





**Homosexuality in the City:**  
A Century of Research at  
the University  
of Chicago

**Chad C. Heap**

*With an Introduction by George Chauncey*

Partial support for this publication was provided by the University of Chicago Lesbian and Gay Studies Project with funds from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.

1500 copies of this catalogue were published in conjunction with an exhibition held in the Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library  
September 14, 2000 – December 15, 2000

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ISBN: 0-943056-26-8

## Acknowledgements

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"Homosexuality in the City: A Century of Research at the University of Chicago" places 100 years of academic inquiry into the context of changing social and political circumstances. In charting shifting disciplinary frameworks for the study of homosexuality, the exhibition illustrates the broad array of potential sources in the Library's collections supporting research in this field. The University of Chicago Library is delighted to recognize the work of students and faculty presented in "Homosexuality in the City," who contributed to the growth of scholarship and of the Library's collections.

The exhibition was proposed by George Chauncey, Professor of History and chair of the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project of the Center for Gender Studies, to coincide with "The Future of the Queer Past: A Transnational History Conference." He provided untiring and invaluable advice and counsel at every stage of the project, from the broadest level of shaping the theme and defining the scope to details of item selection and descriptive narrative. Chad Heap, Assistant Professor in the American Studies Department at the George Washington University, curated the exhibition. His recently completed dissertation in the Department of History at the University of Chicago, "'Slumming': Sexuality, Race and Urban Commercial Leisure, 1900-1940," provided excellent historical and theoretical background for astute selection and elegant interpretation. Jay Satterfield, Special Collections Reader Services Librarian, artfully coordinated the research and edited the exhibition text; and he prepared the "Note on Sources" and section relating to the Library's collections. Frank Conaway, Social Sciences Bibliographer, and Sem Sutter, Assistant Director for Humanities and Social Sciences, offered helpful suggestions. Valarie Brocato, Special Collections Exhibition and Preservation Manager, produced the exhibition and publication with skill and sensitivity.

On behalf of the University of Chicago Library, I express deep appreciation to all those who contributed to the success of this exciting project and helped to identify areas for future collection growth and development.

**Alice Schreyer**

*Curator of Special Collections*



## Introduction

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"Homosexuality in the City" was organized in conjunction with "The Future of the Queer Past: A Transnational History Conference" held at the University of Chicago on September 14–17, 2000. With 200 historians from around the world speaking on 50 panels, this was the largest lesbian, gay, and queer history conference to date.

The conference and exhibition mark the coming of age of a new field of history. In the mid-1980s, when I began my dissertation at Yale on pre-World War II gay male culture, I knew of only one other graduate student in the country writing a lesbian or gay history dissertation. In 1991, when the University of Chicago's Department of History hired me as an assistant professor, it became only the second history department in the country to offer a tenure-track appointment to a candidate with a gay history dissertation. (A decade earlier, the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, became the first when it hired John D'Emilio, now at the University of Illinois, Chicago.) So few graduate students explored gay history in part because faculty warned them that such research questions were outside the boundaries of acceptable historical inquiry and would endanger the students' careers.

The field has dramatically expanded and become more accepted and influential among historians since then. Historians who a decade ago would have ignored or suppressed evidence of homosexuality in their research are now more likely to explore its implications for the historical processes they study and to include such issues in their courses. There are now eight graduate students planning or writing dissertations bearing on lesbian and gay history in the history department at the University of Chicago alone, on topics ranging from the history of black gay life on Chicago's South Side, the sexual and racial politics of early twentieth-century urban culture, and immigration and sexuality, to the influence of American gay activists on the Canadian gay movement in the 1970s and the development of lesbian feminist cultural politics in the 1970s and 80s. A growing number of graduate students as well as tenured scholars around the country have taken up the subject of gay history in the last decade, and the literature of the field is developing rapidly. The next wave of books based on dissertations has just begun to appear, including James Green's history of homosexuality in twentieth-century Brazil, Jennifer Terry's history of American medical discourse, and John Howard's study of homosexuality in the rural, postwar South—all recently published by the University of Chicago Press. Although the



Photograph of unknown man in drag [1930s]. Ernest W. Burgess Papers, box 98, folder 3.



job market remains perilous for students whose dissertations are in this area, the situation is improving. Indeed, the two most advanced of the Chicago students recently secured tenure-track faculty appointments: Chad Heap, who curated this exhibition, at the George Washington University, and David Churchill, one of the Queer Past conference organizers, at the University of Manitoba. The contrast with the situation a mere decade ago could not be greater.

The first task of the field was to begin reconstructing the hidden history of the everyday life, social networks, cultural practices, and political movements of lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people. But the most fundamental—and counterintuitive—finding of recent scholarship is that homosexual and heterosexual identities themselves are historically-specific ways of understanding ourselves, no matter how universal, natural, and timeless they may seem today. Research has shown that ways of understanding sexual practices and identities have varied widely throughout history and across cultures. Given the importance of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and sexuality itself as sources of personal and collective identity and of political conflict in contemporary societies, understanding their historical emergence is a task of crucial importance.

Queer historical research has also changed the way we think about other historical problems. Learning that more homosexuals than communists were purged from the State Department during the McCarthy era forces us to reassess the politics of Cold War American culture. The fact that three societies and political regimes we normally think of as diametrically opposed—Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, and Roosevelt's America—all launched major crackdowns on gay life in the 1930s forces us to rethink the political and cultural logic of that tumultuous era. As is often the case, the discoveries made by scholars in a new field such as this not only add to our existing base of knowledge but change the way we think about phenomena we thought we already understood.

This exhibition and conference signal the growing strength of lesbian, gay, and queer studies at the University of Chicago. The Lesbian and Gay Studies Project of the Center for Gender Studies, founded in 1997, coordinates the biweekly Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies Workshop, brings speakers to campus, supports interdisciplinary research projects, and organizes conferences such as this one. Building on the strength of the University of Chicago's Graduate Divisions, its primary mission has been to train, support, and place the next generation of scholars in the field. Support from the University, alumni, and friends has made it possible to provide essential assistance to graduate

students writing dissertations in lesbian, gay, and queer studies, including two year-long fellowships and several dissertation research grants.

"Homosexuality in the City" helps put recent developments in a longer historical perspective. It reminds us that the city of Chicago has a rich queer history, whose full story still awaits its historian. We get intriguing glimpses of the diverse lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender cultures that flourished in Chicago and other major cities in the early twentieth century: the lesbian salons that drew crowds of sightseers to Towertown in the 1920s (long before this bohemian district became known as the Magnificent Mile), the groups of "degenerate" hobos and newspaper boys who gathered in Grant Park and published their own newspaper, the drag entertainers on Chicago's South Side in the 1930s, and the extensive gay bar scene that took shape in the 1950s and 60s.

It also reminds us that we dare not imagine gay history as a steadily progressive tale of growing acceptance and visibility, since gay life here—as in New York and many other cities—was more open and tolerated in the 1920s Jazz Age than it was in the more repressive climate brought on by the Depression and Cold War in the 1930s–50s. The latter decades witnessed a series of sex crime panics that depicted homosexuals as threats to the nation's security and its children, wholesale purges of homosexuals from federal employment, and a series of police crackdowns which resulted in the arrest and resignation under pressure of at least a handful of gay faculty at Chicago (one of whose cases is documented in this exhibition).

Perhaps most surprising, even for those of us who have been building the gay studies program here for a decade, the exhibition reveals that research on homosexuality at the University of Chicago has a long history—and one profoundly influenced by broader shifts in intellectual and political trends. Indeed, the University of Chicago, long recognized as the birthplace of American urban sociology, must henceforth also be recognized as a deeply influential pioneer in the sociological study of homosexuality. Prominent faculty such as Ernest W. Burgess and their students decided as a matter of course to make research on the social organization of homosexuality a part of their study of urban culture in the 1920s and 30s. While some of these scholars had a benign view of homosexuality, their social theories depicted it as one of the many social pathologies produced by urbanism, and their studies were frequently tied to the policing of homosexuality in an era when social research often served the interests of social control.

Strikingly, though, many eminent sociologists who were trained at Chicago, including Howard Becker, John Gagnon, Erving Goffman, William Simon, and Edwin Sutherland, went on to develop pioneering critiques of the demonization of homosexuals and other social outcasts in the 1950s. Their work reminds us that while conservative psychoanalysts, psychologists, and police officials dominated the public discussion and legislative hearings concerning homosexuality in the postwar years, with catastrophic effects for gay men and lesbians, at least some sociologists criticized their stigmatization of homosexuals. Moreover, a number of graduate students here, most prominently the anthropologist Esther Newton, conducted innovative research on the culture of gay men that was keenly sensitive to how their culture was shaped by the repressive climate in which it emerged. Much of their research was sponsored by the anthropologist David Schneider, who had little interest in the subject himself but whose open-minded and passionate curiosity about the world represented the best of the University's intellectual traditions.

What has always distinguished research on homosexuality at the University of Chicago has been its attentiveness to the social context and organization of same-sex practices, identities, and cultures, even when psychological studies came to dominate such inquiry in the 1950s and literary studies did so in the 1990s. Indeed, although the theoretical perspectives and moral judgments of the early twentieth-century sociologists were dramatically different from those of gay studies scholars here today, the earlier generation's research, appropriately reevaluated and contextualized, has already provided an important source for the reconstruction of Chicago's and the nation's queer history. The century of research on homosexuality in the city documented in this exhibition will also prove invaluable for a large-scale, multi-year interdisciplinary research project on the historical development and ethnographic, cultural, and political complexity of the city's racially and ethnically segregated queer worlds, which is still in the early planning stages by Lesbian and Gay Studies Project faculty.

I am grateful to the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library for responding so enthusiastically to my proposal that they host this exhibition on the occasion of "The Future of the Queer Past" history conference. I regard their support for this project—as well as the Library's ongoing commitment to developing a research collection in this field—as important signs of the University's support for lesbian, gay, and queer studies.

The sobering lesson of "Homosexuality in the City" is that we cannot take the recent effervescence of gay studies here or elsewhere for granted. This exhibition restores to history a rich tradition of earlier research and symbolizes the academy's new openness to such inquiry. The evolution of social science research perspectives it illuminates gives us a deeper understanding of the genealogy of current research interests and theoretical perspectives. But the very fact that most of us will find the history it documents so startling and unexpected reminds us how effectively the memory of the earlier generation's research was erased in the postwar years. Our task is both to reconstruct this history and to build on it.

**George Chauncey**

*Professor of History*

# Homosexuality in the City: A Century of Research at the University of Chicago

**The University of Chicago** has become a major center for research in lesbian, gay and queer studies in recent years, as faculty and students in the social sciences and humanities have turned to these topics in growing numbers. This development is usually seen as a product of the social and political advances that lesbians and gay men have achieved during the past several decades, but the study of homosexual life and culture is hardly a new phenomenon at the University. Rather it is a field with a long and complicated history on campus—one that has been shaped as much by the social and political climate of the city and nation as by the disciplinary fields in which it has been pursued.

The study of homosexuality began largely as a medical enterprise during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In this literature, the people we have now come to think of as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender were often grouped together as “sexual perverts” or “inverts.” In the United States, the study of homosexuality so-named dates to 1892, the year in which the term *homosexual* was first used in print by an American physician, Dr. James G. Kiernan of Chicago. Sexological studies by Kiernan and other local physicians soon established the city as a major center for American sex research, while fostering an intellectual atmosphere that legitimated further academic inquiry into homosexuality in Chicago and on university campuses across the country. Situated primarily within a medical and psychoanalytic framework, these studies profoundly shaped Americans’ understanding of homosexuality throughout much of the twentieth century.

While such scholarship influenced faculty and students at the University, what distinguished the Chicago study of homosexuality from that at other research institutions, almost from the beginning, was its endeavor to situate the phenomenon within a social and cultural context. As early as 1910, scholars at the University began to grapple with the complicated relationship between homosexuality and the urban environment. Building on their training in sociology

Peter

1. Self consciousness  
Ill at ease, nervous, jittery  
Forced religion, altar boy
2. Meek
3. Sensitive -- high voice, boys made fun of him
4. Seclusiveness  
Lack of interaction with boys and their games  
~~Family situation~~
5. Family situation  
Unwanted child  
Nervous and upset, mistreated
6. Neatness -- could not stand to be dirty
7. Gentle  
Household  
Girls games  
Dislike for rough games  
Obedience
8. Withdrawal patterns not well developed  
Slightly developed, we get a certain amount.
9. No indifference.
10. Anxiety traits, crying
11. Introspection
12. Feeling of difference from other boys.

"Sissy"  
voice high  
played with girls  
also will be  
crystal, hand and  
femaleness

Awakening: "coming out"  
small city of 7500  
induced by homosexual individual

Role in homosexual world  
aloof elegant role  
long affair: husband relation  
not promiscuous

and social reform, they explored the city's emerging sexual subcultures to create new disciplinary perspectives on lesbians and homosexual men and sometimes deployed this new knowledge, in turn, to help discipline the same individuals. The resulting scholarship laid the groundwork for current analyses of the social construction of sexual identities, practices and cultures, even though a surprising amount of it—especially the reams of research generated during the heyday of urban sociology in the 1920s and '30s—has been largely forgotten.

As with most fledgling academic fields, the development of Chicago's pioneering social and cultural approach to the study of homosexuality progressed unevenly. After an explosion of such research in the relaxed social and intellectual climate of the 1920s and early '30s, the field came to a virtual standstill as Depression and Cold War-era social and political anxieties ushered in a period of more conservative academic inquiry. In this repressive era of sex crime panics and red scares, the psychological study of homosexuality, which usually characterized gay men and lesbians as unstable, potentially dangerous threats to the social fabric, grew in prominence at many research institutions. But the Chicago faculty largely abstained from such analyses and left this field of research until the early 1950s, when scholars affiliated with the Department of Sociology began to challenge the Cold War demonization of homosexuality by analyzing the process by which social "deviance" and norms were labeled and policed. In the 1960s, as intellectual and political restraints began to diminish, urban anthropologists and ethnographers at the University further enhanced Chicago's distinctive social approach to the study of homosexuality by incorporating a greater emphasis on the role that culture—its meanings, performances and symbols—played in shaping popular conceptions of gay men and lesbians.

Since the 1970s, amid the rapid advance of lesbian and gay political activism and scholarly inquiry, University faculty, students and alumni have sustained Chicago's rich tradition of social and cultural studies of homosexuality. In recent years, clusters of sociologists, anthropologists and historians, as well as growing numbers of scholars in the humanities, have made significant contributions to the increasingly transnational field of lesbian, gay and queer studies. Although lesbians and gay men remain a primary focus of study, University faculty and students have broadened their research to explore a wider range of counter-normative—or queer—identities, politics and cultures.

This essay and the exhibition it accompanies portray major trends in the study of homosexuality at the University over the past century, while simultaneously examining the University's role in the policing of homosexuality in Chicago and the ways in which local political developments have influenced academic inquiry. Because it documents research undertaken at the University during previous decades, the exhibition reflects many of the characteristics of that research: a tendency to focus on men rather than women, on whites rather than people of color, and on homosexuals rather than bisexuals or transgender individuals. In addition, because it presents historical documents in their unedited original, it is sprinkled with racist, sexist and homophobic stereotypes long prevalent in American culture.

*The preparation of this exhibition has truly been a collaborative effort. I am especially grateful to George Chauncey for his significant and invaluable contributions to the conceptualization and revision of the exhibition and catalog text. I must express my gratitude for the extraordinary insight provided through conversations and correspondence with a number of University alumni, including Howard S. Becker, Murray S. Edelman, Ruth Padnos Fishman, John H. Gagnon, Doug Mitchell, Harvey Molotch, Esther Newton and James M. Sacks, as well as for the assistance of scholars such as Andrew Abbott, Elizabeth Kennedy, Joanne Meyerowitz, Peter Nardi, James Polchin, Taylor Stoehr and Susan Stryker, whose shared research and insights provided a framework for my own. Finally, thanks are due to Wallace Best, David Johnson, Bryan Smith and Rebecca Zorach.*



## CHICAGO: A CENTER OF AMERICAN SEXOLOGY

### Sexologists Define “Sexual Perversion” in the City

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, sex outside attempts to procreate—whether practiced by same- or different-sex partners—was viewed primarily as an immoral act committed by individuals whose sinful practices did not make them fundamentally different from other women and men. Beginning in the late 1860s, however, European and American physicians began to challenge this belief. Subjecting non-reproductive sex to the “scientific” study of sexology, they argued that such “sexual perversions” were not the result of failed moral restraint, but the product of physical or mental abnormalities, including apparent hermaphroditism and insanity, which were peculiar to the individuals who engaged in such acts.

Two physicians from Chicago, James G. Kiernan and G. Frank Lydston, were among the most prominent Americans to take up the study of sexology. By the 1880s, they had made the city a center for American sexological studies, not only publishing reports on the “sexual perverts” they encountered in the course of their medical practice, but also supplying case studies of these patients to prominent European sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. In the decade before the opening of the University of Chicago in 1892 (the same year the term *homosexual* first appeared in an American publication), they had begun to establish an intellectual environment where the study of sexual abnormality was seen as a proper, even urgent subject of academic inquiry.



## **Recommendations for Policing Sexual Perversion**

Although Chicago's sexologists insisted that "sexual perversion" was a medical rather than a criminal condition, a handful of widely publicized murders and attempted murders by "sexual perverts" during the 1890s led local physicians to reexamine the connection between perversion and criminality. G. Frank Lydston analyzed the mug shots of men convicted of indecent exposure and pederasty to determine whether physiognomy could be used in identifying potential sex criminals. But finding no distinguishing facial features, he simply renewed his warning that youths must be taught to avoid associating with such men. Other physicians recommended the use of castration and clitoridectomy to curb the potentially violent sex drives of perverts, but the potential effectiveness of these policies was called into question by Chicago physician Eugene S. Talbot and by Havelock Ellis. Citing a particular case study from Chicago, they reported that such practices—and the "melancholia" they spawned—might actually incite perverts to more violent behavior.

Still other sexologists stressed the linkage between insanity and sexual perversion, advocating the institutionalization of perverts for the protection of themselves and society. James G. Kiernan took exception to this premise, insisting that it allowed perverts to avoid taking responsibility for their criminal behavior. Citing the example of Alice Mitchell, a Memphis lesbian who escaped conviction for the 1892 murder of her former lover by being found insane, Kiernan insisted that justice would not be served unless criminal perverts were prosecuted to the full extent of the law. No new legislation was required, in Kiernan's opinion. Rather, the laws simply had to be adapted to these new situations. For example, Kiernan suggested that a married woman who left her husband for a female companion might be charged with desertion and her girlfriend with alienating the wife's affections.

## SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL REFORM: THE UNIVERSITY TAKES UP THE STUDY OF HOMOSEXUALITY

### **University Faculty Join the Chicago Vice Commission**

The University of Chicago's participation in the study and policing of sexual perversion began when Mayor Fred A. Busse named several sociologists and clergymen on the faculty to the city's famed Vice Commission in March 1910. Formed to investigate the growth of prostitution in Chicago and to make recommendations on how this "social evil" might be remedied, this commission included Professor Herbert L. Willett, Associate Professor of Semitic Languages and Dean of Disciples Divinity House; Professor William I. Thomas, a prominent sociologist; and Professor Graham Taylor, co-founder of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, which later became the School of Social Service Administration. In the autumn of 1910, they were joined by their colleague Charles R. Henderson, an ordained Baptist minister and head of the Department of Ecclesiastical Sociology in the Divinity School—a field designed to equip ministers with the tools of sociology to combat social ills.

Although charged primarily with investigating female prostitution, the Commission expanded its mission when it discovered "whole groups and colonies" of male "sex perverts." Stunned by the scale of this problem, it launched a sweeping investigation of the "definite cult" of feminine men and female impersonators who frequented Chicago's music halls and saloons. In its published report, the Commission urged lawmakers to address this "latter day growth of degenerate traits" by criminalizing specific homosexual offenses, while consulting with "scientific men" about any additional steps that might need to be taken.

Other local reform organizations demanded similar action. In the summer of 1909, for instance, the president of the Chicago Law and Order League, Arthur Burrage Farwell, spearheaded a police crackdown on the "vulgar performance" of two female impersonators at the city's popular Riverview Exposition amusement park. Yet for the most part, anti-vice crusaders ignored comparable performances and same-sex relations among women. A 1908 raid of the South Side brothel known as the Sapho [sic] Club may have been an exception to this tendency.

## The “Chicago School” of Sociology Discovers Homosexuality

The faculty’s involvement in Progressivist social and sexual reform not only promoted an atmosphere of legitimate sexual inquiry at the University, but also enhanced the growing interest in sociological studies on campus. Under the leadership of Professors Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, sociologists at the University pioneered the detailed study of urban neighborhoods and social networks that came to characterize the “Chicago School” of sociology in the 1920s. Encouraging its students to treat the city as a giant laboratory, the department charted the transformation of modern social and sexual mores in relation to particular urban spaces and institutions. The most famous of these studies—including 1920s dissertations that were later published by the University of Chicago Press as Paul B. Cressey’s *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (1932) and Walter C. Reckless’s *Vice in Chicago* (1933)—documented the growing acceptance of casual heterosexual relations among the women and men who frequented Chicago’s expansive commercial amusements. But students also examined the increasing presence of homosexuality in the city, chronicling a wide range of same-sex relations and networks associated with specific urban locations and populations.

Gathering life histories in Chicago’s “hoboheimian” district along West Madison and North Clark Streets during the early 1920s, Nels Anderson uncovered an extensive homosexual network among the transient men and boys who inhabited the area. In the published version of his master’s thesis, *The Hobo* (University of Chicago Press, 1923), he described a world of intergenerational relationships in which older homeless men frequently enticed the youths who visited this district to become their “wives.” According to Anderson, such gendered arrangements—as well as more egalitarian “fifty-fifty” relationships between adult hobos—seemed to flourish in the nearly all-male environs of the central city’s cheap flophouses, alleyways and public parks. Likewise, the social structure in the lodging houses, tearooms and studios of “Towertown,” the bohemian district centered around the old water tower at Chicago Avenue, appeared to foster homosexual activity. Researching *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (University of Chicago Press, 1929) during this same period, Harvey Warren Zorbaugh discovered that, alongside bohemian advocates of “free love,” lesbians and homosexual men routinely visited the colorful nightspots of Towertown, while constructing an even more explicit homosexual world through the private parties they held in local apartments.

## **Chicago's Sociologists Conduct Investigations for Local Anti-Vice Organizations**

In the eyes of most urban reformers, including members of such organizations as the Juvenile Protective Association (JPA) and the Committee of Fifteen, sociology graduate students' adept use of participant-observation techniques and their infiltration of the city's more marginal neighborhoods made them ideal anti-vice investigators. By the mid-1920s, the JPA had already employed Nels Anderson and Paul B. Cressey, among others, to search out evidence of prostitution and other social vices in Chicago's dance halls, cabarets and brothels. Learning (as noted in its 1925 annual report) that "little boys" had begun attending local theaters "for the purpose of soliciting men for homo-sexual practices," the JPA turned once again to the University's sociologists, hoping to exploit their knowledge of the city's homosexual networks in an effort to stop these activities.

Perhaps noting a similarity between the intergenerational homosexual practices observed in local theaters and those described in Nels Anderson's hobo study, the JPA commissioned him to search out comparable activities elsewhere in Chicago. In fulfillment of this assignment, the JPA reported that Anderson conducted a study, during the summer of 1925, of "the homo-sexual group of men and boys who have their headquarters in Grant Park, publishing a paper of their own, using a vocabulary which no one outside the group could easily understand."

When student investigations of the city's "news alleys" turned up similar conditions during the mid-1920s, the JPA acted decisively to regulate homosexuality. Presenting local authorities with evidence that men were visiting the dark passageways behind Chicago's newspaper plants to have sex with teenage newsboys, it demanded and secured more frequent police supervision of these sites. Moreover, the JPA pressured many of the city's newspaper publishers to shut down their alleyway operations altogether, while forcing the remainder to institute more rigorous surveillance of the activities that took place on their property.

## Documenting Homosexuality in Prison

Although Professor Ernest W. Burgess helped pioneer the sociological study of homosexuality within an urban context, his interest in the subject extended well beyond the confines of the city. In 1927–28, while serving on a state commission investigating the workings of the parole system in Illinois, he and his student John Landesco, who is best known for his scholarship on organized crime, uncovered a complex web of homosexual practices in the state's correction system. Not only did they document a number of "sex perverts" serving time in the state's penitentiaries and reform schools as a direct result of their homosexuality, but they also uncovered an elaborate system of submissive "punks" and aggressive "wolves" whose homosexual activities appeared to be limited almost exclusively to their term of imprisonment.

Landesco and Burgess paid scant attention to the unique sexual culture such men created within the confines of prison, focusing instead on determining which prisoners could be successfully paroled. Less than a decade later homosexual men would come to be seen almost uniformly as dangerous sexual predators, but at the time of their study, these two sociologists resolved that "sex perverts"—especially those of the "sissy type"—were usually "no trouble" at all and were, therefore, suitable candidates for parole. Only the "wolves" and "punks"—whose homosexuality was understood to be primarily "situational"—were routinely expected to commit further crimes.

Upon completion of this study, Burgess continued to gather occasional information about the homosexual activities of prisoners and juvenile delinquents. His research files include the life histories of several such men, each scrawled in his own distinctive shorthand, as well as a graduate student interview with a former convict who claimed to have firsthand knowledge of the prison homosexual activities of the University's most famous criminal alumni: Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb.

## A Closer Look at Lesbian Relations

Given the thoroughness with which sociologists and reformers investigated male homosexuality in early twentieth-century Chicago, their relative inattention to lesbian relations is particularly striking. This oversight can be attributed, in part, to the fact that lesbians were usually less visible in the city than homosexual men. Women's restricted access to public spaces meant that much more of lesbian life took shape within the confines of private apartments and houses, than in the theaters, saloons and alleyways frequented by their male counterparts. Just as important, because cultural conventions governing relations among women permitted a substantial degree of same-sex intimacy, observers often failed to distinguish between lesbianism and other close relationships between women.

University alumna Katharine Bement Davis was one of the first American researchers to conduct an extensive investigation of women's sexual relations. In 1920 she launched a major survey of the sex lives of "normal" women for the Bureau of Social Hygiene in New York. Later published as *The Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-two Hundred Women* (Harper & Brothers, 1929), this study documented a surprisingly high incidence of homosexual experience among the nation's married and single female populations. Categorizing "intense emotional relations with women" alongside more overtly homosexual encounters, Davis and her associates discovered that over fifty percent of single women and slightly more than thirty percent of married women had experienced some degree of homosexual involvement. Even when limiting their definition of lesbian relations to explicitly sexual contact, they found that nearly one fifth of single women and over one seventh of married women had, at some point, participated in an "intense relationship accompanied by mutual masturbation, contact of genital organs, or other physical expressions recognized as sexual in character."

The acceptability of such relationships in the early twentieth century is also indicated by the high percentage of women surveyed who considered their involvement in lesbian relations to be a perfectly natural part of a woman's sexual and emotional life. Whether they had decided to pursue long-term lesbian relationships or had opted for more traditional heterosexual marriages, significant numbers of these women refused to see their lesbian experiences as pathological. This trend was confirmed in a study of *The Unadjusted Girl* (Little, Brown, 1923) by University alumnus and former sociology professor William I. Thomas which quoted at length from a happily married woman's confession that most female college students—herself included—had "tasted homosexuality in some degree."



## STUDYING HOMOSEXUALITY IN PROFESSOR BURGESS'S SOCIAL PATHOLOGY COURSE

### **For Your Next Term Paper: Consider Exploring Chicago's Homosexual World**

By the late 1920s, when faculty and students in the Department of Sociology set out to chart the social and cultural dynamics of the city's various populations, they were so conscious of the homosexual presence in Chicago that they included homosexuals in their studies, alongside African American and Filipino migrants, immigrants, prostitutes and Hyde Park "apartment dwellers." Indeed, the growing residential concentration of lesbians and homosexual men on Chicago's Near North Side persuaded them that homosexuals constituted a "social type," rather than a psychological anomaly.

For some students, the impetus to study Chicago's homosexual world arose entirely through their enrollment in the social pathology courses offered by Professor Ernest W. Burgess—courses which were designed, according to the 1930–31 course catalog, to provide students with a "survey of pathological conditions and processes in modern society." As he taught students to consider the impact of the urban environment on modern life and social mores, Burgess encouraged his pupils to explore the ways that Chicago's vastness—and the anonymity that it provided—promoted not only the proliferation of homosexual contacts in the city, but also the development of a homosexual culture. Numerous students took up this challenge, venturing into the lesbian salons and gay speakeasies of the city's Near North Side to gather evidence for the field reports and term papers that Burgess routinely assigned. And, as Pauline Redmond suggested in a 1932 term paper, these sociological expeditions sometimes led the previously uninitiated to develop an unexpected fascination with the city's increasingly popular homosexual entertainments.

More often, however, the students' decision to study homosexuality arose from their on-going extracurricular pursuits. In the midst of the "pansy craze" that captivated Chicago and other major U. S. cities during the late 1920s and early '30s, University students composed a significant portion of the "slumming" crowd that nightly filled cabarets with queer reputations to overflowing—a fact confirmed by student reports on such resorts as "Diamond Lil's." Well aware that his students were participating in this nightlife phenomenon, Burgess urged them to transform their leisure activities into detailed sociological field reports by documenting the nightspots and drag

balls they attended as well as the jokes and musical performances they witnessed in such spaces. The extraordinary diversity of the materials that students submitted to Burgess provides testament to the widespread nature of the public's fascination with homosexuality during this period. Even Burgess himself, who is ordinarily remembered as a reserved lifelong bachelor, seems to have been at least momentarily swept up in the vogue for homosexuality—as the shorthand notes of his own observations of a New Year's Eve drag party at Jack Ryan's Rush Street cabaret indicate.

### **"I only want it for social studies": Interviewing Chicago's Homosexuals**

Realizing that outsiders' observations could provide only minimal insight into the workings of Chicago's homosexual world, Burgess asked his students to supplement their descriptions of queer meeting places (as they were often called at the time) by interviewing the lesbians and homosexual men they encountered in the city. To fulfill this assignment, students adopted a variety of inventive strategies.

One particularly industrious student, Earle W. Bruce, interviewed more than forty homosexual men from the mid-1930s through the early '40s while enrolled in the University's undergraduate and graduate programs. With the assistance of his wife, he held open house at his apartment, exchanging "coffee and rolls" for the data his informants provided. Other students, including the undergraduate Myles Vollmer, used their knowledge of the cruising habits of homosexual men to approach potential subjects on the city's streets. "The pick-up was the conventional one, asking for a cigarette, etc.," Vollmer reported in his 1933 life history of a "vagabond boy," noting that the youth was initially confused when Vollmer asked for his life history, rather than a sexual encounter.

A drag queen known as "Fay Templeton" even claimed that some local college students *dated* the men they met on the city's Near North Side in order to gather information for their "social studies." Interviewed by a student from the University, Templeton maintained that he had been approached for such purposes by men from Loyola, Illinois, Northwestern and Notre Dame—a catalogue which suggested that an academic pansy craze of sorts was sweeping the sociology departments of Midwestern universities during the early 1930s.

### Students Write about Their Friends' Homosexual Experiences

While the gay and lesbian amusements of the Near North Side provided a substantial outlet for students' Depression-era fascination with homosexuality, the pansy craze also reverberated on campus. Not only did images of queer men and women surface, on occasion, in undergraduate publications, but students also explored homosexual practices in their college relationships—as the life histories written for Burgess's social pathology course often attested.

Most of Burgess's pupils fulfilled the life history requirement of his course by recording the effects that more conventional "pathologies"—including juvenile delinquency, poverty, physical handicap and addiction—had on the lives of others. But during the 1930s, they increasingly submitted accounts of the role that homosexuality played in shaping their friends'—and, occasionally, their own—social experiences. In 1932, for instance, one student wrote about a fellow coed named Suzie who had entered into a lesbian relationship after she "began to consort with the long-haired intelligentsia on campus" and "convinced herself that homosexuality was a natural and a beautiful thing." Roberta Fenzel recounted a similar schoolgirl crush in her account of a tomboyish friend, while one male undergraduate confided his childhood homosexual seduction as part of the case history of his hometown music teacher.

Unlike the life histories that students gathered on expeditions to Chicago's nightspots, these documents recounted the biographies of women and men who were not regular participants in the city's homosexual world. Rather, they usually portrayed individuals who had temporarily experimented with homosexual practices, only to return to what Burgess called "the world of heterosexuality." In his 1934 essay on the "Sociological Aspects of the Sex Life of the Unmarried Adult," Burgess argued that such "detailed intensive case studies...of the different types of persons who find their way into the world of homosexuality" were vital to the discipline, because they provided scholars with the means to draw sociological distinctions between the "homosexual personality" and "homosexual practices *per se*."

## QUEER CHICAGO IN THE 1930s

### **The Diversity of 1930s Queer Chicago**

Although the structure of Chicago's lesbian, gay and other queer worlds generally conformed to the racial segregation of the rest of the city, by the early 1930s lesbians and homosexual men had become such a visible part of the urban landscape that students documented their presence in nearly every local neighborhood. On the Near North Side, they found white lesbians cavorting with curious heterosexual spectators in a Clark Street cabaret, while African American drag entertainers performed for racially mixed audiences at some of the South Side's most famous "black and tans." Mexican "queers" carved out a space for themselves along Ashland Avenue, and ethnic working-class "queens" from the city's North, South and West Sides met at private parties and public drags throughout the city. In Chinatown, students collected homoerotic jokes and slang which suggested the presence of same-sex relations within the district's nearly all-male "bachelor society."

## Fiction and Sociology

The pansy craze that swept urban American nightlife during the early 1930s also permeated the popular fiction of the period, providing literary role models for young lesbians and homosexual men, as well as general entertainment for many others. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (Covici Friede, 1928), Blair Niles's *Strange Brother* (Liveright, 1931), André Tellier's *Twilight Men* (Greenberg, 1931), Robert Scully's *A Scarlet Pansy* (Faro, 1932), and Anna E. Weirauch's *The Scorpion* (Greenberg, 1932) were but a few of the novels with lesbian or gay themes that readers devoured during the early years of the Depression. In an effort to gauge the popularity of such books in Chicago, sociology students canvassed nearly one hundred local rental libraries, learning that hundreds of copies of these novels had been loaned until "worn out" by heterosexual and homosexual readers, highbrow and lowbrow alike, in almost every section of the city. Students took further note of the existence of messenger services that would deliver such titles directly to the libraries' more timid customers.

Yet as sociologists examined the content and audience of such novels in an effort to better understand the makings of the urban homosexual world, they remained largely unaware of the extent to which depictions of homosexuals in the realist literature of the 1930s resembled the life histories that they were producing. The similarity between John Dos Passos's depiction of homosexuals in Chicago's bohemian district (in his *U.S.A* trilogy) and an earlier life history written by the future journalist and novelist Meyer Levin is striking. Likewise, James T. Farrell's description of a queer house party on the city's South Side (in his short story "Just Boys") reveals an intimate knowledge of the relatively obscure social practices documented in life histories such as Earle W. Bruce's study of Leo, an eighteen-year-old African American homosexual. The close relation between such fictional and sociological studies is hardly surprising given the fact that both Farrell and Levin honed their observation and writing skills in the University's sociology courses before achieving literary prominence.

### **Depression-era Correspondence**

Personal letters were among the many sources that Chicago sociologists routinely collected in their studies of urban populations. In the case of ethnic communities, such documents revealed the complex web of social relations that tied immigrants to the family members they left behind or to others who settled in different American cities. These Depression-era letters and typescripts of correspondence between gay men do not represent such connections between blood relations; rather, they provide a unique glimpse into the social networks that linked suburban and even small-town homosexuals with their counterparts in the city. The first set of letters documents the developing—and already fractured—friendship between a man from suburban Zion, Illinois, and one of the gay Chicagoans he met at Navy Pier in August 1932. The second collection represents a more extensive set of social relations, linking a Chicago man named James to three separate pen pals in South Bend, Indiana; Saginaw, Michigan; and Baltimore, Maryland. Like many gay men of his day, James had apparently placed a personal advertisement in a national bodybuilding or hobby magazine, surreptitiously seeking a gay romance and inviting his new friends to visit Chicago in 1934 for the Century of Progress World's Fair. It is unclear whether James ever managed to meet any of his correspondents.

### **The Outbreak of Sex Crime Panics in Chicago**

Despite its extraordinary popularity during the early 1930s, Chicago's pansy craze was short-lived. By 1935 Mayor Edward J. Kelly had effectively eliminated queer nightlife from the city's Near North Side by banning female impersonators from local cabarets and ordering the closure of any nightclub that catered to lesbians or homosexual men. This backlash against the perceived social and sexual excesses of both Prohibition and the 1933-34 World's Fair significantly restricted student access to Chicago's homosexual world and contributed to a substantial decline in the sociological study of homosexuality at the University.

During the late 1930s, a series of local and national sex crime panics equating homosexual men with child molesters and sexual psychopaths delivered an even more devastating blow to the city's homosexual world and to the University's study of it. Fueled by the sensationalistic press coverage of a string of unrelated child murders and rapes, these panics generated a public outcry against "sex morons" and other "sex criminals" and prompted a sustained drive by Chicago authorities to eliminate their presence from the city. Studying the effects of the first panic in early 1937, undergraduate Ruth Padnos reported a three hundred percent rise in the number of sex offense cases in the local courts, as well as the establishment of a special Sex Bureau in the State's Attorney's Office to prosecute such cases. Yet as Padnos discovered, the authorities' zeal to incarcerate dangerous rapists and child molesters quickly devolved into a general crackdown on the city's male homosexual population. Police stepped up their surveillance of the city's theaters and public cruising grounds, including a popular stretch of South State Street, and routinely arrested the men who used such spaces to search for consensual homosexual partners.

These sex crime panics continued with some regularity until the outbreak of the Second World War and resumed again at its close. But by July 1938, they had already prompted the state legislature to put a powerful new law on the books—the second of its kind in the nation. Popularly known as a "sexual psychopath law," this legislative act allowed the state, upon the recommendation of two psychiatrists, to incarcerate homosexuals and individuals charged with sex offenses until they had "fully and permanently recovered from such psychopathy"—a sentence that, unlike convictions for sodomy, rape or assault, could be extended indefinitely with no provision for parole.



## Responding to the Panic?

With the passage of a series of sexual psychopath laws throughout the country, the study of homosexuality shifted firmly into the realm of psychiatry and psychology. These disciplines had long been centers for such studies, but the courts' increasing reliance on psychiatrists in the policing of homosexuals and other "sex offenders" expanded their cultural authority. During the 1920s and '30s, University sociologists had encouraged local authorities to view homosexuality in relation to the complex social conditions of the city, but by the late 1930s, the rising prominence of psychology had convinced these same authorities—as well as the general public—that homosexuality was a matter of individual psychopathology.

The faculty at such local institutions as Northwestern and the University of Illinois diligently pursued this psychological and psychiatric interest in homosexuality and even transsexuality, but such studies never really took off at the University of Chicago. When invited, in 1937, to join a statewide commission implementing a new law requiring the segregation of sex criminals within state prisons, Professor of Sociology Ernest W. Burgess declined and, as a result, was not asked to participate when this same group of psychiatrists and neurologists later began drafting the state's sexual psychopath law. Instead, Burgess immersed himself in an on-going study of the social and sexual determinants of marital success.

One prominent alumnus and former professor in the University's sociology department offered a scathing critique of psychiatrists' growing influence over the regulation of homosexuality. In 1950 Edwin H. Sutherland denounced the nation's sexual psychopath laws as little more than an attempt to mollify public hysteria. He sharply criticized psychiatrists for attempting to use such laws to secure "a monopoly on professional advice to the courts," arguing that psychiatry held no "monopoly of knowledge of human personality and human behavior which warrants their nomination as 'the experts' in the field of diagnosis and treatment of criminals."

## Faculty Get Caught in the Panic

For the most part, the University was not caught up in the demonization of homosexuality that accompanied the sex crime panics from the late 1930s through the 1950s, but on occasion, the public hysteria that periodically seized Chicago invaded even the liberal sanctum of the Quads. Amidst the feverish crackdowns of the period, at least two members of the University's faculty—including the prominent bisexual writer and social critic Paul Goodman, who was then pursuing graduate studies and serving as an instructor in the Department of English, and another popular professor in the Department of Music—lost their academic appointments as a result of homosexual activities.

Unlike other institutions of the era, including the federal government, the University did not initiate a wholesale purge of the lesbians and gay men in its employ. Rather, it took action against only those faculty members whose public behavior either generated or seemed destined to generate unwelcome publicity for the University. At a time when the arrests of gay men routinely became the subject of sensationalistic stories in the local press, administrators undoubtedly believed the forced resignation of such offenders was necessary to protect the University's reputation. Yet when confronted with actual incidents, they policed their employees' sexual behavior with some reluctance and, at times, even compassion.

With the 1939 case of Paul Goodman, who later acknowledged being "fired from the University of Chicago during the early years of Hutchins," the administration apparently launched a pre-emptive strike against anticipated trouble. In his three years at the University, Goodman had never made a secret of his homosexual pursuits, cruising Jackson Park for working-class youths and socializing with a group of young gay intellectuals who made International House their headquarters. But during the autumn of 1939, Goodman's open participation in such activities was challenged: Dean of the Division of the Humanities Richard P. McKeon demanded that his young protégé either keep his sex life off campus or resign. Unwilling to accede to the dean's demands, Goodman tendered his resignation in October of that year, despite the fact that he had both a wife and a newborn baby to support. McKeon stood firm in his conviction that such behavior was incompatible with continued employment, but his concern over Goodman's financial predicament prompted him to secure temporary funding for the young instructor—both from the University and from an outside foundation.

At least initially, the University responded in a similarly ambivalent fashion when the popular chair of the Department of Music was arrested in December 1944 on charges of fondling a sailor in a Clark Street theater. As students and colleagues rallied around the professor—whose arrest and later jury trial made headlines in the *Chicago Tribune* and provoked substantial discussion on campus—the University not only withstood anonymous letters demanding the man's dismissal, but even loaned him funds to retain the services of a prominent defense attorney. At the same time, however, assistants to President Hutchins launched an extensive investigation of the professor's sexual past, pursuing reports of similar prior incidents by consulting his colleagues, local newspaper editors and, apparently, the manager of the apartment building where he had formerly lived. Despite the professor's acquittal, the mounting evidence gathered by the administration suggested that the charges against him likely had some basis in fact, and his continued employment was secured only after Dean Richard McKeon intervened. In an impassioned letter to President Hutchins, the dean argued that the University should not act to dismiss the music professor unless his behavior either proved a threat to the student body or continued to generate unflattering publicity. Fears of the first were largely allayed when administrators failed to discover the professor's name among the "data concerning suspicions and reports of homosexual proposals and activities" kept by the Student Health Service, and he was allowed to keep his job on condition of the latter. But in the spring of 1946—apparently following a second arrest—he was forced to resign. Explaining this development to Dean McKeon, President of the University Ernest C. Colwell remarked, "It is our judgment that we simply cannot support on our faculty any member who provides publicity of this sort to the degree that [this professor] has done."

### **The Decline in Sociological Studies of Homosexuality**

In this atmosphere of public hysteria and faculty forced resignations, the study of homosexuality at the University experienced a significant decline. Gone were the reams of student papers documenting lesbian and gay life in the city, the life histories of students' homosexual friends, and any substantive discussion of the topic in sociology courses at the University. In part, this was a result of the stepped-up policing of homosexuality in Chicago and of researchers' growing fears that they might become too closely identified with the subject of such studies. But it was also a response to University sociologists' diminishing cultural authority in this area, as psychologists came to dominate such research.

Only one major sociological research project at the University examined homosexuality in any depth during the 1940s, and even it reflected the growing influence of psychology. By 1942, sociologist Earle W. Bruce had been documenting Chicago's vibrant homosexual world—its nightspots, private parties and colorful participants—through nearly a decade of study at the University. But as he turned to his master's thesis, he chose not to parlay this research into a full-scale ethnographic study along the lines of other neighborhood studies produced by department colleagues for nearly two decades. Rather, he examined the "personality traits" of the homosexual man, supplementing the life histories he had gathered from nearly forty gay men with psychological testing, dream analysis, and even occasional hypnosis. The result was an unusual mixture of sociology and psychology that attempted to situate the results of his informants' personality tests within the particular social problems they faced as urban homosexuals.

## **Charting the Psychological Influence**

The shift toward the psychological was even more apparent in James M. Sacks's 1957 dissertation for the Committee on Human Development, in which he recounted the findings of an experiment designed to test Freud's hypothesis that delusions of persecution originated in a fear of homosexuality. Using subjects drawn from the patients and employees at Manteno State Hospital, Sacks employed a tachistoscope (an apparatus used to test visual perception by projecting images onto a screen) to quickly display a selection of "homosexual," "sexual" and "neutral" words to his subjects, timing how long it took them to recognize these terms. If paranoia were founded in homophobia, Sacks hypothesized, then the response times of delusional patients would be slower than average when confronted with "homosexual" words, since such patients would seek to defend themselves against the threat they associated with homosexuality by delaying the process of recognition.

Aside from this dissertation, however, the psychological study of homosexuality failed to gather much steam at the University. A handful of graduate student reports from the School of Social Service Administration document the increasing influence of psychological approaches within the institutional world of 1940s reform schools and military hospitals, but they provide little insight into the methods used either to diagnose or to treat homosexuals deemed psychopathic. Rather, they recount the many ways that institutions often failed in their attempts to regulate homosexuality, noting that hospitalized sailors often could not be trained to find "normal social outlets" and juvenile delinquents frequently participated in a flourishing homosexual subculture at the Illinois State Training School for Boys.

### **The Production of Homosexuality as "Social Deviance"**

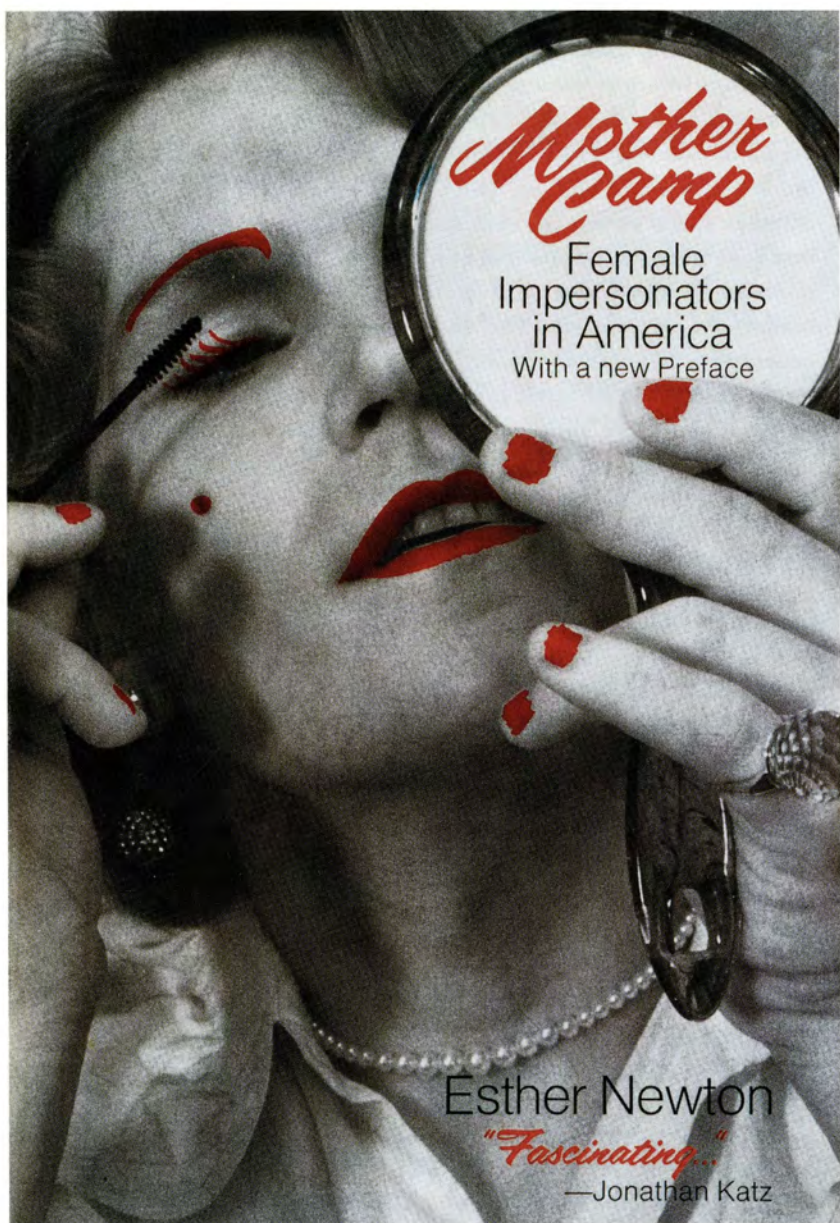
Although discussion of homosexuality had disappeared almost entirely from sociology courses at the University, during the 1950s and early '60s a handful of alumni and students from the department returned to the topic with a new emphasis on the construction of social norms. Studying homosexuals in conjunction with marijuana smokers, jazz musicians, mental patients and other so-called "social deviants," these scholars—led by prominent alumni such as Howard S. Becker and Erving Goffman—questioned the assumed pathology of such groups, as well as the naturalness of social and sexual norms, by focusing on the process by which some acts and individuals came to be labeled "deviant" while others were considered "normal." Participation in homosexual acts did not constitute deviance in and of itself, these sociologists argued. Rather, homosexuality acquired a deviant status because society established rules and sanctions—including the infamous sexual psychopath laws—to regulate such practices.

This shift in focus prompted researchers to look more closely at the ways in which homosexuality was both labeled and policed. In his 1961 study of teenage gangs in Nashville, for instance, Albert J. Reiss, Jr.—an alumnus and former professor in the Department of Sociology—reported that while local youths allowed themselves to be felled by homosexual men in return for money, neither the youths nor local authorities considered them to be queer. Instead, that label was reserved for the youths' adult clientele who, as Reiss noted, were often arrested for sexually "exploiting" impressionable youth, even as the teenage hustlers—who had usually been the true "exploiters" in such arrangements—were allowed to go free. Earlier research by alumnus William A. Westley had noted a related trend among the Chicago police, whose frequent use of violence when arresting homosexual men rarely extended to their teenage partners. Excerpts from a 1959 course paper by John H. Gagnon show that the policing of this distinction between homosexual acts and homosexuals extended even to the prison population of the Cook County Jail, where those prisoners who engaged in homosexual relations within the confines of the prison routinely isolated convicted "sex offenders" from the general prison community.

## Re-examining the Homosexual Community

As the influence of sociological studies of "social deviance" became more extensive, University alumni and students reevaluated their knowledge of urban homosexual communities. Focusing on the processes by which society labeled and policed homosexuality, they began to examine these communities not simply as aggregates of individual lesbians and gay men seeking sexual partners, but as the complex social structures that such women and men produced in response to social stigma and perpetual regulation. In Montreal, alumnus William A. Westley and one-time University fellow Maurice Leznoff charted the extent to which the collective support and social acceptance found in community bars and private cliques allowed both "overt" and "secret" homosexual men to mediate the stigmatization they encountered elsewhere in society. William Simon and John H. Gagnon—who had each suspended their graduate studies in the Department of Sociology to work at Alfred Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research in Bloomington, Indiana—produced a similar analysis of the lesbian community which reinforced the notion that homosexual community life was largely a response to outside social forces.

The social stigmatization that shaped North American lesbian and gay communities during the 1950s and '60s was hardly abstract. Many lesbians and gay men experienced name-calling on a daily basis, feared for their physical safety on public streets, and dodged the recurring threat of police harassment and even arrest. Indeed, as Nancy B. Achilles argued in her 1964 master's thesis for the Committee on Human Development, the establishment of the homosexual bar as the central institution of the gay community provided one of the most tangible examples of the very real effects of social regulation on urban homosexual life. She insisted that the constant "pressure from law enforcement agencies" forced lesbians and gay men to situate their public interactions in "a gathering place which is as mobile and flexible as possible, that is, a place which can open, close, and open again without great alteration or loss."



Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1979).



## Esther Newton and the Anthropology of Drag Queens

Urban anthropologist Esther Newton situated her 1968 dissertation on "The 'Drag Queens'" of Chicago and Kansas City—later published as *Mother Camp* (Prentice-Hall, 1972)—within the evolving sociological study of "social deviance," as her correspondence with her advisor, Professor of Anthropology David M. Schneider, shows. But in focusing upon a group of gay men who performed a particular version of homosexuality for both straight and gay audiences, she added complexity to sociologists' understanding of the social organization of urban homosexuality. In Newton's study, the labeling and policing of sexual "deviance" literally came to life as cultural performance. By embodying stigmatized stereotypes of homosexuality, drag queens provided the counter-example against which straight audiences could define the boundaries of "normal" behavior. Yet at the same time, these performers provided their gay patrons with a complicated means of understanding and coping with their own social stigmatization through camp.

Despite this shift in framework, the study of homosexuality at the University remained a precarious enterprise during the latter half of the 1960s, especially for lesbian and gay students and faculty. As Newton recalls in her forthcoming book, *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas*:

In 1965, when I was a graduate student in anthropology, I decided to write, or rather felt impelled to write my thesis on female impersonators as symbolic leaders of the gay community. I was lucky to be at an elite graduate school—one that could afford to take chances on some students. Even so, my topic was widely viewed as an inappropriate dirty joke. Without the support of several powerful straight male faculty members, my project would have been squashed. I dared not mention in my dissertation that my being a lesbian had anything to do with my choice of topic, my perspective, or the relative ease with which I had gained my informants' confidence.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LESBIAN, GAY AND QUEER STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY

### **In the Wake of Lesbian and Gay Liberation**

Following nearly three decades of repression, Chicago's lesbian and gay community became an increasingly effective organized political force during the late 1960s and early '70s. In 1965 a group of activists founded Mattachine Midwest, in part to respond to a sustained period of police harassment which, by early 1966, had resulted in the arrests of hundreds of gay men and lesbians and the closure of many of the city's gay nightspots—including five of the seven drag clubs studied by Esther Newton during the preceding year. By the end of the decade, lesbian and gay activism had taken an even more visible and militant turn with the founding of Chicago Gay Liberation, an organization that traced its roots to a student group established at the University during the autumn of 1969.

The growing political organization and increasing visibility of lesbians and gay men in Chicago and throughout the nation substantively reshaped the study of lesbian and gay issues on campus during the late 1970s. The emergence of new lesbian and gay institutions in the city provided new subjects of study, as well as potential collaborators. In the Department of Anthropology, E. Michael Gorman initiated this new round of Chicago-oriented research with his 1980 dissertation on three gay religious congregations: Good Shepherd Parish Metropolitan Community Church, Congregation Kol Ami and the Catholic organization Dignity. At about the same time, researchers at the School of Medicine joined doctors and social workers associated with the gay-operated Howard Brown Memorial Clinic to study the prevalence and transmission of gonorrhea and hepatitis B among Chicago's gay male population—research that laid important groundwork for later collaborative studies on AIDS and HIV. Likewise, in the Department of Sociology graduate students expressed a renewed and increasingly quantitative interest in lesbian and gay topics. For example, one master's student, James G. Wolf, conducted a survey of the personal behavior and attitudes of gay Catholic priests, published as part of *Gay Priests* (Harper & Row, 1989).

### **Counting Lesbians and Gay Men: The NORC Study**

Reflecting the growing national trend toward quantitative sociology, in 1992 a group of researchers based at the University and its affiliated National Opinion Research Center (NORC)—led by Professors Edward O. Laumann and Robert T. Michael, in conjunction with University alumnus John H. Gagnon and Stuart Michaels, who was then a doctoral candidate in sociology—launched a major national survey of adult sexual behavior. Designed to provide policy-makers with statistics regarding the prevalence of particular sexual practices in the era of AIDS, the survey was originally commissioned by the federal government, but Congress terminated the funding for it and all such sex surveys after Jesse Helms denounced the Chicago study on the floor of the U. S. Senate.

Unlike most previous studies of homosexuality at the University, this project produced quantitative data on sexual practices, rather than qualitative descriptions of homosexual identities and cultures. Although widely regarded as the most rigorous study of its kind, it generated substantial publicity and controversy by reporting that only 1.4 percent of women and 2.8 percent of men identified themselves as either homosexual or bisexual, thereby challenging the popular belief that lesbians and gay men composed ten percent of the nation's population. The authors cautioned that identification rates were considerably higher in the twelve largest cities of the nation—2.6 percent of women and 9.2 percent of men. But scholars and activists who remained skeptical of NORC's findings prompted a sustained academic and political debate over the study's interviewing procedures, theoretical assumptions and interpretations.

## Recent Trends in Research

In recent years, the University has become a major center for research and critical theory in the emerging interdisciplinary field of lesbian, gay and queer studies. Graduate students in a dozen departments are currently writing or have completed related dissertations over the past decade. Reflecting national trends in the field, significant work has been undertaken in the humanities at the University, but research at Chicago continues to be distinguished by its engagement with the social and cultural (and often urban) processes that shape sexuality.

Since the late 1980s, several graduate students and faculty associated with the Committee on Human Development—led by Professors Bertram J. Cohler and Gilbert Herdt (who recently left the University)—have sought to map the life course of lesbians and gay men. Working with Chicago-based lesbian and gay community organizations such as Horizons, they have studied issues ranging from the emergence of new forms of gay youth culture to the social and cultural concerns of middle-aged and older lesbians and gay men.

At present, the largest cluster of graduate students is working in the Department of History with Professor George Chauncey. Their dissertations document and analyze a wide range of historical processes, including the impact of immigration on the formation of sexual identities and politics, the development of an African American lesbian and gay community on Chicago's South Side, the transnational interaction of the Canadian and American gay movements in the 1960s, and the rise of lesbian feminist cultural politics in the 1970s.

Faculty including Lauren Berlant (English), Michael Camille (Art History), Deborah Nelson (English), Patrick O'Connor (Romance Languages) and Elizabeth Povinelli (Anthropology) are also conducting important work in the field. In recent years, several graduate students have undertaken dissertations in anthropology, art history and English—three particularly active centers of research and critical theory at the University—as well as in the Departments of Music, Political Science, Romance Languages and Sociology, and at the Divinity School and the School of Social Service Administration. Their research has illuminated the emergence of queer social movements and cultures in Austria, Brazil, India, South Africa and Taiwan, the debates over same-sex marriage in the Methodist Church, the impact of AIDS and the politics of ACT-UP, literary and cultural representations of "degeneracy," and the role of the homoerotic in art, music, and theatrical performance.

### **The Lesbian and Gay Studies Project**

Building on the University's strength as a center of graduate training, in 1997 an interdisciplinary group of faculty led by George Chauncey and Elizabeth Povinelli organized the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project of the Center for Gender Studies to provide institutional, intellectual and financial support to the growing number of graduate students working in the field. Since then the Project has provided funding for two annual dissertation-year fellowships and a larger number of dissertation research grants. It coordinates the Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies Workshop, founded a decade ago, where faculty and graduate students meet biweekly to discuss works in progress, as well as papers presented by visiting scholars. In 1997-98, with funding from the Mellon Foundation, the Project organized a year-long seminar and three conferences on "Sexual Identities and Identity Politics in Transnational Perspective," which resulted in the publication of a special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* on "Thinking Sexuality Transnationally." In the last three years it has sponsored major conferences on issues ranging from the "Politics of Respectability" to "Homosexualities and the History of Collecting." The Project's largest conference to date, "The Future of the Queer Past: A Transnational History Conference" (September 14-17, 2000), created an opportunity for more than 200 scholars and artists to chart the development of this rapidly growing field, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and explore new directions for its future. A major interdisciplinary study of the history, ethnography and politics of the racially and ethnically diverse queer worlds that have developed in Chicago's segregated neighborhoods is in the early planning stages and will make considerable use of the University of Chicago Library's archival sources highlighted in this exhibition.

### **The Role of the University Press**

From the publication of incidental accounts of homosexuality in sociological studies such as *The Hobo* (1923) and *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929), the University of Chicago Press has played a prominent role in disseminating academic scholarship on lesbians and gay men. During the early 1980s, it cemented its leadership in the emerging field of lesbian and gay studies by publishing two works which have proven to be landmarks in the historical study of homosexuality: John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980) and John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983). Largely under the editorial hand of Douglas Mitchell, the press has since built up an impressive list of lesbian, gay, transgender and queer studies monographs, covering nearly every facet of this expansive field—from anthropology, sociology, psychology and law to art, history, literature, politics and religion.

## **Supporting the Research: Resources in the University of Chicago Library**

Over the past century, the Library's comprehensive collections in the social sciences, biological sciences and the humanities have provided needed sources for research in homosexuality. More recently, the Library has actively supported the rapid growth of gay and lesbian studies by acquiring and making available electronic and print resources. Collecting has been particularly intense over the past decade as the field and the number of publications in it have exploded: the Library currently purchases as many gay and lesbian theme works per month as it did in the entire decade of the 1950s. An estimated 2500 new gay and lesbian works have been added in the last ten years.

In addition to collecting recent scholarly publications dealing with gay and lesbian themes, the Library continues to acquire primary source material vital to the study of homosexuality such as the Dutch *Schouw-toneel soo der Geexecuteerde al ingedaagde over de Verfoeielyke Misdaad van Sodomie* (1731). This book documents the persecution of sixty Dutch men sentenced to die "for the Detestable Misdeed of Sodomy" in the early-eighteenth century. Of a strikingly different character, the Library has recently added an historical collection of twenty-seven gay travel guides from the 1960s and 1970s, including the first volumes of *The Lavender Baedeker*, which catalog gay and lesbian bars, accommodations, and services in the United States and Europe.

## Note on Sources

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The archival, manuscript, and printed material on which this exhibition draws illustrates that the study of homosexuality demands a wide resource base. While the exhibition exploits the University archival collections most heavily, it also includes materials from the Library's manuscript, rare book, and circulating collections. The John Crerar Library, D'Angelo Law Library, the Joseph Regenstein Library, and the Social Service Administration Library are all represented, testifying to the interdisciplinary nature of the field and to the strength of the Library's collections.

Those who wish to pursue any of the rich avenues of research introduced in this exhibition will find the *Guide to Gay and Lesbian Resources in the University of Chicago Library* (University of Chicago Library, 1999), compiled by Frank Conaway and Sem Sutter, invaluable. Located on-line at <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/gaylesb/glguide.html>, it identifies and classifies over 2800 monographs and serials in the University of Chicago Library collections that deal primarily with gay and lesbian themes.

Special note should be made of the Ernest W. Burgess Papers. Burgess was an influential member of the "Chicago School" of sociology from 1916 to 1952 who took an active interest in both sexuality and "social pathologies." His students gathered information about various social groups, including homosexual communities, which Burgess preserved for his files.



### **Checklist of Collections Consulted:**

Ernest W. Burgess. Papers. 1916-1952.  
97 linear feet.

Chicago Committee of Fifteen. Research Data. 1909-1927.  
26 bound volumes (MS 1028).

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