



## *Perversion or Perversity?*

MEDICINE, POLITICS, AND THE REGULATION  
OF SEX AND GENDER DISSENT AFTER SODOMY  
DECRIMINALIZATION

**H**ow would Soviet power understand and regulate same-sex love? One ambitious junior psychiatrist in 1922 had no doubt that the latest scientific knowledge dictated a medical view of the issue:

Doctors look upon homosexuals as unfortunate stepchildren of fate. They are like cripples, similar to the blind, deaf-mutes, et cetera, who owe their defect only to a physiological deformation; but they can in no way be considered ill-intentioned, debauched people offending public morality and therefore, the term *perversion* [*izvrashchenie*] (inversio), and not *perversity* [*izrashchennost'*] or even less so, *debauchery* [*razvrashchennost'*], is used to designate this pathological condition.<sup>1</sup>

V. P. Protopopov of Petrograd argued for a potentially progressive approach. By banishing the old regime's religious, moralistic understanding in favor of a view already widely supported in Western medical circles, Soviet jurisprudence and medicine would rationalize the treatment of this sexual anomaly. As "homosexuals" were thought to be victims of a biological deformity and not responsible for their sexual drives, a modern society relieved of bourgeois philistinism would no longer condemn them to prison but invite them instead into the clinic. Writing as Russia's new criminal code was still under discussion in the People's Commissariat of Justice, Protopopov expressed what some held to be the rationale for the eventual decriminalization of sodomy.

The Communist Party's preoccupation with the fundamental questions of rule dominated its politics in the 1920s. A succession struggle followed Lenin's incapacitating strokes beginning in 1922 and his death in January 1924; the associated debate over industrialization between

Stalin and his opponents occupied the first peacetime years of Soviet rule. Bolshevik ambiguities about same-sex relations should be considered in this context. Communists generally believed that sexual questions, despite their evident importance for the revolution, were superstructural matters that would resolve themselves once collectivist economic and social foundations were laid. Moreover, medical science would be enlisted by the state (which had, under the old regime, mistrusted technocratic expertise) to define the “healthy” and the “pathological” citizen on a basis assumed to be materialist. When these expectations were combined with the deliberate deletion of “sodomy” from the first revolutionary criminal code, a discursive vacuum opened and permitted various agents to express a plurality of approaches to sex and gender dissent. There was no single or official position on homosexuality during the period of sodomy decriminalization (1922–33), but instead a diversity of views among a range of experts and administrators.

Few experts sought to stake their careers on the issue of homosexuality in the way Protopopov did. If disputes seldom erupted in public between those who espoused diverging views, nevertheless the implications of these arguments may be distilled from the percolating discussions of the period. Certain jurists and police remained suspicious of the homosexual, despite the new penal code. Meanwhile, a few psychiatrists and endocrine experts seized upon apparent discoveries about the determination of sexual orientation to claim the homosexual as theirs. To these authorities, same-sex erotic attraction was supposedly the result of hormonal anomaly; some regarded it as a natural human variant, with its own legitimate historical and cultural precedents. Others asserted a biosocial view, claiming the origins of sexuality resided not principally in the glands but in society or in the individual’s developmental history. By looking at these psychiatrists’ studies and their approaches to methodological and gender issues, the range of alternatives in circulation in the new society can be reassessed and the potential for a politics of sex and gender diversity in revolutionary Russia can be evaluated.

### *Sexual Revolution, Medicine, and Sexual Anomalies*

The discursive vacuum left by the Bolsheviks around issues of sexual and gender dissent created opportunities for Soviet legal and medical experts of the 1920s. Seeking to make their disciplines “Soviet,” they used the possibilities for interpretation and research afforded by encounters with “homosexuals” and members of the “intermediate sex”

to promote views that would differentiate them from their tsarist predecessors. Jurists, most trained under the old regime, struggled to reconcile the experience of revolution and civil war, an era without positive law, with the new requirements of a return to a formal legal framework under the New Economic Policy. Where same-sex relations were concerned, the new criminal norms said little, and jurists filled the discursive vacuum with speculation about the medical or emancipatory implications. Meanwhile medical experts and, in particular psychiatrists, examined “homosexuality” and “transvestism” with vigor not seen before 1917. As Susan Gross Solomon has argued in the case of social hygiene, novelty was not necessarily required to confer positive political credentials on a line of research. Under the patronage of the astute and charismatic People’s Commissar of Health Nikolai Semashko, sponsorship could come if the ideas were new to Russia.<sup>2</sup> Despite the considerable resource limitations on the new Health Commissariat, which in budgetary priorities ranked low in the Soviet state,<sup>3</sup> an impressive volume of research and discussion on problems of sex and gender anomaly took place during the 1920s.

Experts in law and medicine wasted little time in claiming their turf. Three months after the enactment of the 1922 RSFSR criminal code, in the weekly journal of the Commissariat of Justice, an obscure jurist published “Trials of Homosexuals,” an article describing two cases and arguing that homosexual behavior, in the absence of a sodomy statute, could still be illegal under the new code.<sup>4</sup> The item dealt with one trial, apparently completed, against a large number of men arrested in a Petrograd “pederasts’ club” in a private flat, where several males were apprehended in women’s clothing. This party had been one of a series of gatherings organized in and around Petrograd as masquerades, with dancing, matchmaking rituals, and mock wedding ceremonies. The other case, said to be under investigation, was that of a woman, Evgeniia, who had impersonated a man to marry her female friend in a civil registry office (ZAGS, an agency of the Commissariat of Justice). The two women had successfully argued against local prosecutors seeking to invalidate the marriage. Psychiatrists too discussed these cases, both in print and behind closed doors, and their accounts diverged substantially from that offered by the Justice Commissariat.<sup>5</sup>

The article’s author, identified only as G. R., offered broad interpretations of criminal code articles against “hooliganism” and brothel-keeping to secure convictions against “homosexuals.” Charges of hooliganism would presumably have proved successful in the women’s case, while the brothel-keeping charge covered “dens” like the “pederasts’

club.” This jurist argued that forensic psychiatric expertise provided a medical justification for the prosecution of homosexuals. He cited testimony, warning of the influence of perversion on “normal” persons, that he claimed Russia’s leading psychiatrist, academician V. M. Bekhterev, had given during the trial of the Petrograd men.<sup>6</sup> Medicine and law in the young Soviet republic were apparently united in their determination to repress “homosexuals” as harmful elements, despite the decriminalization of sodomy.<sup>7</sup>

Yet jurists who approached the question did not display unanimity on the proposed treatment of “homosexuals.” It is doubtful that “Trials of Homosexuals” necessarily reflected the attitude of all jurists or that provincial officials closely read and obeyed the commissariat’s journal.<sup>8</sup> The author of this article noted himself that the higher judiciary had not been moved to produce guiding determinations “on this subject.” His conclusions were couched in the cautious language of a jurist offering an opinion rather than the confident tones of a bureaucrat relaying a fiat from the desk of the people’s commissar.<sup>9</sup> Legal commentaries on Soviet Russia’s new criminal code ignored these suggestions at least as often as they agreed with them, but significantly, none ever referred to this article.<sup>10</sup> Many Soviet jurists commenting on the new code understood the absence of a ban on sodomy as a progressive measure. Sodomy had been decriminalized, one jurist wrote, because

science, and much legislation following from it . . . had taken the view that the commission of the act of sodomy with adults infringed no rights whatsoever, and that [adults] were free to express their sexual feeling in any form, and that the intrusion of the law into this field is a holdover of church teachings and of the ideology of sinfulness.<sup>11</sup>

Adults who committed consensual same-sex acts could thus be regarded as beneficiaries of the sexual revolution, emancipated from religious prejudice by science. Other legal experts explicitly invoked the authority of medicine to justify decriminalization, citing the range of theories of the origins of same-sex desire from psychopathological disturbance to the latest biological hypotheses of Iwan Bloch, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Eugen Steinach.<sup>12</sup> Scholars also cited a history of retreating criminal sanctions against homosexual acts; they noted that a “more humanitarian point of view” was responsible for the gradual easing of penalties in European legislation.<sup>13</sup>

Psychiatrists—including Bekhterev—also contradicted G. R.’s analysis. Evidence that this lawyer’s proposals represented only an isolated

expert's opinion is found in articles by psychiatrists describing the same cases dealt with in "Trials of Homosexuals." In a 1927 case history of "transvestism" and "homosexuality," Moscow psychiatrist A. O. Edel'shtein presented a woman, Evgeniia Fedorovna M., whose actions closely resembled those of "Evgeniia" in the 1922 Justice Commissariat item.<sup>14</sup> The psychiatrist dryly noted as fact the information that the Commissariat of Justice had conceded the legality of his patient's 1922 marriage to another woman on the grounds of "mutual consent."<sup>15</sup> The two texts may well describe the same Evgeniia/Evgenii. Yet even if they do not, Edel'shtein's article indicates that justice officials did recognize *his* subject's same-sex marriage in 1922. The legal strategies promoted in "Trials of Homosexuals" were certainly not heeded by those jurists investigating the woman who eventually became Edel'shtein's patient.<sup>16</sup>

Medical articles relating to the case of the "pederasts' club" contradicted the 1922 Justice Commissariat's account of the psychiatric expert testimony provided. Psychiatrists also challenged the timing of this trial as reported in this item.<sup>17</sup> As with the women's case, available evidence precludes an indisputable connection between the Petrograd raid on a private party at which sailors and other men staged a masquerade wedding, as described in the commissariat's weekly journal, and the similar incident described separately by Petrograd psychiatrists Bekhterev and his student, V. P. Protopopov.<sup>18</sup> But the circumstances of the cases are so similar and extraordinary to suggest that they were the same. Even if they were not, the credibility of "Trials of Homosexuals" as conclusive evidence of a supposed prevailing Soviet approach toward same-sex relations is undermined when these two accounts are compared.

The Justice Commissariat's jurist implied that the raid on the "pederasts' club"—or at least the subsequent trial—had taken place after the 1 June 1922 enactment of the new criminal code.<sup>19</sup> The author presented the timing of the case in this way to strengthen his argument that homosexuality should now be criminalized as disorderly conduct, since sodomy was no longer a prohibited act. Yet Bekhterev's accounts of his activities during the investigation following a Petrograd raid on a "pederasts' club" undermined this timing and suggested that his professional opinions had been distorted in the Commissariat of Justice's version. In 1922, the psychiatrist published an account of the arrest of "an entire club of homosexuals, about ninety-eight individuals altogether, during their festive wedding party."<sup>20</sup> This article was addressed to a professional audience of psychiatrists and physicians. Bekhterev said police telephoned on the night of the raid to invite him to

examine the men for research (*nauchnye*), not forensic, purposes, and a footnote indicates his examinations must have taken place before 28 February 1921 (fifteen months before the new criminal code was adopted).<sup>21</sup> He reported nothing here about being required to furnish forensic psychiatric opinions or to attend a trial.

Bekhterev again described the police raid and his interviews with the men who were arrested in a chapter dated December 1924 addressed to an audience of professional educators and included in a twice-published, respected volume on sexual education.<sup>22</sup> In this version, the psychiatrist aggressively strove to correct the Justice Commissariat's account without directly mentioning it. Bekhterev claimed to have studied the police investigation files, and he gave the date of the raid as 15 January 1921. He noted that police surveillance of similar gatherings in a succession of private flats had begun in late 1920.<sup>23</sup> Bekhterev made no comment about this surveillance, but his terse observation about his own official role in the aftermath of the raid is a distinct contradiction of the Commissariat of Justice official's representation of the academician in court. "I was required to give an opinion on the case, and naturally, it was for the quashing of the case, for neither seduction nor propaganda for homosexuality were possible to establish in this instance."<sup>24</sup>

At issue in the discussion between psychiatrists, jurists, and the shadowy author of "Trials of Homosexuals" was the question of the status of "homosexuals." Were they still to be regarded as criminals (as the police and some jurists apparently viewed them), or would they now be patients awaiting psychotherapy (as Bekhterev, an advocate of hypnosis, recommended) or maybe even a hormonal adjustment (as Protopopov's study implied)? Perhaps homosexuals were now "free to express their sexual feeling" like other adult citizens, as some legal commentaries argued. Fragmentary evidence suggests that emancipatory and medical views were preferred (when no public disturbance, or politically disloyal act took place) over likely police preferences for a tougher line.

A similar dispute over the correct approach to women as (heterosexual) prostitutes raged at this time between police, jurists, medical experts, and social activists, offering instructive indicators of official attitudes toward sexuality in public.<sup>25</sup> A chaotic range of views about prostitution had been expressed during the civil war years by authorities, resulting in a patchwork of rehabilitative and repressive measures. Social workers and Zhenotdel (the Women's Department of the early Communist Party) activists promoted communal housing experiments and sex education programs, while police in some jurisdictions simply rounded up prostitutes and confined them in labor camps. An early

effort at coordination, an interdepartmental commission set up in 1919 under the auspices of the Commissariat of Welfare, tried to promote policies of education and social assistance. In December 1922, after legislators had rejected any suggestion that prostitutes themselves should be criminalized in the new RSFSR criminal code, another, much broader, interdepartmental commission for the struggle against prostitution led by Health Commissar Semashko was established. This commission rejected police methods on ideological grounds, arguing instead that social assistance and education for the woman who sold sex (regarded as a victim of economic circumstance and masculine disrespect) would win her for “useful labor.” In the course of debate, police proposals for a special unit (a “moral militia”) to target brothel-keepers and male clients were attacked by Clara Zetkin and venereologists for threatening to revive the tsarist regulationist system while driving prostitution underground, leaving disease to flourish unchecked.<sup>26</sup> Where female prostitution was concerned, Soviet medicine would coordinate policy, which would be predicated not on punitive practices like those of the tsarist regime, but on therapeutic and redemptive strategies intended to combat disease and restore women’s dignity.

Less clarity surrounded policy on same-sex love. No one of Zetkin’s stature commented publicly, inside the USSR, on the legal and medical discussion about “homosexuals.” Nor was the question dramatized with the formation of a committee of experts. But one month after the interdepartmental commission on prostitution had been established, Health Commissar Semashko, during a visit to Berlin, indicated to German allies in the international movement for sex reform that the Soviet legalization of male same-sex relations was a deliberately emancipatory measure, part of the sexual revolution. The research and sex-reform activities of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sex Research, founded in Berlin in 1919, were followed with interest by Soviet social hygienists, and apparently by their patron, Semashko.<sup>27</sup> In January 1923, Semashko paid a visit to the institute with a delegation of Soviet doctors. They particularly requested a screening of the film, *Anders als die Andern*, a cinematic documentary about same-sex love made in 1919 with Hirschfeld’s participation. The institute’s journal on sexual intermediate types reported that the Soviet viewers expressed amazement that the film had been regarded as scandalous and had been banned. The journal then observed that Semashko

stated how pleased he was that in the new Russia, the former penalty against homosexuals has been completely abolished. He also explained

that no unhappy consequences of any kind whatsoever have resulted from the elimination of the offending paragraph, nor has the wish that the penalty in question be reintroduced been raised in any quarter.<sup>28</sup>

This careful and allusive statement (not published in the USSR) was the most positive expression of homosexual emancipationist sentiment by a senior figure in the Soviet regime. It suggested that the emancipation of homosexuals was a logical outcome of the revolution. The health commissar ignored the call, expressed in “Trials of Homosexuals” (and reminiscent of police proposals for a moral militia), for a return to the regulation of homosexuality by other means. Semashko appeared optimistic about the consequences of the new legal dispensation.

Semashko’s link with social democrat and sex reformer Magnus Hirschfeld was one of many associations with German medicine which the people’s commissar cultivated as evidence of Soviet Russia’s radical break with tsarist public health policy.<sup>29</sup> Two years after Semashko’s visit to Hirschfeld’s institute, social hygienist Grigorii Batkis, a “young hothead Bolshevik doing his graduate studies at Moscow University,”<sup>30</sup> published a German-language pamphlet, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia*, in Berlin. Here Batkis said that in the USSR homosexuality was a private matter, to be treated like “so-called ‘natural’ intercourse.”<sup>31</sup> Later Batkis and other Soviet representatives spoke at conferences of the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR), the international face of Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sex Research. In the late 1920s, the WLSR became an arena in which Soviet social hygienists enjoyed the spotlight thanks to radical Bolshevik legislation on sexual matters. At the earliest league conferences, Soviet decriminalization of male homosexuality was routinely hailed. The presence of Aleksandra Kollontai, the Bolshevik Party’s foremost spokesperson on sexual issues, along with Batkis and a Ukrainian professor on the organization’s “international committee” of directors gave it the appearance of official Soviet support.<sup>32</sup> Yet Kollontai’s oppositional agitation within the Party and her poorly understood and easily distorted sex radicalism gave opponents pretexts to mount attacks on her in the Soviet press for promoting “free love” and “bourgeois feminism” during 1923.<sup>33</sup> Kollontai had less influence on these issues in Soviet politics after that year in her new role as ambassador to Norway.<sup>34</sup> The impression that Soviet approval extended to the full roster of the WLSR’s goals (which specifically included homosexual emancipation) must be seen in the context of an increasingly bifurcated policy on sexual politics in Communist discourse, especially in the second half of the 1920s. Internationally, it was popular and profitable

where Communists were out of power to support the sex reform movement, while inside Soviet Russia where the gains of the sexual revolution were institutionalized, rationalizing and not libertarian forces were gathering political momentum, often with substantial popular support.<sup>35</sup>

Interest in and sympathy for the homosexual in early-Soviet medicine came not only as a byproduct of participation in the international sex reform movement. Health Commissar Semashko, as a patron of research in the emerging field of endocrinology, indirectly prompted psychiatrists to examine the links thought to exist between hormonal functions and mental disorders. Again, the commissar was backing ideas that aroused intense interest among scientists in central and eastern Europe and which had the potential to make medicine “Soviet” if important breakthroughs could establish a contrast with tsarist medical research.

The apparent discovery in 1918 that sex gland functions determined sexual orientation was part of a wider body of endocrinological study by Austrian biologist Eugen Steinach. His prewar and postwar research on animals had contributed to a revolution in the understanding of the sex glands; with publicity and encouragement from Hirschfeld, Steinach turned to the question of altering human sexual behavior by controlling glandular secretions. In 1918, Steinach and the surgeon Robert Lichtenstern completed a successful partial transplant of a “normal” (heterosexual) human testicle to a male homosexual, who reportedly then lost his effeminate mannerisms, enjoyed sexual relations with a female prostitute, and later married.<sup>36</sup> Hirschfeld seized upon these results as the most compelling basis for his “biomedical construction of a new homosexual identity” and publicized them widely in the early 1920s.<sup>37</sup> Russians were aware of Steinach’s experiments, especially because of his related work on animal and human rejuvenation therapy (*omolozhenie*). The supposedly rejuvenating surgical procedure, fashionable in Europe and the USSR during the 1920s, received wide publicity in the Soviet press. To Bolshevik visionaries, rejuvenation seemed to promise mastery over the mysterious processes of life itself, and many hundreds of such operations were carried out on animals and (mostly male) humans in NEP Russia.<sup>38</sup>

Against this backdrop of sex reform politics, interdisciplinary approaches to female prostitution, and endocrinological advance, a comparatively significant body of psychiatric studies on the question of homosexuality appeared during the 1920s in the Soviet Union. Psychiatric studies of homosexuals had the potential to differentiate the Soviet

psychiatric discipline radically from its tsarist antecedent, which had been so reluctant to medicalize the homosexual. In clinical and forensic psychiatric studies of modest numbers of “homosexuals,” psychiatrists gathered data and speculated, sometimes with great polemical force, about the etiology of same-sex desire. Most agreed that social and biological factors combined to produce the anomaly, but there were sharp disagreements about the appropriate emphasis to be placed on biological causes. A temporal coincidence had conferred revolutionary élan on endocrinological discoveries, endowing glandular research with a residual political glamor. If the question of the etiology of homosexuality could lead psychiatrists and biologists to new discoveries about hormonal functions, it would contribute prestige as well as new knowledge to Soviet medicine.

The first and most confident statement of the endocrinological hypothesis for the origin of homosexuality was made by the laboratory assistant who accompanied academician Bekhterev to examine the men arrested in the January 1921 Petrograd “pederasts’ club” raid. V. P. Protopopov disagreed publicly with his teacher and used the issue of homosexuality to stake out his own scientific territory, not without success. At the police station that evening Bekhterev had dictated notes of interviews with at least seven men to a Doctor Mishutskii, who “for some reason” subsequently refused to hand them over.<sup>39</sup> Protopopov meanwhile conducted extensive interviews with forty men detained by police. He not only wrote up ten of the most interesting case histories from his sample but also used the material as a springboard to survey the current state of medical thinking on homosexuality. Protopopov concluded that his material supported Steinach’s endocrinological hypothesis as proposed in 1918; the gland-centered etiology was diametrically opposed to Bekhterev’s nurturist viewpoint.<sup>40</sup> Protopopov was made director of the Faculty of Psychiatry at Khar’kov State University in 1923, and five years later he supervised an experiment based on the Steinach hypothesis, an attempt at sex-gland implants conducted by psychiatrist Ia. I. Kirov.<sup>41</sup> The procedure, adapting techniques of rejuvenation therapy as applied to women, was undertaken to reverse the sex drive of a determined “female homosexual” (*gomoseksualistka*). Sheep and pig ovary sections were implanted under the right breast of twenty-eight-year-old patient “Efrosiniia B.,” who was said to have consented to the operation.<sup>42</sup> It proved a dismal failure, and neither Protopopov nor his student Kirov revisited homosexuality as a research topic.

Early supporters of the hormonal theory for the origins of same-sex desire were also found among the first cohort of Soviet-era psychiatrists

trained during the civil war by P. B. Gannushkin, the profession's leader in Moscow.<sup>45</sup> After qualifying, Mark Ia. Sereiskii specialized in mental disturbances produced by endocrinological processes, publishing a monograph on the subject in 1925 and later a general psychiatric textbook with another Gannushkin associate, M. O. Gurevich.<sup>44</sup> Unsurprisingly, given his research interests, Sereiskii was the most committed of Soviet psychiatrists to the theory that homosexuality constituted a hormonal anomaly. During the cultural revolution (in circumstances discussed in chapter 6), his assertion of the theory would attract wide attention.

Evgenii K. Krasnushkin had also been encouraged by Gannushkin to examine endocrinological factors in mental illness. During the civil war he assumed forensic and penal psychiatric responsibilities, and in the 1920s he specialized in the assessment and rehabilitation of criminals with mental disorders at the V. P. Serbskii Forensic Psychiatric Institute, the Moscow Bureau for Study of the Personality of the Criminal and Criminality, and the city's labor reformatory for minors, *Mosstrudom*.<sup>45</sup> It was in a forensic capacity that Krasnushkin studied sexual and gender dissent. In his 1926 joint article with N. G. Kholzakova on "female murderer-homosexuals," the two psychiatrists had proposed a constitutional etiology for homosexual desire originating in the sex glands, with secondary significance attached to environmental factors.<sup>46</sup> They relied on an interpretation of Hirschfeld's complex modeling of "intersexuality," a modeling that predated the Steinach testicular transplant breakthrough. The two Russian doctors appear to have been heavily influenced by Hirschfeld's *Die Transvestiten*. In this groundbreaking 1910 work on cross-dressing, the German sexologist had elaborated a theory of sexual "intermediaries" to classify all forms of gender and sexual nonconformity between the extremes of an innate and heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Krasnushkin and Kholzakova confusingly designated all "intermediaries" as "transvestites" and referred to "homosexuals" and "bisexuals" as subcategories.<sup>47</sup> Their reading ignored Hirschfeld's clear distinction between cross-dressing and same-sex eros. It also paved the way for later disputes in Soviet medicine about the "transvestite" as citizen and patient.

Krasnushkin and Kholzakova's two subjects had murdered their female partners, in one case from jealousy when the lover had announced her intention to marry a man, and in the other instance from apparent sexual provocation. The criminality of the "female homosexuals" under review did not prevent the two psychiatrists from introducing the topic in terms that reflected the influence of emancipationist arguments for

tolerance of the harmless or gifted homosexual. Unenlightened “popular” (*khodiachee*) opinion of sexual intermediary types as “unnatural” (*protivoestestvennye*) ignored a growing body of scientific evidence that found these types to be widespread. Anthropologists demonstrated the existence of same-sex desire and gender intermediacy across boundaries of “civilization,” class, and culture. Hirschfeld, the foremost authority on intermediaries, was hailed as “the most prominent expert of modern sexology.” Finally, Krasnushkin and Kholzakova argued that homosexuals were not always linked to crime or illness. “Both male and female homosexuality are frequently combined with high aesthetic giftedness,” they observed. “A classical example of this combination is the Greek poetess (*poetessa*) Sappho; the name of the island of ‘Lesbos,’ where she so successfully cultivated love between women, to this day gives the name “lesbian” to this love.”<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere Krasnushkin asserted that persons “suffering from sexual perversions” were few in number and had little harmful effect on society: “as long as they do not harm the rights and physical well-being of others, their perversions in and of themselves” should not be punished. The “genuine sexual revolution” included Soviet understanding on this point, in contrast to Western European law, which treated perversions harshly.<sup>49</sup> These arguments for a medical and historicizing approach to same-sex love resembled those used by some tsarist-era apologists, and by Hirschfeld’s Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the German campaigning organization for homosexual emancipation.

A similar biological emphasis, drawing on Hirschfeld, was evident in the work of forensic expert N. P. Brukhanskii of Moscow’s Institute of Neuropsychiatric Prophylaxis. In a 1927 monograph on “sexual psychopathology,” he described a number of cases of female and male “homosexuality” that arose in the capital’s provincial court. In these cases of murder or attempted murder motivated by jealousy, Brukhanskii had served as an expert witness, authenticating for the court the psychology of same-sex desire expressed in defendants’ and victims’ letters. Not infrequently, the cases ended in the hospitalization of defendants rather than imprisonment (in the international context, a progressive outcome). He supported the decriminalization of sodomy, while professing doubts about all scientific theories for homosexuality given the current state of knowledge.<sup>50</sup> In his forensic psychiatric textbook published in 1928, he gave more explicit indications of the theories he favored, suggesting that “authentic homosexuality” was the result of constitutional factors (citing Hirschfeld), while acknowledging that culture could force individuals into same-sex relations against “their nature.”<sup>51</sup>

In Leningrad, where clinicians explored blood testing as a means of identifying “sexual anomalies,” similar sentiments were evident. While one pair of researchers claimed that “homosexuality must be viewed as a particular biological imperfection,” they rejected any quick presumption that homosexuals were thus psychologically impaired. Presenting the “confession” of twenty-three-year-old “Sergei E.” neuropathologist N. F. Orlov asserted that the “moral level” of this subject “was no lower than that of the majority of healthy, normal heterosexual men.”<sup>52</sup> Yet these assertions were clouded with ambiguity, for Sergei E. had in his own words sought psychiatric help to “be reborn, to become different, to become like everybody else.” He wanted “to start a family” and believed same-sex love was too unstable a basis upon which “to build a life.” Orlov posited that the roots of homosexuality were the likely result of “profound biochemical phenomena” and not merely hormonal anomaly; in his view, “the activity of all the cells of the organism” was implicated. His sympathetic presentation of four cases of male homosexuality (explored in a clinical, not penal, setting)<sup>53</sup> suggests that, as in Hirschfeld’s work, Soviet medical practice could wed a humane approach to the individual who experienced same-sex desire with a biomedical understanding of homosexuality.

In June 1926, in his capacity as a sexologist, Hirschfeld visited the Soviet Union sponsored by Semashko’s Health Commissariat. Hirschfeld returned from the USSR apparently disappointed with Bolshevik prudery, remarking that scientific interest in homosexuality was in decline and that homosexual behavior was regarded as “unproletarian” in the new socialist state. The German activist-physician realized that no open, organized group of homosexuals existed in the new Russia and that Soviet journalism and literature were silent about the question. Hirschfeld was uncharacteristically laconic about this journey and only published a brief newspaper article describing it.<sup>54</sup> It is not known if he encountered any of the Soviet psychiatrists mentioned here for his influence on their work.<sup>55</sup> (He made a poor impression on Mikhail Kuzmin, who along with Nikolai Kliuev attended a “deadly dull” meeting with the sexologist on 8 June 1926.)<sup>56</sup> Yet Hirschfeld’s influence on Soviet views of the sex and gender dissident, however modest, had nevertheless been powerful, and it was far from exhausted in 1926.

### *Biosocial Perspectives on Homosexuality*

While hormonal etiologies for sexual anomaly attracted attention for their novelty and promise, many Soviet psychiatrists promoted explana-

tions that acknowledged a role for biology, but emphasized the social environment in which sexualities developed. Biosocial understandings of social anomalies (such as criminality, suicide, prostitution, and drug addiction) were the dominant paradigm shared by experts in many Soviet disciplines in the 1920s. Like-minded psychiatrists tended to invoke the flexible and dynamic concept of psychopathy when discussing the sex or gender dissident. The psychopathic model for this type of patient gained ground in the late 1920s, and is discussed in chapter 6. Earlier in the decade, groups of psychiatrists put forward alternative biosocial explanations for sexual anomalies, and these challenged the highly biological Steinach-Hirschfeld hormonal model. In their privileging of the influence of environment (or nurture), Bekhterev's reflexology and psychoanalysis as interpreted in Russia also had a potential political appeal to Marxist sponsors.

The theory that sexual attraction was a complex reflex had been expounded by Bekhterev well before 1917, and his sober promotion of "sexual health" and of scientific sex education apparently accorded with the rationalizing sexual politics of the Communist Party leadership. His success after October 1917 was based, however, on the vigorous range of his psychiatric activities and on his political credentials. He embraced the Bolshevik regime and energetically participated in institution building while remaining outside the Party. Bekhterev's principal tsarist base for research and therapy, the Petrograd Psychoneurological Institute, became in the 1920s the nucleus for a Psychoneurological Academy, grouping fifteen research facilities under his presidency, including the Institute for the Study of the Brain and Mental Activity (established in 1918).<sup>57</sup>

Little in Bekhterev's etiology for homosexuality and other "sexual deviations and perversions" changed after 1917, but in 1922 he published an extensive survey of the clinical material he had collected over more than two decades.<sup>58</sup> (This article would be the longest single work on sexual anomalies to be published in Soviet Russia until 1974.<sup>59</sup>) In his survey, Bekhterev interpreted recent claims about glandular influences on sexuality to underpin his environmental theory of perversion. Noting that the sex drive "was facilitated by development of the sex glands and their hormones," Bekhterev argued that the hormonal system in humans was subordinate to the mediation of "socio-cultural conditions" (such as modesty taboos, literature, and courtship practices), which ordered sexuality. "Inversion" (same-sex attraction) resulted from the habit of mutual masturbation between boys or girls, "when the inclination to normal sexual intercourse is weakened or absent"

or from the influence of deliberate sexual stimuli, especially during puberty.<sup>60</sup> Taking pains to explain Sigmund Freud's theories of the emergence of sexual anomalies, Bekhterev nevertheless argued robustly against the Viennese psychoanalyst's eroticization of "parts of the body not intended for sexual attraction" and the imprecision of psychoanalytic categories of sexual pathology and health. Bekhterev confidently stated that nature "intends" sex to end in procreation, and he evaluated patients experiencing same-sex attraction according to whether they could easily ignore this urge and engage in "natural" (procreative) sex. The "inversion" of desire felt by those who could still have natural relations he set aside as a sexual "deviation" (*uklonenie*), admittedly an "unnatural" one. Those, however, whose inverted desire "had taken root" (*vkorenilos'*), were "pathological" (*patologicheskije*). The Petrograd psychiatrist in effect divided homosexual patients into those who might be persuaded from their deviation by psychotherapy, and those whose pathology suggested a pessimistic prognosis.<sup>61</sup>

Until Bekhterev's death in 1927, his authority in the Soviet Union on the scientific basis of sexual development was considerable, but with the breakup of his institutional networks after his death, the reflexological viewpoint lost its most vocal advocate.<sup>62</sup> A perspective on sexuality that attracted more modest attention from psychiatrists in the Soviet Union was offered by psychoanalysis. While enthusiasm for Sigmund Freud's theories among a new generation of psychiatrists marked the last years of tsarist rule, little about homosexuality found its way into the Russian psychoanalytic movement's journal, *Psikhoterapiia* (*Psychotherapy*).<sup>63</sup> Freudian explanations of homosexuality were infrequently rehearsed in Soviet Russian psychiatric literature, notwithstanding the widespread receptivity to Freud's psychotherapeutic practices in the early 1920s. In the later 1920s, officially sponsored attacks on "Freudianism" (*freidizm*) as a worldview as well as a psychotherapeutic technique mounted. Psychoanalysis fell under proscription until the 1970s.<sup>64</sup>

Freud's work was translated into Russian and published in NEP Russia, and his theories circulated widely among the reading public. His influence on early-Soviet pedagogy and cultural criticism was significant.<sup>65</sup> Yet psychiatric writing on "homosexuality" in this period does not reflect the appeal of psychoanalysis. One reason why few psychoanalytic interpretations of same-sex perversion appeared in Russia is that while Freud's work was well known, few institutionally powerful psychiatrists actively sought to work with and develop his concepts. There were structural and ideological reasons for this. To the tsarist psychiat-

ric profession struggling for recognition and resources, minor psychiatry (*malaia psikhiairiia*, the treatment of neuroses and everyday life problems)<sup>66</sup> had been a significantly lower priority than in affluent Germany or France. Both Bekhterev and Gannushkin opposed the Freudian view, the former from his biological and reflexological approach, while the latter, from his training under Emil Kraepelin, an opponent of psychoanalysis.<sup>67</sup> Two students of Gannushkin, Krasnushkin and Lev Rozenshtein, exhibited interest in Freud before the revolution. Yet there is no trace of this influence on Krasnushkin's later work about sexuality. Rozenstein's activities as director of the Institute of Neuropsychiatric Prophylaxis in Moscow were said by Wilhelm Reich in 1929 to be influenced by Freud, but the Soviet doctor said little about sex or psychoanalysis in print.<sup>68</sup> Rozenshtein's views are difficult to reconstruct. He undoubtedly continued in the 1920s to be interested in sexuality and its place in mental hygiene. He devoted precious time during a research trip to Berlin in the mid-1920s to visiting Hirschfeld and the psychiatrist Arthur Kronfeld at the Institute for Sex Research. Yet he came home disappointed that Kronfeld held a position no more important than psychotherapeutic counselor in the institute, "an institution of the commercial type with a fine-sounding (*gromkoe*) name."<sup>69</sup> The Institute of Neuropsychiatric Prophylaxis apparently continued to conduct counseling and sex education work during the late 1920s.<sup>70</sup> Rozenshtein's sanguine view of female sex and gender dissent, reported in 1933 by a U.S. observer, was frankly emancipationist but lacked any hint of the psychoanalytic approach. As a clinical psychiatrist, he apparently believed it was appropriate to assist patients in accepting same-sex desire and finding suitable and productive social roles. He invited "Lesbians, militiawomen and Red Armyists" in uniform to come and give their life histories to his students, while claiming that "women [in Soviet Russia] may legally take men's names and live as men."<sup>71</sup> (Whether in fact such bureaucratic procedures existed is examined in chapter 6.) Perhaps Rozenshtein was speaking in the discourse of the sexual revolution as cultivated for the foreign left. Yet by the time of this conversation, in 1932 or 1933, events were shaping a new and far harsher discourse around the "individual misfit." Psychiatrists would be left without guidance once the new discourse criminalized the male homosexual and made the position of "women [who] take men's names and live as men" untenable.

Isolated case histories of same-sex relations from practitioners in Russia's regions displayed enthusiastic applications of psychoanalytic concepts and are indicative of the remarkable penetration of Freudian

theories beyond Moscow.<sup>72</sup> The most explicitly Freudian analysis of a “homosexual” emerged from the Bureau of Criminal Anthropology in Saratov. Bureau psychiatrist A. P. Shtess’s 1925 case history is a psychoanalytic profile of a “female homosexual,” unparalleled in Soviet psychiatric literature, with its creative application of the Oedipal complex, penis envy, and castration fear to interpretations of the patient’s psyche. Suggestion therapy, Freud’s technique of free association, and seventeen hypnosis sessions gradually secured the patient’s cooperation and her supposed rehabilitation. Shtess, like U.S. psychoanalysts in a later era, used the techniques of Freudian analysis to “cure” homosexuality, which he believed “serves as a barrier to the development of a [healthy] outlook, and lowers the social worth of the human personality.” He also combined psychoanalysis with hypnosis, a blending much explored in Russia but condemned by Freud, who also rejected the dogmatic and hostile pathologization of homosexuality.<sup>73</sup>

#### *Gender and the Soviet Homosexual*

Studies of same-sex desire in early Soviet Russia seldom voiced concern about the “social worth” of the individual homosexual as explicitly as did Dr. Shtess in Saratov. Psychiatrists in this period frequently presented homosexual “patients” with little comment on their life prospects, effectively inviting a professional audience to supply its own readings of extraordinary anamneses. Yet in the selection of cases for consideration, doctors were already signaling the types of deviations they found socially troubling and perhaps those they felt would interest their institutional sponsors. Frequently, in the study of sexual anomaly, gender was a key factor they pursued. Implicitly, in studies focusing on the gender-transgressive “homosexual,” psychiatrists sought to erect boundaries between anomalous and “normal” gender identities. Their studies, and the silences in them, suggested much about their readings of appropriate femininity and masculinity in the new socialist state and about their aspirations for the problem of “homosexuality” in their discipline.

If tsarist psychiatry had been reluctant to explore female homosexuality, early-Soviet psychiatrists were relatively eager to study this virtually uncharted phenomenon. Almost all of their texts discussing “female homosexuality” were the result of encounters with women who violated conventional gender norms.<sup>74</sup> Soviet psychiatrists of the 1920s recorded with considerable consistency the “mannish” (*muzhepodobnyi*) character of their principal subjects. Such gender nonconformity

was found to have begun early in childhood. Women's case histories of homosexuality paid at least as much attention to girlhood gender transgression as to early sexuality, in contrast to case histories of male homosexuals that privileged the *sexual* development of boys and downplayed their effeminacy. V. P. Osipov described how a female soldier, who sought his assistance with her sexual deviance, had "loved the company of the boys she grew up among in childhood, and often wore their clothing."<sup>75</sup> Another woman who had served in the civil war as a commander told N. I. Skliar in 1924 that she had played with boys as a child and loved "climbing trees, playing Cossacks, war games." She did not begin wearing men's clothing until her military service, when she "began to go by a masculine name" and refer to herself using masculine grammatical forms.<sup>76</sup> Forensic psychiatrists likewise found elements of masculinization in the histories of childhood they obtained from their patients. Valentina P., who murdered her lover Ol'ga Shch., said that she "began to wear men's clothing in childhood . . . I loved men's clothing." Valentina had applied to join the Red Army while a young teenager but her older, more feminine lover had prevented it. Ol'ga's brother said that Valentina "had trouble in school because she was always chasing after girls, writing them notes"; at home she would refuse to wear her skirt and put on trousers instead.<sup>77</sup> Similar accounts appeared in the work of Krasnushkin and Kholzakova who also reported on Valentina P. and another "female homosexual-murderer" in 1926 and in Edel'shtein's 1927 study of Evgeniia Fedorovna M.<sup>78</sup>

Psychiatrists were fascinated by individuals like Evgeniia who publicly transformed their gender identities, taking male names, changing their passports, adopting masculine occupations, gestures, and habits. Cases of women's gender identity transformation aroused the interest of (overwhelmingly male) psychiatrists whether they promoted hormonal or biosocial etiologies for sexual anomaly.<sup>79</sup> Their curiosity about the phenomenon, for which science had no conclusive explanations, implicitly reflected the anxiety about appropriate gender roles for women, which was widespread in NEP society.

Much ambivalence accompanied descriptions of "masculinized female homosexuals." On the one hand, these individuals enacted public roles that accorded with generally accepted notions of revolutionary equality. Three of the passing women in this psychiatric literature had served in military formations as commanders or soldiers during and after the civil war, conducting political education work, and in one case, later managing a clinic.<sup>80</sup> These were women with education and talent whose service to the revolutionary state was impossible to gainsay.

Likewise, two anonymous “female homosexuals” described as masculine in their appearance and temperament by sexologist I. G. Gel'man in his 1923 survey of the sex lives of Moscow's Sverdlov University students were from worker and peasant backgrounds; in their potential they embodied Soviet goals for women's education and promotion in the public sphere.<sup>81</sup> Even “female homosexuals” whose criminality brought them into view displayed a perverse competence in a masculine world, apparently appropriating the gender equality promised by the revolution, while subverting its economic values.<sup>82</sup>

In the 1920s, some forensic doctors viewed the rise in Russian women's suicide after the revolution as an unfortunate index of progress, a measure of the rise in women's assumption of public duties and burdens.<sup>83</sup> While psychiatrists did not express similar notions explicitly, their interest in the “masculinized female homosexual” perhaps suggested that they saw in her another potential index of the stresses of emancipation. As People's Commissar of Health Semashko had indicated in 1924, vulgarized “equality of the sexes” led some women in urban life to crop their hair, drink, smoke and swear, and stride about in “half-trousers.”<sup>84</sup> Along the way, these “masculinized” women had ignored the “feminine constitution, designed for the functions of child-birth,” which he said they possessed. Women who rejected a “natural” femininity, the destiny Semashko argued had been ordained by their biology, had in his scheme exceeded the limits of emancipated Soviet womanhood. The pathology of the “masculinized” woman evidently lay in the hint that she might reject maternity. Psychiatrists studying the “female homosexual” seldom made this connection an explicit justification for their research, yet it implicitly underpinned their interest in the gender-transgressive woman.

While masculinization and its problematic relation to revolutionary values appeared to fuel psychiatric interest in the female homosexual, early-Soviet doctors who encountered men who had sex together said rather little by comparison about male effeminacy (*zhenopodobnost'*). Of the prerevolutionary psychiatric authorities on sexual perversion, only Veniamin Tarnovskii expressed thinly disguised contempt for boys and men of Russia's elite who failed to internalize the values of courage, controlled emotions, and devotion to duty. According to his classification of “pederasts,” the most effeminate were deemed to have a congenital disorder. Effeminacy was observed in some pederasts from early in childhood and was a symptom of degeneration.<sup>85</sup> Tsarist psychiatrists after Tarnovskii avoided descriptions of unmanly behavior and expressed far less interest in gender role patterns in their perverse sub-

jects. This lack of attention to effeminacy was a symptom of psychiatrists' reluctance to pathologize same-sex relations wholeheartedly.<sup>86</sup> Bekhterev's prerevolutionary, upper-class men were described with sparing reference to their gestures or forms of dress.<sup>87</sup> It was actually in popular-scientific, literary, and journalistic depictions of male same-sex relations published after 1905 that images of the decadent, effeminate homosexual began to appear with any frequency in Russian discourse.

Revolution briefly revived psychiatric interest in the male effeminacy—homosexuality link. Osipov recycled Tarnovskii's accounts of the soft pederast, now rechristened the "homosexual," for a new generation of psychiatrists in his 1923 textbook on mental illness.<sup>88</sup> Bekhterev's and Protopopov's articles about the 1921 raid on the Petrograd "pederasts' club" described transvestite parties and male parodies of heterosexual relations, a world of transgressive behavior in gesture and language depicted with an ethnographer's eye. This world of the "women-haters' ball" was also reflected in Moscow forensic psychiatrist V. A. Belousov's 1927 case of the "male prostitute" known as "P."<sup>89</sup> The momentary revival of interest in the gender-transgressive male homosexual stemmed from concerns about public order. Most of the relevant case histories emerged from police initiatives to control private gatherings (the "pederasts' club") or economic crime (the "male prostitute"). Psychiatric expertise was apparently sought by authorities in these cases to confirm the dangers of "mental infection" if suggestible individuals associated with homosexuals.<sup>90</sup> Occasionally, forensic psychiatric expertise exculpated the homosexual by desexualizing him or by claiming to have cured him, and in such texts effeminacy was minimized or ignored.<sup>91</sup>

Far more consistent were the rigid roles with which Russians viewed sexual activity between men, assigning holistic identities according to positions supposedly adopted in anal intercourse ("passive" and "active pederasts"). The passive/active binarism could be expressed in explicitly gendered terms from the earliest moments of Russian reception of medical discourses of homosexuality.<sup>92</sup> Case histories of males, when describing sexual postures, employed phrases such as "D. offered himself as a woman,"<sup>93</sup> and "he generally prefers to be in the woman's position."<sup>94</sup> The Russian language possesses a vivid means of shaping this gendered perception in the verbs "to use" (*upotrebliat', ispol'zovat'*), to describe the insertive, "man's" role in sex acts.<sup>95</sup> The division of pederasts into active and passive types, reinforced in the reception of Casper and Tardieu, resonated in Russia with the deep cultural divide

between men and women and the mechanistic understanding of lust as a masculine drive to which women submitted passively.<sup>96</sup> Where other forms of sexual relations were described, they could be recast within this binarism.<sup>97</sup> The official language of criminal dossiers and the recorded speech of sodomy-trial defendants in the 1930s–1940s reflected the enduring presence of this vision of gender and sexual relations in Russian society.<sup>98</sup>

Psychiatric attempts to link male passivity with congenital homosexuality, and an active sexual posture, to acquired forms, appeared frequently. Doctors sought to distinguish cases caused by neuropathy, hormonal imbalance, or degenerative constitution, from supposedly less authentic, acquired forms of homosexuality.<sup>99</sup> The link was tightest in writing on the 1921 “pederasts’ club,” in which Bekhterev to a limited extent, and Protopopov more radically, insisted that “pederasts” who also had relations with women were exclusively “active” users of the male anus “as *ultimum refugium*.” Protopopov went further, adding that such men were not true or “congenital homosexuals” at all. Both psychiatrists disassociated the medically interesting “homosexual” (as opposed to the morally corrupt “pederast”) from the practice of anal intercourse, seeking to exculpate the homosexual by distancing him from the most reviled of sexual acts.<sup>100</sup>

Men and women who conformed to gender role expectations (“manly” men, “feminine” women) but engaged in same-sex practices, were seldom regarded by psychiatrists as genuinely “sick.” Doctors often asserted that removal from the influence of the gender-transgressive “homosexual” partner or a course of suggestion therapy or hypnosis was all that was needed to restore this “normal” individual to health. In their medical histories of homosexuality, psychiatrists discussed gender-conforming women differently from men. Their attitudes toward these potentially recoverable individuals anticipated later differences between the approaches to same-sex love taken by authorities in law and medicine.

In psychiatric case histories of the 1920s, partners of the “mannish” female homosexual were often represented as “normal” (heterosexual), and their femininity was taken as read. Feminine partners appeared fleetingly in the cases, often indulging the masculinized principals, then rejecting them for marriage to males.<sup>101</sup> Feminine partners in this literature also conformed to gender expectations by exposing themselves to psychological and physical abuse from their masculinized partners.<sup>102</sup> Ol’ga Ivanovna Shch., a librarian and teacher, murdered by Valentina P., was described by Krasnushkin and Kholzakova (who did not meet

her alive) as “a woman with a soft, kind, generous character, a feminine (*zhenstvennaia*), subtle, refined figure, of slight height, with a sweet face.”<sup>105</sup> The fascination with the mannish female homosexual was accompanied by the implicit denial of the possibility of a feminine “genuine” homosexual as partner. Psychiatrists suggested that the womanly partners of masculinized female homosexuals were actually normal women who had only temporarily come under the influence of a scheming and forceful homosexual personality. The resolution of the feminine woman’s problem was implicit in her “passive” role in these case histories and scarcely needed to be spelled out. Sexual relations with a man, and preferably marriage, would close this unfortunate chapter in her life.

The manly, uneffeminate man who engaged in same-sex love was also felt to be less pathological, but his rehabilitation could seldom be left to a “natural” resumption of heterosexuality. Often enough, these subjects had once been or still were married. Tarnovskii had invented the category of the congenital “periodic pederast” to describe how such men might live peacefully in the family bosom between sex romps with bathhouse youths or male street prostitutes.<sup>104</sup> In his landmark 1922 article on sexual perversions, Bekhterev’s portraits of homosexuals included many masculine males. Men and boys in single-sex environments were at risk of acquiring homosexual tastes, he argued, illustrating the point by relating how one individual could corrupt an entire *artel* of lumberjacks or how a man still capable of relations with women could, through mutual masturbation, develop a taste for rough lower-class men.<sup>105</sup> Both before and after 1917, Bekhterev’s prescription for rehabilitation was confidently interventionist: courses of hypnosis and sessions of talk therapy were often undertaken, with doubts about effectiveness only expressed in the case of effeminate males.<sup>106</sup> In 1927, Belorussian psychiatrist A. K. Lents described how he had cured or lessened homosexual desire with hypnosis. Two patients had been inclined to the insertive role and were not effeminate, but another homosexual spoke in a “effeminate” tone, and Lents judged him less susceptible to hypnotherapy.<sup>107</sup>

The masculine male who had sex with other males was in the eyes of Russian psychiatry less authentically pathological because of his “active” sexual role and the positive prognosis this suggested. Yet these men, unlike their female counterparts, could not be trusted to resume heterosexual relations without therapeutic intervention. “Normal” masculinity was more fragile and socially determined than the “feminine constitution, designed for the functions of childbirth” imagined

by Semashko. Therefore, normal masculinity had to be reconstructed through hypnosis or persuasion. Effeminate homosexual men, however, posed a more profound psychiatric dilemma: how to redirect sexual desire from a passive to an active posture, and how to resocialize the unmanly male who preferred such acts? Psychiatrists appear to have avoided discussing these questions after the interest displayed in the early 1920s, and reports of effeminacy in males dropped dramatically by the end of the decade.<sup>108</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Some early-Soviet psychiatrists, following developments in European sexology and endocrinology, examined the question of homosexuality, apparently hoping that important discoveries might enhance their discipline's links to key revolutionary values. The silence in the penal code on same-sex relations offered new opportunities for medicine in an area formerly dominated by police approaches. A vanguard role in the international sex reform movement, and friendly ties with Hirschfeld, its leading sexologist, were cultivated by the Health Commissariat. By conducting research in sexual anomalies, psychiatrists could potentially attract patronage for work that would distinguish them from tsarist predecessors and raise their prestige within and outside the Soviet Union in the quintessentially modern discipline of sexology. Hirschfeld's promotion of a hormonal etiology for sexual intermediaries also afforded a potential avenue for psychiatrists to contribute to revolutionary ambitions to master nature. By incorporating and attempting to replicate the Steinach breakthroughs in identifying the source of sexual anomalies, psychiatrists could enhance their association with the pioneering work of endocrinologists.

Despite the promise of these initiatives, their contradictory political potential rendered problematic the question of a biological basis for homosexuality. Methodological limitations highlighted this dilemma. For psychiatrists reliant on anamnesis, finding sufficient material to make a case for problematizing same-sex relations was a formidable hurdle.<sup>109</sup> It was not that there were no "homosexuals" to study—one Leningrad psychiatrist, extrapolating from Hirschfeld's attempt at demographic analysis, said that two to three million probably lived in Soviet Russia.<sup>110</sup> A more significant obstacle was the epistemological threshold, the point at which dozens of scattered case histories constituted a critical mass pointing to a recognized social entity. No psychia-

trists of the 1920s managed to assemble studies of large numbers of “homosexuals.” After the articles produced by Protopopov and Bekhterev in the aftermath of the 1921 “pederasts’ club” raid, only a handful of psychiatrists published *comparative* multiple case histories of homosexuality, and these were not quantitative studies of large samples but anecdotal reviews of a few patients.<sup>111</sup> There was no Russian version of Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sex Research, which studied sexual variety and educated the public, nor of the U.S. Committee for the Study of Sex Variants, formed to conduct a systematic mass study.<sup>112</sup> Soviet social hygienists in their sexological research confined themselves to surveys of relations *between* the sexes; the only deviance they added to this agenda was female prostitution. Studies of homosexuals that did appear in Soviet medical literature were usually based on modest clinical samples or on individuals processed through a penal psychiatric facility. Psychiatrists in revolutionary Russia tended to encounter the homosexual fortuitously rather than actively seeking him or her out.

As a result of this reactive posture, these psychiatrists eschewed the methodologies of quantification that other disciplines embraced in the 1920s to make “Soviet” their studies of the socially anomalous. Questionnaires, structured surveys, and gathering of statistics were among the ways in which social hygienists and forensic doctors studied forms of social anomaly such as female prostitution and suicide.<sup>113</sup> These tools connected the individual case to the social body and dramatized the problem for researchers asserting claims for their disciplines inside the Health Commissariat, as well as for Party activists and political agitators who took interest in the political issues flowing from these claims. Demonstrating the significance of the object of research depended, in part, on being able to count its prevalence in society and to situate it (by markers of class, gender, education, and so on) within the social body. As the individual case history became part of a larger whole, the research topic acquired a firmer claim to political relevance, and doctors could present themselves as “physician-sociologists” (*vrachi-sotsiologi*), diagnosticians of society.<sup>114</sup>

Material difficulties also arose for psychiatrists who asserted a primarily hormonal origin for same-sex desire and gender nonconformity. A constant problem in Soviet biological experimentation was the short supply of healthy tissues, both animal and human, for research work of every kind. An attempt to replicate the Steinach transplant and cure a male “homosexual” in 1923, conducted by leading biologist M. M. Zavodovskii of Second Moscow State University, proved unsuccessful.

While skeptical of the procedure, Zavadovskii nevertheless noted that failure could also be ascribed to the lack of appropriate tissues for transplant.<sup>115</sup> In 1928, Kirov in Khar'kov similarly complained that "we were unable to obtain a necessary high-quality ovary satisfying all the present requirements" in his implant experiment on Efrosiniia B.<sup>116</sup> As in Western European nations, the directions taken by researchers of the sex hormones in the Soviet Union were often determined by the materials most readily available to gather and manipulate.<sup>117</sup> Human testicular and ovarian tissue supplies were difficult enough to obtain in peacetime, and the Soviet Union's geographic position and economic limitations constricted access to gorilla or monkey glands.

Ultimately, unlike rejuvenation therapy, which appeared to work at least temporarily, the Steinach-Lichtenstern gland transplants to alter sexual orientation produced no material results. Numerous attempts to replicate the Austrians' breakthrough were made in the early 1920s in Central and Eastern Europe. By the mid-1920s, biologists in the region were generally convinced that the techniques were ineffective, and the few reversals of sexual appetite observed were solely the products of doctors' influence on suggestible patients. Hirschfeld, a physician not a biologist, continued to hope for an endocrinological etiology of sexual intermediaries, because a congenital basis for same-sex love had underpinned the logic of his brand of emancipationism.<sup>118</sup> In the late 1920s, some Soviet psychiatrists would also continue to anticipate the day when biologists would reveal the hidden mechanisms of sexual orientation in the sex-gland system. Yet in NEP Russia, material obstacles to sex-gland transplantation and the failures of transplants undertaken made it clear that the existing procedure was a fruitless drain on scarce resources.

Embedded in the transfer of the question of sex and gender dissent from the law to medicine were a number of dilemmas that made doctors cautious. Without explicit political signals, how were doctors to know what medical involvement was intended to achieve? Were doctors meant, through the techniques of "minor psychiatry," to assist the individual who embodied sexual anomaly to accept her- or himself as fully capable citizens of the new society? Were doctors supposed to be curing "individual misfits"? Or were they supposed to be unlocking the secrets of sexual anomaly in order to create "a life that will not produce misfits"? Unlike other social anomalies, homosexuality's political significance was far from clear. Suicides were unambiguously regarded as losses to the new society, and while female prostitution evoked contradictory responses from police, social workers, and medical practitioners,

they nonetheless could agree that the phenomenon was undesirable. In the 1920s, as Bolsheviks surveyed the social landscape and considered ways of transforming it according to Marxist aspirations, sex and gender dissent evoked a variety of responses that were dependent on their context. Doctors assessed their position astutely when they remained cautious about medicalizing all forms of sexual anomaly.



## *“Can a Homosexual Be a Member of the Communist Party?”*

THE MAKING OF A SOVIET COMPULSORY  
HETEROSEXUALITY

**D**espite the advances claimed for the forced-pace industrialization program of the first Five Year Plan, crises marked the years 1932 and 1933 that threatened to undo all that (from the leadership’s point of view) had been accomplished. If, in material terms, the plan had laid the foundations for a huge expansion of the heavy industrial base of the nation, in social terms the results were appalling. The most disastrous effect of the drive for wholesale collectivization had been a virtual civil war in the countryside with deportations of better-off peasant families (the “liquidation of the kulaks as a class”), accompanied by the confiscation of grain for urban consumption and export. Meanwhile, party activists backed with police and legal officials forced poorer peasants, their tools and livestock into the new collective farms. The expropriation of seed grain and peasant demoralization contributed to mass famine in 1932–33 in Ukraine and southern Russia, killing three to five million people.<sup>1</sup> Many millions fled the village and sought refuge and employment in the rapidly expanding factories of the new industrial complexes and towns invoked by the plan. There they found that despite the new enterprises’ hunger for labor, little had been done to provide for workers’ needs on a scale commensurate with planned growth: housing in particular was improvised, cramped, distant from work, and unhygienic. Thousands who arrived to work in the steel mills of a plan centerpiece, the new town of Magnitogorsk, lived summer and winter in the early years of the decade in tents and mud huts. In Moscow the number of inhabitants per room rose from 2.71 in 1926 to 3.91 in 1940.<sup>2</sup> The flow of new arrivals in the cities “ruralized” them, bringing thousands of new residents who knew little of urban and industrial ways. Workers dissatisfied

with poor housing and living standards took advantage of the labor shortage to change jobs with increasing frequency, and the result was a huge turnover of employees, and consequently of urban residents, what Moshe Lewin has dubbed a “quicksand society.”<sup>3</sup> In social terms, the first Five Year Plan had produced rural famine, serious labor shortages, urban chaos, and decline in the health and welfare of the proletariat, in whose name the Communist Party ruled. While seeking to stabilize the food situation (with the worst of the famine peaking in winter and spring 1933–34), the leadership acted to conceal the scale of village suffering from the urban population and to weed out and repress critics. A purge (*chistka*) of the Communist Party, which during the previous four years had accepted large numbers of new worker and peasant members, was ordered in December 1932 and continued through 1933.<sup>4</sup> The purge, with its review of biographies and its intense scrutiny of Communists’ political and intimate actions, contributed to a mentality of suspicion and a search for scapegoats. In this atmosphere, the impatience with the continued existence of urban “social anomalies,” and the impulse to social cleansing in the cities increased.

In 1933, urban male homosexuals would fall within the larger net of these trends. In the case of this group, international developments also significantly contributed to justifications for the decision to recriminalize sodomy. The legal measure, first proposed in September 1933 by the deputy chief of the secret police (OGPU), G. G. Iagoda, was preceded by the rupture in German-Soviet relations occasioned by Hitler’s coming to power and the intensification of a virulent propaganda war in Europe between Fascism and Communism. Accusations of homosexuality (hurled as an insult to the masculine honor of the opposition) had already become a significant new feature of this political discourse. This international homophobic rhetoric significantly elevated a modern antihomosexual discourse to the diplomatic arena for the first time in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Its crucible had been Weimar Germany. There, politicians inheriting the legacy of the Eulenberg scandal in the Wilhelmine era confronted the visibility of a national homosexual emancipation movement, an interest group that successfully established the voices of “homosexuals” as citizens in Weimar political culture.<sup>6</sup> Until Hitler’s accession, the German Communist Party (KPD) generally supported Magnus Hirschfeld’s campaign for the abolition of paragraph 175 in the German criminal code that prohibited male homosexual relations.<sup>7</sup> Weimar Communists had argued, with perhaps more faith in historical progress than comprehension of sexual dissent, that decriminalization would be the logical consequence of removing all

“reactionary” legislation on sex. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) also supported these goals but had failed to do so with the consistency of the KPD. In 1931 and 1932, lurid reports in the social democratic press about the homosexuality of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (SA) leader Ernst Röhm generated a morals scandal. The KPD’s Richard Linsert criticized SPD disclosures about Röhm’s personal life as “sexual denunciation”; yet in April 1932 the KPD joined in the irresistible attacks on the SA chief, while continuing to support the abolition of paragraph 175.<sup>8</sup> The ideological purity displayed by Linsert was less sustainable once the stakes became more desperate, and the left was erased from the German political landscape in 1933.

When ex-Communist Marinus van der Lubbe was arrested after the Berlin Reichstag fire on the night of 29 February 1933, Nazis seized on his political ties to blame international Communism for the attack. In response, the Communist International exploited the fact of van der Lubbe’s homosexuality in a resonant campaign to disassociate him from the left. A widely distributed book by a collective of exiled German Communists accused van der Lubbe of being in the pay of the Nazi Party and under the sexual and moral influence of SA leader Röhm.<sup>9</sup> Homosexuals were branded as violent, unreliable, and morally degenerate in this tract and in the war of words within the left, and between left and right, that it generated.<sup>10</sup> The central European nationalist and later Fascist institution of *Männerbund* (associations for young men’s physical and moral education) came under increasingly searing attacks from the left as fountainheads of homosexuality and other moral impurities.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the Nazis linked Magnus Hirschfeld’s leftist politics and his Jewish faith to his long campaign to abolish the German statute prohibiting male same-sex relations. The closure of Germany’s homosexual publications, organizations, and bars in February and March 1933 and the ritualized destruction of Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sex Research (6 May 1933) gave expression to Nazi moral outrage. A “battle for the birthrate” with military objectives firmly in view would determine the new regime’s outlook on sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast to Hitler’s loud and crude antihomosexual campaigning of the 1920s and early 1930s, the proscription of male homosexuality throughout the USSR in 1933–34 was imposed without public discussion. The orchestrated press campaigns which accompanied other new measures (on juvenile crime in 1935, or on abortion in 1936) were not an aspect of the adoption of the sodomy law. As with decriminalization in the first RSFSR criminal codes, historians have been forced to speculate on the reasons for the change, and a small number of texts and

clues have been sifted repeatedly for what they can yield. In addition, little has been said in this historiography about the decision not to prohibit lesbian relations. With fresh evidence on the legislative process and on the administrative and medical consequences of the adoption of the antisodomy law, new light can be shed on the reasons for the change and on the way experts and citizens greeted it. Significant gaps in our knowledge still exist. Without further access to archival materials, particularly ordinary and secret police archives and the Presidential archives,<sup>15</sup> the political motives for the recriminalization of sodomy remain speculative. Nevertheless, it is possible from the new sources to construct a clearer picture of the development and reception of this legislation and of the silence on women who loved women that accompanied it.

*“Destroy the homosexuals—Fascism will disappear”*

According to documents from the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF) published in 1993, after the decriminalization of sodomy by Boris Yeltsin in April of that year, the immediate initiative for the enactment of the antisodomy law in 1933 came from the political police.<sup>14</sup> OGPU deputy chief G. G. Iagoda wrote to Iosif Stalin on 15 September 1933 to argue for the need for legislation against “pederasty” as a matter of state security. Iagoda reported that raids had recently been conducted on Moscow and Leningrad “organizations of pederasts” and that 130 persons had been arrested. Iagoda wrote that they were guilty of

establishing networks of salons, centers, dens, groups, and other organized formations of pederasts, with the eventual transformation of these organizations into outright espionage cells . . . Pederast activists, using the castelike exclusivity of pederastic circles for plainly counterrevolutionary aims, had politically demoralized various social layers of young men, including young workers, and even attempted to penetrate the army and navy.

Stalin forwarded Iagoda’s letter to Politburo colleague L. Kaganovich, noting that “these scoundrels must receive exemplary punishment, and a corresponding guiding decree must be introduced in our legislation.”<sup>15</sup>

Iagoda sent Stalin the text of a draft law on 13 December 1933, with a covering letter outlining the OGPU’s arguments in favor of the measure.<sup>16</sup> Iagoda did not mention spying by the homosexuals who had been arrested earlier that year; instead, he noted that the OGPU had

established that organized groups of “pederasts” had operated “salons” for “orgies,” engaging in the “recruitment and corruption of totally healthy young people, Red Army soldiers, sailors, and individual students.” The OGPU’s attention, at least in this letter, appeared after three months to have shifted to the potential security danger that closed groups presented and the threat to “healthy young people” drawn into them. Iagoda’s interest was concentrated on male rather than female sociability (which he did not mention). At no point in the subsequent development of this legislation was the question of female homosexuality explicitly raised. This does not mean that women’s same-sex love continued to be held in the positive regard characteristic of some circles in the 1920s. The factors that would impinge on women are examined later in this chapter.

The draft decree for the Presidium of the USSR Central Executive Committee (TsIK) attached to Iagoda’s December letter consisted of a proposed wording of the new law, a clause ordering the inclusion of the statute in each union republic criminal code, and a final paragraph confirming the continued validity of laws dealing with rape and prostitution. This draft was approved by the Politburo on 16 December 1933.<sup>17</sup> The following day the USSR All-Union Central Executive Committee adopted virtually the same decree, distributing it to the analogous RSFSR body for the development of corresponding draft decrees.<sup>18</sup>

There were significant variations between the original statute proposed by Iagoda and the version finally adopted by the highest organs of the USSR (7 March 1934)<sup>19</sup> and RSFSR (1 April 1934) governments.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most eloquent expression of the distance in mentalities between the Party leadership and the legal theorists who administered Soviet justice was apparent in the language they used to discuss the issue. Intraparty correspondence and even the Politburo’s 16 December 1933 decree employed the crude expression *pederastiia* (pederasty) to refer to the offense in question. The traditional legal term *muzhelozhstvo* (sodomy) was used in all Russian government documents and the draft law itself. The Iagoda draft proposed maximum, but no minimum, sentences for simple and aggravated forms of sodomy. Moreover, the forms of aggravated sodomy that the OGPU deputy chief proposed to make crimes specifically included such acts “for payment (*za platu*), as a profession or in public.”<sup>21</sup> These qualifications were only dropped from the decrees at a very late stage, and *minimum* sentences were also added (three years for simple and aggravated sodomy) the week before the USSR decree’s publication on 7 March 1934.<sup>22</sup> The insertion of sentencing minimums suggests legislators intended to underline the

seriousness with which the new offense was to be viewed and set this sex offense apart from others in the code.<sup>25</sup> The late deletion of Iagoda's formulas mentioning male prostitution and public displays is unexplained in the available sources; some possible reasons are examined below.

Despite the apparent uniformity imposed by the all-union decree of 7 March 1934, the timing and language of adoption of the sodomy law unaccountably varied in some republics. Ukraine was by far the first union republic to incorporate the statute in its penal code, on 11 January 1934; it used the language of Iagoda's original proposal as found in the 16 December 1933 Politburo decree. Male prostitution and public homosexuality were thus explicitly named as crimes in the Soviet Union's second largest republic. In addition, no minimum sentences were spelled out for sodomy in Ukraine's penal code.<sup>24</sup> The effect of these anomalies on enforcement and sentencing practices was potentially great, with local policing patterns influenced by the concern expressed in the code about public and prostitution-related manifestations of male homosexuality. Ukrainian judges may have had little option but to impose the union-level decree's minimum sentences, although undoubtedly they found the same means to evade these minimums as those employed later in the 1930s by their Russian counterparts.

The same textual variant was for some reason adopted in the Tadzhik SSR penal code.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, local justice drafters generally followed the RSFSR wording patterned on the USSR decree of 7 March, adopting their versions in April 1934. The location of the new statute within penal codes reflected a rough division in Stalinist perceptions of modernity and backwardness in matters of sexuality, with some codes incorporating it into existing sections on sexual crime (reflecting a modernized sexual ethic), and others placing it among crimes constituting survivals of primitive custom. In the Belorussian SSR and Ukraine, the new article was situated with articles on sexual offenses. The Transcaucasian republics of Armenia and Georgia followed this comparatively modern categorization.<sup>26</sup> In the Tadzhik and Uzbek codes, the prohibition figured among local customary offenses instead of sex crimes.<sup>27</sup> Turkmen and Azerbaidzhan penal codification had no distinction between sexual and customary crime, and the existing antisodomy statute among these articles was simply revised to reflect the all-union decree.<sup>28</sup>

The Stalinist leadership was silent about these legislative changes, leaving little in the available documentary record to indicate why it responded in this enthusiastic and draconian fashion to Iagoda's initiative. The OGPU's initial extralegal arrests in late summer 1933 of male

homosexuals in Moscow and Leningrad demonstrated that no law need hamper the work of the secret police, if "castelike" groups were suspected of conspiracy. More than enough legislative latitude existed to combat espionage and counterrevolution, and indeed in the Five Year Plan atmosphere of campaign justice, the OGPU had a comparatively free hand to deal with these crimes.<sup>29</sup> Iagoda's proposal for new legislation after these raids and the changes to the legislation as it developed suggest that while suspicions of espionage were present, other concerns were paramount. As the process of urban social cleansing accelerated in late 1932 with the introduction of internal passports and city residence permits, "social anomalies" and "class aliens" were increasingly becoming the targets of security police action. "Recidivist" female prostitutes, "professional" beggars, the homeless, and unrepentant "criminal elements" formed visible subcultures of the street that the new identity document regime was supposed to weed out of the socialist city.<sup>30</sup> Male homosexuals in their most public subcultural guise, meeting on the sexualized territories of Moscow's Boulevard Ring and Leningrad's Nevskii Prospekt, apparently drew police attention to a further anomalous subculture of the urban landscape.<sup>31</sup> While Iagoda seized Stalin's attention with his first letter's warnings about espionage among homosexuals, the legislation he proposed and most of his arguments for it targeted a subculture. Private circles of homosexual men could constitute potentially treasonous "salons" and "dens," but it was the public aspects of homosexual sociability and its "demoralizing" effect that attracted sustained concern. Iagoda's anxiety about the "recruitment and corruption of totally healthy young people," actually young men, in the military and higher education, was reminiscent of the concerns voiced by psychiatrists discussing "mental infection" among cohorts of "normal" army conscripts. What homosexual sociability threatened was a crisis of mental or sexual hygiene, imagined by police and Politburo in the crude language of the street as the seduction of innocent young men by "pederasts." Moreover, Iagoda's first draft of the legislation singled out sodomy "for payment, as a profession or in public" as particular features he sought to eliminate with stiffer penalties. These were (in the context) striking descriptions of social behavior, resembling the quasi-ethnographic language of laws against "crimes constituting survivals of primitive custom," explicitly enumerated in peripheral republican codes. Evidently, this language proved too vivid, for it was excised in the week before publication, perhaps on the advice of the RSFSR Commissariat of Justice or jurists of the USSR and RSFSR Supreme Courts. One may speculate that jurists argued for a less ex-

plicit, more euphemistic law that would not inspire the “mental infection” created by publicity of forbidden practices. They probably suggested as well that public sexual acts, male prostitution, and “professional” sodomy could all be prosecuted under existing legislation.<sup>32</sup> It also seems likely that jurists pointed out the inconsistency of formally outlawing the male prostitute, while female prostitutes had never been made official criminals.

Soon after the relatively low-key official adoption of the new anti-sodomy statute, Stalin was made aware of the kind of reaction it would receive among the Western European left. In a letter received in May 1954, British Communist and Moscow resident Harry Whyte, an editorial employee at the *Moscow Daily News*, asked Stalin to justify the new law.<sup>33</sup> (He also chronicled his efforts to learn the whereabouts of his lover, a Russian man arrested in secret police raids on Moscow homosexuals between December 1933 and March 1934.) In its thorough exposition of contemporary Marxist views on homosexuality, the letter made evident the problems of presentation that the new law would attract and probably influenced the direction of the subsequent Stalinist public pronouncements on the sodomy law.

Whyte’s long missive opened with a question for Stalin: “Can a homosexual be considered a person fit to become a member of the Communist Party?” The journalist laid out Marxist arguments against the blanket prohibition of sodomy, which, he claimed, introduced unwarranted contradictions in Soviet social life by imposing “sexual leveling” on a harmless minority and by ignoring science on the issue. The new law jettisoned the achievement of the previous Soviet legislation protecting sexual liberty and inviolability, legislation that represented Soviet power’s resolution of capitalist contradictions on the question. Whyte likened the social position of homosexuals to that of other groups in society suffering arbitrary discrimination, naming women, “colored races,” and national minorities. He drew a fine distinction between a Communist’s personal life (to which private sphere his sexual proclivity ought to be consigned), and cases in which homosexuality became a public, political issue in bourgeois societies. The letter cataloged Marx and Engels on political aspects of homosexuality, noted with approval the Comintern line on van der Lubbe’s alleged contacts with homosexual Nazis, and pointed to the hypocrisy of fascist policy inherent in the destruction of Hirschfeld’s sexological institute. Whyte reminded Stalin of his criticism at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934 of “leveling” (*uravnilovka*) in wages, living standards, and “tastes and personal *byt*” as a form of “primitive asceticism” unworthy of

Marxism. These comments against leveling “have a direct connection to the question” of homosexuality, the journalist argued, since the new law forced a biologically distinct minority to comply with “sexual leveling.”<sup>54</sup>

Stalin directed that the letter be archived, recording his opinion of its author: “An idiot and a degenerate.”<sup>55</sup> The document was retained in a file with others relating to the introduction of the new legislation, suggesting that its arguments were not viewed as an idiot’s prattle, but served as a useful guide to an unfamiliar discourse. To counter it, Stalin apparently turned to a mouthpiece for whom the European terms of this rhetoric were familiar. Cultural spokesman Maksim Gor’kii’s article, “Proletarian Humanism,” appearing in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* on 23 May 1934, was the regime’s first public explanation of the recriminalization of male homosexuality, and it placed the question squarely within the terms of the propaganda war between Fascism and Communism.<sup>56</sup>

The themes of this war were the moral degradation and outright seduction of a nation’s youth and, particularly, of young men as the nation’s productive and fighting force, by the evils of the opposing political system. Underlying this ideological anxiety about corrupted youth was an appeal to more venerable stereotypes. Gor’kii deployed the myth of elemental Russia’s purity to set up a familiar contrast with an overcivilized West, declaring that proletarian humanism was transforming the huge reserves of “barbaric” Russia’s “physical energy” into productive, “intellectual energy.” Meanwhile, capitalism now hired Fascism to mobilize the physically and morally depleted scions of the bourgeoisie, the sons of alcoholics, hysterics, and syphilitics. “In the thousands of gray, desiccated faces, it is especially rare to see healthy, full-blooded individuals, because there are few of them.” Among the “hundreds of facts speaking of the destructive, demoralizing influence of Fascism,” homosexuality was but one of the most “revolting” features. At stake was not only the purity and health of a population but of its culture. Where the proletariat ruled, homosexuality was regarded as a force for corrupting youth and was punished, while “in the land of the great philosophers, scientists and musicians [Germany], it is practiced freely and with impunity.” Fascism’s “poison” of nationalism and anti-Semitism was schooling youth in “social cynicism, a sadistic passion for murder.” Yet Gor’kii dismissed any claim that homosexuals might constitute a social minority (like Jews or “the unarmed Hindus, Chinese, and Negroes”) worthy of safeguarding by the workers’ state, with his notorious slogan, “Destroy the homosexuals—Fascism will disap-

pear.”<sup>37</sup> One could infer from the content of this article, much cited as the reflection of the intentions behind recriminalization of sodomy in 1934, that an obedient Gor’kii was briefed about Whyte’s letter to Stalin and the arguments against the new legislation he was required to demolish.<sup>38</sup>

The unanticipated sodomy ban threw functionaries, including literary officials and medical experts, into confusion. Not all were inclined to accept the consequences for their fields of competence. The best documented example of this disarray concerns the purchase, by the State Literary Museum director V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, of the well-known diary and papers of Leningrad poet Mikhail Kuzmin. In November 1933 Kuzmin received 25,000 rubles for these papers, comprising a daily record of his life from August 1905 to December 1931. They contained frank references to his and others’ homosexuality.<sup>39</sup>

On 1 February 1934 (that is, between the December Politburo and March Soviet government decrees enacting the sodomy ban) an OGPU official demanded and received from Bonch-Bruevich the complete archive. In April, a special commission of the Cultural Enlightenment Department of the Party Central Committee began an investigation of the museum director. The purchase of the Kuzmin papers, for the large sum, was the focus of the inquiry. Bonch-Bruevich defended the worth of the archive and its homosexual themes, which he noted were essential to an understanding of “bourgeois left symbolism,” in letters to Iagoda and Commissar of Enlightenment A. S. Bubnov in May 1934.<sup>40</sup> Three days after these letters were written, Gor’kii’s article “Proletarian Humanism” appeared in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, but Bonch-Bruevich did not immediately abandon the defense of the purchase.<sup>41</sup> On 20 June, the Party commission reprimanded Bonch-Bruevich for paying “dearly” for “material of an uncommonly trashy (*makulatornyi*) character,” ordered a purge of museum staff, and directed that future purchases be vetted by Bubnov’s commissariat. Kuzmin himself escaped arrest, dying of natural causes in 1936, while most of the diary and papers he had sold to Bonch-Bruevich were returned to the museum in 1940.<sup>42</sup> Iurii Iurkun, Kuzmin’s partner during the Soviet era, was arrested in 1938 during the Great Terror by the NKVD (on charges of counterrevolution, not homosexuality) in a sweep against Leningrad’s literary figures. He was executed after seven months of interrogations in September 1938.<sup>45</sup>

Other homosexuals and their literary works met similar fates during the 1933–34 crackdown.<sup>44</sup> Nikolai Kliuev, poet of the Russian village and of homosexual love, drew the ire of Ivan Gronskii, chief editor of

*Izvestiia VTsIK* and the thick literary journal *Novyi mir* in the 1930s. Gronskii had (he would claim in 1959) allotted the indigent bard a generous academician's ration in 1932. Kliuev moved to the country with his male lover (the artist A. Iar-Kravchenko; they first met in 1928), wrote poems, and eventually sent Gronskii some verses for publication. The editor was outraged by their homosexual content and endeavored to persuade the poet to “write normal verses.” When Kliuev flatly refused, Gronskii did not hesitate to telephone Iagoda (later confirming the decision with Stalin), demanding the poet be deported from Moscow.<sup>45</sup> The call apparently took place immediately before Kliuev's arrest on 2 February 1934. The poet was interrogated in Moscow's Lubyanka and charged under criminal code article 58(10)—counterrevolutionary agitation—not homosexual offenses, probably because of the inflammatory invective of his poems denouncing collectivization. On 5 March he was exiled to Narym territory in Siberia. Kliuev was re-arrested while in exile and shot as a counterrevolutionary in October 1937.<sup>46</sup> Gronskii's response to Kliuev's refusal to heterosexualize his verses was to “cleanse” Moscow of the poet and his homosexuality. With more self-interest than Bonch-Bruевич, this literary functionary comprehended what political costs a subsidy to an outlawed (and anti-Soviet) homosexual artist could incur. The OGPU's decision to apply counterrevolutionary articles of the criminal code in Kliuev's case does not diminish the impression that the poet fell into the hands of the security police for his unrepentant homosexuality, but more enlightened investigation of his secret police file would be required to substantiate this.<sup>47</sup>

Doctors and even Commissariat of Justice officials were less aware of the new legislation and of the “homosexual conspiracy” upon which it was founded. One psychiatrist, approached by Harry Whyte, checked with the Justice Commissariat (Whyte does not say when) before twice assuring the *Moscow Daily News* staffer that the Commissariat had no objection to the treatment of patients “if they were honest citizens or good Communists,” and that these homosexuals could organize their personal lives as they wished. Whyte consulted another psychiatrist, who refused to believe in the existence of the antisodomy law until the journalist produced a copy of the legislation. Whyte contacted the Commissariat of Justice himself (between the December 1933 and March 1934 decrees) and was told that the law was being enacted because “homosexuality is a form of bourgeois degeneracy.” Seeking information about his arrested lover, Whyte also contacted the security police directly, and obtained differing responses to his questions before

and after the legislation was published in its final form, suggesting a shift in the way it was being implemented. During the interval between decrees, when speaking to OGPU officials, Whyte was told that the arrests being carried out had a “political character” (and not a public morality basis). The journalist understood this to mean that a distinction would be drawn between politically loyal homosexuals, who would not be targeted, and those deemed counterrevolutionary, who would be arrested. After the publication of the law of 7 March 1934, however, an OGPU employee told Whyte that “the law would be strictly applied in every observed case of homosexuality.”<sup>48</sup> It appears that with the published law came fresh instructions widening the scope of its enforcement, but evidence of these directives remains scant.

In contrast to other criminal legislation enacted during the 1930s, the antisodomy decree left no trail of circulars informing procuracy and judiciary of the intent behind the measure or how the law ought to be enforced. Normally, such directives assisted court investigators and judges in carrying out their duties in the regular criminal justice system.<sup>49</sup> Instructions on the antisodomy law could have been transmitted orally or via closed circulars, which were returned after being read.<sup>50</sup> In this study’s sample of eight Moscow sodomy trials dating from 1935 to 1941, only one case (the first, dating from March 1935) offers any evidence that courts were informed of the meaning of the law of 7 March 1934. In its sentence, the municipal court justified its qualification of defendants’ acts under this law by noting

that the law of 7 March 1934 is directed against sodomy not in the narrow meaning of the term, but against sodomy as an antisocial system [*pravlenie*] of sexual liaisons between men in whatever form they may take and especially when they occur among groups of persons organized on that basis.<sup>51</sup>

The court used this reasoning to acquit one defendant and give another a greatly reduced sentence. The RSFSR Supreme Court confirmed this reasoning in its review of the case and even acquitted a further defendant on the basis that no proof of sodomy after 7 March 1934 had been presented.<sup>52</sup> None of the remaining seven cases up to 1941, nor any of the six cases found in the same archive dating from 1949 to 1956, offer any similar statement suggesting courts had been given directives on the interpretation of this law.

Clinical psychiatrists received no direct guidance regarding the new law, and they were left to learn about it fortuitously. Forensic psychia-

trists evidently knew about the shift and quickly altered their definitions of psychopathy to fit.<sup>53</sup> In 1935, psychiatrist E. A. Popov radically deconstructed “homosexuality” as a category of mental illness. Without mentioning the recriminalization of sodomy, he sought to purge psychiatry of the homosexual. Classifications of sexual perversion based on symptoms rather than etiologies were a “remnant” that betrayed the discipline’s diagnostic and therapeutic weakness. A variety of primarily exogenous causes could account for homosexuality: normal sex life was “perverted” by “a lack of success, difficulties, disappointments, chance factors which cause revulsion toward women.” Men of this type still have a “normal sexual basis [*ustanovka*]” that continued to influence their choice of sex object (preferring effeminized youths) and sex act [“striving to imitate normal coitus by means of the pederastic act”]. Applying the full force of the nurturist psychopathic model, he spoke of the “nonuniformity of that group of phenomena figuring in psychiatric systems under the name of homosexuality.”<sup>54</sup> In Popov’s prescient scheme, eros between men would only be the object of medical attention as an aspect of a mental disorder or psychopathy, not as an entity in itself.

The state abruptly shifted the nexus of medico-legal supervision of same-sex love to practitioners of forensic medicine and gynecology, disciplines undergoing significant restructuring as a result of the Five Year Plans.<sup>55</sup> In late 1933, the newly founded Central Institute of Forensic Medicine drafted Soviet Russia’s first comprehensive guidelines for doctors acting as expert examiners in cases of sexual crime. These rules for “forensic medical obstetric-gynecological examination” were adopted by the Health Commissariat in consultation with the Procurators of the RSFSR and USSR, and a representative of the main administration of the regular police three months after the sodomy law, in June 1934.<sup>56</sup> The rules were under discussion just as the new antisodomy statute was being drafted, but evidence of a link between the two initiatives has not emerged. Yet the guidance for legal doctors contained specific instructions for detecting the signs of “pederasty”:

13. In examinations regarding depraved acts, accompanied by rape or not, and as well regarding sexual perversions (with or without the use of force), the expert, . . . examines (in the case of pederasty [*pederastiia*]) the anal orifice and should note its form (crater- or funnel-shaped), whether it gapes or not, the flabbiness or slackness of the mucous membrane of the rectum, the presence or absence of ray-shaped folds of skin around the anal orifice, of fissures and wounds, the status of the sphinc-

ter, levator, the dilation of the ampulla, prolapsus of layers of the rectum; particular attention is to be paid to the presence of rectal gonorrhoea, especially in victims who are men (or boys) . . .<sup>57</sup>

The location of this passage on the anatomical indications of “pederasty” directly following a discussion of heterosexual rape, in a code of rules governing gynecological examinations, echoed Vladislav Merzhhevskii’s treatment of the issue in his manual fifty-six years previously. Yet this was not simply a return to pederasty-as-vice according to the old regime’s formula, but part of a larger process by which the state attempted to standardize forensic medical practice in matters of sexual crime.<sup>58</sup> A more systematic procedure for the detection of pederasty conformed with authorities’ determination to impose routine and standard values on the haphazard production of medical expertise in criminal investigations of rape, defloration, and sexual abuse.

In a manual of forensic gynecology, published in 1935 by doctors who contributed to the formulation of these rules, male homosexuality was, nonetheless, treated with a degree of inconsistency that betrayed the authors’ political and scientific bewilderment. Gynecologists N. V. Popov and E. E. Rozenblium, at the end of a chapter entitled “Rape,” discussed “rape with sexual perversions,” and devoted two pages to etiologies of “homosexuality” and “lesbian love.” The authors presented a neutral review of endocrinological and reflexological theories, listing foreign and domestic authorities by name, and even stating, unusually for the period, that hormonal theories “deserve . . . full attention.”<sup>59</sup> Popov and Rozenblium then turned abruptly from scientific discourse and wrote:

Finally, the role of specific class conditions must be emphasized: homosexuality has obtained a special prevalence in such countries as Germany, among the aristocratic military bosses and generally among the “big shots” of the Fascist movement.<sup>60</sup>

Noting that homosexuality was now punished in all union republic criminal codes, the authors argued that because it was an offense between men, there was no need to deal with it in their volume.<sup>61</sup> Forensic gynecologists, responsible for gathering evidence from victims and perpetrators of sexual crimes, appeared reluctant to take on the duty of detection of voluntary sodomy in males. By minimizing the crime’s prevalence, suggesting that the problem was better understood by psychiatrists and even endocrinologists, and finally, by putting a class-enemy gloss on the offense, Popov and Rozenblium apparently rejected

any involvement for their discipline. Yet immediately after these passages, they presented the case of a wife whose husband demanded “perverse” sex (anal and oral), referring to her as a “passive pederast” (*passivnyi pederast*). The authors then rehearsed all the classic stigmata of receptive anal intercourse, in language reminiscent of Merzheevskii and Tarnovskii, and concluded with remarks on the differences in signs of anal gonorrhoea between women and men.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the authors, by presenting a case of “passive pederasty” gendered as female, were emboldened to transmit a heritage of medical lore on male sodomy.<sup>63</sup>

In an apparent attempt to dispel confusion surrounding the antisodomy statute, RSFSR People’s Commissar of Justice N. V. Krylenko spoke at some length about it in a March 1936 speech before legislators in the Central Executive Committee (VTsIK).<sup>64</sup> The commissar extended the regime’s homophobic rhetoric by explicitly adding homosexuals to the list of class enemies, declassed elements, and criminal elements that had been the subject of urban social cleansing campaigns. Since the end of the first Five Year Plan, various types of crimes of “daily life” (including group rapes), said to be committed by members of these social layers, had become the target of higher penal sanctions and concealed but ongoing scrutiny.<sup>65</sup> By linking homosexuals with the preexisting categories of social deviance, Krylenko closed a gap that had left officials and experts perplexed about how to understand “ordinary” homosexuals without any apparent connection to centers of espionage or Nazi ruling circles.

Krylenko referred in his address to a number of legal changes designed to eliminate “the remnants of enemies . . . who do not wish to admit that they are doomed by history to finally concede their place to us.” The changes were to be transformational for all Soviet society; they were enacted “to rework ourselves, to foster in ourselves the new man . . . and new attitudes toward *byt* (daily life).” The law against sodomy, he noted, had been the subject of comment in the Western press, adding that until recently, Soviet thinking on the problem of “this type of crime” was dominated by the “Western bourgeois school,” which taught that “this type of action is always a phenomenon of illness.” Krylenko argued that homosexuality and alcoholism were analogous conditions: just as alcoholics were responsible in law for their criminal acts, except in a tiny number of cases where “a genuine illness is present,” so homosexuals were in the overwhelming majority of cases criminally responsible for their behavior.<sup>66</sup>

It is clear in the published text, from the gradually intensifying reaction in the hall, that this extravagantly masculine people’s commis-

sar manipulated his (primarily male) audience's emotions associated with love between men, as he reached the climax of his argument:

In our environment, in the environment of the workers taking the point of view of normal relations between the sexes, who are building their society on healthy principles, we don't need little gentlemen [*gospodchiki*] of this type. Who then for the most part are our customers in these affairs? Workers? No! Declassed rabble. (*Mirthful animation in the hall, laughter*) Declassed rabble, either from the dregs of society or from the remnants of the exploiting classes. (*Applause*) They don't know which way to turn. (*Laughter*) So they turn to . . . pederasty. (*Laughter*)<sup>67</sup>

Krylenko appealed to the political and (at least unconsciously) to the masculine anxieties of his audience, cloaking a disturbing topic with humorous political banter, to establish a distance of class and loyalty between the panicking sexual social refuse and the healthy toiling Soviet man (and woman). He then rapidly shifted to an earnest tone, pointing out that pederasts “in secret filthy hiding places and dens” were frequently engaged in counterrevolutionary activity. The law against sodomy was justified in bantering language that located male homosexuals within familiar class and social categories, and distanced Soviet medical views of them from “bourgeois” theories. Krylenko thus reduced the ambiguity in the regime's construction of the “ordinary” homosexual to a minimum.

*Compulsory Motherhood, Compulsory Families,  
Compulsory Heterosexuality*

If the male “pederast” was reconfigured in the Stalinist imagination to fit the discourse of the declassed, the woman who loved women did not appear in this dehumanizing polemical realm at all. The reasons for this gendered dichotomy in the Stalinist treatment of homosexuality have not been revealed in archival discoveries. We know, by contrast, that in Nazi Germany discussions among police, doctors, and Nazi officials did take place about whether women having sex together should be classed as criminals, but nothing comparable has emerged to illuminate the attitudes of Soviet leaders on this issue.<sup>68</sup> The “female homosexual” or “masculinized” woman did not excite interest during the laconic discussions of what to do with the male homosexual. It is, however possible to reconstruct an official perspective on these apparitional figures from the well-known measures adopted in the area of family policy and from evidence in medical and legal practice of the 1930s.

The conservative turn in social and family policy under Stalinism has long been familiar to students of the Russian Revolution as a “betrayal” of revolutionary principles or as a “great retreat.”<sup>69</sup> Historians more recently have pointed out the syncretic nature of policy on marriage, divorce, and family during the period of the first Five Year Plans. Stalinism did not simply turn back the clock to 1917, but mixed elements of the revolutionary drive for women’s emancipation with expectations (never seriously examined by Russian Marxists) that biology ordained a feminine social role.<sup>70</sup> The accumulation of the state’s measures in the middle and late 1930s blended appeals for women to join the expanding industrial labor force with an increasingly insistent promotion of maternity and family. Women’s employment increased massively, especially during the second Five Year Plan (1932–37), when 82 percent of all new workers joining industry were women; by 1940, 39 percent of industry’s work force was female.<sup>71</sup> Yet the threat of war, which underlay the planning priorities of the new command economy, also prompted the Stalinist leadership to worry about the Soviet Union’s falling birthrate. A 1934 study of fertility rates in Soviet society by economist S. G. Strumilin evidently had an important impact on the leadership’s thinking, undermining the consensus around health arguments that had supported the 1920 abortion legislation.<sup>72</sup> In this climate, new penalties and incentives were intended to revise attitudes toward procreation, childrearing, and family obligations and to compel women to combine motherhood and waged work. Abortion, a common form of birth control among employed urban women who enjoyed priority of access through insurance schemes, was banned, and divorce was made less accessible in a comprehensive decree on family policy in June 1936. The same decree announced new welfare entitlements for women with seven or more children and promised greater funding for new maternity homes and day care facilities. It also laid out more stringent norms for alimony payments from breadwinner salaries (almost always men’s) in divorce cases. Access to birth control devices was simultaneously and secretly curbed in an order to the Commissariat of Health, further limiting women’s reproductive autonomy.<sup>73</sup>

Preceding and accompanying these open and secret measures intended to make women carry more pregnancies to term, press campaigns were orchestrated to inculcate sexual probity and to emphasize that maternity was a social duty. Family life became the subject of prescriptive scrutiny, where before Bolshevik leaders had said little about the internal dynamics and psychology of the husband-wife relationship. *Pravda* condemned “so-called ‘free love’ and all disorderly

sex life” as unquestionably bourgeois and against Soviet morality and pointed out the dominant pattern of family relations among the “elite of our country [who] are as a rule also excellent family men who dearly love their children.” The same article condemned “the man who does not take marriage seriously”; somewhat later, extracts from the correspondence of Lenin to Inessa Armand were published to underline his concern for “the serious in love.”<sup>74</sup> Underlying the nostrums against male promiscuity was the implicit assumption that it was naturally and correctly always women who assumed the nurturing role after childbirth. The alimony provisions in the 1936 decree evoked genuine approval from women who feared or had experienced abandonment, and some of this emotion was evident in accounts of reaction to the new law. From the pages of the press, a cult of motherhood was celebrated, reaching proportions critical observers found grotesque, as the lives of mothers of seven, eight, or ten children were vaunted as examples of patriotism, and women were depicted rhapsodizing over “the first cry, the first smile of a child.”<sup>75</sup> The cumulative effect of these measures was to impose a state-sponsored compulsory heterosexuality on all women of childbearing age. Women who had sex with men and who chose to limit their fertility in order to advance in education or work were now driven to abstinence, backstreet abortions and their dire consequences, or the abandonment or curtailment of a hard-won career.

An integral part of the recasting of socialist heterosexuality was the selective revival of femininity as a promoted public identity for key groups of Soviet women. The most prominent heroines of the first Five Year Plans included female aviators, tractor drivers, and exemplary factory and collective farm workers who overfulfilled production targets. Women like Valentina Grizodubova, Polina Osipenko, and Marina Raskova, who completed the first nonstop flight from Moscow to the Soviet Far East in 1938, were celebrated for their embodiment of the ideals of emancipation and technical accomplishment. Productivity gains, the mastering of technology, and the military applications of women’s participation in industry and warfare were the significant themes emphasized in the promotion of these exceptional women to national notoriety. The externals of their femininity were not as significant as their technical achievements. Yet simultaneously, the movement of “wife-activists” (*obshchestvenitsy*), launched in 1936 with the sponsorship of Sergo Orzhonikidze, the Commissar for Heavy Industry, extolled a public role for wives of industrial executives, engineers, and army officers.<sup>76</sup> The femininity of these women, and its association with prosperity, was a striking and deliberate feature of their public perso-

nae. Cast as mothers, housewives, and "mistresses of the great Soviet home," these wives without paid employment were recruited by the wife-activist movement to supervise factory amenities and to organize cultural, educational, and leisure activities for workers. They were also exhorted to care for their husbands and children in a fashion that combined the wider theme of maternity as national duty, with new notes of consumerism and (where appropriate) of deference to husbands. In the propaganda of the movement, such women were told to provide a hygienic, cosy, and soothing domestic environment, to watch over the "moral condition" of their husbands, and to talk to them about their work in a constructive and frankly productivity-enhancing manner. Likewise, they were to accept criticism and tutoring from their husbands; but this was not to stand in the way of their participation in social activism, nor blind them to antistate acts or words from family members. The usually nonparty wife-activist, in the words of Rebecca Neary, "with her permanent wave, fur-collared coat, and stylish cloche," presented a blunt contrast with the "plainly dressed, severely countenanced" woman Communist, who had no time for fashionable clothing or hair treatments. To the stereotype of the "plain and stern" or "principled and selfless" Bolshevik woman was now added a maternal, gentle and more feminine alternative, "as would befit the denizens of a land in which life had become 'better' and 'more joyous.'" <sup>77</sup> For select groups of Soviet women, a new ideal, "[f]eminized without being overtly sexualized," completed the construction of a Stalinist version of socialist heterosexuality.

It would seem that Stalinist leaders did not perceive a need to prohibit or pathologize explicitly the "masculinized" woman or "female homosexual" despite these exertions to construct a new heterosexuality. There were several possible explanations for this apparent lack of concern. The first was the virtual absence, already noted, of a female subculture of same-sex relations exploiting public space. Women who loved women were less able (and perhaps inclined) than their male counterparts to create and exploit special urban territories for socializing and sexual contact. Had such an open subculture existed, it would have suffered the same fate as the street cultures of female prostitutes and of male homosexuals. Another probable reason for the lack was the perception, evident in Soviet medical encounters with female homosexuals in the 1920s, that "genuine" or "congenital" female homosexuals were extremely rare in Soviet society and, moreover, that their partners consisted of "normal" women who had been diverted from heterosexual relations, perhaps after unsatisfactory affairs with men.

The abortion and contraception bans theoretically meant that such women would no longer have the option of rejecting motherhood if they engaged in heterosexual relations. As in Nazi Germany, leaders considering the possibility of mutual female relations may well have assumed that intercourse with a man was sufficient to “cure” the lesbian.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the image of the old-style female Bolshevik with her selflessness and political consciousness (embodied, for example, in the person of Lenin’s widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya) and the acquired rather than inborn traits of “masculinization” (such as technological skill and courage) could not be written off lightly. Political literacy, technical prowess, and strength under pressure were assets to be cultivated among the vast numbers of new women workers entering industry. By contrast, the “feminization” of the image of the wife-activist was a badge of special status, linking her to membership in the managerial elite raised to positions of responsibility by Stalinist promotion policies.<sup>79</sup> The syncretic nature of Stalinist policies on the family produced numerous tensions and contradictions between new and old ways of thinking about appropriate gender roles for women.

An echo of this unstable combination of expectations was present in the work of forensic gynecologists in the middle 1950s. When in 1933–34 the forensic medical discipline in conjunction with jurists and police drafted rules for “forensic medical obstetric-gynecological examination,” they avoided explicit mention of female same-sex offenses comparable to those on “pederasty.” One passage on gathering evidence of sexual crime indicated that assaults by women on girls, of the type understood in the RSFSR Criminal Code’s gender-neutral article 152, were anticipated. When conducting examinations on individuals (who could be either alleged assailants or victims),

establishing VIRGINITY or RAPE with DEFLORATION, or DEPRAVED ACTIONS, or SEXUAL MATURITY the expert should verify:

a) GENERAL STATUS OF THE EXAMINED PERSON: body structure corresponding in external appearance to her [*eiu*] stated age, infantilism, virilism (masculinization [*omuzhestvlenie*]), abnormalities of hair cover, defects of general development, etc.<sup>80</sup>

Guidelines then directed doctors to check whether the person being examined displayed “masculine” or “feminine” patterns of hair growth. They were also instructed, depending on the aims of the examination, to collect information about the “sexual life” of the person in

question, and the terse directive spelled out only two key questions: “from what age did [sexual life] commence (perversions).” In the formulation of these instructions, forensic experts and jurists, led by the gender-neutral language of the law, anticipated that assaults on sexually immature females could be inflicted by adult women. Yet the criminal code had always been silent about the assailant’s or victim’s body structure or “virilism”: these were medical concepts reflecting a constitutional view of the “masculinized” female, and their inclusion in the medico-legal guidelines pointed to a shared expectation that at least one female in a same-sex act would belong to this category. The representatives of the police and judiciary who presided over the adoption of these rules in 1934 allowed these discursive shadows of the “masculinized” woman to remain, regardless of the antibiologizing campaigns of the cultural revolution. A year later, the guidelines were published in the forensic gynecological manual that handled the question of “pederasty” so awkwardly. N. V. Popov and E. E. Rozenblium only briefly addressed the issue of female same-sex assaults in a commentary on “rape with sexual perversions.” They completely avoided any discussion of masculinization in women sex offenders or victims of female same-sex assaults, which the guidelines in the same textbook indicated were an important factor in these kinds of crimes.

Instead, Popov and Rozenblium, not wishing to highlight the proscribed NEP-era “biologization” of the female homosexual implied in the guidelines, said that lesbians were seldom encountered, mostly foreign to Russia, and not really relevant to forensic gynecology. “Lesbian love” figured among the rare, but not specifically criminalized, sexual perversions of which the medical examiner ought to be aware. “Tribadism” left “no changes in the genital region,” although “rare cases observed in Paris” of clitoral wounds caused by teeth were known. “Active partners” could have an enlarged clitoris, and their victims often displayed hysteria or more complex mental disorders.<sup>81</sup> If Popov and Rozenblium revived the archaism of treating pederasty under the rubric of forensic gynecology, then by ignoring domestic authorities on female homosexuality, they also returned to the trope of innocent Russia and sexually depraved Western Europe. The only source they cited on this issue was Louis Martineau’s 1883 *Leçons sur les déformations vulvaires et anales*, a text that by its temporal and cultural remoteness rendered “lesbian love” that much more exotic.<sup>82</sup> It could be dismissed by the casual reader as a symptom of bourgeois degeneracy, whether Imperial Russian or, more probably, Parisian. Simultaneously, by pointing to the potential for mental disorders among “tribades,” Popov and

Rozenblum also hinted that they preferred to leave the problem with psychiatrists. In its evasions and denials, their commentary on “lesbian love” reflected the contradictory gender currents of the middle 1930s: the dilemma about “masculine” qualities in women and the anxiety about the woman who avoided maternity.

### *Conclusion*

The syncretism that marked the construction of the Stalinist system of gender and family relations had an effect on Soviet constructions of same-sex love developed during the 1930s. Elements of the variegated tsarist and NEP-era approaches to sexual and gender dissent were combined with the slogans and exigencies of the Five Year Plan era. Stalinism revived and strengthened the primary divide in prerevolutionary views, that between male and female forms of homosexuality. The gender-neutral language of sex crime in the first Bolshevik criminal codes that were applied to the “modern” Soviet republics was repudiated in the new sodomy law of 1933–34: this was a stunning reversal of a key principle of the sexual revolution. Nevertheless, it was a retreat that had precedents in NEP legislation beyond the “modern” heartland, in the “backward” republics where “survivals of primitive custom” encouraged the cataloging of clearly gendered offenses. Within Soviet Russia, prosecutions of clerical same-sex offenses presented another Bolshevik precedent where “survivals” of the past were mapped on society as defects created by class rather than the historical backwardness of “primitive” societies. The ambition that a secular, medicalized, and gender-blind modernity would inform the way revolutionary justice dealt with sexual crimes was already reserved for a vanguard population (workers and peasants) within a vanguard “nation” (Russia and its “civilized” partners in socialism).

The attention paid exclusively to male homosexuality reflected the vanguard role in which men were habitually cast by Russian Marxist thinking. While both male and female proletarians were nominally equal, Party activists from the revolution’s inception to the consolidation of the Stalinist system feared the politically unconscious female and revolutionary iconography represented the Bolshevik movement as resolutely masculine.<sup>85</sup> The demoralization of the “healthy young people, Red Army soldiers, sailors, and . . . students” seduced by “pederasts” deflected the cream of this male vanguard from its historical mission, just as the “double dealers” and “turncoats” inside the Party supposedly tried to derail it during the economic and social crisis of 1933.

Both elements had to be eliminated from the leading institutions of the regime so that “mental infection” could be reduced and new cases of pederasty or political disloyalty averted. The same intentions underpinned the social cleansing of the leading cities of the Soviet homeland. Ultimately, the vanguard class, gender, and cities would rework themselves, sloughing off the “bourgeois degenerates” who haunted them in secret dens and salons, as life itself was transformed and remnants of the former classes disappeared.

Women’s role in this drama was a supporting one, but in its class dimensions it acquired complexity and contradiction. As peasants in “backward” regions, as collective farmers, and as proletarians, women were called upon in greater and greater numbers during the 1930s to enter public life and wage labor. Women in these spheres were compelled and encouraged to emancipate themselves from patriarchal fathers and husbands, who were not to stand in the way of their progress toward careers beyond the home. They were becoming more like men, even in some cases becoming what some could regard as “masculinized.” Meanwhile, the wife-activist movement promoted a feminine and materialistic ideal for a new elite entitled to the fruits of socialism. The two conflicting norms coexisted in an uneasy moral equilibrium, the heroism of self-transformation and productivity gains on the one hand, and the dutiful concern for bringing culture to the existence of those around her, on the other. Compulsory motherhood bridged the gap between the two roles. The cult of motherhood could be called upon to redeem an excess of “masculinization” acquired by working-class women on the shop floor or at the aerodrome. The experience of maternity gave the wife-activist in her potentially delicate role as dogooder a common reference point with women at the factory bench.<sup>84</sup>

The “grotesque hybrid”<sup>85</sup> of Stalinist family policy produced a crude form of compulsory heterosexuality, which depended heavily on pronatalist coercion. It was a heterosexuality composed of many fears and impulses, a nervous amalgam worthy of the arriviste “culture” the new Soviet elite sought to acquire.<sup>86</sup> Male homosexual subcultures threatened the purity of the healthy Soviet young man and perhaps harbored opportunities for sedition. Degenerate remnants of a defeated bourgeoisie, aristocracy, and clergy—survivals of Russia’s own backwardness—lurked in these salons and dens, encouraging male prostitution and the practice of “sodomy . . . as a profession.” Mental infection perhaps threatened to contribute to an already falling birthrate, just as war loomed. Men whose sexuality was too unstable would require a spell of corrective labor to teach them “normal” ways. Women did not run

the same risk, since there was no visible network of female homosexuals. The supposedly rare, anomalous “masculinized” female who preyed on “normal” young women could be recognized by doctors and isolated if necessary, without the need for legislative revision. The “normal” young woman, meanwhile, was to be reminded (in the words of Lenin) that her freedom to love was not freedom “from the serious in love . . . from childbirth.” Her biology naturally assured her status as “normal,” and the motherhood cult would remind her of the purpose of her sexuality.