry Hay, Barbara Gittings, Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Hal Call, Frank Kameny, and Jim Kepner—Sagarin never formally “came out” and even backtracked on many of his assertions in *The Homosexual in America*,

284 Jonathan Ned Katz, 6, 1996, Martin Duberman Papers, Box 110.
including his suggestion that homosexuality was not curable and that, under better social circumstances, gay identity might represent a pathway to a positive self-image. Despite his centrality to the early Homophile movement, his legacy is largely overshadowed by the political “militants” who embraced direct action and “coming out” after the mid-1960s, charting a pathway toward the Gay Liberation movement and rendering Sagarin a self-loathing relic of the closet.

In the context of the early 1950s, however, it is difficult to find an intellectual project with as much daring and sophistication as *The Homosexual in America*. Drawing on a quarter century of experience in the gay world, Sagarin’s formal research for *The Homosexual in America* ultimately led him to collaborate with Albert Ellis, a leading psychiatric authority on homosexuality and author of numerous books on the subject; Alfred Kinsey and his associates at the University of Indiana; Norman Haire, a British sexologist; and Max Lerner, a regular columnist for the *New York Post*. Sagarin chose the pseudonym Donald Cory as an oblique reference to André Gide’s scandalous and recently translated defense of homosexuality, *Corydon*, although his publisher insisted he add the middle name Webster to avoid a lawsuit. In many respects, Sagarin’s defense is significantly more timid than those found in his few contemporaries and even fewer forebears, especially Gide, who died the year *The Homosexual in America* was first published. Indeed, Gide’s English translator, Richard Howard, remarked that “the

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287 Very few defenses of homosexuality existed in English, though sympathetic novels began to appear in the 1930s and 1940s. A number of Sagarin’s observations and analyses of homosexuality had been a staple of what historians call the homosexual emancipation movement in Germany and to a lesser extent in England, especially the works of Magnus Hirschfeld, Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds, and a handful of other sexologists and reformers. However, with the exception of a handful of books by English sexologists like Carpenter, Symonds, Havelock Ellis, and the sexology-inspired novels of Radclyffe Hall,
author of such platitudes might serve valiantly as one’s congressman…but was hardly apt
to do justice to the complexities so desperately engaged…”

The merits of the writing notwithstanding, Sagarin’s account effectively revealed,
for the first time in mass print, an insider account of the elaborate cultural and social
world built into the commercial economy of bars, restaurants, and other gathering spots,
typically segregated from or, less often, hiding in plain sight within “straight” gathering
spaces. In New York City, this geographic segregation was perhaps the most dramatic,
primarily because of the concentration of gay life in a geographically idiosyncratic
neighborhood populated by bohemians and other eccentrics tucked away in the
southwestern pocket of Manhattan—Greenwich Village. His description of gay life
transmitted scarce information about how to enter into and negotiate that world. Although
Sagarin’s primary purpose was to argue on behalf of the amelioration of negative
attitudes toward homosexuals and the decriminalization of laws negatively affecting
homosexuals, he inadvertently exposed a relatively autonomous social and cultural world
that thrived on the very secrecy in which The Homosexual in America so deftly traded.

most such works remained untranslated (and many German sexologists, including Hirschfeld, had their
research destroyed by the Nazis) and mostly unknown to audiences in the United States. Hall was actually
subject to a long and scandalous obscenity trial in the United States. The most popular fictional accounts of
homosexuality in the decade before Sagarin published The Homosexual in America were Charles Jackson’s
The Lost Weekend (the film version, an Academy Award Best Picture winner scrubbed all references to
homosexuality) and, more scandalously, Gore Vidal’s The City and the Pillar. For information about the
homosexual emancipation movement in Germany, see Elena Mancini, Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest
for Sexual Freedom (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) and James Steakley, The Homosexual
Emancipation Movement in Germany (New York: Arno Press, 1975). For information on the relationship
between sexology and homosexual emancipation in England, see Sheila Rowbotham, Edward Carpenter: A
Life of Liberty and Love (London and New York: Verso: 2008) and Diana Souhami, The Trials of Radclyffe
Hall (New York: Doubleday, 1999). As mentioned earlier, Susan Stryker points to the significance of
Jackson and Vidal as anticipating a publishing boom in homosexuality, particularly in the pulp presses, in
Stryker, Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback, 7-12.

288 Howard, Translator’s Note in André Gide, Corydon, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus,
The book was a minor blockbuster and served as a guidebook to gay social life for its readers. For the first generation of gay activists, it was nothing less than a political blueprint for the roughly two decades between the founding of the Mattachine Society and the Stonewall Riots in 1969. Sagarin’s studies both in *The Homosexual in America* and subsequently were especially important in animating the intellectual interests at the California-based One Institute, the earliest institute in the U.S. dedicated to the study of homosexuality and gender non-conformity and the publisher of *ONE Magazine*, which won the right to publish information about homosexuality in a landmark decision before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1958. *The Homosexual in America* is cited in too many memoirs and firsthand accounts of gay life to mention. And, indeed, until the 1960s it remained the most popular and influential source of information yet published on gay social life. Greenberg Press issued seven printings in the 1950s before Castle Books issued a second edition in 1960. Its citation in the earliest Homophile publications and Sagarin’s own appearances as “Donald Webster Cory” at Homophile conferences makes *The Homosexual in America* something of an Urtext for the gay rights movement in the United States.

Whatever his legacy now, Sagarin’s influence among gay readers and activists in the 1950s was unparalleled. The role of both *The Homosexual in America* and its writer proved crucial to the Homophile movement as both an organized campaign and as an intellectual challenge to the pathologization and criminalization of non-normative gender and sexuality. By the end of the decade *The Homosexual in America* could count among

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289 Sagarin’s legacy is complex, since he declared homosexuality to be a “sociological minority” but declined to be politically active (or even “out”) based on that supposition. W. Dorr Legg, ed., *Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice* (San Francisco: One Institute Press and GLB Publishers, 1994), 118.
its informational and ideological offspring the three national Homophile publications—
ONE Magazine and The Mattachine Review, founded by Mattachine and former
Mattachine members, and the Daughters of Bilitis’ The Ladder—all of which Cory had played a direct or indirect role in establishing and to which he contributed articles and letters. Although the Homophile organizations and their publications remained based on the West Coast during the 1950s, Cory provided an important node of connection between the seasoned activists of Los Angeles and San Francisco and the fledgling activists in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and New York City, where he was instrumental in founding a local chapter of the Mattachine Society. The book proved such an invaluable source of information that Barbara Gittings, long-time editor of the Ladder, credits it with her entrée into Homophile politics. She recalled:

The book itself was fascinating, but what really appealed to me was his list of literature, his bibliography, at the end of the book. I had no idea that there was so much available…[b]ecause I had had some difficulty finding my way to material on homosexuality. And had developed some strong feelings about the literature, what there was, and suddenly, here was this long list.”

Cory also met with Gittings in a basement apartment in Manhattan and told her about both ONE, Inc. and the Daughters of Bilitis, whose offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco she visited in 1956. Eventually, Gittings became the long-time editor of The Ladder and helped found chapters of the Daughters of Bilitis in both New York City and Philadelphia. Cory also participated in ONE’s famed Midwinter Institute in Los Angeles, providing an important intellectual voice to the swollen debates over sexual pathology

291 Barbara Gittings Interview, Martin Duberman Papers.
and the swelling debates over the path of political activism and visibility—debates over which Cory increasingly found himself on the conservative side.  

It is difficult to imagine a more poignant representative of the “double life” or the closet economy than Edward Sagarin, who was both a symptom of the changing patterns of gay life and, to some extent, a victim of the very social forces he helped to unleash. Straddling both the gay and the straight social worlds and the chronology of the closet and Gay Liberation, Sagarin represents an ultimately transitory figure, much like the closet itself—which is less a durable social pattern than an impossible and impassible space between the closet’s demand for discretion and silence Gay Liberation’s demand for visibility.

III. “New and Wider Circles”: The Promise and Peril of Gay Information and the Communicative Contradictions of the Closet Economy

Even as The Homosexual in America helped to carve out a daring new kind of social and political subject, its very publication epitomized the communicative risks of the closet. Whatever promise it represented to gay or curious readers, the exposure of gay life in print still occurred in a broader cultural context in which homosexuality was considered insidiously pathological, criminal, and even disloyal. For Cory, those fraught possibilities could be summed up with a new vocabulary of identity and sociability that proved resistant to both pathologization and stigmatization, providing an alternative if risky path toward visibility. Dissatisfied with technical words like “invert,” “pervert,” “sodomist” and “homosexual,” and horrified and humiliated at being called “fairy, queen,

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sister, nance;  “pansy,” “queer,” “fag,” and “c— s—,” Sagarin pleaded for “an ordinary, everyday, matter-of-fact word, that could express the concept of homosexuality without glorification or condemnation…Such a word has long been in existence, and in recent years has grown in popularity. That word is gay.”

The psychological benefits of the word “gay,” as a source of affirmation and positive identification, are hard to underestimate; but its practical, communicative dimensions suggest the importance of the word gay as a signifier or “brand” of the lifestyle growing up around the commercial geography of gay bars and other businesses. “Gay…gay…gay!” Sagarin exclaimed.

Life is gay, the party is gay, the bar is gay, the book is gay, the young man is gay—very gay—or, alas! he is not gay! …The word serves many purposes…a secret code that will always be understood by some, never by others… Conversation can be held in which the homosexuals in a room use a language which they alone understand, but, unlike the situation prevailing were a tongue being spoken, the others present are unaware of their ignorance.293

He complained, however, that

the usefulness of gay diminishes as its meaning becomes more widely understood. New and wider circles are constantly becoming familiar with the word, although the public at large, except for theatrical and artistic people, literary groups, bohemians, underworld characters, and police officers, are unaware of its slang meaning. However, as it becomes better known, its secret character, and the advantages derived therefrom, are to a certain extent vitiated.294

These remarks were certainly prescient for 1951, the beginning of a period in which the organization of gay commercial life redefined the social, cultural, and economic

294 Ibid., 109.
manifestation of “homosexuality” in the U.S. Furthermore, Sagarin’s emphasis on conversation implicates the strategic importance of verbal communication networks and gossip as vehicles for the transference of indigenous gay vernacular knowledge without arousing suspicion, surveillance, and violence. However, in the historical context of the early fifties, the word “gay” (and gay communication networks more generally) held the potential to undermine the cultural and social invisibility on which gay commercial institutions and gay consumers depended.

The paradox of the word gay and the vernacular its speakers drew from were essential features of the illicit market in which gay social life was embedded at mid-century. As Sagarin’s description implied, the word gay represented the superficial features of a much deeper and more complex vernacular, one that was almost always spoken, occasionally written in a letter, and rarely if ever published. For all practical purposes, historians might understand the social and economic form of this vernacular as gay gossip, a formal and verbal discourse that encompassed privileged information, moral discourse, and the identification of an “in-group.”

My analysis of “communication networks” and “gossip” relies on economist Thomas Schelling’s theory of the information economy, in which communication networks emerge from interactive behaviors among groups and individuals in “the diffusion of rumor, gossip, and news, information about sex and cooking and gardening and automobile repair; in the circulation of jokes and stories and folklore; and the rules for playing games and adjudicating disputes.” He elaborates that participants in a communication network “maintains [the network] or repairs it or transforms it or, sometimes, helps to cause it to wither away or collapse. People who pass along tips on the stock market or the horse races, where-to-get-it-wholesale, what movies to see or what restaurants to patronize, how to avoid getting caught, whom to date, and where to go for help, are simultaneously involved in two related activities. They are transmitting particular information; and they are exercising the network.” Schelling, Micromotives and Macrobehavior, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 40.

Gossip implies a number of meanings. My definitions of gossip as a verbal, person-to-person based vernacular knowledge and moral discourse derive from the essays in the anthology Good Gossip. In particular, my analysis is indebted to Maryann Ayim’s assertion that gossip is “a form of inquiry to elicit information or knowledge.” Ayim’s defines the characteristics of gossip as “informal talk, …conducted within very small groups of participants, …who know one another fairly well, …trust one another not to violate each others confidence.” She continues, “[t]here is a sense of illicitness connected with the activity of gossip, and hence, participants often engage in it covertly” (86). She also concludes that “[t]hose who remain shut off from the bastions of …power will continue to look to gossip as one form of inquiry,
Homosexual in America represented nothing less than the transmogrification of verbal gossip into a public source of information, creating a cascading “Gutenberg” effect and expanding the cultural and social contours of the gay “lifestyle” to potentially limitless “new and wider circles” of participants.

The most obvious and important “Gutenberg” effect was the way in which the term gay described an entire social milieu as a “brand.” For Sagarin, this was particularly true in the context of the institution most central to gay life: the bar. “What are these bars? In the bigger cities of the United States they are to be found in abundance, some so gay that to be seen entering or leaving is to invite a ‘brand’; others somewhat less stigmatized, but nevertheless primarily a meeting-place for the homosexually inclined.”

Sagarin’s use of the word “brand” is ambiguous here, since it suggests the “brand’ associated with what Erving Goffman would develop of the visible signifiers of an otherwise invisible “stigma,” as well as the economic practicality of a signifier that could draw consumers into the institution at the center of gay social and, ultimately, political life.

Knowing, and power available to them as other forms are not” (99). As moral discourse, Louise Collins emphasizes the feminist potential for gossip as “a suitable context for moral development where selves are seen in terms of a non-masculinist model” (106). Emphasizing, again, the non-official nature of gossip, Collins explains that “[g]ossip is an informal discourse in contrast to a business meeting…It has tacit norms, an etiquette, but it has no explicit formal rules governing who speaks when, the order of business, and so on…no participant is recognized as having special authority by virtue of a formal role…There are no theoretically based rules of entitlement to speak: there is no prespecified level of back-up evidence required, in contrast to scientific discourse; no fixed criteria of relevance, in contrast to legal discourse; no rules of proper sequence, unlike the construction of a deductive argument in philosophy” (107). As such, gossip poses “a different concept of moral agency [in which]…moral development is not a purely isolated, internal affair but occurs in relation to and interaction with others” (111). Collins’ assertion seems especially pertinent to the study of gay communication networks in the fifties as informal, counter-normative spaces that generated alternative knowledges and moralities. See Ayim, “Knowledge through the Grapevine: Gossip as Inquiry,” and Louise Collins, “Gossip: A Feminist Defense,” in Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze’ev, eds., Good Gossip (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1994).

Cory, The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach, 120.
As numerous economists, sociologists, and other social scientists suggest, information is the fulcrum of the decision-making that defines economic exchanges and behaviors. Defining the economy by its cultural forms—whether as gifts, markets, or other ritualized and routinized forms of exchange—requires a view of the economy as greater than the sum of its parts in raw materials, finished products, and the price of goods. As a cultural form, the economy provisions goods and services that have meaning and value, transmitted to and among consumers as both practical information about markets, and as the raw material of culture itself. The quality of goods and services, the best locations to find goods and services, or the benefits that accrue to buyers and sellers are crucial to the functioning of a market, and the information conveyed between and among these groups and individuals comprises the networks that make up the larger economic framework of a society. At the same time, the shared meanings and values conferred on goods and services determines cultural ideas about worth and value beyond the abstractions of price, grounding questions about ethics, spirituality, and even the meaning of life itself.

Because of the centrality of communication in both the practical function of as well as cultural meanings circulating within the market, the economic framework of society is intrinsically linked to language and communication. As Thomas Schelling argues

[C]ommunication systems…develop out of the unmanaged behaviors of individuals—the diffusion of rumor, gossip, news, information and misinformation about sex and cooking and gardening and automobile repair; the circulation of jokes and stories and folklore; and the rules for playing games and adjudicating disputes. Everybody who participates in a communication
system is part of the system. His [sic] participation maintains it or repairs it or transforms it or, sometimes, helps to cause it to whither away or collapse. People who pass along tips on the stock market or the horse races, where-to-get-it-wholesale, what movies to see or what restaurants to patronize, how to avoid getting caught, whom to date, and where to go for help, are simultaneously involved in two related activities. They are transmitting particular information; and they are exercising the network.

Thus, “[i]nformation networks, racial separation, marital behavior, and language development are often overlapping and interlocking.”

We might add “gay life” to these other social phenomena listed by Schelling. These observations seem especially applicable to gay life in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly since, as Jeffrey Escoffier argues, its functioning depended on the “strict segregation of [any] information” that might implicate an individual in transgressing the customs and, more importantly, laws that mandated (cis)gender and (hetero)sexual conformity in public and even private life.

For Escoffier, the segregation of information defined the economy of the closet, a social world imbued with criminality and stigma.

More than any other work, The Homosexual in America represented the promise and peril of information about the closet economy. On the one hand, it was effectively a form of advertisement of gay life, “exercising” the communication and social networks of the closet by expanding the “new and wider circles” of gay consumers. By offering a “gay” alternative to pathological and criminal identities, it also supplied information as an ideological good, or even advertisement, for the closet economy. On the other hand, given the political circumstances surrounding the closet economy, it also offered the

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298 Thomas C. Schelling, Micromotives and Macrobehavior, 40.
299 Jeffrey Escoffier, American Homo: Community and Perversity, 69.
distinct possibility that, by publishing information about this illicit and clandestine market, it might also invite the surveillance and persecution that signaled its peril.

The problem with gay life at mid-century was hardly that the communicative strategies of the closet were not working well, but rather that its products were less than satisfactory. Customers frequently complained about their rough treatment in gay bars by bouncers and bartenders; the high prices of drinks and entrance fees, low-quality, watered down, and unhygienic drinks; and even the failure to keep blackmailers, extortionists, and police fully at bay. Some businesses were certainly better than others there were no bar weeklies or bloggers desperate for publication to describe the ambience and quality, let alone security, of bars and other businesses that catered gay customers. The places that tended to offer higher service quality did so because no overtly gay activity was allowed. In the 1950s, this meant that gay men congregated in the posh men’s bars—like the bar at the Plaza Hotel or the Four Season’s—on the Upper East and West Sides, though overtly gay behavior was strictly forbidden. Such opportunities were obviously restricted based on class (and, by extension, race) and gender, although a handful of classier bars catered to women.\textsuperscript{300} Even so, most of the middle- and upper-class clients at those bars had as much incentive to conceal their identities as the managers and barkeeps desperate to keep the posh Four Seasons men’s bar and the like secure from a bar raid.

The entrepreneurs and operators of most gay bars, however, had little incentive to offer high quality service since they held a virtual monopoly on the more or less captive markets of the closet economy. In Greenwich Village, especially, entrepreneurs and operators cut costs any way they could and their business seems to have grown in the decades before Stonewall, a testament not only to the strangled supply of gay bars but

\textsuperscript{300} See Appendix B1 (Bars).
also to the extraordinary social and cultural demand for such spaces by gay consumers. The divey atmosphere that permeated the Village in the fifties and sixties further suggested the lengths to which gay consumers would go in search for safe and reliable social spaces. Even then, gay consumers may have been secondary to other forms of profit. Especially in New York City, criminal entrepreneurs used gay bars as convenient sites for money laundering, drug marketing, and vending stolen cigarettes.

In any case, the closet economy seems to be a case of the bad driving out the good. By the 1950s, the basis of the economy had become analogous to what George Akerlof calls, in his eponymous essay, a “Market for Lemons,” in which the closet economy created an “incentive for sellers to market poor quality merchandise...As a result there tends to be a reduction in the average quality of goods and also in the size of the market.” Because the number, type, and location of gay bars was not fully described or recorded in the fifties and sixties, historians have no way of showing whether this trajectory occurred in fact. However, we can be fairly assured that it occurred in the minds of customers of gay bars. Because of an uptick in bar raids and arrests at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s—at least until 1966, when the city effectively decriminalized gay sociability in bars—consumers typically perceived the number of gay bars as declining in both number and quality. More importantly, gay consumers increasingly saw bar owners and entrepreneurs as dishonest profiteers—a

301 George A. Akerlof, Explorations in Pragmatic Economics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.
302 Another comment from Akerlof is instructive here. “The Lemons model can be used to make some comments on the costs of dishonesty. Consider a market in which goods are sold honestly or dishonestly; quality may be represented, or it may be misrepresented. The purchaser’s problem, of course, is to identify quality. The presence of people in the market who are willing to offer inferior goods tends to drive the market out of existence—as in the case of our automobile “lemons.” It is this possibility that represents the major costs of dishonesty—for dishonest dealings tend to drive honest dealings out of the market.” I use this quote to emphasize that the closet economy was not, in the long run, a sustainable model, although it
situation that would reach an explosive head in the summer of 1969. Of course, as the riots at the Stonewall Bar suggest, external events—i.e., the emergence of a discourse of Gay Liberation—could dramatically alter the dynamic between sellers and buyers, or straight and exploitative “outsiders” and gay “insiders.”

As a result of the many uncertainties, perceived and real, that consumers faced when they entered gay bars, gay people developed important communicative strategies in order to cope with the arrhythmia of the scene. As Akerlof suggests, the most important aspect of the “market in lemons” is that they often spawn “counteracting institutions,” often as a last ditch effort to save a market from being driven out of existence. Akerlof identifies manufacture guarantees, brands, chains, and licensing. In the closet economy, that brand was the shared culture codified in the bars, restaurants, and other spaces that defined the milieu of gay life.

The most important part of the “brand” was purely symbolic: coded language, gestures, and the standardization of complex gendered behaviors that, like the use of the word gay, signaled desire while evading surveillance. In many ways, the gay brand was not simply a visible sign, style of dress, or vocabulary, but an entire code of conduct. This code or brand, however, was incredibly discreet. The point of the gay brand was to signify belonging to gay life without alerting outsiders. Indeed, there was a virtual taboo on what we would refer to as “outing,” kind of “honor among thieves.” The most obvious example is what Susan Sontag describes as the camp sensibility, which relied on

did achieve a short-lived equilibrium in places like New York City in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the most immediate causes of the market’s disruption were political—especially the idea of Gay Liberation cultivated form ideas about rights and liberation from the African-American Civil Rights, Black Power, and Women’s Movement—their outpouring, at least in New York City, was that of a consumer revolt (i.e., the Stonewall Riots). These remarks are somewhat premature, however, and I will return to the consumer revolt elements of the Stonewall Riots in a later chapter. Akerlof, 33.
reversals, artifice, and innuendo in order to communicate the incommunicable, i.e., gay desire. “To talk about Camp…is to betray it.”303 Camp—most often identified with male effeminacy—was not the only cultural brand. Indeed, its usefulness may have derived from the interaction of camp behaviors and stereotypes with the brand of masculinity associated with the culture of trade: that is, presumably straight men who slept with gay men for money. The relationship between camp effeminacy and the masculinity of trade culture was extraordinarily complex, since many people that identified as “straight” did so because straight trade came at a much higher premium.304 Another strategy, endemic to the lesbian scene, was the much more visibly delineated butch and femme styles. Although and perhaps because they occupied a much smaller segment of gay life, lesbian gestures and sartorial styles tended to be much more recognizable in the fifties and sixties. Butch lesbians were probably the most visibly gender non-conforming people in the Village in the fifties and early sixties, at least in public. Unlike “female impersonation,” the police more often than not ignored butch lesbians. The butch persona became a way to exude strength and confront insecurity rather than sidestep it.305 These examples hardly do the complexity of camp, trade, or butch-femme culture justice, but they demonstrate the symbolic importance of dress and comportment in establishing a gay “brand” in the fifties and sixties. Leaving aside the more complex questions about

304 This scenario is memorably described in John Rechy’s 1963 depiction of the autobiographical, masculine Youngman and “the Professor,” an effete older gentleman who serves as Youngman’s source of financial support after his arrival to New York City. John Rechy, *City of Night* (1963; New York: Grove Press, 1984), 58-80.
305 Marijane Meaker’s (aka Ann Aldrich’s) description of butch-femme culture, while incredibly disparaging, demonstrates the toughness of the butch as an important characteristic of butch-femme culture. In one particularly disturbing description, she describes a fistfight between a butch and four young men on the streets of Greenwich Village resulting in the butch being “guided away from the scene by her femme…holding a handkerchief to her bleeding face.” Ann Aldrich, *We, Too, Must Love* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2006), 29.
subjective gender and desire, the visible styles associated with these cultures consolidated a vocabulary through which same-sex desire could be communicated.

The second aspect of the gay “brand” was primarily ideological. In the Cold War era of stigmatization and criminalization, this meant establishing a gay counter-culture that affirmed rather than denigrated same-sex desire and gender non-conformity. Although the cultural elements of gay life before Stonewall were decidedly ambiguous—Gay Liberationists frequently dismissed previous generations of gay people as “self-loathing”—it was in the period from the late forties to the mid-sixties that gay people began to affirm their individual selves and collective lives. Over time, the ambivalence of this discourse gave way to more strident expressions like “Gay is Good” (a phrase invented by Frank Kameny much to Sagarin’s chagrin306) and, especially, “Gay Pride,” but in the 1950s and 1960s this discourse attempted to resist the massive guilt complex cultivated by medical professionals, the police, family members, and popular culture. Of course, this not only provided subjective relief to participants in gay life, it also helped to absolve them of the guilt and shame they felt when they went to gay bars and other businesses. One symptom of this mode of resistance was the cultivation of a kind of folklore of gay fame and celebrity, a common tactic that led gay people to adapt unlikely compatriots from the Ancient Greek academies to the stable of Hollywood Stars.

Marijane Meaker wrote,

We thrived on borrowed glory, all of us closeted, many from families in small towns, suddenly in a world where we needed police protection to have drinks in bars catering to us. We took some small comfort in proclaiming that Noël Coward was one of us, W.H. Auden was, Katherine Cornell, Eva Le

306 Franklin Kameny Interview, Martin B. Duberman Papers.
Gallienne, James Baldwin, Rudolf Nureyev, E.M. Forster, Mary Renault, and on and on.\textsuperscript{307}

Though important to gay life in the closet era, this kind of justification was hardly universally acclaimed.

In the context of the early 1950s, however, the ideology of the closet was hardly universally embraced. In one of the earliest political declarations of what we might today call gay rights, the poet Robert Duncan decried an apolitical “cult of homosexual superiority” in which “the cultivation of a secret language, the camp…is loaded with contempt for the human.”\textsuperscript{308} Whatever Duncan’s objections, the culture that developed over the course of the 1950s and 1960s did so in part by cultivating an almost defensive pose of superiority, or “borrowed glory” from famous people from the past and present. In addition to the celebrity discourse of gay culture, Sagarin pointed to the importance of “the drag” (or drag ball) in creating an atmosphere that allowed gay people to resist the internalization of anti-gay stigma. Reminiscing directly from his own experiences at a drag ball, he wrote,

\begin{quote}
The gay folk do not go for the thrill and the adventure, nor are they seeking new friends. I do not believe they are primarily motivated by a need to exhibit themselves. In the main, what attracts them to the drag is the feeling that they will be among many of their own kind. Here they are known, liked and accepted for what they are. It is a masquerade, ironically enough, where one goes to discard the mask…For a fleeting moment, this becomes their world. The abnormal is the normal, the straight fellow is a curiosity, and love is synonymous with the attraction of one person to another of the same sex…I hope that they enjoy this
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{307} Marijane Meaker, \textit{Highsmith: A Romance of the 1950s} (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 27.

moment of peaceful triumph as much as I do. It was at one such drag, as I watched a very lovely and graceful person being crowned queen of the night, that a companion muttered to me: ‘Happy soul for an hour, but what a guilty unhappy person you can be sure she is.” …“I am not all sure, “I said.” I have learned one thing in the gay life that people from the outside cannot seem to believe…All that glitters is not guilt.”

This description of gay culture shares many features with the principles of advertising, particularly in the ways in which advertising affirmed a particular “vision of the good life” and “validated a way of being in the world,” to borrow Jackson Lears’ assessment of the ideological promises of advertising and consumer culture. The gay culture of the closet functioned as the closest thing to an advertisement for an otherwise unrepresentable culture. Indeed, the growth of gay culture in the fifties and sixties was arguably grounded in the need for a discourse both desirable and, as Sagarin suggested, utterly normal.

In addition to establishing patterns of behavior and a consumer ideology that affirmed gay life, the institutionalization of the “brand” also helped gay and curious people to locate the geographies of gay life. This final aspect of the gay brand was probably the most obvious. As Kinsey had already demonstrated in Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, large cities were to some extent synonymous with gay life in the 1950s and 1960s. They were especially central to the cultivation of gay styles according to Edward Sagarin’s analysis, even appropriating the marketing terminology of branding. He wrote, “In some of the bigger cities of the United States [gay bars] are to be found in

abundance … With the possible exception of San Francisco, no city was as identified with Cold War gay sub-cultures as New York City. As already mentioned, Meaker’s Aldrich books are loaded with references to New York City locations, especially Washington Square Park and Greenwich Village, indicating the extent to which not only entire cities but even very specific neighborhoods could be branded as gay. As previous and subsequent chapters show, newspapers, gossip columnists, and — by the 1960s — film, television, and radio helped confirm this fact. The search costs in the gay world were considerable, but a bus ticket to New York City and a well-worn copy of *The Homosexual in America* reduced them considerably.

**IV. “On the Gayest Street in Town”: The Geography of the Closet Economy**

The most significant and daring sections of *The Homosexual in America* dealt with the geography and emerging markets that came to define what Escoffier calls the “closet economy. Although he never named the specific city, knowledge of Sagarin’s biography suggests that most of his observations are drawn from the gay social worlds consolidating in particular neighborhoods and parks in Manhattan. Moreover, he continually referenced the “big city,” a term that conjures an image of many cities in the U.S., though none so big as New York.

He described gay social life as a “world within the world, forced on the one hand by rejection from the populace at large, and encouraged on the other by the myriad of interests and activities common to the group.” Far from a homogeneous society, its participants were drawn to gay life “driven by the sensual impulse, seeking new forms

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311 Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach*, 120.
312 Ibid., 114.
and new partners for the love of the flesh” while others “find its social and cultural interests far from the field of the search for sexual outlet…” “They read, wonder, discuss, question.” These observations reveal a social world built on both erotic and non-erotic bonds, drawn together as much by cultural and social affinities as a desire to get off and get on. Indeed, these non-erotic bonds account for the friends, acquaintances, and even enemies that constituted gay communication and social networks; much more so, anyway, than the ephemeral and more enduring sexual couplings—largely private—that might last from a few moments or an evening to weeks, months, or years. Indeed, at some level Sagarin’s analysis defined gay identity as belonging to the gay social world as opposed to a pathologically inverted or deviant desire.

The public world described in *The Homosexual in America* bears a strong resemblance to what Harry Hay described as the “twilight world,” and in many ways resembles the male homosociality and public erotic cultures of major trade and port cities since well before medical practitioners invented a psychosexual language to account for such same-sex activity. “Living in a gay world! What gay world, and where, and which one? The world of the street corner, or of a special and well-known path in the park, or the lonely and dark street on the breezy lake front, or on the banks of a river in one of America’s largest cities?” Significantly, he identified this world with the economic activities of sex work, describing “some seeking financial gained”—hustlers—and “others unmindful of the financial loss.” The financial incentives of the gay world also invited the “few seeking to exploit” and “rob, even if it must come from violence.” Sagarin explained that most exploitative agents were “usually themselves not

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313 Ibid., 115.  
314 Ibid.
homosexual, in fact frequently not bisexual” who justified their actions “by thinking in contemptuous terms of their potential victims as ‘goddam fairies who only get what’s coming to them!'” Sagarin located these sources of ideological contempt in the law and stigma itself—again, a trenchant analysis that anticipated similar conclusions among sociologists of deviance like Erving Goffman by nearly a decade. “Thieves not only in the night but even the day, protected by a law that is indifferent to the fate of the outcast, but doubly protected by the stigma that attaches to the activity that may be the prelude to violence, a stigma that will hold in silence the tongue of the victim.”315

Despite these dangers, a number of important cultural features helped to insulate gay sociability from the criminalization and stigmatization that induced blackmail and the violence of “rolling” or homophobic violence. More importantly, these features helped to consolidate what Sagarin described as a community. The most important feature were the coded signals that made possible initiation into the “cruising” culture of the gay world. “The gay walk along the street, and to the initiate they are apparent. No obvious traits are needed to characterize them. No special mannerism need to be displayed to brand them. Here and there a tweezed eyebrow, or two youths walking hand in hand. But seldom are the obvious seen.” But “[v]irility”—a word that Sagarin used to mean masculinity—“freedom from the betraying gait and voice—these are the more common traits, here as elsewhere in the group life.” Through the interactions and rituals of cruising, patterns develop in which “[s]ome come back to the same street” and “know each other, give a nod of recognition, then talk, form a community.” Despite these inchoate forms of community, “for the most part they are strangers to each other, youths and mature men who return only on occasion, not by plan or appointment or design, but when the

315 Ibid., 116.
convenience of proximity is added to the strength of the desire.” Sagarin’s analysis suggests what social scientists might call the cascade effect of the snowballing frequency and increased proximity of such interactions, with both communal and individual psychological effects. “It is the amalgam of closeness and qualitative content that brings the steel to the magnet. And, once within its range, resistance becomes difficult, the hopeless... so why resist? How much greater is the joy of a wholehearted participation.”

Sagarin’s analysis suggests a number of implications, most notably the assumption that age provided a significant difference in attracting partners of the same sex, an assumption built into the practices of ancient Greek pederasty, the images of which were furnished by classicists as the most culturally accessible symbols of same-sex eroticism—however ahistorical. Indeed, Greek pederasty provided the basis for the only other “defense” of homosexuality whose popularity rivaled Sagarin’s—André Gide’s Corydon, which had been translated into English and published the year before The Homosexual in America made its debut.

In any case, according to Sagarin, the most significant and lasting effect of cruising interactions was their ability to initiate newcomers into an established if clandestine public sexual culture and to stitch together a community through commonly understood signals. Sagarin recreated a common cruising scene in which two strangers make eye contact before moving onto small talk about the time that builds into a request for a cigarette. “In the exchange of words, each is seeking a clue. Neither desires effeminacy, yet each needs just a suggestion of it, in a softness of tone, an overenunciation of word sounds, an affectation in the movement of the hands or in the method of holding the cigarette.” As Sagarin’s description implies, cruising in the public
world was camouflaged by performances of masculinity, which served to deflect surveillance and to cultivate an erotic aesthetic. However, the camouflage of masculinity also presented the communicative problems that led to the complex and sometimes fruitless rituals of cruising.

Perhaps more importantly, at least from the standpoint of the closet economy, such rituals ultimately led to participation in what we might describe as the emerging markets of gay life. Tellingly, Sagarin’s recreation of the cruising ritual concludes not with “the release from the tension that had gripped him,” but with an invitation to a gay bar and, through use of the word gay, initiation into the social and communication networks that comprised gay urban life.

“Take a walk?”
“I don’t mind. Got the night to kill.”
“I’ve no plans myself.”
“Live near here?”
“I’m from out of town. Massachusetts. I’m stopping at a place near here.”
“Whereabouts?”
“Just down the street and around the corner.”
“I wouldn’t know. I don’t get around to those spots very much.”
“You should. It’s quite a gay place.”
*The word* has been uttered, and the rapport has now been established.316

While these markets were hardly new, such institutions typically relied on straight consumers for their business and, in some sense, the preceding decades’ gay life—and especially the “pansy craze” of the 1930s and 1940s—represented a spectacle for straight entertainment as much as gay sociability. The most visible, identifiably gay bars seemed to flourish only in the brief era of tolerated illegality represented associated with Prohibition. Even so, the spectacle of “pansy” and “lesbian” culture, especially those that

316 Ibid., 117-118.
featured elaborate drag performances, tended to do so for the benefit of straight rather
than gay consumers. While the bars described by Sagarin shared some continuities with
the speakeasies of the 1920s and early 1930s, gay bars in the 1940s and 1950s were
typically much more clandestine, and “gay” seemed to represent a surreptitious brand
known only to the initiate as opposed to the “freak show”-style spectacle of the previous
era’s “pansy” and “lesbian” gatherings.

The basic conditions of these bars and the scene described by Sagarin reveals that
the most important cultural social ties of gay life were not so much a matter of an
innovating and institutionalizing culture, but through the adaptive use of gay gossip. In a
place like New York City, where bars were as abundant as anywhere else but under the
constant threat of a raid, gossip allowed consumers to colonize and reinvent space to
allow social network building that, if not exactly the same as Caffe Cino’s, provided an
outlet for the emotional and erotic intimacy denied those who lived “straight lives.” Like
camp, gossip also served as an important disciplinary device, particularly in terms of
access to and acceptance within networks organized by class, race, and gender. These
informal, loose cultural codes ultimately meant that, while corralled into the same legal
categories, bars that catered to covert, largely middle- and upper-class white people (and
especially men) could in many cases avoid the most stringent legal and financial costs
imposed on most businesses operating within the late closet economy.

In Frank O’Hara’s “Homosexuality,” a cheeky ode to cruising written in 1959, he
opened, “So we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping/our mouths shut?” The
simultaneous unmasking and silencing sets up a poem that moves through the camp-
tragicomic surrealism of an “old cow…not more full of judgment,” “shadows…like a puff,” and “the most exquisite moment of a very long opera” before admitting

It’s wonderful to admire oneself with complete candor, tallying up the merits of each of the latrines. 14th Street is drunken and credulous, 53rd Street tries to tremble but is too at rest. The good love a park and the inept a railway station, and there are the divine ones who drive themselves up and down the lengthening shadow of an Abyssinian head in the dust, trailing their long elegant heels of hot air…

The final image is likely a reference to what one-time lover Joe Sueur alluded to as a penchant for cruising Black men. The social climbing editor and critic LeSueur’s memoir of 1950s New York City suggests the degree to which fortune, social class, and implicitly race facilitated initiation into the complex networks that crisscrossed the gay world.

“There was another homosexual subculture of New York that had…had nothing to do with subway latrines, public parks, and railway stations,” LeSueur recalled. “Indeed, it was an enclave so rarefied that it might be wondered how I, an upstart from trashy Los Angeles, found my way inside its covert perimeters.” LeSueur’s initiation occurred in the Oak Room of the Plaza Hotel, a bar where wealthier gay men congregated but where cruising and other conspicuously sexual aspects of gay life seemed to pale in the glow of the highbrow if ambiguously sexless foppery that characterized New York City’s elite. LeSueur gained entry “through no effort on my part, unless one counted my sporting a specious Ivy League outfit (Brooks Brothers jacket, regimental striped tie, scuffed white bucks),” a measure of cultural capital that, combined with his apparent good lucks, made

him an excellent candidate for inclusion in a social network that could afford enough private space to be sociably and visibly gay without the cover of a mob bar or a twilit tearoom. He detailed:

I was invited to what would be the first of a number of parties held in an imaginatively decorated West Fifties railroad flat whose hosts, an accommodating couple named Fred (Butch) Melton and Wilbur Pippin, made their digs available for what can truly be described as a gay salon, the likes of which I’d never seen and would never see again, certainly not fifteen years hence in the wake of the populist gay liberation movement, which dealt a deathblow to gatherings as precious and sequestered as those arranged by Butch and Wilbur.318

Few descriptions of 1950s gay life seem to distill the social and cultural distinction of a gay world that, as LeSueur suggests, could only exist in the rarefied and stratified world of tightly organized social and communication networks. At Butch and Wilbur’s salon, LeSeur met Leo Lerman, an editor at Condé Nast, and Lincoln Kierstein, the philanthropist and founder of the School of American Ballet, as well as a handful of other well-to-do and famous (or at least semi-famous) men. Though a private and domestic space, the salon nonetheless relied on a posh bar as a filter to the otherwise surveilled and stigmatized sphere of “subway latrines, public parks, and railway stations.” The wealthier (and presumably whiter) heir to the gay flat parties described in George Chauncey’s and Eric Garber’s accounts of 1920s New York City, participants in this “precious” and “sequestered” gay salon also carefully shielded it from the wider, “populist” bulk of gay social life.

In addition to distinctions of class, LeSueur’s experiences speak to the ways in

which access to gay life was much more obviously gendered. The tendency of men to
move from “public” to “private” spaces contrasts with the experiences of women, who
generally had much less access to public space both because of cultural norms around
gender and the occupation of public versus domestic space as well as women’s more
limited access to money—which essentially paid the price of admission either in the form
of cover charges or drinks. Marijane Meaker, who as Ann Aldrich wrote several books
that were essentially non-academic sociological studies of lesbian life, dedicated an entire
chapter of the watershed *We Walk Alone* to the importance of domestic space in
organizing and maintaining communication and social networks. “[T]he average female
homosexual,” claimed Meaker, often “knows no other homosexual than the one with
whom she is involved.” Lesbian sociability, particularly middle-class sociability, thus
tended to emanate from domestic spaces as opposed to the public and semi-public spaces
that constituted gay commercial life. Meaker also remarked on the gendered difference,
though she interpreted these contrasts through the lens of gay male homosociability and
“mixed” lesbian sociability. “Male homosexuals seem to enjoy giving and attending
parties for their own kind,” she claimed, “and most of them have a large circle of male
homosexual friends with whom they gather at each other’s homes. Such parties are
apparently an important part of the male homosexual’s life…[L]esbians,” however,
“more commonly…meet socially at ‘mixed’ parties, where the guests are both straight
and gay.”319 However, like LeSueur, Meaker suggested that such spaces seemed designed
as much to create class-based distinctions as opposed to distinctions between gay and
straight social life. As if channeling Joe Friday, she wrote, “The time is the present. The
place is Sutton Place…Kitty and Eric are giving another cocktail party for their intimate

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friends. Sutton Place is...not merely a good address, but a very good address. The
apartment...in which Kitty and her brother Eric lives...occupies a huge nine-room flat
on the fourteenth floor.” Introduced in narrative “real time” by Eric, Meaker described
the attendants, their fashions, and their foibles before concluding, “Eric is a great gossip;
his hobby is intrigue.” Like Butch and Wilbur, “Kitty” and “Eric” served as important
nodes for the word-of-mouth information that linked and organized different parts of the
gay world.

During the 1950s, participants in the commercial centers of most well-known
known “gay” districts in the fifties tended to be overwhelmingly white and, to a lesser
extent, male, although that narrative is complicated by the existence of gay networks
defined by their racial and/or ethnic difference from white gay social networks. Neither
LeSueur nor Meaker discuss race in extensive detail, though Meaker does describe the
frank racism and anti-Semitism expressed by her Texas-born lover, Patricia Highsmith.
Occasionally, writers described the presence of “black homosexuals,” but they are almost
always represented as anomalies in otherwise white dominated spaces. James Baldwin,
perhaps the most famous gay person of color from the time period, cast white characters
in his classic study of the closet Giovanni’s Room, a novel mostly set in Paris. Ebony
magazine published an article on drag clubs that hinted at the presence of gay bars in
Black commercial districts like Harlem, and descriptions in contemporary sources, like
Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer’s Confidential series, suggested that gay life tended to be

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320 Ibid., 69.
321 See Thaddeus Russell, “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality,” American Quarterly 60, no. 1 (March, 2008), 101-128. Russell somewhat controversially argues that the demands of respectability from the contemporary African-American Civil Rights movement led movement leaders and intellectuals to distance themselves from images of Black sexuality, and especially homosexuality. This subject is taken up in much greater detail (and with significantly more nuance) in John D’Emilio’s Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
Audre Lorde’s memoir *Zami*, offers one of the few sources that frankly detail the strained participation of Black people in the white dominated gay nightlife of Greenwich Village. As she crossed boundaries between the Black and white, gay and straight, and male female neighborhoods and social spaces, Lorde experienced the multiple dimensions of her identity through these different geographic and cultural contexts.

“Downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and invisible Black,” she wrote.

“Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder.” These social spheres diverged and intersected with the cultural geography of New York City’s neighborhoods, and Lorde described the geographic and cultural divisions of Manhattan in the concrete appearance of the race and sexuality. Lorde’s more profound sense of alienation stems from her experience of racial difference in a social and commercial world whose uniqueness and cultural currency depended not only on a visible manifestation of lesbian culture but whiteness as well. Indeed, the fact that she ultimately found a network of Black lesbians who preferred house parties to bars suggests the extent to which the gay market could be as exclusive for people of color as inclusive for white consumers—early evidence of, to paraphrase Allan Bérubé, how gay “became white” via the market’s accommodation of prevailing racist stereotypes, white supremacy, and discrimination.

Nevertheless, bars represented but one way in which the gay social world was increasingly defined by business institutions rather than the public “twilight world” of parks and what Sagarin called the “gayest street in town.” The interiorization and privatization of gay life also suggested the ways in which markets and market

institutions—however exploitative—provided a protective cover from the intensity of anti-gay stigma and persecution by the police. And even though police obviously raided gay bars in the 1950s and 1960s, business institutions still provided a safer and more reliable source of sociability, friendship, and community than the hurly-burly of the Central Park ramble or 42nd Street.

V. Conclusion: Markets and the Production of Identity in the Early Closet Economy

The most important “products” of the emerging markets of the closet economy were not the drinks, service, or even the sociability that bars and other businesses offered. Rather, the closet economy helped to foster both an inchoate gay market and reified gay identities through the growth and development of a distinctly gay brand, or even brands. These brands ultimately forged the cultural basis for the gay cliques and communication networks that flourished in gay bars and other businesses in the 1950s and 1960s.

These cliques in turn produced and multiplied the culture of and knowledge about gay life through gossip and code, which ultimately allowed gay people to circumnavigate the uncertainties that arose from constant police presence and popular violence. Although blackmail provided the most stable element of the closet—simultaneously exploiting and protecting gay consumers—the culture of discretion and silence that underlay it was gradually eroded by the very identities and markets blackmail had enabled. While gay culture in the fifties and sixties remained purposely evasive to outsiders, the information distributed through gay cliques and communication networks afforded individuals the relevant knowledge to cope with the motley assortment of untrustworthy trade,
extortionists, gangsters, and even the occasional indiscreet chatterboxes of their own ranks.

More importantly, the introduction of a gay brand—which, as the next chapter demonstrates, became more or less absorbed into the Cold War culture of surveillance and scandal—operated in a way that literal communication networks could not, primarily by familiarizing consumers and would-be consumers with the codes of gay bar culture, diluting the internal stigma of Cold War homophobia, and locating the clandestine geographies of gay life. The gay brand, which emerged from the complex interaction between consumers and the cultural extortion that the Cold War U.S., ultimately helped to establish bars and other businesses as the center of gay social and cultural life in the 1950s and 1960s. This process was nothing less than the marketization of gay life, the origins of an inchoate gay market that ultimately represented the object of a political Gay Liberation movement—nowhere as radically as in New York City.

As the next chapter will show, a highly complex, gradual transition occurred as the result of the proliferation of knowledge about gay life: the increase in information about the negotiation of stigmatization and criminalization eventually came to represent knowledge of surveillance and oppression. Gay consumers (and would-be consumers) became savvy, able to view information through a “queer lens” of what Jennifer Terry calls “vengeful countersurveillance,” in which “deviant subjects…have spoken back against the terms of a pathologizing discourse which has relied upon us [queers] parasitically to establish its own authority.” Terry limits her analysis to “the process by which a position or identity-space is constructed discursively by sexology and medicine and strategically seized upon by its objects of study, who, in their processes of self-
inquiry, are at moments compliant and at other moments resistant to pejorative or pathologizing characterizations of them by doctors.”  

My own analysis extends this “vengeful countersurveillance” to the ways in which consumers seized the means of cultural production, in the process forging non-pathological, non-criminal identities based on a shared sense of affinity and affirmation in the context of gay bars and other businesses. The triumphalism of that narrative is mitigated by the fact that, as blackmail lost its currency to the political imperatives of gay visibility, many of the cultural elements of life in the closet perished along with the closet economy. The tragic irony is that many Gay Liberationists, and even their Homophile predecessors, took this as an incentive to demonize butch lesbians and effeminate gay men as throwbacks to an era defined by self-loathing, missing completely the affectionate and affirmative bonds that butch-femme and camp cultures.

Of course, not all participants in gay life were as willing to enter these increasingly branded markets or inhabit the gay identities emerging there. As Marijane Meaker, writing as Ann Aldrich, reminded her readers, defection from gay social life in the closet era seemed to proffer the most tragic results of all.

Roger…is considered a ‘closet queen,’ one who shys away from overt homosexuals in public. Even in private, he is cautious. He never brings a man to his apartment. He prefers to visit the Turkish baths for his sexual expression, or to frequent a subway urinal. He never wants to know his partner’s name, or anything about him. He indulges in sex only about once a week, and the time spent takes less than an hour. Roger does not like himself after.

325 Aldrich, We, Too, Must Love, 99.
Whether contemporary readers can dismiss her narrative of Roger the ‘closet queen’ as an ideological product of the branding of gay life, or a more authentic story about alienation and self-loathing—or, indeed, both—it nonetheless serves as a potent reminder of the value of gay social life and identity.
Chapter 5: “Worlds Created with Very Little”:

Constructing a Lesbian Way of Life in the Closet Economy, 1950s-1963


I found my community in the bars of the Village in the fifties. I found this community to be incredibly supportive, so there was a tremendous sense of communal vitality within our own confines. But also, there was a tremendous sense of surveillance of us in terms of the vice squad, cops who would come in. Everything we did was under surveillance. That meant, for instance even the clothes we wore. If you were a butch woman going to the bars, you had to put on three pieces of women’s clothing, because you could be arrested for transvestitism. And what would happen is, and I saw this with my own eyes, the cops would come in, they would look for a butch woman, they would take her outside, shove her up against the wall, and they would strip her to see if she was wearing male BVDs. I grew up—or I came out—in a community that was the most oppressed, and also the most resilient, the most courageous. So my sense of who we were was a tremendously brave people, who created worlds with very little.—Joan Nestle

Nestle’s simultaneously painful and celebratory recollection provides a chilling if all too common vignette of lesbian life in the 1950s. Through memoirs, poetry, and documentary and fiction films, veterans of the lesbian bar scene have distilled into a sub-genre of literature the common experiences of communal survival in the face of pervasive physical and sexual violence during the period of the early closet economy: stigmatization of butch visibility, the flimsy justifications of what essentially amounted to sexual assault and a regime of sexualized terror, and the persistence and resilience of

326 One Nation Under God, directed by Zinka Benton and Teodoro Maniaci (1993; New York: First Run Features, 2004), DVD.
lesbians who constructed something from nothing—or “very little,” to be more precise—in the consumer culture of the 1950s. Adapting visual gender cues from mass culture and burrowing within the larger underworld of gay male bars, lesbian social networks built a veritable nursery that nurtured lesbian relationships, sociability, and culture in a period that placed on lesbians’ shoulders the the intersecting burdens of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory domesticity.

Lesbian bars were embedded within but distinct from a more expansive gay male cultural geography, which included public spaces that lesbians, like most women, commonly avoided: subway toilets, parks, and other places where gay male cruising and public sex seemed to go on with greater abandon. Lesbians, on the other hand, seemed to cluster in little enclaves of Manhattan’s west side, preferring the dense nightlife of Greenwich Village. While lesbians may have cruised—or at least used its terminology—such acts of public seeking rarely if ever culminated in public sex, and more typically served as a means to social introduction. As a result, lesbians were slightly less vulnerable to police surveillance. At the same time, the relatively cloistered aspects of lesbian culture and the obsession with gay men in popular culture meant that lesbians spent greater time and energy seeking each other out, a cost made even more burdensome by the fact that women, and especially lesbians, were vulnerable to sexual violence without much recourse to the law. Indeed, as Nestle’s vignette suggests, it was often law enforcement agents who perpetrated such violence. Though lesbians might occasionally seek one another out in public, they typically limited their “cruising” to much smaller zones in better lit and well populated areas, like Washington Square Park or nearby Third Street, whose relative openness guaranteed greater safety from the additional violence
that women might face in the shadowy and nocturnal undergrounds preferred by gay men, like Riverside Drive, Times Square, or the Central Park ramble.\footnote{Lillian Faderman, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in the Twentieth Century}, 168-169; Joan Nestle, Lesbian History Project of New York - List of Lesbian and Gay Bars Pre 1970, Bars (Folder 06190), Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn.}

Centered on a handful of businesses—primarily bars but also nightclubs, cafes, and restaurants—gay markets in the 1950s and 1960s provided one of the few means of public sociability and cultural expression for women, gay or straight. While the Village’s was not the only lesbian enclave in the country, it was certainly the most famous and iconic lesbian community in the post-war United States—a fact attested to in the many lesbian pulp novels published in the 1950s and 1960s, not to mention the San Francisco-based Daughters of Bilitis, whose publication \textit{The Ladder}, typically focused as much (if not more) attention on the Village scene as its own flourishing scene in North Beach and the Tenderloin. One of the most iconic cover images of \textit{The Ladder} features a woman in slacks and a pixie cut gazing at a woman strolling in the foreground of the Washington Square Arch.\footnote{\textit{The Ladder}, Outhistory.org, http://www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/lorraine-hansberry/item/1822, accessed 10 August 2014.}
Frank Caprio, a psychoanalyst who wrote frequently on homosexuality, published his study, *Female Sexuality* in 1954, describing the precariousness of gay commercial life and the lesbian culture of which it was a part. “In almost every large city, one can find a particular tavern or café where male and female inverts congregate. These places
frequently change, for when the establishment becomes notorious as a hangout for ‘queers’ some civic or religious group tries to have them closed.” Caprio’s description suggests the importance of mobility and the role of consumers, rather than managers and owners, in branding and colonizing particular establishments and even parts of cities. He adds that there “are a number of centers to which male and female inverts have been and are attracted…where they find it possible to lead an uninhibited type of existence, for here they encounter little or no social or moral censorship because of their homosexual behavior…Greenwich Village…has for many years been known as a center where lesbians and male homosexuals tend to congregate…” Indeed, “So well known is Greenwich Village’s reputation that local tavern owners have capitalized on it, seeking to attract visitors by having their places of business become known as a rendezvous for the inverted.”

According to Caprio, gay and lesbian nightclubs were so numerous and well-known to taxi cab drivers that they still attracted tourists and the “upper class circle…‘going slumming,’” He described one proprietor that capitalized on this demand for a lesbian spectacle by hiring “pseudolesbians” to cut their hair, wear mannish clothes, and dance with one another in order to sell drinks—almost a specialized kind of B-girl. “The customers sit at tables, order more drinks and seem to enjoy this atmosphere of subdued lights, heavy smoke and girls dancing together, little realizing that to many of these girls it is simply a way of earning some extra money…” Elaine Howe, an informant for the National Gay Task Force’s Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book, confirmed the tourist trap element described by Caprio, remembering that “[i]n 1945 the
Village gay bars…were of the nightclub style, strictly for tourists.” According to Howe, such nightclubs maintained a hierarchy built on the economic potential of different types of customers. “Straight couples got the best tables; then by the usual order of who could tip best, gay men were seated, with lesbians assigned the rear tables. Those waiting on tables (all gay) were in heavy drag and the men often doubled as entertainers…with lesbians occasionally allowed to sing.” However, Caprio suggested that the spectacle of lesbian culture was giving way to “places where the authentic lesbians meet. There is less frivolity, the atmosphere is a more serious one and the lesbians and their ‘dates’ when dancing together are preoccupied and engrossed with each other.” According to Caprio, such “authentic” places were becoming significant to women seeking companionship and community. “[T]he overt [presumably butch] lesbian is more apt to come to the table of some unescorted girl and invite her to dance with her. She assumes that since the girl came there alone she is looking for the companionship of her own sex.”

Throughout the country, the most visible, quasi-public lesbian cultures depended on the existence of gay male bars, and by necessity lesbian consumers made ad hoc alliances with crooked bar owners, the gay men with whom they typically shared and occasionally fought over public space, and the more tolerant denizens of the neighborhood that housed the bars, nightclubs, and cafés where lesbians spent much of their leisure time. As Caprio suggests, no location was as evocative of the lesbian underworld as Greenwich Village, a social product of a seemingly burgeoning lesbian life.

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331 Caprio, *Female Homosexuality*, 63.
in a period otherwise marked by attempts to drive lesbians from American life either through coercive and ineffectual cures or through sequestration in asylums, prisons, and even neighborhoods.

Despite its legendary status, historians have only handful of contemporary sources for this inchoate market segment, less so than for the gay male markets that largely overshadowed them. While the “lesbian craze” of the 1920s and early 1930s left behind scandalous ephemera—handbills, tabloid stories, and the like—the postwar paranoia that characterized gay life in the 1940s and 1950s reduced information about lesbian life to the bits of information that filtered through pulp novels and a growing body of psychological literature about homosexuality. Many lesbian bars operated either illegally or in legally questionable ways, and the culture that grew within those illicit and quasi-illicit spaces followed a set of discretionary communicative patterns similar gay men. In contrast to camp, however, butch-femme codes tended to reflect the particular circumstances of women’s bars, with butch identity reflecting more solemn and seriously sexual roles than the camp queen. Or, as Esther Newton remembered, butch-femme culture “was utterly serious, always ‘for real,’ completely different in feeling and tone from the fabulous and bittersweet excesses of the camp drag queen” even if “bar life had had a dramatic side: fist and knife fights, jealous passions, the erotic bravura of ‘the fish,’ . . . and the striking entrances that certain lesbians achieved.”

As a result, published information about lesbians and lesbian life—like information about gay men and gay life—was often indirect and almost always anonymous, like the enormously popular lesbian books by Ann Aldrich and Ann Bannon

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(the pseudonyms of Marijane Meaker and Ann Weldy), or written by heterosexual experts like Caprio, who claimed to have mastered the etiology and therapy of sex perversion, though the general focus on gay men and male perversion overshadowed serious discussions of lesbian lives. Fortunately, most of the information we have about these inchoate lesbian markets can be supplemented by oral recollections, memoirs, and the materials gathered in the Lesbian Herstory Archive, many by founder Joan Nestle, as well as a list compiled by author Lisa E. Davis as research for her historical novel *Under the Mink*.

One of the most complete sources of information about the inchoate lesbian market was reconstructed by Nestle in 1980 and 1981. Reaching out to subscribers of the Lesbian Herstory Archive newsletter, Nestle scrawled out the notes from the resulting correspondence on her personal stationary. The type-written copy, finished in February of 1981, lists 30 bars prior to 1970, and 12 after. A number of these listings raise questions about the exact location or name of the bar, but for the most part the information is confirmed by memoirs and a handful of primary sources in existence. There are certainly omissions as well. The Howdy Club, a well-known lesbian bar in the 1930s and 1940s, and one described at length in Allan Bérubé’s *Coming Out Under Fire*, does not appear on her list. Neither does the Ubangi Club, the musical home of New York City’s most famous lesbian performer, Gladys Bentley, appear. But more importantly, Nestle’s collaborative list describes a genealogy of lesbian markets that emerged first in Harlem and Greenwich Village in the 1920s before being reduced to a downtown rump during the 1940s and 1950s. From the 1940s through the late 1960s, the most frequently referenced

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lesbian bars were almost all in Greenwich Village, or at least within a few blocks. The famed 82 Club and the 181 were located in the East Village, just blocks away from the main drag of lesbian bars and gathering spots that included the Bagatelle, the Howdy Club, the Gantry, the Bagatelle, the MacDougal Tavern, the Page Three, the Sea Colony, the Washington Square Lounge, and the Welcome Inn. As the relative concentration of bars in Greenwich Village suggests, lesbian life was essentially a segment of a larger gay market in which men predominated.

Although this world was small and under siege, the relative lack of available space for women sometimes contributed to internecine conflicts within the tight-knit lesbian world, conflicts that typically pit butch-femme culture against an emerging kiki identity that largely cut a middle path between the hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity of butch-femme culture in the 1950s and 1960s. The archive for this chapter attempts a cross-section of lesbian life, taking into account the exemplary works of women who identified as butch, femme, and kiki, as well as women who spoke to the race and class differences that striated the lesbian segment of the closet economy: the pulp novels and reminiscences of Ann Weldy (writing as Ann Bannon) in the Beebo Brinker series; the books and memoirs of Marijane Meaker, including the classics We Walk Alone and We, Too, Must Love published by Meaker’s alter ego Ann Aldrich; Audre Lorde’s memoir of lesbian life in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name; and memoirs and documents collected by Joan Nestle, including those collected for her anthology of butch-femme writings and the materials compiled at the lesbian Herstory Archive.

335 See Appendix B.
In a number of ways, the shifting gender representation within the lesbian bar and the anxiety expressed between the butch-femme and kiki scene suggests a tension in cultural strategy over the meanings of visibility and sexual representation in a vastly changing economy, one whose patterns and networks were increasingly defined by the falling search costs and rising protection costs incurred by an increase in information. Indeed, it is in many ways a testament to the formal effects of publication that the most important lesbian authors of the 1950s, and certainly their successors, typically favored the relative demurral and respectability of the kiki to the more rough-and-tumble eroticism of the older butch-femme bar scene.

As key pieces of information about this key segment of the gay market—indeed, the only segment in which women had either access or agency—these works, especially the primary sources by Aldrich/Meaker and Weldy/Bannon, provide an important window into a lesbian social world and consumer market in transition, detailing the more intimate interactions, cultural symbols, habits, and social roles that lesbians played out by scavenging mass culture and nightlife, and carving out “worlds made with very little.” These first-hand accounts and memoirs reveal an intramural conflict over gender that often served as a proxy for problems of race, class, and age discrimination within a lesbian commercial culture, the only public culture in which visible and openly gay women congregated. Competing for status, lovers, and space, lesbians in New York City built a complex of cultures that anticipated the social changes and conditions—not to mention on-going conflicts over gender representation, and especially butch identity—of both Gay and Women’s Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
As Lillian Faderman, Elizabeth Kennedy, and Madeline Davis have shown, butch-femme culture emerged in the early twentieth-century, with origins among working-class, African-American, and imprisoned women. Esther Newton argued that the emergence of the New Woman and new gendered ideologies of work, politics, and sexuality among middle-class women also produced new masculine or “mannish” templates for women’s behavior in the 1910s and 1920s. Although in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries male clothing, gestures, and names allowed some women to “pass” and therefore obtain higher paying work and male social opportunities, by the 1930s, butch emerged as an important if not hegemonic form of erotic and social signaling in opposition to the femme, an identity that emphasized conventionally feminine and even hyper-feminine dress and gestures. As Kennedy and Davis argue, butch, identity, in particular, was tied to the entry of women into the industrial workforce and eventually the military in the 1930s and 1940s.

Framed within a broader mass culture of heterosexual gender patterns and romance, butch and femme appropriated, mimicked, and subverted a gendered division of labor that reflected expectations about actual work (i.e., “women’s” jobs versus “men’s” jobs) as well the gendered division of labor in the emotional maintenance of women’s relationships. However, in the 1950s and 1960s a new genderless sensibility of “kiki” identities challenged the older butch-femme patterns of the bar scene, reflecting an attempt to accommodate the changing gendered expectations of the 1950s and shed the

stereotypes of butch-femme culture as violent, lazy, and anti-social. By the 1950s, butch-femme roles were clearly defined and customers at lesbian bars were expected to hew to one or the other sensibility. Women who either refused to do so, who switched, or who were insufficiently butch or femme were frequently marked as outsiders. On the other hand, the typically middle-class, younger, and often educated or professional kiki lesbians represented the sensibilities of an emerging coteries of lesbian political activists and intellectuals, notably those from the Daughters of Bilitis, often viewed the butch-femme scene as petty, exploitative, and hypersexualized. Although it may be tempting to see the provenance of these cultures as their destinies—a rubric in which butch-femme culture represented the interests of older, working-class, and African-American women and in which kiki culture represented the interests of middle-class and white women—these patterns did not always play out according to such neat and rigid expectations. Audre Lorde and the Greenwich Village circle of Black lesbians to which she belonged identified as kiki, in contrast to the older women who signaled butch-femme identities. The Ann Aldrich books describe the butch-femme scene as a means of recruiting lower-class juvenile delinquents.

The backdrop of this conflict is the arbitrariness of stigmatization and social punishment—whether by the police or not—created an atmosphere in which such interests and solidarities were secondary to personal desire and the exigencies of carving out a lesbian life in a virulently homophobic, sexist, and sexually violent urban environment. Moreover, it may be difficult to criticize who hated butch-femme culture more, the kiki lesbians or butches and femmes themselves since, like gay male culture, lesbians were often ambivalent about their own identities and communities.
Finally, the proximity to and domination of gay space by men in the Village—many of whom also found their way to the few women’s bars—added a sense of fraught companionship and claustrophobia to this conflict. The lesbian bars where women like Nestle and others congregated in the post-war decades represented a gendered segment of the broader gay market of the early closet economy. Despite the violence that Nestle and so many other gay women encountered in the postwar decades in the lesbian bars of Greenwich Village, lesbian patterns of cultural consumption refined and redefined the cultural and economic geography of gay life in New York City, especially as the scene concentrated in Greenwich Village. Like the closet economy in general, straight outsiders continued to dominate the ownership and management of lesbian bars. However, over time many lesbian bars represented reasonably steady sources of employment and lesbians even found their way into management positions.

Although many more gay men patronized the bars of the Village, it was the presence of gay women that signaled the neighborhood’s safety to other gay and curious consumers (and would-be consumers). Moreover, lesbian consumers and to some extent the gay men around them offered a market dominated by a culture of exclusive homosexuality. Indeed, while a gendered culture of effeminate gay men and presumably straight and hypermasculine trade, or highly discreet married bisexuals and closet queens, seemed to pervade other queer areas of New York City like Central Park, Times Square, and the Upper East and West Sides. While Greenwich Village had plenty of these shared strategies of disavowal and dissimulation, the neighborhood increasingly hosted a culture dominated by customers and residents who openly identified as gay, especially women,
forging one of the few quasi-public lesbian cultures in the United States in the immediate post-war decades.

II. Historical Context: The Lesbian History of Greenwich Village and the Policing of Women’s Lives in Post-War America

In the U.S., the 1940s confronted gay and straight women alike with a dizzying set of contradictions, and especially in large manufacturing and port cities like New York. The years of the Second World War had offered women unprecedented opportunities outside of the home, especially in places like New York City. Goals of full wartime employment, the mobilization of much of the industrial and professional male workforce, the labor demands of wartime industry at home, and the demand for women auxiliaries abroad propelled millions of American women out of domestic work and onto the employment rolls. The war offered opportunities for a degree of financial and social independence unthinkable before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This quiet and necessary revolution in gender and work, especially in cities where munitions factories and military installations were plentiful, profoundly affected the gay world, as well; and, perhaps no part of it as dramatically as the bar scene where small but persistent networks of lesbians had carved out an unlikely cultural and social existence.

However, the end of the war heralded a nostalgia for prewar innocence and a massive economic contraction as wartime manufactures slowed down, both of which

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340 Despite a drop-off in the immediate post-war years, women’s entry into the workforce continued to rise throughout the later 1940s and in the 1950s, despite the gendered ideology that stressed domesticity during the period. The result was a dizzying set of contradictions in which management often developed sexist managerial, hiring, and salary practices with regard to a work force that was both rising and devalued. Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II*, (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1987), 99-127; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (1992; New York: Basic Books, 2000), Kindle Edition, ch. 7.
colluded in a public and private campaign to induce women to “give men back their jobs,” marry, and produce as many children as possible. This campaign served two purposes. First, it readjusted the employment market to create greater opportunities for men. Secondly, it promoted an ideology of female domesticity that revalued women not as wage-workers, but as wives and mothers. This was no mere cynical ploy to achieve full-time employment, it represented a deep collective yearning for a kind of a prelapsarian American order of which domesticated women as mothers were the most potent symbol. As Elaine Tyler May argues in Homeward Bound, the Cold War idea of “containment” accelerated the re-domestication of women and revealed a sinister kinship in both foreign and domestic policy. At some level, the culture of the Cold War invaded the households and private spaces of millions of people by seeking to both reign in communism in a global context and to discipline the family, and especially women, in a domestic context. Obviously, some women continued to work industrial jobs and many more entered domestic service—especially women of color—but the image of a woman worker was distinctly out of sync with the cultural imperative of the times, and women who remained in or joined the workforce during the 1950s often struggled to do so. Indeed, it may not be much of a stretch to say that the postwar culture of gender tended to depict women who worked outside the home as either viragos who had abandoned their “natural” roles of helpmeet and mother. In other cases, women represented goofy and helpless nuisances epitomized by the “Job Switching Episode” of I Love Lucy—a television series that basically runs on an eight-year gag about the incompetency and stupidity of women—in which the titular heroine gums up the works at a chocolate

factory in a job she has to take after overspending her allowance. And of course in this new mass form of entertainment, the paterfamilias reigned over both the domestic goddesses like Donna Reed and the buffoons like Lucy, because, after all, “Father Knows Best.” In any case, the resulting Cold War ideology of gender, domesticity, and work spelled disaster for all gay people—and the pressure to marry fell on men as well as on women, and much of the later self-reckoning of gay liberation represented the unraveling of these disastrous pairings.

For lesbians, however, the gendered ideology of the Cold War was an especially bitter pill after the more or less emancipatory effects of the previous three decades. In the 1920s and early 1930s, especially, lesbians seemed to enjoy much greater freedom than in the fifties and sixties, or at least they had significantly greater options of bars and gathering spots from which to choose. Unlike the post-war era, where lesbians were essentially corralled into Greenwich Village, Harlem offered an important if not the most important site of lesbian sociability and culture. It goes without saying that the lesbian world that predated the Second World War offered exponentially more choices for women of color, especially for those women who lived in and around Harlem. As Chad Heap suggests, Harlem arguably represented the most vivid and visible lesbian culture in New York City. The same-sex affairs of entertainers like Bessie Smith and the overtly butch style of the tuxedoed Gladys Bentley had largely established and defined lesbian style in the 1920s and 1930s, linking it closely to the culture of Black Harlem. The most famous lesbian club before the Second World War was arguably the Ubangi Club, a nightclub that opened at 131st and Seventh Avenue at the site of the former Harlem Tavern. By the end of the decade, however, years of economic depression, clean ups at
the behest of reformers like Fiorello LaGuardia, and shakedowns from the local mob had eroded much of the customer and capital base of Harlem. The spectacular riot of the summer of 1936 seemed to panic many of the white customers whose patronage had kept many of Harlem’s nightclubs open, and the declaration of many of the bars as “off limits” by military police during wartime proved a kind of nail in the coffin. By the end of the 1940s, what was left of a formerly geographically dispersed lesbian entertainment culture were a handful of establishments crowded around Abingdon and Washington Squares where the residents and the clientele there were typically more middle-class and more white.

The very few references to and by Black and Latina lesbians in the fifties and sixties suggest that racial diversity in Greenwich Village’s bar scene was an anomaly in the city, and, as this chapter later shows, lesbians of color often found themselves alienated from a scene to which they had often journeyed across the city or from the suburbs to join. Moreover, the cultural prestige of Black lesbians, in particular, and especially artists like Gladys Bentley, created an important mold for butch-femme culture. Bentley, who frequently appeared in a tuxedo and a top hat, represented one of the most popular entertainers of the 1930s, and her ability to draw crowds across the country—not only in Harlem’s chicest jazz clubs and cabarets but also in far away San Francisco—helped link lesbians to a commercialized tradition of butch and femme that traversed the borders of individual gay neighborhoods.

Greenwich Village had its own lesbian traditions, as well, but lesbian life in the Village tended to revolve around financially independent, often wealthy, single, and

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notoriously radical women, few of whom dared express the brash eroticism of women like Bentley. Such women were arguably defined more by free love ideologies and “Boston marriage” arrangements—a term invented by Washington Square denizen Henry James. In addition to the leading intellectual lights of anarchism, the birth control movement, and avant-garde modernism, the Village also provided much needed and relatively cheap housing for single and independent women. Urbanist Carolyn Ware’s study of the Village stated that by 1930, the “pursuit of a common avocation or common tastes in recreation” brought together different groups and introduced newcomers to the Village, “especially the Lesbians, into whose group it was easily possible for strangers to find their way.”

During the Second World War, work in wartime industries and in the military also offered women newfound economic independence, unprecedented access to public life, and even a kind of cultural camouflage of 1940s styles that included short hair, slacks, and military dress for women. For lesbians, the war meant the resurgence of a commercialized social world that had already been codified in the 1920s and early 1930s. While Depression and the repeal of Prohibition had driven lesbian life underground, wartime industry revived and accelerated the expansion of a distinct lesbian commercial culture in bars, restaurants, and other public gathering places. Although historians like Allan Bérubè and Nan Alamilla Boyd have documented the growth of this wartime lesbian (and gay) culture as central to the emergence of gay communities in New York City and San Francisco after the war, the place where this process is best explained is arguably Buffalo, New York, in Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy’s account of

344 Ware, Greenwich Village, 1920-1930, 237.
working-class lesbian communities in Buffalo comprised, in part, of women in the industrial workforce.\textsuperscript{345}

The war’s end brought with it a general loss of income for women, an ideology that attempted to banish women from the public sphere (including the sphere of work for wages), and a Cold War security discourse that linked homosexuality and political subversion. For married women—who at the time comprised the vast majority of the adult female population—this ideology represented the achievement of domestic bliss or the anxiety and depression of stifling sequestration (or more often than not something in between). For lesbians who lived as lesbians—that is, lesbians who refused to marry, worked for wages, and lived independently from men, often alone—the effects of the postwar period could not have been more disadvantageous. Not only were many lesbians deprived of their livelihood, but Cold War ideology discouraged even their unescorted presence—unescorted by men, that is—in public. For the inchoate lesbian markets that had largely grown up around the nightlife core of the Jazz Age and the industrial core of wartime factories, the effects of post-war demobilization and Cold War gender ideology could not have been more catastrophic. The new cultural and social changes reshaped representations of gender and expectations of women’s public and private behavior and created new and sometimes onerous demands on women’s working-lives.

The reactionary retrenchment of traditional gender ideologies after V-day included an attempt to clamp down on this public and sometimes women’s drinking culture—of which lesbian bars were apart—and to curtail women’s encroachment on what was generally accepted as a masculine domain of sociability. \textit{New York Times} columnist Marjorie Frankenthaler noted these attitudinal changes as early as 1946. She

wrote, although “no one will stare because a woman has perched herself on a bar stool and, addressing her favorite bartender by his first name, order[s] her third whiskey-and-soda” that “[c]ustodians of bars recall with nostalgia the good old days when a lady, if she did any drinking at all, consumed her spirits at a table.” Bartenders complained that women spilled more drinks than men, and cluttered the bar with cosmetics. “[T]he only thing a man leaves on the bar is dough,” stated one bartender. She concluded that “women are welcomed at bars for one reason only—their patronage boosts cash receipts.”

In a chapter of New York: Confidential! entitled “The Minx in Minks (For Gals Only),” Lait and Mortimer reported that “every year…the little gals from farms and villages, inland whistle-stops, and now again, foreign lands…come here, breathlessly and hopefully, in search of fame and fortune.” Covert references and more explicit cautionary tales of seduction, sexual assault, and ruin follow. They even imply a mild casting couch scandal linking the married Hollywood producer Joe Pasternak to musical comedy stars Deanna Durbin, Kathryn Grayson, and Mary Stuart. The rest of the chapter expounds upon the dangers to single and unescorted women, unapologetically cementing the image of the city as both a “man’s world” and dangerous to women. According to Lait and Mortimer, single women are at best in danger of having their feminine sensibilities affronted by “dirty subways” and at worst in danger of being seduced into working for a brothel. But whatever else, “Do not come to New York for a visit ALONE.” They advise against talking to strangers—presumably men—in theatres, subways, and virtually all other public places. “You may not to him in a hotel if you both live there and have seen

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each other before,” they qualify. The city seems especially a man’s (or wolf’s) world at
night, suggesting that all women—including, of course, lesbians—faced down a regime
of sexual violence that extended well beyond the local police precinct. “DO NOT walk in
Central Park, or other parks AFTER DARK, even if escorted,” they commanded
ominously. Nightclubs and bars, they reported, stopped admitting women unescorted by a
man after 10 p.m., and furthermore, they reported, the City Council was considering a bill
to ban unescorted women’s entrance to bars altogether—presumably to protect women
from the very public dangers against which Lait and Mortimer cautioned.\footnote{Lait and Mortimer, \textit{New York: Confidential!}, 145-151.}

The bill passed about the time \textit{New York: Confidential!} hit the bookshelves. In
1948 the \textit{Times}, in an uncharacteristically snarky article, reported a “spirited and
unexpected protest” from Bronx Democrat Bertha Schwartz, the lone woman in the City
Council, who “gave [the Council] a piece of her mind” over legislation banning
unescorted women in bars. The legislation was presented by no less than majority leader,
Joseph T. Sharkey, stating “no female shall be permitted to be served at a public bar, nor
shall any alcoholic beverages be sold over said bar to and upon the premises for
consumption off the premises, except in original containers, unless accompanied by a
male over the age of 21.” The bill exempted table service at restaurants and hotels,
providing an additional loophole for private clubs. The bill also banned women outright
from “back rooms,” a vestige of speakeasy architecture that sometimes led to illegal
gambling dens and makeshift brothels.\footnote{“Woman’s Ire Raises on Bar Proposal,” \textit{New York Times}, Feb 4, 1948,
http://search.proquest.com/docview/108317857?accountid=13626.} Although Schwartz registered her complaints
with the Council, protests were limited. A week after the initial report, the \textit{Times}
described a picket line of fifteen women—all of whom described themselves as
“housewives”—that rallied at a bar across from City Hall on Beekman Street, “tossed off a few, and squared away for the march on City Hall. The grievances were real—placards read “We Pay Taxes Unescorted; We Vote Unescorted; We Demand the Right to Enter Bars Unescorted”—but the newspaper portrayed a small and tippling protest against an otherwise popular measure. That summer, the council quietly filed the bill banning unescorted women from bars and backrooms. To be sure, the legislation was weak—there were a number of loopholes and enforcement was limited to local police as opposed to the State Liquor Authority—but it nonetheless served as a powerful symbol of the city government’s protective and restrictive attitude toward women.

Banning women from public places represented the synthesis of an older strain of progressive legislation meant to protect women from the harsh consequences of a modern, urban life as well as a newer strain of Cold War era legislation meant to redomesticate women after three decades of social and economic upheavals, especially the unprecedented scale of war and the boom and bust cycle of business and industry that had so radically transformed the nation and the city from the First World War to the end of the Second. That so few women rose up against this piece of protective legislation is testament to both women’s broad acceptance of the sequestration of public space in the postwar era and the relative weakness of the bill.

The legislation may well have contributed to the decline of a vibrant and visible women’s culture that had formerly exhibited itself with abandon in the erotic carnival of Harlem and Greenwich Village. The primary aim, of course, was to shutter the market for sex work that had flourished during the Second World War. But the city fathers would

have no doubt approved of lesbians forsaking the bars, and along with it a pathological and morally reprehensible lifestyle, in favor of a woman’s “proper role” as wife and mother in the suburban homes being mass-produced for exactly that purpose. As Donna Penn argues, Cold War discourse and popular culture often linked prostitution and lesbianism. “Lurid and sensationalistic accounts of those who strayed from monogamous, heterosexual bliss filled the cultural landscape. In their efforts to make absolutely clear to an otherwise ignorant public what dangers lurked in the shadows, the purveyors of the dominant discourse painted a sinister association between the lesbian and the prostitute as sisters of the sexual underworld.”

Still, lesbianism was largely absent from the debate over women in public in the late 1940s, even if lesbians for the next two decades worried about the consequences of drinking unescorted. Of course, many lesbian establishments simply opened as private clubs, devised ways to pay off or evade police detection, and encouraged gay men who might serve as unofficial escorts. This final element played an especially crucial role in knitting the largely independent gay male and lesbian worlds together, and also provided gay men a convenient alibi against charges of homosexuality.

However, by the early 1950s lesbian life had once again begun to experience a resurgent cultural visibility because of a publishing boom in lesbian novels—many of them soft-core pornography—churned out by the pulp presses. As Susan Stryker points out, men wrote most of the books with lesbian themes—most of them cheap paperbacks—and men were presumed to be the reading public for this body of literature. Such publications proved to be a double-edged sword, since they often appealed to

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heterosexual men whose violence sometimes menaced lesbians and lesbian communities.\textsuperscript{351} Though some lesbians may have found bars and other public spaces hard to come by, the imagery of lesbianism and lesbian bars was becoming more common in the 1950s. Like the larger boom in publications about homosexuality, the fifties also witnessed a publishing boom in books about lesbians from both scholarly experts as well as lesbian writers who, like Edward Sagarin, wished to provide a “subjective” perspective for a literary culture dominated by heterosexual outsiders. The culturomic frequencies of the word “lesbian” in both the \textit{New York Times} and on the N-gram Viewer show both gradual and steep, but nonetheless steady inclines after the 1940s, skyrocketing after the mid-1950s in a now familiar pattern.\textsuperscript{352}

\textsuperscript{351} Stryker, \textit{Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback}, 49-72.
\textsuperscript{352} See Appendix A.
Gay women, however, proved to be an important audience and lesbians also used this burgeoning literary market to write about their own lives and loves—though not, of course, without the genre’s requisite melodrama or the time period’s approbation, even if “normal” straight men did find lesbian pulps sexy. Indeed, these circumstances structured an informational claustrophobia similar to the cultural and economic conundrums that gay men faced, although its cultural and economic patterns were cut as much from the ideology of female domesticity as homophobia.

Understanding the historical trajectory of these lesbian markets begins with a consideration of the various forms of violence that permeated and constructed lesbian life. One of the most important aspects of Nestle’s account is the repetition of a widely believed and scarcely substantiated legal prohibition against wearing less than three items of clothing of one’s legal sex and the particular vulnerability of visibly non-gender conforming people concentrated in Greenwich Village. In fact, no such law existed, although as a target population in a neighborhood known for vice and sexual crimes, lesbians—and especially butch lesbians—represented easy prey for the police. In any case, like many participants in gay life lesbians were often ignorant of the laws that regulated their lives, though the urban legend of the legal system was as effective as any code of law passed by the City Council or the State Legislature. Because of an unquestioned, violent antipathy toward homosexuality, lesbians had plenty of reason to believe police justification for strip searches and sexual assaults. Nestle demonstrates the central role played by the misinformation of the closet economy in maintaining a regime of sexualized violence, not to mention the more enduring and difficult truth that the power to arrest trumps virtually any civil right or liberty. Moreover, she demonstrates a
general truism within the early closet economy: as information about lesbianism and
lesbian life increased lesbian cultural visibility, the search costs may have fallen, but the
surveillance it invited effectively raised the price of protection.

Though gay men often found themselves on the receiving end of physical
violence, an all-pervasive threat of sexual harassment and assault characterized the most
horrifying lesbians encounters with the police and street toughs. The police and
regulatory agencies also focused most of their attention on gay men, since New York
City and State law—not to mention the popular stigma of the vernacular culture—almost
invariably equated homosexuality with male activity. Though the State Liquor Authority
policed homosexuality in bars, its primary targets were bars that catered to men whose
visible cruising attracted significantly more attention than the relative discretion and
demurral that characterized lesbian culture. Of course, masquerade laws criminalized
wearing clothing of the opposite sex, but changing and more flexible clothing and
hairstyles for women made a presumed woman in pants more difficult to police (or even
notice) than a presumed man in a dress.

If the police presented a great threat to lesbians, it was arguably because lesbians
often concentrated in and patronized an illicit market commonly targeted by the law. In
addition to laws that punished homosexuality, regulations that targeted women
specifically created an additional set of constraints for lesbian bars. In 1948, the city
council’s ban on unescorted women posed the greatest legally justifiable threat to
lesbians—though the three pieces of clothing rule is invoked many more times in the
historical record than references to laws governing unescorted women. Indeed, it might
be more appropriate to call the legal or institutional basis of the lesbian economy a “gray
market,” since it was actually legal even though none of its participants believed it to be. The “worlds created with very little” to which Nestle referred thus required the careful, ingenious strategy of cultural and economic entrenchment in a city that seemed intent on the fool’s errand of ridding the city of homosexuality and policing women from much of the public sphere.

In the 1940s, the seeming decline of lesbian life in Harlem coupled with the concentration of the inchoate lesbian market in Greenwich Village reordered lesbian geography, opportunities, and priorities in the postwar era. By the 1950s and 1960s, some lived in the vicinity of the bars and even moved to places like Greenwich Village to be closer to the social, cultural, and economic nucleus of lesbian life. Greenwich Village’s women had a long history as outspoken and prominent features of the neighborhood, where wealthy women like Mabel Dodge established households in the fashionable brownstones on the northern edges of Washington Square. The presence of a correctional facility for women, the New York Women’s House of Detention, also made the neighborhood around Jefferson Market an important conduit for women moving in and out of the criminal justice system, many of whom were lesbians. Women’s bars and cafes were clustered around Abingdon Square in the West Village, as well as around Washington Square Park. In addition to a large number of women who permanently relocated to Manhattan, non-residents were important as well, including regular weekend tourists who could easily get to the Village on the Holland Tunnel or a quick cab ride from Penn Station, Port Authority, and Grand Central—a relatively easy commute from the New Jersey, Connecticut, Upstate, and Long Island suburbs. Given the constant presence of violence, an assumption of safety in numbers seems fairly important and the
fact that the Village—especially around Abingdon Square and Washington Square—was reasonably well-lit and densely populated.

III. Cruising, Signaling, and Initiation: Butch-Femme Culture

Many aspects of lesbian culture built on reversals of mass market consumer products, especially fashion and cosmetics. In Marijane Meaker’s *We, Too, Must Love*, the author recalled visiting a New York City department store with a lesbian friend who appropriated not only the mass cultural space of the department store, but also the gay male practices and terms of “cruising” and “camp.” Meaker emphasizes that cruising meant not only to “hunt” for a partner—a scene more typical of gay men—but to cruise for potential friends—to “go to the gay bars and see what’s going on” or to look “someone over at a party, in the office, or on the street, wondering if she is a homosexual.” “It’s so “cruisy” today,” her friend announced. “Everyone is ‘coming on’…I’ve been looked at, up-and-down, by about a dozen women from the perfume counter on up to bedding. It’s a camp!” That this occurred in the commercialized milieu of a department store rather than the public site of a park or side street seems particularly important. Such “cruising” or “camp” practices of subversively appropriating the gendered cues of a presumably heterosexual culture also served as a means of seduction, initiation, and above all mutual recognition. Meaker admitted,

In some instances, a Lesbian can actually detect the interest of another Lesbian in a public place; or she may not be really a Lesbian, but a woman who is conscious of another woman’s subtle sexual interest in her which makes her curious. Sometimes such a woman is more than curious—sometimes she is
strangely attracted, even though she herself is not homosexual.\footnote{Aldrich, \textit{We, Too, Must Love}, 7-8.}

Within many lesbian networks and spaces, erotic signals were often much less subtle, particularly when they were presented through the more familiar codes and rituals of butch-femme culture. In another instance in \textit{We, Too, Must Love}, sexual initiation is especially tied to gendered identification with the trappings of 1950s fashion. Meaker described “Fortune Secora,” an Atlantic City ingénue who went with “Tommy.” After an awkward sexual encounter with Tommy, Fortune’s feelings turned to disgust as she realized that Tommy “was too masculine, and when she undressed, she was wearing men’s jockey shorts. It looked dumb for a girl to be wearing men’s underwear, and I didn’t like it.” Meaker explained Fortune’s lack of attraction for Tommy as the product of her own unrecognized butch or at least masculine identity. Although “Fortune is not a complete transvestite”—Meaker’s favorite pejorative for describing overtly butch lesbians—“when you see her in the bars wearing men’s pants and shoes and shirts, with her hair cut short and combed back, you see what might be a young boy.” According to Meaker, what kept Fortune from being a “complete transvestite” was her adoption of a more or less “double life” in which she worked in a skirt and “looks much like any other girl” and, more importantly, lacked the cultural objects more explicitly tied to butch identity. “She owns no men’s suits or sports coats, no ties or male underwear.”

The “genuine transvestite,” as Meaker described them, “does not own any women’s clothing, but ‘passes’ completely as a man.” One such person, “Arlene, or “Allen, as she calls herself” stated, “I’m a man…[a]s far as I’m concerned…” “I’ve taken out girls who don’t even know I’m not. I’ve made love to them and they still don’t
know.” What tied Allen to the gay world was ultimately the more banal politics of negotiating gender in public, particularly around public restroom facilities—a concern that, as recent California legislation protecting transgender and transsexual students suggests, persists well into the present. “[S]ometimes I get nervous,” Allen stated. “[W]hen I’m out with a girl, unless I take her to a gay club, there’s no place to go to the john.”

The poetry and memoirs of butch-femme culture are littered with references to objects of importance drawn from mass consumer culture. Such objects served as the raw material for a vibrant scavenger culture for lesbians who saw no images of themselves in mass culture and, even more so than men, required initiation. As advertising and the culture industry solidified a mass market for fashion and cosmetics through film, print, and radio after the 1930s, gendered marketing created an easily recognizable way to decode products and appropriate them in a reversed context where they could signal same-sex eroticism without explicating identity. With the right application of cologne or deodorant, a femme could practically sniff out her partner. The gendered reversal of cosmetics and fashion, in the case of butch lesbians, or the exaggeration of their femininity, in the case of femmes, suggests a subtle interpretive strategy, one that might more easily invite detection.

Men’s suits, shirts, and underwear all carried significant currency in lesbian life. “Male jewelry is a fetish with them—keychains, rings, watches, cuff links, tie clasps, and cigarette cases…” Grooming and hair care was also particularly important, extending from the appropriation of fashion to the beauty industry itself. According to Meaker,

354 Ibid., 27.
butches “abstain from the use of cosmetics except for after-shave lotion, or hair tonic.”

For butch icon Merrill Mushroom, Vitalis hair tonic was as essential to butch signaling as the gestures and fashions that identified her in public. “The butch is sultry. The butch is arrogant. The butch is tough. She picks up the bottle of Vitalis and pours a generous amount into her palms, rubs her hands together, and strokes the lotion through her hair, rubbing carefully to be sure that each strand is well coated, yet not greasy.” For Mushroom, Vitalis was essential in creating a quintessential feature of butch signaling, “a perfect duck’s ass.”

Hairstyles, one of the most important features of butch-femme style, signaled as much about race as it did about gender, and not always using the national brands invoked by Merrill. In a social world that was de facto racially segregated and in which lesbians of color represented distinct and visible minorities, hair became an essential component of butch-femme visual style, with or without brand names. In Zami, Audre Lorde describes a mostly Black butch-femme party in which “[f]emmes wore their hair in tightly curled pageboy bobs, or piled high on their heads in sculptured bunches of curls, or in feather cuts framing their faces.” For Lorde, the associations between Black butches and femmes and hair is as much a consequence of local beauty cultures as national mass marketing.

“That sweetly clean fragrance of beauty-parlor that hung over all Black women’s gatherings in the fifties was present here also, adding its identifiable smell of hot comb and hair pomade to the other aromas in the room.” Butch styles included the ever-popular duck’s ass, as well as “a short pageboy” or styled “in a tightly curled poodle

\[355\] Ibid., 25.
that predates the natural Afro.” Lorde also points out the culturally specific practice of straightening in the 1950s, recalling only one other Black woman at the party besides Lorde who did not straighten her hair—an “acquaintance…from the Lower East Side named Ida.”

Ultimately, grooming and hair products also reified butch and femme identities for individual subjects. Perhaps the strongest indication of this process can be summarized in Madeline Davis’ poem, “Old femme.” Whether intentional or not, each stanza is an anaphoric deviation of the Cartesian meditations: “I know what I am…” “I know what I am,” repeats Davis, when she sees old photographs of herself with “long, wavy hair, eyeliner, mascara” or, again in the scene of a department store, when she “wander[s] on my lunch hour to sample new fragrances and linger near lace lingerie.” Davis’ poem also suggests the ways in which butch and femme established an erotic difference through male and female products. She also “know[s] what I am when the sight of white t-shirts and the smell of Old Spice can still make me shiver and smile.”

In addition to Vitalis, Mushroom’s other preferred products are another essential element of post-war consumer culture, the Zippo lighter and Camel cigarettes. Such objects took on a kind of emotional or affective intensity that cannot be underestimated; the subversions of the various cultural meanings of clothing, cosmetics, and hairstyles crystallizes the ways in which women not only constructed a world with very little from the larger consumer culture around them but also the constitutive identities of that world.

Such cues were essential in establishing the identity of the wearer as overt (butch-femme) or covert (kiki), but such representations typically carried the more significant

symbols of class and to a lesser extent race status. In any ways, the differentiation of class and race status occurred because of the growth, differentiation, and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion that began to define the lesbian segment of the gay market. Some lesbians—especially butch, working-class women—found work in lesbian bars and restaurants, even rising to management positions, or worked local jobs where bosses and coworkers subtly winked at their nocturnal activities. Beebo Brinker, the titular heroine of Ann (Weldy) Bannon’s lesbian saga, serves as a pedagogical model for young butch lesbians coming to the city and attempting to forge a lesbian existence. After moving from Juniper Hill, Indiana to New York with little more than pocket change and a suitcase, Beebo meets a gay man, Jack Mann, at a local bar on her first night in town. Jack explains that life in the Village is “like everyplace else. You eat three squares a day, you sleep eight hours a night, you work and earn money and obey the laws…well, most of the laws. The only difference between here and Juniper Hill is, we stay open all night.” Jack offers Beebo a place to stay and finds her a job where she can wear pants, working as a delivery truck driver for a local grocer, Pete Pasquini.\footnote{Ann Bannon, \textit{Beebo Brinker} (1962; Berkeley, CA: Cleis Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, ch. 2.} Although Beebo’s new life diverges sharply from her past life, the concern with mundane details like housing and work ultimately allows her to live a more romantically and socially fulfilling life at night. In many ways, though, Beebo’s singular identity—the fact that she lives out the same identity both day and night, an identity symbolized by her ability to wear pants—was the exception rather than the rule in the lesbian segment of the closet economy.

Like gay men negotiating a double life, many more lesbian consumers divided their lives along a cultural line that strictly divided work, where most of them assumed normatively heterosexual identities, from play, where lesbians let their hair down and...
mingled among those whom they increasingly recognized as their own kind. By the 1950s, even middle- and upper-class white women—“respectable” women—began to abandon their lives in the suburbs, where they lived completely heterosexual lives sometimes with unwitting husbands, children, and parents.

Barbara Gittings, a major figure in the east coast Daughters of Bilitis and the long-time editor of *The Ladder*, first discovered lesbian life in New York City in the early 1950s, largely through the recognition of cues that were generally available via popular culture. Her frequent pilgrimages to New York City began shortly after she flunked out of Northwestern University and moved home to Philadelphia in 1950—an exit prompted by her traumatic self-realization as a lesbian. Unaware of the lesbian bars in Philadelphia, she hitchhiked across Route 1 in uncomfortable drag—“I thought that was a way to show I was gay.” Familiar with lesbian life by reading Colette, Radclyffe Hall, and the handful of other thinly veiled Sapphic classics then in print, Gittings’ intellectual curiosity and erudite desire little prepared her for the actual experience of the hard-edged, predominantly working-class lesbian bars in post-war New York City. A bookish if outspoken intellectual, her personal style and mannerisms clashed with the often garish spectacle of butch and femme—a symptom of the growing number of women, many of them budding intellectuals like Gittings, to whom the butch-femme crowd referred to as hopelessly kiki. Her predicament spoke to one the central problems of closeted life—namely, that its cultural practices seemed to create a rigid in/outgroup dynamic—and the ways in which such social and cultural norms posed barriers to physical and cultural access to the lesbian bars of the closet economy.³⁶²

Residing just up the Main Line from Gittings, suburban housewife Ann Weldy

followed the same well-worn route across suburban New Jersey, through the Holland Tunnel, and into the bohemian wilds of Greenwich Village. Though college life at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign introduced Weldy to the pangs of same-sex desire, Weldy’s Midwestern university experience contrasted greatly with Gittings’. After witnessing the horrendous consequences meted out to a lesbian sorority sister, Weldy quietly completed a degree in French and dutifully married an engineer. Like many middle-class, college-educated women who settled into the “feminine mystique” of domestic suburbia, she felt isolated and, despite giving birth to two adored children, personally (and sexually) stunted. Like Gittings, she thumbed through The Well of Loneliness and discovered Spring Fire, a 1952 pulp novel written by an obvious nom de plume, Vin Packer. Spring Fire ignited Weldy’s curiosity and, like many women in the fifties, she began exploring her sexuality by constructing a fictional universe of actors unencumbered by a needy family and the respectable trappings of the Philadelphia Main Line. While drafting a final copy of her first novel, Weldy reached out to Packer, which was one of several pseudonyms used by the prolific writer Marijane Meaker. To Weldy’s surprise, Meaker offered to read an unfinished manuscript whose plot borrowed heavily from Spring Fire. Meaker ultimately introduced her to the editor of Gold Medal Books, and under the pseudonym Ann Bannon Gold Medal published Odd Girl Out in 1957. Weldy’s sudsy novel became the publisher’s second best-selling title of the year and earned her a bevy of fans that rivaled Meaker’s.363

More importantly, Meaker introduced the budding author (and fledgling lesbian) to the lesbian life of Greenwich Village. Like a character in one of her novels, Weldy’s

“research” gave way to the immediate experience of cultural knowledge and social and sexual intimacy. “New York was the focus of gay and lesbian culture in those days,” she recalled. “[I]t was electrifying to be there, even though my visits were necessarily brief, stolen from a conventional housewifely routine in Philadelphia.” In the Village, “with its parks, its crooked streets, its craft shops, and its beckoning gay and lesbian bars… I felt like Dorothy throwing open the door of the old gray farm house, … viewing the Land of Oz for the first time.” Lesbians flirted openly in the bars, and Weldy swooned at the sight of two women bold enough to walk arm in arm through Washington Square Park.

Weldy’s fantasy of Greenwich Village as “Oz” revealed an almost prescient observation of closeted life in the 1950s. Despite police harassment and frequent bar raids, Greenwich Village continued to offer colorful escape from the drab, monochromatic exile of suburban heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{364} The efforts at communal and, in the process, self-discovery certainly resembled Dorothy’s revelatory gesture at pulling back the curtain to reveal the Wizard of Oz—a manufacturer of authoritarian fantasies not unlike the psychiatrists and moral philosophers who uncritically proclaimed the superiority of heterosexuality—as nothing more than an impotent charlatan clinging to power through smoke and mirrors.

Weldy, Gittings, and Meaker represent an interesting study in comparison, if for no other reason than that their status as middle-class white women educated from large Midwestern universities made them so incongruous among the largely working-class (if overwhelmingly white) women who dominated New York City’s lesbian bars in the fifties. Coupled with the geographic expansion of suburbia away from the urban economic core, the post-war resurgence of female domesticity placed fairly stringent

limitations on women’s geographic and socioeconomic opportunities, conditions that, as Lauren Gutterman’s recently defended dissertation suggests, often made suburban domestic spaces more congenial to middle-class and white lesbians’ social and sexual relationships than the urban bars where butch-femme culture thrived. The predicament of Gittings and Weldy, in particular, spoke to the isolation and melancholic curiosity structured by an anemic and often damning body of information about homosexuality and gender non-conformity. The geographic sequestration of gay social life to handful of urban bars and other businesses created an additional physical barrier between the gay social life of Greenwich Village’s “Oz” and the “old gray farmhouse” of Philadelphia’s Main Line. Meaker proved a vital part of this process, a guide who introduced Weldy to “Oz” rather than the unfriendly cliques that Gittings awkwardly encountered.

Despite Weldy’s exhilaration at discovering a gay social world, anti-gay stigma reached its apogee during the 1950s during what historians called the Cold War Lavender Scare. As a result, the lesbian social world and individual participants in that world—especially middle- and upper-class women clinging desperately to an unspoiled identity—had little choice but to accommodate the demand for silence and discretion. However, newcomers like Gittings, Meaker, and Weldy cracked open the clandestine sub-culture of gay commercial and social life by exposing gay life on paper even as they explored it in person. Indeed, Gittings, Meaker, and Weldy represented important voices in a transitional period in the closet economy. They also provide an important study in comparison, not only for their similarities—three Midwestern educated, middle-class white women—but because of the vastly divergent turns their lives took in the context of the Cold War closet: Weldy, publishing as Ann Bannon, created an entire series around
the fictional Beebo Brinker, who became the most iconic and well-known butch characters in the twentieth century aside from perhaps Radclyffe Hall’s Stephen Gordon. Although she visited Greenwich Village periodically throughout the late fifties and early sixties, she continued to go home to an ambivalent marriage in the drab Betty Crockerdom of suburban Philadelphia, where her mother cautioned her against too much time writing for a latter-day Grub Street outfit—a worry that stemmed as much from the scandalous content of her daughters novels as the publishing house that peddled them at dime stores and newsstands. Weldy remained married for more than two decades after the initial publication of *Odd Girl Out*, later earning a Ph.D. in linguistics at Stanford University while raising two children. She eventually came out after Naiad Press reissued the Beebo Brinker series in the early 1980s, appearing on the lecture circuit and in documentaries.¹³⁶

Meaker, who published dozens of books under nearly as many pseudonyms, lived a more or less open lesbian life in Greenwich Village. For about a year, she lived with celebrated novelist Patricia Highsmith, and the couple divided their time between a Greenwich Village apartment and a Bucks County farmhouse before Highsmith finally retreated to Europe. In the second half of the 1950s as Ann Aldrich, Meaker published three non-fiction titles, two popular sociologies and an anthology, that offer among the most detailed pictures of lesbian social and cultural life in Greenwich Village during the closet era. She engaged in a high-profile dispute with members of the Daughters of Bilitis, who accused her of sensationalizing and exaggerating lesbian life in order to sell books. In the sixty years since the publication of *Spring Fire*, Meaker gained critical acclaim and even wider readership as a young adult author.

Gittings, who passed away in 2007, came to represent a central intellectual voice in the Homophile movement, which was partly mobilized by dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities of a closeted life framed by illicit markets and a strangled corpus of reliable information. In the 1960s, she became the editor of *The Ladder*, the publication of the Daughters of Bilitis and one of the big three Homophile publications (the other being *ONE Magazine* and *The Mattachine Review*). Gittings was one of a very few Homophile veterans to enjoy prominence in Gay Liberation organizations, spearheading the successful 1973 campaign against the American Psychological Association’s inclusion of homosexuality in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. A testament to her commitment to making information about gay life more available, Gittings also became the leader of a gay caucus within the American Library Association. As one of the most celebrated lesbian activists in U.S. history, Gittings’ name is attached to numerous literary and activist awards.

Although the divergences in these women’s lives suggest the enormous complexity of queer history, their similarities are also remarkable. Gittings, Meaker, and Weldy typified the new political orientation of gay life, in part driven by the entry of middle-class people into the gay social world. For the first half of the twentieth century, gay life was largely the province of working-class vice districts—a phenomenon well documented in classic studies by Kennedy and Davis, Chauncey, Mumford, and Heap. The birth of the Homophile movement in the 1950s signaled the extent to which gay life had begun to expand beyond the illicit bars and twilight encounters in public parks by challenging the authority of the state to regulate the public expressions and private activities of otherwise law abiding citizens. Furthermore, Homophiles and other
contemporary gay intellectuals borrowed heavily from the civil libertarian vocabulary of
the middle-class oriented African-American Civil Rights (and to a lesser extent other
contemporary activist movements) in order to construct a group identity around the
demand for universal dignity and rights.

Their whiteness also seems to be an important albeit more typical component of
their participation in gay life, particularly considering the ways in which white people
dominated both the Homophile movement and gay commercial spaces. Considering the
experiences of contemporary gay African-Americans like James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin,
or Lorraine Hansberry—the last of whom contributed to *The Ladder* anonymously and
attended several D.O.B. meetings in New York City—the urgency and complexity of the
African-American Civil Rights Movement precluded public involvement with the
Homophile movement, let alone identification with a group more widely considered to be
perverts and criminals. Ultimately, though, racism created new forms of exclusion and
alienation in the larger lesbian scene.

Audre Lorde’s memoir *Zami*, offers one of the few sources that frankly detail the
strained participation of Black people in the white dominated gay nightlife of Greenwich
Village. As she crossed boundaries between the Black and white, gay and straight, and
male female neighborhoods and social spaces, Lorde experienced the multiple
dimensions of her identity through these different geographic and cultural contexts.
“Downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and invisible Black,” she wrote.
“Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder.” These social spheres
diverged and intersected with the cultural geography of New York City’s neighborhoods,
and Lorde described the geographic and cultural divisions of Manhattan in the concrete
appearance of the race and sexuality. Lorde’s experience offers a marked contrast to the convivial and communal ways in which consumption stitched Meaker and Weldy into the social and cultural world of lesbian bars. Like Gittings’, Lorde’s intellectual and academic inclinations marked her as an outsider, a fact that made both women uneasy in the bar scene. However, Lorde’s more profound sense of alienation stems from her experience of racial difference in a social and commercial world whose uniqueness and cultural currency depended not only on a visible manifestation of lesbian culture but whiteness as well.

“During the fifties in the Village,” she remembered, “I didn’t know the few other Black women who were visibly gay at all well. Too often, we found ourselves sleeping with the same white women.” Her assertion suggests the ways in which the bar scene simultaneously pitted Black women in direct erotic competition for white partners while also commodifying their Blackness as scarce and exotic “products” in a perverse erotic market that circulated within the broader commercial context of the bar. “We recognized ourselves as exotic sister-outsiders who might gain little from banding together,” she emphasized. In contrast to white lesbian communication networks in which gossip banded woven together, Lorde’s experience suggests the ways in which both the scarcity and devaluation of Black women prevented from forming those same bonds. Indeed, Lorde’s description is a remarkable description of lesbians, and in particular Black lesbians, who found themselves shut out of gay communication networks. At least in Lorde’s case, ill-informed rumor substituted for the veracity of gossip.

Her remembrance of the 1950s evoked a mythical solitude, one that alienated her from both Black and white women.
I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell. There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone, like our sister Amazons, the riders on the loneliest outposts of the kingdom of Dahomey. We, young and Black and fine and gay, sweated out our first heartbreaks with no school nor office chums…

Although Black women found value within the lesbian commercial world, Lorde suggested they did so at the cost of minimizing their presence within it. “We were good listeners, and never asked for double dates, but didn’t we know the rules?” Lorde recalled. The “rules” seemed to dictate a different set of norms for Black women, one that frequently prevented them from acknowledging one another. “Always we moved in a necessary remoteness…We discovered and explored our attention to women alone, sometimes in secret, sometimes in little pockets that almost touched (‘Why are those little Black girls always either whispering together or fighting?’)…” The emotional and eventually physical toll of life in the bar also reflected problems of alcoholism and addiction in the closet economy, a situation that both Black and white lesbians commented on extensively. “I remembered Muff, who sat on the same seat in the same dark corner of the Pony Stable Bar drinking the same gin year after year. One day she slipped off onto the floor and died of a stroke right there between the stools. We found out later her real name was Josephine.” An exploited, alienated, exoticized, anonymous, and lethally neglected fringe of the gay bar economy, Josephine’s fate represented one of the gay bar scene’s casualties in the 1950s. For all its liberatory potential, the fact that gay consumers had few if any real social alternatives to gay bars bound them to a commercial scene driven by the sale of a substance that easily exacerbated the self-
loathing and alienation that made the gay world seem to many like an infinite loop of depression and interpersonal violence. In Josephine’s situation, gossip not only served to inform consumers but to narrativize tragedy and scandal, offering discipline in the form of a racial melodrama and a cautionary tale.

Aside from a friend and part-time lover, Felicia or “Flee,” “I thought we were the only gay Black women in the world, or at least in the Village…I had heard tales from Flee and others about the proper Black ladies who came downtown on Friday night after the last show at Small’s Paradise to go muff-diving with…but I only met one once…” Audre Lorde’s Village, in contrast to Weldy’s, seemed unwelcoming if alluring, and laden with the traps of racial alienation. At the Bagatelle, one of the more popular lesbian bars in the closet era, the bouncer harassed Lorde for ID though she was older than the white women who seemed to slip by the velvet rope unnoticed—“Of course ‘you never can tell with Colored people.’”\(^{366}\) In this case, the inconvenience and psychological hassles of Blackness in the segregated 1950s placed her in direct confrontations with the gate-keepers of gay social life. More problematically, anti-gay stigma often served as an alibi for racist attitudes and prevented discussion. In some sense, gay communication networks (at least those dominated by white people) seemed incapable of grappling with the costs of Blackness in gay social life. Lorde wrote sarcastically, “[W]e would all rather die than have to discuss the fact that it was because I was Black, since, of course, gay people weren’t racists. After all, didn’t they know what it was like to be oppressed?”

Lorde’s racial alienation from gay life exacerbated her sense of alienation from Black life as well. “For both Flee and me, it seemed that loving women was something that other Black women just didn’t do. And if they did, then it was in some fashion and in some

place that was totally inaccessible to us, because we could never find them.” In this sense, Lorde’s (and Flee’s) alienation sprang from their inability to access reliable sources of information vis-à-vis Black lesbian communication networks. Nonetheless, Lorde claimed that “Lesbians were probably the only Black and white women in New York City in the fifties who were making any real attempt to communicate with each other; we learned lessons from each other, the values of which were not lessened by what we did not learn.” As Lorde’s comment suggests, lesbians forged a community in spite of and sometimes across their differences, although the communal lessons unlearned in the 1950s and 1960s would surface repeatedly in the decades after Gay Liberation and the Women’s Movement constructed alternatives to institutionalized homophobia and sexism while leaving the race and class hierarchies of the closet untroubled and therefore largely intact. The writings of Lorde, Nestle, Gittings, Weldy, and Meaker represented a general turn toward the lesbian market itself, even a world shared by women across race, class, and age differences inspired the ambivalent and strained affections of longing and alienation.

IV. Revenge of the Kiki: Class, Gender, and Respectability

Because their writings reflected the immediate experiences of the city, Weldy’s and Meaker’s (as Bannon and Aldrich) work seems especially symptomatic of the social and cultural growth, displacement, and struggle of the lesbian segment of the early closet economy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Weldy wrote of the Beebo Brinker cycle that “[t]he role that lesbian pulps had played in educating women and serving as sort of travel guides and providing insight into life as it could be lived as a lesbian—that role was

367 Ibid.
diminished and taken over by theatre and film and popular magazines that really replaced the need for the lesbian pulps.” Meaker’s intentions were more frank. Inspired by *The Homosexual in America*, Meaker wanted to introduce her readers to the lesbian markets of Greenwich Village. In the foreword to the 2006 reprint of *We, Too, Must Love*, Meaker commented, “Today a lesbian can use any search engine on her computer to find Internet sites, clubs, magazines, newspapers, and television shows catering to her. In the 1950s, you found others by word-of-mouth, by going to bars, and by happenstance.” Meaker recounted that she discovered her first gay bar by asking a taxi cab driver.

The most important part of these “guides” was not only the practical advice they dispensed, but the class-inflected ideologies of lesbian work and consumption, all of which were inflected with a conflict between butch-femme lesbians and kiki lesbians. A reflection of the limited resources that women had at their disposal in the fifties, the emphasis on work was not so much a producerist glorification of work, but the means by which women gained the economic independence to enter into these lesbian markets. The most important aspect of their work represented a commentary on the contested relationships between the butch-femme culture of the bars and the gender-conforming kiki who, for different reasons, represented a more employable and ultimately more economically sustainable model for lesbian consumption. The heroines of their novels were similar to Horatio Alger figures, but instead of a gospel of wealth what emerges is a gospel of lesbian life.

In many ways, Meaker’s work represented a straightforward “how to” guide for

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369 Meaker, Introduction in Aldrich, *We, Too, Must Love*, viii.
accessing lesbian markets through non-fiction while Weldy’s represented a fantasy on butch, femme, and kiki themes. Indeed, neither Meaker nor Weldy fit the butch-femme mould, although their divergent views on butch-femme culture played a central role in redefining work for lesbians. Weldy’s portrait of lesbian life revolved around the adventures of the noble if occasionally misguided butch archetype, Beebo Brinker. However, Meaker’s portraits of butches and femmes relied mostly on stereotypes about the laziness and unsuitability for steady work of lesbians steeped in these gendered patterns. According to Meaker, “Ms. Aldrich…got more mail from readers than any other author at Fawcett Publications had ever received….The letters to Ann Aldrich were mainly from young women. Some just wanted to tell their stories, and some wanted to come to New York. Where should they live? What kinds of jobs were there? What were lesbian bars? How could they meet lesbians beside lesbian bars?” Meaker’s books offered ready answers for each of these questions but, more importantly, the questions addressed to Aldrich suggest the features at the crux of lesbian economic existence: housing, work, and play. The housing and leisure questions were simpler, questions whose answers were largely determined by geography: the proximity of bars and other businesses that catered to lesbians. The Aldrich series and all but the first of the Bannon series were set in Greenwich Village, the site of the vast majority of the city’s lesbian bars at the time. More importantly, the rents there were relatively cheap. In addition to the single room occupancies and cold water flats, a large women’s hotel, the Martha Washington, was located just a few blocks north of Abingdon Square in Chelsea.

Questions about work were significantly more complex, particularly given the context of women’s opportunities in an era defined by expectations that women marry

\[\text{Ibid., xi.}\]
and stay out of the industrial work force. Butch identity first emerged in relation to work as more women joined the industrial work force, the circumstances of which were reflected in the sartorial styles that came to define butches, in particular: short hair, pants, and the absence of make-up and women’s jewelry. As the Aldrich titles suggest, however, these styles had become a serious liability to work in the 1950s. More importantly, at least according to Meaker, butch-femme culture belied an economic parasitism between non-gender conforming and gender conforming women. Although the “venial transvestite, the benign butch” is “inconspicuous in society,…unknown to or ignored by her employer[, s]he is the exception to the rule.” More typical, at least according to Meaker,

[T]he butch makes herself conspicuous, and chooses a society in which it is safe to do so. Once she finds one of the many bohemian areas of big cities, she happily sets about the business of exhibiting herself with rapt abandon. If she works—but she probably won’t if she can avoid it—she often finds employment in a night club or café that caters to homosexuals and people curious to see them.

Instead of applauding the stereotypical butch for finding work within gay bars, or suggesting the importance of gay bars to lesbian employment, she criticized butches for their exhibitionism. Moreover, she described most butches as too lazy or reluctant to work. “Ideally, she is kept by another stereotyped lesbian, the fem.”

According to Meaker, the femme also represented a stereotyped caricature, only “this time a caricature of womanliness. Her perfume is a little too heavy, her hats are a little too zany, he make-up is overdone, her walk is exaggerated, and her speech affected.” Moreover, she stated, the femme is “always on the verge of something. A

371 Aldrich, We, Too, Must Love, 34-35.
butch is an expensive dependent, and the fem often talks of the break she is on the verge of getting, which will provide her and her lover with those luxuries for which they dare to hope.” Instead of a symbiosis between two types of lesbians who, for different reasons, faced economic challenges because of a lack of employment opportunities, the butch-femme culture she described is exploitative and pathological. Although femmes may have worked, according to Meaker they did so “as hostesses in nightclubs, as B-girls, as whores.” “[I]f they were normal,” she opined, she might find “the same kind of man they now have in a transvestite,” but they would have to “keep” him. “He might be a wonderful, gentle lover; and ostensibly, a great sentimentalist, but like the ‘little boy’ a lot of transvestites are, he probably won’t be able to hold a job for long…” Meaker conflated the stereotypes of laziness and infantilism, a conclusion likely drawn from the many psychoanalytic sources on which she drew for the Meaker series. The relationship that resulted was far from a benign pathology of infantile dependency, however. She concluded her assertions with the story of a “transvestite” pushing her femme girlfriend down a flight of stairs, only to ventriloquize the femme stating: “Blackie didn’t really mean to hurt me. It was just one of those things. She lost her temper suddenly.” While Meaker claimed to draw this event from personal experience, historians may wonder at the provenance of this vignette given that “Blackie” was the name of one of the most famous butch performers of the famous Howdy Club during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Blackie Dennis. We might speculate that Meaker was inverting the cultural prestige of a well-known performer in order to indicate the shifting norms of lesbian life.

In any case, the late 1950s and early 1960s brought little relief to the conditions

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372 Ibid., 31.
that made Greenwich Village, and especially its enclave, a pressure cooker. Although Aldrich had attempted to provide a guidebook for other lesbians, she was roundly criticized in *The Ladder* for emphasizing what the authors considered to be an unsightly and garishly pathological aspect of lesbian life. Although Meaker’s vision diverged from the writers and editors of *The Ladder*, they did share a broad perspective on the general undesirability of butch-femme life.\(^{374}\) As the Daughters of Bilitis became more prominent in the Homophile movement of the early 1960s—staging national conventions and picketing at demonstrations—the politics of respectability often diverged wildly with the larger constituency of lesbian culture in the bars. Even so, as Marcia Gallo suggests, lesbians in the Homophile movement were often confronted by the unapologetic sexism of male leaders from ONE and the Mattachine Society. By the end of the decade, lesbian culture had begun to fray, as political lesbians declared the butch-femme culture of the bars either passé or declassé and the Homophile politics of the Daughters of Bilitis were confronted with the sexism of the bars. In many ways, the debates over kiki and butch-femme culture suggest the paucity of public institutions and their inability to accommodate the desires and needs of a broader lesbian constituency. Even as individual groups of lesbians formed tight-knit circles of friends and lovers, lesbians found themselves excluded from the bar scene and Homophile politics. While the Women’s Movement and Gay Liberation would bring some political, social, and cultural relief for the claustrophobia of lesbian life, there, too, women confronted homophobia and sexism. Lesbians in the early closet an confronted intractable dilemma of exclusion and the desire to belong to a community about which many lesbians felt ambivalent at best—not

only “worlds constructed with very little,” but worlds with enormous costs, little agency, and even less personal investment. If the later Gay and Women’s movements offered relief, women in the early closet economy expressed at worst a kind of hopeless immobilization and at best confusion. As Meaker concluded We, Too, Must Love

[D]espite any explanations, rationalizations, or justifications for homosexual behavior, the cliche: no man is an island holds. Childhood is a kingdom where no one cares about being different, but when the world is grown up and the individual grown up with it, the homosexual lives on an island in our society. Surely he cannot help but be lonely for the mainland of Real People, and nostalgic for the time when he didn’t care about being different and thus a part of that mainland. Some homosexuals try to recapture that kingdom by pretending they still don’t care. The majority do care, but don’t know what to do about it.375

V. Conclusion: From Erotic to Social Capital

In 1963, Meaker seemed ready to offer more specific remedies in the final book in her Aldrich trilogy, the depressingly titled We Two Won’t Last. In typical Aldrich fashion, Meaker sets up her book around a series of vignettes about different theoretical stereotypes drawn from gay life. “Jackie” and “Ricky” are the central figures of her chapter on the “Young Lesbian,” a chapter more or less addressed to lesbians coming into the gay world. For Meaker, the chapter provides an almost pedagogical overview of the pros and cons of butch-femme and kiki representation.

Jackie is a 19-year old lesbian. She has had one year of college at a southwestern university. Gay life is new to her, and she revels in going to the gay bars at night, in meeting more gay people, and going to parties. She…wears her hair short, in a

375 Aldrich, We, Too, Must Love, 156.
monk’s-cap style. Her dress, when she is not working, is very collegiate. She wears button-down shirts, Bermuda shorts with high knee socks, or tapered pants, desert boots or sneakers…She wears make-up and perfume. She does not merely think of herself as a ‘butch’ or a ‘femme,’ but merely a lesbian.

Ricky is also 19. She did not finish high school. Gay life is new to her, too, and she is also caught up in the social whirl. During the day, she works in a printing plant. She…wears her hair short and combs it back in a very boyish style. Her dress…is very masculine. She wears men’s shirts and pants, and loafers. She wears no make-up and does not use perfume. She thinks of herself as a ‘butch,’ a lesbian attracted to feminine lesbians.

Needless to say, it is easier to take Ricky’s lesbianism more seriously than Jackie’s.

Ricky’s girlfriends would also find it hard to take Jackie as a lover, though Jackie likes more feminine lesbians herself…

Ricky’s girlfriends would be proud of her masculine appearance, and they would feel uncomfortable or ‘silly’ with a Jackie.

Jackie’s girlfriends are proud of the fact [that] Jackie doesn’t look gay…376

_We Two Won’t Last_, provides an important index for the changing styles and identities in lesbian commercial life during the late 1950s and early 1960s. “Ricky” and “Jackie” represent two competing archetypes: the “butch” (and by extension the other half of this ‘coupled subject,’ the femme) and what Aldrich describes as the “new lesbian,” or the kiki. The attempt to distance the “new lesbian” from the sexualized butch-femme pair to the kiki individual is highly suggestive. Contextualizing the Aldrich books within this broader history of New York City’s lesbian markets in the late 1950s and early 1960s, representations of gender and erotic signaling in the Aldrich books suggest the ways in which the currency of lesbian commercial culture transitioned from

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376 Aldrich, _We Two Won’t Last_ (Greenwich, CT: Gold Medal Books, 1963), 30-31.
what sociologist Catherine Hakim defines as “erotic capital,” bodily and sartorial attributes used to maximize sexual appeal, to Bourdieu’s definition of social capital based on taste, distinction, and education. It is, in many ways, a transition from sexual appeal to economic productivity, a transition also implied and demanded by later feminists. Perhaps more importantly, it suggests the ways in which lesbians—confronted not only with the distorted search and protection costs of the closet but also the limited social opportunities of a male dominated economy—felt pressured to offer stark alternatives between pleasure and power, or sexuality and social acceptability.

Such a transition helps to explain, in part, how the erotic signals of butch-femme identities transitioned to the social capital signaled by the muted gender representation and respectability of what Aldrich admiringly called “today’s young lesbian.” Although Meaker avoids the specific language of class, the emphasis on education and especially boarding school and college education suggests Bourdieu’s definition of cultural capital as the prestige and connections acquired through particular modes of education, taste, and comportment. Written at a time when unprecedented numbers of women (and men) were attending college in the United States, Meaker’s admiring description of “today’s young lesbian” suggests not simply an ideology of radical respectability—though it certainly does that—but the formulation of a strategy that would resist any visual identification with the butch at a time of intense scrutiny and persecution.

In addition to larger patterns of women’s work and education, this shift should also be explained by the ways in which the lesbian market was instituted through legal regulations and informal, cultural norms and social stigma during the 1950s and 1960s: a criminalized, stigmatized, and outsider-dominated market composed primarily of bars,
cafés, and other sites of commercialized sociability. Until the 1950s, butch-femme identities and signals generated and organized erotic capital during an informationally impoverished period in which lesbian bars and networks were difficult if not impossible to locate and decode. However, the intensification of the regulations and informal stigma that marked the closet economy of the 1950s and 1960s helped to erode the value of such capital, requiring new and more discrete modes of self-representation and visibility. “Kiki” identities supplied a specific set of cultural strategies that resisted the visual stigmatization of butch-femme eroticism, innovating currencies of cultural capital that drew on the prestige of education and cosmopolitan “taste” to forge social networks outside of the choked off space of the closet economy.

Critically, the kiki emerged at a time when women like Meaker needed the social capital of respectability more than they needed the erotic capital supplied by butch-femme culture, and even desired and cultivated the erotic capital of the genderless or gender-ambiguous kiki style. But much more significant than the eroticism of the kiki, the social currency of education and work largely displaced the now-stigmatized trappings of butch and femme identity. For lesbians, negotiating employment was at times almost impossibly complex, particularly given the context of women’s opportunities in an era defined by expectations that women marry and stay out of the industrial work force. Butch identity first emerged in relation to work as more women joined the industrial work force, the circumstances of which were reflected in the sartorial styles that came to define butches, in particular: short hair, pants, and the absence of make-up and women’s jewelry. As the aesthetic arch of the Aldrich books suggest, however, these styles had become a serious liability to work in the 1950s.
Meaker’s description of the new lesbian, however, reveals an inconspicuousness that provided lesbians with both cover as well as prestige.

For Meaker, these forms of social capital were tied explicitly to greater economic opportunities in a more expansive job market. In *We Walk Alone*, she wrote, somewhat exaggeratedly that “[a] woman today is freer to enter almost any profession she chooses, from engineering to medicine to the Marine Corps, with little speculation from others as to her normality or femininity… The female homosexual who cares to be discreet knows little restriction in her personality, appearance, or choice of profession. Her presence in a business establishment, in a restaurant, along the boulevard, or at a party is inconspicuous.” In many ways, the style of the new lesbian (and women more generally) also reveals the erosion of butch-femme erotic capital and the social capital of gender ambiguity in a period of women’s changing styles and gender norms. “If her hair is cut ear-length, it is a new style,” Meaker wrote. “If she walks with giant strides, and stands with legs spread and arms akimbo, she is forceful, aggressive, and probably a good golfer. She can wear slacks and shirts virtually everywhere. If her voice is pitched differently than most women’s, she is the sultry type.”

Eight years later, in *We Two Are Drifting*, she wrote that “the young, educated lesbian will dress and behave more circumspectly than the young, uneducated one…It is not simply that the educated lesbian has more refined tastes than her uneducated sister; it is more that she finds employment that makes her sensitive to her appearance and deportment, and, in turn, she finds a crowd equally sensitive for the same reason.”

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378 Aldrich, *We Two Won’t Last*, 32.
The “new lesbian’s” work life, for Meaker, was represented as professional and respectable—in middle-class jobs that required some level of higher education and provided security and independence without raising suspicion the way that unskilled industrial workers sometimes did. “Many lesbians argue that the ‘butch-femme’ relationship is going out of style…today’s young lesbian is educated and employed in advertising, publishing, television and the like industries…Ten years ago, in New York City, the lesbian bars were filled with ‘butch-femme’ types, and the sightseers were welcome, as were the ‘Johns’ who bought the girls drinks. The State Liquor Authority has closed many of these bars…The ‘gay’ bars that are in existence now, in New York City, do not welcome sightseers, and in many cases, will not allow girls in who wear pants.”

Though Meaker’s descriptions smack of bourgeois class prejudices, they also chart a path in which lesbians had greater economic and social opportunities and an easier time negotiating the constraints and contradictions of the closet economy. As such, Meaker’s “new lesbian” also anticipates the shift from an illicit or quasi-illicit market to a legal or so-called ‘free’ market, defended on the basis of people who were otherwise respectable, economically productive, and law-abiding consumers. However, they also indicate the extent to which a combination of women’s increased social opportunities and the increase of information about lesbian life had radically altered the visual and communicative cues of commercialized sociability in lesbian bars.

While it is easy to dismiss Meaker’s prejudices as artifacts of internalized homophobia, she also emphasized the difficulty with which kiki or non-butch- and femme lesbians had negotiated a social world in which they lacked the basic erotic

379 Ibid., 31-32.
resources for initiation and contact. As women who were not accepted and stigmatized by butch-femme lesbians, they were also subject to a guilt-by-association treatment by the police and other interlopers in the lesbian social world. But strategies of “butch-femme” and “kiki” probably shared more qualities than either camp admitted, since both forms of self-representation had to deal with the ways in which visibility offered the rewards and risks of pleasure and danger. Despite their commonalities, however, their differences structured important cultural and social asymmetries that would last for decades.

Ultimately, changing lesbian identities and aesthetics were fundamentally shaped by the market, the opportunities it offered, and those that it foreclosed. Early on, a visual culture that emphasized gender ambiguity and masculinity provided a useful and relatively easy-to-decode signifier of same-sex desire or erotic capital, however pathological its representation in expert literature. Because of the lack of affirming or positive images of lesbian life, the lesbian bars and especially the butch-femme appropriation of consumer culture represented a strategy that, again, reflects Judith Jack Halberstam’s notion of “scavenger culture,” a quintessential element of a clandestine, criminalized, and stigmatized culture that had historically cobbled together a butch-femme culture from images of conventional feminine sexuality and female masculinity as diverse as the “New Woman,” the tuxedoed nightclub singer (a la Gladys Bentley or Marlene Dietrich), and (especially after the 1930s) the image of the industrial worker. Indeed, these elements of “scavenger culture” were the raw materials marshaled by the erotic capital of the butch-femme scene.

By the time the Aldrich books appeared, the growth of information about lesbian life (as symptomatized by Meaker’s books) and the increased scrutiny of gay and lesbian
sociability by authorities meant that most lesbians had to avail themselves of strategies of “vengeful countersurveillance.” Such countersurveillance often meant using descriptions and observations of homosexuality developed by psychiatrists, criminologists, and other “experts” as visual cues and markers of lesbian desire to develop new codes of discretion, even as they resisted butch-femme patterns described as pathological. As Meaker’s example suggests, such countersurveillance did not always successfully avenge the harm done by homophobia. It is likely that Meaker, like many contemporary lesbian authors, was pressured to reflect these attitudes by editors or had internalized them herself. Because of this distortion, it can be difficult to see to what extent (or even if) kiki aesthetics and identities totally displaced butch-femme signaling and identity, though by the early 1960s a diverse range of women including Weldy, Gittings, and Lorde suggest varying degrees of relief about its abandonment as the sole cultural strategy available to lesbians.

These new forms of social capital had largely displaced the butch-femme culture of the previous decades and, by the 1960s and 1970s, had appended a feminist critique that recast butch-femme as heterosexual and patriarchal mimicry. The resurgence of butch-femme visibility in the past thirty years indicates the limits of those particular critical poses. Even so, the shifting, sometimes contradictory erotic and social currencies of butch-femme and kiki culture in the 1950s and early 1960s argue for the centrality of markets of sociability and their institutionalization of queer history.

I. Introduction: Caffe Cino as Purveyor of Camp Culture and Gay Sociability

In the early morning hours of March 10, 1965, a fire ripped through the ground floor of 31 Cornelia Street, an aging brick tenement tucked between Bleecker and West Fourth Street in the old Italian-American section of Greenwich Village. The fire mainly affected “New York’s most tenacious and active theatre,” Caffe Cino. “Joe Cino’s World Goes Up in Flames,” the Voice headlined on the front page of its Thursday morning edition the day after the fire beneath a stark black and white photograph of twisted metal, burned wood, and a stoic Joe Cino standing in the background. Village Voice theater critic Michael Townsend Smith’s cover feature credited the Cino with jumpstarting the careers of some of the most promising performers playwrights—including Lanford Wilson, Paul Foster, and Harry Koutoukas—as well as serving as the most important progenitor of the highly popular “café theater” or Off-Off-Broadway scene of the 1960s. The article carefully pointed out that the Cino’s company would set up shop at LaMaMa, another unconventional Off-Off-Broadway Theater founded by Ellen Stewart, a friend and one-time protégé of Joe Cino. Despite the bad news, the Voice reported that Harry Koutoukas had organized a benefit program the following Monday at the Writers Stage Theatre. The article concluded with a prophetic quote from Caffe Cino’s owner: “Good always comes from what is supposedly bad. What we need now is the room, to be open
again as soon as possible. I’m very anxious to get open again and continue what we’re doing. It is all worth it, forever.”  

Like so many of his contributions to the Voice, Smith’s article was actually a sly, guerrilla playbill slipped into a story about a local tragedy. As a long-time playwright for the Cino, Smith was a part of a zany artistic pantheon alongside fellow playwrights George Birisima, Steve Susoyev, Robert Patrick, Deric Wilson, Sam Shepard, Diane di Prima, Paul Foster, and Tom Eyen, as well as a slate of performers that featured Warhol superstars and included future superstars Bernadette Peters, Al Pacino, and Harvey Keitel. Smith had as good a reason to boost Cino as the titular owner himself. His play, “I Like It,” had been performed less than two years before in June 1963, and as a theater critic for the Voice Birisima and Susoyev had described Smith as the “father, godfather, and the grand patron of off-off-Broadway”—the genealogy of which was commonly traced to the first plays performed at Caffe Cino, an ostensible Italian coffeehouse tucked into a little storefront on MacDougal.

Caffe Cino was a haven for theater people, local Beatniks, unknown artists, and gay men, groups who overlapped so much at times that they seemed indistinguishable. The then-hip, quasi-outsider Voice’s articles and ads had been central to the Cino’s rise as a Village institution. Its reviews from critics who sometimes doubled as Cino writers or performers, like Smith, helped shepherd early audiences to the nightly shows at the tiny café-cum-theater. At first a small-scale affair, by the mid-1960s the Cino’s crowds had

grown so large that they had begun to attract the attention of the fire marshal and the local police.

Smith’s front-page feature included a long interview with Cino, replete with sympathetic backstory and an almost hagiographic biography, helping to ensure that the benefit would provide Joe Cino with the funds he badly needed to reopen the space. The fire, though tragic, also provided the community with an opportunity to return some of its good fortune to Caffe Cino. It also provided the garrulous, almost larger-than-life Cino with a platform and free press. Most importantly, Joe Cino (and his theater) thrived under the pressure of long odds and imminent destruction. The fire provided the stage on which Joe Cino could perform the role he seemed born to play, an unlikely phoenix rising from the destruction of his beloved café-theater. In 1965, the Village Voice’s Obie Awards cited Caffe Cino (along with LaMaMa) for providing unknown playwrights the opportunity to have their work performed.384

However adulatory, Smith’s article also suggest some fairly purposeful evasions. In many ways, Caffe Cino’s ambiguous status as a café-theater, the scandalous content of its plays, and the downright illegal actions of the owner and management meant that the Cino shared more with the Village’s other market of illicit and quasi-illicit businesses at the time, gay and lesbian bars. Though rarely included as more than a peripheral establishment in gay life, Smith’s article and the larger historical record left by the Cino suggests that the institutional features of Caffè Cino and those of gay and lesbian bars were essentially identical. Indeed, Smith’s article suggests the classic problem of the closet economy: the politics of visibility and illegality.

384 Stone, ibid., 113-114.
For Smith, who worked at the Cino, it was essential that his coverage carefully manage the information that the Cino was essentially an illegally zoned and unlicensed theater. Like gay bars, Caffe Cino had to maintain a careful threshold between advertisement and secrecy, requiring enough attention to sustain a customer base (or in the case of the fire, donors) without alerting police and other agents with the power to shutter the business. Smith never mentioned at all that Joe Cino and most of the Cino’s playwrights, performers, and clientele were known to be loudly and unapologetically gay—a point made plain when other Voice writers reviewed performances at the Cino. But, then, there were a number of omissions in the article: plays were frequently pirated, the packed audience routinely violated the fire code, the Cino paid below union scale, and the electrical wiring was illegally hooked up to a local subway station. Still, Smith’s editorial maneuvers managed to advertise a very public fundraiser for an un-theater and un-gay business that was very clearly both, careful not to eulogize.

Caffe Cino was both an exemplary and exceptional establishment in the late closet economy, characterized by principally by falling search costs and rising protection costs. As the previous chapters show, gay and lesbian visibility—that is, information about homosexuality as well as gay and lesbian social life—continued to increase and, as a result, drew the negative attention from the police, bureaucrats, and other so-called experts responsible for surveilling and policing “deviant” behavior. Though that regime hardly weakened in the 1960s—a reactionary tide proved a conservative antidote to any immediate manifestation of even the most timid of the Homophile movement’s arguments—the sheer number of challenges to sexual mores and gender conventions in the 1960s made it difficult to contain the seeming postwar expansion of gay and lesbian
social life, especially in the consolidation of a distinctly gay and lesbian market. Businesses like the Cino, where the clientele were openly gay or lesbian, were rare in the 1960s. In many ways, the Cino was unique because its owner and management could emphasize its visibility without running afoul of the same authorities that policed bars. In New York City, where the State Liquor Authority barred service to homosexuals until 1966, gay and lesbian bars technically illegal through most of the Cino’s run. Caffe Cino, on the other hand, did not serve alcohol and fell outside of the purview of the State Liquor Authority. Although Joseph Cino regularly fell afoul of the fire marshal, the Department of Buildings, actors’ unions, and publishing houses, his activities were contained enough that Caffe Cino flew under the radar with few problems.

Unlike the mafia bars at the time, however, the most exemplary and exceptional feature of the Cino in the late closet economy was not its consumers but its producers: the playwrights, technicians, performers, and especially Joe Cino himself. While gay and lesbian bars were more or less colonized by consumers because of and based on their ability to protect the identities of consumers, Caffe Cino actually provided a safe space and actually promoted explicitly gay expressions. Caffe Cino’s plays and performances, as well as the atmosphere of what Cino called “the room” created a public culture that treated gay and lesbian coping mechanisms, lingo, and identities as quotidian if atypical aspects of a distinct way of life—or of social and erotic interaction. Building on a somewhat older bohemian business model, Joseph Cino was essentially an entrepreneur for an increasingly distinct and well-defined mode of cultural expression and social interaction: camp.
A ubiquitous term in gay life, camp had come to define all the cultural elements of a truly queer sociability and self-presentation that had grown somewhat independently of the medical discourse of homosexuality. In 1963, Donald Webster Cory and John P. LeRoy included a definition of camp in their glossary to *The Homosexual and His Society*:

(v.) To act in an aggressively effeminate manner, usually with a group, revelling in this group in a loud and ostentatious way, and showing one’s effeminacy aggressively. Also used to describe the activities of female homosexuals who camp by showing their masculine mannerisms and traits. (n.) A person who camps; also a scene, party, or gathering in which there is a great deal of camping.385

Caffe Cino’s cultural productions—of plays and performances as well as of space, relationships, and networks—drew many of its sexual and gender patterns identified with the underground sub-culture of the closet: camp.

Using camp as its cultural medium, Caffe Cino acted as an important organizational component of the changing closet economy through what Paul DiMaggio calls the process of classification and his appropriation of Bourdieu’s cultural capital, or the “knowledge and familiarity with styles and genres that are socially valued and that confer prestige upon those that mastered them.”386 DiMaggio’s examination of American culture in the nineteenth century showed that distinctions of “high” and “low” class culture were purposely created through the organizations founded to establish and marshal cultural capital through the Museum of Fine Arts and the Boston Symphony

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Orchestra. According to DiMaggio, the classification of the Boston Brahmins is defined by “the institutionalization of high culture and the creation of distinctly high-cultural organizations” as well as “the process by which urban elites forged an institutional system embodying their ideas about the high arts…”387 Like the Brahmins who manufactured a high-class culture built around European classical music and art, Cino was a cultural entrepreneur promoted a cultural community devoted to a particular kind of performance. Cino’s explicit priority was theater and art, but it was also implicitly linked to the lives Caffe Cino’s performers, artists, and clientele lived off the stage, as well, a phenomenon fostered during the daytime, as well. In that regard, it was both a theater as well as a public space not unlike the tearooms and the cafeterias had been to an older bohemian cohort in Greenwich Village and its implicit mission was certainly to serve as a gay sanctuary.

It was in this way that Caffe Cino and the gay economy of the later 1960s and 1970s that anticipated differed most from the Brahmin cultures in terms of the way in which and the kind of capital they accrued. Instead of a “high” culture, however, Caffe Cino produced an explicitly gay culture. As DiMaggio argues, the Boston Brahmins who founded the city’s massive cultural non-profits were capitalists both because of their relation to the nineteenth century industrial economy and because the cultural capital they collected was “prestige.” But if “prestige” is, indeed, the currency of cultural capitalism, then Caffe Cino suggests the extent to which the currency of cultural capitalism and cultural markets could lead to radically different outcomes than the power dynamics that emerged from the currency of actual capitalism. In the case of Caffe Cino, cultural capitalism was not used to accumulate existing power, but could be used to free

387 Ibid., 42.
individuals and networks from the social, economic, and sometimes legal compulsion to marry, have children, and maintain a “normal,” heterosexual identity. The accumulation of the knowledge of camp in places like Caffe Cino introduced new values, based not so much on “prestige” but on new values of honesty, authenticity, beauty, pleasure, and liberation.

There was one important difference, however, between most camp conventions and the culture fostered at Caffe Cino. As Susan Sontag’s famous article, “Notes on Camp,” explained in 1964, the “sensibility” of camp was defined by “artifice and exaggeration;” however, “[t]o talk about camp is…to betray it.” At one level, Sontag’s definition of camp—a term associated with gay culture well before Sontag codified it—suggests “style over content” at the surface level of identity. At another, camp is a “taste in persons” in which the “androgyne is…one of the great images of Camp sensibility….Here, Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste: the most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists in going against the grain of one’s sex.” Furthermore, as a verb “[t]o camp is a mode of seduction—one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders.” Camp thus provided a cultural space for the expression of same-sex desire and gender transgression. Moreover, she wrote that “[w]hile it’s not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap.” Comparing the ways that homosexuals cultivated a camp sensibility

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389 Ibid., 281
to the ways in which Jews developed a liberal sensibility, she argued that camp, like liberalism for Jews,

is a gesture of self-legitimization..., which definitely has something propagandistic about it... The Jews pinned their hopes for integrating into modern society on promoting the moral sense. Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness.\(^{390}\)

Sontag’s description of camp suggests the political limitations of gay life. Although a number of commentators have criticized Sontag for “de-gaying” camp and robbing it of its political potential, I would argue that Sontag’s “Notes” are a symptom of the cultural and legal strictures that regulated gay life to invisibility. “To emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content. It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical.”\(^{391}\) Camp is “disengaged” and “depoliticized” not because it is “apolitical,” but because the political—defined, at least in an American context, as public—was next to impossible. However, as a “solvent” of morality it had implications that were political if subversive and invisible. Indeed, its political potential derived, in part, from its ability to evade the public world of politics: “Camp is esoteric—something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques.”\(^{392}\) Caffe Cino’s highly public existence (very much like the publication of Sontag’s essay) meant that while the content of the culture may have been camp its form was certainly not: an indication not so much of how Caffe Cino, Susan Sontag, or anything else was or was not camp—an endless and

\(^{390}\) Ibid., 290.
\(^{391}\) Ibid., 277.
\(^{392}\) Ibid., 275.
endlessly frustrating coffee table debate among both amateur and professional camp aficionados—but how the conditions of gay life were transforming the basic rules of camp, setting the stage not for a betrayal but for a mass coming out that would effectively inoculate any betrayal.

These elements of camp were essential to Caffe Cino, where gay men cultivated camp taste and sensibility both on stage and in the audience. Cino embraced the dual role of the café and theater in part because it provided flexibility and interplay between audience and stage, providing an atmosphere that was absolutely unique to the Village. These elements were almost immediately present, the word camp associated with Caffe Cino from the moment it burst into the Village Voice. The earliest mention of Caffe Cino in the Voice, a review of No Exit, described it as having “a big roomy, informal coffee house on Cornelia Street. It has a precious air…with the incense burning and the faggots camping (a big boy in glasses offered his hand to be kissed by a smaller guy wearing a single earing and chewing a toothpick, yet)...” But if its gay visibility brought in the crowds, its visibility as an illegally zoned place also brought the authorities. In 1968, when the Cino was being reported on a weekly basis in the Voice, Caffe Cino had to close, facing tens of thousands of dollars in fines for the violation of the zoning code.

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393 In his introduction to a volume of essays dedicated to camp, Fabio Cleto refers to camp as “discursive resistance, a semiotic excess, which indeed translates directly into the exuberant, virtually inexhaustible camp corpus of reference. Examples spring from any age and place, its “camp sites” ranging from High Art to pop culture, from high life and showbiz to the outlandish rhetorics of politicians, gathering on the very same “queer” campground Oscar Wilde with Charles De Gaulle and, yes, with Benito Mussolini (oh, dear), John Water’s favorite Divine with the lower-case (and “nonetheless” more sublime) divinity of Greta Garbo, Caravaggio with Andy Warhol, Art Nouveau with the so-called “Fleamarket School,” Mozart with David Bowie, Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes with the “orgasmic dance” of Michael Clark, rococo churches with Philip Johnson’s Postmodern, etc.” Cleto, editor, Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 3.

The unique features of the late closet economy provided the ideal conditions for Caffe Cino’s success, and the visibility of its gay clientele suggested the degree to which gay men (and to a lesser extent lesbians) negotiated a détente with the authorities and carved out a unique sub-culture within the artistic networks of the avant-garde “downtown scene.” As the sole example of gay entrepreneurship in New York City before the opening of the Oscar Wilde Bookstore in 1967, Caffe Cino epitomized the problems of sustainability, visibility, and legal regulation that defined the waning, tumultuous years of the closet economy. This chapter explores the three elements that were the key to the Cino’s successes as well as its downfall: the way that Joe Cino, playwrights, and performers used information and ideology to signaled and affirm gay identity and desire; the Bohemian, non-commercial ethos of Off-Off Broadway and its effect on Joe Cino’s entrepreneurial style; and the Cino’s negotiation with and ultimately troubled relationship to the law. Indeed, it seems that the biggest contrast between the cultural capital traded at Caffe Cino and the cultural capital of Brahmin Boston was its attachment to actual capital. Joseph Cino’s pennilessness and Caffe Cino’s own impressive debts were nonetheless the product of the anti-commercial milieu he insisted on creating. In that regard, Caffe Cino’s failure is either a cautionary tale about the perils of bohemian hubris or a martyrrology of an artist who was consumed by the system.

Caffe Cino was not only an alternative to compulsory heterosexuality, but also to the commercialization of theater in the 1950s and 1960s. Caffe Cino is well known and widely cited in the annals of theater history and the history of the 1960s avant-garde that anticipated much of the counter-culture. Dance and theater historians Stephen J. Bottoms, Sally Banes, and Wendell Stone describe Caffe Cino as the first Off-Off Broadway, an
avant-garde scene that actively resisted the commercialism and mass appeal of Broadway and even Off-Broadway theaters. More occasionally, Caffe Cino is cited as the first gay theater, although that designation really belongs to the Other Side of Silence Theater, co-founded by Cino veteran Doric Wilson and modeled explicitly after the Cino. Gay artists made the Cino their home base because of what Sally Banes calls “an extraordinarily permissive atmosphere” sponsored by the openly gay Joe Cino. In many ways, as Banes argues, the Cino’s space and the networks it fostered served as an alternative to both the more conventional entertainment offered in New York City as well as the domestic confines of familial life. “Caffe Cino has been mythologized more as a family than as a collective… [T]his first off-off-Broadway theater was a haven of offbeat domesticity, compensation for—actually, an improvement on—home for deracinated downtown theater people (here, after all, unlike at home, one’s ‘family’ was always supportive and loving.” Cino was often referred to as a “big papa,” as much a father figure for the cafè-theater’s networks as an entrepreneur or stream of funding.

In the context of the late closet economy—period of intense anti-gay policing just before the decriminalization of gay bars and other commercial establishments in 1966—the Cino was as notable for its open gay sociability and culture in Greenwich Village as for the gay content of its plays. Banes describes the Cino as a “center for the gay underground,” and Stone describes the ways in which the Cino pioneered “pop art, camp, and the outrageous deconstruction of gender that would later be called genderfuck.”

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396 Bottoms, ibid., 361.
397 Banes, ibid., 47.
398 Stone, 2
a time when gay sociability and culture were practically illegal and completely beholden to organized crime, Caffe Cino may well have represented one of the few alternatives to the bars and the most important site of gay representation in the city, and arguably the entire country. As a community institution as well as a theater (or café-theater), it was also one of the few gay businesses owned and operated by a gay man, however “non-commercial” a philosophy Cino and the rest of the downtown arts scene may have projected. Because Joseph Cino insisted on free shows and often allowed customers to sit and socialize for long periods over time for the price of a cup of coffee, the Cino was as public as nearby Washington Square Park or Sheridan Square, but without the threat of police harassment. As an establishment in which the owner, managers, actors, technicians, servers, and clients were predominantly gay men, Caffe Cino represented an institution in which gay identities and an affirmative style helped to foster an innovative gay culture as a public good that could resist the increasing costs of the late closet economy—especially entrapment, blackmail, and violence but also the more mundane forms of exploitation and rip-offs that pervaded most other gay businesses in 1960s New York City. Despite the importance of the Cino to theater history, its significance to gay life has thus far been largely overlooked. As a kind of cultural factory in which the most important products were identity, community, and style, it also anticipated the new thrust of pop art and the post-industrial service economy as well as the political and cultural ethos of Gay Liberation. However, as a business on the cusp of these changes, Caffe Cino was still indebted to and embedded within the quasi-illegal and bohemian economy of the Village.
These features speak to the Cino’s almost unimaginable early success after opening in 1958, as well as its equally unimaginable failure just a decade later in 1968. In order to understand the larger significance of Caffe Cino to gay life, this chapter situates the iconic café-theater within the larger illicit gay market of the Closet Economy. The late closet economy, especially in New York City, was characterized by the sustainability of an illicit market through graft and organized crime as well as a bohemian revival that anticipated the sexual freedom of the counter-culture, which, in the case of Caffe Cino was the production of a camp subculture. This was essential to the dissolution of the late closet economy simply because camp culture created the first context in which one could “come out,” a phenomenon that occurred both as the increase and availability of information and media about homosexuality made the gay sub-culture public knowledge but also as individuals made themselves known within this subculture. For those people moving and working in Greenwich Village—sustained in no small part by people like Cino, within and among the artistic and sexual networks fostered in the downtown scene—this subculture even offered a measure of safety, security, and sexual and cultural openness, all of which were not only unavailable but punishable in the vast majority of workplaces, residences, and leisure and entertainment establishments. Although Caffe Cino’s existence cannot be attributed as a single cause of this shift, its production of camp, a distinctly gay culture, was part of a larger trend of gay territorialization in Greenwich Village and elsewhere in New York City during the early 1960s. As this chapter will show, Caffe Cino’s ability to survive in a period of intense police persecution and popular violence derived not just from its ability to negotiate violence and pay its protection costs, but to create a new economy in which gay people could live
without the costs and requirements of the double life. In many ways, Caffe Cino provided a model for all those men and women whose lives were dominated by the constant anxiety of insecure secrecy, the vast majority of whom had few alternatives to the bars.

II. The Bohemian Business Model and Cino’s Camp Entrepreneurship

Joe Cino lived as exemplary a life as any bohemian saint conjured in Henri Murger’s Latin Quarter, Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury or, scarcely a generation earlier, Eugene O’Neil’s Greenwich Village. Although Cino left no writing himself, reminiscences of the playwrights and performers associated with Caffe Cino suggest a figure as legendary as he is historical. In addition to a few contemporary news stories from the arts and theater pages of the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*, the memories of the man and his theater congeal around a few themes: the glorification of Cino’s poverty and itinerancy as signs of his dedication to art, the tragic nature of his success, and the ostensible authenticity of the art forms he promoted and promulgated due to their rootedness in the experiences of the poor, the radical, the criminal, and the queer who disrupted bourgeois custom and challenged its legal and cultural authority in markets of representation and sociability.

Newly arrived from Buffalo in 1949, sixteen-year-old Cino happily settled into the artists’ life of communal poverty and itinerancy, thrilled to escape the stifling family life of three aggressively masculine older brothers and devoutly Catholic parents who grew suspicious of their youngest son’s apparent proclivities for dance and other boys. Along with a dozen other artists, actors, and dancers, he moved into a frowzy mansion on Irving Place. Like good Bohemians, Cino and his friends hosted three a.m. dance parties,
campy masquerades, comedy revues, and one-act plays that anticipated the experimental and haphazard performances introduced a decade later at his eponymous café-cum-theater. He cultivated a reputation as the fastest typist in New York City at odd office jobs while irregularly studying dance, cruising the parks, carousing in the Village’s queer speakeasies, and, on summer weekends, sunbathing on the Riis Park beachfront. By the decade’s end, Cino abandoned dance—his more vicious friends murmured that he had simply put on too much weight—and turned his attention to entrepreneurship in 1958. 399

Opening that Bohemian institution par excellence, the café, Cino soon discovered that the space perfectly suited the experimental plays and performances then flourishing among the Village’s impoverished avant-garde. Eventually critics from the New York Times, the Village Voice, and Life Magazine visited, a measure of success that Cino and his associates looked on dubiously, wedded, as they were, to the old-fashioned Bohemian ethos that scorned financial and critical success as capitulation to the dominant bourgeois culture. 400 Success also bred more surveillance and Joe Cino found himself spending more time and money paying off the police, bureaucrats, and lawyers who came to enforce the zoning ordinances, union scale, and intellectual property laws that Caffe Cino openly flouted. 401 In 1965, Andy Warhol—whose Pop Art productions appropriated Bohemian imagery without any of its productive values—filmed one of the Cino’s more provocatively homoerotic plays, Robert Heide’s “The Bed,” for his catalogue of languid, lurid underground films. According to numerous observers, Cino’s appetite for methamphetamine grew to monumental proportions through his friendship with Pope

Ondine (aka Robert Olivo), one of the earliest Superstars, and fueled Cino’s personal disintegration. A few months after the accidental death of his long-term lover, Joe Torrey, Cino hacked his arms and belly on the tiny eight-by-eight foot platform as if acting out one of the many Artaudian scenes that passed over Caffe Cino’s stage. With characteristic dramatic flair, the café’s sometime manager Charles Loubier described Joe Cino’s suicide “as blessing the theatre with blood, the old Dionysian tradition.”402

Descriptions of Cino and memories of his café-cum-theater echo cultural historian Elizabeth Wilson’s analysis of Bohemia as a cultural Myth about art in modernity, a myth that seeks to reconcile Art to industrial capitalism, to create for it a role in consumer society…The myth of the bohemian represents an imaginary solution to the problem of art in industrial Western societies. It seeks to resolve the role of art as both inside and outside commerce and consumption, and to reconcile the economic uncertainty of the artistic calling with ideas of the artist’s genius and superiority.403

However imaginary, bohemian solutions also fostered the cultivation of radical, artistic, and queer networks and communities in numerous Western European and North American cities (and occasionally rural colonies) throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, the explicitly gay sexuality went beyond the bohemian ethos of experimentation by embracing a more or less stable identity built on the social, cultural, and economic alternatives to the double life and the strictures of compulsory heterosexuality.

402 Loubier, ibid., 10.
Unique among other gay and artistic spaces, Caffe Cino represented a scene that can only be described as alternative—a heterotopia, to reference the most fashionable Foucauldian neologism. As a theater, the Cino served as an important alternative to Broadway and Off Broadway, institutions that fell under the strict management of profit-hungry producers and underwriters as well as the growing regulatory power of Actors’ Equity. Producers, actors, and playwrights alike embraced the enormously profitable blockbuster model of theater, which often clogged large venues with months- and even years-long runs of the anodyne if splashy fare of the fifties. The Cino, on the other hand, became known as an important playwrights’ theater in part because performances ran for a week or at most, two, until the 1966 production, *Dames at Sea* (featuring then-ingenue Bernadette Peters), which ran for nearly twelve weeks. Artists were free to experiment with avant-garde forms and queer themes without the opprobrium of “high theater” critics or drawing the attention of the various reform societies and watchdog groups that hounded Broadway producers for any hint of sexual scandal or political subversion. Just as significantly, the Cino offered an important social alternative to the bars. The content of the plays themselves promoted a critical dialogue that anticipated the cultural spaces that comprised the queer public of the later sixties and 1970s—spaces like the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, The Other Side of Silence Theater (co-founded by Cino veteran Doric Wilson), and the various coffeehouses that opened and closed over the course of the decade the decade. Furthermore, Caffe Cino’s status as a theater that drew reviewers from the *Village Voice* and the *New York Times* provided patrons a convincing

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alibi for mixing in queer space, thus undercutting the economic incentives for the extortion that plagued the bar scene.

From its beginnings, Cino’s unorthodox business model spoke both to the Bohemian communalism its proprietor embodied and to the quasi-illegal space it inhabited. In the days before espresso became its present racket, the café’s daytime business hardly supplemented the costs of rent and production. Moonlighting as a typist for a laundry to pay the rent and keep the place open, Cino brought in just enough to sustain his beloved theater, which never turned a profit. On several occasions, he slept on the floor of the café when he could not raise the rent for his apartment. Nevertheless, Cino never charged admission to any of his shows, and actors and playwrights seldom earned more than ten dollars a week, if they were paid at all. In a gesture familiar to the avant-garde (or churchgoer), each performance concluded with an offertory passing of the hat and most proceeds came from the good will of audience members. And while some performances were so well attended that they invited the fire marshal, others played only for Cino and “the room.”

Charles Loubier, an early manager of the Cino, remembers the periodic appearance of Josie the landlady, a stereotypical Village matron who occasionally appeared in the doorway of the Cino in curlers and a night robe, querying, “Joe, when you gonna pay the fuckin’ rent?” before sitting down to watch the night’s show with a mix of resignation and pride that she let one of the most talked about theaters in New York City. His Bohemian ethos also likely informed Cino’s refusal to consider government and foundation grants, which ultimately helped sustain Off-Off Broadway theaters like the Judson and LaMama beyond the ephemeral lifespan of the

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406 Loubier, ibid.
sixties avant-garde. He claimed that grants and, more importantly, the oversight that came with it, would kill Caffe Cino’s unique operations. However, the communal voluntarism that Cino inspired also helped him to reopen the theater after a fire gutted the interior in 1965. Ellen Stewart shared profits from LaMama and a number of prominent playwrights, including Edward Albee, lent their voices and financial support to benefits for Caffe Cino, which reopened a short time later.407

Cino kept few records and simply piled receipts in a basket to be sorted later by his beleaguered bookkeeper and accountant, in part because a paper trail might have been lethal to the nebulous Caffe Cino. John Torrey managed to wire the elaborate light set designed by John Dodd into the West 4th Street subway station. Charles Loubier waited for ConEd on meter-reading day and tipped off the house to kill the stage lights and put candles on the table, giving Caffe Cino the air of a modern-day speakeasy. In addition to its minimal production costs—which Cino supplemented by dumpster diving for props, costumes, and set pieces—the Cino reportedly made the same payoffs as many Greenwich Village institutions, a situation that suggests how ensconced the Cino was in the legal twilight zone of café-cum-theaters, queer bars, and gambling dens. If Cino was willing to rock the boat culturally, it seemed he was more than willing to operate his business as usual within the system of graft that kept much of the Village’s commercial life afloat. When a bribery scandal erupted at the Gaslight Café, Cino abstained from participating in Gaslight owner John Mitchell’s crusade against police extortion despite


“Never have so many payoffs been made for so many ripoffs to so many jerkoffs,” playwright Paul Foster recalled.\footnote{Foster, ibid.} The elaborate system of bribes that ran business as usual in the Village also helped to underwrite the economic practices that made the Cino simultaneously the artistic utopia of New York’s theater world and quite possibly the lousiest business investment below Fourteenth Street. City agencies routinely stopped by to harass Cino for failing to obtain a proper theater license (a charge he could dismiss in part because performances were free); the Samuel French company issued warnings over pirated material well before the days of Napster; and the Actors’ Equity union hassled Cino for employing union actors and failing to pay union scale. Cino never failed to skirt the law if it kept his business open or enhanced a performance. Eschewing discretion, Cino incorporated the speakeasy conditions into the atmosphere of Caffe Cino’s performances itself, once dedicating a performance to “the cop who took the last ten from the register.” His advertising methods also invited surveillance. Robert Patrick explained that Cino distributed free matchbooks inscribed with “Caffe Cino, Plays and Scenes.” “This was daring,” claimed Patrick, “because any entertainment was illegal (’61 was the year they beat the folk-songers out of Washington Square.” The performances themselves routinely violated intellectual property and obscenity laws. “Williams, Pinter and Albee one-acts were pirated. Short stories were barely dramatized. \textit{Death-watch} was done near-nude, \textit{The Maids} near-porno.” Like most operations in the Village demimonde, Caffe Cino remained open because Joe Cino made sure the Sixth
Precinct got their cut. “I used to see Joe slip bills to some of the neighborhood cops,” remembered Patrick. “Others he’d take in the back and they’d come out red-eyed and sniffing, or zipping their flies.” As Patrick’s reminiscence suggests, the Cino was also something of a drug market—likely the extension of its proprietor’s increasingly obvious habit. Cino was well-known as a steady supplier of pills, especially benzadrine and other forms of speed, and readily dispensed drugs to actors, playwrights, and friends. Actor David Christmas, the male lead in Dames at Sea, recalled “Were there drugs at the Cino? Fuck my reputation. I was tired, young, and needed a ‘lift.’ Little did I know the lift that I would get. Lovely!!!!!!! Joe gave me a potion one night that lifted me up to the sky. I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.” Drugs also seem to be one of the principle lures for a sub-set of the Cino’s clientele. Patrick stated that “[d]rugs were one aspect of the Cino, and there were people who came only for that.” The negotiation of criminal networks—especially graft and drug markets—played an ambiguous role in the day-to-day operations and eventual of the Cino. Cino’s death occurred following a drug-fueled spiral into depression. But ultimately, none of his successors seemed to grasp the importance of graft, and the last months of Caffe Cino’s existence saw the business accrue thousands of dollars in citations a week. “The cops never bothered us while Joe was alive,” explained Patrick.

Although a variety of plays and performers—straight, gay, queer and curious—came wrote for Caffe Cino and appeared on its stage, camp was the most important cultural argot of the Cino’s favored playwrights. Doric Wilson, who served as an early unofficial house playwright for the Cino, wrote productions like “And He Made a Her,” a

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410 Patrick, ibid.
411 David Christmas, “A Recollection,” in Return to the Caffe Cino, 82-83.
412 Patrick, ibid.
“precious” retelling of the Genesis story featuring a sexually ambivalent Adam, and “Now She Dances,” a mash-up of Oscar Wilde’s trial for gross indecency and the playwright’s own “Salome,” in which John the Baptist mouths political slogans that only the most courageous Homophile activists dared utter. Among the most famous performances at Caffe Cino, Lanford Wilson’s (no relation) 1964 production “The Madness of Lady Bright” featured a drag queen in the titular role, confronting the audience so unabashedly with such sexually explicit themes that they surely would have invited the censors at most other venues.

Despite the unmistakably gay performances, the gendered dynamics were nonetheless male dominated, sometimes—like the larger gay male world—to the point of misogyny. A few women wrote for Caffe Cino’s stage, including Diane diPrima, Lucy Silvay, and Roberta Sklar, and many more appeared in its performances. However, actress Helen Hanft suggested the difficulty of working in such an environment. Hanft stated that the Cino provided actresses a welcome path to the stage without the hassle of the casting couch, but also recalled an incident in which the lighting director, Johnny Dodd, physically beat her for complaining about the lighting.

Johnny Dodd...clobbered me in the back of the head. Tom Eyen joined in with Johnny Dodd, hitting me. Marie-Claire [Charba] was there. I was thirty, but she was just a kid. I was thinking she would phone for help. She ran into the dressing room and locked the door, so I ran out into the street. I saw two cops at a café on the corner and dragged them into the Cino and told them my story. “Do you want to arrest these guys for battery?” they asked me. “No,” I said, “we’re theatre people.” So the next day Johnny Dodd bought me flowers. I was black and blue. I never spoke to him again, and I didn’t perform under that ghastly green light.

\[413\] Ibid.
She continued, “Joe was a wonderful guy,” but he “[d]idn’t want to be in the middle…I always got the feeling he would protect me. But he couldn’t be around all the time, and he was distracted by his relationship with emphetamines.” Hanft’s statement that she needed protection from Cino and inhabited a culture that rationalized the short-tempered violence “theatre people” suggests the extent to which even a place like Caffe Cino could be unsafe, particularly for women.

The most important site of camp interaction seemed to occur not on the tiny sixty-four square foot platform that served as a stage, but in the tables and on the floor of the café itself. According to Robert Patrick, “The regulars were ex-cons in overcoats, future cons in leather jackets (no boy went horny or hungry while Joe was around),” a description that may well have matched any of the gay bars around Sheridan Square. Photographs show pin-ups of Dietrich, Garbo, Crawford, and a host of other camp queens surrounded by gauzy headshots of young actors and the odd cutout of a young stud in a posing strap. In that regard, the most important performer at Caffe Cino was Cino himself. In addition to taking part in each performance—a mantle-clad Cino relished introducing each play as “magic time,” sometimes opening the cape to reveal the master of ceremonies wearing only tennis shoes—the café itself served as both the stage for his own highly visible queer and artistic life and the setting for a culture unique even among the queer and artistic set of the Village. Cino even devised his own argot, a pidgin of English and Sicilian, to create an insider vibe among the café’s cognoscenti. One of the most commonly used terms in Cino-ese, phonoccia for phony, spoke to the proprietor’s

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414 Helen Hanft, “To Thine Own Self Be True,” in Return to the Caffe Cino, 26-27.
415 Patrick, ibid.
416 Caffe Cino, Photographs, Performing Arts Research Collections—Theatre (T-Pho B), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York, NY.
disdain for the artificiality that permeated a Bohemian underworld of crooked cops, closet queens, and artistic poseurs. Cino was also more than willing to put his own amorous tumult on display. He frankly exhibited his legendary, on-and-off relationship with Joe Torrey, the theater’s chief electrician and Cino’s only known long-term relationship. The two lovers expressed open affection toward one another and publicly vented their frustrations with the other’s inconstancy and infidelity. On one occasion, a jealous Torrey—blinded by an amphetamine rage—destroyed an entire set for one of Lanford Wilson’s plays, leaving the beleaguered playwright just hours to reconstruct the scenery for the evening’s performance. Whatever Torrey’s indiscretions, he had plenty of reason for jealousy, as Cino’s sexual audacity earned him a dubious reputation in the Village’s theater circles. He often followed introductions with offers for fellatio, and it was not uncommon for customers to see Cino’s shock of black hair bobbing up and down on the lap of an unusually satisfied customer. Torrey’s unexpected death in the winter of 1967—he was electrocuted while wiring a set for a stock company in New Hampshire—sent Cino into a depressive cycle that ended with his own spectacular suicide later that spring. After months of gorging himself on alcohol and amphetamines, Joe Cino, reportedly in the throes of an acid trip, performed the gruesome last act of his dramatic relationship with Torrey—as star-crossed as any lovers in the history of the theater. Actors and writers mobbed the waiting rooms of St. Vincent’s, lining up to donate blood to the ailing Cino, who died three days later without regaining consciousness.

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417 Loubier, ibid.
418 Glenn DuBose, “Gebondoretta,” in Return to the Caffe Cino, eds. Susoyev and Birisima, 76.
III. From Black Market Bohemia to Gay Ghetto: Caffe Cino, the Late Closet Economy, and the Politics of Urban Reform in the Mid-1960s

After the owner’s death, Caffe Cino managed to stay open another year until April of 1968. Under new management committed to greater “professionalism” than Joe Cino had been, Caffe Cino seemed to enjoy even greater success than under its namesake’s management. Sometime Village Voice critic Charles Stanley, who took over as the director, brought more critical attention and cachet to Caffe Cino’s productions until a municipal judge shut it down for failing to comply with New York City’s byzantine regulations. \footnote{340} Understanding the failure of Caffe Cino’s business model requires a closer look at the changing institutional chessboard on which the Cino was ultimately captured and disabled.

Circumstantial evidence places Caffe Cino’s closure in the midst of several local “reform” movements, in actuality a period of convoluted, \textit{House of Cards}-like power plays that ultimately helped to break the decades old influence of graft, organized crime, and influence peddling that permeated the political culture and economy of New York City, especially Greenwich Village. The most notable event in this transition occurred with the fall of the Tammany Hall Democratic Party machine the rise of the “reform” minded Village Independent Democrats, who came to dominate Democratic Party politics in the Village after the 1961 election, when Tammany candidate Carmine de Sapio lost the district leader election to V.I.D. candidate Jim Lanigan. In the 1960s, the V.I.D. was the most powerful political force in Greenwich Village, allying itself with several neighborhood associations that complained about the increasing noise and

“disorderliness” of the Village. One prominent V.I.D. founder and the most famous politician associated with the club, future U.S. congressperson and mayor Ed Koch, helped to found the MacDougal Area Neighborhood Association. MacDougal Street and the surrounding area, which included Caffe Cino on Cornelia Street, had once been largely residential, dominated by Italian and Irish immigrants who lived in the neighborhoods’ tenements, established small businesses in the Village, and founded local social clubs and parishes. By the 1950s, however, the street played host to a number of cabarets and all-night coffeehouses, not to mention the cluster of lesbian bars around West Third Street. MacDougal Street between West Third and West Fourth Streets was the site of two of the most popular lesbian bars in the 1950s and 1960s, the butch-dominated MacDougal Tavern and the femme-dominated Welcome Inn next door. Tony Pastor’s was just around the corner, between MacDougal and 6th Avenue on West Third. A popular restaurant and nightclub, lesbians and gay men colonized Tony Pastor’s in the fifties and sixties, when the State Liquor Authority revoked its license in 1967. The site of lesbian hangouts Ernie’s Restaurant in the forties and fifties and its 1960s carnation, Ernie’s Three Ring Circus, were located just two blocks from MacDougal Street on West Third and Thompson, and the Bleecker Tavern was located just a block south on Bleecker and Thompson. As Caffe Cino historian Wendell Stone shows, Koch’s involvement in the MacDougal Area Neighborhood Association wrought havoc on the community’s gay and lesbian establishments, but it was just as aggressive in targeting late night coffee shops in the area. Stone’s research shows that M.A.N.A., and Koch in particular, had played a direct role in the harassment of Caffe Cino, whose fame and


421 See Appendix B1 for full addresses and references of bars.
popularity led angry local residents to call police and state and local government attention to the unruly and “indecent” clientele, late night noise, and the flagrant violations of the fire code and zoning rules for theaters.\(^{422}\)

But M.A.N.A.’s power and the influence it wielded against Caffe Cino and other establishments was part of a contestation of public and private space in Greenwich Village that exposed divisions in both the local Democratic Party clubs as well as the long-time residents and newcomers to the Village. Such divisions emerged spontaneously, usually over “quality of life” issues—especially noise, late night activity, cleanliness, and vagrancy—that typically pit younger and older residents of the Village against one another, encouraged in no small part by the political divisions of the local Democratic Party. It would be a mistake to see the V.I.D. as decisively anti-gay. The V.I.D. and the reform insurgency it represented helped pave the way for the liberalization of city regulations and agencies targeting gay bars and other establishments, though reform politicians tended to call for vigorous enforcement of public decency and disorderly conduct statutes against local cruising grounds. The result was a somewhat contradictory policy that essentially shuttled gay life into interior, private spaces that could be sequestered from public view and the resulting political fallout. Such establishments could remain open as long as their patrons were “orderly” and “quiet,” or did not fall afoul of the cabaret laws by allowing dancing.

Koch, while controversial for his actions toward the Village’s gay and lesbian communities, was not so much anti-gay as pro “law and order,” a philosophy that often placed him at odds with a community in which public sex and cruising were central to the

cultural and social repertoire. But Koch’s first campaign, for state assembly in 1960, was notable for a platform calling for the decriminalization sodomy and adultery laws and liberalization of divorce statutes—a campaign that both Koch and others had remembered as the SAD campaign. Koch lost the primary to one-time De Sapio ally William Passanante, though Passanante eventually joined the V.I.D.423 However, four years later, after Koch was elected Democratic leader of the Village, he personally lobbied Police Commissioner Michael Murphy for a greater police presence in the Village, including plainclothes policemen and policewomen to prevent the congregation of “homosexuals” in the area. “I told him that I understood the great demands that are made all over the city,” Koch told the Times, “but I pressed the position of the Village as an area which requires a larger share than would ordinarily be because of the tremendous daily influx of visitors.”424

More importantly, though, in the 1965 mayoral election Koch and Greitzer refused to endorse the Democratic candidate for mayor, Abe Beame, which amounted to a passive endorsement of the Liberal Republican John Lindsay, who at the time of his run represented Greenwich Village in the U.S. congress.425 Lindsay, another “reform” candidate, famously reversed course on the practice of police entrapment of queer people in public and raids on queer bars after pressure from the New York Mattachine Society in 1966, paving the way for gay businesses to operate in the open.426 Although sporadic

raids and suspicious arrests continued throughout the late sixties, city guides published by
the Mattachine Society in the late 1960s suggest a queer nightlife that—as long as it was
limited to bars in certain neighborhoods—enjoyed an unprecedented level of police
toleration.⁴²⁷ The raids that did occur rarely ended with an arrest of patrons, since their
primary motivation was the enforcement of zoning laws that restricted dancing to bars
with cabaret licenses and regulations on the sale of alcohol. Incidentally, the raid that
prompted the Stonewall Riots was not a simple maneuver by the Sixth Precinct, but a
coordinated effort with the Public Morals Squad, the Department of Consumer Affairs,
and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. One counterfactually wonders what
role Joseph Cino and his theater might have played in the summer of 1969 had he lived.

Caffe Cino’s run is all the more remarkable considering the intensity of campaign
drives against gay life from 1959 to 1965. The same reform campaign that swept Koch
and Lindsey into power also had consequences for the administration of Mayor Wagner,
one of the few allies of the Tammany regime to survive de Sapio’s defeat by the the
V.I.D. Few politicians were as important to the local regulatory regime of the closet as
Wagner. Although police raids were a regular part of gay life throughout the early 1950s,
they acquired an almost deadly intensity during his second term, when the mayor
abandoned much of the old guard represented by Tammany in favor of alliances with
reform groups like the V.I.D.

Though inconsistent policy, it made for good strategy was for politicians in the
Village, who needed support of a wide range of constituencies including poorer residents,
the older radical bohemian crowd as well as newly arrived artists, N.Y.U. students and
faculty, working-class immigrants, a small numbers of African-Americans, and the

recently arrived middle- and upper-class residents whose clout and cash had begun to reorient the political culture of the once radical Village. Though perhaps the most successful at appending the label, the V.I.D. was hardly the only reform organization in New York City politics in the post-war era. Indeed, before becoming entrenched in the local machines both de Sapio and Wagner had been staunch reform candidates; and while de Sapio’s associations with organized crime (and no doubt anti-Italian-American stereotypes) cost him his reform reputation, Wagner managed to maintain his reform credentials for three terms from January 1, 1954 to December 31, 1965, the second mayor after LaGuardia (another so-called reformer) to achieve such a feat and the last one to do so before Koch’s own three terms nearly two decades later. Within this broader set of reform strategies, gay and lesbian bars and public cruising grounds were low-hanging fruit for reform candidates and politicians, who could and did blame their existence on a host of evils: the dissolution of public morality, the failure of public education and the lack of adequate youth programs, inefficient and unenforced regulations, and graft and political corruption.

The Cino’s success and ultimate decline followed closely the most important events or trends of the late closet economy, in which reform strategies fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of gay life to create what activists called the “gay ghetto.” The first and broadest trend was the reform and liberalization of obscenity laws and the Motion Picture Association code, the effects of which portended the expansion of information (including cultural representations) about gay life. The second trend was the local regulation of gay commercial life and the intensification of public policing. In response to these two overarching and sometimes contradictory trends, gay people
developed new techniques and cultural strategies to colonize space—and especially commercial space—within the limited confines of illegal and quasi-legal markets like Caffe Cino.

The Cino was only one of many gay commercial establishments, although it was unique both because of the range of cultural expression encouraged by Caffe Cino as well as because of the relative flexibility afforded to coffeehouses. These features were interrelated, since Caffe Cino’s official status as a café meant that it could not be subjected to the anti-gay regulations that targeted bars and theaters. As such, it could tolerate and even encourage gay sociability without incurring the fearing the S.L.A.’s formidable power, and it could host performances with gay or queer themes without incurring the wrath of any number of public and private agencies and societies dedicated to the prevention of “immoral” or obscene performances. However, like the other gay businesses in New York City, the Cino was as subject to the extremely claustrophobic conditions of the late closet economy: it was cramped and crowded—both literally and symbolically—between the cultural pressures that drove migration toward establishments like the Cino, and the legal pressures that punished the entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers who sought out the desires promoted—most often inadvertently—by that cultural pressure. However, for the rare entrepreneurs, like Joe Cino, who capitalized on the gay identities and cultural practices formulated in response to these conditions, the “gay ghetto” created in the context of the late closet economy also anticipated the enormous political and cultural as well as economic potential of the gay markets unleashed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
The first and most important precondition of the late closet economy of the late 1950s and early 1960s was the expansion of information about homosexuality and gay life, a dizzying, snowball effect of the expansion of information about homosexuality and gay life. The cultural performances at the Cino were only a symptom of this expansion. The limited and rarefied audience of avant-garde theater could hardly account for the tremendous expansion of information about homosexuality and gay life in the 1960s, though the Cino did influence more widely popular artists like Andy Warhol. The legal context of the expansion information certainly held important implications for Caffe Cino, although the café-theater never faced serious any serious threat of censorship. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, New York City was the center of a number of sensational trials for obscenity, many of which either directly or indirectly had to do with the depiction of homosexuality and gay life. Indeed, the foundational case for the loosening of obscenity law, the 1957 decision in Roth v. United States, occurred over the right of a Manhattan bookseller to distribute materials deemed obscene according to U.S. obscenity law. Although the Roth decision upheld the obscenity statute, it also redefined obscenity to such an extent that by 1970 even hardcore pornography could be produced and distributed without fear of prosecution.\textsuperscript{428} As Whit Strub argues, contests over “obscenity” are in actuality a “history of social boundaries being firmed, tested, and shifted over time. Not just smut, but contraception, homosexuality, and questions over the meaning and significance of pleasure and play out through obscenity doctrine As it moves, so too do the borders of…sexual citizenship, or the sense of social belonging

\textsuperscript{428} Whitney Strub, \textit{Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Freedom} (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas), 236.
afforded to various forms of sexuality at any given point.”429 Indeed, the year after the *Roth* decision, in 1958, the Supreme Court affirmed the right of *ONE* to send its editions through the mails, the first Supreme Court decision to affirm gay rights.430 In another wide-ranging decision, in 1962, the Court affirmed the legality of male nudity in beefcake magazines in *MANual Enterprises v. Day*.431 Although it would be somewhat unusual to call Caffe Cino a “post-*Roth*” space, Cino and other male performers frequently appeared nude on stage and its walls were as crowded with beefcake imagery as with glamor shots of Hollywood and Broadway stars. In any case, by the end of the decade, bookstore fronts in Times Square and Greenwich Village were crowded with images of oiled and muscly body builders in various stages of undress and the city’s cinemas screened the underground gay movies of Jack Smith (also the subject of an obscenity trial), Kenneth Anger, and Andy Warhol, whose production of *The Bed* was based on a play originally staged at the Cino.432 Changing obscenity standards meant that Caffe Cino could without fear of persecution stage shows like Lanford Wilson’s “The Madness of Lady Bright,” a tragicomic play about an neurotic, aging drag queen living in an Upper West Side apartment; Robert Heide’s *The Bed*, in which two languorous men in their underwear act out the boredom of a sterile relationship in a confined space; and Robert Patrick’s “The Haunted Host,” set “just above the main homosexual cruising crossroads, Christopher Street and Greenwich Avenue.”433

429 Ibid., 2.
430 Ibid., 185.
431 Even so, as Strub insists, “when infused with even the slightest tinge of homosexual appeal” nude images could earn prison time for the publishers and distributor. Ibid., 186, 193.
While liberalization of obscenity laws and the changing attitudes of some (but certainly not all) publishers, film makers, artists, and other cultural producers helped to build the stock of information about homosexuality and gay life, the second precondition of the closet economy—the intensification of the policing of gay life—directly undermined and challenged any serious attempts to grow gay life. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, anti-gay hysteria began to have more serious consequences at the local level, and pundits and politicians capitalized on fears of gay infiltration and subversion to mount police an other regulatory campaigns to drive gay life out of existence. Few places experienced this drive as dramatically as New York City, where the local police under Mayor Robert F. Wagner began to more aggressively target cruising spots in parks, subway arcades and restrooms, and other public places even as the New York State Liquor Authority ramped up its efforts to shutter drinking establishments that catered to gay men and lesbians. The result was the retrenchment of the illicit market, the further promotion of blackmail and entrapment, and the further criminalization and stigmatization of a population that was both growing and under siege. Indeed, it seemed to be growing not in spite of but almost because of criminalization; the unlikely growth of gay life in the 1960s is as dramatic an illustration of the unintended consequences of market regulation as any in recent U.S. history—save, perhaps, sex work and drugs.

The preconditions and the responses to them that constituted the late closet economy hardly unfolded in a sequential or orderly fashion. Instead, the growth and regulation of gay culture occurred as a result of the persistence of desire and the flexibility and parasitism of capitalism—especially illicit capitalism. As chapter three suggests, gay life in the 1950s had been a bonanza for organized crime, and consumers at
gay bars benefited enormously from the provision of that service. However, few observers besides Lait and Mortimer had drawn attention to this shady underground. By the early 1960s, however, a new, reformist zeal had begun to sweep through U.S. politics. At the national level, U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy devoted unprecedented time and energy to rooting out corruption and organized crime. As state and local police agencies began to deal with the tremendous scope of graft and organized crime, political reform sounded the death-knell for many of the older urban political machines. Few places saw the prosecution of reform politics as extensively as New York City, where the insinuation of mafia ties and a reformist bloc in the Democratic Party—drawing on power brokers like Mayor Wagner and Eleanor Roosevelt and up-and-coming Village Independent Democrat stars Koch and Greitzer—broke Tammany Hall’s supercentenarian hold on the city’s politics with Carmine de Sapio’s slide from power in the late 1950s and his electoral defeats as male Democratic leader in 1961 and 1963, the final defeat to Ed Koch. ⁴³⁴ Though somewhat liberal in outlook, reform Democrats—and especially Wagner—toowed the line on prosecuting “homosexuals” and preventing acts of public indecency and disorderly conduct. During the end of Wagner’s second term in the late 1950s and early 1960s, stepped up police persecution and state regulation continued to accelerate, not least because of the associations between gay commercial life and organized crime. As the previous chapters have shown, these drives tended to peak during the summer months of July and August, and gay men became more or less accustomed to the general rhythm of the police campaigns. However, the most intense campaigns against gay cruising occurred in anticipation of the 1964 World’s Fair, a drive

⁴³⁴ Soffer, *Ed Koch and the Rebuilding of New York*, 38, 46. New York State law stipulates the election of both male and female assembly district leaders, powerful political positions in local politics and, in the case of New York City, municipal and state politics.
whose intensity and scope is near-legendary in gay folklore and central in the gay historiography of New York City in part because gay bars were as aggressively policed as public places.435

At the height of anti-gay persecution from 1963 to 1965, gay and lesbian bars either closed or adapted. Like the kiki for bar-going lesbians, customers at so-called leather bars could sometimes hide in plain sight, since the Brando-inspired leather and denim uniforms that characterized the scene tended to raise less suspicion than the more flamboyant “sweater” bars—whose customers’ campy gestures and mod fashions tended to serve as more visible kinds of markers of same-sex desire. (Incidentally, the Cino’s patrons seemed to come from this latter subculture, though they tended to claim artistic license.) During the pre-World’s Fair campaign, one participant, Frank Wilson, was particularly important in the survival of gay leather/S&M networks. Gayle Rubin’s dissertation states that “whenever a leather bar would open, the police would close it. Frank led the crowd from one bar to another, like Moses through the Wilderness. When a bar would close, he would scout out a place that did not have much business. He would talk to the owner and offer to bring a crowd; if the owner agreed, word was spread and the men would show up.” The patterns of gay bar customers were the most significant strategy of the late closet economy, although unlike at the Cino, these efforts were led by consumers who used their networks to seek out and colonize spaces for gay sociability.

Until the very late 1950s, local police drives focused almost exclusively on parks, subways, and other public places, only occasionally bothering to set foot in a gay bar—and even then, at least based on anecdotal evidence, they did so more often to make a

delivery or accept a bribe rather than make arrests. The evidence of the transition to more aggressive police tactics after 1959 is sketchy and tangled if suggestive of changing politics not so much at the local level, but at the state level. Until 1959, the S.L.A. chairmanship was held by Thomas E. Rohan, a de Sapio ally. During the tumultuous elections of 1958, de Sapio and Democratic Governor W. Averell Harriman had clashed over the party’s nomination for New York’s seat in the United States Senate. De Sapio had succeeded in securing the nomination of New York County D.A. Frank S. Hogan over Harriman’s objections. The fight scandalized the state party and exposed a deep rift between the Governor’s office and Tammany, and in November Republican Kenneth B. Keating defeated Hogan while Nelson Rockefeller unseated Harriman in his own race.\footnote{Leo Egan, Special to the \textit{New York Times}, “Harriman Defies De Sapio in Fight Over a Judgeship,” \textit{New York Times}, Dec 30, 1958, http://search.proquest.com/docview/114477592?accountid=13626.}


Although I want to be careful not to draw too definite conclusions on the evidence, it stands to reason that an ally of de Sapio—a man with well-known ties to Frank Costello, a leading figure in the Genovese organization\footnote{In 1969 de Sapio was tried and sentenced to federal prison for attempting to bribe the New York City water commissioner and to extort kickbacks from Con Ed. Repetto argues that de Sapio’s conviction was one of the outrageous events that prompted the passage of the federal RICO act the following year. See Repetto, \textit{American Mafia: A History of Its Rise to Power}, 36, 101; Lesley Oelsner, “De Sapio Conviction another Kind of Defeat for a Political Warrior,” \textit{New York Times}, Dec 14, 1969, http://search.proquest.com/docview/118584563?accountid=13626.}—would have been more lenient on gay bars than somebody like the Rockefeller-affiliated Epstein.

In any case, even before Rohan left the board the number of bar closings increased steadily after 1959 until a series of court decisions weakened the S.L.A.’s ability to police gay and lesbian bars in the later 1960s. In October 14, 1964, the \textit{New
York Times revealed an S.L.A. investigation into “bars and taverns patronized by prostitutes and homosexuals” as well as “places under the control of gangsters,” transferring sixteen upstate agents to the agency’s local office. Just four days later, the Times announced that the S.L.A. had shuttered the Grapevine bar for employing homosexuals and because “a substantial potion of the patronage included lesbians and homosexuals, some of whom were observed committing indecent acts.” On October 23, the S.L.A. revoked the license of the Kildare Restaurant at 638 Sixth Avenue for the same reason. On October 30, the authority shuttered Chez Elle on 108 W. 73rd Street for failing to serve out a previous sentence.

Although the closure of gay bars appeared to enjoy widespread public support, it was public cruising that tended to raise the most public hackles. In August and September of 1959, massive police drives netted hundreds of “loiterers,” “rowdies,” and “juvenile delinquents” in Central Park and Greenwich Village, many of whom “were said by the police to have approached or addressed other males in a dubious manner” in a “possible homosexual aspect.” In the fall of 1959, police also redoubled their efforts around Times Square and Bryant Park, where cruising, hustling, and pornography were commonly cited as spectacles of decline and the corruption of youth. The Times called 42nd Street a “study in decay” in which “[h]omosexuality is an obvious problem…The

clergy, the police, merchants and business organizations generally agree that
homosexuality has increased in the area over a period of several years.” However,
according to the article, the changing behavioral standards of the period made it difficult
for police to identify such apparent criminals. “It becomes swiftly apparent to an inquirer
that even the neighborhood ‘experts’ who are not of one mind as to who is a homosexual.
In the beatnik era—and an era of relaxed standards of dress at many levels of the
population—it is impossible to equate the way a man dresses and speaks with a behavior
pattern that is against the law,” and in fact, ‘[o]ne high police official held that although
homosexuality appeared to have increased, the ‘flagrant’ deviates—those who wear
make-up, a feminine hair-do, and walk with a ‘swish’—had decreased.”

In addition to changing styles, was difficult to identify and police gay cruising
because such practices were embedded in the more chaotic and ad hoc uses of public
space by a number of different groups that were considered undesirable, though typically
less so than “homosexuals.” The political perils of policing public space reached a fever
pitch in the so-called “Beatnik Riot” on April 9, 1961. Though folk singers had regularly
gathered on weekends in Washington Square since the 1940s, a coalition of
neighborhood activists and longtime residents including Italian-Americans from the
South Village active in the de Sapio-backed Greenwich Village Association and the local
community board as well as middle- and upper-class residents in the Washington Square
Civic Association, local real estate interests, and New York University. Jonathan Soffer
argues that “[w]hat had changed since 1944, when the tradition began” was the “addition

of African Americans to the crowd.”  

Although contemporary news articles did not draw attention to the presence of African-American folk singers, a letter to the editor from J. Owen Grundy, the editor of *Greenwich Village News* clarifies some of the reasons for community support of the police actions. Grundy related that

> The Washington Square-Greenwich Village community, historically tolerant and broad-minded, is accustomed to Bohemians and all sorts of individualistic expressions of personality. But during the past two or three years the community has experienced an extraordinary invasion of homosexuals and professional beatniks, mostly from outside, who seem to take special pride in appearing in public in the dirtiest and most unkempt conduct...Mothers in the area have publicly complained that the immoral actions invading the park make it impossible to bring children there.

Although African-Americans made up a small number of those present at the “Beatnik Riot,” the Village had been a site of what the *Times* referred to as racial enmity for some time. In 1959, the paper ran a story about violence in the Village in which white Village youths had smashed the windows of coffeeshops and nightclubs and, more ominously, attacked African-American men living in the area. The *Times* described a particularly ugly encounter: “‘Dig that Bronx bagel baby and the spade,’ one young tough remarked recently as a Negro man and a young white woman walked by. ‘Come back this way one more time and we’ll split your head open.’” A photograph for the story showed Black and white women together, with a caption that read “The influx of Negro men accompanied by white girls has led to growing tensions in the once-quiet Village.” One Black artist interviewed by the paper claimed, “I’ve just never seen things so bad here. It’s

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dangerous, really dangerous. There are some blocks where it isn’t safe to walk at all. They have what they call neighborhood recreation halls. I would call them medieval torture chambers. God help you if they ever drag you inside one of them.” Another Black man interviewed by the *Times* had determined to leave “before the whole thing blows up” while a local coffeeshop owner complained that after his staff had been threatened, they all quit. Local establishments known for their interracial clientele had also been recently attacked, including one of the neighborhood’s most prominent jazz clubs, the Village Gate. “Another cause of friction,” claimed the *Times*, “is the homosexual.”

As a rule the homosexuals practice their own kind of segregation. They had their own section of Washington Square Park until the police evicted them recently. They patronize particular bars and particular street corners, and usually keep to themselves. Sometimes, however, they put on a more flamboyant show of their homosexuality. At times street brawls result, but homosexuality at present is much less an immediate cause of rowdyism than is the matter of racial mixing.

As the last comment suggests, the spectacle of “homosexuals” in the Village was largely white and, at least by some measures, less outrageous to locals than the site of a Black man and a white woman walking arm and arm on the street.447

In any case, Washington Square Park remained a sore spot for the Greenwich Village community throughout the decade. In 1965, New York University Professors Howard Green and William Grossman presented parks commissioner Newbold Morris with a petition with 1,180 signatures charging “intolerable” and “offensive” activities in the park, including the use of profanity, alcohol consumption, drug use, public urination, and “conspicuous love-making between members of the same sex.” Grossman, a 29 year

resident of the area, was particularly disturbed by the number of gay men and lesbians in
the park and demanded an explicit demand on same-sex kissing. “He said that he had
nothing against the private practices of adult homosexuals but that those homosexuals
and lesbians who became amorous on the park’s benches ‘mean to be seen, mean to be
shocking…It’s ostentatious and exhibitionistic,’ he asserted.”

By the mid-sixties and especially in the run-up to the World’s Fair, the contests
over public space had begun to limit many of the gay cruising areas throughout the city.
Trees were ripped up, subway arcades closed, and policemen added to many well-known
gathering spots. As a result, gay men came to rely increasingly on bars and other
establishments for sociability and cultural expression. Lesbians, who had always relied
on such spaces, continued to do so. However, as the S.L.A. and local police efforts
continued to target such places, many gay and lesbian consumers found themselves
subject to nearly impossible conditions. As a result of police persecution in public and the
regulation of gay life in private businesses, criminal activity flourished and gay life in
New York City became as indebted to the model of the illicit market in the late 1960s as
at any time in its history. A full-page exposé in the Times in 1965 revealed the State
Liquor Authority had begun to compile information on bars owned and operated by
organized crime in New York City, especially in Greenwich Village, mid-town, and the
East Side—the areas with the densest concentration of gay bars. The article claimed that
“most of the bars that cater to male and female homosexuals are Mafia operations and
some are bases of blackmail of deviates from wealthy families.” In addition to control of
gay bars, one of the story’s informants related that virtually all businesses in the Village

paid some kind of protection to organized crime—“It’s impossible to open a joint in the Village and stay in business without a Mafia partner,” said one operator—an indication that Joseph Cino may well have paid protection costs. However, as the S.L.A. loosened its regulations against gay bars (or rather, as the courts loosened them) in 1966 and 1967, organized crime began to sell off its interests in gay bars. In 1967, the *Times* reported that “[u]nderworld owners…have sold their interests to legitimate operators who had previously shunned that field as too risky and socially repugnant.” However, organized crime was not getting out of the gay market. Instead, the *Times* reported that they were investing in private clubs that could not be regulated by the State Liquor Authority. (Incidentally, the Stonewall was one such establishment.) As the next chapter demonstrates, these conditions and not police or state regulations led to the tense battles over gay bars. Indeed, as the events at the Stonewall Inn suggest, Gay Liberation was less about freedom from state regulation as it was about access to markets. In that regard, Caffe Cino had truly pioneered the culture that made such a movement possible. As Martin Duberman claims, even in the bohemian Village Caffe Cino was the “only…avant-garde theater where it was thoroughly okay to be gay,” a “significant if rarely credited crucible for an emerging gay male sociability.”

*IV. Conclusion: The Formalization of the Gay Market and the Fall of Bohemia*

The history of Caffe Cino offers a symptom of the most momentous changes sweeping Greenwich Village and the country during the 1960s: a midpoint between the bohemian heyday and yuppie gentrification, and the transitions from an artistic avant-

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450 Duberman, *Stonewall*, 60.
garde to erotic counter-cultures. More importantly, it represents one of the very few examples of gay entrepreneurship in a market otherwise marked by the entrepreneurship of exploitative outsiders. The transitions and conditions that precipitated Caffe Cino’s failures argue for the ways in which markets—not to mention entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers—began to shift decisively from the illicit and the secretive models of the past and the legally protected and openly advertised mass markets of the present.

The Cino’s success and ultimate undoing resulted from the fact that it was ensconced in the extra-legal demimonde of artistic and sexual space. Toward the end of its run, the sensation of frank and even celebratory representations of homosexuality and gender transgression that brought its early patrons to “The Madness of Lady Bright” and “The Bed” became increasingly accessible and even run-of-the-mill in mainstream theater. In 1968, the year Caffe Cino closed, Times theater critic Rosalyn Regelson declared, “In the past few years, the theatrical scene has provided a comedy in which playwrights…and their plays became objects of a paranoiac game of spot-the-hidden-homosexuality. Drama criticism became a matter of categorizing plays according to manifest, concealed, or latent homosexual content.”

In the same year, the manifestation of queer life exploded onto the Broadway stage with a sensational and wildly popular musical directed by Cino veteran Tom O’Horgan. Set among the misfit communes of the East Village—by the end of the sixties the new forbidden zone for the city’s down-and-out artists and soon a new sub-culture of punks—Hair’s fourth number showcased a gay character, Woof, who partakes of the Eucharist before leading the cast in a hymn-like

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refrain: “Sodomy, fellatio, cunnilingus, pederasty…Father, why do these words sound so nasty? Masturbation can be fun. Join the holy orgy Kama Sutra everyone!”

The conditions that had permitted the emergence of a quasi-illicit cultural and economic bohemianism in the Village seemed to disappear as both reformist politics and the counter-culture exposed the hypocrisy of the old sumptuary and morals laws in a so-called “free” market society and, in the process, began to fuse with the ostensibly heterosexual mainstream of consumer culture. Just as significantly, bohemianism had represented not only defiance of legal and cultural conventions, but the primary sub-cultural strain of modernity. As art critic David Sylvester wrote, almost as if he were describing Joe Cino, “[t]raditionally…the avant-gardist had a masochistic relation to the bourgeois: he was despised and rejected, a martyr, and the arrows of his outrageous gestures against society hurt the bourgeoisie no more than the arrows of the Lilliputians hurt Gulliver, no more than the angry infant’s punch or slap hurts the complacent parent.”

After the 1960s, the fragmentation diagnosed as post-modernism augured a society composed entirely of sub-cultures or, perhaps more appropriately, a society in which the mainstream—the bourgeois, the white, the male, the moneyed, and the heterosexual and the cisgendered—no longer monopolized the means of cultural production and the marketplaces of cultural exchange. Terms like “avant-garde” and “Bohemian” became meaningless as they moved into the mainstream. As Hilton Kramer complained at the end of the sixties, “the romance of the avant-garde…clouds our vision and prevents us from recognizing the direction in which artistic energies are moving. For

what characterizes the art of the sixties more than anything else is not its posture of risk and rebellion—that exists only in the rhetoric of ‘permissive parents’ like Mr. Sylvester—but its positive sense of ease and accommodation with the world as it now is. Can it be that we cling to the romance of the avant-garde because the new styles would lose their glamour without it, and stand revealed as having far more in common with the bourgeois ethos than with the old avant-garde spirit? I think so. The ‘permissive parent’ recognizes that even the ‘child who sees how far he can go’ is his own true offspring. Alas, there is no avant-garde!” 454

Caffe Cino’s ephemeral if glorious existence, the tragicomedy of Joe Cino’s life and premature death, and the circumstances surrounding the café’s closure by a municipal judge augured the end of Bohemia, both as a central element of modern culture as well as an organizing principle of urban space in Greenwich Village. Well before Cino’s death and the shuttering of his theater, the decline of Bohemia seemed apparent to many more New Yorkers than Lait and Mortimer, who had written in 1948 that “a bohemian section always attracts the freaky fringe; those who would live the life of genius without having its admirable attributes, but all its faults and sins. These, in turn, displaced most of the true intellectuals.” 455 Less than a decade later in August 1957, the local papers announced the death of the “Last Bohemian,” Joe Gould, a vagrant philosopher who served as sort of a walking encyclopedia of Village memories dating from the heyday of Mabel Dodge and the Eastman Siblings through the ascendance of the Abstract Expressionists. 456 In December of that year, the Times declared, “The mellow

454 Ibid.
455 Lait and Mortimer, New York: Confidential!, 73.
old landmarks of Greenwich Village are rapidly disappearing beneath the modern glass
monuments to the bourgeois respectability against which the Bohemians revolted forty
years ago.”457 A bastion of irregularly angled streets, quaint farmhouses, and cultural
non-conformity in a city long dominated by perpendicular grids, Babellian verticality,
and flannel suits, the Village seemed to finally succumb to police surveillance, Robert
Moses’ “urban renewal” and “slum clearance” schemes (a policy that disproportionately
targeted the area’s predominantly African-American and Italian-American sections in
present-day Washington Square Village), and the consolidation of the late twentieth
century real estate empires (especially New York University).

In the fifties and sixties, the Village was as famous for the Bohemians who left as
for those who stayed. Successful Abstract Expressionists had fled to farm studios upstate,
in New England, or on Long Island as their work graduated from smaller downtown
galleries to those in mid-town or the Upper East Side “Museum Mile.”458 Taking
Bohemianism from its urban roots to a picaresque adventure On the Road, the Beats
famously vacated their cold-water flats for North Beach, Tangiers, Mexico, and points
between. The sole “Black Beat” LeRoi Jones—reborn as Imamu Amear Baraka in the
mid-sixties—took flight to New York City’s northern bohemian capital in Harlem and
then to Newark along with a coterie of other artists, poets, and playwrights central to the
Black Arts Movement, disenchanted by the clubby intransigence of the mostly white
artistic circles that settled into the Village’s cheap digs.459 Toward the end of the decade,
Village even activist-intellectuals Jane Jacobs and Paul Goodman left: Jacobs, with her

draft age sons to Toronto, and Goodman to a New England farmstead. In contrast to the political activism and cultural experimentation in the early 1960s, by the end of the decade, even the radicalism of the anti-war movement sometimes seemed more prominent around Columbia University than the Washington Square campus of New York University, which, along with the neighborhood’s middle- and upper-class residents began to aggressively acquire real estate and political clout in the neighborhood those interests now dominate.

Even so, these interests had regularly clashed with the older bohemian ethos of the Village in the 1950s and 1960s, not to mention the newer generation of folk singers, pop artists, avant-garde theater people, and gay residents who had crowded into the Village’s cheaper housing on the west and south sides. On April 9, 1961, clashes with the police and city administration culminated in a “Beatnik Riot” in which young folk singers and their fans violently resisted the attempts of the police to enforce permit laws. Although community complaints about the Village and especially Washington Square focused on young people, buskers, and “vagrants,” homosexuality was the most garish spectacle of blight and public indecency. Though Jacobs never directly addressed gay life in Greenwich Village, even she had linked the “pervert park” of Philadelphia’s Washington Square to the “unimaginable vice and crime problem” so that it was “shunned by office lunchers” and other respectable folk.  

In what was arguably the among the most widely read obituaries of the Village’s bohemian scene, Allen Churchill’s *The Improper Bohemians*, first published in 1959, recounted that after Prohibition

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MacDougal Street and its environs—notably Third Street—sprang violently to life, though this time the life was not primarily intellectual. On the block below the Provincetown Playhouse, between Third and Houston Streets, the Minetta Tavern and the San Remo became the places where lusty Bohemians could...drink openly. Opposite the Provincetown itself (on MacDougal between W. 3rd Street and Washington Square South) a new kind of district began evolving. Here male and female homosexuals became dominant. Ever the home of the free, the old Greenwich Village had always included homosexuals in its groupings. Members of the third sex had mingled with everyone else and had been tolerated, if not encouraged, as an example of Bohemian broadmindedness. But now the homosexual influx reached such a point that is members formed a society of their own. As headquarters, this new group chose the block of nightclubs in the now-ratty buildings immediately opposite the Provincetown Playhouse. This area was callously named the Auction Block…

Caffe Cino was right in the middle of this intertwined world of theater and gay life (and less than two blocks form the Provincetown Playhouse on Cornelia Street), entering Greenwich Village’s history during a period of transitions in the late fifties and early sixties that contemporary critics, echoing the anxiety and nostalgia of the architectural critics and neighborhood activists, characterized as a shift from fringe avant-garde to mass counter-culture and from a mythic bohemian demimonde to a “gay ghetto” in the midst of a gentrifying and homogenizing community. Some of these changes occurred on a mass scale; to name just two examples, Village playwright Edward Albee’s absurdist epic Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? ranked third among the highest grossing films of 1966 and Andy Warhol was arguably the most famous artist in the U.S. during the sixties. However, even with the artists decamping and the arrival of modernist architecture and

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prototypical yuppies, residents of the Village seemed to experience these cultural and political transformations at a much more rapid pace than any location in America outside the campus walls of Berkeley or the Haight in San Francisco.

The result was a mix of utopian hope and culture shock, an atmosphere to which Caffe Cino contributed no small part. And yet, despite the elegiac announcements from *New York Times* and *Village Voice* columnists, the jeremiads of Jacobs and Goodman, and the apparent flight of artists and writers in the fifties and sixties, Caffe Cino was poised to become the birthplace of a style of theater that epitomized the best that Bohemia had to offer and, in the process, introduced a coterie of writers and performers whose names would dominate film, theater, and letters for the next fifty years.

Additionally, the Cino’s reputation as a queer theater and social space helped contribute to a new vision of queer culture that transcended the practical limitations of a Bohemian demimonde steeped in cultural practices of evasion, code, and intransigence. Regarding Lait and Mortimer, it seems less likely that the “true” artists fled than that queer artists, emboldened by institutions like Caffe Cino, took advantage of new opportunities to explore and cultivate a queer sub-culture on the verge of becoming a liberationist political movement.

The Cino combined the criminal, the queer, and the artistic in a way that directly challenged the legal and social injustices of “compulsory heterosexuality” and forged new forms of expressive agency that rooted and inspired both the counter-culture and gay liberation. Central to that community was the Bohemian ethos that Cino embodied. As Robert Patrick quipped, Caffe Cino “was unique in history in that it presented plays without concern for profit, publicity, propaganda, propriety, *prana*, or particular esthetic
principles. It was an asylum for rejects. It was a model for tribal communalism. It pioneered in ‘Pop.’ It was a training-ground for artists. It was a fair pick-up joint. It was a good time cheap. It was also what a prominent OOB producer called it when trying to get control of it from the owner’s heirs: a ‘homosexual drug ring, M’sieur.’” Patrick’s description suggests that much of the Cino’s clientele was as incongruous as any crowd in the Village. Partly an extension of the queer bar scene surreptitiously expanding across the Village’s dimly lit taverns in the early sixties and partly composed of a more typical theater crowd, “The regulars were ex-cons in overcoats, future cons in leather jackets…, turbaned art-ladies trailing their veils in spilled coffee, failed or failing actors underlining scripts or casting notices, and media-mutants like me.”

During the Cino’s existence, Greenwich Village was at the center of one of the most notorious vice districts in New York City, and the Cino, like many Village businesses, owed a fair debt to that model. The illicit market conditions directly fueled the growth of many of Bohemia’s central cultural institutions, but especially the gay and lesbian nightlife that dominated the area around Sheridan Square. Gay and lesbian bars represented golden opportunity for extortionists who, almost always in league with police (and occasionally sex workers), blackmailed closeted people in order to “protect” their identities from colleagues, employers, family members, and journalists during an era when homosexuality and gender transgression represented one of the gravest threats to the social hygiene, cultural integrity, political orthodoxy, and by the Cold War era even the national security of U.S. society.

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462 Robert Patrick, “The Other Brick Road,” *Other Stages*, February 8, 1979, 3.
In New York City in the fifties and sixties, Mattachine Society president Dick Leitsch estimated that as much as a third of the gay bar scene in New York City was controlled by organized crime, especially the Genovese corporation, whose territory centered on Greenwich Village and the west side of Manhattan. Although the federal government prosecuted and jailed Vito Genovese for heroin trafficking in 1959, his organization continued to monopolize both the illicit and, according to numerous sources, the legitimate businesses in Greenwich Village. But as the trade in heroin and other illegal drugs ballooned into a billion dollar enterprise, the gay market must have occupied a smaller and smaller province of the larger empire of organized crime—a point stridently addressed by queer activists in the wake of the failed 1969 raid at a Genovese operated bar, the Stonewall Inn.

The Cino had directly competed with those criminal enterprises, even if there was little evidence to suggest that his competitors cared or even noticed. Even so, it is difficult to know: records from the period merely scratch the surface of a corporate entity that operated via concealment, code, and misdirection—a strategy common to the cultures of both crime syndicates and the queer world. Caffe Cino was a direct product of this Bohemian, gay, and criminal milieu, so much so that the little café-theater must have represented a scandalously public counter-part to the rent parties described by Lait and Mortimer. Although part of Cino’s legend is his association with Italian-American organized crime, Caffe Cino, in fact, was more likely the victim rather than the beneficiary of criminal corporations, as evidenced by the numerous observations of bribes and “ripoffs.” Beyond the vaguely slanderous innuendo of Italian-American

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stereotypes, no evidence whatsoever links Joe Cino to organized crime (although one of his brothers would be convicted under RICO more than twenty years after his brothers’ death). In addition to the direct competition with the bar scene, the owner’s proclivities would have certainly offended the delicate sensibilities of syndicates like the Genovese organization.

In the seventies, Gay Liberation, along with the Black Nationalism, the Women’s Movement, and the many strains of identity politics that spilled out of the sixties came to embrace mass culture as a means rather than the obstacle to empowerment. Although the radical picture of democracy envisioned by the many elements of the counter-culture remains out of reach, the outsider romanticism that defined the various inhabitants of the demimonde began to fade as they made their way to the stage, the screen, the legislature, and other avenues of power and prestige. In the same process, the fragmentation of modernity into post-modernity has yielded the unexpected similarities of the Bohemian and the bourgeois, and revealed unanticipated and often difficult differences between white gays and African Americans, gay men and lesbians, and lesbians and gay men and transgender people.

The urban legacy of the sixties is equally mixed, in that queer liberation signaled the coming of Richard Florida’s “high bohemians,” of which LGBT people form the core, as well as the seemingly endless cycles of dislocation, which the New York Times, citing a similar phenomenon in Europe, referred to as “gentrification” in the late seventies. “Affluent young professional people…have been moving into previously deteriorating city centers and driving out the working class and the poor,” announced columnist Blake Fleetwood in 1979.
And it is now becoming apparent that America’s oldest cities, not only New York but Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington, are also beginning to be resettled—an ironic twist to the blockbusting that turned many urban areas black and Hispanic in the 1950’s and 60’s. Indeed, the evidence of the late 70’s suggests that the New York of the 80’s and 90’s will no longer be a magnet for the poor, but a city primarily for the ambitious and educated—an urban elite. 465

In our post-modern queer world, we have little patience for the maudlin Bohemian and camp tragedies that marked Joe Cino’s life and the brief existence of his little theater. However, jaded as we are by the ambiguities and contradictions of post-modernity, we must marvel at the irony that Cino, like so many of his bohemian and gay ilk, helped to construct a world that they would scarcely recognize, let alone afford. It is difficult to imagine an institution like Caffe Cino existing in any other time period. The camp culture of the closet provided the raw materials for Caffe Cino’s subversive cultural productions. Simultaneously, Joe Cino’s savvy negotiation and exploitation of the illicit and corrupt economy of Greenwich Village in the 1960s provided Caffe Cino with the institutional resources it needed to survive. The visibility of Gay Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s undermined much of the subversive potential of camp even if it provided new and more politically effective modes of expression.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Making the Gay Market in the Liberation and Territorial Economies: Organizational Entrepreneurship and the Territorialization of Gay Liberation, 1966-1980

I. Gay Liber(aliz)ation and Gay Liberation: Legacies of Julius’ and Stonewall

Barack Obama’s second inaugural address included the provocative lines: “We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall…” The president’s comments argued for the inclusion of the queer rights movement into the liberal teleology of U.S. democracy, the first such comments by a sitting U.S. president, although the Supreme Court’s rulings on Shelby County v. Holder and Windsor v. U.S. just a year later should give any cheerleader for this simplistic, whiggish vision pause. But if the president’s civil rights litany is right, then consumption and sociability are, for the queer movement, analogous to the century-long struggles for women’s and Black suffrage. Depending on your perspective, this statement either trivializes the significance of voting to citizenship, or it greatly complicates notions of social struggle and political belonging. The undeniable significance of Stonewall, both as a symbol and as a catalytic event, casts into relief the contradictions between the markets that incubated the queer movement and the more radical (and even anti-capitalist) political rhetoric that animated Gay Liberation in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The framework of Northian institutional economics suggests that during the late 1960s the most dramatic changes to gay life in New York City involved
decriminalization and incorporation into the so-called “free” market. Though Gay Liberation is commonly traced to the riots that followed a failed raid on the Stonewall Bar in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, those explosive events were the culmination of frustration with the dynamics of the gay market that had festered over several years. As Martin Duberman and David Carter’s respective histories of the riots suggest, the 1966 Mattachine Society sip-in at Julius’ and the political activities of Mattachine leadership, especially Dick Leitsch and Craig Rodwell, had effectively ended the criminalization of gay life through local police tactics and the regulations of the New York State Liquor Authority. Though commonly misunderstood as a battle between the police and angry bar-goers (and the allies from the local scene who joined their protests), the Stonewall Riots were really a response to a market criminalized not because of anti-gay regulations but because of the general monopoly that organized crime held over the city’s more popular gay bars. The raid on the Stonewall was ultimately not about policing gay consumers, who had basically won the right to congregate and drink openly at the city’s bars and restaurants, but rather a coordinated effort to discover financial irregularities in the international bond market linked to the blackmail of gay men at New York City’s bars. Coordinated by Seymour Pine of Manhattan’s First Division of the Public Morals squad with information obtained from Interpol and an agent from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the task force disrupted an economic pattern that had predated the de facto decriminalization of gay consumption in 1966: the bribery and graft that had availed local organized crime of the protection and information of the Sixth Precinct of the N.Y.P.D., who were not informed of the raid.466

466 Carter, Stonewall, 100-102, 134-137.
Though the actual circumstances of the raid resists the common characterization of the Stonewall Riots as a battle between gay people and the police (and especially the police as representatives of the state and, in the language of the counter-culture, the political and economic “establishment”), that was exactly how the issue was framed by protestors and organizers in the Gay Liberation Front, an organization that grew out of the initial violent response to the raid on the Stonewall. Cops, however, were largely identified with the criminal entrepreneurs who ran and controlled the small market of gay bars in New York City.

Linked together in the rhetoric of the Gay Liberation Front, the cops and the “mafia” came to represent the ways in which gay men and lesbians were exploited by capitalism, though the language of visibility and choice underscores some of the tensions between liberalism (and access to markets) and a social democratic strategy that more explicitly demands the dismantling of capitalism (and therefore markets). The first issue of *Come Out!*, a newspaper printed by a Gay Liberation Front cell, demanded, “We will not be gay bourgeoisie, searching for the sterile ‘American dream’ of the ivy-covered cottage and the good corporation job.” However, in indicating the fine line between liberation under ideal circumstances and liberalization under the actual circumstances of the U.S. economy, the editorial introduction also stated, “neither will we tolerate the exclusion of homosexuals from any area of American life.” The qualification outlined a set of demands that, in many regards, was actually a continuation of the gradual liberalization that had begun with Mattachine’s actions at the start of the Lindsey administration.

COME-OUT has COME OUT indeed for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Make no
mistake about our oppression: It is real, it is visible, it is demonstrable...Hell, every homosexual and lesbian in this country survives solely by sufferance, not by law or even that cold state of grace known as tolerance. Our humanity is questioned, our choice of housing is circumscribed, our employment is tenuous, OUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD TAVERN IS A MAFIOSO-ON-THE-JOB TRAINING SCHOOL FOR DUM-DUM HOODS. It is just such grievances as these which have sparked the revolutionary movements of history.\(^\text{467}\)

Mine is not the first analysis to point out the underlying tensions between liberalism (or markets) and liberation (or social democracy) in the organizations that flourished in New York City and throughout the country in the first two or three years following Stonewall. Terence Kissack, one of the earliest historians of the early Gay Liberation movement, essentially presents a narrative in which the strategies of liberalization displaced those of liberation and the more single-goal orientation of the Gay Activists Alliance (an organization that seems to overlap more in terms of membership and goals with the G.L.F. than is often represented in the historiography).\(^\text{468}\)

More recently, Jessi Gan and Ian Lekus have written about the tensions between Gay Liberationists and other elements of the New Left, especially the Yippies, the National Organization for Women, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, and the Students for a Democratic Society-led Venceremos Brigade.\(^\text{469}\) Each of these groups promoted political and economic ideologies that reflected the more radical and anti-capitalist rhetoric of the Gay Liberation Front, though their members and leadership often

\(^{467}\) Come Out! 1, no. 1 (November 14, 1961), 1.


expressed homophobic sentiments and marginalized sexuality and sexual minorities in an effort to focus on more ostensibly “political” goals like the widening war in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, addressing gender and racial inequalities in pay, or dismantling the remnants of Jim Crow and fighting against the resurgence of racial violence in the late 1960s.

Whatever the exact circumstances of the Stonewall Riots and the anti-capitalist rhetoric of the reaction, a thriving, fairly well integrated, and aboveground gay market had thrived in New York City, and especially in Greenwich Village, since about 1967. The widely available, virtually free information represented by national advertisements in gay guides fed a market built on both the business foundations of the closet economy like gay bars, restaurants, theaters, and bathhouses, as well as new businesses, most of them gay owned, which included pornographic as well as non-pornographic bookshops, clothing boutiques and gay retail stores, hotels, and other specialty businesses and non-profit services—matchmaking services, discussion groups, political organizations, etc. Guides to New York City published after 1967 also featured information about legal advice, local medical and psychiatric services, and even information about how to settle permanently in neighborhoods that were perceived to be safe and friendly for gay people.

At first, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s—the earliest years of decriminalization— the dynamics of anti-gay stigma remained entrenched even if the legal basis for the persecution of gay people had begun to disintegrate. Activists and community members typically referred to living in a “gay ghetto,” neighborhoods in which the residents were exploited by outsiders and largely cowed into submission by anti-gay stigma, unwilling to fight spurious charges made by the police or to press
charges against violent attackers and blackmailers. The Stonewall Riots and the organizational flurry that followed it—not only in New York City, but nationally—helped to create an ideology of gay pride and visibility, which once and for all undermined the informational basis of the closet economy and laid the groundwork for a mass groundswell of resistance. In many ways, the real departure of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the more actively entrepreneurial role played by older gay organizations like the Mattachine Society, the political entrepreneurship of organizations like the Gay Liberation Front, and the political orientation of more conventionally defined entrepreneurs—people like Oscar Wilde Bookshop owner Craig Rodwell, or Bob Kohler, who owned a boutique called the Loft.

An analysis of the Stonewall Riots seems especially important to understanding both what came before and what followed. For one thing, the social eruption and physical disruption at the Stonewall Inn in the last days of June, 1969, suggests the ways in which liberalization had been politically insufficient. Access to “respectable” gay bars was in no way a guarantee against harassment and discrimination, and liberalization prompted few (if any) people to disclose their identities to employers, landlords, or family members—all of whom could discriminate and ostracize regardless of what legal restrictions did or did not apply to gay bars. Organized crime continued to run most gay bars. Underage youth—many of whom were sexually exploited the same class of gay men that dominated the Mattachine Society—had no choice but to go to bars, like the Stonewall, that might allow them entry without proper identification. Gay youths, or “street kids”—many of whom were homeless, poor, and people of color—faced an enormous set of challenges that remained unmet by liberalization. It was ultimately the “street kids” that
played the most decisive role on the nights of the riots, providing the energy and rebelliousness that demonstrated, once and for all, the grievances of sexual minorities and their determination to address them. As Martin Duberman wrote of the riots,

not all gays were pleased by the eruption at Stonewall. Those satisfied by, or at least habituated to, the status quo preferred to minimize or dismiss what was happening. Many wealthier gays, sunning at Fire Island or in the Hamptons for the weekend, either heard about the rioting and ignored it (as one of them later put it: “No one [at Fire Island Pines] mentioned Stonewall”), or caught up with the news belatedly. When they did, they tended to characterize the events at Stonewall as “regrettable,” as the demented carryings-on of “stoned, tacky queens”—precisely those elements in the gay world from whom they had long since dissociated themselves.⁴⁷⁰

Of course, the irony of the Stonewall is that the greatest beneficiaries of Gay Liberation and a mass “coming out” were precisely the largely white, middle-class crowd who parlayed the demands of Gay Liberation into legal protection and social acceptability. The “street kids,” many of whom remained (or tried to remain) active in the Gay Liberation Front and its successor organizations, often found themselves excluded from the movement they had helped foment.

Whatever its ideological underpinnings or anti-capitalist rhetoric, the practical and symbolic basis of Gay Liberation—gay pride, visibility, and the liberation of the gay “ghettos” like Greenwich Village—was the market. In addition to their role in organizing protests, organizations like the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance essentially supplied an alternative market. Dances provided important alternatives to the bars, and the Gay Activists Alliance (along with Lesbian Feminist Liberation, an offshoot

⁴⁷⁰ Duberman, Stonewall, 206.
organization founded by the G.A.A.’s women’s caucus) rented a firehouse from the City, which arsonists burned to the ground in 1974.\textsuperscript{471} The G.L.F.’s newspaper, \textit{Come Out!}, was a clear alternative to the \textit{Village Voice}. a newspaper whose exclusion of gay ads the G.L.F. protested. The first issue implored readers not to be duped by \textit{Gay Power}, a rival newspaper published by \textit{East Village Other} publisher Joel Traficant, who was “cash[ing] in on the new interest in homosexuality via the new freedom of the press.” Traficant and \textit{Gay Power}’s biggest sin was not just that they were motivated solely by profit, but that they promoted an un-liberated market.

To increase circulation and his profits, …he turned on the very people his publication theoretically is out to champion and protect. He attacked homosexuals by name in print, endorsed mafia-run bars, included borderline pornography, and started a personal column in which people advertised for sex a la “Kiss” and “EVO.”\textsuperscript{472}

In 1973, an organization founded by G.L.F. activists and Stonewall veterans Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (or S.T.A.R.) opened one of the first housing facilities for homeless trans* people in the city, attempting to mitigate costs of New York City’s expensive housing market.

Most importantly, though, the organizations founded in the wake of Stonewall promoted and, in many ways built, a liberated market: a market in which gay community members were visible and unapologetic in their gender and sexual non-normativity and in which entrepreneurs were gay people themselves. After a brief period of radical, anti-capitalist rhetoric, gay life in the mid-1970s settled into a pattern of local economic development, or, as most people joining and building this new and experimental...
community argued, the construction of a community unencumbered by police harassment and the exploitation of the illicit market. In the late 1970s, the retail market built out of the processes of Gay Liberation formed the basis of a neighborhood-based politics that attempted to link the liberal and progressive case for gay rights to the positive impact of the “gay community”—an innovative and innovating demographic of post-1970s municipal politics—on the local economy. Although identifiable with the dynamics of gentrification, at the time business organizations had actually attempted to reverse the political symbolism of homosexuality as a sign of blight and decay into a sign of beautification, community improvement through private investment, and rising real estate values. Indeed, this is exactly the history of the transformation of an albatross to what Gary Gates and Richard Florida have called the “canaries of the creative age.”

The result was the emergence and refinement of a market defined both by physical goods or commodities, as well as by intangible public goods like relatively free social and sexual interaction; open as opposed to secretive or furtive cultural expression, status, and style; and political clout. Although intangible goods had long been an important feature of the closet economy, the market of physical goods and commodities that represented visible signifiers of sexual identity represented the ways in which gay life after 1967 was largely organized around a public goods of a liberated or out culture of recognized and recognizable signs.

The final chapter of this study examines the gay neighborhoods in New York City from the late sixties to 1979, just before the cataclysm of HIV/AIDS transformed queer community and politics once again. The period covered here explores what Jeffrey

Escoffier has called the shift from the closet to the liberation economy as well as the expansion of the territorial economy, in which the “dominant economic institutions were the proliferation retail businesses; [and in which] bars, bookstores, bathhouses, and consumer services emerged from the confines of semilegality,” as well as the entrenchment and expansion of the territorial economy, “marked by gentrification and community development.”

This chapter begins with an overview of liberalization, and the ways in which organizations like Mattachine acted as boosters or entrepreneurs of a gay community—largely understood in terms of its business institutions. My study concludes with an examination of how an especially large and visible business association, the Greater Gotham Business Council, came to represent one of the most politically connected, powerful organizations in New York City’s gay community before the emergence of AIDS in the 1980s. In many ways, the last chapter explores the ways in which activists and business owners helped to convert the cultural capital of Gay Liberation into the political capital of clout and influence in municipal politics, anchoring the politics of gay rights to the gay economy and tethering its fortune, for better or worse, to the market.

II. Making the Scene: Published Information, Public Cultures, and the Liberalization of the Closet Economy

Although Escoffier argues that the liberation economy commenced with Stonewall, I argue that New York City’s liberation economy anticipated the Stonewall Riots by several years and, in fact, created the geographic and economic conditions—the “Gay Scene,” to use the words of gay boosters—for a Gay Liberation movement in the

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country’s largest city. By stretching the chronology of the Gay Liberation era, I will show that Gay Liberation was not the spontaneous combustion of an activist movement but the most visible symptom of a longer, contested process of decriminalization, the branding of certain bars and neighborhoods as “gay” (or safe and reliable for gay consumption), the growth of explicitly queer businesses and markets, and the political and social capital accrued within queer commercial culture—a process that this panel identifies as “closet to market,” but that this dissertation identifies as “market to liberation.”

An examination of the earliest gay guides and directories published by gay organizations and boosters reveals the gradual, processual elements of this history. I use the term liberalization rather than liberation, since the beneficiaries of Gay Liberation almost always did so vis-à-vis the market and the privileges it enabled. Guides and directories were produced by and for predominately white, middle- and upper-class gay men with the means to enter the gay market. Most guides and contemporaries reflect their narrow tastes, interests, and prejudices. These sources also reflect one position, albeit the hegemonic one, within the larger and more complex social dynamics of class, race, and gender that permeated and striated queer neighborhoods in New York City (and arguably throughout the U.S.) from the earliest years of the closet into the present-day. This critical perspective will, I hope, attend to both the possibilities and limits of Gay Liberation as a movement whose most immediate and enduring successes included the decriminalization, expansion, and official or institutional recognition of queer markets as the historical basis for queer social and political movements in the U.S.

The most significant and impactful feature of Gay Liberation for the gay market was gay cultural entrepreneurship, i.e., the creation of information as a public good,
within the larger economic context of emerging gay markets, including 1) the transformation of the city’s cultural and economic geography of gender and sexuality (that is, the labeling of certain businesses and geographies as “gay”); 2) the illicit versus free market dynamic that directly preceded and informed Gay Liberation; 3) the ways in which guides and directories provided information about and accelerating the expansion, diversification, and specialization of queer businesses; and 4) the political limitations of queer markets (and boosters) in addressing the gender, race, and class inequalities that characterized, and were both masked and exacerbated by, the politics of consumption.

Significantly, decriminalization was a process that took place in many major urban spaces throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, setting into motion a set of economic processes that were surprisingly uniform given the geographic and demographic differences of such varied places as, say, Wichita, Dallas, Cincinatti, and Minneapolis-St. Paul—not to mention the more obvious megalopolises of New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago, whose gay communities regularly made national headlines in the 1970s. In New York City, decriminalization occurred significantly later than it had in the seat of Homophile politics in San Francisco and Los Angeles, or Chicago, where the state of Illinois had been the first to decriminalize sodomy in 1961. This fact alone helps to explain the considerably more explosive and violent resistance that characterized Gay Liberation in New York City. In San Francisco, decriminalization occurred sooner because, as Nan Alamilla Boyd suggests, the city was a “wide open” town with a history of liberality and tolerance. More important, the local bar owners and operators, many of whom were gay, formed the Tavern Guild and worked closely with local Homophile organizations in order to change both California Alcoholic
Beverage Control and San Francisco Police Department policy in 1962.\textsuperscript{475} In New York City, by contrast, decriminalization occurred in 1966 after a series of actions spurred by the Mattachine Society of New York, including a “sip-in” at Julius’, a popular gay bar, modeled on the lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville and Greensboro. The leadership of the Mattachine negotiated a change in official police policy with the liberal Republican Mayor John Lindsay, whose inauguration the year before began with a comment that New York City, despite a paralyzing transit strike, was still a “fun city”—a comment that would characterize the benign neglect of Lindsay’s chaotic tenure through 1973.\textsuperscript{476}

Though decriminalization legalized queer consumption, it did little to displace the deeply ingrained graft and organized crime that kept bars and other businesses running. As a result, bar raids continued, albeit less steadily, and queer consumers continued to get caught in the dragnet. Gay markets, especially in the aftermath of Stonewall, reflected struggles between gay consumers and the Mafia as much as it reflected queer dissatisfaction with any other part of the official establishment (whether represented by the state or capitalism, a term that often stood in as a proxy for organized crime). Gay organizations, and especially the Mattachine Society, played the most important role in transforming an illicit market dominated by outsiders to a legal and liberated queer market, in part by promoting businesses whose entrepreneurs, owners, and operators represented the ideology of Gay Liberation (i.e., gay pride, coming out, etc.). Occasionally, activists even crossed over into entrepreneurship. In 1967, Mattachine veteran and inaugural gay pride march organizer Craig Rodwell opened the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop. But among the most visible and far-reaching roles played by queer

\textsuperscript{476} Duberman, \textit{Stonewall}, 115-116.
organizations was the publication of guides and directories. Mattachine’s *Gay Scene Guide*, published between 1967 and 1970, detailed and promoted the increasing specialization of queer markets in New York City. The publication of the *Guide* suggests the extent to which political organizers-cum-gay boosters took for granted the openness and legality of queer sociability and expression within queer markets. Just as significantly, they reflect the purpose of the authors in supplying information that guided queer consumers to build markets that were safe, affirming, reasonably priced, and reliable.

After 1969, the *Gay Scene Guide* listed a “Homosexual Bill of Rights” informing residents, tourists, and potential visitors of the kinds of institutional protections they should expect. These “rights” included “1. Private consensual acts between persons over the age of consent shall not be an offense. 2. Solicitation for any sexual act shall not be an offense except upon the filing of a complaint by the aggrieved party, not a police officer or agent.” The *Guide* also provided the Mattachine Society’s phone number for free legal referrals. The *Gay Scene Guide* was written by and primarily for locals, focusing on the safety and reliability of queer hang-outs, emphasizing the danger of public places and the relative safety of bars and businesses. “Manhattan offers a great deal of activity,” *Gay Scene Guide* contributor Robert Stack wrote, “but it’s also possible that a visitor to New York might find himself in a great vacuum if he doesn’t know where the gay fun spots are in ‘fun city.’” Furthermore, “we must point out that certain areas in the city can be ‘danger areas’ in the late hours of the evening.” The *Gay Scene Guide* discouraged visitors from Times Square or from patronizing hustlers, effectively boosting the businesses in places like Greenwich Village while holding out the Ramble in Central
Park or Port Authority as high risk areas. Cruising was best done indoors than out. “Most
of the bars in the city are relatively free of hustlers, because of the cost of the drinks, and
should be considered as good places to meet new people. There is also no longer any
police entrapment by plain clothes vice squad officers in the gay bars.” Thus, while
offering information about the relative safety or danger of the different parts of “Fun
City,” the Gay Scene Guide also effectively functioned as an advertisement for the
market. As such, the Gay Scene Guide helped to accelerate the privatization and
interiorization of gay life that reflected the new institutional imperatives of the recently
decriminalized gay economy.

The most innovative feature of the Gay Scene Guide was the promotion of an
elaborate and specialized market with a diversity of businesses beyond the local bars. To
be sure, the Gay Scene Guide includes a long list of bars, but it also includes bathhouses,
coffee shops, hotels, theaters, nightclubs, private clubs (essentially bars without liquor
licenses), restaurants, and clothing shops. Furthermore, though the Gay Scene Guide lists
bars in the outer boroughs, Upstate New York, New Jersey, Long Island, and
Connecticut, it was only in Manhattan (and only in Greenwich Village, Chelsea, and
West Midtown) that the full range of queer businesses—the conglomeration of which
arguably represents the first recognizably queer market—actually existed.

In addition to the Mattachine guides, the late 1960s also witnessed the first mass
market guides and directories to gay life, the most popular of which included Angelo
d’Arcangelo’s The Homosexual Handbook and The Love Book, published in 1968 and
1970 under the Ophelia and Traveler’s Companion imprint of Maurice Girodias’ quasi-
pornographic Olympia Press, as well as Gay and The Advocate columnist John Francis

Hunter’s *Gay Insider/New York* and *Gay Insider/U.S.A.*, published in 1971 and 1972, respectively. These guides were written primarily to move copies, integrating New York City’s queer markets into the consciousness of a national readership. However, both authors’ books also reflected the political imperatives of the New York City Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance, organizations with which Hunter, in particular, was closely allied. These books also reflected the fashion and behavioral “dos and don’ts” that cultivated specific norms of taste, style, and comportment. These guides also subdivided the types of “scenes,” an indication of the kinds of consumers drawn to specific types of bars. *The Homosexual Handbook* subdivides bars into dancing bars, conversation bars, hook-up bars, and make-out bars. There is also the general division between “sweater” and “leather” bars, a designation that used fashion as a signifier for gender comportment, class status, and erotic preferences.

Notably, in its chapters on gay bars, “The Watering Hole,” the *Homosexual Handbook* singled out the Stonewall as the starting point for a raunchy bar-crawl in the Village.

The bar is reputed to be a private club [a bar without a license]. The burly at the door keeps boxes that hold, or are rumored to hold, thousands of cards upon which are printed the particulars of the many thousands of customers that have come and continue to patronize the place [a testament to the enduring power of blackmail in the Liberation economy]. On the weekends, there is a price of admission which is euphemized into something else, but it’s not very much actually, only a couple of dollars or so.

D’Arcangelo described the Stonewall as a

*young* bar. The patrons are primarily youthful and primarily good-looking. That’s the premium. A
haven of and for narcissists. Sex is in the air but it remains there while people preen and rubberneck about to see who is or might be watching their contortions. Median age I’d reckon to be about twenty-two.478

D’Arcangelo’s comments suggest the extent to which queer people and their bodies represented the most significant and desirable commodities (or at least commodity fetishes) in the Liberation Economy. Indeed, the Liberation Economy represented what Gary Becker might call a “social market” (not unlike a marriage market, though much shorter term) in which cultural norms of beauty and desirability predominate. As the aforementioned guides suggest, the “premium” for youth and beauty also included a premium on certain gender and racial characteristics.

The most apparent division within the queer market was a gendered division between gay men and lesbians. Lesbians and lesbian organizations did not publish any analogous lesbian “scene guides,” although lesbian bars designated as such in the Gay Scene Guide by designating certain bars as “mixed” or “girls only.” The reliability of the Gay Scene Guide for lesbians also seems questionable, since the Guide describes Kookie’s as a “lovely, gracious, well-run establishment” despite the eponymous proprietor’s penchant for sticking her fingers into customer’s glasses to encourage them to buy more booze as well as an incident where Kookie reportedly hired Mafia goons to break up a women’s dance at the nearby Alternate U. In 1971, lesbian-feminist activists picketed Kookie’s bar in an action that resembled the post-raid protests that highlighted the Stonewall’s Mafia connections.479

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Trans* people, then typically referred to as “transvestites,” were even more marginalized. The most visibly queer and therefore vulnerable subset of the community, trans* people had faced discrimination in gay bars and other businesses since well before the 1970s. However, some of the political critiques that emerged from Gay and Feminist Liberation organizations and activists emphasized gender conformity and stigmatized trans* individuals. Even effeminate men could be singled out as counter-revolutionary, as they were in Craig Alford Hanson’s 1970 essay on the “fairy princess.” (Incidentally, what amounts to a full-throttle assault on camp aesthetics argues that “the gay traditionalist is victim of his material possessions, a captive of his own fairy palace. Material goods are probably the most important things for the fairy princess.”)\footnote{Craig Alford Hanson, “The Fairy Princess Exposed,” in \textit{Out of the Closets}, eds. Jay and Young, 269.} The best known example of the exclusion of trans* people from gay organizations, however, is the physical assault on Sylvia Rivera at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Parade after being denounced as a “parody” of womanhood by G.A.A.’s Jean O’Leary.\footnote{Duberman, \textit{Stonewall}, 236.}

A less visible or at least less remarked upon division was the distinction between white queer people and queer people of color. A number of queer people of color—Marsha Johnson, Audre Lorde, Sylvia Rivera, and Anita Cornwell, to name only a few—remarked on the hassles of trying to gain admittance to gay bars, racism and mockery from other patrons (including friends), and the tendency of white queer people to conflate homophobic and racist oppression as a pretense to ignore racial discrimination within queer life. Racism also surfaced most in the guides and directories that proliferated in the liberation economy helped to reconstitute queer space as white space, a significant departure from the 1920s and 1930s, when African-American neighborhoods like Harlem
represented the most important geographic anchor of the city’s gay nightlife. To be sure, a variety of other external factors had conspired to erode this scene between the 1920s and the 1960s, but racism and the preference of white consumers for Manhattan’s predominantly West Side neighborhoods had rendered Harlem’s queer past a forgotten relic among whites. The 1968 *Gay Scene Guide*, the only edition to list any businesses in Harlem, listed only two: the Mt. Morris Baths and Pauline’s Interlude. They describe Mt. Morris rather indelicately as “In Harlem (colored). At your own risk.” The guides also identify risk and other threats to safety with race, and specifically African-Americans. The 1969 guide included a warning about the “two negro NEW YORK CITY policeman harassing two customers, who one cop claimed had been touching” at the New Amsterdam Theatre.

Pure harassment—the cop succeeded in extracting the names and places of employment from these two DUMB JERKS, and then, after the ‘intimidation lecture’ he told them to beat it. Same cop was also observed guarding the MEN’S ROOM ENTRANCE at the Harris several times in following weeks. The negro pickpocket who roles [sic] the sleeping drunks late at night at the Harris (working it over for two years, as of last summer) was still there (cop too busy watching the gays, evidently [sic]!!)

The *Gay Scene Guide* further complained that at the Lyric Theatre, a “[f]ormerly… popular spot with [the] collegiate crowd” had been transformed into “an old auntie’s spot thanks to the new ushers, the fat negro Burns Detective…” “Particularly of note since last summer is the 6’ negro usher…who discharges his duties not with respect and courtesy of the clientele…” Perhaps the most disturbing part of this account—the longest of any
description of a business in the 1969 *Gay Scene Guide*—is an account could have been written by James Q. Wilson or Norman Podhoretz.

Most shocking was the evening of Dec. 21, 1968 where my lover called a fist-fight. (one-way)to my attention as we were leaving, wherein a negro, evidently [*sic*] tipsy and high on something, was standing, pounding on the face of a white (middle-aged, COMPLETELY Straight, and with two middle-aged companions) seated next to him. Usually when such fights occur, there are cheers from some of the more irresponsible members of the audience. Despite a packed house, the audience was hushed and what, stunned me and others was not the fight, but the ushers [*sic*] reactions. The tall negro usher (mentioned above) and his small, slightly lighter-skinned fellow usher stood in the aisle, steadily holding their flashlights on the assailant (giving him more light to hit his target accurately??) for TWO, perhaps as much as 3-3½ minutes, without any attempt to grab the assailant. The little usher even broke out in a smile a couple of times. Some of the observers made comments that reflected their stunned disbelief of the behavior of these ushers. The white man, downstairs in the lobby, talking to the manager, his face a mass of bruises, had cuts (6-7) over his face and forehead. We feel quite certain that the manager does not KNOWINGLY CONDONE such behavior on the part of his staff, nor would he knowingly retain the services of such people.  

This seems especially notable because stereotypes are not otherwise present in the *Gay Scene Guide*. There are no anti-Irish or anti-Italian stereotypes, for example, though descriptions of organized crime in the Village often invoked those slurs. The *Gay Scene Guide* made race visible only in the context of anti-gay harassment, setting up and anticipating an enduring political antagonism between sexual orientation and race (and putting queer people of color in an impossible position).


In many ways, the features just described highlight the broader macrohistorical context of the cultural economy of the post-Fordist cityscape as well as an anticipation of gentrification. Indeed, it is difficult to find an aspect of contemporary life as characteristic of post-Fordism as queer life. “Post-Fordist” is obviously a contested term whose chronology is unsettled by the very clearly Fordist (i.e. mass production and mass consumption) basis of U.S. culture and economy in the 1950s and 1960s, and it might be more appropriate to describe the economic and cultural specialization and segmentation of LGBTQ markets as an anticipation of the post-Fordist moment. Following geographer Allen J. Scott, the consolidation of queer markets in the transition from the Closet Economy to the Liberation Economy signals post-Fordism as “a new kind of cultural economy” characterized by the reorganization of “patterns of urbanization.” Like the consolidation and expansion of queer markets, post-Fordism entails an expansion of an assortment of craft, fashion, and cultural-products industries throughout the advanced capitalist economies, along with a great surge in niche markets for design- and information-intensive outputs. A provocative but revealing manner of designating this trend might be to label it as a postmodern expression of changing consumer tastes and demands involving a general aestheticization and semioticization of marketable products…[that] range…the gamut from…masterworks of cinematic art to jewelry to…tourist souvenirs or designer shopping bags, with the vast majority representing goods and services that trade on the basis of short- or medium-term fashion, information, and entertainment values, and on their merits as social markers.

In many ways, the history of the queer “cultural economy” represents the ways in which “cultural products” reflect the tastes and sensibilities of queer life. By emphasizing the

importance of this shift to “cultural products” and the segmentation and differentiation of consumer groups, Scott draws our attention to the “ways in which aspects of black consciousness, feminism, punk fashion, or gay lifestyles have been incorporated into the design specifications of consumer goods." Far from the trivial patterns identified by Christopher Lasch and others as a pathological “culture of narcissism,” the economics of queer life in the late 1960s and early 1970s demonstrates the consolidation of social and political capital and the sources of solidarity and division in the making of different kinds of queer selves.

III. The Greater Gotham Business Council and the Making of the Territorial Economy

On the evening of February 24, 1976, about a dozen gay business owners met in the Spring Street apartment of Bruce Voeller, a noted biologist, former president of the Gay Activists Alliance, and founder and first national director of the National Gay Task Force. Coordinated by Voeller and an NGTF colleague and local antiques dealer, Allen Noseworthy, those who attended the first meeting set about the difficult work of establishing New York City’s first gay business organization, initially titled the Gay Business People’s Association and rechristened the more anodyne Greater Gotham Business Council (G.G.B.C.) just two months later. This was a daring feat for a community with few political allies and little understanding of what a “gay business” even was, or what a gay business organization might mean, although, as Voeller’s involvement and role as organizational midwife

484 Ibid., 2.
485 All archival sources with the initials G.G.B.C. are from the Greater Gotham Business Council Series 59. Greater Gotham Business Council, National LGBT Archives at the New York City LGBT Community Center, 208 W. 13th St., New York, NY.
486 Letter from Allen Noseworthy to Gerald Schiff, February 17, 1976; File 20, G.G.B.C.
suggest, it bore some relationship to the larger broader LGBTQ political movement. Just what that relationship would be remained an open question, one better posed to the small business owners and freelancers of New York City (and the country’s) newly liberated “gay ghettos” rather than to movement intellectuals like Voeller, who arrived late to the first meeting and virtually disappears from the G.G.B.C.’s archive after the summer of 1976. Although activists like Voeller increasingly turned their attention to national politics in the late 1970s, local organizations offered the strongest and most effective bulwark against homophobia and heterosexism, which were often felt more immediately as local economic discrimination. Indeed, the repeal of gay rights ordinances at the local level in 1977 and 1978—in Dade County, Florida, Wichita, Kansas, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Eugene, Oregon—helped to consolidate LGBTQ politics on the national level in the late seventies. Whatever the national dimensions of the movement, “coming out” and the “gay agenda” (or agendas) had to be enacted on the local level first, in part because the most entrenched, daily site of conflict were local conflicts between LGBTQ people and local authorities. Moreover, local conflicts typically emerged within the economic framework of the market rather than the arena of electoral politics.

The G.G.B.C. represented both a continuation of and a departure from these economic conflicts in that, in addition to gay consumerism, its members represented an entrepreneurial orientation for gay politics. These were no longer simply passive consumers held captive by an exploitative and in many cases illicit market. The members of the G.G.B.C. represented entrepreneurs in a new, liberated—i.e., visibly and safely gay—market, as well as what activists increasingly called “clout.” Established using Robert’s Rules of Order—the procedural handbook used by Congress and at the center of
rancorous debate within the Gay Activists Alliance—the G.G.B.C. decided on a strict admissions policy guided by a rigidly hierarchical Board of Directors. After 1978, new members had to be carefully vetted with sponsorship by an existing member, and the bylaws stipulated that all major decisions would be made by a small Board of Directors and a bureaucracy of committees who oversaw the Board’s extensive research, communication, and social activities.487

No notes exist for the first meeting, but the second, held at the home of attorney George Terzian, included a hodgepodge of gay business owners and freelancers: Jack McNinney, owner of the Gifts of Nature Florist; Noseworthy, owner and operator of Noseworthy Antiques (and night manager of the Saint); Hal Witt, a jewelry designer; Jim Clitter, Avon Products’ head of marketing; Jerry Schiff, a CPA; Jack Modica, the first gay owner of the famous longshoreman bar, the Eagle (or Eagle’s nest); Alan Bell, a typesetter; an anonymous electrician; Lew Todd, a restaurateur and owner of the glamorous Ballroom in SoHo, the first gay bar in the city owned and operated by an openly gay man; Bill Bland, owner of Man’s Image salon; Voeller; Bill York, affiliated with the pornographic Mandate Magazine;488 Bernard Granville, an insurance broker; Jack Bakal, a wine importer; George Terzian, an attorney; and John Topash and Ray Baddard, owners of Eagle Leathers. For the next three months, the group met twice a month, eventually outgrowing its apartment meeting spaces and decamping for the Frankenstein Disco, the Copacabana Nightclub, or the Ballroom in the hours before the crowds arrived.489

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488 Questions surround this affiliation. Mandate is a Mavety publication, and its publisher in 1975 was John Devere.
489 File 20, G.G.B.C.
Although a handful of the G.G.B.C.’s members represented owners of businesses targeted specifically to gay consumers—bars, bathhouses, and clubs that relied primarily on gay male consumption—most of the businesses represented by the G.G.B.C. offered the same goods and services offered by otherwise straight business owners in legal and financial services, healthcare, retail, and the beauty industry. Indeed, after only a month of debate, the founding Board dropped the word “gay” both from the title of the organization and from the promotional material used by the G.G.B.C.. The G.G.B.C. modeled its language and marketing style on the first such organization founded in the United States, the Golden Gate Business Association established in 1974 in San Francisco. As early members argued, the G.G.B.C. would find it easier to fulfill its mission to gay business owners if it could downplay or sidestep any language that might cost its members business or worse, invite harassment from the police. As such, the G.G.B.C. was to be a quasi-chamber of commerce to advocate on behalf of gay entrepreneurs, small business owners, and freelancers in the heart of the most recognizably gay neighborhoods in one of the most recognizably gay cities in the country, if not the world. Two years later, its mission affirmed the G.G.B.C.’s support for the “Gay community,” though not explicit identification of its membership as gay. This rhetorical dance suggests the ways in which early middle-class (and largely white, male) business owners negotiated (or calculated) the risks of homophobia and the benefits of gay identity in the first decade following the mass “coming out” of Gay Liberation.

By that time, membership had soared exponentially to include over a thousand local business owners, managers, and scores of free lancers, arguably the largest, most visible and politically influential gay organization in New York City during the late
1970s. The organization promoted a mixture of goals and projects, though very few of them under the radical banner of Gay Liberation politics that had gripped the Village less than a decade before, when a botched 1969 raid on the Stonewall Bar catapulted the neighborhood into the vanguard of sexual politics in the U.S. In 1978, the G.G.B.C. also joined with similar gay business organizations in San Francisco, Chicago, Columbus, Houston, San Diego, Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles to form the National Association of Business Councils. In 1979, the Greater Gotham Business Council launched the Gay Market, an expo that featured hundreds of booths and displays.

In the late seventies, the G.G.B.C.’s meetings became an important campaign stop at a time when most politicians were putting maximum distance between themselves and the “gay community.” Politicians who campaigned before the G.G.B.C. included Congresswoman Bella Abzug and future New York Governor Mario Cuomo, both of whom addressed the organization in a primary election they lost to eventual Mayor Ed Koch. Incidentally, some of Cuomo’s supporters targeted the allegedly closeted Koch’s supporters with homemade campaign signs that read, “Vote for Cuomo, Not the Homo,” which might explain Koch’s absence. Although Koch himself never visited the organization, on September 18, 1979 the administration’s comptroller Harrison Goldin dropped by the G.G.B.C.’s general meeting at the Ice Palace Disco to tout the “economic revitalization of New York City and the part that gay business people have in that recovery.” The comptroller, an elected position that oversees and audits the city’s budget and finances, may have been one of the most thankless and perilous jobs in a city that famously teetered on the brink of insolvency. The not-so-benign neglect of Mayor John Lindsay (1966-1973), rising crime, declining property values, white flight, and national
and global financial crises contributed to a financially toxic mix that consumed the mayoralty of Koch’s predecessor, Abe Beame, also a former comptroller. In 1975, as the city nearly declared bankruptcy, the federal government refused to bail the city out, leading to massive cutbacks in all city sectors. Four years later, Goldin acknowledged that “the City lost hundreds of thousands of jobs and many businesses, [which]…went first to the suburbs and then lower tax areas in the South and West which welcomed them with still further government-subsidized incentives.” He further stated, “business is in the business of making profit.” When “it’s…cheaper and more convenient to do business elsewhere, then staying in New York becomes a charitable enterprise activity…” Goldin’s prescription was in line with what today we readily identify with “neo-liberalism” or, in the U.S., the Clintonian “third way” policies that synthesizes conservative economic policy and liberal/left-wing social policy: cut taxes to appease and encourage businesses, cut or eliminate city services and sell government property to balance the budget, and demand both an end to discrimination on the profit principle and market inclusion in actual practice.

As representatives of an entrepreneurial class of people who by and large did not rely on city services (especially schools), the Greater Gotham Business Council and its constituents benefited from these policies in ways that their more radical predecessors could never quite pull off. This included profit, which the earlier generation of radicals rejected along with “capitalism” and other establishment traps, and the political influence for which the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance salivated. Goldin admitted that “even the most conservative guesses…give the gay community an
enormous potential economic clout.” Goldin estimated the gay contribution to the 1977 Gross City Product to be four billion dollars.

Your role, therefore, in the City’s economic recovery is a large one. Conversely, when you suffer economic discrimination, damage to the City’s economy can be considerable. Thus, when the Greater Gotham Business Council attempts to move the City to reduce at least official discrimination against gay businessmen and women, it behooves officials to stop and listen. It might make sense—dollars and sense—to include the gay community in the national promotion of New York City as a tourist attraction. It might make sense for the Board of Estimate to initiate its own affirmative action program and think about awarding certain municipal service contracts to openly gay groups…

Although the City would not pass an ordinance prohibiting discrimination on the basis of homosexuality (but not gender identity) until 1986, the city administration largely supported these aims and cultivated an ever-closer relationship between Christopher Street and Centre Street. Although Ed Koch was notoriously slow and neglectful in responding to the AIDS crisis in New York City (where half the U.S. cases were located in the 1980s), the “clout” of the gay business community was arguably responsible for holding the mayor’s feet to the fire even if the HIV/AIDS crisis unleashed inestimable economic devastation on the City’s gay businesses.

Goldin’s speech called out the qualities most important to the success not only of the G.G.B.C., but LGBTQ entrepreneurs and business owners more generally: what Philip Scranton and Patrick Fridenson refer to as “improvisation” in business history.491

“Improvisation” represents a strategy that is distinct from, if at times complementary to, the innovation model of entrepreneurship in the business and economic historiography most often identified with the theories of Joseph Schumpeter. According to Scranton and Fridenson, improvisation refers to the problem-solving and trouble-shooting techniques that have defined many successful entrepreneurial strategies since the 1970s, an era when technological and financial disruptions upended conventional wisdom and led to a period of “managerial floundering.” In this sense, the improvisation of organizations like the Greater Gotham Business Council should be understood in the context of the changing dynamics of the gay economy in the 1970s.

The improvisational roles played by gay entrepreneurs and business organizations suggested a flexible and pragmatic politics in contrast to the more stridently revolutionary politics that had actually fomented Gay Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. More importantly, their aim was not specifically political and, as such, they were more concerned with constructing a gay market than a gay political movement. That they succeeded where political organizations failed explains the significance of economic activity to political success in New York City (and the U.S.), not to mention the conditions under which straight politicians came to court and support LGBTQ communities and causes. To explicitly address the themes of the conference, this mix of success and cynicism suggests the ways in which the “virtues” and “vices” of gay businesses and business organizations are essentially different sides of the same coin: the effects of the gay market itself.

In order to understand the economics of daily life in the 1970s, historians must look to the local economies of gay neighborhoods themselves—spaces largely
identifiable with what gay activist Carl Wittman called gay “ghettos” in his oft-quoted 1969 manifesto. By the end of the 1970s, many of these former “ghettos” represented some of the more prosperous areas of cities otherwise marked by declining population and real estate values, rising poverty and crime, and a combination of corruption and bad luck. This was especially true of the twin cities of Gay Liberation, where LGBTQ tourists and migrants, primarily gay men, flocked to the Eureka Valley of San Francisco and Greenwich Village and Chelsea in San Francisco, injecting the area with cash and a newly “liberated,” or decriminalized sexual culture. In many ways, the economic and social transitions at the end of the 1970s suggest a decisive shift from the Marxist and anti-capitalist inspired politics of “Gay Liberation” to a more business-friendly politics of Gay Liberalization—one that has certainly proved the more durable and successful model in the history of U.S. LGBTQ politics.

The events of the 1970s were the focal point for the LGBTQ movement in U.S. history and historiography. John D’Emilio, Alice Echols, Amin Ghaziani, Susan Stryker, Terrence Kissack and others point to the increasingly national dimensions of Gay Liberation, Lesbian-Feminism, the emergence of a distinct Trans politics, and other “sexual minority” movements between the Stonewall Riots in the summer of 1969 and the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1979. Although these and other scholars have provided valuable analyses of the political framework and events so central to the queer historiography of the 1970s—the election of openly lesbian and gay candidates to office and the Anita Bryant-Florida orange juice boycott, for example—only a handful of scholars have seriously approached questions about the economics of daily life in the 1970s, and even then tangentially.
Attending to the microsocial circumstances of the national movement means investigating the private businesses, economic institutions, and consumer patterns that LGBTQ neighborhoods encouraged, as well as their complex relationship to the evolving structure of what Margot Canaday calls the “straight state.” LGBTQ businesses (most but by no means all of which were owned, operated, and patronized by gay men) occupied a newly empowered if precarious position within a hodgepodge of governmental institutions that, on the one hand, had by and large decriminalized sociability in gay bars and other businesses associated with queer life while, on the other, not only allowed but in some cases required discrimination (especially in federal employment). The few studies (and much of the evidence) of queer economic life in the 1970s suggests that the most significant industry associated with LGBTQ life was comprised primarily of gay male sexual markets, which included enterprises like movie theaters, pornographic film production companies, and bathhouse owners, followed closely by discos and bars.

The “virtues” and “vices” of the G.G.B.C. largely depend on perspective, many of which are specific to the complex identity politics of the larger LGBTQ or queer movement. From the perspective of Gay Liberation politics—especially the rejection of capitalism and other trappings of the political and economic “establishment”—the vices are easy to recognize. In many ways, they are the products of improvisation, which are, by nature, business strategies built on pragmatism and compromise with the establishment. In this view, the G.G.B.C.’s entrepreneurial strategies merely incorporated gay life into the circuitry of capitalism without seriously addressing the underlying

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492 To be sure, Canaday’s discussion primarily concerns immigration, though the creation of a “homosexual” political subject or class of citizenship through immigration policy held far-reaching ramifications for LGBTQ people in the U.S.
problems of economic exploitation and stratification or the cultural homophobia that heightened exploitation and stratification. That much is true. The G.G.B.C. largely addressed the narrower interests of gay, middle- and upper-class men. Although the G.G.B.C. attempted to bolster women’s participation—and several women played prominent roles in the organization—the women represented but a fraction of the membership. Moreover, trans people, working-class people, and LGBTQ people of color, who suffered the most—economically as well as socially and politically—at the hands of a homophobic and transphobic society. In essence, business and entrepreneurial strategies represented the “normalization” of some queer identities, while continuing to ignore and marginalize others.

The “virtues” were more straightforward effects of what was innovative about the G.G.B.C.: the affirmation of gay identity and the formulation of post-Gay Liberation identity politics. In the same way that Black nationalists like Harold Cruse called for Black entrepreneurs to simultaneously instill the virtues of Black nationalism into its consumers and consolidate the political, economic, and cultural clout of the “Black community,” entrepreneurs and business owners like the general membership of the Greater Gotham Business Council deployed similar economic strategies to build up the political and cultural clout of the “Gay community.” The “virtues” of gay business thus owed more to the not-for-profit principles of businesses explicitly tied to the LGBTQ movement as the narrower self-interest for profit. It is more or less impossible to divide one strategy from the other, however, since the not-for-profit principle anchored the

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ethical project of the Greater Gotham Business Council while the profit principle made the organization sustainable and valuable to the straight political class.

Although the G.G.B.C. illustrated these so-called “virtues” and “vices” in equal measure, it is also important to recognize the ways in which this strategy congealed at a national level. Entrepreneurship and business ownership emerged as a central strategy throughout the United States, especially in San Francisco, one of the few cities in which the LGBTQ movement may have outpaced New York City. The influence of organizations like the Golden Gate Business Association notwithstanding, the most famous gay politician of the late 1970s, Harvey Milk, launched his political career as the small business owner of Castro Camera. Like Milk, the members of the G.G.B.C. positioned themselves as hardworking, tax-paying citizens who represented the most vaunted species of American citizenship: the “little guy” or the small business owner.

IV. Conclusion: Branding the Gay Market and the Politics of Visibility in the Territorial Economy

The G.G.B.C.’s explicit, gradual embrace of the term “gay” in 1978 ultimately represented the organization’s most important symbolic contribution to the clout of New York City’s gay community. This was not a foregone conclusion when the organization was founded. Although the earliest members were recruited by Voeller and the organization maintained a close relationship to the National Gay Task Force, a number of members contested the embrace of both the term “gay” as well as the political aims and goals shared by the larger movement and the G.G.B.C..
For many members, the organization must have seemed like the gay equivalent of a combination chamber of commerce and non-political civic club in small and medium-sized towns across the country: the Optimists, Kiwanis, Rotary International, Kiwanis, or the Lion’s Club. The G.G.B.C. created a small business caucus, facilitated workshops and seminars, promoted social events that introduced business owners to one another, held blood drives, and hosted fundraisers alongside other organizations. In many ways, the Greater Gotham Business Council represented the gay equivalent of all the civic clubs and mutual aid organizations in small and medium-sized towns across the country: the Optimists, Kiwanis, Rotary International, Kiwanis, or the Lion’s Club. The organization offered business seminars and presentations, social nights at local nightclubs (including a yearly event at the Copacabana, a major fundraiser for the organization), and advertising opportunities that strengthened the economic interests of New York City’s LGBTQ business owners and entrepreneurs. In addition, the G.G.B.C. helped to fund the growing number of not-for-profit community services centers populating Greenwich Village and Chelsea, including Compass, an addiction treatment center located in Chelsea; the formation of the Gay Community Center (now the LGBTQ Community Service Center, the archive of which maintains the G.G.B.C. papers); the Big Apple Corps Gay and Lesbian Marching Band; Heritage of Pride, and the organization that sponsors the annual June Pride March. The organization also lent support to the National Gay Task Force, the National Association of Business Councils, and the 1979 Lesbian and Gay March on Washington, DC. The major difference, of course, was that the G.G.B.C. offered support to one of the most stigmatized and maligned minorities in the United States. The initial years of the organization, while a tremendous success in recruiting business owners,
freelancers, and entrepreneurs, nonetheless faltered in offering explicit support to or even recognition of LGBTQ people or organizations.

The orientation of the organization changed decisively in 1978 and 1979, however, when the G.G.B.C. stopped running away from the “gay” label and began to seize on the marketing opportunities of gay life. As Matt Houlbrook has written in a British context, the “pink schilling” or—in the case of the U.S.—the “pink dollar” offered as much promise as peril to entrepreneurs and businesses willing to stake their fortune on gay consumers.494 The political fallout of the embrace of gay politics ultimately cost the G.G.B.C. a handful of members (though it probably gained more than it lost) and resulted in an embarrassing spat between G.G.B.C. president George Terzian and Stephen Temmer, the president of Gotham Audio Corporation and Donald Eggena, the president of the Lendahand Personnel Service. In a letter dated July 25, 1979, Terzian, following a call to action by the National Gay Task Force, issued a letter to the general membership about planned protests and disruptions of the filming of William Friedkin’s “Cruising,” a controversial film that depicted highly sexualized and violent stereotypes of gay men in New York City’s leather and SM underground. After reading the script and, according to Terzian, “serious consideration of the constitutional issues involved, I feel compelled to go on record as being vehemently opposed to the production of this movie in our city…The last 10 years have seen immense gains in the acceptance of the lesbian and gay community. The misleading, inflammatory and explosive tenor of this film can only encourage increased discrimination and violence against our community.”

On July 30, Temmer mailed a letter to Terzian, stating

I am not in accord with your stand and also do not feel that G.G.B.C. has any right to assume such a posture without a clear polling of its members! When we joined G.G.B.C. it was on the assumption that G.G.B.C. would not be engaged in political activities other than helping the gay business community, not the community at large.

Temmer’s views reflected those of several members of the G.G.B.C. that the organization should be engaged in business, not politics. Moreover, Temmer dismissed the protest (and by implication LGBTQ politics) as counter-productive: “There is no question in mind that this gay protest, like all others before it, will have no other benefits than to advertise the movie you are trying to get banned…There are some protest [sic] better unfulfilled. This is one of them.”496 Temmer ultimately complained to the Board about Terzian’s actions in November, months after filming (and the controversy) subsided. Although the Board clarified the procedure for such “position letters” from Board members in response to Temmer’s complaint and stated that Terzian’s statement was unofficial, they ultimately found “no fault with the contents of the statement made by Mr. Terzian, as its purpose was informative in nature and did not call for any action by G.G.B.C. or its members.”497

However, it was the impassioned if slightly deranged response from Eggena that attracts most attention. Dated just a week after the Board’s official response—and seemingly in response to the new, explicit marketing strategy taken up by the Board and endorsed by Goldin’s visit just months before—Eggena resigned his company’s membership because “any person joining the G.G.B.C. should be willing to publicly profess their persuasion without threat of their job security and not having to worry about

their chairmen, supervisors, or whatever, becoming aware of their lifestyle and/or sexual orientation or preference.” The most strident language in Eggena’s language comes through a homophobic threat:

If I receive one more phone call or piece of faggot correspondence from anyone on the Board of Directors of G.G.B.C. concerning the professionalism [sic] or ethical standards of how this company is operated, there will be a lawsuit initiated. Our ninth year will continue to be successful without reprimands, threats, or advice from a group of two-bit lawyers and asshole primadonnas.498

Eggena’s unhinged and homophobic language suggests an almost irrational fear of sharing the gay “brand” with other businesses. More significantly, the complaints of members like Temmer and Eggena suggest that the G.G.B.C. was at a crossroads in 1979. One tack involved turning back toward surreptitious advocacy and the economic advantages of evasion, while the other embraced identity politics and the economic advantages that such a strategy might confer.

The G.G.B.C. embraced the strategy of the gay market both figuratively and, indeed, literally. In 1979, the G.G.B.C. hosted the “Gay Market,” a large exposition with hundreds of booths from gay business owners. The Gay Market ended up being the G.G.B.C.’s most important fundraiser, and in their first year they managed to turn a profit of over $16,000. Held annually from 1979 to 1986, the Gay Market represented the largest such expo in the United States and the G.G.B.C.’s signature achievement. Although the Gay Market provided the organization both with funds and publicity, the organization (and the event) fizzled at the end of the 1980s as New York City’s LGBTQ community dealt with the devastation of HIV/AIDS and a rancorous era of backlash that

498 File 20, G.G.B.C.
saw LGBTQ activists do battle against the Board of Education, the Archdiocese of New York, and the general rising tide of conservative politicians and pundits.

The crisis itself, aside from ravaging the bodies of community members, also took a severe economic toll. On October 6, 1987, the Board announced: “the consensus was that we abandon the project since we have not been successful in booth or program sales. Many reasons were given for the failure. The health crisis was a problem, many potential businesses have been affected by it and so cannot participate in the event. There was a perception in the community that there is a ‘low demand’ for this type of event. Also that many businesses don’t perceive that there is a “Gay market” and so don’t see the need to market their businesses to the community. Many businesses have forgotten about the successful markets in the past.” Although the Board minutes reveal a few bright spots—a new member was starting back up the weekly business lunchtime meet-and-greet—the organization ultimately did not last out the year.

The G.G.B.C. folded in the early spring of 1988 at what was arguably the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. In many ways, the demise of the Gay Market in 1987—and the organization itself—reveals the ways in which the “virtues” of economic clout did not and could not always translate into political power, nor overcome the overwhelming vices of homophobic and transphobic discrimination in the midst of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the political and cultural clout that the G.G.B.C. represented continued to be an important model for future political organizations, laying the groundwork for what Andrea Chasin has somewhat derisively called the “gay marketing” moment. Without debating the relative “virtues” and “vices” of the present movement, it is clear that the G.G.B.C.’s strategy anticipated much of what we take for granted about LGBTQ politics.
in the past two decades: the identity politics of LGBTQ or queer visibility, a strategy that emphasizes pragmatic liberalization over revolutionary liberation, and the transformation of economic into cultural and political capital.

In a number of ways, the most important feature of this long period was not the realization of social democracy but the mass coming out and liberalization that transformed the Village and other gay enclaves throughout the United States. My study concludes with the infiltration and increasing dominance of insiders—that is, queer people themselves—as the central entrepreneurs, displacing the older system of the closet economy in which straight outsiders, typically under the aegis of organized crime, dominated. As a movement that has occurred largely within markets, Gay Liberation and liberalization is a remarkable achievement for a social group whose very emergence was defined by and limited to stigmatized and criminalized markets. However, the history of the market also suggests some important limitations. As a movement that has mostly emphasized the identity politics of consumption and ownership, the organizations and institutions that came to represent that community have also failed to grapple with larger, intersecting problems and processes created, exacerbated, and ignored by the market: race, class, and gender discrimination. This study is not capable of resolving the tension between liberalism and social democracy, but it does close with a suggestion about the ways in which both of these broader social and political movements have historically been unable to fully accommodate the needs and desires of LGBTQ people. In many ways, this tension comes down to the problem of sexuality and the broader social and political needs unmet by a simple formulation of sexual freedom. Sexuality has always
been a problem for social democracy and social democrats—a problem related to population and demography, the very heart of Foucaultian biopolitics and biopower.

Although Escoffier’s chronology breaks these down into separate periods, my conclusions argue for the ways in which the legal features of the liberation and territorial economy were essentially the same: the creation of a public discourse of gay pride and the practice of “coming out” enervated the power of anti-gay stigma to constrain gay social, cultural, economic, and ultimately political activities. Rather than a successive chronology, my framework views this long period of liberalization as one in which the market-based aims of liberalization and the more politically intersectional and transformative aims of Gay Liberation overlapped and sometimes competed. Indeed, the contest between the liberalism of the “gay rights” movement and the radicalism of LGBTQ rights within a larger intersectional struggle for social democracy—a movement that includes gender, racial, and economic justice—remains in tension today as the issue of marriage equality and gay rights to marriage has largely overshadowed (though hardly repressed) organizations like Queers for Economic Justice, the Audre Lorde Project, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, or ACT UP. If, as my introduction suggests, the more recent past has been characterized by the collapse of the local gay market, then it behooves activists and thinkers in the LGBTQ movement to look not only at the ways in which market strategies can help us to break down the barriers of racial, gender, and economic justice as well as the ways in which those strategies have been incommensurate to the task.
Appendix A: Culturomic Data and Graphs
Figure 1. Identity terms (*homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite*) comparison by decade. *New York Times.*
Figure 2. Identity terms (minus *homosexual*) comparison by decade.
Figure 3. Identity terms (minus *homosexual* and *lesbian*) by decade.
Figure 4. Expert ambiguous terms (pervert, invert, deviant/deviate, sodomy) compared to homosexual by decade.
Figure 5. Slang ambiguous terms (*gay*, *queer*, *faggot*) compared to *homosexual* by decade.
Figure 6. Identity terms in comparison by year, 1940-1969.
Figure 7. Identity terms (minus *homosexual*) by year, 1940-1969.
Figure 8. Screenshot of Google Ngram Viewer. All identity terms from figure 1 with one term, *transsexual*, missing from the legend. Violet represents *transsexual* and its inflections.

Equation:

gay, homosexual + homosexuality + homosexuals + homosexualities + homosexualism, lesbian + lesbians + lesbianism, transvestite + transvestites + transvestic + transvestitic + transvestitism

[Note: *Bisexual* and its inflections had to be omitted from this equation due to the space allowed by the Ngram Viewer’s input mechanism.]
Figure 9. Screenshot of Google Ngram Viewer. Comparison of *bisexual* and *homosexual*.

Equation:

\[ \text{bisexual + bisexualism + bisexuals + bisexuality, gay, homosexual + homosexuality + homosexuals + homosexualities + homosexualism} \]
Figure 10. Screenshot of Google Ngram Viewer. Comparison of terms \textit{homosexual} and \textit{heterosexual}.

Equation:
\textit{homosexuality+homosexuals+homosexualities+homosexualism,heterosexual+heterosexuals+heterosexuality+heterosexualism+heterosexualities}
Figure 11. Screenshot of Google Ngram Viewer. Comparison of terms *transvestite* and *transsexual*.

Equation: \text{transvestite} + \text{transvestitic} + \text{transvestite} + \text{transvestites} + \text{transvestitism}, \text{transsexual} + \text{transsexuals} + \text{transsexualism} + \text{transsexualist}
Figure 12. Screenshot of Google Ngram Viewer. Comparison of terms *lesbian* and *bisexual*.

Equation: lesbian+lesbians+lesbianism,bisexual+bisexuals+bisexuality+bisexualism
### Appendix B: Bars and Businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Business</th>
<th>Type of Business</th>
<th>Address, Location</th>
<th>Description of Business</th>
<th>Year(s) listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2-3 Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>123 University Place; Greenwich Village/Union Square</td>
<td>“One of the quieter spots in town, this dancing bar is primarily for the slightly older gay crowd.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“9” Plus Club, Inc.</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>149 W. 21st St.</td>
<td>“Formerly the location of the N.Y. Motorbike Club, it’s an “S &amp; M” bottle club – members and guests only. Open 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. (closed on Mondays). They publish the monthly ‘Scimitar,’ a bar gossip type magazine that’s distributed through various bars and gay clubs.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Barrow Street</td>
<td>Restaurant/ later Bar</td>
<td>17 Barrow St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“a restaurant run by ‘Mamie’ and very popular with gay girls. There was a big fireplace and candles all around to create a romantic atmosphere.”†</td>
<td>1940s and 1950s; 1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82 Club</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>82 E. 4th St.; East Village/Lower East Side</td>
<td>“Suit and Tie, mixed. Excellent entertainment, with a large female impersonator review.”*</td>
<td>1964*, 1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 Social Club</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>200 W. 70th St.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>“One of the newer spots in town. Dancing, boys.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 181° Lesbian nightclub</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>181 Second Ave.; East Village</td>
<td>“very commercial/touristy gay nightclub on Second Ave… Most of the waiters…were major butches, who dressed as men even away</td>
<td>1940s-1950s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from the club. All of the entertainers were male transvestites who appeared in ball gowns singing, ‘Balls, balls, how I love balls.’ …The customers, of course, were all out-of-towners thinking they’d found the secret homosexual life.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>415 Bar</td>
<td>Presumably Upper West Side</td>
<td>“The 415 Bar on Amsterdam Avenue was typical: you walked in, saw a few locals talking with the bartender, and figured you’d made a mistake. But through an unmarked door in the back and down a flight of stairs, you entered a cavernous basement teeming with hundreds of gay men who were dancing and laughing and cruising and kissing and drinking and passing out in the johns.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Hotel</td>
<td>23 E. 10th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“In Village, reasonable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Nicks</td>
<td>Pacific &amp; Smith St.; Brooklyn—Downtown/Cobble Hill</td>
<td>“Mixed, casual, local crowd.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldo’s</td>
<td>340 Bleecker St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“N.Y.’s most popular gay restaurant, Dinner, lunch. (Mostly a gay clientele, but still mixed). Bar.” “Mixed restaurant and bar. Dinner &amp; lunch. Not as popular with the gay set as it once was.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam Cinema (renamed New Amsterdam Theater in 1969)</td>
<td>214 W. 42nd St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>“Features top new films, generally crowded on Sat. nights. Very elegantly built old theatre, with oversize stairs and frescoes.” “No interesting people here—this was where the ‘get tough’ policy started (two ushers last year transferred to the Lyric). This is also where we personally observed two negro NEW YORK CITY Policemen harassing two customers, who one cop claimed had been touching. (Having stood about 10 feet to the back oft ehm for 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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503 Meaker, ibid., 12.
prior, they were AT ALL TIMES more than three feet apart—NOR COULD the cop have seen ANYTHING at all from where he came up, at ANY TIME! Purse harassment—the cop succeeded in extracting the names and places of employment from these two DUMB JERKS, and then, after the ‘intimidation lecture’ he told them to beat it. Same cop was also observed guarding the MEN’S ROOM ENTRANCE at the Harris several times in following weeks. The negro pickpocket who roles [sic] the sleeping drunks late at nights at the Harris (working it over two years, as of last summer) was still there (cop too busy watching the gays, evidently!!!) If a cop harasses you, report the incident IN FULLEST DETAIL either to the Mattachine Society (N.Y.) or to D.A. Frank Hogan, who will keep your name confidential.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anco Theatre</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>Times Square; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>Harris, Anco, Liberty, Times Square, and Victory Theatres listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“…nothing of interest, (even if it looks interesting) but trouble, as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>few, if any, gay kids seem to go here because of past incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annette’s Restaurant</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>600 Mamaroneck Ave.; Westchester County</td>
<td>“Mixed, hustlers.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>223 W. 42nd St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>“Most reasonably priced place in town to see top foreign film imports. Due apparently to poor construction of balcony, there is much ‘seat-hopping’ by people who seem to have ended up with uncomfortable seats!”*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astor Bar (Hotel Astor)</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Midtown West/Times Square°</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Bagatelle</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lesbian Bar</strong></td>
<td>86 University Place (E. 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; St. at University Ave.); Greenwich Village&lt;sup&gt;504&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Lorde’s favorite haunt, open in the 1950s but not mentioned in either the <em>Baedeker</em> or <em>GSG</em>; apparently also a locus of Black lesbian sociability, though not a Black lesbian bar.&lt;sup&gt;505&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bali Club</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>234 W. 50&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, Theater District/Dance Circuit</td>
<td>“Casual, fun spot. Mixed.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barefoot Girl Cocktail Lounge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>157 Hempstead Ave.; Long Island—West Hempstead</td>
<td>“Mixed, dressy.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Bat Cave (Beach Hotel)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>Long Island/Fire Island/Cherry Grove</td>
<td>“Gay, dancing summer only.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Big Dollar</strong></td>
<td><strong>Leather bar</strong></td>
<td>E. 34&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; and 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Ave.</td>
<td>“One man recalls it as ‘one of the first decorated bars I’d been in. They had done country-western, and they had all these railings up for people to lean on.’”&lt;sup&gt;506&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bleecker Tavern (Later Kenny’s Castaways)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>157 Bleecker; Greenwich Village&lt;sup&gt;°&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Blow-Up</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Ave. between 80&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; and 81&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Sts.; Upper East Side</td>
<td>“Gay Dance bar, reportedly trying to discourage girls which is bucking the trend of guys and girls together. Dancing, food (in a limited menu), and pleasant people are making this one look like a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<sup>505</sup> Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, 223.
The Blue Parrot  | Bar  | “Bird Circuit.” “The Parrot is actually remembered as a bar for the gentleman homosexual who liked his liquor and knew his old show tunes…But that was the flavor in this neighborhood, a certain gentlemanly campiness, even gentlemanly cruising. One writer recalled the technique as ‘the mirror game’: puff on your cigarette and glance at his crotch in the mirror; if he returns the favor (via the mirror, that is), send him a drink. It sounds like very little, but one fellow years later recalled the Parrot as ‘an excellent cruising spot.’ It had a narrow front aisle along the bar, and then a ‘large square back room, dimly lit with blue lights (whence the name), and though there was no ‘orgy’ element in the modern sense, there was a good deal of freedom of conversation, quick propositions, etc.”  | 1950s

Boatel Hotel & Bar  | Bar  | Long Island/Fire Island Pines  | “Mixed. Summer only.”*  | 1968

The Bohemian  | Lesbian bar  | 15 Barrow St.; Greenwich Village  | “Relatively new gay bar, this one is for GIRLS only. Casual, after-hours bar.”†  | 1964\(^2\); 1969

Bon Soir  | Nightclub*/ Bar†  | 40 W. 8\(^{th}\) St.; Greenwich Village  | Famous night club where, among others, Barbra Streisand, performed.\(^5\)  | 1964\(^2\); 1968; 1969

Famous night club where, among others, Barbra Streisand, performed.\(^5\)

“Mixed, entertainment, night club and bar.”* “Listed under ‘Night Clubs’ in our previous issue of this guide, it has now re-opened as a gay spot, with the closing of the Moroccan Village across the street. About the most pleasant bar in town, it’s a dance parlor now, and the gay crowd is really turning up in droves. They like the new look.”†

Brick Shed House  | Clothing shop  | 51 Greenwich Ave.; Greenwich Village  | “Latest ‘mod’ styles, shop is ‘the’ place where the village crowd go to for their sale attire. The store’s décor is wild and kicky.”* “…and you’ll adore those handsomely rugged young salesmen.”†  | 1968, 1969

Brickford’s  | Coffeeshop  | 861 Third Ave.;  | “Mixed, frequented by ‘trade’ and hustlers trying to make a score.”†  | 1969

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Coffee Shop</strong></th>
<th><strong>Midtown East</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
<th><strong>Year</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Bridge</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>58&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Street between 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; and Second (Quensboro Bridge); Midtown East</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broadway Sauna &amp; Steam Baths</strong></td>
<td>Bathhouse</td>
<td>49 Broadway; Newark, NJ</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buddy-Buddy Club</strong></td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>1400 Clove Road; Staten Island/Wagner College</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Camp</strong></td>
<td>Coffeehouse</td>
<td>W. 69&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; St. and Columbus Ave.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candlelight Lounge</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>309 Amsterdam Ave. between 74&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; and 75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Sts.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candy Store</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>44 W. 56&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; St., Midtown West/Theater District</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnaby’s</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>323 E. 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; St.; East Village/Lower East Side</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carr’s</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>204 W. 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; St.;</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*“Gay, casual, rough trade.”*

“It is included in this guide as it’s located very near the Metropolitan N.Y. area, and has become quite popular for it’s clean surroundings—something that can’t be said for most of the bath houses in town. A nice establishment, with friendly management. Has rooms and dormitory, open 24 hours daily.”

“Informal casual sweater crowd.”

“After hours place, gets many of the Central Park West crowd, casual, mixed.”

“Casual, informal neighborhood people.”

“Casual, in formal Central Park West crowd predominates.”

“Piano Bar, very elegant, jacket & tie required, good entertainment.”

“(Someone recently published a comment that his nominee for bars with the most ‘up-tight’ people are Julius’ and the Candy Stores).”

“Dancing bar, one of the newer spots in town – be sure to pay a visit. Casual.”

“In the Village, this gay bar has a casual college-type crowd. It can
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar/Restaurant</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casa Verde Bar</td>
<td>Liberty Ave. and Rockaway Blvd.; Queens—Ozone Park</td>
<td>“College crowd, dancing. Neighborhood people.”*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cave Coffeehouse</td>
<td>Avenue A between 10th and 11th; East Village/Alphabet City</td>
<td>“In the East Village, this fairly new coffee house is mixed but predominantly has a clientele consisting of a younger gay crowd, many of them local residents.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C’est Bon Bar</td>
<td>2520 Merrick Road; Long Island—Bellmore</td>
<td>“Mixed, neighborhood crowd.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandelle Bar</td>
<td>E. 48th Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charade Club Bar</td>
<td>93rd St. and 2nd Ave., Upper East Side</td>
<td>“Fun spot, dancing, not to be missed.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles the Fourth Restaurant</td>
<td>49 Charles Street; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Suit and Tie, mixed.”*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkerboard Bar</td>
<td>105 Christopher St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Boys and girls. A small, cozy bar with friendly social atmosphere. Packed on weekends. Owner Jack Lundy has decorated it pleasantly and the dancing is among the best in town.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkmate Bar</td>
<td>E. 31st St.; Midtown (East?) o</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry Lane Theater</td>
<td>42 Commerce St. o</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chez Elle Bar</td>
<td>108 W. 73rd St.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>Shuttered by S.L.A. in October 1959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

509 Lait and Mortimer, ibid., 314.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chez Mia/Chez Pat’s   | Lesbian Bar  | 23 E. 74th St.; Upper East Side | “Mia often took over failed restaurants with a year or two left on the lease. Gay restaurants didn’t last that long, anyway, once the police discovered who the clientele were. They would suggest the price needed for protection. If it was refused, they would raid the place with the excuse drug traffic was underway there. It must have been a shock to the sedate East 60’s Volney Hotel once they realized Mia’s customers were mostly female. They could not be hookers since there were few men, yet the coat room girl in the hall was kept busy until three in the morning, catering to this exotic group, many in pants. The hotel residents who ate dinner in Chez Mia were too early for Mia’s following, most of whom were drinkers, not diners. By the time management realized Chez Mia catered to lesbians, there were only months left on the lease.”  
512 Meaker, ibid., 136. | 1960-1961   |
| Chez Pepe             | Bar          | Livingston St. near Jay St.; Brooklyn—Downtown | “Dancing, casual, Brooklyn Heights crowd”*†                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1968; 1969 |
| Chick’N’Rib (Mama’s Chick’N’Rib in 1969) | Restaurant   | 39 Greenwich Ave.; Greenwich Village | “Casual, gay crowd. Dinner, sandwiches, malts, etc.’’*  
“Predominantly a young gay crowd. Dinner, sandwiches, malts, etc. This restaurant was closed a while back due to fire, but it has no[w] been nicely remodeled and is back in business as usual.” | 1968; 1969 |
| Cinema Corner         | Coffeeshop   | 60th St. at 3rd Ave.; Upper East Side | “Mixed, but where a predominantly gay crowd gathers in the late evening, to refresh themselves with coffee, etc., after the [unreadable] tour.’’†                                                                                                                                 | 1969       |
| Claret Baths          | Bathhouse    | 1415 Boardwalk;                | “Open during summer only.’’*                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1968       |

511 Also listed as Chez Pat’s in the LHA List of Lesbian Bars.
512 Meaker, ibid., 136.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Club Atlantique</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Long Island/Fire Island/Cherry Grove</td>
<td>“Features floor shows, predominantly gay-boys &amp; girls.”</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club 19</td>
<td>Private club/bar</td>
<td>19 W. 19th St.; Chelsea</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coat of Arms</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>140 E. 53rd St.; Midtown East</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coffee Shop</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>3rd Ave. at 51st St.; Midtown East</td>
<td>“After hours place, mixed, casual.”*†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Copper Cup</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>33rd St. at 3rd Ave.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>106 W. 83rd St.</td>
<td>“Reasonable rates, in ‘CPW’ area.”†</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy Corner</td>
<td>Coffeehouse</td>
<td>Christopher Street; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“An all night ‘camp’ coffee shop – younger crowd.”*†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Baths</td>
<td>Bathhouse</td>
<td>On the Boardwalk at Coney Island; Brooklyn/Coney Island</td>
<td>“That old sun-worshiper’s landmark ‘Claret Baths’ was torn down last year and the gay crowd now goes to Cook. Be on your guard, it’s mixed, with a good many trouble makers out to give you a black eye!”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corduroy Club</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>240 W. 38th St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>“Middle-class social club, bring your own drinks. Most active on weekends.”* “A bottle club – bring your own drinks for set-ups. Nice cleanly-run establishment, which now reports well over a thousand members. It’s a quiet and reserved club, crowded weekends.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell’s Pub</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>10 West 32nd Street; Chelsea</td>
<td>“Bar, steaks and chops, mixed.”*†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coronet</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>46 W. 22nd St.; Midtown/Madison</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Square</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Address</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Year(s)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazy Corner</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Pacific and Hoyt St.; Brooklyn—Downtown/Boerum Hill</td>
<td>“Mixed.”* “Mixed, not much action here.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazy Horse</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>149 Bleecker St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“In the Village, featuring a very good female impersonator review. Mixed, suit &amp; tie.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny’s</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>139 Christopher St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Formerly the Buddy Buddy Bar [not Staten Island’s Buddy-Buddy Club], check this lively spot if you haven’t visited it yet. Packed on weekends, with a mixed (not straight and gay, but rather, leather &amp; some sweater) younger crowd.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Den</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>Little W. 12th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Leather crowd.”* “Leather crowd-members only.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dock Restaurant</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Long Island/Fire Island/Cherry Grove</td>
<td>“Gay, colorful eating establishment. Summer only.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dover</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>1201 Lexington Ave.; Upper East Side</td>
<td>“Dancing bar with some ‘trade’, hustlers, etc. It has a faithful following which might seem to indicate something good about it.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earle Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>103 Waverly Place; West Village</td>
<td>“Reasonable.”*</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Baron Club</td>
<td>Private Club</td>
<td>74-02 Eliot Ave.; Queens—Middle Village</td>
<td>“Informal, casual crowd, crowded weekends.”* “Informal, casual crowd, very busy on the weekends. Don’t miss this lively spot if you live in the area. Get a member to sponsor your membership. Predominantly a younger crowd.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>42nd St. and 8th Ave.; Midtown</td>
<td>“Old War and adventure films predominate, which attract many of the leather crowd. 2 balconies Saturday night-standing room”</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernie’s Restaurant‡/Three Ring Circus</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>76 W. 3rd St., MacDougal Street; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>West/Time Square only. *†</td>
<td>Lisa Davis describes “a bar with a straight clientele but a very gay staff and atmosphere.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everard Baths</td>
<td>Bathhouse</td>
<td>28 W. 28th St.; Chelsea</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“A number of Gay Guide publishers have incorrectly spelled the name of this bath house in past issues of their guides – it is Everard, not EVER Hard! Everard is one of the oldest and most popular bath houses in the city.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faller’s Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Christopher &amp; West St.; Greenwich Village/Docks</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“S &amp; M Leather crowd.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Door</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>52nd between 5th and Madison; Midtown°</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fedora’s</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>239 W. 4th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“catered to many homosexual men, they were usually in suits with ties, and there were also straight people from the neighborhood.”*¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finale (Finale Bar in 1969)⁵¹⁵</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>48 Barrow Street; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Dressy, mixed, has bar.”* “Dressy, it’s one of the oldest gay restaurants where the atmosphere is casual and friendly. Their “Shrimp Victoria” is great and reasonably priced.”†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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⁵¹⁴ Meaker, ibid., 12.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restaurant</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Five Oaks</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>49 Grove St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Casual, mixed, with bar in restaurant.”* “Casual, MIXED, with bar in restaurant.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster House</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Long Island/Sayville</td>
<td>“Mixed, suit and tie.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Seasons</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>99 East 52nd Street, Seagram Building; Midtown</td>
<td>“Mixed and very elegant.”* “MIXED, and very posh elegant, upper class clientele.”†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran Bell’s</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Route 9-W; Rockland County/Congers</td>
<td>“Weekends, bar, impersonator show, gay.”* “On weekends there’s an impersonator show, gay crowd.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser’s Restaurant</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>136 Waverly Place; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Mixed, where the gay kids go for dinner before the bar tour.”</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gallery</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>77 Christopher St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Casual, mixed, with bar.”*†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gantry</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>13th Street and 6th Ave., Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“This was a mixed bar of lesbians and gay men, a combination that seldom worked because it was too hard to keep heterosexuals out if men and women were seen going in. Gays required privacy. You never knew when someone from your office, the school you taught in, or one of your clients would stroll in, see you, and conjecture your scene by the crowd you were with, or by your intimate attitude at a table for two.”<em>516  “GIRLS only. Casual.”</em></td>
<td>1950s; 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gianni’s</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>53 W. 19th St; Chelsea;§</td>
<td>Butch-femme bar, site of straight violence in fall 1969.517</td>
<td>Late 1960s early 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Goldbug</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>3rd St. off 6th Ave.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Sweater crowd predominates. Recently opened and is gathering a steady following. Live band, dancing, boys and girls. On</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

516 Meaker, ibid., 137.
The Gold Rail  Bar  2850 Broadway between 110th and 111th; Upper West Side/Morningside Heights  “Casual, informal gay crowd.”*†  1969

The Golden Pheasant  Bar  E. 45th St and 3rd Ave.; Midtown East  “One of the most patronized…almost exclusively by fairies, and it is not uncommon to see as many as a hundred young near-men packed up against the bar without a woman on the premises.”518 Part of the “Bird Circuit” most active in the post-war era until the end of the fifties.519  1940s and 1950s

The Grapevine  Lesbian Bar  300 East 28th Street; 8th St. and 2nd Ave.; Documented also in the East 30s (Meaker)  Possibly two bars, or the bar possibly moved: first citation from “Lesbian History Project of Lesbian and Gay Bars Pre 1970” (LHA 06190); second, “The Grapevine, a trendy lesbian bar, had a raunchy quality to it. On weekends and some busy weeknights, a bouncer took five dollars admission, stamped your wrist with a purple mark, and gave you two drink tickets…[I]t was very popular because it was run by Gwen Saunders and Mia Fabrizzio, veteran barkeeps in the lesbian world. Their names always drew the more affluent and sophisticated women, along with the younger wannabes.”521  1950s; (2) 1958 or 1959

The Great Society  Private club  14th St. and 2nd Ave.; East Village  “Casual, dancing.”*  1968

Greenwich Theatre  Cinema  97 Greenwich Ave.; Greenwich Village  1969

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519 Hurewitz, ibid., 191.
521 Meaker, ibid., 26.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ham and Eggs (2)</th>
<th>Restaurant</th>
<th>Greenwich Village</th>
<th>Two locations</th>
<th>1964</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harris Theatre</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>Times Square; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>Harris, Anco, Liberty, Times Square, and Victory Theatres listed “…nothing of interest, (even if it looks interesting) but trouble, as few, if any, gay kids seem to go here because of past incidents here.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry’s Back East</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>1422 3rd between 80th and 81st; Upper East Side</td>
<td>“Boys and girls, casual, upper East Side patronage.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hayloft</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>835-A Washington St.; Greenwich Village/Meatpacking District</td>
<td>“Membership club – strictly for the LEATHER crowd (located at same address as the “O K” Corral). Open 10 p.m.-4 a.m. nightly. Beer bar.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hayloft</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Grand Ave.; Long Island/Baldwin°</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Howdy Club</td>
<td>Lesbian Nightclub</td>
<td>733 Greenwich St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>According to Lisa Davis, “is the earliest club I know about that hired lesbians as entertainers--strippers, singers like Blackie Dennis, and chorus boys who might serve the first round of drinks, then join the floorshow. They were paid a token $10/night, but made a small fortune in tips. The Howdy dates back to the late 1930s, when many midtown operations that featured strippers and other risqué acts moved downtown to the Village, fleeing from Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia’s attempts to clean up the troublesome Times Square area--target of many subsequent cleanups.”*522</td>
<td>1930s to 1950s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J.B.’s</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>105 W. 13th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Dressy, mixed with bar.”* “Piano bar, it’s quiet and reserved with a casual gay crowd, as well as some of the jacket &amp; tie clientele, which makes this a nice place for sitting and talking with your friends. Has a pool running the length of the dining area to cool your feet in while dining. Bar drinks-75¢. Complete dinners from $3.50.”</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack and Nat’s</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>679 3rd Ave.; Midtown East</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack of Hearts</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>55th St. and 2nd Ave.; Midtown East</td>
<td>“(next door to ‘Gigi’s’ – an after hours spot). Small gay bar with dancing. Primarily local neighborhood patronage.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanie’s Patio</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>48 West 8th St.</td>
<td>“MIXED, dinner, reasonable prices.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius’s</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>159 West 10th Street at Waverly Pl.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Mixed, college crowd, some show business people and athletes.”* “One of the older and very popular bars. Clientele is generally in their 30’s and up, with some show biz people and businessmen.”†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare Restaurant</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>638 6th Avenue; Chelsea/Flatiron</td>
<td>Shut down by S.L.A. in 1959†</td>
<td>1950s(?)-1959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates/Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’s Bar</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>3rd and 5th St.</td>
<td>“a little side street in Greenwich Village”; W. 3rd St. and Thompson</td>
<td>1946-1950; 1958-1959 (1940s and 1950s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Laundry Chute</td>
<td>Coffeehouse</td>
<td>74th St. at Amsterdam St.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>“Casual, mixed, after-hours rendezvous coffee, sandwiches, downstairs entrance.”</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Laurel (or Laurel’s)</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>Vandam St.‡</td>
<td>Mentioned in <em>Zami</em>, one of Lorde’s regular haunts. “like most of the other bars, the tiny tables lining the dance area were first come, first served. Sometimes we’d run into Vida and Pet, two of the few Black gay-girls we knew. They preferred the word ‘dyke’…” Free food with drinks on Sunday, “Many of the gay bars used this to get Sunday afternoon business at a traditionally slow time, but Laurel’s had the best food…every Sunday afternoon at four o’clock, there would be a line of gay-girls in front of Laurel’s, smoking and talking and trying to pretend we had all arrived there at that time by accident…Dancing wasn’t allowed at Laurel’s so it never got to be as popular as the Bag, except on Sunday afternoons.”</td>
<td>ca. late 1950s and possibly early 1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LePonts</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>57th between 2nd and 3rd St.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather Land</td>
<td>Clothing Shop</td>
<td>131 MacDougal St.</td>
<td>“No clothing here, but plenty of LEATHER clothing and home accessories for those who like leather. Leather bracelets,”</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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524 Davis, ibid.
525 Meaker, ibid., 1.
526 Lorde, ibid., 206.
527 Ibid., 221.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Leather Man (still open?)</td>
<td>Clothing Shop</td>
<td>85 Christopher Street</td>
<td>&quot;Are you one of the virile men who enjoy the musky, animal scent of leather next to your skin? Well, look no further -- visit the LEATHER MAN, and choose from a wide selection of unique leather attire. Custom-made leather apparel to your order as well as ready-made items.&quot;†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty Theatre</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>Times Square; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>Harris, Anco, Liberty, Times Square, and Victory Theatres listed &quot;…nothing of interest, (even if it looks interesting) but trouble, as few, if any, gay kids seem to go here because of past incidents here.&quot;†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Intrigue</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>35 W. 56th St.; Midtown</td>
<td>“Gay crowd, piano bar.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Little Club‡</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>No address</td>
<td></td>
<td>40s and 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge</td>
<td>Leather bar</td>
<td>3rd Ave. between E. 53rd and E. 54th St.</td>
<td>The Lodge…was about fifty percent leather.528</td>
<td>1950s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loew’s Sheridan</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>7th Ave. and 12th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Shakedowns: Several movie theatres have been traditional ‘pick-up’ spots since World War II, and many of them hire private policemen. Periodically, these private cops catch someone in the act, or they set up an ‘offense’ much as the City Police used to, to entrap homosexuals. Then, instead of making an arrest, or having an arrest made by a real policeman, they offer to let the ‘guilty’ party or parties go, provided the victim’s wallet is emptied into the cop’s. This has occurred recently at the Loews Sheridan in the Village, and in the past at several 42nd Street theatres.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Love Cage‡</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 1950s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

528 Rubin, ibid., 125.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucky’s</td>
<td>Lesbian  Bar‡</td>
<td>Harlem‡</td>
<td>1940s-1950s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxor Baths</td>
<td>Bathhouse</td>
<td>121 W. 46th St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>229 W. 42nd St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“**We give this theatre top recommendation. It has first-run films, low prices, fairly clean interior, nice management. Wednesday, and especially Saturday nights, it’s standing room only. 2 balconies. Large sweater & college crowd.”**

“Formerly most popular with collegiate crowd, it’s an old auntie’s spot thanks to the new ushers, the fat negro Burns Detective (who no longer works here—see last section for news column), the high prices, discourteous (often cursing) attendants and porters. Still popular on weekends (Fri-Sat) but gay attendance has fallen to less than half. Two balconies. If you feel you have not been treated courteously, as a cash-paying customer, then BY ALL MEANS, COMPLAIN to the manager. If you are physically abused or intimidated, call the police department. Particularly of note since last summer is the 6’ negro usher in the employe of the Lyric management who discharges his duties not with respect and courtesy for the clientele, but has been often so abusive to scores of the paying clientele that jeers are being directed back at him from some of the audience. His language to those standing leaves something to be desired (he called one of our friends a ‘mother-fucker’,) and has gathered quite a reputation as a ‘queer-hater’ (bigotry?) Most shocking was the evening of Dec. 21, 1968 where my lover called a fist-fight (one-way) to my attention as we were leaving, wherein a negro, evidently tipsy and high on something, was standing, pounding on the face of a white (middle-

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aged, COMPLETELY straight, and with two middle-aged companions) seated next to him. Usually when such fights occur, there are cheers from some of the more irresponsible members of the audience. Despite a packed house, the audiences was hushed and what stunned me and others was not the fight, but the ushers reactions. The tall negro usher (mentioned above) and his small, slightly lighter-skinned fellow usher stood in the aisle, steadily holding their flashlights on the assailant (giving him more light to hit his target accurately??) for TWO, perhaps as many as 3-3 ½ minutes, without any attempt to grab the assailant. The little usher even broke out in a smile a couple of times. Some of the observers made comments that reflected their stunned disbelief of the behavior of these ushers. The white man, downstairs in the lobby, talking to the manager, his face a mass of bruises, had cuts (6-7) all over his face and forehead. We feel quite certain that the manager does not KNOWINGLY CONDONE such behavior on the part of his staff, nor would he knowingly retain the services of such people. Certainly the parent company (Brandt) would disapprove of such behavior on the part of it’s help. But until you start acting like men, not mice, and COMPLAIN, these incidents will continue. Sadly, while an emotionally disturbed individual may be discharged from one job, he will merely continue to prey on those he has a phobia against at the next job, UNTIL society institutionalizes and provides PROPER psychiatric care for these very disturbed neurotics.” “Our readers will be pleased to know that the Lyric no longer has the fat, (250 lbs. plus) 6 foot Negro private dick on it’s premises, as of last summer. Involved in numerous shakedowns of gay kids, including one witnessed by a staff member (who also interviewed several of the victims), wherein he thundered (literally) up the steps to the balcony, and failing to nab the intended victims, grabbed two kids seated near the aisle and yanked them by the back of their shirts
through a side exit. After spending over 15 minutes with them at the bottom of the back staircase (which is roped off and not used), and extracting their cash, he let them go. The Lyric seems to have lately replaced him with a younger, private cop who sits in one of the men’s stalls in the tea-room most of the time... (weak bladder???)

Since complaints to either the theatre management or the detective agency providing the private policemen seldom results in action being taken, we suggest you report all such shakedowns to the N.Y. City Police Dept., to help the City Police arrest private detectives, or anyone else who tries to extort money from homosexuals. While there are limits beyond which homosexuals should not go, there are also limits to the conduct in which policemen and others may engage.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MacDougal Tavern</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>MacDougal St. between W. 3rd and W. 4th; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>Butch bar; next to Welcome Inn</td>
<td>1940s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan Towers</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>76th and Broadway; Upper West Side</td>
<td>“Very convenient, quiet, and in a gay neighborhood, with moderate rates.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlton Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>5 W. 8th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Reasonable accommodations, in the Village.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayfair Bar and Grill</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>3 Hyatt Street; Staten Island/Ferry Slip</td>
<td>“Sweater crowd, mixed.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano’s Lounge</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>267 Amsterdam at 72nd St.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>“Casual, mixed, informal neighborhood place, little fun here.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona’s‡</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>No address</td>
<td></td>
<td>1950s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Montero’s Bar &amp; Grill</strong></th>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>73 Atlantic Ave.; Brooklyn—Downtown/Brooklyn Heights</th>
<th>“Mixed, in ‘Heights.’”* “Mixed, in Brooklyn heights area.”†</th>
<th>1968; 1969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mount Morris Baths</strong></td>
<td>Bathhouse</td>
<td>1944 Madison Ave.; Harlem</td>
<td>“In Harlem (colored). At your own risk.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moroccan Village</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>23 W. 8th St. between 5th St. and MacDougal St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Piano bar with dancing. Casual, informal fun people.”*</td>
<td>1952; 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mystique East</strong></td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>256 E. 49th St.; Midtown East</td>
<td>“Informal sweater and college crowd.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Nautilus</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>267-269 W. 23rd St.; Chelsea</td>
<td>“Nightclub, bar and restaurant, reservations are needed for dinner. Mixed, dressy.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nero’s Nook</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>18th St. and 2nd Ave.; Chelsea</td>
<td>“Fairly new gay bar, Clientele seems to be primarily in their 30’s and up. Casual atmosphere.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The New Gallery</strong></td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>15 E. 11th St. (see Van Rensselaer Hotel); Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Opens 10 PM. nightly. Dancing, casual.”*†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Yorker Theatre</strong></td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>2409 Broadway; Upper West Side</td>
<td></td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Night Cap</strong></td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>234 Jerusalem Ave.; Long Island—</td>
<td>“Dancing”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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531 Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*, 313.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restaurant/Bar</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Ninth Circle Restaurant</td>
<td>Hempstead</td>
<td>“Bar, with all the free peanuts you can eat. Downstairs has the steak house (medium prices). Interesting, varied patrons. Mixed clientele.”*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The O.K. Corral Bar</td>
<td>Greenwich Village/Meatpacking District</td>
<td>“Leather crows (the ‘Hayloft,’ a private club at the same address). Popular bar for the leather set. Full course meals are served nightly from 7 to 11 PM.”*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean Club Private club</td>
<td>Ocean Boulevard; Long Island—Hempstead/Atlantic Beach</td>
<td>“Mixed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Old Vic Bar</td>
<td>Upper East Side</td>
<td>“Very popular dance bar. Try to avoid on weekends, as it’s very crowded.”*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Old Place Bar</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“it was a gay dance bar, a world of difference, as one would have been hard put to find a straight person in that seedy, out-of-the-way basement bar. And when I say the place was gay, I don’t mean it was anything like what came later, in the sex-crazed seventies, the pre-AIDS period when you sniffed poppers, snorted coke, and had sex on the dance floors….No, the Old Place was sweet and innocent, more limp-wristed than S&amp;M or pseudo-macho, and it was about as wild as a high school prom of years past.” ca. 1955-1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Sargent’s Clothing Shop</td>
<td>165 W. 4th St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.J. Boutique (Two locations) Clothing shop</td>
<td>Greenwich Village and 983</td>
<td>“Large selection of latest styles in men’s fashions, including a line of more conventional clothes for the smartly man about town.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Third Ave./Upper East Side</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>204 E. 18th St. between 2nd and 3rd Aves.; East Side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Page Three</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>W. 10th St. at 7th Ave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam-Pam</td>
<td>Bar; Listed as coffeehouse in 1969</td>
<td>95 7th Ave. South at Grove and Bleecker; West Village°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline’s Interlude</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>2267 7th Ave. between 133rd and 134th St.; Harlem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Penthouse (Westover Hotel)</td>
<td>Private Club</td>
<td>253 W. 72nd St.; Upper West Side</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

532 Ibid.
533 Lorde, ibid., 244
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restaurant/Business</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Picadilly</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Montague Street; Brooklyn/Brooklyn Heights</td>
<td>“Gay (predominantly) restaurant in Brooklyn Heights.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgram (?) Bar</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>49 E. 10th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Dressy, with bar, mixed crowd.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Room, Plaza Hotel (listed as Plaza Hotel Men’s Bar in GSG)</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>5th Ave. and 59th St.; Midtown</td>
<td>“unique cruising opportunities…”534 “Elegant, mixed, hustlers.”* “MIXED, with some hustlers and ‘trade.’ Elegant.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pony Stable Inn 535</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>150 W. 4th St.536</td>
<td>“Source – Susan Ainge” From “Lesbian History Project of Lesbian and Gay Bars Pre 1970”‡ Also mentioned by Allen Ginsberg as a “dyke bar” where he met Gregory Corso in 1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post and Coach Inn</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>8th Ave. &amp; 41st St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>“mixed restaurant, but recommended here because of it’s excellent food at very reasonable prices, and because it’s located at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. If you’ll take a table at the rear, you’ll be able to also enjoy, (through the glass windows that open directly into the Port Authority main ticket floor), such delightful delicacies as ‘sea-food’ and lively young spring chickens, as they pas by your view. The front of the restaurant opens toward 40th Street, where you’ll see many of the young hustlers at work.”†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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535 Lorde, ibid., 177, 222, 240, 241, 249, 253.
536 Lost Womyn’s Space: Pony Stable Inn (http://lostwomynspace.blogspot.com/2011/06/pony-stable-inn.html); long episode mentions an unsourced Ginsberg quote, possibly from the documentary about Corso’s life, “Corso.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greene Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>“around the corner” from the 181 on 2nd Ave.</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rat Race Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>76th St. and 1st Ave.</td>
<td>“Piano bar downstairs, dancing upstairs, with a casual crowd.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Swing*/Red Velvet Swing†</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>57 Lexington Ave. at 25th St.; East Side</td>
<td>“College crowd, informal fun place.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red’s Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>E. 50th Street at 3rd Ave.; Midtown East</td>
<td>Part of the “Bird Circuit” most active in the post-war era until the end of the fifties. “Red’s had been a speakeasy since the twenties, and as the Second World War approached, it became increasingly popular with gay men, an absolute must on any night out.”†</td>
<td>Post-1945 and 1950s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rene’s Cozy Corner Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>234 Main Street; Long Island—Hempstead</td>
<td>“Sweater crowd.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Roost Restaurant</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Cornelia Street</td>
<td>“It’s MIXED, dressy, meals are a bit higher priced than most, but worth it.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan’s Tavern Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>676 Fulton Street; Long Island/Hempstead</td>
<td>“Predominantly gay crowd.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandpiper Bar</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Long Island/Fire Island Pines</td>
<td>“Gay bikini crowd, summertime only.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauna Bath &amp; Health Club</td>
<td>Bathhouse</td>
<td>18 W. 58th St.; Midtown*</td>
<td>300 W. 58th St.; Midtown West†</td>
<td>“Recently opened at this new location—...and now consists of an entire floor, with air conditioned lounge, suana bath, and a large dormitory. The price has been increased by only 50¢.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>132 W. 45th St.;</td>
<td>“Clean, safe, double room is $5. A ‘no questions asked’ hotel.”*†</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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537 Lait and Mortimer, ibid., 314.
538 Hurewitz, ibid., 191.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sea Colony</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>8th Ave. and Horatio St.</td>
<td>“Girls bar, survivor of every ‘clean-up’ campaign to date. Casual, relaxed atmosphere.”</td>
<td>1950s and 1960s, 1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sea Shack</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Lewis Walk; Long Island/Fire Island Pines</td>
<td>“Gay, dancing, bikini crowd; Summer only.”</td>
<td>1964; 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Floor (see L’Intrigue)</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>35 W. 56th; Midtown West/Theater District</td>
<td>“Formerly listed as ‘L’Intrigue’, this piano bar has a steady clientele. Mostly sweater and older ‘suit &amp; tie’ crowd. Also has a juke-box for dancing. Elegant (rather garish) decor.”</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selwyn</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>239 W. 42nd St. (listed as 229 W. 42nd St. in 1969)</td>
<td>“Missed a film at the Lyric? See it here the next week. Similar crowd to that at Lyric, but a smaller theatre with just one balcony.” “Similar to Lyric as far as ‘UP-TIGHT’ new ushers go-only MORE SO. Many incidents reported here-(several witnessed by this writer)-space does not permit us to relate any here.”</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serendipity General Store</td>
<td>Coffeehouse</td>
<td>225 E. 60th St.; Upper East Side</td>
<td>“Mixed, ‘after-hours’ malt shop, with kookie &amp; kicky novelties &amp; gimcracks for sale.” “:: …The most ‘way-out’ soft drink concoctions you’ve ever seen!”</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Steps Down</td>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>Unknown, probably Seventh Ave.</td>
<td>Mentioned in Zami; “raided in the sixties” according to LHA Bars‡</td>
<td>ca. 1950s and 1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sewer</td>
<td>Private Club</td>
<td>11 E. 16th St.;</td>
<td>“Located in the basement. This club (which opened in late August,</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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540 Lorde, ibid., 240.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sham Shop</td>
<td>Clothing store</td>
<td>150 W. 10th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>&quot;A gift and novelty shop, especially for the leather set. They carry a gift to calm all marital woes. It's a CAT-O-NINE-TALKS featuring a pink handle with nine lengths of manila hemp, that have swishy pink bows at each end.&quot;†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw’s (Rubin suggests that Shaw’s opened at the site of the Swan)</td>
<td>Leather bar</td>
<td>E. 50s and 3rd Ave.</td>
<td>According to a Gay Men S&amp;M Activists Panel cited by Rubin, “It was owned by the same gentleman who also had something called the Blue Parrot and the Golden Pheasant. They were all sort of fluff bars, the last two. Shaw’s was really the only one that catered to S&amp;M, though you could find it if you looked hard enough.” According to another Rubin interviewee, Thom Magister, “The most notorious bar in that period was Shaw’s. It was a narrow little bar that gave you the feeling you were inside of a bus…You would come in the front door and the bar was full of filthy, dirty, scuzzy paraphernalia hanging from the ceilings.” 541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shed House</td>
<td>Clothing shop</td>
<td>184 W. 4th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shore House</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Ludlam Ave.; Long Island—Bayville</td>
<td>“Mixed, suit and tie, in Nassau Co.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Dollar</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>163 Christopher St.</td>
<td>“Mixed restaurant, open 24 hours-closed Sat. nights. Reasonable prices.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Skull</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>421 W. 13th St.; Greenwich Village/Meatpacking District</td>
<td>“Membership. This is strictly a leather ‘S &amp; M’ crowd. If you dig chains, you’ll like the crowd at the SKULL.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snooky’s</td>
<td>Lesbian bar</td>
<td>Unknown, possibly</td>
<td>Mentioned in Zami. 542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

542 Lorde, ibid., 221.
| **St. Mark’s Russian and Turkish Baths** | **Bathhouse** | 6 St. Mark’s Place; East Village | “Most activity on third floor up. Swimming pool, Swedish massage, open 24 hours.”*† | 1968, 1969 |
| **Stage 45** | **Bar** | 305 W. 45th; Midtown | “Jacket required.”* “A MIXED crowd, jacket & tie is required.”† | 1968, 1969 |
| **The Stone Wall** | **Bar** | 53 Christopher Street; Greenwich Village | “One of the most active spots in town currently. Very crowded on weekends. Casual.”* “It continues operating amid persistent rumors of closing. Caters to a younger crowd who seem to spend all their time perfecting their dancing. Observers note that ‘go-go boys’ installed on platforms have failed to attract the dwindling crowds…I (the following news item was reported in the March 1968 Mattachine (N.Y.) Newsletter, and is presented here in condensed form…the Matatachine Society Inc., of New York was instrumental in aiding D.A. Frank Hogan’s office with information that led to the arrests of a number of blackmalers): - ‘Edward F. P. Murphy, an ex-convict who is alleged to have been the head of the national ring which recently was active in extorting money from homosexuals…has served prison terms for larceny and for carrying deadly weapons, and was arrested for impersonating an officer, and for extortion. …under Federal indictment on extortion charges…permitted to plead guilty and received a five-year probation. On a number of indictments in the State courts, Murphy pleaded guilty on May 16, 1966…sentencing has been postponed six times…he could get up to 15 years in prison as a second offender, on the robbery charge alone. MSNY has also been informed that Murphy has an interest in the Stone Wall, a club on Christopher Street, and several other gay clubs in New York.’ We caution our | 1968, 1969 |
readers NEVER to use your real name when cruising, NEVER to give your address to a questionable bar or club, and remember that trick of hustler you’ve just picked up may be ‘working’ for the management! We urge you, if you’ve been intimidated or blackmailed in the past, to report it to the D.A.’s office, or to M.S.N.Y. -

| Steve Carney’s | Bar | 2nd Ave. between 80th and 81st St.; Upper West Side | “Gay, bar, casual.”* | 1968 |
| The Swan Club | Bar | 780 Third Ave.; Midtown East | Part of the “Bird Circuit” most active in the post-war era until the end of the fifties 543 | 1940s and 1950s |
| The Swing Rendezvous | Lesbian bar | Unknown, Village, possibly 7th Ave. | Mentioned in Zami 544 | ca. late 1950s and 1960s |
| Table Top Club | Private club | 93rd and 3rd Ave.; Upper East Side | “Dancing, bottle club, casual.”* | 1968 |
| Table Tops, Inc. | Private Club | 2226 Third Ave.; Upper East Side | “Boys & girls; it’s a must for our uptown readers. Open every night except Mondays. For amusement they have billiard tables, baseball games, bowling, shuffleboard games, chess, checkers, television etc. Dancing, bottle club, casual.”† | 1969 |
| The Tel-Star | Private Club | 148 Washington Street; Downtown | “Membership, casual college crowd, very active on weekends. Dancing.”† | 1969 |
| Tenth of Always | Bar | 375 Bleecker St.; 82 W. 3rd St.; | “Mixed college crowd, casual.”* “An after-hours, casual college crowd.”*† | 1968, 1969 |

543 Hurewitz, ibid., 191.
544 Ibid., 221, 241.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address/Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>3rd Avenue El Restaurant</td>
<td>985 3rd Ave.; East Side</td>
<td>“Dinner, bar, casual, mixed crowd.”*†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Times Square Motor Inn</td>
<td>43rd St. and 3rd Ave.; Midtown/Times Square</td>
<td>“Close to Times Square area, with moderate rates.”*†</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>Times Square Theatre</td>
<td>Times Square; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>Harris, Anco, Liberty, Times Square, and Victory Theatres listed “…nothing of interest, (even if it looks interesting) but trouble, as few, if any, gay kids seem to go here because of past incidents here.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Bar</td>
<td>Tony Pastor’s Downtown‡</td>
<td>130 W. Third St.</td>
<td>Liquor license revoked by State Liquor Authority on February 28, 1967 because the spot “permitted the licensed premises to become disorderly in that it permitted homosexuals, degenerates and undesirables to be on the license premises and conduct themselves in an indecent manner.”†</td>
<td>1930s-1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>The Tool Box</td>
<td>507 West St.; Greenwich Village/The Docks</td>
<td>“Casual gay leather set. Open daily 8 p.m., Sat-Sun at 3 p.m.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Club</td>
<td>The Top of the Town (33rd Floor, Sheraton Towers Hotel)</td>
<td>811 7th Ave.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>“Very popular dancing bar that has a predominantly younger crowd. (No wild types) and some of the ‘Geritol’ set.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Tor’s Restaurant</td>
<td>21 Greenwich Ave.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Casual, gay crowd.”* “Casual, predominantly gay crowd. Dinner, sandwiches, malts, etc.”†</td>
<td>1968; 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Trude Heller’s</td>
<td>6th Ave. at 9th St.</td>
<td>“Mixed, live entertainment.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two Penny Club</td>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>36 E. 30th Street; Midtown/Madison Square</td>
<td>“Primarily college crowd. Clean modern atmosphere, 3 floors, one for boys, one for girls, and lounge. Dancing. Occasionally, some show business people, and celebrities.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Turtles</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>27th Street between Park and Lexington; Midtown/Madison Square</td>
<td>“Informal, sweater set.”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Sam</td>
<td>Clothing store</td>
<td>110 W. 45th St.; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>“The leather set will be interested to know that ‘Uncle’ carries such interesting items as whips, cats, etc., and once one ventures into the shop, many more subtle items will intrigue our readers who are partial to ‘S &amp; M.’”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val’s</td>
<td>Private Club</td>
<td>421 W. 13th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Recently opened, members only. A young collegiate group, casual, dancing.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Rensselaer Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>15 E. 11th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Washington Sq. area, in the Village, every room with private bath, T.V., etc. Cocktail lounge.”*</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Theatre</td>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>Times Square; Midtown West/Times Square</td>
<td>Harris, Anco, Liberty, Times Square, and Victory Theatres listed “…nothing of interest, (even if it looks interesting) but trouble, as few, if any, gay kids seem to go here because of past incidents here.”†</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Village Green</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“…an old Greenwich Village restaurant, newly soliciting a gay clientele. Restaurateurs sometimes sought a gay dinner crowd who would stay on to drink, and attract late-night drinkers, as well. They would hire a popular gay piano man. Sometimes these places caught on, but mostly they didn’t last because the police would pressure them with payoffs.”547</td>
<td>1950s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Village Squire, Inc.</td>
<td>Clothing shop</td>
<td>59 W. 8th St.; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Fashions that are so way out that they’re ‘in’. You may have seen the many pages of coverage given to the interesting styles this shop</td>
<td>1968, 1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

547 Meaker, ibid., 38.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Village Squire to Boot</strong></th>
<th><strong>Clothing shop</strong></th>
<th>61 W. 8th St.; West Village</th>
<th>“Second location expanded in 1969 at 49 W. 8th St. and the first location renamed “Village Squire, Jr.”” has come up with in various issues of ‘The Young Physique,’ and ‘Muscleboy’ mags.”*†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Waldorf-Astoria Men’s Bar</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>301 Park Ave.; Midtown°</td>
<td>“Bill Miller has opened a boot shop, with décor built around a collection of ‘old’ light fixtures used with barn siding and a handsome black and red wall-to-wall carpet. Prices are from the middle 20’s and up.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Washington Square</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lesbian Bar</strong></td>
<td>675 Broadway; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Girls Bar, casual.”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Washington Square Lounge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>679 Broadway; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>“Dancing, live band, entertainment, mixed.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Waverly Theatre</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cinema</strong></td>
<td>6th Ave. &amp; 3rd St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welcome Inn</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lesbian bar</strong></td>
<td>Bleecker between W. 3rd and W. 4th; Greenwich Village</td>
<td>Lesbian bar; primarily femme, next to MacDougal Tavern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Y.M.C.A. McBurney Branch</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hotel</strong></td>
<td>215 W. 23rd St.; Chelsea</td>
<td>“Many of our young gay acquaintances live here.”†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Y.M.C.A.-West Side Branch</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hotel</strong></td>
<td>5 W. 63rd St.; Upper West Side</td>
<td>“the 9th and 10th floors are notorious as a homosexual whorehouse.”† “A goodly portion of attractive gay Manhattan worked out at the West Side Y, and I never went to the Y without the expectation I</td>
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549 Lait and Mortimer, ibid., 314.
might go home with someone afterward. At least I usually got a telephone number or two for future reference.”
“Centrally located in mid-town Manhattan. By day or by week.”*
“...We have reports that the management has been putting on the ‘heat’ on clientele it considers undesirable, throwing out a hundred clients in a period of one month alone. Not recommended at this time.”†

| Y.M.C.A.-William Sloane House | Hotel | 356 W. 34th St.; Midtown | “Residence, day or week, close to Times Square, theatre district, Lincoln Center, shopping area.”* “Residence, day or week. 600 resident rooms, 3 body-building rooms, two swim pools, Suana bath, massage and over a million dollars in other health-improvement facilities. Their ad in the Village Voice last summer, ‘Cool it, Man – at the West Side “Y”’, had a gorgeous teenage physique model in a few poses, with the accompanying by-line ‘A real Swinging Place for People of All Ages.’ If you want to join the action, write Arthur J. Cunningham, Director: Membership Dept. at the address above. Location is ideal-near Lincoln Center, theatre district and Times Square.”† | 1968, 1969 |
| Yukon Bar | Bar | 140 E. 53rd St. between Lexington and 3rd Ave; Midtown | “Informal, gay sweater crowd.”* “Casual-collegiate.”† | 1968 |

* Gay Scene Guide, 1968  
† Gay Scene Guide, 1969  
° The Lavender Baedeker, 1964  
‡ Lesbian Herstory Archive, “Lesbian History Project of Lesbian and Gay Bars Pre 1970” (LHA 06190)

On the Bird Circuit, Gayle Rubin cites Bob Milne, who recalled that “in the fifties and before I came here there was something called the Bird Circuit and those three bars were S&M, very much underground… The Bird Circuit was three bars and they were all in Third
Avenue, Lexington Avenue, and the forties and fifties…I remember the El was up at that time and Third Avenue was kind of honky-tonk and run down and has greatly changed since they took the El down…and anyway, the Golden Pheasant was one and the Swan was the other one. The Swan was perhaps the most known by this very underground system.”

**Bird Bars quote may have come from Allan Helms, see p. 127 on 405 E. 55th, “405 was called ‘four out of five’ because of the many gay tenants who lived there, but the building was better known as a place where celebrities lived.”

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*Village Voice.* Google News Archive.

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**Appendix B**


