



EMERALD POINTS

# EFFEMINATE BELONGING

Gender Nonconforming Experience  
and Gay Bottom Identities

**RICHARD VYTNIORGU**



# EFFEMINATE BELONGING

*This book explores popular media narratives, queer theory, and biological explorations to coin a multifaceted understanding of effeminacy, gender normativity, and sexual pleasure. Moving from autobiographical narratives to twink porn, and well beyond, Richard Vytنيorgu weaves together diverse voices while retaining a notably enjoyable authorial tone throughout; one committed to honoring the complexities of gay male bottoming and its cultural framings.*

—Susanna Paasonen, *Professor of Media Studies, University of Turku, Finland*

*What if the bottom is more than a sexual position? In Effeminate Belonging, Richard Vytنيorgu challenges readers to reconceptualize and reorient themselves towards and about the bottom. Drawing on an expansive archive that braids together the social sciences and literary and cultural studies, the bottom is no longer just a position, but an identity, one rich with complexity and nuance. By reimagining the idea of the bottom, masculinity and belonging is brought into a new light, one which illuminates possibility.*

—Jonathan A. Allan, *Professor and Canada Research Chair in Men and Masculinities, Faculty of Arts, Brandon University, Canada*

*The uncoupling of same-sex desire, receptive positionality, and effeminacy might have enhanced the acceptance of same-sex sexuality and promoted the respectability of the LGBTQ+ community. Nevertheless, this separation has come at the expense of marginalizing men whose identities are shaped by these very aspects. This book presents a genuine and daring interdisciplinary argument for the reassessment and recognition of individuals embodying these characteristics. It advocates for the rehabilitation of fairies, pannies, and queens, while urging a more profound exploration of gender and positionality-based identities.*

—Theo Sandfort, *Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Science (in Psychiatry), Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University, USA*

*Breathtaking in scope and beautifully composed, Effeminate Belonging illustrates the ways gay bottoms are structured as a*

*'minority within a minority' and how fem gay bottoms write themselves into spaces of belonging despite these minoritizing tendencies. Richard Vytنيورгу's interdisciplinary approach to the subject of fem gay bottoms and his deft negotiation of non-Western cultural practices to critique Anglo-American discourses of bottoming is revelatory. A model approach for research and a gift to clinicians, Effeminate Belonging should be required reading for anyone interested in gay male identity or sexuality.*

—**Timothy Oleksiak, Associate Professor and Director of the Professional and New Media Writing Programme, Department of English, University of Massachusetts Boston, USA**

*Drawing from multiple disciplines, including psychology, sociology, queer theories, porn studies and fiction literature, this book is extraordinarily well-researched in spotlighting the often dismissed populations of effeminate gay bottoms. Richard Vytنيورгу thoroughly explores the nuanced in-between space of sexual orientations, gender nonconformity and sex role preference, highlighting the double marginalisation of homophobia and femmephobia, as well as courageously bringing forth the unsettling discussion on heterogender homosexuality. Vytنيورгу skilfully analyses the narratives of sexuality, gender and sexual behaviours in Western culture and beyond, helping his readers with an in-depth understanding of the bio-psycho-social landscape in which effeminate gay bottoms live. It is an essential read for academics in psychology, sociology, and queer theories as well as psychotherapists specialising in gender, sex, and relationship diversity.*

—**Silva Neves, Psychosexual and Relationship Psychotherapist and Author of Sexology: The Basics, Pink Therapy Clinical Associate, UK**

*Richard Vytنيورгу has marshalled his scholarly acumen and media savvy to investigate a pocket of gay male experience that is under-researched. The search for community as a fem gay bottom requires persistence, patience, self-compassion, and the courage to prize difference over conformity. The overlap of gender identity,*

*erotic practice, and embodied expression can present in different ways, and the author makes a thoughtful case for the meaningful link between effeminate belonging and sexual wellbeing.*

—Don Shewey, *Author of The Paradox of Porn: Notes on Gay Male Sexual Culture and Daddy Lover God: A Sacred Intimacy Journey*

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Gender Nonconforming Experience  
and Gay Bottom Identities

BY

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Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## PREFACE

*All the time, I think, we want to find out about each other, to know if we really belong to each other, belong together.*

*(Bartlett, 1988, p. xx)*

These words by the novelist Neil Bartlett capture the essence of what this book is about. At the height of the AIDS crisis, he wanted to know if he belonged with Oscar Wilde. In the late 1980s, very few wanted to belong with gay men, and an entire generation of gay men risked being wiped out.

While issues of belonging may have seemed especially pertinent to gay men at the time I was born, as the 1980s turned into the 1990s, they are also relevant now, as indeed they were before the 1990s. Many gay men grow up feeling different from other men. This is especially so if they present in ways others would deem gender nonconforming or effeminate, or in ways that deviate from socially normative standards of masculinity. And this in turn is connected to perceptions and self-awareness concerning sexual role and behaviour, particularly bottoming, or engaging in receptive anal intercourse with men.

Fears around anal sex have always been central to homophobic and effeminophobic attitudes, especially in countries such as Britain that at various times carried punitive legislation targeted specifically at male–male anal sex, or ‘sodomy’. Up until the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, men in England, Wales and Ireland risked the death penalty if caught engaging in ‘the detestable and abominable vice of buggery’, as the Buggery Act 1533 described anal sex. And, until the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it was technically illegal for men in public to ‘importune’ one another for consensual sex with each other, as it was for schools to even talk about gay sex with pupils, through Clause/Section 28. In many other places around the world, anal sex between men – hence bottoming – is still illegal, and in some instances punishable by death.

The impact of cumulative prejudice against gay anal sex, bottoming and effeminacy on males throughout history cannot be overstated. It can still be a conscious task to belong with these non-normative aspects of self in contexts that

hold very different standards of what is deemed typical or normal when it comes not only to being an adult male but being gay as well.

*Effeminate Belonging* is about the stories and experiences of male–male sex and love at the edges of acceptability: about those who are fem and who bottom and who see these two aspects as inextricably connected in themselves despite wider resistance to such a synergy. Perhaps because of this connection, this book is about the challenge of belonging in the gay community, with its own shifting norms and prejudices, as much as it is about belonging in the wider world.

As I will argue, the best response to this challenge of belonging is not to pretend – as some gay men do – that bottoming has nothing to do with effeminacy or gender nonconformity, now or in the past, or that bottoming should be analysed independently of gender expression. Rather, I argue for the need to forge more inclusive attitudes towards those for whom this connection feels both natural and integral to their sense of self, even if this goes against the political grain. Given the centrality of anal sex and non-normative gender expression to anti-gay sentiment throughout history, it seems crucial that the voices of those for whom bottoming and effeminacy go hand in hand are given sustained scholarly attention.

Since beginning to write about these topics and connecting on social media with fem bottoms from a diversity of places, I’ve found that far from being considered peripheral, self-indulgent or irrelevant, issues of belonging rooted in gender expression, sexual orientation and anal sex role preference are integral to some gay men’s wellbeing:

- ‘I like how you explore bottomness as an identity and not just a sexual practice. And that you bring up the bond that we effeminate bottoms share. Like a sisterhood of pussyboys.’
- ‘Your research shows that feminine bottoms exist and we are here.’
- ‘I think you are doing something wonderful for this particular section of the gay community.’
- ‘What you do is brave, cool and encouraging for boys like me.’

These comments, which come from around the world, speak of a desire to belong, to know that one is not alone. It’s in this spirit that I offer this book to various people: to other academics; to LGBTQ+, health, and educational professionals; to artists and activists; and perhaps most importantly, to those like me who knew they were different, but couldn’t articulate why, and why it mattered.

I hope this book can begin to help in this process of articulation, and in so doing, to re-orient perceptions of what it might mean to be gay and belong.

*Abergavenny, 29 February 2024*

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To all those who have reached out to me via Twitter/X: thank you. It means more than I can say to hear that my work has helped, inspired and encouraged you in your own self-explorations.

I would like to thank Heike Bartel, who not only introduced me to Emerald through her book on eating disorders in men but who also showed me how to use the study of autobiographical writing to understand and enhance personal and social wellbeing.

My thanks also go to the institutions that gave me the impetus and space to work on this project: the University of Exeter, University of Hertfordshire, the Wellcome Trust, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council.

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# INTRODUCTION

Men who primarily engage in receptive anal sex with men, often known as *bottoms*, and who are also perceived to be and/or self-identify as effeminate, fem or gender nonconforming face multiple challenges when it comes to navigating their identities and sense of belonging in the wider gay community and beyond. Males who are perceived to be insufficiently masculine, and who prefer to be receptive in anal sex with men, are frequently considered undesirable as sexual and romantic partners. Such males are also criticised by those in the gay community for perpetuating unhelpful and inaccurate stereotypes about gay men (Thoma et al., 2021). Many gay men would argue that being a bottom shouldn't automatically be equated with being effeminate or unmanly (O'Flynn, 2018). For too long, some would insist, have gay men, and bottoms in particular, fought to be recognised *as real men* (Milton, 2022). By this logic, being fucked by a man needn't necessitate a specific gender expression or even a specific identity. It's just something you *do*.

This book is in sympathy with such an argument and recognises that for many gay men in the West – predominantly Western Europe and North America, but also Australia and New Zealand – *bottom* is merely a temporary sex position which in no way indicates an absence of masculinity. For many gay men, bottoming is often coupled with topping (being the fucker rather than the fucked) as part of a versatile sex life, and indeed it may well be the case that anal sex is excluded from an individual's sexual practice altogether.

The dominant climate in LGBTQ+ media in the West seems to support the notion that anal sex role should be separated from stereotypical gender expression, as part of a progressive politics set against heteronormativity. Such a culture celebrates the existence of fem dom tops, masc power bottoms, versatile men who 'flip fuck' and even *sides* who eschew anal sex and may prefer oral sex or mutual masturbation (Bollas, 2023; Kort, 2020).

But this book is not primarily about such men. *Effeminate Belonging* is about males who are now on the margins of mainstream gay life in the West. I want to highlight the experiences and vantage points of those males who are gender nonconforming and who are also strongly associated – in fantasy and/or in real life – with taking the bottom position in anal sex with men.

Indeed, they are so identified with this as their primary mode of sexual behaviour that they are happy to identify as bottoms or even as effeminate or fem bottoms (or similar terms in their own language).

In some cases, such bottoms may even shy away from self-identifying as men even if they still see themselves as male and actively seek and desire masculinity and manhood in the men they choose as partners. Thus, for them, *bottom* is an identity as much as a sexual practice, to the point where even if one has never been anally penetrated, one can still identify as a bottom. Crucially, such males see their gender expression as intricately connected to their sexual preferences in ways that other gay men would strongly resist.

In a different historical moment, and even today in some non-Western localities, such a combination of gender expression and anal sex role preference would hardly be considered unusual, although it may be stigmatised and result in varying degrees of marginalisation. The key distinguishing factor for these same-sex attracted males is that they do not simply bottom: they *are* bottoms, and somehow recognise that their sexuality is of a different order to that of the men they typically find sexually attractive as partners. As anthropologist Don Kulick has argued:

*...whether they are the mahus, hijras, kathoeyes, xaniths, or berdaches of non-Western societies, or the mollies and fairies of our own history, links between habitual receptivity in anal sex and particular effeminate behavioral patterns structure the ways in which males who are regularly penetrated are perceived, and they structure the ways in which many of those males think about and live their lives. (Kulick, 1998, p. 575)*

The fact that there have been and still are words in non-Anglophone languages to describe precisely the kind of combination of anal sex role and gender expression denoted by the contemporary English label *fem gay bottom* suggests that this is a transcultural and indeed transhistorical phenomenon, but one that has receded from view in recent years. Attention to non-Western forms is needed to properly contextualise the Western effeminate bottom.

It's one of the major premises of this book that non-Western labels, often working-class and colloquial, as well as some Western labels which are also working-class and colloquial, encapsulate a broadly equivalent transcultural and transhistorical combination of effeminate gender expression, with varying degrees of flamboyance and with or without cross-dressing, and receptive sex role or being a bottom in anal sex with masculine men (Murray, 2000; Norton, 2016). Those who have been assigned these labels or who self-identify

as they need not adhere strictly to these ideal types, and there is some flexibility around the nature of the connection and the power dynamics they connote. But they do so sufficiently and in public view to fall into these personality categories and modes of self-awareness, even if eventually they may change preferences or discard such identification over their ‘sexual career’, depending on the current partner or stage of life (Murray, 1995).

It’s also true that these ideal types can, in some instances, become prisons in which same-sex attracted men often feel compelled to place themselves simply to indicate to others their sexual preference and availability for the same sex (Loftin, 2007; Murray, 2000). For example, studies have shown that after migrating to the West, or indeed even simply by adopting a contemporary gay identity, some men who previously assumed a traditionally effeminate, sexually passive role have left this behind in favour of a more congenial versatile and more masculine self-presentation – in Latin American discourses historically called *moderno* or *internacional*, or, as simply *gay* (Carrillo & Fontdevila, 2014; Guasch, 2011). Similarly, during and after the Second World War, middle-class homosexuals in Britain and the homophile movement in the United States increasingly detached gender expectations from sexual orientation in an attempt to claim social respectability and acceptance as masculine men, in the process distancing themselves from working-class effeminate *queens*, *fairies*, *pansies*, *poofs* and *swishes* (Chauncey, 1994; Loftin, 2007; Norton, 2016).

This transformation can, of course, be interpreted as breaking the oppressive power dynamics of a patriarchal, heterosexist and heteronormative environment in which the only possible combination of sexual complementarity is a powerful man and a disempowered sexual receptacle – a female, or a receptive male who has lost all pretence at being a man. For such men, entering a more egalitarian relationship with another man in which both males are considered men and, in theory, both able to top and bottom (or do neither), would be an act of liberation from oppressive norms and power structures (Nguyen, 2014). As Wayne Wooden and Jay Parker argue in their classic, *Men Behind Bars: Sexual Exploitation in Prison* (1983), ‘a positive gay identity attempts to free men from the tyranny of rigid role-playing’ – a rigidity which is, these authors argue, ‘directly opposed to the goals of the modern gay movement’ (p. 145).

This argument is further developed in Walt Odets’s *Out of the Shadows: Reimagining Gay Men’s Lives* (2020), in which the ‘gay sensibility’ should symbolise the triumph of egalitarian relational dynamics between men and, ultimately, a versatile sex life. For Odets, some exclusive or ‘total’ tops and bottoms might be in accord with their ‘entire conscious internal sensibilities’,

but others – perhaps even most – are containing ‘aspects of their unconscious sensibilities that might, if recognized and allowed expression, nurture a broader, a more authentic experience’ (p. 54). For Odets, ‘polarized’ relationships ‘fortunately [...] do not describe all Americans, particularly today’s younger, educated, urban adults’ (p. 39). But to my mind, it’s also possible that making the meaning of gay synonymous with masculinity and sexual versatility is just as much an attempt at social control as the ‘inauthentic’ polarised forms of masculine-effeminate complementarity for which Odets reserves his scorn.

For some males, adopting or retaining a form of heterogender homosexuality (masc–fem as opposed to masc–masc or fem–fem) would, paradoxically, represent an act of liberation and entrance into something more authentic. For such fem bottoms, the egalitarian, versatile and masculinist model has now become, for them, an oppressive, inauthentic norm and for whom the internet offers a plethora of creative ways to negotiate heterogender sexual identities and seek masculine ‘total top’ sexual partners who, in their own ways, may also be tiring of the ‘gold standard’ of egalitarian sexual versatility monopolising meanings of being gay (Vytņiorgu, 2024a). Thus, the attempt to universalise a North American or Western European gay sexual politics as being ethically better and more psychologically fulfilling – for all gay men – presents serious problems, not only for non-Western and global majority settings in which *gay* has limited appeal or reach but for those within the West who do not identify with the kind of ‘blended’ sensibility so praised by Odets.

In the contemporary Anglophone-speaking West, identity names are not readily at hand to describe those males who prefer to bottom in anal sex with other men and who are also gender nonconforming, and, crucially, who see these two aspects of themselves as mutually reinforcing, strongly influencing their overall sense of self. To be sure, in 1972, American scholars still referred to *queen* as an ‘effeminate homosexual’ who ‘prefer[s] more masculine men’ (Farrell, 1972, p. 106) or, in 1984, as a ‘passive, effeminate homosexual’ with a distinct personality type and interest in masculine or even hypermasculine male sexual and romantic partners (Person & Ovesey, 1984, p. 173).<sup>1</sup> And, out of all the possible historical Anglophone words available that might still connote a fem gay bottom whose identity encompasses more than simply their sexual behaviour/preferences, *queen* is possibly the closest term at hand, however imprecise its usage may be in practice.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond *queen*, there simply aren’t many words available to describe this combination, perhaps due to the relentless attempts among Odets’s urban, educated gay men to eliminate any suggestion that effeminacy and being sexually receptive have any intrinsic connection. And it’s this reality which, I

would argue, contributes to feelings of disconnect and marginalisation in contemporary Western settings, where it's largely inadmissible to suggest that being a bottom is in any way responsive to or connected to being gender nonconforming or effeminate – terms which themselves demand greater scrutiny and which are explored in detail in Chapter 1.

This book therefore aims to explore the interconnections between sex object choice (being attracted to men), sex role (being a bottom) and gender expression (being gender nonconforming or effeminate), arguing that negotiating these different facets of the self has implications for feelings of marginalisation and belonging. The book proceeds by reading contemporary Western lived experience narratives in a range of media, exploring gender nonconforming experience and bottom identities in their broadest remit, by connecting these two to a critical mass of multidisciplinary literature on these themes, and by contextualising them through reference to non-Western parallels which, while not completely equivalent, nevertheless reveal striking similarities that help to refine the key areas of debate concerning effeminate belonging in the West. In doing so, this book recognises that 'comparative studies across time and across social systems are a vital prerequisite to the emergence of a satisfactory concept of human homosexual behavior in all its fullness and complexity' (Dynes, 1995, n.p.).

One of the deeper aims of the book is to begin to consider gendered and sexual belonging in more inclusive and dialogic ways. I want to try and move beyond an *us and them* mentality in which self-identified LGBTQ+ people set themselves in opposition to non-LGBTQ+ people in an understandable but separatist way – often mirroring the treatment they have received at the hands of non-LGBTQ+ people. I am interested in exploring modes of effeminate belonging in digital and non-digital spaces and places typically made up of a range of different people. To what extent do the narratives emphasise the necessity for withdrawal from such places in favour of a metropolitan gay or LGBTQ+ enclave immured from the rest of society? I am interested in how reconciliation might begin to take place, between those who have experienced prejudice and violence at the hands of others in different places and spaces, and those in such spaces who have, for whatever reason, decided that a *faggot*, *tapette*, *queen*, *bicha*, etc., does not belong there.

One of the main reasons for including non-Western and global majority narratives and perspectives in this book – especially those from working-class contexts in which 'global gay' or LGBTQ+ politics has limited appeal or reach or is hybridised with local forms – is that they show, however imperfectly, that 'non-normative' individuals can belong with others in non-oppositional and generative ways. And, moreover, that it's possible, if often challenging and

painful, to share the same space in ways that promote a bottom-up (no pun intended), day-to-day awareness of difference at the *I-thou* level. In the West, this has certainly been the case in the past, even in interwar south and east London, as Matt Houlbrook has deftly shown: working-class *queans* were ‘acknowledged, precariously accepted, and often welcomed’ by the rest of the local community (2005, p. 160), as they were also on merchant navy vessels well into the 1970s and 1980s, where queens took ‘straight’ husbands and effectively became wives on board (Baker & Stanley, 2003). How might examples like these be instructive today?

### STATE OF THE FIELD

Current research in the area is alarmingly fragmented. In the humanities, work on effeminacy typically views the phenomenon through queer theory lenses that aim to emphasise the social construction of power dynamics that cast the effeminate as the queer ‘other’ to forms of hegemonic masculinity (Bristow, 1995; Hennen, 2008; Maddison, 2015). Scholarship on gay bottoms forms another field of research altogether, mostly from within the social sciences (Brooks et al., 2017; Hoppe, 2011), which explores identity formations and experiences of struggle, marginalisation, and stigma around bottoming – as well as power and pleasure (Hoppe, 2011; Moskowitz & Garcia, 2019). Within the humanities, work on the crucial intersections of bottoming and gender expression in media, film and other cultural texts is lacking, with some key exceptions which, while important in raising the visibility of the area as a necessary field of inquiry, can also be over-reliant on queer theory approaches to do the interpretive work.

Such work in the humanities also tends to overlook scientific research that also has explanatory power when it comes to understanding cultural representations of effeminacy and gay bottom identities and experiences (Allan, 2016; Geraths, 2022; Kemp, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Oleksiak, 2022). Historically, research drawing on queer theory has typically dismissed any reference to transhistorical or transcultural ‘essences’ of same-sex self-awareness and personality and questions the use of scientific discourse in explaining sexual orientation and/or sex and gender. In this book I aim to demonstrate, however, that inquiry into sexual identities and experiences based on a sensitive reading of lived experience narratives can be strengthened by drawing on the insights of psychobiological studies in the human sciences.

Research in psychology is currently exploring gender nonconformity and anal sex role preference among gay men from a more psychobiological stance (Swift-Gallant et al., 2021; VanderLaan et al., 2022). This work, while still indicative, nevertheless suggests that bottoms experience more gender nonconformity than tops. Gender nonconformity in this literature is broadly equivalent to an effeminate gender expression and goes far beyond stereotypical representations of effeminacy associated with flamboyance. It's in this sense that I conflate the terms in this book; although there may be a case to be made for gender nonconformity signifying something broader than simply the manifestation of typically feminine traits in males – it could indicate a broader refusal to adhere to stereotypically masculine traits without necessarily leaning towards the feminine. However, due to the way in which the scientific literature has, and continues to use, the term *gender nonconformity* among males as a proxy for *effeminacy*, this book will maintain this terminological equivalence. Although, I am aware that this will not be a perfect synergy for all readers and that one might ideally speak of *effeminacies* rather than *effeminacy* (Hennen, 2001). I explore these questions in more detail in Chapter 1.

Contemporary psychological research on gender nonconformity and anal sex roles among gay men, bisexual men and men who have sex with men builds on a much older body of literature in sex research and lesbian and gay studies, published in journals such as *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *Journal of Sex Research*, and *Journal of Homosexuality*. Some of this research has examined the endocrinological, immunological and genetic factors which are thought to shape or influence gender nonconforming and homosexual outcomes among boys and men (LeVay, 2017), while also establishing the relationship between gender nonconformity among boys and a homosexual orientation among men (Carrier, 1977; Hines, 2011; Li et al., 2017; Weinrich et al., 1992).

Much of this research has argued for a clear link between gender nonconforming experiences in childhood and later homosexual or bisexual identities, behaviours and preferences in men, while also stressing that effeminate experiences are only relevant for *some* gay men – by no means all – and that they may change or subside with an individual's own life course. A subsection of relevant research from a social scientific dimension has also sought to understand how and why adolescent males defeminise due to hormonal changes in puberty and/or to feel accepted among their peers and avoid the stigma of being identified by others as gay (Glick et al., 2007; Harry, 1983; Pascoe, 2012; Taywaditep, 2002).

This book aims to triangulate these related but atomised bodies of research and bring a much-needed interdisciplinary approach to the study of gender

nonconforming experience and gay bottom identities, behaviours and preferences among males, anchored in an empathetic and sensitive reading of lived experience narratives in the cultural domain. Indeed, while valuing the work of empirical and psychobiological studies, I hope to show that positivist accounts of gender nonconformity and bottom identity and practice only tell half the story, and are often unconscious or inattentive to the emotional, embodied, and fraught ways in which individuals experience and represent themselves that often shine through in stories and other representational media.

Moreover, while I think it's important to recognise the variety of gay bottom identities out there, it would also be irresponsible, given the research that exists, to pretend that being a bottom has nothing to do with gender or can be analysed independently of this (Hoppe, 2011). Indeed, one of the key arguments of this book is that being both effeminate and a bottom has critical implications for feelings of marginalisation and belonging in the gay community and beyond. Many of the narratives explored in this book confront the experience of effemiphobia or femmephobia – the fear of femininity in males – and the association therefore not only with homosexuality, but with being fucked and a resultant loss of manhood (Hoskin, 2019; Richardson, 2009; Sedgwick, 1991). As Leo Bersani famously wrote, we are dealing with the 'intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman' (Bersani, 1987, p. 212).

*Effeminate Belonging* highlights the ways in which anxieties and desires around effeminate bottoms intersect with feelings of marginalisation and belonging in the home, family, school, healthcare settings, LGBTQ+ community, online and also in the body itself. As such, the book draws on work in geographies of sexualities which affirm that sexuality 'cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practised and lived' (Browne et al., 2009, p. 4; Bell & Valentine, 1995).

Mannerisms, voice and clothing have always been and still are key cultural markers of effeminacy and are routinely 'read' by people in different places and spaces as a proxy for homosexual identity formation (Norton, 2016). Research has shown the extent to which these signifiers are used to consolidate homosexual identities in others, sometimes with negative consequences which result in stereotyping (Daniele et al., 2020; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). As I will show: voice, physical build, clothing and mannerisms act as features which shape preoccupations with effeminate belonging – with absorbing, making sense of, and eventually, belonging with gender nonconformity and sexual receptivity in different places and spaces.

Intended primarily for academics studying sex, gender and sexuality from multiple disciplinary angles in the humanities and social sciences, the book is