

“The Cry of Sodom”  
*Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in  
Colonial New England*

*Richard Godbeer*

Nicholas Sension settled in Windsor, Connecticut, around 1640, married in 1645, and became a prosperous member of his community during the ensuing years. Sension’s marriage was childless, but his life appears to have been otherwise unexceptional save in one regard: in 1677, he appeared before the colony’s General Court, charged with sodomy.<sup>1</sup> The frank and detailed testimony presented to the court by neighbors and acquaintances left no room for doubt that Sension had made sexual advances to many men in his community over a period of three decades. These advances, deponents claimed, had often taken the form of attempted assault:

I was in the mill house . . . and Nicholas Sension was with me, and he took me and threw me on the chest, and took hold of my privy parts. [c. 1648] I went out upon the bank to dry myself [after swimming], and the said Sension came to me with his yard or member erected in his hands, and desired me to lie on my belly, and strove with me, but I went away from him. [c. 1658]<sup>2</sup>

On other occasions Sension had offered to pay for sex: “He told me,” claimed Peter Buoll, “if I would let him have one bloo [blow] at my breech he would give me a charge of powder.”<sup>3</sup>

Town elders had investigated Sension’s behavior and reprimanded him informally on two occasions, first in the late 1640s and again in the late 1660s. Both investigations were prompted by complaints from relatives of young men who had been approached by Sension.<sup>4</sup> Yet no formal action

was taken against him until 1677. Fortunately for the defendant, although several men came forward at the trial to describe his unsuccessful overtures, only one claimed that Sension had actually “committed the sin of sodomy.”<sup>5</sup> Because this was a capital crime that required two witnesses for a conviction, Sension could be found guilty only of attempted sodomy. He was sentenced to a severe whipping, public shaming by “stand[ing] upon a ladder by the gallows with a rope about his neck,” and disfranchisement. His entire estate was placed in bond for his good behavior. Sension died twelve years later. No information survives to indicate whether he changed his ways as a result of the prosecution.

Nicholas Sension’s experience raises many questions about attitudes toward sex in early New England and the effects of illicit sexual behavior on social relations in local communities. This article explores sodomy as a sexual category and as a social issue in colonial New England.<sup>6</sup> In seeking to understand sodomy and its place in the sexual culture of the northern colonies, I make two assumptions that underlie recent theoretical and historical scholarship. First, sex as a physical act must be distinguished from sexuality, the conceptual apparatus that men and women use to give meaning and value to sexual attraction and its enactment.<sup>7</sup> People never simply have sex; at some level of consciousness, they interpret their behavior in terms of their own and their culture’s attitudes toward sex. Sexual acts are thus always “scripted.”<sup>8</sup>

Second, the meanings ascribed to sex vary from one culture to another, from one place to another, and from one time to another. Although members of different societies may experience similar physical impulses and engage in similar acts, they understand them differently. Sexual categories have no universal signification; they are cultural products, emerging from and contingent on their specific context. Thus, if we are to understand past people’s experience of sex, we need to jettison our own notions of sexuality in favor of the categories that they used. Indeed, we cannot assume that sexuality or even desire functions as an independent causal agent in all versions of human subjectivity. Sex acquires meaning in many cultures only as a function of political, economic, social, and religious ideologies.<sup>9</sup>

Theological and legal formulations in early New England, which together constituted the region’s official discourse, had no place for desire or sexual orientation as distinct realms of motivation. Puritan thinkers condemned sexual “uncleanness” in general and sodomy in particular as sacrilegious, disorderly acts that resulted from innate depravity, the expression

of which did not have to be specifically sexual. The word "lust" denoted any "fleshly" impulse that distracted men and women from "spiritual" endeavors; illicit sex, drunkenness, and personal ambition were equally lustful in Puritan eyes. Official statements on sodomy were sometimes inconsistent in their details, but two fundamentals united them: neither ministers nor magistrates thought of sodomitical acts as being driven by sexual orientation, and they were unequivocally hostile toward those who committed sodomy.

While some ordinary people (by which I mean those who were not invested with clerical, legislative, or judicial authority) doubtless perceived and judged sodomy along lines similar to those advocated by their leaders, others ascribed to it somewhat different meanings and values. The attitudes of colonists toward sodomitical behavior as it occurred in their communities are much more elusive than the legal and theological viewpoints promulgated through sermons, laws, and judicial decisions. Even more obscure are the ways in which people who were attracted to persons of the same sex viewed their own physical impulses. Legal depositions do survive that embody such responses, however, albeit in fragmentary and often oblique form. Whereas ministers perceived sodomy as one of many acts, sexual and nonsexual, that expressed human depravity, some lay persons apparently recognized a specific inclination toward sodomitical behavior in certain individuals. The extant sources reveal a few occasions on which New Englanders, sensing that official discourse was of limited use in making intelligible their actual experiences and observations, created what seemed to them more appropriate categories and frameworks of meaning. This informal and inchoate discourse did not go so far as to invoke a "homosexual" identity as such, but it does seem to have posited an ongoing erotic predilection that transcended the acts themselves. Villagers and townspeople were, moreover, seldom willing to invoke official sanctions against sodomy, despite theological and legal denunciation. Whatever their leaders' expectations, they viewed and treated sodomy on their own terms.

The purpose of this essay is to show that attitudes toward sodomy in colonial New England were more varied than has been assumed, in two ways. First, while religious and legal statements match scholarly impressions of premodern sexual discourse as focused on *acts* rather than *identity*, popular perceptions of sodomy sometimes appear closer to the latter, though we should take care not to invest them with a modern sensibility.<sup>10</sup> Second, not all New Englanders shared the virulent horror of sodomitical

acts expressed in official discourse.<sup>11</sup> Some appear to have found other, nonsexual aspects of a person's behavior more significant in determining his or her social worth. What emerges most clearly from the surviving evidence is that, as in so many aspects of their lives, New Englanders were pragmatic in their responses to sodomy, focusing on practical issues rather than moral absolutes.

Responsibility for "put[ting sex] into discourse"<sup>12</sup> in early New England rested with the clergy. It was they who provided the official lens through which colonists were supposed to view sexual impulses. Ministers did not perceive sex as inherently dangerous or evil. Rejecting with scorn the "popish" advocacy of a single and celibate life,<sup>13</sup> Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic taught that God had ordained sexual relations between husband and wife not only to procreate but also to express marital affection.<sup>14</sup> "Conjugal love," wrote Samuel Willard, should be demonstrated through "conjugal union, by which [husband and wife] become one flesh." This oneness was "the nearest relative conjunction in the world . . . follow[ing] from a preference that these have each of other in their hearts, above all the world."<sup>15</sup> Clerics did, however, condemn sexual relations in any context other than marriage. All variants of nonmarital sex, they argued, desecrated the bodies and endangered the souls of the perpetrators. "Uncleanness," warned Samuel Danforth, "pollutes the body, and turns the temple of the holy ghost into a hog-sty, and a dog's kennel."<sup>16</sup>

Clerical condemnation of sex outside marriage was not indiscriminate. When New England ministers addressed their congregations on the subject of sexual uncleanness, they were careful to distinguish between different kinds and degrees of offense. Speaking in 1673, Danforth argued that "abominable uncleanness" could be "expressed by and comprehended under these two terms, *fornication*, and *going after strange flesh*." Danforth explained that "*fornication*" was to be "taken in a large sense" to include four offenses: "whoredom" ("the vitiating of a single woman"), adultery, incest, and "self-pollution." The second category, "*going after strange flesh*," incorporated sodomy ("filthiness committed by parties of the same sex") and bestiality ("when any prostitute themselves to a beast").<sup>17</sup> Willard, discussing the Seventh Commandment in a 1704 sermon, used different terminology to make a similar distinction. He told his congregation that "unlawful and prohibited mixtures" could be "ranked under two heads": "natural" and "unnatural." Sodomy and bestiality, he claimed, were "unnatural" because of "the species and sexes" involved, whereas "fornication" (sex "between persons who are single"), adultery, polygamy, and incest

were "(in some sense) more natural" because they came "within the compass of the species and sexes."<sup>18</sup>

Danforth and Willard classified sexual acts in terms of those involved and their relationships to each other: their marital status, sex, and species. They and other commentators made a clear distinction between illicit sex performed by a man and woman and that between either two persons of the same sex or a human being and an animal.<sup>19</sup> Clerics believed that women as well as men might engage in sodomitical acts. John Cotton referred to the "unnatural filthiness . . . of man with man, or woman with woman," Thomas Shepard to "secret whoredom, self-pollution, speculative wantonness, men with men, women with women," Charles Chauncy to "unnatural lusts of men with men, or woman with woman," and Samuel Whiting to "unnatural uncleanness . . . when men with men commit filthiness, and women with women."<sup>20</sup>

Those who pursued "strange flesh" disrupted the natural order and crossed scripturally ordained boundaries between sexes and species. Such behavior was thus more clearly sinful and disorderly than was uncleanness between a man and a woman. Sodomy, argued John Rayner, was "more against the light of nature" than other sexual offenses between human beings and therefore "needed the more to be restrained and suppressed."<sup>21</sup> Clerical denunciations of sodomy were harsh and unequivocal. New England, wrote Chauncy, was "defiled by such sins."<sup>22</sup> These were, declared Cotton Mather, "vile . . . unutterable abominations and confusions." They should be punished "with death, without mercy."<sup>23</sup>

Although ministers defined sodomy as involving two persons of the same sex, the notion of sexual orientation had no place in their discourse; nor did they evoke desire as an independent agency that gave rise to sexual acts. They explained sodomy just as they did all other sins, sexual and nonsexual: it was driven by the innate corruption of fallen humanity and embodied disobedience to God's will. Sodomy did spring from a particular frame of mind, but that mental state was not specifically sexual. When William Bradford described the uncleanness that apparently swept through Plymouth Colony during the early 1640s, he divided the illicit acts into categories and clearly saw some as more egregiously sinful than others, but he made no distinction among them when accounting for their incidence. They all derived from "our corrupt natures, which are so hardly bridled, subdued and mortified."<sup>24</sup> Because sodomitical uncleanness was founded in universal corruption, the temptation to commit sodomy afflicted everyone. Even those who remained innocent of particular sinful

acts were guilty in their hearts if not in deed. Shepard reminded his congregation that they were all guilty of “heart whoredom, heart sodomy, heart blasphemy, heart drunkenness, heart buggery, heart oppression, [and] heart idolatry.”<sup>25</sup>

Ministers reminded their congregations of the fate suffered by the citizens of Sodom in order to warn against “all the sins” in which the Sodomites had engaged, not specifically their sexual offenses.<sup>26</sup> When Jonathan Mitchel referred to “the Apple of Sodom” in 1653, he combined two potent images to invoke not any particular sin, but general depravity and its fruits.<sup>27</sup> In 1673, Willard interpreted “Sodom’s overthrow” as an admonition against “security and degeneracy” in all their manifestations, sexual and nonsexual.<sup>28</sup> Sodomy itself figured in the clergy’s moral universe as one of many sins that fed on each other in a devilish symbiosis. Just as pride, gluttony, drunkenness, sloth, disobedience, evil company, irreligion, and profanity constituted “the very fodder and fuel of the sin of uncleanness,” Danforth taught, so unclean acts would in turn encourage all manner of sin by “pollut[ing] the noble faculties of the soul, the mind, and the conscience.” Sinful acts were, then, best understood in association with each other.<sup>29</sup>

Yet for New England clergymen, sodomy was far from being the “utterly confused category” to which Michel Foucault alluded in discussing premodern sexuality.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century, ministers were quite unequivocal in their definition of sodomy: Shepard and Chauncy in the 1640s, Whiting in the 1660s, Danforth in the 1670s, and Willard at the turn of the century referred to sodomy as sex between men or between women.<sup>31</sup> Ministers did not discuss the possibility that anal sex between a man and a woman or nonprocreative sex in general might constitute sodomy.<sup>32</sup> They focused on the violation of boundaries between the sexes, not rectal penetration or sodomy’s nonreproductive character.<sup>33</sup> The word had for them a distinct meaning, even though the phenomenon to which it referred should, they insisted, be understood in tandem with, not in isolation from, other sins.

New England laws against sodomy generally followed clerical example in defining the crime as an act that involved “parties of the same sex.”<sup>34</sup> The legal codes, however, focused much more specifically on male sex than did clerical pronouncements. The Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire laws quoted verbatim Leviticus 20:13: “If any man lyeth with mankind, as he lyeth with a woman, both of them have committed abomination; they both shall surely be put to death.”<sup>35</sup>

Rhode Island adopted the language of Romans 1:26–27, defining sodomy as “a vile affection, whereby men given up thereto leave the natural use of woman and burn in their lusts one toward another, and so men with men work that which is unseemly.”<sup>36</sup> There were two exceptions to this male-oriented view of sodomy on the part of New England’s would-be and actual legislators. A code drawn up by John Cotton in 1636 at the request of the Massachusetts General Court described sodomy as “a carnal fellowship of man with man, or woman with woman.”<sup>37</sup> Cotton’s formulation was consistent with those produced by his fellow ministers, but the court declined to follow his lead and omitted women from the Massachusetts law against sodomy. New Haven’s law, passed in 1655, did include sex between women as a capital offense and cited Romans 1:26 as justification for doing so.<sup>38</sup>

New Haven’s sodomy law differed in other respects from the codes adopted elsewhere in New England. Much more detailed and including a broad range of sexual acts, its definition of sodomy incorporated sex between men and between women, anal penetration by men of women and children, male or female (“carnal knowledge of another vessel than God in nature hath appointed to become one flesh, whether it be by abusing the contrary part of a grown woman, or child of either sex”), and vaginal penetration of a girl prior to puberty (“carnal knowledge of . . . [the] unripe vessel of a girl”). Each of these acts was to be treated as a capital crime. The law added that masturbation “in the sight of others . . . corrupting or tempting others to do the like, which tends to the sin of sodomy, if it be not one kind of it,” could also justify death, “as the court of magistrates shall determine.” The sexual acts encompassed by the New Haven law had two common characteristics, as the law itself explained. Each was nonprocreative, “tending to the destruction of the race of mankind,” and each was “unnatural . . . called in scripture the going after strange flesh, or other flesh than God alloweth.” Unlike clerical formulations and the laws enacted elsewhere in New England, the New Haven code viewed sodomy as a range of acts that frustrated reproduction, not simply as uncleanness between members of the same sex. The Assistants interpreted biblical references to strange flesh and unnatural sex as referring to the misuse of genital organs, not the gender of the persons to whom they were attached. Seen from this perspective, sodomy became a catchall term for any nonreproductive and therefore unnatural act committed by human beings. The act need not even involve a penis, since the law also encompassed sex between women.<sup>39</sup>

On only two known occasions did women appear before New England courts on charges of “unclean” behavior with each other. In 1642, Elizabeth Johnson was whipped and fined by an Essex County quarterly court for “unseemly practices betwixt her and another maid.”<sup>40</sup> Sara Norman and Mary Hammon, both of Yarmouth, Plymouth Colony, were presented in 1649 for “leude behaviour each with other upon a bed.”<sup>41</sup> In neither case does the brief court record suggest that the magistrates categorized the offense as sodomitical or, indeed, that they categorized it at all save as “lewd” and “unseemly.” The use of these vague adjectives may reflect judicial uncertainty about the classification of sexual intimacy between women as well, perhaps, as a reluctance to describe the acts in question.<sup>42</sup>

Except for New Haven’s, New England sodomy laws referred only to sex between men. Yet magistrates were sometimes ready to broaden their conception of sodomy, especially during the first few decades of settlement, which were avowedly experimental. In 1642, the Massachusetts General Court considered treating vaginal sex between a man and a prepubescent girl as sodomy. Dorcas Humfry, the daughter of a Bay Colony magistrate who lived in Salem, had charged three men with having “used her” over a period when she was between six and ten years old.<sup>43</sup> The court faced a serious problem in that the crimes had been committed before the enactment of a law against rape. The Assistants were reluctant to apply the law retroactively and, in any case, it did not apply to children under the age of ten. In the absence of an appropriate law, the magistrates contemplated defining the abuse of Dorcas Humfry as sodomy. They did so on the grounds that Scripture prescribed death for that crime, whereas the rape of a child “was not capital by any express law of God.” Thus, the three men could be executed for sodomy with scriptural mandate as a justification, regardless of whether the General Court had passed a law against the crimes in question.<sup>44</sup> John Winthrop, writing in 1641, had argued that sex between a man and “a girl so young, as there can be no possibility of generation” should carry the death penalty since it was “against nature as well as sodomy and buggery.” From this perspective, any nonreproductive act might be equivalent to sodomy.<sup>45</sup> The court eventually decided that Humfry’s ordeal should be defined as rape. This effectively precluded capital punishment, and so the Assistants handed down sentences far short of execution.<sup>46</sup> But its willingness to consider sodomy as a possible label for sex between a man and a girl suggests that the term was flexible and need not apply only to acts between members of the same sex.

While magistrates were sometimes uncertain about the range of sexual



couplings that sodomy might incorporate, they were much more liable to confusion over issues of proof. Sex between men was incontrovertibly sodomitical, but on neither side of the Atlantic did sodomy laws specify the point at which physical intimacy became a capital offense. There was no consensus among English legal experts as to whether penetration was necessary for conviction.<sup>47</sup> In Massachusetts, this question was debated at the 1642 trial that resulted from Dorcas Humfry's accusations. The General Court sought the advice of ministers and magistrates throughout the northern colonies, asking them "*an contactus et fricatio usque ad effusionem seminis sit sodomia morte plectenda* [whether physical contact and friction leading to ejaculation should be punishable by death as sodomy]." According to Winthrop's account, "most of them answered negatively, and that there must be such an act as must make the parties one flesh."<sup>48</sup> Yet the surviving answers given by three of the ministers from Plymouth, along with Bradford's summary of the colony's responses as a whole, illustrate the broad range of interpretations that the laws against sodomy could accommodate. Although the ministers were consistent and confident in their general definitions of sodomy, their formulations became just as varied and equivocal as those of court officials once they had to determine what constituted a sodomitical act in concrete terms.

John Rayner defined sodomy as "carnal knowledge of man or lying with man as with woman, *cum penetratione corporis* [with penetration of the body]." However, he continued, "full intention and bold attempting" could be as damnable as actually performing the act. Moreover, "*contactus and fricatio usque ad effusionem seminis*" might be "equivalent to penetration" if performed frequently and over an extended period of time. Like Rayner, Charles Chauncy argued that not only penetration but also "all the evident attempts thereof" might be capital offenses. He suggested that "lying with" could signify both copulation and "other obscure acts preceding the same." Meanwhile, Ralph Partridge wrote that there were several reasons to doubt this broad reading of the law. Partridge held that "the intended act of the Sodomites (who were the first noted masters of this unnatural art of more than brutish filthiness)" was expressed in Genesis 19 "by carnal copulation." Moreover, penetration was crucial to the act of sodomy "among the nations where this unnatural uncleanness is committed." (Partridge did not specify the nations.) Finally, he claimed that indictments in English sodomy cases spoke explicitly of penetration.<sup>49</sup> Others in Plymouth Colony must have agreed with Partridge's narrower view, since Bradford, writing to Governor Richard Bellingham on behalf of his

colleagues, argued that while “high attempts and near approaches” in capital crimes may be “as ill as the accomplishment” in God’s eyes, yet it was doubtful whether they were punishable by death according to law: “So in sodomy and bestiality, if there be not penetration.”<sup>50</sup>

Definitions of the crime and of the criteria for conviction doubtless varied from one magistrate to another and from one case to another, so that generalizations are problematic.<sup>51</sup> But one broad feature does seem fairly clear: courts rarely accepted either intent or physical intimacy short of penetration as grounds for execution.<sup>52</sup> They took care to distinguish between sodomy, attempted sodomy, and other acts tending to sodomy.<sup>53</sup> Ejaculation without penetration did not constitute sodomy in their view of the crime, although it was indicative of intent and could substantiate a lesser charge of sodomitical filthiness.<sup>54</sup> This interpretation of the laws reflected the rigorous standards of proof that the New England judicial system sought to enforce in all capital cases. It was also consistent with the treatment of sex in official discourse, whether legal or theological, as a specific physical act rather than as a form of desire.<sup>55</sup> Magistrates and ministers referred to “sodomy” and “sodomitical” activity but not to “sodomites” or to any specifically homoerotic impulse.<sup>56</sup>

Securing evidence that would justify a conviction for sodomy was no easy matter. Most courts had only circumstantial evidence on which to base their deliberations: deponents may have seen the accused in compromising circumstances, but they rarely claimed to have witnessed penetration itself. The two-witness rule made conviction even less likely, and so in most cases the court could find only that relations to some degree sodomitical had taken place. Edward Michell of Plymouth Colony, for example, was whipped in 1642 for “his lude & sodomiticall practices tending to sodomye with Edward Preston.”<sup>57</sup> A year earlier, William Kersley, also of Plymouth Colony, had been presented for “uncleane carriages towards men that he hath lyen withall.” The indictment made no mention of sodomy itself, presumably because the court did not anticipate finding any concrete proof. Kersley’s case does not appear to have proceeded further, suggesting that the testimony available against him was too flimsy to substantiate even a crime of lesser degree.<sup>58</sup>

Given these problems, it is not surprising that only two individuals, William Plaine and John Knight, are known to have been executed for sodomy in seventeenth-century New England. In neither of their cases was the route to conviction straightforward. Plaine appeared before the Assistants at New Haven in 1646, accused of having “committed sodomy with

two persons in England" and of having "corrupted a great part of the youth of Guilford [New Haven Colony] by masturbations, which he had committed, and provoked others to the like above a hundred times." Despite this impressive record, the governor refused to condemn Plaine until he had sought the advice of magistrates and ministers in Massachusetts. Only when his consultants declared that Plaine "ought to die" did the court sentence him accordingly. In 1655, the New Haven General Court found John Knight guilty only of "a sodomitical attempt" on a teenaged boy, but the Assistants eventually decided that Knight's clear intention to commit sodomy, in conjunction with other "defiling ways" and his having been found guilty by a previous court of sexually abusing a neighbor's child, justified the death sentence.<sup>59</sup>

Magistrates and ministers viewed sodomy as a sacrilegious and disorderly act but not as an expression of desire or sexual identity. Yet some men did have an ongoing sexual interest in members of the same sex that was recognized as such by their neighbors, even though the proclivity that they identified was not acknowledged in official pronouncements.<sup>60</sup> Surviving court depositions show that popular perceptions of sodomy were by no means always consistent with official teachings. Whereas ministers sought to understand sodomy as it related to other sins such as sloth and disobedience, townspeople and villagers saw it as a distinct phenomenon. And whereas magistrates focused on the act of penetration, deponents in sodomy prosecutions seem to have found intent equally significant. New Englanders were, furthermore, remarkably slow to act against offenders. The evidence suggests that there was no consensus within local communities as to how (or whether) to respond to sodomy.

New Englanders were sometimes well informed about sodomitical behavior in their midst and the attempts of those who were so inclined to establish local networks. John Allexander of Plymouth Colony, tried in 1637 for "lude behaviour and uncleane carriage" with Thomas Roberts, was found by the court "to have beene formerly notoriously guilty that way." He had apparently sought "to allure others thereunto."<sup>61</sup> Five years later, in 1642, when Edward Michell and Edward Preston appeared before the same colony's court for "lude practises tending to sodomye," Preston was also accused of "pressing" a third man, John Keene, to join them. Keene had refused and reported the incident. The court ordered him "to stand by" while Michell and Preston were whipped. Although Keene had "resisted the temptation, & used meanes to discover it," the judges suspected that "in some thing he was faulty," presumably in having given Preston reason

to think that he might be amenable.<sup>62</sup> Magistrates may have feared that Allexander, Preston, and others like them might experience little difficulty in convincing their neighbors and acquaintances to make the transition from what Shepard called “heart sodomy” to actual sodomy. Allexander’s notoriety presumably originated with men who did not welcome his overtures and who sought to warn others against him, but Roberts may not have been the only man to accede. Indeed, these two cases may well have resulted from attempts to extend, rather than to create, a sodomitical network in Plymouth Colony.

The depositions presented at Nicholas Sension’s trial in 1677 documented one Connecticut man’s prolonged quest for sexual partners among his fellow townsmen. Sension had approached a number of men repeatedly, but the young fellow on whom he fixed his attentions most assiduously was Nathaniel Pond, a servant in the Sension household. Pond had complained to his brother Isaac about his master’s “grossly lascivious carriages toward him, who did often in an unseemly manner make attempts tending to sodomy.” Several witnesses claimed to have seen Sension attempt sodomy with Pond, mostly in the sleeping quarters at Sension’s house, where the master seems to have prowled at night, a sexual predator among his servants.<sup>63</sup> Sension’s interest in Pond does not appear to have been purely physical. In conversation with neighbor Joshua Holcombe, he spoke of the “fond affections which he had toward” Nathaniel.<sup>64</sup> Pond’s feelings about the relationship were clearly ambivalent. On the one hand, he resented his master’s attempts to sodomize him and complained about them to his brother. On the other, when Sension responded to a local investigation of his behavior by offering to release Pond from his indenture, the young man refused, claiming that “he was loathe [*sic*] to leave him who had the trouble of his education in his minority.” Nathaniel, who referred to his master as “Uncle Sension,” may well have felt a loyalty and affection toward the man that Sension misinterpreted as an invitation to physical intimacy.<sup>65</sup>

Nathaniel Pond was not the only male servant with whom Sension tried to have sex. Most of the men he approached were, like Pond, in their teens or early twenties. Sension appears to have been interested in penetrating men whose age and status placed them in a position subordinate to himself; his sexual impulses were articulated in the context of power relations. This fits well with a study by Alan Bray, who argues that sex between men in Renaissance England expressed the “prevailing distribution” of economic and social power.<sup>66</sup> For most sodomy prosecutions in early

New England, there survives only a brief record of the charge and outcome; in some cases, we do not even know the names of those involved, let alone their age or status relative to each other. But the social context that emerges from the unusually informative transcripts for Sension's trial does at least suggest that for men attracted to members of the same sex in New England as elsewhere in early modern English culture, intercourse, hierarchy, and power were closely intertwined.

Although his interest in sodomizing men was bound up with the expression of social power, Sension characterized his many sexual overtures as a distinct realm of activity. When neighbor William Phelps berated Sension for attempting to seduce various young men, Sension admitted that he had "long" practiced "this trade."<sup>67</sup> It is not clear from Phelps's deposition whether he or Sension introduced the word "trade" into their conversation; indeed, Phelps may have used it retroactively. But the application of the term to Sension's "sodomitical actings," by whomever, is significant in that "trade" implied a specific calling or way of life. Use of that term to describe Sension's behavior indicates a sense of its significance, distinctiveness, and permanence in his life. "Trade" as a signifier went well beyond the act-oriented view of sodomy propounded by official discourse. It fitted Sension's own experience much better than did authorized categories. Phelps's deposition, then, provides a rare glimpse of ordinary people creating their own sexual taxonomy, their own discourse.

Yet even if Sension originated or participated in that creative process, doing so did not enable him to discard religious values that condemned the acts in which he wanted to engage. Testimony at his trial revealed that he had been tormented by his attraction to men. John Enno deposed that one night he saw Sension slip into bed with one of his servants, masturbate against him, and then go into the adjoining room, where Enno "heard Sension pray God to turn him from this sin he had so long lived in."<sup>68</sup> Not all of those who engaged in sodomy were disturbed by religious sanctions. William Plaine challenged the very system of values that condemned sodomy. When questioned about "the lawfulness of such a filthy practice," Plaine "did insinuate seeds of atheism, questioning whether there were a God." Such insinuations underscored the spiritual threat posed by Plaine and doubtless contributed to the court's decision to execute him.<sup>69</sup>

Sension was concerned about his fate in this world as well as the next and realized the legal dangers that faced him. He described his affection for Pond as "foolish," and Enno, who had witnessed several incriminating incidents, told the court that Sension had begged him "to say nothing of

these things.”<sup>70</sup> Far from being brazen about his attempts at sex with the young men who slept in his house, he was clearly scared and did his best to dissimulate when caught in the act. Samuel Wilson testified that one night in 1671 he “lay back to back” with Nathaniel Pond when Sension came to the bed and started to fondle Pond’s “breech,” whereupon Wilson “turned about.” Sension immediately pulled his hand “out of the bed and said he had come for some tobacco.”<sup>71</sup> But neither private warnings from local court members and the fear of more formal proceedings against him, nor repeated rejection, nor spiritual misgivings could deflect Sension from his “trade.”

Sension’s predilections were apparently well known. Whether or not he found willing partners in and around Windsor, Sension had a reputation for being sexually aggressive that made at least some of his neighbors and acquaintances nervous of him. When Thomas Barber, another man’s servant, found he was expected to sleep with Sension “in a trundel bed” during a stay in Hartford, he was “unwilling and afraid” to do so “because of some reports he had heard formerly concerning him.” Barber overcame his apprehension, partly because he was reluctant to make “disturbance in a strange house” and partly because members of the General Court “lay in the chamber” and so “he hoped no hurt would come of it.” But not long after Barber got into bed, Sension “strove to turn [Barber’s] back parts upwards and attempted with his yard to enter his body.” Barber now found himself “in a great strait,” on the one hand “fearing to disturb the courtiers in the other bed” and on the other “fearing he should be wronged.” The anxious servant “turned his elbow back to Sension’s belly with several blows which caused him to desist for that time.” Barber “slept in fear all night, and in [the] morning told his master . . . that he would lie no more with Goodman Sension.”<sup>72</sup>

Sension’s persistence, despite his notoriety and the danger in which that placed him, may have been encouraged by the live-and-let-live attitude adopted by the elders of Windsor. After investigating his sexual aggression toward Pond, town elders insisted only that Sension shorten the young man’s indenture by one year and pay him forty shillings “for his abuse.”<sup>73</sup> The primary concern seems to have been to compensate Pond, not to punish Sension. It is striking that community leaders allowed Pond to stay in the Sension household and, in general, that Sension was able to pursue his “trade” for over three decades before being brought to trial. There were those in and near Windsor who had long condemned Sension’s interest in men and feared that others might be seduced into similar behavior. It was,

William Phelps claimed, the "hazard" of Sension "infecting the rising generation" that drove him to initiate the first informal inquiry into Sension's "actings."<sup>74</sup> Barber was not the only young man who was displeased by his attentions. When Sension got into bed with Daniel Saxton and tried to mount him, Saxton "thrust him off" and declared, "You'll never leave this devilish sin till you are hanged."<sup>75</sup> Saxton left his master before his apprenticeship was completed and told several acquaintances that he did so because of Sension's attempt to have sex with him. Yet the community as a whole seems to have been remarkably tolerant of Sension's behavior.

Issues of power may have figured in Sension's impunity as well as in his choice of partners. The status accorded him as one of the wealthiest householders in town probably shielded him to some degree. Reluctance to tear the fabric of community life by taking formal action against an established citizen and employer may also have counterbalanced disapproval of his sexual proclivities. Sension's popularity among his neighbors and acquaintances may have helped protect him. The court depositions are remarkable for their lack of hostility to the accused, save in regard to his sexual behavior. Sension's evident attraction to men did not undermine the general esteem in which he was held. Thomas Barber, whom Sension had tried to sodomize in Hartford, declared that he was "much beholden" to the accused for "entertainment in his house" and "therefore [was] much troubled that he should be any instrument to testify against him in the least measure."<sup>76</sup> Similar feelings on the part of other Windsor citizens may have long delayed legal proceedings against him.

Why then the community's change of heart in the late 1670s? The key event seems to have been the death of Nathaniel Pond in 1675, after which Sension's approaches to other young men became more frequent. This would have provided his enemies with ammunition to secure the support, however grudging, of formerly loyal neighbors such as Barber.<sup>77</sup> There is no evidence from the preceding decades to suggest that any of Sension's neighbors actually condoned his behavior, but neither does it appear that many people in Windsor, apart from the targets of Sension's lust, cared sufficiently about his sexual tastes to advocate a strong community response. Legal prosecution became possible only when the social disruption brought about by Sension's advances seemed to outweigh his worth as a citizen.

There are remarkable parallels between the Sension case and a superficially quite different situation that developed in another Connecticut community in the mid-eighteenth century. Stephen Gorton, minister at

the Baptist church in New London, was suspended from his position in 1756 for “unchaste behaviour with his fellow men when in bed with them.”<sup>78</sup> Like Sension, Gorton was a married man who had apparently exhibited his attraction to men “in many instances through a number of years.”<sup>79</sup> In 1726, he had appeared before the New London county court for “hav[ing] lasciviously behaved himself towards sundry men, endeavouring to commit sodomy with them.”<sup>80</sup> The charge had been dismissed for lack of evidence, but in 1757 the General Meeting of Baptist Churches judged that his “offensive and unchaste behaviour, frequently repeated for a long space of time,” indicated “an inward disposition . . . towards the actual commission of a sin of so black and dark a dye.” The meeting did not explain what it meant by “inward disposition” but went on to recommend that Gorton absent himself from the Lord’s Supper for “several months at least” to “give thereby the most effectual evidence” of his “true humiliation” and reformation.<sup>81</sup> The assumption that Gorton could overcome his proclivities suggests that the meeting viewed his “crime” in terms consistent with earlier religious formulations, as an expression of inner corruption that afflicted everyone but that sinners could defeat with Christ’s support. Yet although the phrase was not being used to denote a permanent or specifically sexual orientation, it did depict Gorton’s depravity as expressing itself in a particular and consistent form. The plain facts of Gorton’s sexual history prompted the meeting to recognize attraction to men as an ongoing facet of his life. The official judgment against him was a diplomatic and subtle response to the situation: it used language in ways that did not actually breach the parameters of authorized discourse but pushed standard categories to their very limits in accommodating local impressions of Gorton’s behavior.

Like Sension, Gorton managed to survive more or less unscathed, despite his sexual reputation. Gorton’s notorious interest in men caused such discomfort that “many” members left the church “on that account.” According to his opponents in 1756, the church had “been broken thereby.”<sup>82</sup> Yet once Gorton acknowledged and confessed his sins, the remaining members voted by a two-thirds majority to restore him to the pastorate.<sup>83</sup> Almost three quarters (71.4 percent) of the voting women favored Gorton’s restoration, whereas only half (52.2 percent) of the men did so. This vote suggests that Gorton’s reputation and behavior made his male parishioners particularly nervous, possibly because they felt threatened by his sexual tastes.<sup>84</sup>

How can we explain the congregation’s apparent inaction during the



three decades between 1726 and 1756 and then its willingness to reinstate him? Gorton's clerical office is unlikely to have afforded him much protection, considering the frequency with which New Englanders challenged unsatisfactory ministers. It seems more plausible that elders had berated Gorton informally and were hoping that he would mend his ways without their having to initiate formal proceedings. Throughout the colonial period, New England communities preferred to handle problematic behavior through informal channels; they resorted to ecclesiastical discipline or the legal system only when private exhortation failed. Although most of the surviving information about sodomitical activity comes from court records, townspeople and villagers did not see such behavior primarily as a legal problem.<sup>85</sup>

The likelihood that members who disapproved of Gorton's inclinations were interested primarily in reclaiming rather than punishing or dismissing him is strengthened by the church's treatment of Gorton, even after it was driven to formal proceedings against him. Gorton was not the only man accused of "unchaste behaviour" with others of the same sex to benefit from faith in the possibility of spiritual renewal. Ebenezer Knight, a member of the First Church at Marblehead, Massachusetts, suspended from communion in 1732 for his "long series of uncleanness with mankind," was restored to full membership after spending six years in Boston and convincing the membership that he had seen the error of his ways. Why the church finally took action against Knight is unclear, but his expressions of repentance and the assuaging effect of an extended absence brought about his reacceptance into the church community.<sup>86</sup>

There is another possible explanation for the New London congregation's behavior. While some of the church members disapproved of Gorton's behavior and so either sought his spiritual reclamation or lobbied for his removal, others may have been less perturbed by his activities, as long as they did not become a public embarrassment. Most of the correspondence relating to the dispute between pastor and congregation addressed not Gorton's exploits, but the fact that "rumour, offense, and reproach" arising from them had now reached "distant parts and different churches." Indeed, the most striking aspect of local hostility toward Gorton is that church members seem to have been more concerned with rumors having "spread abroad in the world" than with Gorton's actual behavior.<sup>87</sup> Gorton's flock resorted to disciplinary proceedings against him only when the spread of scandal made action imperative. The church members who left the congregation may well have done so rather than stay to fight for his

dismissal because they realized that their brethren were either inclined to mercy or did not see Gorton's "unchaste" acts as a serious issue in its own right. If so, their hunch was borne out by the events of 1756.

The impunity with which men such as Gorton pursued their sexual inclinations suggests an attitude on the part of their neighbors that was far removed from the spirit of official pronouncements on the subject. We should not downplay too much the effectiveness of such pronouncements: they may well have deterred individuals from experimenting with sodomy and doubtless incited condemnation of those who committed it. Others may have neglected to act against sodomitical behavior because they were slow to recognize or label it as such, especially when the proscribed behavior took place in the context of established relationships such as that between master and servant. Just as sexually predatory behavior toward a female servant might not always be perceived as a distinct issue of assault because it seemed to fall within the parameters of a master's prerogative, so sexual advances made by a master toward a male servant could also be understood in terms of the power dynamic between the two individuals; there was no compelling need to treat sexual aggression in this context as distinct from the broader relationship or to label it explicitly as sodomy. Those unable or unwilling to do so may well have been disturbed by what they saw but were unable to respond because the behavior was undefined.<sup>88</sup>

New Englanders who did identify and condemn sodomy often may have been deterred by the rigorous demands of the legal system from taking formal action against offenders. Just as colonists waited to prosecute suspect witches until they had accumulated enough evidence to mount a credible prosecution, so when dealing with men like Sension hostile neighbors and acquaintances may have delayed for similar reasons.<sup>89</sup> Informal measures by local magistrates or church elders constituted an attractive alternative to the expensive and often intractable legal system. Moreover, addressing the situation through nonjuridical channels was less direful than invoking capital law and so would have appealed to those who wanted to proceed against offenders but did not want to endanger the lives of those involved. If the local standing of the offender was also an element, as in the Sension case, an informal investigation would provide a more discreet way of addressing the situation. And finally, just as a cunning person's social value as a healer might offset suspicions of "*mal-eficium*" and protect her for many years from prosecution as a witch, so too the positive attributes of men such as Sension might counterbalance

disapproval of their sexual propensities. Risking the loss of a good neighbor and the disruption of social and economic relations in the local community might well have struck the practical minded as too high a price to pay for the expunging of the unclean.<sup>90</sup>

We cannot assume that a majority of New Englanders took their leaders' strictures against sodomy all that seriously. Roger Thompson's claim that official condemnation of sodomy translated into an equally intense "public hostility" seems unwarranted by the evidence.<sup>91</sup> Some incidents relating to sodomy may never have reached court or church records because local communities handled such matters informally; others may have gone unreported because too few people were upset for prosecution to be worthwhile. In the Sension and Gorton cases, formal action was taken only when illicit behavior became socially disruptive or threatened to damage the community's reputation. It seems plausible that lay responses to sodomy ranged from outright condemnation to a live-and-let-live attitude that did not go so far as to condone such behavior but that did enable peaceful cohabitation, especially if the individual concerned was an otherwise valued member of the local community. The weight of opinion does not appear to have rested with those actively hostile toward sodomy.<sup>92</sup>

During the years between Nicholas Sension's trial and the proceedings against Stephen Gorton, the metropolis of London provided the setting for a transformation in the relationship among sodomy, social identity, and gender. By the early eighteenth century, there had emerged in London a distinct and visible sodomitical subculture. Men who were attracted to their own sex could meet others with similar tastes in recognized gathering places such as particular taverns, parks, and public latrines. They adopted a distinctive semiotics of slang, gesture, and dress. They became "mollies," in contemporary parlance. In "molly houses" scattered across London it was customary to adopt effeminate behavior; some mollies cross-dressed. One visitor to a molly house in the Old Bailey observed "men calling one another 'my dear' and hugging, kissing, and tickling each other as if they were a mixture of wanton males and females, and assuming effeminate voices and airs." Many were dressed as women, "completely rigged in gowns, petticoats, headcloths, fine laced shoes, furbelowed scarves, and masks."<sup>93</sup>

Unlike the word "sodomy," which had been used to describe specific acts, "molly" denoted a more broadly conceived identity that included not only sexual attraction to other men but also clearly delineated patterns of

self-presentation, even of personality. Whereas theologians in England and New England had argued that everyone was susceptible to sodomitical impulses, molly referred to a specific cadre within the metropolitan population. In focusing on persons instead of acts and in its application to a particular group instead of fallen humanity, in general, the molly represented a major shift in the classification of sexual attraction between men away from “sodomy” and toward what thinkers in the late nineteenth century would term “homosexuality.” But neither the rise of a distinctive subculture nor the conflation of sodomy and effeminacy that it embodied was discernible in English communities outside the metropolis. In smaller towns and villages, men who wanted to have sex with other men continued to rely on more tenuous networks and what Bray terms “socially diffused” encounters,<sup>94</sup> a pattern apparently true of early American communities. Surviving evidence from colonial cities gives no signs of a subculture such as London offered. Nor did attacks on cross-dressing in the colonies imply that the wearing of female clothes was related to sodomitical behavior; effeminacy and sodomy were separate categories in early America.<sup>95</sup>

Recent scholarship on the reconfiguration of sexuality and gender in eighteenth-century London and other major European cities shows that modern notions of sexual identity began to develop long before they became crystallized in the taxonomy that now dominates sexual discourse.<sup>96</sup> The New England evidence suggests that making a clear-cut distinction between premodern conceptions of sodomy as an *act* and the modern construction of a homosexual *identity* is problematic not only for eighteenth-century urban culture but also for early modern popular attitudes in the provinces and colonies. To argue that New Englanders identified a distinct sodomitical sexuality would be to stretch the evidence far beyond the bounds of credibility. But exposure to the recurrent impulses of men like Nicholas Sension does seem to have led neighbors and acquaintances to treat sodomy as a specific and persistent impulse; it became in their minds a habitual course of action that characterized some men throughout their lives.<sup>97</sup>

The boundaries between official and popular attitudes should not be overdrawn. In the judgment against Gorton, we see an ecclesiastical body adapting authorized categories so as to incorporate social observation, mediating between doctrinal formulations and reports of actual behavior.<sup>98</sup> Some people doubtless used official categories to interpret what they saw going on around them. Yet the surviving evidence suggests that other

men and women identified in certain individuals an ongoing predilection for members of the same sex. The latter response, which falls somewhere between the paradigms focused on act and identity, was quite different from the authorized view of sodomy. That difference was more than a function of rhetoric or occasion: it evinced distinct interpretive responses to sex, one determined by a theological system, the other more empirical.

The long-term survival of apparently incorrigible offenders suggests that many New Englanders either did not condemn sodomy as readily as their leaders or else took the view that acting against such behavior was less important than maintaining the social integrity and reputation of their communities. People who felt compelled to do something may often have preferred private exhortation to public confrontation, partly because of the difficulties inherent in legal prosecution and partly because informal channels were more discreet. But others seem to have felt no compulsion to do anything, in some cases perhaps because they did not identify the behavior as specifically sodomitical and in others because they did not particularly care. Difficult though it was to secure a conviction for sodomy in a New England court, the greater challenge for those who favored legal action was persuading their neighbors to join them in pressing charges, even against "notorious" individuals like John Allexander. Thus, the citizens of Windsor allowed Nicholas Sension to avoid prosecution for over thirty years and to live as a respected member of his community, despite his "sodomitical actings." And thus the Baptist congregation in eighteenth-century New London would delay for several decades before acting against even a pastor, who was known for his sodomitical "disposition."

#### NOTES

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1. For the transcripts from Sension's trial see "Crimes and Misdemeanours," Connecticut Archives, 1st ser. (1662/3–1789), vol. I, nos. 85–102, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, and Norbert B. Lacy, ed., "Records of the Court of Assistants of Connecticut, 1665–1701" (M.A. thesis, Yale University, 1937), 67–68. Jonathan Ned Katz discusses this case in *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York, 1983), 111–18. See also Linda Auwers Bissell, "Family, Friends, and Neighbors: Social Interaction in Seventeenth-Century Windsor, Connecticut" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis

University, 1973), 123–28. Limited biographical information is contained in Henry Reed Stiles, *The History and Genealogies of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut, . . . 1635–1891*, 2 vols. rev. ed. (Hartford, 1891–1892). Sension's date and place of birth are unknown. His wife was admitted to church communion in January 1649, but Sension himself does not appear to have been a church member.

2. "Crimes and Misdemeanours," Conn. Arch., I, nos. 87a, 88a.

3. Ibid., no. 101. See also *ibid.*, no. 88a.

4. William Phelps had prompted town elders to reprimand Sension in the late 1640s after discovering that Sension had made advances to his brothers and other young men in the neighborhood. Twenty years later, Isaac Pond initiated a second investigation after his brother Nathaniel, a servant in the Sension household, complained to Isaac about his master's attempts to sodomize him.

5. "Crimes and Misdemeanours," Conn. Arch., I, no. 93.

6. This essay is indebted to the pioneering work of Katz in *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York, 1976) and *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*; Roger Thompson, "Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in the Seventeenth-Century New England Colonies," *Journal of American Studies*, 23 (1989), 27–40; Robert F. Oaks, "'Things Fearful to Name': Sodomy and Buggery in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1978), 268–81, and "Defining Sodomy in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," in Salvatore J. Licata and Robert P. Petersen, eds. *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality* (New York, 1981), 79–83; Louis Crompton, "Homosexuals and the Death Penalty in Colonial America," *Journal of Homosexuality*, I (1976), 277–93; and David Joseph Hibler, "Sexual Rhetoric in Seventeenth-Century American Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1970), esp. 61–68. See also John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York, 1982), 50–51.

7. This very influential view of sexuality as rooted in culture instead of nature was developed by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1988).

8. John H. Gagnon and William Simon develop the concept of sexual "scripts" in *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* (Chicago, 1973), esp. 1–26, and "Sexual Scripts," *Society*, 22, No. 1 (1984), 53–60. These scripts coordinate both the conventions of interpersonal encounters and the ways in which individuals interpret their feelings and behavior. Gagnon and Simon identify different "levels" of scripting, from "cultural scenarios" shared by all members of a given culture to "intrapsychic scripts" that express an individual's most private and idiosyncratic desires.

The relationship between cultural constructs and sexual attraction has given rise to a complex debate among social scientists and, more recently, historians; see Diane Richardson, "The Dilemma of Essentiality in Homosexual Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 9, Nos. 2–3 (1983–1984), 79–90; Gregory A. Sprague, "Male Homosexuality in Western Culture: The Dilemma of Identity and Subculture in His-

torical Research," *ibid.*, 10, Nos. 3–4 (1984), 29–43; Editors' Introduction, in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York, 1989); Stephen O. Murray, "Homosexual Acts and Selves in Early Modern Europe," in Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma, eds., *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe* (New York, 1989), 467; David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York, 1990); and Edward Stein, ed., *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York, 1990).

9. As Bruce R. Smith points out, for the 16th and 17th centuries "sexuality was not, as it is for us, the starting place for anyone's self-definition"; Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago, 1991), 10–11. See also Robert A. Padgug, "Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History," *Radical History Review*, 20 (1979), 16. The application of 20th-century sexual categories such as "homosexual" to earlier cultures can be extremely misleading. Smith makes a useful distinction between "homosexuality" as "specific to our own culture and to our own moment in history" and "homosexual behavior" as "a cross-cultural, transhistorical phenomenon"; Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, 12, but "homosexual" carries so many connotations for the 20th-century reader that I prefer to avoid it, along with the term "gay."

10. Katz's introduction to pt. I of *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, 29–35, implies that colonists in general viewed sodomy through an officially approved interpretive lens. But scholars of early modern England and Europe have suggested recently that a sharp distinction between premodern and modern notions of sex may be less useful for understanding social experience and the attitudes of ordinary people than for discussion of theological and legal discourse; see note 96 below.

11. See especially Thompson, "Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in the Seventeenth-Century New England Colonies."

12. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, I, 11.

13. See, for example, Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (Boston, 1726), 674, and John Cotton, *A Meet Help* (Boston, 1699), 16.

14. See James T. Johnson, "The Covenant Idea and the Puritan View of Marriage," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32 (1971), esp. 108–10.

15. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 609. Marital sex was not without its dangers. Husband and wife must take care lest their physical relationship distract them from their love for Christ. The act of generation was, moreover, tainted by its association with the curse placed on Adam and Eve, so that intercourse and the children that resulted from it were marked by the legacy of original sin. For two very different impressions of Puritan attitudes toward sex see Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritans and Sex," *New England Quarterly*, 15 (1942), 591–607, and Kathleen Verduin, "'Our Cursed Natures': Sexuality and the Puritan Conscience," *ibid.*, 56 (1983), 220–37. See also Michael Zuckerman, "Pilgrims in the Wilderness:



Community, Modernity, and the Maypole at Merry Mount," *ibid.*, 50 (1977), esp. 264–67.

16. Samuel Danforth, *The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into* (Cambridge, Mass., 1674), 6. Frequent use of "uncleanness" to describe unauthorized sexual acts, in court records and sermons, derived from this conception of the body as a temple that must be kept undefiled, "a house for the soul to dwell and act in"; Jonathan Mitchel, "Continuation of Sermons on the Body of Divinity," 209, Feb. 7, 1657, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. See also Cotton Mather, *The Pure Nazarene* (Boston, 1723), 17.

17. Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, 3–5.

18. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 681–82.

19. See, for example, William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), 316. For an intriguing commentary on Bradford's discussion of illicit sex that draws on recent "queer theory" see Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford, 1992), 223–46. Mitchel distinguished between "wantonness and unnatural pollutions," terms equivalent to Danforth's "fornication" and "going after strange flesh," in "Continuation of Sermons Concerning Man's Misery," June 21, 1654, MHS.

20. Cotton, "An Abstract of the Laws of New-England as they are now established" (1641), *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st Ser., 5 (1798), 183; Shepard, *The Sincere Convert: Discovering the Small Number of True Believers . . .* (Cambridge, Mass., 1664), 67; Chauncy, "Opinions of Three Ministers on Unnatural Vice" (1642), in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Morison, 411; Whiting, *Abraham's Humble Intercession for Sodom* (Cambridge, Mass., 1666), 46.

21. It also "might be committed with more secrecy and less suspicion," presumably because the parties involved did not have to worry about exposure through pregnancy; Rayner, "Opinions of Three Ministers," 405.

22. Chauncy, *ibid.*, 410.

23. Mather, *An Holy Rebuke to the Unclean Spirit* (Boston, 1693), 44; *The Sailor's Companion and Counsellor* (Boston, 1709), viii. See also the denunciations by Ralph Partridge in "Opinions of Three Ministers," 407, by Mitchel in "Continuation of Sermons Concerning Man's Misery," Aug. 15, 1655, and by Increase Mather in *Solemn Advice to Young Men* (Boston, 1695), 37. The main biblical prohibitions and precedents that provided the bases for clerical teaching on this subject were Gen. 19:1–29; Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Deut. 23:17; Judg. 19:22–23; I Kings 15:12; II Kings 23:1; Rom. 1:26–27; I Cor. 6:9–10; I Tim. 1:10. Thompson discusses "the conventional revulsion against homosexuals" in early modern England and New England in "Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in the Seventeenth-Century New England Colonies," esp. 31–34.

24. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Morison. 316. See also John Rainolds, *Th'overthrow Of Stage-Playes . . .* (Middleburgh, 1599), 10, 32.



25. Shepard, *Sincere Convert*, 42. See also Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, 11. This general propensity toward at least "heart sodomy" included the ministers themselves. Michael Wigglesworth, for example, admitted to "filthy lust . . . flowing from [his] affection to [his] pupils"; Wigglesworth, "Diary," *Colonial Society of Massachusetts Publications*, 35 (1946), 350. For a detailed discussion of Wigglesworth's struggle with his filthy lust see Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, 94–100.

26. Cotton Mather, *A Christian At His Calling* (Boston, 1701), 43.

27. Mitchel, "Continuation of Sermons Concerning Man's Misery," Feb. 1, 1653.

28. Willard, *Useful Instructions of a Professing People in Times of Great Security and Degeneracy* . . . (Cambridge, Mass., 1673), 12. The importance of Sodom as an inspiration to collective discipline is discussed in Michael Warner, "New English Sodom," *American Literature*, 64 (1992), 19–47.

29. Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, 6, 18–19. Cotton Mather and Danforth both used a developmental framework to portray sodomy and bestiality as the culmination of a career in sin, both sexual and nonsexual; Mather, *Holy Rebuke*, 42–44; Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, 8–9. See also *The Life and Death of John Atherton, Lord Bishop of Waterford and Lysmore* (London, 1641), and Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume de Salluste Sieur du Bartas*, trans. Joshua Sylvester, ed. S. Snyder (Oxford, 1979), 518, 522.

Commentators on both sides of the Atlantic associated sodomy with disorder and linked it to other sins that inverted the "natural" state of things or challenged authority. See Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London, 1982), 25–26. Thus, Danforth saw fit to emphasize Benjamin Goad's disobedience to his parents and his sabbath breaking as part of his slide into "sodomitical wickedness" and bestiality. Edward Coke included the crime in a trio with sorcery and heresy, both of which embodied treason against God; Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, 8–9; Coke, *The Twelfth Part of the Reports* . . . (London, 1656), 36.

30. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, I, 101.

31. There was no identifiable change in clerical attitudes toward sodomy during the 17th century, and ministers' views on the subject were remarkably consistent with each other. Rayner's comment that sodomy's nonreproductive character made it a less serious offense against "family and posterity" than "some other capital sins of uncleanness" was an unusual concession, albeit overshadowed by standard denunciations elsewhere in his *Opinion: "Opinions of Three Ministers,"* 405.

32. Across the Atlantic, sodomy referred sometimes to sex between men and sometimes to anal sex. As Arthur N. Gilbert points out, this dual meaning ("relational" vs. "behavioral") gave rise to "endless confusion"; Gilbert, "Conceptions of Homosexuality and Sodomy in Western History," *J. Homosexuality*, 6 (1980–1981), esp. 62–63.

33. Rayner pointed out that "there was not the like reason and degree of sinning against family and posterity in this sin as in some other capital sins of

uncleanness." From this perspective, sodomy's nonprocreative nature made it less threatening than adultery or rape, either of which could intrude illegitimate offspring into a family's line of inheritance; "Opinions of Three Ministers," 405.

34. The English statutes of 1533 and 1563 used "buggery" to denote both sodomy and bestiality, thus conflating the two principal categories of "unnatural" sex, whereas the New England legal codes treated the two crimes separately. "Buggery" was mostly used in New England to denote bestiality, although it did occasionally refer to sex between men. Sodomy and bestiality were apparently becoming more distinct in English legal minds during the 17th century; see Gregory W. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca, 1991), 19–20.

35. The Plymouth code of 1636 merely listed capital crimes; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, 12 vols. (Boston, 1855–1861), XI, 12, whereas the much fuller General Laws of 1671 incorporated the Levitical injunction; *The Book of the General Laws of the Inhabitants of the Jurisdiction of New-Plimouth . . .* (Cambridge, Mass., 1672), 4. The original Massachusetts law of 1641, "The Capital Laws of New England," *Col. Soc. Mass. Publications*, 17 (1913–1914), 117, was amended to exempt from the death sentence parties who were either "forced" or under age 14 in the 1647 version, *The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass. 1648), 5–6. The Connecticut law of 1642, later incorporated into the code of 1650, copied the 1641 Massachusetts law; J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut . . .* vol. I (Hartford, 1850), 77, 515. It was amended in 1672 along lines similar (force or under age 15) to the Massachusetts revision of 1647; *The Book of the General Laws for the People within the Jurisdiction of Connecticut . . .* (Cambridge, Mass., 1673), 9. For the New Hampshire law of 1680, see "Cappitall Lawes" in John D. Cushing, ed., *Acts and Laws of New Hampshire, 1680–1726* (Wilmington, Del., 1978), 205. The sodomy laws remained unchanged under the Dominion. Nor were there immediate changes under the 1691 charter, although Massachusetts adopted a new law in 1697 that combined biblical language with legal phraseology taken from the English statutes of 1533 and 1563; *Acts and Laws of His Majesties Province of the Massachusetts Bay . . .* (Boston, 1699), 114. New Hampshire followed suit in 1718; *Acts and Laws of New Hampshire . . .*, ed. Cushing, 141.

36. "Proceedings of the First General Assembly," in Cushing, ed., *The Earliest Acts and Laws of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1647–1719* (Wilmington, Del., 1977), 25–26. See also the slightly modified law of 1663, *ibid.*, 64. Unlike the Leviticus-inspired laws, this formulation alludes to the "affection" and "lusts" that apparently drove men to commit sodomy. Puritan writers regularly used these words in describing the impulses, sexual and nonsexual, that innate depravity aroused. Even when used in a specifically sexual context, as in Chauncy's reference to the "unnatural lusts of men with men. or woman with

woman," such language did not signify a distinct sexual agency or subjectivity underlying the acts; "Opinions of Three Ministers," 411.

37. Cotton, "Abstract of the Laws of New-England," 183.

38. *New-Haven's Settling in New-England. And Some Laws for Government*. . . . (London, 1656), 19. The law gave no clue as to how sex between women was to be defined or proven.

39. *Ibid.*, 19. Why New Haven rejected a simple restatement of biblical injunction in favor of a lengthy, unusually explicit, and broadly conceived formulation is a mystery. If this sodomy law had been the first to appear in New England, it might be tempting to argue for a narrowing definition of the crime as years passed. Yet other northern colonies had already adopted laws that specified sex between men as their purview. New Haven's code was thus anomalous, not part of a trend. The General Court may have hoped that a far-reaching definition of the crime would facilitate legal process in dealing with sex offenders, reacting against the restrictive format used elsewhere. If so, no other colony followed New Haven's example. The New Haven law remained in effect for only 10 years since the colony united with Connecticut in 1665 and thereafter came under Connecticut's legal code.

40. George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County*, vol. I: 1636–1656 (Salem, Mass., 1911), 44.

41. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Plym. Col. Recs.*, II, 137.

42. The legal system's focus on male sex was driven not only by a generally phallocentric discourse but also by a preoccupation with the effects of illicit reproduction on lines of inheritance or (in case of bastardy) the public purse and further by the practical difficulty of defining and proving nonphallic sexual acts. For discussion of theological and legal perspectives on sex between women in pre-modern western society see Louis Crompton, "The Myth of Lesbian Impunity: Capital Laws from 1270 to 1791," in Licata and Peterson, eds., *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality*, 11–25, and Judith C. Brown, "Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in Duberman et al., eds., *Hidden from History*, 67–75.

43. John Winthrop describes this case in his *History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage, 2 vols. (Boston, 1825–1826), II, 45–48.

44. *Ibid.*, 48. The court was also uncertain whether Dorcas had been a willing party. In a rape case that would be a central issue, whereas if the sexual acts performed by Daniel Fairfield, Jenkin Davis, and John Hudson were categorized as sodomy, they could be judged as capital regardless of consent.

45. *Ibid.*; Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853–1854), II, 12–13. On the same day, the General Court amended the law against rape so as to enable use of the death penalty in future cases of child molestation; *ibid.*, II, 21–22.

46. Winthrop, *Journal* (Hartford, 1790), 229. No case of anal sex between a

man and a woman is known to have come before a New England court, in New Haven or elsewhere, although it seems possible that magistrates would have considered such an act “against nature” and so at least related to sodomy.

47. Coke held that there must be “*penetratio*, that is, *res in re* (one thing inside another),” although he added that “the least penetration maketh it carnal knowledge”; Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning . . . Criminal Cases* . . . (London, 1644), 58–59. Yet this restrictive view of the crime was rejected in the Westminster trial of Mervyn Touchet, Lord Audley, second earl of Castlehaven, who was accused of “abetting a rape upon his countess” and “committing sodomy with his servants.” The attorney general argued that the law of 1563 did not actually require that penetration had taken place: it described the crime “in general terms, and *ubi lex non distinguit, ibi non distinguendum* (where the law does not distinguish, no distinction should be made).” The lord chief justice followed the same line of reasoning, insisting that the law made “no distinction” between ejaculation without penetration and penetration itself. See Caroline Bingham, “Seventeenth-Century Attitudes toward Deviant Sex,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 1 (1970–1971), 447–72, quotations on 448, 456, 459.

48. Winthrop, *History of New England*, II, 47.

49. “Opinions of Three Ministers,” 404–13.

50. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 319.

51. The inconsistencies appear to have been ad hoc; they do not form any clear pattern of changing attitudes within the magistracy over time. But the surviving records are often so laconic or vague that it is not possible to tell what criteria were being used. In the case of William Plaine, for example, it is unclear whether his conviction was based on his having committed sodomy “with two persons in England” or his encouraging young people in Guilford, New Haven Colony, to masturbate, or both; Winthrop, *History of New England*, II, 265.

52. Drawing on the responses of Rayner, Chauncy, and Partridge, Hibler suggests that the “tendency” among New England theologians was to believe “that a full act of sodomy was constituted merely in the emission of seed, even if penetration did not take place”; Hibler, “Sexual Rhetoric in Seventeenth-Century American Literature,” 62–63. Yet the accounts by Winthrop and Bradford indicate that most of those consulted in 1642 tended toward the more restrictive view.

53. See, for example, Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Plym. Col. Recs.*, II, 35.

54. In 1637, a Plymouth court found John Allexander and Thomas Roberts “guilty of lude behaviour and uncleane carriage one with another, by often spendinge their seed one upon another.” The emission of seed established beyond doubt their unclean carriage, but there was no evidence to support a charge of outright sodomy. Caution is in order here since the record does not specify whether the ejaculations in question resulted from autoerotic or mutual stimulation. The latter may have been treated as closer to sodomy than the former; *ibid.*, I, 64. The officials who presided over the trial concerning Dorcas Humfry in 1642

seem to have assumed that the ability to ejaculate was at least relevant. When Humfry claimed not only that three men had "abused" her but also that two of her own brothers had "used such dalliance with her," the magistrates decided that the boys in question were too young to be capable of "semination" and so left them to "private correction"; Winthrop, *History of New England*, II, 46.

55. As Foucault put it, because sodomy was "a category of forbidden acts, their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them"; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, I, 43.

56. Coton Mather's reference to "Sodomites on board" is the only exception to this that I have found; Mather, *Sailor's Companion*, 39. Ministers did mention "Sodomites" as in the citizens of Sodom. See, for example, Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, 1.

57. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Plym. Col. Recs.*, II, 35.

58. *Ibid.*, 28.

59. Winthrop, *History of New England*, II, 265; "Early General Records of the Colony of New Haven," vol. IB, 89–91, Conn. St. Lib. For three cases of sodomy heard by eighteenth-century Massachusetts courts, see Thomas Foster, "Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Anglo-American Discourses of Sex and Manliness in Massachusetts, 1690–1765" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2002), 157–60.

60. It is not possible to tell whether any of those who engaged in sodomy (or acts "tending to sodomy") were gender exclusive in their sexual tastes, but some were clearly not. Edward Michell of Plymouth Colony had apparently engaged in lewd carriages with Lydia Hatch as well as lewd and sodomitical practices with Edward Preston; Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Plym. Col. Recs.*, II, 35–36. Teage Joanes, also of Plymouth Colony, was presented in 1649 on charges of sodomy with an unnamed individual and other unclean carriages with Sara Norman, who herself appeared in court that same year for lewd behavior with Mary Hammon; *ibid.*, II, 137, 146–48. The laconic court records give no clue as to whether these assorted offenders were aware of each other's activities. See also the 1655 case of John Knight, who was charged with having assaulted both Peter Vincon and Mary Clarke, in "Early General Records of the Colony of New Haven." vol. IB, 89–91.

61. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Plym. Col. Recs.*, I, 64.

62. *Ibid.*, II, 35–36.

63. Fortunately for Sension, only one deponent at his trial claimed actually to have seen him engage in intercourse with Pond. Daniel Saxton, another of Sension's servants, told the court that he saw his master get into bed with Pond "and make the bed shake," which led Saxton to believe that Sension had indeed "committed the sin of sodomy"; "Crimes and Misdemeanours," Conn. Arch., I, nos. 93, 95b. But Sension denied having sodomized anyone, and, since Pond himself had died in Metacomet's Rebellion, the court lacked the two witnesses required by law for a capital conviction.

64. Ibid., no. 95b.

65. Ibid., no. 89. Katz has suggested that since Sension's marriage was childless, the servant may also have been motivated by hopes of an inheritance, in *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, 114.

66. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 49–51, 56. Bruce Smith identifies the myth of "Master and Minion" as an important component in the cultural poetics of same-sex desire in the English Renaissance. That particular mythic configuration "reinforced the hierarchical relationships in which Renaissance readers defined themselves as individuals, as members of society, and as partners in love"; Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, 193.

67. Sension "acknowledged he took [it] up at the school where he was educated"; "Crimes and Misdemeanours," Conn. Arch., I, no. 98b.

68. Ibid., nos. 96a, 96b.

69. Winthrop, *History of New England*, II, 265. Bray discusses Christopher Marlowe's controversial views on sodomy and religion in *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 63–66.

70. "Crimes and Misdemeanours," Conn. Arch., I, nos. 88a, 95b.

71. Ibid., no. 91.

72. Ibid., no. 99.

73. Ibid., no. 89.

74. Ibid., no. 98.

75. Ibid., nos. 87a, 88b, 93.

76. Ibid., no. 99.

77. Ibid., no. 92. In 1677, Sension himself sued Saxton for defaming him by "charging of him with a notorious crime." The timing of the suit relative to Sension's trial is unclear from the surviving transcripts. It is possible that Sension precipitated the charges against himself by bringing the suit and so provoking a series of depositions defending Saxton and incriminating Sension. But it seems unlikely that Sension would have taken such a risk, especially given his sense of his own endangerment as reported in some of the depositions.

78. New London [Conn.] congregation to General Meeting of Baptist Churches, Sept. 11, 1756, Backus Papers, box 7, Andover-Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Mass. I am much indebted to Susan Juster, who kindly shared her transcripts of the correspondence between the General Meeting of Baptist Churches, the church at New London, and Gorton. Juster discusses the controversy over Gorton's behavior in *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, 1994), 90–92.

79. General Meeting of Baptist Churches to Stephen Gorton, Sept. 13, 1756, Backus Papers, box 7.

80. New London County Court Records, loose files, June Term, 1726, Conn. St. Lib. Since neither the court record nor the church correspondence from 1756 revealed the identity of the men with whom Gorton tried to have sex, the distribu-

tion of social power between those involved cannot be reconstructed, although Gorton's position as a household head is suggestive.

81. General Meeting of Baptist Churches to Stephen Gorton, Sept. 10, 1757, Backus Papers, box 7.

82. New London congregation to General Meeting of Baptist Churches, Sept. 11, 1756.

83. Thirty-seven members (12 men and 25 women) supported Gorton's restoration; 16 (9 men and 7 women) agreed that he should be restored to church membership but opposed his resumption of pastoral responsibilities; only 5 (2 men and 3 women) voted against his restoration to membership or the pastorate; vote of New London congregation re receiving Stephen Gorton as minister again, June 8, 1757, Backus Papers, box 7.

84. Gorton's restoration to the pastorate might have been less decisive were it not for the preponderance of women in the church membership. He might also have had more difficulty holding on to his position had the disciplinary hearing taken place in the 17th century. As Cornelia Hughes Dayton has noted, New England clergymen were apparently better able to weather accusations of fornication by the early 18th century. It does seem remarkable, nonetheless, that Gorton could survive notoriety for "unchaste behavior with his fellow men"; Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 48 (1991), 39 n. 72.

85. Any number of local incidents and controversies involving sodomy may have escaped record because of New Englanders' preference for noninstitutional forms of social control. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich argues convincingly that "courts seldom prosecuted sexual deviance because informal mechanisms of control were so powerful"; Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York, 1990), 149. The paucity of legal cases in the 18th century does not necessarily represent a decline in either sodomitical activity or popular concern about such behavior. As courts took less and less interest in the enforcement of moral values, incidents of illicit sexual behavior were addressed through informal action within local communities and within the families concerned; Dayton, "Turning Points and the Relevance of Colonial Legal History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 50 (1993), 12-13.

86. "Marblehead First Church Records, 1688-1800," Old North Church, Marblehead, Mass. I am grateful to Christine Leigh Heyrman for sharing this citation. There is no evidence to indicate whether Knight or Gorton did mend their ways.

87. New London congregation to General Meeting of Baptist Churches, Sept. 11, 1756; General Meeting of Baptist Churches to Stephen Gorton, Sept. 13, 1756.

88. See Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 69, 76.

89. *Ibid.*, 69. A witness in the English case of George Dowdeney (an innkeeper from Hatch Beauchamp, Somerset) came forward only when "he heard diverse others charge him with facts of the same kind"; Somerset Record Office/Q/SR/40.



This case is discussed in G. R. Quaife, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1979), 175–77, and Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 70, 74, 76, 128–29.

90. According to Thompson, “the evidence suggests that homosexual behavior was virtually unknown in everyday life”; Thompson, “Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England,” 34. But the tendency of locals to act against such behavior either informally or not at all supports Oaks’s contention that “there was undoubtedly much more homosexual activity than the court records indicate”; Oaks, “‘Things Fearful to Name,’” 271. As the Rev. John Rayner pointed out in 1642, it was more likely that those who engaged in sodomy would escape detection than when a man and a woman fornicated, since there was no threat of pregnancy (see note 21 above). This further strengthens Oaks’s case.

91. Thompson, “Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England,” quotations on 31, 34.

92. Popular attitudes toward sodomitical behavior in early modern England do not seem to have been particularly disapproving. As B. R. Burg argues, although sodomy was not “an accepted form of conduct,” it had “little inherent capacity to evoke passionate detestation.” There were very few prosecutions for sodomy in part because the law could not be enforced without local cooperation; Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean* (New York, 1984), 40; Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 70–71.

93. *Select Trials for Murders, Robberies, Rape, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, and Other Offences at the Sessions-House in the Old Bailey*, 3 vols. (London, 1742), II, 257–58. For discussion of molly houses in 18th-century London, the subculture that developed around them, and the reconfiguration of sexual and gender identity in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, see Randolph Trumbach, “London’s Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the 18th Century,” *Journal of Social History*, 2 (1977–1978), 1–33; Mary McIntosh, “The Homosexual Role,” in Kenneth Plummer, ed., *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (Totowa, NJ, 1981), 30–49; and Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, chap. 4. Trumbach, McIntosh, and Bray disagree over exactly when the subculture emerged, but it was clearly in place by the early 18th century. For discussion of similar developments in other major European cities, see Stephen Murray and Kent Gerard, “Renaissance Sodomite Subcultures?” in *Among Men, Among Women* (Amsterdam, 1983), 183–96; Trumbach, “Sodomitical Subcultures, Sodomitical Roles, and the Gender Revolution in the Eighteenth Century: The Recent Historiography,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 9, No. 3 (1985), 109–21; and Gerard and Hekma, eds., *Pursuit of Sodomy*, *passim*.

94. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 92.

95. Thompson argues that Puritan hostility to sodomy was a defensive response to “the presence of gender role confusion and sexual insecurity within an



aggressively masculine environment"; Thompson, "Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England," 34. This assumes, inter alia, a connection between effeminacy and sodomy that did not exist in early American culture. None of the depositions given in the 1629 trial of Thomas/Thomasina Hall in Virginia for cross-dressing made any mention of sodomitical behavior on Hall's part; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia*, 2d ed. (Richmond, 1979), 194–95. Nor did any of those who accused Lord Cornbury, royal governor of New York and New Jersey (1701–1708), of appearing in public dressed as a woman attempt to besmirch his reputation further by suggesting that he was interested sexually in other men; Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, 125–27. Nor did English colonial documents make any connection between "effeminacy" and sodomy among Native Americans; *ibid.*, 50.

96. Bray, for example, questions the radicalism of developments in the late 19th century in *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 134–37. See also Murray, "Homosexual Acts and Selves in Early Modern Europe," and Joseph Cady, "'Masculine Love,' Renaissance Writing, and the 'New Invention' of Homosexuality," in Claude J. Summers, ed., *Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment England: Literary Representations in Historical Context* (New York, 1992), 9–40.

97. The English case of George Dowdeney resembles that of Sension in that locals described many attempts by the accused during at least the previous 14 years to seduce men and youths in the vicinity, presenting Dowdeney's interest in members of the same sex as an ongoing "course" (analogous to Sension's "trade").

98. This is reminiscent of the mediations between clerical and lay concerns captured brilliantly in David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York, 1989).