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Eugenics, Homosexuality, and the Development of "Queer Science" in Postwar Britain

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Abstract

Whilst the continuity of eugenics and the concomitant development of genetic psychiatry in post-1945 Britain are subjects of increasing interest to historians, the importance afforded to homosexuality, and queer bodies and sexualities more generally, in this context has not previously been considered. The specific issue of "homosexuality" had emerged as a leading concern of Nazi eugenicists and their interlocutors through the interwar period largely through the pursuit of twin studies, a highly problematic method of determining genetic traits initially developed by the "father" of eugenics, Francis Galton, in the 1870s. In the United States, the German émigré geneticist Franz Josef Kallmann conducted influential studies on homosexual twins through the immediate postwar period, his interest in the subject impacting on British psychiatry in various ways. Not least, Kallmann's studies on homosexuality, profoundly influenced by his eugenic agenda, influenced the prominent English psychiatrist Eliot Slater, himself associated with Nazi psychiatrists. Slater firmly established homosexuality as an object of study within British neuropsychiatry, widening the formative focus on twin studies to include personality testing and studies of maternal age, sibs, and birth order. Slater's unquestioning assumption that homosexuality was, *per se*, a pathological condition was not accepted by all his contemporaries but nonetheless shaped the development of "queer science" as it was subsequently pursued in Britain and elsewhere.

Key words: Franz Josef Kallmann, Eliot Slater, Britain, Eugenics, Homosexuality, Twin Studies

Introduction

Historically, the pursuit of eugenics has had ambiguous associations with changing concepts of sexual inversion, homosexuality, bisexuality, intersexuality, trans, and other queer bodies and sexualities. Whilst it is incontrovertibly the case that innumerable eugenicists have treated queer people with disdain and sought atrocious interventions to eliminate us from the human population, this has not

consistently been the case.¹ Elsewhere, many queer people have embraced eugenics, whilst homosexuality has sometimes been considered as a useful eugenic method to limit reproduction. Exploring the complexities and ambiguities that have long characterized the relationships between eugenics and queer bodies and sexualities is a growing area within historiography and is especially useful for underscoring an important lesson from that historiography: that eugenic theories and practices are largely matters of (mainly elite) opinion, prejudice, and politics, not science.

The subject of 'homosexuality' fully emerged as a serious concern of certain British psychiatrists and their interlocutors only through the late-1940s and early-1950s, precisely the time, and not coincidentally, when calls for reform of the law relating to gay sex began to gain pace. Such calls, and the sensational reporting of legal cases concerning "gross indecency" involving well known public figures and aristocrats, eventually led to the convening of the Home Office's historic Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution in August 1954. The Committee's famous 1957 Report, commonly termed the Wolfenden Report after the Committee's chairman John Wolfenden, recommended the partial legalization of male homosexual acts, as well as establishing an age of consent for males as already existed for females, recommendations that were eventually realized by the Sexual Offences Act 1967.

Much of the intense debates that surrounded the subject of homosexuality in postwar Britain centred on medico-scientific models of sexuality. Highly contested, and almost comically contradictory when viewed together, such models were increasingly challenged by a growing recognition that homosexuality, in and of itself, was a natural variation of human sexuality. The notion, little expressed in Britain before 1945, gained ground especially following the sensational publication (in America and Britain) of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual*

¹ Some recent assessments of the historical associations between eugenics, sexualities, and sexology, all useful for further references, include L. O. Lair, *Disciplining Diagnoses: Sexology, Eugenics, and Trans* Subjectivities*. PhD thesis. University of Kansas, 2016; J. Honkasalo, "When Boys Will Not Be Boys: American Eugenics and the Formation of Gender Nonconformity as Psychopathology," *International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 11, 4 (2016): 270-286; T. Brennan, "Eugenics and Sexology," in *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality*. Vol. 1: A-G, ed. Patricia Whelehan and Anne Bolin (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 356-360; M. Wessel, "Castration of Male Sex Offenders in the Nordic Welfare State in the Context of Homosexuality and Heteronormativity, 1930-1955," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, 5 (2015): 591-609; Th. van der Meer, "Voluntary and Therapeutic Castration of Sex Offenders in The Netherlands (1938-1968)," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 37, 1 (2014): 50-62; F. G. Mildenberger, "Socialist Eugenics and Homosexuality in the GDR: The Case of Günter Dörner," in *After The History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault*, ed. Scott Spector, Helmut Puff, and Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 216-30; Alexandra Minna Stern, "Gender and Sexuality: A Global Tour and Compass," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, A. Bashford and P. Levine (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 173-191.

Behavior in the Human Female (1953)—together known as the Kinsey Report—by the famous American zoologist and sexologist Alfred C. Kinsey and his associates. The Kinsey Report was enormously influential, but its finding of the high prevalence of homosexual behaviour amongst Americans, its occurrence in non-human animals, and Kinsey's insistence upon its normality also prompted some vicious responses and the period of the Kinsey Report's publication and global reception also witnessed a punitive intensification of pathological models of homosexuality, and queer sexualities more generally, including the development of supposed therapies ('gay cures').

Franz Josef Kallmann on Homosexual Twins

Garland E. Allen has previously discussed how homosexuality became established as an object of eugenically-infused twin studies in the United States through the immediate postwar era, largely through the interventions of the German émigré psychiatrist and eugenicist Franz Josef Kallmann.² Kallmann was a student of the Swiss-born German psychiatrist, geneticist, and Nazi racial hygienist Ernst Rüdin. In collaboration with his brother-in-law, and architect of Nazi racial hygiene, Alfred Ploetz, Rüdin co-founded the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (German Society for Racial Hygiene) and, as a member of a committee on racial hygiene headed by Heinrich Himmler, played a major role in drafting the German sterilization law for psychiatric patients, promulgated with murderous consequences in July 1933. Kallmann was complicit with Rüdin's eugenically infused psychiatry and is recognized today as a pioneer of genetic psychiatry. Following the earlier example of Francis Galton, he developed the use of twin studies in an effort to identify familial lineages of schizophrenia and suicide, urging that the Nazi programme of forcibly sterilizing patients be extended to their family members who exhibited "minor anomalies" but were otherwise unaffected. Nonetheless, Kallmann's Jewish ancestry compelled him to leave Germany for the United States in 1935 where he pursued a prestigious career within the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University (its Director from 1955) and as a co-founder of the American Society of Human Genetics. The irony of his persecution appears to have had little impact on his genetic approach to psychiatry. Kallmann remained a committed eugenicist and is an important figure in the continuity of eugenics after 1945.

² G. E. Allen, "The Double-Edged Sword of Genetic Determinism: Social and Political Agendas in Genetic Studies of Homosexuality, 1940-1994," in *Science and Homosexualities*, V. A. Rosario (ed.), (New York: Routledge, 1997), 242-70. On Kallmann more generally see V. Roelcke, "Eugenic Concerns, Scientific Practices: International Relations in the Establishment of Psychiatric Genetics in Germany, Britain, the USA and Scandinavia, c.1910-60," *History of Psychiatry* 30, 1 (2019): 19-37.

Beginning in 1947, Kallmann began to compare monozygotic with dizygotic twin subjects, and other familial relationships, for concordance for homosexuality. It is not clear precisely why he turned his attention to the subject at this time, although the burgeoning interest in studies of sexual behaviour generated by Alfred Kinsey and his associates may account for no small part of it. Possibly Kallmann considered homosexuals as 'fair game' for genetic and eugenic scrutiny, even in the wake of Nazi atrocities, and that such a focus would appeal to many in his adopted country through its dark, and profoundly queerphobic, McCarthy era.

Unlike Kinsey, Kallmann's studies remained anchored in Nazi genetic and eugenic psychiatry, which had situated homosexuality, ipso facto, as a psychiatric condition on par with schizophrenia. Under National Socialism, this vehemently pathological construal of homosexuality had eclipsed, and occasionally appropriated, the assertions of the homophile German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and others who had suggested a hereditary link to homosexuality but framed the notion within naturalization and liberational contexts. Even before Hirschfeld's pioneering Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexology) was brutally suppressed in May 1933, Nazi eugenicists sought to more assuredly establish homosexuality (and other sex variations) as a pathological diagnosis, an endeavour by no means confined to Germany. For example, the influential Nazi geneticist Fritz Lenz, Professor of Racial Hygiene at the University of Munich, identified homosexuality as "[t]he most important anomaly of the reproductive impulse" in a lengthy chapter on "Morbific Heredity Factors" in his widely read book, a veritable textbook of Nazi pseudo-genetics, *Menschliche Erblchkeitslehre* (1921; 4th edn 1932-1936), co-authored with his fellow scientists and racial hygienists Erwin Baur and Eugen Fischer.³ An English translation of the book, rendered by Eden and Cedar Paul, was published in London (by George Allen and Unwin) and New York (by the Macmillan Company) as *Human Heredity* in 1931. Lenz was convinced that homosexuality originated from a genetic basis and was therefore hereditary. He acknowledged that there was a dearth of evidence that showed conclusively that "this disorder of the sexual impulse" ran in families but thought this might be attributable to the problem of garnering information from subjects about something that was widely regarded with disapproval. Lenz concluded his commentary by pre-empting any argument that a genetic basis suggested normality. "Homosexuality," he wrote, "[...] cannot be regarded as a normal or quasi-normal variant, as its organised defenders are wont to declare. It is unmistakably morbid, being markedly antagonistic to race preservation."⁴

³ E. Baur, E. Fischer, and F. Lenz, *Human Heredity*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (London: George Allen & Unwin / New York: Macmillan Company, [1927] 1931), 463.

⁴ Ibid., 464.

Kallmann was not the first to attempt to claim a genetic basis of homosexuality by recourse to studies of twins. A study (in German) was published in the Dutch journal *Genetica* in 1934.⁵ It was conducted by Jacob Sanders, a Jewish physician and Director of the Abteilung für medizinische, statistische Erblchkeitsforschung (Division for Medical Statistical Heredity Investigations) of the Holländischen Institut für menschliche Erblchkeitsforschung und Rassenbiologie (Dutch Institute for Human Heredity and Racial Biology), founded in 1933. Sanders sourced female twins from the Nederlandsch Wetenschappelijk Humanitair Komitee (Dutch Scientific Humanitarian Committee), an offshoot of Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft. The Dutch enterprise, however, was not a success and floundered because of a lack of financial support. Sanders's study on homosexuality, however, was known and cited; in Britain, for example, it was noticed in the *Eugenics Review* in October 1934.⁶

Some of the most influential twin studies of homosexuality were conducted by the German psychiatrist Theo Lang, a medical assistant to Rüdin and Kallmann. Michael R. Dietrich has discussed Lang's studies, which were prompted by his acceptance of the German geneticist Richard Goldschmidt's theory of homosexuality as a case of genetic intersexuality, despite the fact that by the 1940s Goldschmidt himself had abandoned the theory.⁷ Lang embraced the theory in attempt to account for a reported surplus of male births in the familial lineages of homosexual men. His studies on homosexuality were reported by the British and American medical press. A brief report in the *British Medical Journal* (1 October 1938), for example, reported that "Lang brings further figures in support of his theory that a great number of homosexuals are so by virtue of a genetic factor."⁸ A major article, titled 'Studies on the Genetic Determination of Homosexuality', in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* cemented his presence in the Anglo-American medical imagination and prompted a raft of responses and further studies by American and British researchers. Lang wrote: "in the majority of homosexual individuals, the primary cause may be a heredito-constitutional rather than a purely psychological mechanism, explainable, under certain conditions, by the assumption of hormonal influences. At present, of course, it can merely be suggested that these hormonal

⁵ Jacob Sanders, "Homosexuelle Zwillinge," *Genetica* 16 (1934): 401-434.

⁶ C. B. S. Hodson, "International Federation of Eugenic Organizations: A Survey of the Zürich Conference," *Eugenics Review* 26, no. 3 (1934): 217-20.

⁷ Michael R. Dietrich, "Of Moths and Men: Theo Lang and the Persistence of Richard Goldschmidt's Theory of Homosexuality, 1916-1960," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 22, 2 (2000): 219-47.

⁸ Anon., "Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie," *British Medical Journal* (1 October 1938): 104.

disturbances, especially when occurring in the earliest embryonic stage, may be based in themselves on a specific genetic phenomenon."⁹

Possibly Lang's studies were another impetus for Kallmann to turn his attention to homosexuality. Beginning in 1947, Kallmann compared samples of 85 twin pairs comprising of 40 pairs of monozygotic (identical) twins and 45 pairs of dizygotic (fraternal or nonidentical) twins. The subjects were sourced from psychiatric, correctional, and charitable institutions in New York and "also through direct contacts with the clandestine homosexual world."¹⁰ His study was published in two articles in 1952, one in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* and the other in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*. He discussed the subject of homosexuality in numerous other publications including his popular book *Heredity in Health and Mental Disorder: Principles of Psychiatric Genetics in the Light of Comparative Twin Studies* (1953). Kallmann reported a 100 percent concordance rate for homosexuality amongst the monozygotic twin pairs (i.e., that both twins were homosexual) and just over a 60 percent concordance for dizygotic twins. For the non-twin siblings, he reported a concordance rate of 11.5 percent. He concluded that homosexuality was largely determined by genetic elements.

As Allen shows, the conceptual and methodological flaws of Kallmann's study, as well as his convoluted, sometimes impenetrable, style of writing (at least in English), are manifold. Most significantly, Kallmann's a priori assumption that homosexuality was pathological coloured all his ensuing endeavours. He ended both his 1952 articles with pleas for more funds and continued study on genetic aspects of homosexuality, an enterprise he considered pressing. For example, in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* he wrote: "The urgency of such work is undeniable as long as this aberrant type of behavior continues to be an inexhaustible source of unhappiness, discontentment, and a distorted sense of human values."¹¹

Various studies disputed Kallmann's claims and his methodology, among them a 1956 study by C. M. B. Pare, Registrar of the Bethlem and Maudsley hospitals, and a 1962 study by Michael Pritchard, a University of London student.¹² These studies established that the sex chromosomes were found to be no different between

⁹ T. Lang, "Studies on the Genetic Determination of Homosexuality," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 92, 1 (1940): 55-64.

¹⁰ F. J. Kallmann, "Comparative Twin Study on the Genetic Aspects of Male Homosexuality," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 115, 4 (1952): 283-298, here at 287.

¹¹ F. J. Kallmann, "Twin and Sibship Study of Overt Male Homosexuality," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 4, no. 2 (1952): 136-146, here at 146. See also Kallmann, "Comparative Twin Study," 296.

¹² M. Pritchard, "Homosexuality and Genetic Sex," *Journal of Mental Science* 108, 456 (1962): 616-23; C. M. B. Pare, "Homosexuality and Chromosomal Sex," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 1, 4 (1956): 247-51.

homosexuals and heterosexual subjects, undermining the claims of Goldschmidt, Lang, and those who perpetuated their genetic theories of sex.

Nonetheless, Kallmann's impact and significance in establishing a pernicious, profoundly queerphobic genetic psychiatry in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere cannot be underestimated. For example, Carlos Blacker, the prominent English psychiatrist and eugenicist, reviewed Kallmann's book for the *Eugenics Review* (October 1954), lamenting his "stupefying jargon" but nonetheless trumpeting Kallmann's assertions about homosexuality.¹³ In an address to the Medico-Legal Society in February 1957, published in the *Medico-Legal Journal* the following June, the prominent English psychiatrist and author David Stafford-Clark lauded Kallmann's intervention in adulatory terms. Broaching the vexed issue of whether there was a physical cause of homosexuality ("the 64,000 dollar question"), and having rejected the possibility of a hormonal cause, Stafford-Clark wrote: "In America, a man named Kallman [sic] has made an enormous number of studies of twins. He is one of the most brilliant, hard-working, ingenious, and illuminating genetic experts of our time. He seeks out twins as other men seek out money. He has studied so many cases of twins that he can give facts on almost anything relevant to such studies."¹⁴

Eliot Slater on Homosexual "Traits", Maternal Age, Sibs, and Birth Order

Most significantly, Kallmann's work on homosexuality, and his ideological and rhetorical approach more generally, was echoed by the prominent English psychiatrist and eugenicist Eliot Slater, a specialist in the genetics of mental disorders, editor of the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (*Journal of Mental Science* before 1962) between 1961 and 1972, and Vice-Chair of the Eugenics Society between 1963 and 1966. Slater's chequered ideological and professional credentials are well known to historians.¹⁵ In 1934, as a young medical officer at London's Maudsley Hospital, he visited Munich to study psychiatric genetics with Ernst Rüdin and his associates at the Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie (German Research Institute

¹³ C. P. Blacker, "[Review] Kallmann, Franz J. *Heredity in Health and Mental Disorder* [etc.]," *Eugenics Review* 46, no. 3 (1954): 172-173, here at 173.

¹⁴ D. Stafford-Clark, "Homosexuality," *Medico-Legal Journal* 25, 2 (1957): 65-81, here at 72.

¹⁵ See, for example, Roelcke, "Eugenic Concerns, Scientific Practices"; especially 25-29; D. Pilgrim, "The Eugenic Legacy in Psychology and Psychiatry," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 54, 3 (2008): 272-284. On the continuity of eugenics in postwar Britain more generally, see, for example, P. T. Merricks, *Religion and Racial Progress in Twentieth-Century Britain: Bishop Barnes of Birmingham* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); P. Weindling, "Julian Huxley and the Continuity of Eugenics in Twentieth-Century Britain," *Journal of Modern European History* 10, 4 (2012): 480-499.

for Psychiatry, now Max-Planck-Institut für Psychiatrie / Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry), supported by a travelling fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation. Slater visited other Nazi-run psychiatric institutions in Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Sweden and again visited Rüdin's Institute in 1937. A notoriously equivocal article on 'German Eugenics in Practice', published in the *Eugenics Review* in January 1936, reflected dispassionately on the first year of compulsory sterilization in Nazi Germany.¹⁶ Despite his later protestations and repudiations of Nazism, Slater was ambiguous about his commitment to eugenics and he remained committed to his acquaintances at the Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie throughout his career. His caginess about eugenics has often been reflected in scholarship about him and his work; a hagiographic appraisal was published in 1996 and collections of his publications are highly selective.¹⁷

Slater's commitment to eugenics, as well as the influence of Kallmann, is clearly apparent in his writings on homosexuality that were, and remain, enormously influential. Slater was responsible for rendering much of the relevant German literature on the subject in English through his own studies and writings of which several concerned homosexuality. For example, from 1944 he made various reports of Lang's studies on homosexuality, as well as those of his interlocutors, for the *Journal of Mental Science* and elsewhere. Slater further perpetuated pathological (psychiatric) genetic ideology and studies of homosexuality in his major publications such as *Psychotic and Neurotic Illnesses in Twins* (1953), *Clinical Psychiatry* (1954; 3rd edn 1969), co-authored with Wilhelm Mayer-Gross and Martin Roth, and *The Genetics of Mental Disorders* (1971) co-authored with Valerie Cowie.¹⁸ In his book *An Introduction to Physical Methods of Treatment in Psychiatry* (1944; 5th edn 1972), co-authored with the equally contentious English psychiatrist William Sargant, Slater advocated highly invasive medical interventions for homosexuals including hormone

¹⁶ E. Slater, "German Eugenics in Practice," *Eugenics Review* 27, 4 (1936): 285-295.

¹⁷ I. I. Gottesman and P. McGuffin, "Eliot Slater and the Birth of Psychiatric Genetics in Great Britain," in *150 Years of British Psychiatry. Vol. 2: The Aftermath*, ed. Hugh Freeman and German Barrios (London: Athlone, 1996), 537-48. See also M. Roth and V. Cowie, *Psychiatry, Genetics and Pathography: A Tribute to Eliot Slater* (London: Gaskell Press, 1979); J. Shields and I. I. Gottesman, *Man, Mind, and Heredity: Selected Papers of Eliot Slater on Psychiatry and Genetics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

¹⁸ See, for example, E. Slater and V. Cowie, *The Genetics of Mental Disorders* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 117-21 and 315-9; W. Mayer-Gross, E. Slater, and M. Roth, *Clinical Psychiatry* (London: Cassell and Company, 1954), 169-81 ('The Sexually Perverse'); E. Slater, *Medical Research Council Special Report Series No. 278: Psychotic and Neurotic Illnesses in Twins* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1953), 21; E. Slater, "Psychiatric Genetics," in *The Journal of Mental Science: Recent Progress in Psychiatry*, ed. G. W. T. H. Fleming, 2nd ed. (London: J. & A. Churchill, [1950]), 1-25; E. Slater, "The Genetical Aspects of Personality and Neurosis," in *Congrès international de Psychiatrie Paris 1950: VI Psychiatrie Sociale. Génétique et Eugénique* (Paris: Hermann, 1950), 119-154; E. T. O. Slater, "Genetics in Psychiatry," *Journal of Mental Science* 90, 378 (1944): 17-35.

treatments. In the fourth, 1963 edition of the work, Sargent and Slater indicate that prefrontal leucotomy operations were conducted on homosexuals and other "sexually deviant" individuals, but these had only exacerbated their "sexually abnormal tendencies".¹⁹ The authors therefore dissuaded other practitioners from using the operation in such cases, recommending the use of stilboestrol and librium instead.

Along with his statistician brother Patrick Slater, Eliot Slater applied a new test in an attempt to assess "homosexual traits". Although it used a psychological measure, the Slaters were clear that, in their view, the psychological measure would accurately reflect an underlying constitutional (genetic) condition; in their words: "Good grounds are to be found in genetical theory for expecting that psychological traits which differentiate men from women will also differentiate constitutionally different types of men from one another, etc."²⁰ At this point in time Slater still gave credence to Lang's theory of sex differentiation whereby sex differences were considered quantitatively rather than as the sharply qualitative one that it was commonly considered." Psychological traits, the Slaters believed, reflected this underlying corporeal masculinity and femininity in all its gradations and a profoundly gendered psychological test could therefore act as a useful measure of intrasex sex differences as well as differences between males and females. In this scenario, and in common with Lang, homosexuality was taken as a measure of an underlying genetic femininity in men and masculinity in women (the Slaters made no study of lesbians or bisexuals).

The Slaters' joint study on homosexuality was published in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology* in March 1947, precisely the time when public debates about homosexuality and the desirability of law reform were rapidly proliferating, but in their article the Slaters stated that the origins of their test dated back to the publication of American psychologists Lewis M. Terman and Catharine Cox Miles's influential *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity* (1936) which promulgated an experimental analysis of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' through the use of highly gendered personality testing.²¹ Around that time, in 1937, Patrick Slater was engaged as a research psychologist at the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (now Centre for Crime and Justice Studies) where numerous sex offenders were sent for medical treatment. The Slaters wrote: "Many

¹⁹ W. Sargent and E. Slater, *An Introduction to Physical Methods of Treatment in Psychiatry*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: E. and S. Livingstone, 1963), 123.

²⁰ E. Slater and P. Slater, "A Study in the Assessment of Homosexual Traits," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 21, 1 (1947): 61-74, here at 73.

²¹ On Terman and Miles, see J. Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 168-175.

of the delinquents referred to this clinic, even if they were not overt homosexuals, were charged with offences into which a homosexual component might have entered, e.g. indecent behaviour in public lavatories."²² Whilst they thought that Terman and Miles's test might have some use in such cases, the Slaters considered it too long, expensive, cumbersome, and, most interestingly, recognised its cultural specificity; i.e., that it contained numerous items that were "obviously topical to the United States." They also recognized that if respondents knew what the test was for, they might easily fake their responses. The basis for an alternative test was initially suggested by the occupational psychologist Mary B. Stott who, whilst developing vocabulary tests, noted that some words were more familiar to children of one sex than the other of the same "mental age."²³ Stott's suggestion led to the development of Patrick Slater's "Selective Vocabulary Test", initially published in 1944.²⁴ The test comprises of lists of words of which subjects are asked the meaning. As an exercise in gender stereotyping, the test is truly astonishing. For example, words listed as being associated with dressmaking (including "bobbin", "crochet", and "haberdashery") were, according to the Slaters, better known to girls than boys. Recognition of these words by boys was therefore taken as an indication of a homosexual trait, not erudition.

In their joint study the Slaters applied the vocabulary test a group of thirty-seven homosexual men who had been referred to the neurological wing of Sutton E. M. S. Hospital for treatment. Their results were compared to those of a group of fifty "normal" men. A short precis of their case histories, along with their test scores, were published in a lengthy table. From the results, the Slaters determined that the group was significantly more heterogenous than "normal men," a result they viewed as supporting Lang's model of genetic sex which allowed for a degrees of constitutional and psychological overlap between the sexes. The Slaters wrote: "The more we magnify the no-man's-land between the sexes, the more diversified we may expect the behaviour to appear of those who spiritual home is there. And this appears to be what has happened. We have developed an instrument for observing the differences between the sexes in psychological terms."²⁵

Like most of Eliot Slater's innovations in the medico-scientific study of homosexuality, his use of vocabulary tests was influential, especially in Britain; as late as 1984 it was used in a study of trans* individuals ("transsexuals") at the

²² Slater and Slater, "A Study in the Assessment of Homosexual Traits," 63.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ P. Slater, *Selective Vocabulary Test: Handbook with Instructions for Administering, Scoring and Interpretation* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1944).

²⁵ Ibid., 73.

University of Manchester's Department of Psychiatry.²⁶ His peculiar view that homosexuality should be considered, and medically treated, as pathological, despite simultaneously arguing that it was produced from the natural distribution of genes in humans, was not universally shared by other British psychiatrists. An insightful text from 1955 shows just how complex, and varied, attitudes towards homosexuality were in postwar British psychiatry. In that year, a special committee of the Council of the British Medical Association produced a major report on homosexuality and prostitution which was published in December 1955 (and précised in a supplement to the *British Medical Journal*) and submitted as expert evidence to the Wolfenden Committee. The wide-ranging report included a chapter titled 'Aetiological Factors' which was subdivided into various categories ('The Case for a Genetic Basis', 'Endocrine Factors', and 'Early and Later Environmental Influences') with specialists in each area asked to contribute. Slater contributed to the section 'The Case for a Genetic Basis' along with the English psychiatrist and eugenicist (Galton Professor of Eugenics between 1945 and 1965 and Professor of Human Genetics between 1963 and 1965 at University College London) Lionel Sharples Penrose who was no less important than Slater in establishing the field of genetic psychiatry in Britain. As its header suggests by the epithet "The Case for [...]", Penrose and Slater were cautious, indeed equivocal, in their claims, the report stating that "[i]t must be admitted, however, that the case for a genetic basis is not acceptable to all observers."²⁷ Homosexuality, the text argues, was an unsuitable trait for precise genetical study as it was so complex. Still, suggestive evidence from studies of familial incidence of psychopathy and from various published studies, including the Kinsey Report and especially Kallmann's twin studies, were outlined (Lang's theory is also referenced but countered by other references to those studies that had disproved it). Both Penrose and Slater appear to have agreed that the evidence, especially from the twin studies, suggested "that certain genes lay down a potentiality which, in average circumstances, will lead to homosexuality in the person who possesses them."²⁸ Still, a difference in basic interpretation between the two psychiatrists is discernible in the final paragraph of the section. It begins: "The evidence summarized in the preceding paragraphs tends, in Dr. Eliot Slater's

²⁶ See, for example, J. C. Kenna and J. Hoenig, "Transsexualism and Slater's Selective Vocabulary Test," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 30, 3 (1984): 207-212; R. V. Clarke, "The Slater Selective Vocabulary Test and Male Homosexuality," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 38, 4 (1965): 339-340.

²⁷ British Medical Association, *Homosexuality and Prostitution: A Memorandum of Evidence Prepared by a Special Committee of the Council of the British Medical Association for Submission to the Departmental Committee on Homosexuality and Prostitution* (London: British Medical Association, 1955), 24.

²⁸ BMA, *Homosexuality and Prostitution*, 26.

opinion, to support the view that there is a small proportion of the population who are so constituted, perhaps in large part by genetical causes, as to be unable to form normal heterosexual relationships and to be strongly predisposed to form homosexual ones."²⁹ The remainder of the paragraph outlines Penrose's conclusion which is decidedly different in tone and argument to the preceding sentence and apparently not endorsed by Slater:

Professor Penrose thinks that variations in sexual polarity might be regarded as a perfectly normal trait, comparable with variation in stature, hair pigmentation, handedness, or visual refractive error. These traits are all probably dependent upon interaction between heredity and environment and the variation within all of them Penrose believes to be probably of degree rather than of kind. He therefore concludes that in the great majority of cases of homosexuality the condition is not abnormal but an example of a natural, and probably inevitable, type of biological variation.³⁰

Penrose's position, outlined here, deftly shows that pathological interpretations of data produced by biological investigations were by no means pervasive through the 1940s and 50s, even amongst committed eugenicists and advocates of genetic psychiatry, and were routinely contradicted by alternative narratives of normalization and naturalization.

Undeterred, Slater continued to pursue methods for detecting and measuring what he unerringly believed to be a genetic basis for homosexuality in pathological terms, developing methods that were subsequently adopted by numerous neuropsychiatrists in their pursuit of "queer science." At the 'Symposium on Nuclear Sex' at King's College Hospital Medical School in September 1957, Slater presented a study titled 'The Sibs and Children of Homosexuals', his paper published in the Symposium's proceedings the following year.³¹ By the time he presented the paper, he reluctantly accepted that studies of the chromosomes of homosexuals rendered Lang's theory of homosexuality as a degree of intersexuality problematic. Slater's disappointment is palpable ("[i]t would seem, then, that the intersexual theory,

²⁹ Ibid., 27.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Around the same time, but apparently independently of Slater, the Danish psychiatrist Oluf Martensen-Larsen similarly investigated the sibs of homosexuals, female and male, corroborating Lang's original observation that homosexual men tended to have more brothers than sisters but without referring to Lang's theory of genetic sex. O. Martensen-Larsen, "The Family Constellation and Homosexuality," *Acta Genetica et Statistica Medica* 7, 2 (1957): 445-456.

at least in its simplest form, would have to be abandoned") but he nonetheless continued to pursue evidence for a hypothesized genetic basis to homosexuality.³² In this endeavour he examined the case records of institutionalized sex offenders in order to determine familial details such as the age of the mother at the time of birth, number of sibs, and birth order. This methodology was developed from studies of familial factors in cases of "mongolism" (i.e., Down syndrome) during the 1930s, these in turn were developed from studies on laboratory animals. In Britain, the subject had especially interested Lionel Penrose and through the 1930s he published a series of enormously influential studies on "mongolism" in the *Journal of Genetics*, the *Journal of Mental Science*, the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, and the *Annals of Eugenics* in which he corroborated the prevailing view that "Mongolian imbeciles" were born to relatively older mothers, the father's age having no bearing.³³

Using Penrose's methodology and his data on birth order in "mongols", Slater examined the case records of patients who had been admitted to the Bethlem and Maudsley hospitals between January 1949 and June 1956 who "had been classified diagnostically as the subjects of sexual deviation" as defined by the International List of Diseases and Causes of Deaths.³⁴ This group comprised 503 males (286 homosexuals, 116 exhibitionists, 18 transvestites, and 83 others) and 45 females (39 homosexuals and 6 others). Among his statistical formulations, Slater reported that the mean age of the mother at the time of the birth of the patient was higher for the male homosexuals than for the exhibitionists. Slater also reported a relatively high mean number of sibs of the male homosexuals. He determined that homosexuals tended to be born later and, he wrote, "[i]n this respect they are comparable with twins and with mongols."³⁵ He thought it possible that being born later might result from a higher age of the mother but, whilst suggestive, Slater's results were not statistically significant and his study was largely inconclusive. Still, however, the assertions of Slater's largely speculative study stuck fast in the minds of psychiatrists. This is immediately apparent in the short account of the ensuing discussion which is reproduced following Slater's paper in the Symposium's proceedings. For example, Arthur St. George Huggett, a physiologist at St. Mary's Hospital Medical School, agreed that birth to elderly mothers linked to the incidence

³² E. Slater, "The Sibs and Children of Homosexuals," in *Symposium on Nuclear Sex*, ed. D. Robertson Smith and William M. Davidson (London: William Heinemann Medical Books, 1958), 79-83, 79.

³³ See, for example, D. J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 160-163.

³⁴ Slater, "The Sibs and Children of Homosexuals," 79.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

of "mongolism". In reply, Slater said: "Yes, indeed—I think the interest of these findings is that, if they were confirmed, they would bring homosexuality into line with these other conditions like twinning and mongolism."³⁶

A subsequent study, titled "Birth Order and Maternal Age of Homosexuals", was published in the *Lancet* (13 January 1962). In it, Slater set his sample group of male homosexuals alongside a large group of epileptics, "[a]s comparative data".³⁷ So too is it evident that he was still holding out on Lang's otherwise discredited intersex theory, which had long underpinned Slater's studies on homosexuality. He wrote: "Although investigations—for instance, by Pare (1956)—have failed to show anomalies of nuclear sex in male homosexuals, the possibility that some members of this clinical group are the subjects of some chromosomal anomaly such as might be connected with late maternal age seems worth investigating further."³⁸

Conclusions

Others indeed developed Slater's eugenically infused study on the maternal age and birth order of homosexuals, albeit somewhat belatedly. In Britain, his data was twice reanalysed by psychiatrists at the Maudsley Hospital, firstly in 1969 and secondly in 1979.³⁹ In the United States Slater's study was used by the controversial sexologist John Money and, most importantly, developed across numerous studies by the American-Canadian sexologist Ray Blanchard and his associates, the first of which was published in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* in 1992.⁴⁰ Unquestioningly, Blanchard grounded his study not only in Slater's studies but also those of Lang, Kallmann and their interlocutors. In a 1998 study, Blanchard (and co-author Marshall B. Jones) attributed the belated development of Slater's study, at

³⁶ Slater, "The Sibs and Children of Homosexuals," 82. Only Raymond Greene, a Harley Street physician, was skeptical, proposing an alternative, psychological explanation for the apparent higher incidence of homosexuals being born to older mothers. Tired of their husbands, he suggested, the mothers might attach all their affections to their sons "and in that way perhaps acquire that undue power over them which is usually associated with homosexuality." *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁷ E. Slater, "Birth Order and Maternal Age of Homosexuals," *Lancet* (13 January 1962): 69-71, here at 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁹ E. H. Hare and P. A. P. Moran, "Parental Age and Birth Order in Homosexual Patients: A Replication of Slater's Study," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 134, 2 (1979): 178-182; K. Abe and Paul A. P. Moran, "Parental Age of Homosexuals," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 115, 520 (1969): 313-317.

⁴⁰ R. Blanchard and P. M. Sheridan, "Sibship Size, Sibling Sex Ratio, Birth Order, and Parental Age in Homosexual and Nonhomosexual Gender Dysphorics," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 180, 1 (1992): 40-7; J. Money, "Genetic and Chromosomal Aspects of Homosexual Etiology," in *Homosexual Behavior*, ed. Judd Marmor (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 59-72.

least in part, to "methodological problems".⁴¹ He did not consider the tempestuous socio-political context of his own interest in the study of sexuality or the unique pressing cultural and historical issues that routinely accompany periodic surges of interest in the subject across time. Slater's interest in seeking out biological markers of homosexuality gained pace amid the sensational media reporting of homosexual cases and concomitant calls for reform of the law relating to male homosexual acts which intensified so dramatically in postwar Britain. Blanchard's interest in the subject, echoed by other scientists chiefly in the United States, came at the height of the changing political landscape in post-Reagan America and the new politics of AIDS. Intense political debates focussed on homosexuality ignited especially amid the unprecedented global media furore surrounding the British-American neuroscientist Simon LeVay's claim, originally reported in August 1991, of a difference in the structure of the brains of homosexual and heterosexual men. This was followed by the claims of the American geneticist Dean Hamer who, in July 1993, claimed to have identified a genetic marker for male homosexuality. Amid this highly politically-charged burgeoning of medico-scientific and media interest in (mainly male) homosexuality, Slater's formative articles on the subject have been widely cited and are still used today in what passes variously as "queer science" and "the psychobiology of sex orientation" without regard for their historical and ideological underpinnings or Slater's methodological and rhetorical biases. They are therefore a prime example of what David Pilgrim has described as "the abiding presence of eugenic ideas in mainstream psychology and psychiatry".⁴²

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⁴¹ M. B. Jones and Ray Blanchard, "Birth Order and Male Homosexuality: Extension of Slater's Index," *Human Biology* 70, 4 (1998): 775-87, here at 776.

⁴² Pilgrim, "Eugenic Legacy," 282. Book-length studies that can be used as useful guides to what is now an massive medico-scientific literature include S. LeVay, *Gay, Straight, and the Reason Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); G. Wilson and Q. Rahman, *Born Gay: The Psychobiology of Sex Orientation* (London: Peter Owen, 2005); J. M. Bailey, *The Man Who Would be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2003); S. LeVay, *Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

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