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Politeness, Self-Mastery, and the Shameful Sodomite:  
Disciplining Masculinity and Sexual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Britain

Jissel Becerra

HIST 091

## Abstract

This thesis sets out with the aim of making an intervention in the study of gender and sexuality in the eighteenth century by centering shame in the construction of polite masculinity and sodomy in eighteenth-century Britain. Utilizing key insights from Habermas' idea of the 'public sphere,' and theories of gender and sexuality by Randolph Trumbach, this paper proposes that the figure of the fop and the sodomite, together, became shameful models in their lack of proper masculinity and 'excess' of vice. Through this analysis, this paper highlights how eighteenth-century emphasis on manners, politeness, and Protestant morality, and public virtue facilitated the renegotiation of the divide between the public and the private as to deny the 'sodomite' right to privacy. Finally, this thesis aims to emphasize the disciplinary society that was evolving via discourses of morality and self-mastery, shame, and eventually, public punishments of the sodomite.

## Introduction

"I think there's no Crime in Making what use I please of my own Body," William Brown testified at his trial on July 11, 1726, after being accused of the intent to commit sodomy.<sup>1</sup> Although Britain's long eighteenth-century has often been studied for being the century in which the autonomous 'individual' surfaced,<sup>2</sup> Brown's defense is still quite striking. After all, Brown was a man accused of sodomy who was levying defense against his prosecutors defending his right to sexual desire and behavior, and notably, not identity. And yet, he so confidently articulated a right to autonomy and *privacy*, a right to be free from public disciplining and public

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<sup>1</sup> Trial of William Brown. Typescript, 11 July 1726, Old Bailey Proceedings: Accounts of Criminal Trials, *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?id=t17260711-77-defend421&div=t17260711-77#highlight>.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas King, *The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750: Volume 2, Queer Articulations* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 10.

judgement. Such a seemingly self-evident defense, however, raises crucial questions for scholars of gender and sexuality: Where does gender and sexual desire and practice fit within the paradigm of the public and the private? And what is formulating and molding these inter-relationships?

Habermas famously argued that the eighteenth-century expansion of print media and the expansion of the middle class came to form the ‘public sphere’ and enabled mutual exchanges of reason.<sup>3</sup> Print media worked alongside public spaces like the coffeehouse to facilitate public rational exchanges between private citizens.<sup>4</sup> Politeness, as this thesis will explore, was one of the models for rational exchange that secured a man’s belonging in the public. Yet discourses on politeness and later, sexual morality, indicated a muddled zone between the private man and the public sphere. This nebulous dialogue between the public, the private, and figures of the eighteenth century, like the effeminate fool and the sodomite, I argue, complicate any traceable history of sexuality.

Brown’s trial case makes evident this tension between the rising privacy of eighteenth-century Londoners and gendered bodies performing certain sexual behaviors. This tension is where I would like to point towards conceptions of politeness, self-mastery, and ultimately, public punishments of shame as important ways to understand the mutually informed categories of the private and public, and where the ‘self’ surfaces. It is in the widening public sphere that offenders like William Brown were condemned and more specifically *shamed*. Although shame is experienced by the privatized individual, this particular affect is contingent on its attachment to social expectations vis-à-vis sexual practices and desire. These expectations upheld repression as

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<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 27.

morality, as fears of an increasingly immoral metropolis lingered in the London imaginary following Britain's religious divisions and the dissolution of the Church and State as a combined regulatory entity.<sup>5</sup> Growing urbanity in the midst of this unraveling relationship "placed the conventional machinery of sexual discipline under impossible strain"<sup>6</sup> and necessitated a mass method of moral discipline different from the countryside's church courts. With declining legislation on sexual morality and with a growing metropolis to regulate, print media and the Societies for the Reformation of Manners were able to undertake this role of mass policing. Thus, anything from printed "annual sermons, pamphlets, and accounts of the societies' own activities"<sup>7</sup> became part of the "innovative use of the press to name and shame sexual offenders"<sup>8</sup> as an act of both sexual and urban regulation. Naming and bringing offenders into the public indicated a sexual morality that was both social and private; social because it was a consequence of the public normalizing behavior at a metropolitan scale, but private because sexual practice became an isolated and obscured part of a proper Londoner's life.

As this thesis will argue, shame and all the feelings which emanate from this particular affect (guilt, embarrassment, fear, etc.) aided in construction of a polite masculinity that paralleled and reinforced the construction of a normative sexual morality. Starting with discourses on politeness, I will explore how the private nature of feeling, and the public functions performed by polite masculinity, were interdependent and more importantly, exemplified the disciplinary use of shame deployed in public social practices and in moralistic discourses on sexual behavior.

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<sup>5</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (New York: Oxford University, 2012), 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities 1700-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 72.

<sup>8</sup> Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, 57.

A brief history of politeness, as will be explored, provides the affective basis which masculinity and virtue—the opposite of vice—characterized the cultural transformations of the eighteenth-century, that of the public and private spheres. Building from this, I will explore the way attacks on sodomy reflected a similar fear of impropriety and an identifiable affective punishment for male transgressors of proper male sociability. Alongside Enlightenment philosophies and burgeoning public sphere, other disciplinary methods were being formed as a reaction to religious fears remnant from the Glorious Revolution. Religious and rationalist discourse of the eighteenth-century converged to transform the act of sodomy into an act of crime against nature that threatened Protestant virtue and the delicate balance between legalism and natural law of the Enlightenment era. From manners to the pillory, the eighteenth-century saw discourses of self-mastery that shamed transgressors of moral virtue and muddled divisions between the private individuate and public order. Within the public sphere, the private individual was surveilled by his own internal manual for conduct, moral reformers, and humiliating punishments.

### **Politeness, Good Manners, and the Ideal Man**

Despite William Brown's unflinching conviction that he had a rightful claim to make 'use' of his body as he pleased, he was tried as guilty and sentenced to the pillory, made to pay a fine of 10 marks, and imprisoned for a year.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, his argument had not moved the court, but neither had his reputable character as "an honest Man, a kind husband, and one that loved the Company of Women better than that of his own Sex."<sup>10</sup> That Brown called upon men and women to verify his reputation, but more importantly, his character, was not unusual in the eighteenth century. Although a neighbor's estimation of 'reputation' became less sustainable or

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<sup>9</sup> Trial of William Brown.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

even credible in the London metropolis, reputation among selected acquaintances, family, or even in print media, still held power and relevance.<sup>11</sup> Print itself, however, acted as tool from which a man could *learn* about good character, politeness, and general refinement. Thus, conduct manuals, advice columns, periodicals, and other ‘polite literature’ is useful for understanding how proper social relationships between men were understood, and accordingly, how polite masculine identity was imagined.

Polite masculinity, as will be argued in the following pages, came to signify self-mastery, which worked to turn the eighteenth-century man inwards towards self-consciousness. The man in the eighteenth-century was thus subject to a disciplinary gaze from his own self and the company of men that he was part of, often in spaces like the tavern and the coffeehouse. However, because of this performative dimension of ‘politeness,’ one that forced self-mastery to act in service for public easiness and sociability, men could easily be made subjects of ridicule. One particular representation of impoliteness was the fop, whose excessive interest in manners made him distasteful in the company of men. As the figure of the fop makes clear, participating in the gendered public sphere of London functioned as sites of shame regulating proper conduct. The figure of the foolish effeminate male reinforces the shame that men were liable to should they fail to express a normative masculinity, one that was distinctly and visibly restrained, sociably pleasing, and *not* feminine. Because of its elusive nature, politeness gave men the opportunity to gain respect and status, but it was also very fragile and varying. Any man at any point could theoretically be socially shamed or feel inner shame at displays of impoliteness, but the figure of the sodomite, misaligned with the fop, offered a crystal-clear vision of ‘unnatural’ and shameful behavior.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Shoemaker, “The Decline of Public Insult in London 1660-1800,” *Past and Present*, no. 169 (2000): 126, 127.

I do not intend to draw linear causation between the effeminacy of the fop and the sodomite's persecution in the concluding thoughts of this section, but rather I am interested in exploring how the eighteenth-century's culture of politeness, and its fluidity, informed discursive struggles occurring at the site of the sodomite. Although not aligned with the figure of the sodomite in eighteenth-century literature, both figures were sites of a failed male sociability and proper heterosexual intimacy between men; moreover, the figure of the sodomite was, much like the fop, the antithesis of self-mastery and sense. The sodomite failed to control his passions and sexual desires and therefore could not represent public interest, much less public virtue. In other words, while the figure of the fop emerges as polite society's representation of improper male sociability, the figure of the sodomite emerges as a representation of proper punishment for those men 'perverting' manly sociability.

Manly sociability was defined according to the culture of politeness in the eighteenth-century, which took on a gendered and contested definition. Conduct manuals in the 1600s and the early eighteenth century intended to refine behavior via practical advice and instructions.<sup>12</sup> However, after John Locke's popular conduct guide, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1694), new ideas of politeness began circulating.<sup>13</sup> Locke's guide worked in tandem with the writings of Whig writers, one of which being the widely-read third earl of Shaftesbury, to sever courtly politeness from a broader bourgeois politeness. This new sentimental politeness centered 'inner virtue' and rejected the courtly focus on outer refinement.<sup>14</sup> Locke, Shaftesbury, and other popular thinkers mounted a criticism against courtly conduct advice, like that of the fourth earl of

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, 56.



Chesterfield, Phillip Dormer Stanhope, as being too convoluted, formal, and “duplicitous.”<sup>15</sup> Although Chesterfield’s writings were not the only published writings focused on the practical details of refined behavior, his letters in particular were accused of being motivated by a “bid for personal advancement.”<sup>16</sup> Whigs, Scottish enlightenment thinkers, and other public figures eschewed such courtly politeness in favor of a more bourgeois, morally-founded model of self-mastery that was intended for a pleasant sociability between men.<sup>17</sup> Rather than relying formalities and rules, the polite gentleman was a “man of feeling” who possessed both sincerity and virtue.

Politeness remained an ideal waiting to be realized and more importantly, waiting to be scrutinized. Although criticized for his ‘duplicitous’ advice, Lord Chesterfield’s writings reflect the simultaneous themes of self-regulation and public scrutiny that the polite gentleman was subject to. In *Advice to His son on Men and Manners*, the earl offers “a system of education” for his son that was advertised as a being guide towards “form[ing] a man of virtue, taste, and fashion.”<sup>18</sup> According to Lord Chesterfield, such virtuous man possessed the “mastery of one’s temper, and that coolness of mind and serenity of countenance.”<sup>19</sup> This self-mastery which enabled politeness, however, was frequently paired with the sense of instability and danger that came from being *visibly* polite in public. Self-mastery, as Chesterfield wrote, was only in service of public performance: “Labour even to get the command of your countenance so well, that those [hasty] emotions may not be read in it.”<sup>20</sup> The polite gentleman, he wrote, rejected passions, was properly sociable, and maintained a moral character that was “not only pure, but . . .

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<sup>15</sup> Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Dormer Stanhope, *Lord Chesterfield’s Advice to His Son, On Men and Manners* (London: 1781), advertisement page.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 87.

unsuspected.”<sup>21</sup>In effect, Chesterfield’s writings linked politeness and proper ‘countenance’ to an inner and outer gaze that the eighteenth-century man should be wary of at all times.

Politeness was thus no longer solely tied to courtly tradition made possible by wealth, land, titles, etc., but rather, politeness came to signify *gentlemanly* virtue achievable by the bourgeois public. Politeness acquired a social and cultural dimension. The gentleman’s self-mastery made him popular and distinguishable in the company of peers, and but such company of peers, but what this company of peers dictated was ‘tasteful’ and ‘refined’ was ever-changing. In a brief guide to refinement published in the *The Tatler*, Jonathan Swift, a proponent of self-mastery and a critic of Whiggish sentimental politeness, warns against the “neglecting or *perverting*”<sup>22</sup> of manners, yet the definition of this perversion is never made clear. However, its effects are felt upon one’s peers, as perversion or neglect, he argues, “introduc[es] a traffic of mutual uneasiness in most companies.”<sup>23</sup>Impropriety and impoliteness thus posed a social risk for men. Swift and Chesterfield give accounts of men whose “vices”<sup>24</sup> or even “pedantry in manners”<sup>25</sup> disrupt the pleasant sociability that Shaftesbury imagined, and they ridicule such men as being “fools.”<sup>26</sup>Failing to meet the ideal of politeness, an ideal that was ever so mutable and thus difficult to achieve, risked humiliation at the individual and collective level.

While the courtesy literature of Chesterfield and Swift offered both moral and practical advice for refinement, such public-facing works did not make evident how exactly eighteenth-century men came to exercise politeness. More private documents like that of James Boswell’s *London Journals*, however, speak to the anxiety of a failed “English bourgeois Anglican

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<sup>21</sup> Dormer Stanhope, *Lord Chesterfield’s Advice to His Son*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Swift, “A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding,” in *The Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. Sir Walter Scott, Second, vol. 9, 18 vols. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1824), 251.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>24</sup> Dormer Stanhope, *Lord Chesterfield’s Advice to His Son*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Swift, “A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding,” 243.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

masculinity”<sup>27</sup> that was failed both in public and in the privacy of Boswell’s self-reflection.

Boswell, a Scot seeking to enter the foot guards, arrived in London (and also leaves) London with only one resolution in mind: “Let me be manly.”<sup>28</sup>

A clear thread appears between the self-mastery emphasized by the conduct manual and Boswell’s anxious reflexivity due to the elusive rules of refinement and morality. As Boswell, described, these rules manners conduct emphasized self-mastery and discipline under the guise of refinement and morality; however, Boswell frequently expresses feelings of uncertainty about this “plan of studying polite reserved behavior”<sup>29</sup> that he models after popular refinement literature circulating the public, like that of journalists Richard Steele and Joseph Addison:

“I felt strong dispositions to a Mr. Addison . . . I hoped by degrees to attain to some degree of propriety. Mr. Addison’s character in sentiment, mixed with a little of the gaiety of Sir Richard Steele . . . were the ideas I aimed to realize.”<sup>30</sup>

In Boswell’s imagination, Steele and Addison, with their periodical, *The Spectator*, figured as models. if not guides, of polite masculinity. Boswell, armed with this guide on ‘propriety,’ experiences London as a stage on which he can distinguish himself from the “rattling uncultivated”<sup>31</sup> Scottishness that he left behind. London provides Boswell with the opportunity to come under the guidance of such polite gentlemen as Samuel Johnson, English essayist and author behind the periodical, *The Rambler*. Boswell makes evident that his proximity to the estimable Johnson, offered him an opportunity to build and “acquire a composed genteel character”<sup>32</sup> in proper manly company. Thus, Boswell paints a picture of politeness of London’s

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Rowland, “‘Plain, Hamely, Fife’: James Boswell’s Shameful National Masculinity,” *European Journal of English Studies* 23, no. 3 (September 2, 2019): 284.

<sup>28</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell’s London Journal 1762-1763*, ed. Frederick Pottle, Second (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 333.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

eighteenth-century as being predicated on intimate male sociability, but a male sociability that is bound by a heterosexual masculine code.

The nature of Boswell's private writings perhaps offers an escape from public scrutiny and instead provide refuge in moments of self-doubt, but the imagined presence of the public does not leave Boswell's writings. As he states in his first entry, "knowing that I am to record my transactions will make me more careful to do well. Or if I should go wrong, it will assist me in resolutions of doing better."<sup>33</sup> Boswell internalized external judgment to the extent that his journal came to assume a semi-public dimension. This imagined gaze, while motivating Boswell's writing and his stay in London, injects his journals with a palpable uneasiness. He imagines a readership that, after reading his journal entries, will "hold [him] in great contempt, as a very trifling fellow,"<sup>34</sup> suggesting he is indeed afraid of the shame which follows exposure of a failed self-discipline and failed male sociability.

Boswell's anxiety over his embodiment of politeness and sociability was not unfounded, however. Just as Boswell's influences (*The Spectator*, Addison and Steele, etc.) provided guidance towards politeness, they also provided lessons and examples of inadequate manliness. A frequent representation of this improper masculinity was the fop, a figure of effeminacy whose extreme self-concern resulted in a womanly obsession with manners, presentation, and dress.<sup>35</sup> The fop served as an example of an effeminate fool who is too immersed in female modes of

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<sup>33</sup> Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Cowan, "What Was Masculine About the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England," *History Workshop Journal* 51, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 136.

politeness and is therefore excessively “skilled in all the niceties of dress”<sup>36</sup> and “too much studied”<sup>37</sup> in manners.

Such was the ‘education’ of the fop in a satirical essay published in Samuel Johnson’s popular periodical, *The Rambler*. Although authored by Johnson, the essay is written in the voice of a self-identified fop who attributes his foppishness to his mother’s “superintendence of her son’s education.”<sup>38</sup> This feminine education barred the fop “from all masculine conversation,”<sup>39</sup> which consequently forced the fop into exclusively female sociability. However, as time passed, the fop found himself in the company of only a “few grave ladies . . . unacquainted with all that gives either use or dignity to life.”<sup>40</sup> Although Johnson gives the fop space for self-examination, which results in the fop’s recognition of his improper ‘education,’ the fop nevertheless emerges as a figure of “stupidity and contempt.”<sup>41</sup> The fop’s self-reflection in this essay serves as a satirical warning to men to behave in accordance with polite *masculinity* to avoid “singularity and consequently ridicule.”<sup>42</sup> Fops, in their excess and ‘stupidity,’ thus emerge as shameful bodies.

The ridicule to which the fop was exposed illuminates the transformations between gender relations and codes of masculinity occurring throughout the century. Trumbach sees foppish effeminacy as characteristic of the sodomite as well, but the fop poses more as a figure of failed male *sociability* than the sodomite, who comes to embody debauchery and crime against nature, not just a failure to adapt to rules of social conduct. Discourses on politeness,

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<sup>36</sup> Samuel Johnson, “No. 109 The Education of a Fop,” *Samuel Johnson’s Essays*, April 02, 1751, <http://www.johnsonessays.com/the-rambler/no-109-the-education-of-a-fop/>.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Dormer Stanhope, “Letter XII” in *Letters Written by Lord Chesterfield to His Son*, ed. Charles Saye. (London: The W. Scott Publishing Co., 1890), 26.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, “No. 109 The Education of a Fop,”

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Stanhope, “Letter XII,” 26.

which presented gender difference and polite masculinity as both natural yet learned and constructed, exposed its mutability and contradictions in the form of the fop. Similarly, the eighteenth-century figure of the sodomite exposed a sexual morality that did not fully exist in either the public, as Faramerz Daboiwala argues, or the private. Both the sodomite and the fop come to embody a civilizing process at work, one that worked towards a seemingly clear-cut distinction between the public and the private, but which introduced the public gaze into the private life of Londoners. Boswell's journals demonstrated the instability which shame brought into the experience of the emerging self, but as will be explored in the following section, shame also came to be a tool of regulation that the public wielded. Although the fop was not publicly disciplined for his social inadequacy, the sodomite was indeed disciplined publicly for his sexual inadequacy.

For foppish men, humiliation and ridicule was the likely outcome of exposure, but for the sodomite, the stakes were more than public ridicule. The sodomite transgressed boundaries that the fop technically still operated in (i.e., in the world of manners and sociability, not sexual practice). Johnson's essay as well as Chesterfield's writings ridicule the fop's impropriety, but this lack of politeness is not described as a dangerous 'vice.' Rather, Johnson presents the fop as capable of repentance and reform, but the sodomite proved to be harder to reform, as the act of sodomy itself was 'unnatural.' How then, could the unnatural fit in a polite society? As the Societies for the Reformation of Manners saw it, conduct manuals could not reform those accused of sodomy. Rather, it was the public who had to subject the sodomite to exposure and punishment in order to tame the unnatural desires of the sodomite. There was a public economy to be protected from and by the individual. If the court and the elite no longer provided sincere

moral instruction, then it would be the crowd of common individuals that would create its own form of vigilantism to shame and punish the immoral sodomite.

### **Sodomy and Public Punishment**

Until the 1640s, the Church and its 250 plus courts were tasked with trying cases of incest, adultery, etc., but when Charles I eliminated Courts of High Commission in 1641, he effectively removed power and authority from ecclesiastical courts over criminal cases.<sup>43</sup> With criminal cases, sex-based crime cases, to be more specific, transferred to quarter sessions and assizes, trials became public, and soon, attendees of Old Bailey court proceedings took interest in documenting the proceedings and publishing them.<sup>44</sup> These crime reports were thus published in *Old Bailey Sessions Papers (OBSP)* and the *Ordinary's Account* and used crime content to provide prescriptive moralism for their London readers.<sup>45</sup> The *Ordinary's Accounts*, in particular, took on a more serious and condemnatory tone when publisher of the *OBSP* became printer of the *Accounts* in 1745.<sup>46</sup> Unlike previous publications by the *Accounts*, Cooper implemented a more censorious view of crime in which those accused of crime would be referred to as “poor wretches” in order to educate the “better kind of readers.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, print culture allowed criminal accounts, in particular sex-based crimes, to be published, and while this is part of the public sphere Habermas implicitly argues for as a liberatory transformation in the eighteenth-century, the *Ordinary's Accounts* and *Session's Papers* published served a moral purpose that sought to expose sex-based crime and thus shame the frequently accused criminal, the sodomite, to provide the public moral instruction, as Cooper had intended as printer. So contrary to

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Wagner, “The Pornographer in the Courtroom: Trial Reports About Cases of Sexual Crimes and Delinquencies as a Genre of Eighteenth-Century Erotica.” *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 120.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>45</sup> Wagner, “The Pornographer in the Courtroom,” 120.

<sup>46</sup> Hitchcock, *English Sexualities 1700-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 191.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Habermas' liberatory assumptions of the century's print culture's relation to the public sphere, the publication of these sex-based crimes was part of the century's increasingly disciplinary culture.

Beyond publicizing sexual crimes, particularly sodomy, publications like the *Ordinary's Account* were also able to transform the treatment of crime into an affective one rather than a judicial one. The courts still acted as sites of sexual control, but they proved to be increasingly ineffective, especially when the existence of molly houses and masquerades, temporal and spatial spaces of sodomy and same-sex pleasure, were an open secret. Thus, the importance of print culture lies not just in that it exposed such sexual transgressions, but in that it helped enable a culture of shame by giving readers the agency to voice their moral condemnations. Shame became integral to the process of sexual repression in the eighteenth century after what Faramerz Dabhoiwala calls the decline of the "the judicial punishment of immorality."<sup>48</sup>

Dabhoiwala identifies a shift away from a "culture of discipline" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a growing religious tolerance that resulted in the court and clerical system losing power and ability to police sexual mores.<sup>49</sup> However, this shift from a culture of discipline does not align with the disciplinary intent and consequences behind the *Ordinary's Accounts* and *Sessions Paper's*. The court of public opinion reacted with its own regulatory measures that could act as corrective tools without the need of state, clerical, or legislative clout. Discourses of vice, shamefulness, and public interest defined the public's disciplinary culture, which again, was informed by and informed the crime publications of the *Session's Papers* and the *Ordinary's Account*. Moralistic literature that employed such discourse was particularly useful at a time when there was not a firm distinction between the public and private divide, and

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<sup>48</sup> Dabhoiwala, "The Decline and Fall of Public Punishment," 78.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



it was because of this lack of distinction that the affect of shame proved so powerful; it forced the public to catalog sexuality as a matter of interiority and by extension, as a matter of inherent, natural civility. The development of shame is then not natural in the history of sexuality. It developed as a social and political disciplinary tool that was easy to wield in the absence of a strong punitive judicial system. Though present in the courts, shame primarily functioned in informal spaces as a mass regulator of sexuality; it facilitated the transformation of public conceptions of virtue and morality into concerns of the private citizen, and in the process, presented itself as a ‘civilizing’ measure.

Print media and the absence of proper court rule, as will be explored in the following pages, worked in conjunction with the decline of public insult to strengthen public forms of punishment in the name of public interest. Robert Shoemaker gives an extensive account of the seventeenth century use of public insult and judicial punishment, which served the purpose of defaming and tarnishing reputation.<sup>50</sup> As he notes, by the eighteenth-century, the importance of neighborhood-based reputations declined, and with this decline, neighborhood policing practices (e.g., mob protest) also decreased.<sup>51</sup> However, these community-based forms of punishment and reputation-building were replaced by voluntary societies, “the printed word, and individual self-examination.”<sup>52</sup>

The Societies for the Reformation of Manners was a particularly important organizer of these voluntary societies that surfaced to enact social order. Although frequently dismissed or footnoted as merely a fringe group lacking in mass popularity, the societies launched a vocal campaign against sexual immorality that succeeded in arresting and prosecuting drunkards,

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<sup>50</sup> Shoemaker, “The Decline of Public Insult,” 98.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-28.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

prostitutes, adulterers, and sodomites. As the transcript of William Brown's trial reveals, Newton and Stevenson, those who arrested and prosecuted Brown, were "constable[s] [with] a warrant to apprehend Sodomites."<sup>53</sup> These constables, voluntary vigilantes acting in the name of virtue and in the name of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, sought to fulfill their campaign's goal to regulate public immorality by targeting brothels and molly-houses all in the name of protecting Protestant virtue.<sup>54</sup> The discourses the Societies used to foreground their persecution of sexual immorality, in particular that of the sodomite, was foregrounded in publication *The Sodomite's Shame and Gloom*, published by anonymous minister working with the reformation campaign effort against sodomitical crime.

These societies distributed moralistic literature and pamphlets, pressed for legislation, and employed constables to arrest those suspected of prostitution, adultery, fornication, etc., until the society's dissolution in the 1730s.<sup>55</sup> Reformers came together in 1690, after the Revolution of 1688 had placed William of Orange on the throne and averted Catholic rule.<sup>56</sup> The reformers feared that after narrowly avoiding a Catholic monarchy, England would slide into vice and immorality and warrant punishment from God that would once again threaten English Protestantism.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the societies saw themselves as vanguards of morality, and equated sexual manners and propriety with virtue and most importantly, a divine natural law. It was not just good manners that were important to the reformers, but instead, they sought to enforce the laws of religious morality themselves via persecution, arrest, and the use of moralistic literature and sermons.

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<sup>53</sup> Trial of William Brown.

<sup>54</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, "Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688–1800," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (April 2007): 297.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Gordon Craig, "The Movement for the Reformation of Manners, 1688-1715" (Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1980), 37.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

A decade after their formation, the Societies for the Reformation of Manners published a text identifying and attacked the sodomite entitled *The Sodomite's Shame and Gloom*. The text was in response to the indictment of Captain Edward Rigby, commander of a ship accuses of attempted sodomy against his servant in 1698.<sup>58</sup> Rigby's servant, to his own detriment, was a friend of Reverend Thomas Bray who in 1690s, was a leader of the societies and a campaigner for sexual morality.<sup>59</sup> Rigby's case, which Bray forth to the Old Bailey court in 1698, provided a highly dramatic example of the sexual immorality that the societies sought to publicize in order to lead the new century into a period of public moral instruction by way of intruding into the privacy of the sodomites activities. As such, *The Sodomite's Shame and Doom*, anonymously published in 1702, after the stirring case of Captain Rigby, and foregrounded the rhetoric of shame and 'wickedness' that came to define discourses of sodomy.

Of considerable importance, however, is the publication's acknowledgement of the early eighteenth-century's silence on sodomy; nothing could fill the public with more "disdain," than the "intolerable stench"<sup>60</sup> of sodomy, the writer claims. For that reason, he continues, this "hateful Sin is seldom reprov'd in Sermons in Books."<sup>61</sup> This, however, did not deter the societies from prosecuting sodomites publicly. To the reformation movement, only "condign punishment," fear, or as the publication made clear, shame would dissuade the wider public from falling trap to those "abhorrent" sexual 'vices.' In fact, the minister threatens the sodomites, to which this publication is directly addressed, with exposure of their activities:

"To your shame, man of your Names and Places of Abode are known and tho' they are not present concealed, to see whether you will reform; some way may be taken to publish

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<sup>58</sup> Craig, "The Movement for the Reformation of Manners," 100.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>60</sup> Minister of the Church of England, *The sodomites shame and doom, laid before them with great grief and compassion. By a minister of the Church of England*, (London: Printed and sold by J. Downing, 1702), 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

you to the World, that your Scandalous Company may be shun'd by all that regard their reputation that ye persist in your inhumane Filthiness.”<sup>62</sup>

The minister's threat emphasizes the societies' course of action throughout the eighteenth-century, where constables and an even more informal voluntary ring of the societies of unknown informers, all directed the by the Society, patrolled the city of London looking for bawdy houses to enforce sexual conduct laws. Fearful of an inadequate court system that would fail to apply morality laws, reformers took to a visible enforcement of virtue that both utilized the courts and a more informal, voluntary mode of prosecution. Blanket search warrants and courts of petty sessions proved particularly useful for this objective of sexual policing, and as the minister in *The Sodomites Shame and Doom*, cautioned, they targeted public vice as an effort to bring immediate virtue, harmony, and divine favor from God upon England.<sup>63</sup>

Much like the constables that arrested Brown, crusaders of the reformation campaigns would go into the streets or the brothel and prosecute the sexually immoral, from the “Night-walking Strumpet” to those “abominable Wretches, that are guilty of the *Unnatural vice*.”<sup>64</sup>As Bishop Richard Smalbroke, a bishop well-aligned with the Societies of Manners, put it in one of his sermons, all offenders were “brought to condign Justice” in what was an “eminent service to the Publick.”<sup>65</sup> Such language, while intended to energize the members of the Society in the audience, also emphasizes the civilizing intent behind their prosecutions. Bishop Smalbroke asserted that it was the “Duty of the private Persons . . . [to assist] in apprehending and conducting to due Punishment all guilty Persons.”<sup>66</sup> In bringing the practices of the sodomite

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<sup>62</sup> Minister of the Church of England, *The sodomites shame and doom*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Craig, “The Movement for the Reformation of Manners,” 66.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Smalbroke, *Reformation necessary to prevent Our Ruine: A Sermon Preached to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, at St. Mary-le-Bow, on Wednesday, January 10th, 1727*, (London: Joseph Downing, 1728), 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Smalbroke, *Reformation necessary to prevent*, 6.

forward to the public, Smalbroke and the Society at large structure a disciplinary mechanism in which sodomitical behavior and pleasure were contained and publicly deemed an unnatural and improper representation of male sociability that is furthermore a “scandalous Abuse of Human Nature.”<sup>67</sup>

More striking, however, is the sentiment that Bishop Smalbroke reemphasized throughout his sermon and which echoes earlier warnings publishing in *The Sodomites Shame and Doom*: that of the private citizen acting in the “Good of the Publick.”<sup>68</sup> This sentiment was the modus operandi of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, whose campaigns indicated an increasing need to comprehend the role of the public and the private in the eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Although unpopular, the societies effectively reflected the a repressive and disciplinary mechanism aimed to contain illicit activities by bringing public and juridical attention to sodomitical pleasure and therefore denying the offender of their private pleasure. In fact, engaging in sodomitical pleasure justified a denial of private rights and self-autonomy.

By 1727, when Bishop Smalbroke delivered this sermon, the moral sentimental theories of thinkers like Adam Smith, David Hume, and Bernard Mandeville had circulated the British public. Mandeville, with *The Fable of the Bees* in 1714, had emphasized individual self-interest and private vice in the interest of public benefit<sup>70</sup>, and although it is impossible, if not inaccurate, to suggest that Bishop Smalbroke and others’ condemnations of private vice were a response against Mandeville’s theories, this emphasis on public virtue was indeed part of an ongoing debate that implicated sexual behavior and politeness. In the face of an emerging public sphere, Smalbroke and the societies were clearly arguing for an ideal of public virtue and social order

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<sup>67</sup> Smalbroke, *Reformation necessary to prevent*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas King, *The Gendering of Men*, 168.

<sup>70</sup> Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, 17.

that was not out of place in the eighteenth-century's culture of politeness. Sodomy came to be situated in this debate on private vice and public virtue, and the societies for the reformation of manners did not just seek to establish public virtue through the prosecution of sexual transgressors like the sodomite, but they sought to do so by targeting those "shameless Scandals of their Sex and Country"<sup>71</sup> and bringing public shame onto sodomites, those "Dishonourers of their own bodies."<sup>72</sup>

However, it was not just the societies and their members that sought to publicly condemn and shame the sodomite, either by corporeal punishment or simple exposure. As other Londoners conceptualized it, such the shamelessness of sodomitical pleasure constituted an erosion of moral order and saw the shameful of the sodomite, on the other hand, as the preservation of that social moral order. In a letter to the editor of *The Weekly Journal*, anonymous writer Philogynus echoes this very sentiment and goes further than Bishop Smalbroke public's call to action, stating that public punishments were a necessary component of sexual regulation:

when any [sodomites] are Detected, Prosecuted and Convicted, that after Sentence Pronounc'd, the Common Hangman tie him Hand and Foot before the Judge's Face in open Court, that a Skilful Surgeon be provided immediately to take out his Testicles, and that then the Hangman sear up his Scrotum with an hot Iron, as in Cases of burning in the Hand.<sup>73</sup>

This proposal calls for the involvement of the public in regulating sexual morality, that is, the private. The body and the genitalia suddenly lose their privacy in this proposal and become the domain of the public court when sexual transgressions are committed. Perhaps then, it is not the violence nor the sentence that succeeds in stigmatizing shameless sexuality and same sex pleasure the most, but rather, the intrusion of the public eye into what was forced to be private,

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<sup>71</sup> Smalbroke, *Reformation necessary*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Letter to the Editor of *The Weekly Journal: or, The British Gazetteer*, 14 May 1726.

that is, one's sexual practice. This violation of interiority, when interiority is what public shame forced upon the sodomite, condemns not just the act but also the very identity of the sodomite, and asserts that the public mores supersede individual desire. For, in the minds of reformers, what was at stake was a Christian wellbeing and the virtue of the English body politic.

The pillory provided a site where such public outrage was exercised upon the sodomite and where an affirmation of public virtue could take place. Displaying the transgressive sodomite to the public no longer required neighborhood-based punishments or neighborhood mob justice, as Shoemaker reminds us.<sup>74</sup> Rather, the pillory was a way of executing public punishment on the sodomite and provided a site for social approbation in which the offender would be humiliated before a participating community.<sup>75</sup> Much like the sodomite that Philogynus describes, offenders sentenced to the pillory would be locked in before a crowd and exposed to ridicule for hours.<sup>76</sup> Unlike in other forms of public punishment, such as branding or executions,<sup>77</sup> the crowd would do more than bear witness to punishment, and instead, the audience would participate by mocking, pelting, or even flogging the offender.<sup>78</sup> This violent assault and humiliation in which the public was key player was, according to historian Peter Bartlett, used to enforce an emerging gendered ideology in which the sodomite was guilty of sexual practice “outside the realm of ‘natural’ sexual relations.”<sup>79</sup> As historian Louis Crompton highlights, however, it was primarily women of the lower class (including even prostitutes and fishwives) that were encouraged to be

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<sup>74</sup>Shoemaker, “The Decline of Public Insult,” 98.

<sup>75</sup>Jody Greene, “Public Secrets: Sodomy and the Pillory in the Eighteenth Century and Beyond,” *The Eighteenth Century* 44, no. 2 (2003): 212.

<sup>76</sup>Peter Bartlett, “Sodomites in the Pillory in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Social and Legal Studies*, (December 1997), 561.

<sup>77</sup>King, *The Gendering of Men*, 193.

<sup>78</sup>Greene, “Public Secrets: Sodomy and the Pillory,” 211.

<sup>79</sup>Bartlett, “Sodomites in the Pillory,” 568.

agents of morality by hurling stones, vegetables, and filth at the pilloried sodomite.<sup>80</sup> That women became primary agents in the pillorying of the sodomite only served to enforce that “realm of ‘natural’ sexual relations”<sup>81</sup> that Bartlett highlights as the underpinning the pillorying of sodomites.

This quest to expose and punish sodomy, however, came with tensions reflective of the uncertainty as to what could become fully public. By 1780, the pillory was contested as a proper form of *legal* punishment for sodomy for the way it exposed crowds to both vice and a perversion of the law. After the high-profile case of Theodosius Reed and William Smith, two men accused of sodomy who fell to their death after a pillorying mishap, Edmund Burke in particular gave a speech demanding the abolition of the pillory.<sup>82</sup> In his speech, delivered to the House of Commons on April 12, 1780, Burke condemns the “perversion of the punishment of the pillory”<sup>83</sup> on the grounds that the pillory had wrongly been “rendered an instrument of death . . . and torment”<sup>84</sup> for the two men killed.<sup>85</sup> However, Burke’s protest of Smith’s and Reed’s deaths was not a protest against the punishment of sodomy via the pillory. In fact, he cites that the ‘perversion’ of the pillory is a perversion of the proper law and the pillory as “public reproach and contempt.”<sup>86</sup> Sodomy was deserving of punishment, as it was “[a crime that] could

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<sup>80</sup> Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality & Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 462.

<sup>81</sup> Bartlett, “Sodomites in the Pillory in Eighteenth-Century London,” 561.

<sup>82</sup> Greene, “Public Secrets: Sodomy and the Pillory,” 212.

<sup>83</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke. Volume IV, July 1778–June 1782*, ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 233.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Of the early modern penal code in England, historians following Foucault note that non-capital punishments in early eighteenth centuries used bodily pain (e.g. branding and whipping) or public humiliation. Post-Foucault historians have focused on the role of pain, but historian Spierenburg has focused on public humiliation in the early penal code, in particular. He notes that with non-capital punishments, public humiliation evolved to become theatrical, and the most common of these humiliating punishments was the pillory, until it was formally abolished in 1837. The pillory, however, was most representative of the ethos and functions of the old penal code.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.



scarcely be mentioned, much less defended or extenuated.”<sup>87</sup> While sodomy, was deserving of punishment, as sodomy constituted “[a crime that] could scarcely be mentioned, much less defended or extenuated”<sup>88</sup> However, Burke criticizes the crowd’s role in Reed and Smith’s death as lacking in the “temper justice” of English law. “Learned gentlemen”<sup>89</sup> of the House, Burke believed, would be right in condemning the violent, mob-caused death of Reed and Smith, as it once again, perverted the intended punishment of the sodomite, one of public humiliation but not of death. Burke did indeed find Reed’s and Smith’s sodomitical crime “detestable,” much like the societies for reformation, but what is evident in his speech is that the execution of the sodomite’s punishment was to reflect the propriety and *self-control* of English society. The pillory was a public site of “shame”<sup>90</sup> for the purpose of moral education, not violent, unrestrained, impassioned assault. Although punishment was indeed necessary, it had to be executed properly and in a balanced, unimpassioned manner of judgement that evokes Burke’s conservatism and his belief in a balanced legalism, beliefs also in line with the Enlightenment thinker’s emphasis on self-discipline explored in the discussion of politeness.

It is noteworthy that much like other eighteenth-century attacks on sodomy, that have been explored in the previous pages, Burke is careful not to name sodomy. While he is able to locate the ‘perversion’ of the pillory, he hesitates to discuss sodomy itself at length. Thus, there is a deliberate silence that shrouds the sodomitical act behind the crime, a silence that is invoked on the basis of both civility and disgust and that in its secrecy, also has an affective intention of

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<sup>87</sup> Sally R. Munt, “Queer Irish Sodomites: The Shameful Histories of Edmund Burke, William Smith, Theodosius Reed, the Earl of Castlehaven and Diverse Servants – Among Others,” *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 51.

<sup>88</sup> Sally R. Munt, “Queer Irish Sodomites: The Shameful Histories of Edmund Burke, William Smith, Theodosius Reed, the Earl of Castlehaven and Diverse Servants – Among Others,” *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 51.

<sup>89</sup> Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 234.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

eliciting shame and disgust in the House of Commons. Burke thus appeals to and creates a sexual morality that condemns sodomy, an act that cannot even be named on the basis that it is "a crime of all others the most detestable, tend[s] to vitiate the morals of the whole community."<sup>91</sup>

Yet Burke goes on to name this crime, grammatically isolating it and calling the crime the two men were punished for as "the commission of sodomitical practices."<sup>92</sup> Despite the naming of that which couldn't be named, this sentence is still full of an ambiguity that refuses to clarify what 'practices' constitute sodomy, leaving the public and their imagination to interpret and envision what these practices might be. Much like 'politeness' itself, sodomy came to be immersed in ambiguity and confusion. The vagueness of Burke's statement, however, does not preclude it from meriting moral condemnation of the crime, as Burke goes on to give an unequivocal statement of denunciation, calling sodomy "a crime of all others the most detestable, because it tended to vitiate the morals of the whole community and to defeat the first and chief end of society."<sup>93</sup> Sodomy is not just deemed "detestable" and without virtue or decency, but the queer subject is also simultaneously created and demarked as a sexual and moral opposite to the heterosexual in their refusal to fulfill a reproductive obligation. That nature and reproduction are implicitly conjured is not new to the rhetoric surrounding sodomy that was published at the time. Throughout the century, sodomy was repeatedly described as being 'against' both morality and 'nature.' If not morality, then the violation of what is natural should have elicited shame in the sodomite. And it is precisely shame that Burke explicitly seeks to subject the sodomite to, for he argues against capital punishment in favor of the pillory, which he deems a punitive option that aptly sentences the sodomite to "public reproach and contempt"<sup>94</sup> rather than murder. Much like

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<sup>91</sup> Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 233

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

the societies, however, burke believed that public vice did indeed compromise the virtue of the individual, an interesting reversal and overlap of the public and private. He, just like the Smalbroke and the minster behind *The Sodomites Shame and Doom*, saw moral education as necessary, but according to him, it had be to be executed properly, and in a balanced, unimpassioned manner of judgement by the crowd doing the pillorying.

Publishing condemnations of sodomy and illicit sexual behavior like those of Burke provided a method of traversing the gap between the private and the public and more powerfully, denying those accused of sodomy a privacy typically afforded to the polite gentlemen. Shame was integral to such surveillance and punishment, as affective policing inhabited a normalizing position in both the private and the public imagination. The rise in print culture (periodicals, pamphlets, crime literature, etc.) aided in trapping the figure of the sodomite within an emerging disciplinary culture of shame, publicity, and the failed politeness of the sodomite.

## **Conclusion**

Politeness was very much a disciplinary tool that served to produce polite bodies capable of becoming shameful bodies. Eighteenth-century polite men were not merely forced to act according to the rules of politeness, but they also actively worked on themselves in order to both internalize the polite masculine identity and perform it in public spaces like the coffeehouses of London. The polite gentleman was instructed to spurn fashion and excessive passions and follow their natural, inner virtue. In addition to virtue, self-mastery and self-examination helped build politeness and continued to be in discourses used by the societies for reformation. Conduct literature by Lord Chesterfield and Jonathan Swift espoused the importance of self-examination, in particular, in constructing and maintaining polite masculinity, but the shifting boundaries of politeness made such ideal a difficult identity to enact. This meant that polite masculinity had to

be reiterated, performed and altered in order to survive. At the level of individual experience, as we see most acutely in James Boswell's journals, this meant that this ideal was a constant source of anxiety and shame at perceived failings to express refinement. Failed politeness came to be represented by the figure of the fop, and mass publications, like that of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* mounted ridicule against the fop, transforming him from a mild into a threatening presence, a contagion able to infect the masculine, polite body. Criticisms of the fop suggested a fear of contagion in that even to look upon a fop could be enough to infect one with foppishness.

Similarly, the figure of the sodomite was deemed a threat to public virtue and morality, not just a threat to polite male sociability due to his 'unnatural vice.' The fierce public reaction against the figure of the sodomite, stronger than that against the fop, circulated via the printed word. The explosion of print culture and a discursive rhetoric exemplified by the Society for the Reformation of Manners and their campaign against immorality buttressed the authoritative intrusion of public surveillance into private matters, i.e., sex. Like the fop, the sodomite was a figure of excess, pleasurable excess, who in his shamelessness, required scrutiny and punishment. For that reason, the sodomite emerged as a figure that required regulation from the public; as counter-enlightened subject, the sodomite could not participate in the public economy of privacy affording to polite gentlemen.

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