

## 1. Gender Nonconformity, Effeminacy, and Gay Bottom Identities

This chapter is divided into two sections that explore the relationship between gender nonconformity, effeminacy, and gay bottom identities in the academic literature as well as online LGBTQ+ media. It explores effeminacy and gay bottom identities among gay males from both socio-cultural and psychobiological angles, and questions the current separation of sexual orientation from gender expression and sex role when studying gay men. This chapter therefore sets out the key concepts and debates.

### 1.1 Deep Structures? Gender Nonconformity, Effeminacy, and Bottom Roles / Identities

Defining gender nonconformity in today's LGBTQ+ climate is not easy. The LGBTQ Center at Montclair State University, for example, defines someone who is gender nonconforming as 'a person who [...] either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (ex. Transgender, transexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc.)' (Montclair State University, n.d.). This definition is not exactly helpful, however, because it simply directs a reader to other labels that also have definitions. *Genderqueer*, for instance, is described as 'a gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Individuals that identify as genderqueer often challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system' (Montclair State University, n.d.). It's not entirely clear, then, how a genderqueer person differs from a gender nonconforming one, or indeed how both can be distinguished from a gender variant individual, or, still, from anyone who 'challenges gender stereotypes' – an extremely broad remit that may, by some definitions, encompass most men and women in post-industrial Western societies. Crucially, none of these definitions has anything to say about such a person's sexuality.

By contrast, *effeminacy* is a term that can be more easily pinned down. Unlike *gender nonconforming*, effeminacy has always been associated nearly exclusively with males and for most of the twentieth century has also had sexual connotations. Merriam-Webster, for example, defines *effeminate* in the adjective form as 'having feminine qualities untypical of a man'. In 1975 US researchers even attempted to offer a quantitative rating scale to measure effeminacy in adult men as opposed to boys.<sup>1</sup> They sought to move beyond 'pejorative' terms such as *swishy*, *faggy*, and *flaming queens* and offer something indicating the actual 'behavioral properties involved' (Schatzberg et al., 1975, p. 32). 67 items were proposed, framed as questions and divided into categories of speech, gait, posture and tonus, mouth movements, upper face and eyes, hand gestures, hand and torso gestures, body type, body narcissism, and Other – 'Does he take his shoes off during the interview?' (!). My personal favourite is: 'As he walks, do his buttocks noticeably roll in an up-and-down direction?' (p. 34).

There are of course a host of difficulties associated with a scale like this, not least its behavioural reductionism and risks associated with medicalising effeminacy and therefore

suggesting it is pathological – something to be remedied rather than accepted and destigmatised. But as a historical document, the Effeminacy Scale offers a glimpse into attempts to define what effeminacy means. It is also instructive for thinking of effeminacy beyond *stereotypical* effeminacy: the flamboyant and the camp, often associated with cross-dressing.

Sex researchers investigating gender nonconformity have usually also seen effeminacy as something deeper or more pervasive (see below and Chapter 2): a sensitive, quiet, ‘soft’ gay man interested in ‘feminine’ pursuits and rejecting ‘masculine’ ones but who mostly dresses in recognisably male clothing can be read as effeminate or gender nonconforming just as more flamboyant effeminate gay men can. C. A. Tripp’s division of effeminacy into *nelly*, *swish*, *blasé*, and *camp* was also an attempt in the 1970s to emphasise the diversity of American effeminacy, with *nelly* being the least flamboyant variety: ‘It is notably lacking in hostility, in bitchy qualities, or any flamboyance’, wrote Tripp, ‘and consequently has the remarkable characteristic of being obvious without being loud. Nelly males tend to be unusually gentle; they seem never to be intrusive or sharp-tongued’ (1977, p. 178).

Tripp’s typology underscores the fact that *effeminacy* and *femininity*, when it comes to males, are not always interchangeable. As scholars have pointed out, when we talk about a gay male being ‘fem’, ‘nelly’, or ‘queeny’, the traits that indicate such a description rarely find direct correspondence in females. Gay voice, a swishy walk, elegant posture, sartorial aesthetics, and even talk of ‘fem energy’, indicate femininity *refracted through maleness*. As Rictor Norton has pointed out, quoting Judy Grahn, there is a ‘gay cultural tradition’ in which effeminacy in males is distinguished from femininity in females: ‘the sweet sibilant faggot speech is peculiar to gay men, and completely distinctive’ (2016, p. 20).

As I discuss in Chapter 5, it’s also the case that for men who are attracted to fem bottoms – and they do exist – part of their attraction or sex object choice is rooted in the bottom’s maleness, even if such bottoms are perceived to be effeminate. These men are attracted to aspects of femininity refracted through a recognisably male presentation; when such a male is able to ‘pass’ as a female, the attraction typically ceases. Hence the contemporary difference between twink bottoms and other femboy identities: the twink bottom has a recognisably male presentation, despite being often seen as effeminate, whereas other fem identities may branch more extensively into female presentation.

However, I am aware that not everyone – including gay men themselves – like the words *effeminacy* and *effeminate*, and it’s for this reason that *fem* is often used precisely to indicate something that isn’t the same as *feminine* but carries less historical baggage than *effeminacy*. But due to the way in which gay-identified online users and media commentators still regularly use the words *effeminate* and *fem* interchangeably, I will maintain this usage. But I fully recognise that for some readers, *effeminate* still carries negative and even medicalised connotations that are distasteful to them. I hope, however, that by emphasising the cultural and historical dimensions of effeminacy, as well as interrogating psychobiological discourses surrounding it, a middle path can be taken. But what about a longer historical treatment of *effeminacy*?

While scholars studying the Classical world have routinely argued that effeminacy need not signify same-sex attraction or behaviour – ‘a soft, romantic disposition in men could be taken as a sign of effeminacy’ – let alone identification with sexual ‘passivity’, scholarly consensus on the nature of effeminacy in early modern Europe to the present is equally contested (Williams, 2010, p. 158; Hennen, 2001, 2008). Indeed, Peter Hennen has preferred to speak of ‘effeminacies’, plural, rather than a singular cultural or historical expression of effeminacy (Hennen, 2001).

In his history of King James I of England and his homosexuality, Michael Young notes the tendency among historians to minimise the role of effeminacy in the history of male homosexuality. ‘It is frequently asserted,’ Young writes, ‘that pre-modern constructions of homosexuality were not yet linked to effeminacy’ (2000, p. 5). He goes on to show that effeminacy, defined similarly to the definition provided by Merriam-Webster, ‘was an integral part of Jacobean discourse about sexual relations between males’, thus predating even Randolph Trumbach’s pinpointing of the marriage of effeminacy and homosexuality to the eighteenth century (Young, 2000, p. 5; Trumbach, 1998).

The historian Rictor Norton has likewise argued persuasively that it’s simply not true to say, as scholars such as Alan Sinfield and David Halperin have done, building on Foucault, that (1) before the late nineteenth century there were only homosexual acts rather than homosexual, same-sex attracted persons, and (2) that effeminacy only became linked to homosexuality after the trial of Oscar Wilde, in 1895 (Norton, 2016; Sinfield, 1994; Halperin, 1990). The latter assertion still echoes in contemporary LGBTQ+ media, as a 2020 article on Vice.com demonstrates, arguing that the genealogy of the effeminate bottom stereotype can be linked to Oscar Wilde (Greig, 2020).

Stephen Murray has shown in his brilliant study of male homosexuality across cultures that the effeminate, sexually passive male-attracted male has in fact been of cultural significance since Classical times (Murray, 2000). Both top and bottom same-sex attracted males have, for a long time – certainly from before the trial of Oscar Wilde – been thought of as certain kinds of persons, with dispositions, bents, and even orientations that marked them out – even if only as ideal types – as deviant, liminal, or queer personalities, not simply as men who committed deviant acts (Murray, 1989; Norton, 2010).

The early modern sodomite, at least until the early eighteenth century, was primarily seen as a sexual insertor, whose counterpart was the receptive *catamite*, *ganymede*, *ingle*, or *pathic* (Murray, 1989, p. 462). These terms indicate seventeenth-century cultural awareness of specific types that synergised same-sex attraction (oriented from males to males), specific penetrative sex roles (insertor / insertee), and possible gendered connotations. Norton has argued, for instance, that the sexually passive catamite was perceived as effeminate across several Romance languages in the early modern period (Norton, 2016, p. 105).

The history of effeminacy and homosexuality in the twentieth century in Britain and North America is somewhat easier to argue for because it postdates the Wilde trial of 1895. George Chauncey’s *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (1994) argues convincingly for the way in which *fairies* and *queers* – two

of the main homosexual types in New York before the Second World War – thought of themselves, were thought of by others, and were distinguished from *roughs* or *trade*, with whom fairies and queers had sex and sometimes built long-term relationships with in a form of heterogender homosexuality. The fairy (or alternatively the *pansy* or *queen*) was conceived of as an effeminate, passive male homosexual who was attracted to masculine ‘normal’ men.

With varying degrees of flamboyancy, the fairy can be read as a twentieth-century manifestation of a type of gender nonconforming, sexually receptive male attracted to masculine men that finds correlates in other time periods and in different places. In Britain, a very similar parallel was found at the same time between *queans* and men (Houlbrook, 2005). According to Murray’s typology of homosexualities, which consists of age-stratified, gender-stratified (or heterogender), and egalitarian types, the fairy and the quean would be placed under gender-stratified or heterogender homosexuality, which also links the eighteenth-century English *molly* to the twentieth-century Latin American *maricon*, ‘with expectations of feminine gender presentation and of insertee sexual behavior’ (Murray, 1989, p. 469).

Attempts to recognise and honour continuity over contingency, and hence to locate similar transhistorical and transcultural types of effeminate bottoms, is a methodological commitment that distinguishes key approaches to the study of gender and sexuality in the humanities and social sciences, between social constructionists on the one hand, and essentialists on the other – the latter often a term of derision employed by the former (Norton, 2010; Dynes, 1995). This is a longstanding and often bitter debate that need not be rehearsed in full here (see Halwani, 1998; LeVay, 1996), suffice to say that there are important reasons for nuancing social constructionist approaches, which dominate cultural studies and the wider humanities and social sciences. One needs to ensure that ‘the psychophysiological *trait* sexual orientation [be] distinguished from the *expression* of that trait in terms of behavior, the *identities* assigned to those possessing that trait by the self and others, and the *meanings* associated with the trait in a particular culture’ (Stief, 2017, pp. 73-4, original emphasis). This book therefore explores how ‘personal homosexual identity arises in the first instance from within the individual, [and] may then be consolidated along lines suggested by the wider homosexual subculture as well as warped by the wider homophobic society’ (Norton, 2010, p.10).

*Effeminate Belonging* is thus interested in ‘deep structures’ of gender nonconformity, sexual receptivity, and male attraction to men, sometimes called *androphilia*, and how these intersect to shape patterns of belonging and marginalisation among such males. Delineating deep structures enables one to ‘transcend differences related to how male same-sex sexual attraction is socially constructed within culturally specific contexts’ (Vasey & VanderLaan, 2014, p. 138). Crucially, it seems that scholars are finding it easier to delineate a deep structure of male androphilia when it’s confined to sexually receptive males who are somewhat effeminate (Cardoso, 2005; 2007; 2012). In 1992 James Weinrich and colleagues proposed that ‘there is a different kind of homosexuality – a personality type or a fairly discrete developmental path – in which childhood gender role was relatively feminine and in which receptive anal intercourse has become a highly preferred adult genitoerotic role’ (1992,

p. 583). Moreover, this is, they argued, a hypothesis that ‘has substantial cross-cultural validation’ (1992, p. 583).

More recent contributions have sought to link cross-cultural research into homosexual effeminacy to psychobiological research emphasising links between gender expression – as relatively gender nonconforming – and preferred anal sex role as a bottom (Stief, 2017; Tasos, 2021; VanderLaan et al., 2022). As Matthew Stief summarises, the major theory informing this work is the prenatal hormone theory of sexual orientation,

which proposes that heterosexual attraction is part of a sex-typical psychophysiological and behavioral phenotype. Sex-atypical non-heterosexual attractions are hypothesized to result from variation in androgen levels during a critical period of fetal neurodevelopment when the basis for these adult sex differences is being established. (2017, p. 74; Boa and Swaab, 2011; Arnold, 2009; LeVay, 2017)

As Simon LeVay has pointed out in his book, *Gay, Straight, and the Reason Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation* (2017), the prenatal hormone theory of sexual orientation also posits that sex-atypical sexual attraction (such as being homosexual) may in some instances also be accompanied by gender-nonconforming traits involving voice, mannerisms, digit ratio (relative finger lengths), hobbies and interests, and, as boys, (dis)inclination for rough-and-tumble play (Lippa, 2020; Boa & Swaab, 2011).

The prenatal hormone theory can be traced back to 1976 and is predicated on finding links between mammals and humans; in its current form it also recognises the importance of different stages of androgen surges prenatally as well as perinatally and is focused on organisational effects of these androgens (or lack thereof) on the brain (Tasos, 2021). However, research using this theory is still often beset by the methodological failure to distinguish *between* gay men as well as between gay men and non-gay men, which is why it is often inconclusive (VanderLaan et al., 2022).

Psychologist Ashlyn Swift-Gallant and her colleagues have attempted to nuance the suggestion that gender-nonconformity and other sex-atypical traits are part of a ‘package’ of a sex-atypical shift in the womb that also includes homosexuality, by effectively returning to Weinrich’s earlier hypothesis that this ‘shift’ was particularly pronounced in a subtype of bottom — those for whom bottoming and being a bottom have ‘become a highly preferred adult genitoerotic role’ and who are likely to have a bottom identity (Weinrich et al., 1992, p. 583; Swift-Gallant et al., 2019; 2017). As Weinrich argued, ‘there is now and always has been something “special” about RAI [Receptive Anal Intercourse] which makes it predictable – that is, which allows researchers to correlate it with other aspects of personality’ (Weinrich et al., 1992, p. 584; Moskowitz, 2022). Or, as Simon LeVay writes in *The Sexual Brain* (1994), such bottoms form a particular subgroup of gay men, ‘for whom their preferred erotic role is in a sense a continuation of a life-long sex atypical form of self-expression’ (p. 115).

The fact that research from multiple disciplinary perspectives seems to point to a deep structure of gender nonconforming bottoms that finds clear correlates in differing cultures and time periods, has important implications for the wider themes of belonging and

marginalisation with which this book is concerned. What might it mean to belong to a type that has historical and cross-cultural precedent? How might studying representations of marginalisation, stigma, and shame associated with being an effeminate bottom mobilise a sense of shared affect and care among such bottoms? Is it possible to treat knowledge about psychobiological influences possibly shaping an effeminate bottom personality in ways that do not oppress the bottoms in question? And how might the attempt to triangulate available cross-disciplinary evidence exploring gender nonconformity and anal sex role preferences transform the broader study of gender and sexuality stemming from a humanities and social science impulse? These are questions the book seeks to engage with.

## **1.2 Gender Expression, Sex Role, and Sex Object Choice: Bottoms the World Over**

If the academic research on gender nonconformity and being a bottom continues to emphasise possible links between the two phenomena, why does LGBTQ+ media typically not do the same? This section explores how Anglo-American LGBTQ+ media writes about bottoms and bottoming, highlighting the broader political insistence on separating sexual orientation from gender expression and anal sex role preference and behaviour. It questions whether, in the case of effeminate bottoms, this separation is helpful, by turning to Freud's distinction between sexual aim and sexual object, and by indicating some of the key challenges facing any cross-cultural analysis of bottom identities with a focus on effeminate ones.

By focusing on the diversity of ways in which media communicates issues of gender and bottoming, this section also emphasises the importance of leaning into a multiplicity of knowledge producers when exploring these topics. Media representations and discussions, which often utilise creative or artistic methods, help shape LGBTQ+ identities and perspectives as much as, if not more than, strictly 'academic' voices (Wignall, 2022; Cavalcante, 2016; Plummer, 1995).

### *1.2.1 From Faggy Bottom to Power Bottom: A Multiplicity of Bottoms?*

In a 2022 article for Pink News, Josh Milton aims to subvert the dominant understanding of bottoms as somehow effeminate. He writes – partly in jest – that bottoms and bottoming have a 'surprisingly versatile history'. The article focuses on the historical power dynamics associated with being the penetrated male, highlighting the importance of the 'power bottom' as a way to subvert stereotypes of the effeminate, submissive bottom (see also Allan, 2016). Writing for Vice.com, James Greig questions whether there even is a bottom 'identity': 'This idea of "bottom" as being a fully-fledged identity category is, for the most, part tongue in cheek – which is why it's so fun swapping the word "women" for "bottom" in famous phrases' (2020). Taking a step further, Alex Green has argued that 'bottoming or topping is not a subjectivity; it's a thing you *do*. Once it's over, it's over – literally' (2020, original emphasis).

Assuming, as I do, that there can be a subjectivity or identity associated with bottoming, meaning that bottoming is something which impacts a sense of self-awareness as

a specific kind of person – a position Greig eventually reaches – how does Anglo-American LGBTQ+ media represent the range of bottom identities or subjectivities out there? This can be divided into two main types that are often pitted against each other: the *fem* or *faggy bottom* and the *power bottom*, who is usually coded as masculine. These identities are often also positioned by LGBTQ+ media on a historical timeline, echoing Chauncey’s delineation of the ‘butch shift’ from *fairy* to *clone*, effeminate to masculine, except that this shift in bottom identities can be pinpointed more specifically to the HIV-AIDS crisis and the rejection of effeminate connotations of bottoming (Milton, 2022; Chauncey, 1994).

The conventional Western bottom identity is largely feminised, and often – though by no means always – associated with the body type of the *twink* – a young(-looking), slender, relatively hairless gay male (Mercer, 2017; Brennan, 2016a). In the 1940s, he may have been called a *pansy* – ‘notable for a slight body’, although the *pansy*, as with the *queen*, was not age-bound in the way the *twink* is (Stines, 2017, p. 131). As Brian O’Flynn argues for i-D Magazine, the *twink* may be quintessentially gay rather than straight, and is often read as a proxy for an effeminate bottom; but at its core a *twink* is first and foremost a male body type.

Gay porn scholar Joseph Brennan has explored how the *twink* as a contemporary term for an effeminate bottom has captured the wider gay imagination (on the internet forum, Data Lounge), in relation to British diver, Tom Daley. Brennan argues that Daley’s ostensibly gender-nonconforming presentation, combined with his body type, leads some to conclude automatically that he is a bottom (2016b). As one blogger has put it in relation to Daley’s effeminate ‘gay face’: “‘pussy’ has never sprung to anyone’s mind when they thought about Tom Daley. Unless it was preceded by ‘boy’”. However, as Daley has gotten older and become a parent himself, it’s interesting to witness how some Data Lounge commentators are using the word *queen* in reference to him, to fantasise about his effeminate bottomhood extending beyond his ‘twink years’.

In a sense, this coupling of *twink* and *queen* to denote an effeminate bottom at different stages in life also has precedent in classical Rome; the poet Martial, for example, linked Ganymede (the prototypical *catamite*) to the *cinaedus* (from the Greek *kinaidos*) – an effeminate male presumed to be sexually passive – suggesting that if a *catamitus* does not desist from his effeminate bottomhood as an adult male, he will become a *cinaedus* (Williams, 2010, p. 206). Similarly, if a *twink* does not man up, he is at risk of becoming a *queen*, in the general sense of being an effeminate bottom.

The effeminate *twink bottom*, however, is only one contemporary type among a constellation of other contemporary *fem bottom* types, including the *nelly bottom*, *bottom faggot*, *pussyboy*, and *boiwife*, and the generic submissive bottom, all of which avoid placing an age fence and body type around such an individual in the way *twink* does (Vytniorgu, 2023b). But it should be emphasised that there is no one word that encapsulates *fem gay bottom* in the same way as the non-Western identities discussed below and the historical Western identities described above.

As a label, *bottom* is often coupled with adjectives to denote greater specificity. American linguist Arnold Zwicky has reclaimed the adjective *faggy* to describe these gender-

nonconforming bottom types, to encapsulate the central place of gender expression in shaping how specific bottoms present and think of themselves. Through his blog (<https://arnoldzwicky.org>), much of which is dedicated to themes of gender and sexuality and gay porn, Zwicky has developed a sophisticated discourse of bottom identities and subjectivities, ranging from *faggy bottom* to *butch fagginess* – a hybrid ‘homomasculine’ blend of traditional fagginess or effeminacy and traditional masculinity that typically resides in more muscular, hirsute and ‘butch’ men (Zwicky, 2018; Duggan, 2002). The way in which Zwicky has communicated a range of identity labels and experiences to represent a blend between masculine and effeminate gay subjectivity is also in part due to the medium of his blog, which invites readers to engage with his content and explore it in non-linear ways through concentrating on tags or keywords which operate through hyperlinks. Thus, Zwicky can present what seems to be well-theorised concepts with copious illustrative material in a relatively short space of time (within a few years).

In a 2019 post, Zwicky writes about a man called Todd (pseudonym):

Todd saw himself as a gay/queer man (that is, as a man and as a man whose sexual desires were directed at other men), but as a particular species or subtype of queer, namely a sissy, a homomasculine identity that for him meant not actual identification with women, but instead an identification with a particular ideal of fagginess. (2019)

Zwicky’s concept of butch fagginess departs from discourses of the fem submissive bottom to demonstrate how for some bottoms, masculinity and femininity can blend in a way that only makes sense by referring to it as *butch fagginess*—something distinctly male and confident, but not conventionally masculine. As I note above, *effeminacy* and *femininity* are distinct enough to warrant separate analysis, and *fem gay bottom* is probably more accurately shorthand for *effeminate gay bottom* rather than *feminine gay bottom*. Effeminacy, or ‘butch fagginess’ (which emphasises the maleness of effeminacy) is the presence of fem typical traits in males.

In the same post, Zwicky suggests that *genderqueer* might, under some circumstances, also be an appropriate term for what butch fagginess represents. However, Zwicky subsumes all of these forms of gender nonconforming expression among gay men under the broad umbrella of ‘f-gays’, or what ‘critics’ might characterise as:

effeminate, fem, femme, flamboyant, flaming, fag, faggy, faggot, fairy, fairy-boy, camp, campy, mincing, prissy, nelly, pansy, nancy, nancy-boy, swish, stereotypical, gay-acting, too gay. (2022)

So, although for Zwicky there may be variations in how effeminacy is expressed in gay men, the general effect is fairly similar, of being different and subversive of normative standards of masculinity while still being recognisably male.

In recent years the popularity of the power bottom has increased, as an alternative to the more restrictive category of submissive fem bottom encapsulated in the twink; although the concept of a *power bottom twink* also exists (Brennan, 2016a). Writing for the magazine



Men's Health, Zachary Zane explains that 'there are a ton of stereotypes associated with bottoms, such as being more effeminate, submissive, and emotionally needy. Being a power bottom bucks those stereotypes and shows that bottoms can be dominant, commanding, and masculine, too' (2021). The role and / or identity of the power bottom seems to be a way for men who have sex with men to maintain a sense of their bottoming as an extension of their manhood, even reaching far beyond this, within a BDSM context, to practices of barebacking, being a faggot, and celebrating 'pig masculinities' that aim to move beyond an equivalence of effeminacy and bottom identity (Florêncio, 2020; Mercer, 2017; Dean, 2009; Underwood, 2003).

In a contemporary LGBTQ+ Western culture in which masculinity and even butch fagginess is deemed more desirable than *nellies*, *bottom queens*, and *faggy bottoms*, the position of effeminacy is precarious (Sarson, 2020; Vytņiorgu, 2023a). It's not simply about endorsing effeminacy or gender nonconformity in gay males and other same-sex attracted males. It's about allowing the cultural space in which effeminacy and bottom identities can coalesce in ways that also avoid the lumping together of these as an act of prejudice directed at those for whom this combination is unsuitable.

One of the reasons why it's currently difficult to speak about the two together in Anglo-American LGBTQ+ media is that, while a masculine power bottom still synergises gender positionality and bottom identity (Hoppe, 2011), an effeminate bottom does so in ways that foreground the gender positionality in ways that are deemed unacceptable and politically suspect (Green, 2020). In other words, the effeminate bottom insists on the mutually reinforcing role, for them, of sex object choice (often masculine men), anal sex role preference (as a bottom), and gender expression (as unmasculine, effeminate, and gender-nonconforming). To understand this contested relationship, we need to return to Freud.

### 1.2.2 Was Freud Right?

In the first of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud made the distinction between sexual object and sexual aim, particularly while discussing the phenomenon of homosexuality and thereby framing himself as a sexologist in the manner of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Richard von Kraft-Ebbing. He writes: 'Let us call the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds the *sexual object* and the act towards which the instinct tends the *sexual aim*' (1975, p. 2). In other words, sexual object refers to the focus of a person's sexual attraction, or rather, the *orientation* of one's attraction – being same-sex attracted, or attracted to masculine men or effeminate bottoms, for example. Sexual aim refers to the behaviour and presentation of self which is designed to secure a response from those to whom we are sexually oriented – positioning oneself as masculine or effeminate, top or bottom, for example.

Freud then proceeds to frame these terms in the language of deviation: deviation of sexual object (an 'inverted' sexual orientation), and a deviation of sexual aim (for example, interest in receptive anal sex). As Chauncey has argued, the relevance of Freud's distinction between sexual object and sexual aim is that, unlike other sexologists such as Ulrichs or

Hirschfeld, Freud (and Havelock Ellis as well) argued that these two aspects were essentially separated. Ulrichs had argued that, while it was possible to find otherwise typically masculine men who happened to be oriented towards other males – often effeminate ones, it was also common to find males whose sexuality and gender expression were fundamentally ‘inverted’ – who were effeminate, enjoyed passive anal intercourse, and who were attracted to masculine men. He termed these males *weiblings* – possibly a late-nineteenth-century version of the 1780s *weichling*, coined by Joseph Jacob von Plenck (LeVay, 1996, p. 14; Janssen, 2017, p. 1852). Freud, on the other hand, argued for at least the conceptual separation of sexual object from sexual aim.

Chauncey has written persuasively about the way in which the middle-class in the mid-twentieth-century US grew to prioritise sexual object – or sexual orientation – over sexual aim, and to insist that one could be sexually attracted to other men and otherwise be just like other men:

The homosexual man, defined solely by his capacity to find sexual satisfaction with another male, began to emerge as a distinct figure in medical discourse, different from the invert, who was still defined by a more thoroughgoing inversion of gender conventions, and from the heterosexual man, who could find sexual satisfaction only with a female. (1994, p. 124)

While this is conceptually interesting, it should also be emphasised that at least until the 1940s in the US and UK, terms such as *homosexual* and *invert* only circulated within a small, middle-class scientific and intellectual community, and that on the working-class ground in New York and London, colloquialisms such as *fairy*, *poof* (or *pouf*), *quean* / *queen*, and *pansy* were noised abroad, immediately understood, and reflected an intuitive grasp of a form of non-normative self-awareness that linked together effeminacy, sexual orientation towards masculine ‘normal’ men, and expectation of only sucking cock and / or being fucked, rendering the queen’s penis functionally useless (see also Houlbrook, 2005, for a British analysis).

To answer my question, then, Freud was probably correct in separating sexual aim and sexual object – at least for analytical purposes – but what needs to be scrutinised is the way in which the latter has now come to dominate conversation around gay men. As we will see, sometimes this has been beneficial. By emphasising the primacy of sexual orientation, men who otherwise might have felt pressured to adopt gender nonconforming behaviour and assume an exclusively passive sexual role, have been liberated to assimilate their sexual orientation as part of an otherwise fairly typical gender expression. They are just men who happen to be same-sex attracted.

On the other hand, there are difficulties for those who are gender nonconforming gay bottoms and may even wish there was a language and space for them to belong with these three inter-related aspects of themselves. Turning to non-Western and global majority examples shows that the triumph of sexual object over sexual aim is not universal (yet), and this provides fem bottoms in the West with a contextual frame of reference with which to nurture a sense of belonging.

### 1.2.3 Non-Western Gender-Nonconforming Bottoms

Gender nonconforming bottoms have been observed in many non-Western countries and global majority settings, including the *kothi* in India and Bangladesh (Alam & Marston, 2023; Steif, 2017; Gill, 2016), the *skesana* in South Africa (Msibi & Rudwick, 2015; Ntuli, 2009), the *bakla* in the Philippines (Garcia, 2009; Manalansan, 2003), the *ciota* in Poland (Janion, 2022), the *tetka* in Eastern and Southeastern Europe (Lambeviski, 1999; Baer, 2005), the *paneleiro*, *bicha*, *viado*, and *maricón* in Brazil (Cardoso, 2005; Carrier, 1976), the *loca* in Honduras (Fernández-Alemany & Murraray, 2002), the *kūnī* in Iran (Guitoo, 2021), the *lubunya* in Turkey (Bereket & Adam, 2006), and the *jota* in Mexico (Prieur, 1997). Murray calls them ‘male receptacles for phallic discharges’ (2000, p. 255).

Allowing for the nuances of cultural variation due to the specific societies and time periods in which they are especially visible, as well as varying degrees of gender nonconformity, these effeminate bottom types nevertheless show remarkable similarity in characteristics (Whitam, 1980): strong preference to be sexually receptive or passive; marked gender nonconformity in childhood and adulthood, including interest in ‘women’s work’ and hobbies and dislike of typical male hobbies and occupations; a clear desire for men unlike themselves – manly, sexually insertive – and a similar dislike of sexual relations with other ‘not-men’ like themselves. As one Bangladeshi *kothi* said recently, ‘I will not be attracted to any feminine man. I like a man who is masculine or manly’ (Alam & Marston, 2023, p. 9). They are often also found among the working classes and are relatively shielded from Western-influenced LGBTQ+ lifestyles and their progressive politics. In other words, they sound like the pre-war *fairies* and *queens* of the US and Britain.

As early as the 1970s researchers were discovering the gendered connotations attached to males who assumed the passive role in anal sex with men in global majority contexts – particularly Latin American ones. In his well-known study of Mexican male homosexuality, Joseph Carrier noted that in Mexico ‘an equivalence is always made between the effeminate male and the homosexual male’ (Carrier, 1976, p. 111). In his 1971 study of Mexican *maricones* (translated in English by Carrier as *sissy*, *fairy*, or *queer*), Carrier observed that a large proportion of ‘anal passive males having adult homosexual contacts remembered themselves as being slightly to very effeminate children, whereas the anal active males having adult homosexual contacts did not’ (Carrier, 1971, p. 290; Thing, 2009).

In India and Bangladesh, *kothi* is a term used ‘by many effeminate men to signal their preference for being passive (bottom) partners during sexual intercourse among men who have sex with men (MSM)’ (Gill, 2016, p. 1). In English it can be translated as ‘fag’ or ‘sissy’ (Gill, 2016, p. 1). Fernando Cardoso’s study of the *paneleiro* in Brazil offers strikingly similar observations of this mode of heterogender homosexuality to that of the *kothi*, despite being culturally and geographically remote from India (Cardoso, 2005). The *paneleiros* whom Cardoso interviewed invariably preferred receptive anal sex and enjoyed performing oral sex in comparison to the men interviewed who had sexual relations with *paneleiros*. Moreover,

as with the Indian and Bangladeshi *kothis*, these Brazilian *paneleiros* refused to have sexual relations with other *paneleiros*, 'since they prefer "real men"' (Cardoso, 2005, p. 105; Alam & Marston, 2023).

Similar findings were established previously by Annick Prieur in her study of Mexican *jotas* who were described 'as effeminate men who are penetrated by other men' (Prieur, 1998, p. 10; Carrillo, 2002). *Jotas*, like the *kothis* and *paneleiros*, will rarely if ever seek sexual contact with each other: they seek a more masculine man. In Turkey, the effeminate passive *lubunya* typically rejects sexual contact with another *lubunya*: 'it is impossible for another feminine man to establish same-sex bonds with him, as two "women" would have nothing to offer to each other' (Bereket & Adam, 2006, p. 139).

More recently, Arash Guitoo has explored the Iranian *kūnī* in online sexual fantasy stories, and the *kūnī* (approximating the Western *faggot* or *poof*) has similar characteristics to these other non-Western identities, while also incorporating the Western 'gay' as a shorthand for traditional understandings of same-sex subjectivity (2021, p. 890). Thabo Msibi and Stephanie Rudwick have outlined a similar model of identity and behaviour among African male IsiNqumo speakers in South Africa, termed *skesana*, who adopt effeminate gender expression and a bottom sex role preference (2015). In contemporary Brazil, *poc* (or *pocpoc* – resembling the sound of heels clicking on the ground) is now used to describe effeminate or 'fruity' gays presumed to be bottoms (as opposed to 'people of colour'), along with older terms such as *bicha* (see also Chapter 4).<sup>2</sup>

Together, these studies and others like them, indicate the long-standing, cross-cultural existence of gender nonconforming homosexual bottoms in non-Western societies, with some common themes. Nearly all of these contexts will, or at least until recently, only designate a male as a homosexual or 'not-man' if they are effeminate (to varying degrees) and purported to be sexually receptive or passive in male anal sex, which is a preferred form of sexual contact, compared to Western interest in oral sex, for example (Garcia-Rabines, 2022; Fernández-Alemanly & Murray, 2002; Kulick, 1998). Other pertinent commonalities include a preference for domestic tasks such as cooking to emphasise one's gender nonconformity, and a strong preference for men who are starkly different from them in sexual object choice, sex role, and gender expression. The converse side of this latter preference is an aversion to sexual engagement with another fem bottom – what historically in twentieth-century Britain was termed by Polari as *tootsie trade*, but which in many global majority settings is phrased around kneading dough or tofu, or, in Turkey, '*kapak kapağa vuruşturma*, literally meaning two lids/caps hitting each other' (Bereket & Adam, 2006, p. 139).

Each of these studies also notes the tensions at play between these traditional, often working-class expressions of effeminate bottom subjectivity, and the encroachment over time of the middle-class Western gay / LGBTQ+ egalitarian form of homosexuality, which has increased (but not entirely displaced traditional forms) since some of these studies were conducted (Garcia-Rabines, 2022), and which is now also along a generational divide, with

older men sometimes adhering more strongly to traditional models (Thing, 2009). In India, Harjant Gill reports Western-identified gay men in Mumbai boycotting nightclubs if *kothis* were present, with a response from *kothis* and *hijras* to incorporate their identities into a LGBTQH movement (Gill, 2016). In some countries heterogender male homosexuality now exists, to some degree, alongside egalitarian models, often in hybridised ways so that even the term *gay* has come to have local meanings that are not synonymous with ‘American gay’ (Jiménez et al., 2021; Vidal-Ortiz et al., 2009; see also Chapter 5).

What is pertinent for Western fem gay bottoms is that typically ‘no one in societies in which gender-variant roles arise shares the Western analytical concern with specifying whether gender or sexuality is more important in defining these kinds of people’ (Murray, 2000, p. 293). In other words, in their traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality, these non-Western settings refuse to make the Freudian separation of sexual object and sexual aim. While this might enable masculine insertors to fuck other males and leave their manhood largely intact, it means that effeminate ‘not-men’ who are fucked by ‘normal men’ hold a culturally recognisable if sometimes oppressed role. They might form long-lasting relationships with men, but they might also simply be ‘a receptacle for phallic discharges’ in cultures where extramarital sexual access to women is taboo (Guasch, 2011). As Murray makes clear, ‘instrumental use, contempt, and violence (sexual and other) are the lot of effeminate men (cross dressed or not) in cultures influenced by the classic Mediterranean code of male honor’ (2000, pp. 256-257).

Throughout the book I will return to examples of global majority types of fem bottom to help contextualise Anglo-American negotiations of effeminacy, homosexuality, and bottom identity and practice. In the next chapter, I discuss the complex experiences of marginalisation and belonging negotiated by gender nonconforming bottoms.

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<sup>1</sup> They were not in fact the first to do so. See also Chapter 12 of *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity* by Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox Miles (1936). Terman’s connections to American eugenicist movements are now well-known. But Lowell Kelly’s research for Chapters 11-13 is instructive for attempts to quantify ‘sexual inversion’ in ‘passive male homosexuals’ during the time covered by George Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, in which homosexual passive males were colloquially known as *queers* and *fairies*. Lowell notes however that the ‘passive male homosexuals’ he interviewed all referred to themselves as *queens* rather than *fairies*, with the majority preferring receptive anal sex over insertee oral sex, contrary to *fairies’* reported preference for insertee fellatio. For one of the first autobiographies of a self-identified *fairy*, see *Memoirs of an Androgyne* by Earl Lind [Ralph Werther] (1918).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see <https://revistamarieclaire.globo.com/Noticias/noticia/2018/08/poc-personagem-de-galisteu-explica-o-que-e-nova-giria-em-o-tempo.html> (accessed August 4, 2023). In 2023, the music streaming service Spotify also released a playlist entitled ‘pop poc’ with an image of singer Troye Sivan on the cover (see also Chapter 4 for more on Sivan).