

Abstract This article re-evaluates the emphasis on the ‘homo/hetero binary’, which appears in many discussions of sexuality since the late 19th century, by exploring several key European sexological texts and their classifications of sexual desire between men. It suggests that these writers offered not so much a nascent binary between ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ individuals, but a complex and contradictory set of sexual ontologies that encoded liminality as well as notions of innate sexual perversion. A strand of sexual fluidity lived on through the 20th century, forming a counternarrative to the notion that individuals could be assigned to either a heterosexual or a homosexual subject position. Such a rereading of important sexological writings offers us one way to complicate current assumptions about the birth and subsequent influence of ‘the homosexual’ and the prevalence of the ‘homo/hetero binary’. This impels us to more closely investigate the spaces lying between and around the poles of this binary.

Keywords heterosexuality, homosexuality, men, sexology, sexual inversion

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Sexology, the Homo/Hetero Binary, and the Complexities of Male Sexual History

Introduction: The instability of sexual categories

Homosexuality . . . I consider a ‘riddle,’ because, in fact, the more closely in recent years I have come to know it, the more I have endeavoured to study it scientifically, the more enigmatical, the more obscure, the more incomprehensible, it has become to me. But it *exists*. About that there is no doubt. (Bloch, 1908: 489, emphasis in original)

The homosexual is a kind of time bomb, encoded with its own explosion. Or perhaps rather its own discreet disappearance. The very circumstances which form the background of his existence also act towards eliminating him; at the same time, he himself helps them along. This has been the case ever since he was a boy at the end of the [19th] century; but it has become all the more clear over the years. (Bech, 1997: 195)

In 1908 Iwan Bloch concluded that something called ‘homosexuality’ existed. While he had long investigated such a phenomenon, he was not sure how to comprehend its character. Henning Bech, 80 years later, contended that homosexuality encodes its own dissipation, taking form and threatening to vanish at the same time. For both writers the homosexual is elusive, resisting conclusive definition; homosexuality is an indeterminate state. In recent times this indeterminacy has appeared in discussions of postmodern sexualities. For instance, it is suggested that the ‘modern homosexual’ may be disappearing, displaced in a ‘post-sexual’ age where many people – especially the young – experience their sexuality as more fluid and porous than categories such as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, or even ‘bisexual’ suggest they might (Archer, 2002; Bech, 1997; Stewart et al., 2000; Tatchell, 1996).

As the excerpt from Bloch’s text suggests, however, sexual indeterminacy has quite a history. Complex and even fluid sexual classifications are not recent constructions. Instead, an important thread of indeterminate sexuality runs through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and on to the 21st century. We would do well to consider its relationship to the oft-mentioned late 19th-century birth of ‘the (modern) homosexual’. There is much academic agreement that this new type of individual expressed a commitment to desire his or her own gender, something that over time generated new sexual identities and styles of life. In this article I want to argue that the invention of ‘the homosexual’ is but one element of the story of same-sex desire since the mid-19th century, between men at least.¹

We might also examine how the sexologists, credited with transforming the juridical subject of sodomy into the medical subject of homosexuality, also understood male sexuality as complex and variable.² They did not simply distinguish between the ‘homosexual’ (or his equivalent) and sexually ‘normal’ (later ‘heterosexual’) men. Instead, they invoked more complicated classificatory schemas, the traces of which survive in our own time. This is important, for the ways we read sexological writings influence the approach we take toward questions of sexuality during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and, in turn, what we see when we explore sexual meanings in earlier times.

I will advance my argument in three stages. First, I revisit one influential intellectual framing of 19th-century classifications of same- and

opposite-sex desire: the theory of the homo/hetero binary advanced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and others. Second, I closely examine selected aspects of conceptual and discursive practice in key sexological texts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in order to explore their terms (cf. Davidson, 2001: 68, 90). These are Johann Ludwig Casper's *Handbook of the Practice of Forensic Medicine* (1858), Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Albert Moll's *Perversions of the Sex Instinct* (1893), Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* (1896) and Sigmund Freud's 'Three Essays' (1905). It goes without saying that I cannot reflect these texts in all their myriad detail. For instance, I do not provide an in-depth discussion of aetiology in relation to physiology, sexual instinct and so on, for this has already been very nicely done elsewhere (Davidson, 2001: chs1 and 3). Instead, I examine how these authors addressed questions of definition and classification, and consider what this tells us about the history of sexuality's indeterminate boundaries. Third, the concluding section of the essay sketches in rough form a bridge between these sexological texts and our own era of (perhaps) postmodern sexuality. I want to suggest that we have not invented the notion of sexual fluidity in the present, so much as instantiated its latest guise with reference to the past.

Social constructionism and the question of 'hetero/homo definition'

The dominant frame of reference within scholarship on the history of sexuality is a social constructionist one. Constructionists are interested in the ways understandings and experiences of human sexuality change across time and place (Brickell, forthcoming). So, history and culture influence how individuals and groups organize and experience sexual subjectivity, desire, love and intimacy, and each these concepts varies in its form and content according to its context (Greenberg, 1988; Halperin, 2002; Katz, 2001; Vance, 1998). As a result, human sexuality comprises historically and culturally variable meanings, discourses, practices and power relations, all of which are embedded in social institutions and instantiated in individuals in particular ways. Social constructionism is often contrasted with 'essentialist' approaches to sexuality, in which the fundamentals of sexual experience, meanings and subjectivities are thought to be inherent to individuals and thus fundamentally continuous over time (for two classic accounts, see Boswell, 1991; Norton, 1997).³

Of central importance in social constructionist scholarship is the work of Michel Foucault, who famously suggested that 19th-century psychiatry played a key role in constituting 'the homosexual' as a new sexual 'species'. The momentary indiscretion of the 'sodomite', he argued, was superseded

by the emergence of the 'homosexual' who henceforth possessed a case history, a 'singular nature' and a 'kind of interior androgyny' (Foucault, 1990: 43). An article written by psychiatrist Carl Westphal and published in 1870 features in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* as the 'date of birth' of a new, medicalized homosexuality (Foucault, 1990: 43).⁴ Many constructionist authors agree with Foucault that the late 19th century was a key period in the development of 'modern' homosexuality (see for instance, Edwards, 1994: 18–20; McLaren, 1999: 87; Turner, 2000: 54),⁵ although there has been some recent debate about how far Foucault's medicalization thesis was meant to be taken. For instance, David Halperin argues that the French historian did not mean to imply that sexual subjectivities were totally dependent upon the new medical 'implantation of perversions' for their existence (Halperin, 2002: 29–32).⁶ George Chauncey, too, has noted that we cannot assume that medical discourses determined individuals' consciousness of their own sexuality (Chauncey, 1991).

This said, many social constructionist writers hold that the late 19th century witnessed the emergence of an influential distinction between 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality', one that often goes under the term 'homo/hetero binary' (Halperin, 1990: 16;⁷ Jagose, 1996: 16–17; Rosenil, 2002: 30–1). Ed Cohen, for instance, writes that 'what distinguishes the emergence of "the homosexual" during the second half of the nineteenth century is the fact that at this time it became inseparable from and literally incomprehensible without its "normal" twin, "the heterosexual"' (Cohen, 1993: 211).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, too, suggests that 'homo/heterosexual definition has been a presiding master term' from the late 19th century onwards (Sedgwick, 1994: 11). She writes that homo/heterosexual definition operates in complex ways. First, it expresses incoherencies and instabilities that arise primarily because heterosexuality depends for its own definition upon its derogated other: homosexuality. The fact that homosexuality is both internal to and external to heterosexuality provides a potent charge (1994: 10), particularly in respect of the close and sometimes ambiguous bonds of male homosociality (Bristow, 1997: 205–7; Sedgwick, 1985: 1–5). Second, homo/heterosexual definition is the site at which two forms of sexual definition interlace: one a 'minoritizing' view, the other a 'universalizing' one. While the former concerns itself with a 'small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority', the latter understands homo/heterosexual definition as an 'issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities' (Sedgwick, 1994: 1). The minoritizing view suggests homosexuality's containment to a limited number of individuals, but the universalizing view evokes a set of universal sexual potentials and socially contingent, open and contested sexual categories (Sedgwick, 1994: 1,

85). Both views may live on side by side in any given moment, even if unrecognized and unrationalized (1994: 45–7).

Although Sedgwick closely interrogates the internal dynamics of the hetero/homo binary in extremely useful ways, she leaves one question unasked: just how binarized was the ‘binarized calculus of *homo-* or *hetero-*sexuality’ of which she writes, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries? (1994: 31, original emphasis). Although sexual intimacies between those of the same sex have a long history, she suggests,

What *was* new from the turn of the [20th] century was the world-mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo-or hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence. It was this new development that left no space in the culture exempt from the potent incoherencies of homo/hetero definition. (Sedgwick, 1994: 2, original emphasis)

Certainly homosexuality and heterosexuality do present a tense, complex and shifting set of relationships. However, we might pay closer attention to the idea that the ‘incoherencies of homo/hetero definition’ have emptied sexual cultures of other possibilities, during the late 19th century or since. Although it is useful to ask after the emergence of the homo/hetero binary, we ought not to overemphasize its cultural power at any point. In other words, while it may have constituted one new possible ‘world mapping’, it was not necessarily the only model available. Through a reading of several important 19th-century sexological texts, I want to suggest that we might rethink the homo/hetero binary’s status as the ‘presiding master term’ in the recent history of sexuality. I suggest that the sexologists offered not so much a binary between ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ individuals, but a complex and contradictory set of sexual ontologies that encoded liminality as well as notions of innate sexual perversion.

Sexology and the perils of classification

The sexology of the 19th century constitutes one particular, influential site at which sexual knowledge has been historically constructed. Its practitioners – many of them trained in psychiatry – sought to explain intimate desire between men and between women, along with various other forms of sexual disreputability, at the same time they negotiated their own claims for professional credibility and status (Beyer, 1987: ch. 1; Minton, 1996). To give two examples: some sexologists argued that the perpetrators of sexual crimes ought to be subject to the medical surveillance of the lunatic

asylum and the private medical practice rather than the legal apparatus of the prison (Bullough, 1974: 107), while at the same time the psychiatrists jostled among themselves for professional recognition and the ability to define the field (Crozier, 2000b). The sexologists were not the only ones claiming privileged knowledge of sexuality, however: Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and other emancipationists argued that same-sex love was a benign variation from the norm and vigorously opposed its criminalization (Ulrichs, 1994).⁸ As it turned out, the emancipationists' writings, along with the experiences of ordinary people, fed into the sexologists' own work (Oosterhuis, 1997; Terry, 1999: 37).

During the early decades of the 19th century, Englishmen Alexander Morison and John Millingen drew connections between 'monomania' and 'unnatural propensity' or 'sodomy' (Beyer, 1987: ch. 1; Mendelson, 2003: 679). Later, French psychiatrists Paul Moreau and Jean Charcot contended that those desirous of the same sex inhabited a state 'midway between reason and madness' (Beyer, 1987: 19; Rosario, 1997: 85). However Johann Ludwig Casper, who wrote the *Handbook of the Practice of Forensic Medicine* in 1858, was much less interested in questions of insanity. A forensic psychologist, he sought to uncover corporeal traces of 'unnatural gratification of the sexual appetite' for use as legal evidence (Casper, 1864: 328). He took a great interest in Ambrose Tardieu's idea that those with a predilection for sodomy would be revealed by the shape of their genitalia (corkscrew-shaped penises or funnel-shaped anuses), and his *Handbook* featured the (unsurprisingly) inconclusive results of his own medical examinations (Casper, 1864: 329–34; on Tardieu, see Rosario, 1997: 72–7).

More importantly for our purposes, Casper formulated what would prove to be an influential distinction between two forms of same-sex attraction: one innate and the other acquired. First, he thought most of those 'addicted' to the 'vice' of 'paederastia' ('the love for boys or young men') were driven by flawed heredity. They possessed a form of 'mental hermaphroditism' and preferred either passive ('pathicus') or active ('paederastus') roles in sex. Although middle-class 'pathicus' were said to be somewhat 'womanish', those of 'the lower classes' were 'externally undistinguishable [sic] from others of their own rank' (Casper, 1864: 330–1). These men, Casper added, 'recognise one another' all over Europe (1864: 331). Second, Casper wrote that not *all* sexual desire between men was the result of faulty heredity. Sometimes, he thought, 'the vice is acquired, the result of satiety of natural sexual pleasures' (1864: 331). Such satiety might occur if a man tired of sexual relations with women, and decided to experience the novelty of sex with other men. Such was the 'sensual' man who, much to Casper's astonishment, would indulge himself with whomever he fancied: 'it is nothing unusual

to find these men, in their gross sensuality, alternating the two sexes!' (1864: 331).

Casper did argue that sexual desire cleaved across a binary, but one that distinguished between congenital predisposition and sexual laxity, not between male and female sexual object choice. Thus, some men were sexually attracted to both men and women, and 'sensual' men might adopt the 'vice' of 'pederasty' when overcome by curiosity or boredom. Casper also considered sexual conduct fundamentally affected by social and historical processes. He wrote that pederasty had a clear historical and geographical origin as a sexual practice, emerging in Asia and proceeding to spread over time through Greece and Rome (1864: 330). Thus, the desire for pederasty was made possible by the transmission of very particular cultural forms. In this way, Casper offered what we might now classify as social constructionist and essentialist impulses in the one account. He perceived important differences among same-sex attracted individuals and the cultures through which desires came into being, while he did attribute some forms of same-sex desire to heredity.

Casper's disinclination to see desire between men as stemming from one source alone, as well as his evocation of the potential porosity between same-sex and opposite-sex desire, were further developed by the German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Krafft-Ebing's substantial volume, titled *Psychopathia Sexualis*, was first published in 1886, translated into English in 1892, and appeared in 12 editions. Krafft-Ebing attempted to classify sexual deviations in some detail, apparently inspiring subsequent sexologists in their efforts (Bristow, 1998: 90). He further developed Casper's distinction between 'congenital' and 'acquired' forms of what he would call 'antipathic sexual instinct'.

According to Krafft-Ebing, 'congenital antipathic sexual instinct' developed from a pre-existing predisposition or 'taint' in particular individuals. In each case of this type a 'homo-sexual instinct' predominated over a 'hetero-sexual' one, and many of the men so afflicted professed a 'horror' of sexual relations with women (Krafft-Ebing, 1932: 442). Krafft-Ebing presumed most of these individuals to be effeminate, to prefer a passive role in penetrative sex, and to experience psychic disturbances caused by their degenerate heredity (1932: 285, 302, 340, 365).⁹ Notably, however, the psychiatrist suggested that any man contained *both* forms of sexual instinct, homosexual and heterosexual, but that his eventual sexual preferences were determined by their relative proportions. Thus, these new terms 'homo-sexual' and 'hetero-sexual' referred not to types of persons, but to elements of each and every individual. Krafft-Ebing wrote that many of his cases exhibited 'psychosexual hermaphroditism', an attraction to both men and women, although not necessarily in equal measure (1932: 336). He suggested that perverse desires might become entrenched where

the predominance of the 'wrong' instinct was coupled with a failure of moral volition. Thus, a weak 'inverted sexual instinct' could be 'awakened' by masturbation, that most reprobate form of sexual self-expression thought to inflame coarse, animal desires (1932: 286–7).¹⁰

While some men digressed from 'normal' sexuality under the influence of a combination of internal and external factors, others were simply led astray by the temptations offered by 'active pederasty' (Krafft-Ebing, 1932: 594). These men experienced 'acquired antipathic sexual instinct': they had originally known sexual attraction to women and, unlike the passive congenital invert, were rarely given to an effeminate comportment. An individual's sexual desires might also change under the influence of mental debilitations like senile dementia, or the gradual weakening of an originally 'hetero-sexual' disposition by masturbation or neurasthenia, the latter a state of chronic nerve weakness (Krafft-Ebing, 1932 [1902]: 341, 603–4). Not unlike Casper, then, Krafft-Ebing proposed that the direction of desire varied *between* individuals, and over time *within* individuals.

Although in places Krafft-Ebing wrote that a trace of hereditary taint lay behind most cases of inversion (1932: 338, 349),¹¹ elsewhere he concluded that masturbation or seduction might provoke same-sex desires in 'untainted' individuals (1932: 286–8, 604). 'Cultivated vice' could result from excessive male segregation in schools or prisons and on long sea voyages, where 'individuals of low morals and great sensuality' might 'seduce the others' (1932: 443, 586). Sometimes acquired inversion disappeared when corrupting influences were removed, although an overactive libido could further propel some men away from their attraction to women and entrench their transgressive desires (1932: 288–94, 350).

As this discussion suggests, dualistic 19th-century constructions of human nature and sexual desire provided important underpinnings for Krafft-Ebing's account of 'acquired antipathic sexual instinct'. Correctly controlled and channelled 'sexual life' formed the basis for human altruism, creativity and endeavour (Krafft-Ebing, 1932: 1), however there was always a risk that an absence of moral self-control might reveal an underlying 'animal desire' and 'sensual power'. The result would be the 'basest' of 'vice', moral decay and social ruin (1932: 2–6). Other doctors agreed, such as August Forel (1908: 242), and James Foster Scott who warned against the 'pure, healthy glow of Sexuality . . . the greatest boon to the individual and the race, [which] becomes a curse when debased by Sensuality' (Scott, 1908: 20). For these writers, the sexual aspects of life involved 'a never-ceasing dual between the animal instinct and morality', from which no person was exempt (Krafft-Ebing, 1932: 5).

In other words, Krafft-Ebing's focus lay not only upon dividing those men who desired men from those who desired women (or both sexes),

but also upon the eternal struggle between a bestial sexual nature and the demands of civilized culture. Moral backsliding was a never-ending threat, and there was always the possibility that any man might end up in the unrestrained – and, crucially, *undifferentiated* – state of ‘sensuality’. The ‘sensual’ man, ‘libertine’ or ‘roué’ was a dangerous and liminal figure: bored with sexual convention, he would choose ‘perversity’ by trying pretty much anything (Hall, 2003: 30; Krafft-Ebing, 1932: 79). Historically, this figure was marked not by his sexual object choice, but by his sexual indiscriminacy (Trumbach, 1988: 163). He was particularly transgressive at a time when notions of ‘self control’ underpinned public discourses of sexuality, and provided an influential standard against which individual behaviours were measured.

Krafft-Ebing’s classifications of congenital and acquired antipathic sexual instinct leaked somewhat; minoritizing and universalizing views jostled for attention. Even though some men possessed a congenital predisposition to same-sex attraction, he thought, the desires of others shifted across the life-span, while those who refused or were unable to control their passions were sucked into an abyss of base, undifferentiated sexuality and drowned in a sea of bestial pleasures.

Eight years after Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* first appeared, Albert Moll published his *Perversions of the Sex Instinct* in which he developed his own ideas about the complexity of male sexuality. Although he thought same-sex desires pathological in themselves, Moll wrote that in all other respects their subjects were usually ‘perfectly normal physically and anatomically’ (Moll, 1931: 63, 74).¹² Moll considered Krafft-Ebing’s distinction between ‘congenital’ and ‘acquired’ forms of sexual inversion to be unconvincing, and he did not make use of it. He did, however, share Krafft-Ebing’s belief that same-sex desires might either arise from ‘burdened heredity’ (Moll, 1931: 147) or develop out of particular contexts. For instance, such desires could lurk beneath the surface and be awakened by ‘a sympathetic man’, be aggravated by masturbation fantasies (1931: 151, 153, 157), or be caused by sexual segregation in places like boarding schools (1932: 154).

Curiosity and a desire to expand one’s sexual horizons were also factors, just as they had been for Casper and Krafft-Ebing. Moll considered that a period of ‘unwholesome curiosity’ might result in same-sex relations becoming a ‘habit’ (Moll, 1931: 144), and he invoked Krafft-Ebing’s ‘sensual man’ in his suggestion that some ‘ceaselessly seek new excitations for sexual satisfaction’ (Moll, 1931: 158). Age, too, could lead to sexual deviation. A man might be quite happy in sexual relationships with women until relatively late in life, at which point he may or may not become effeminate (Moll did stress that effeminacy and same-sex desire were not intrinsically related, 1931: 65, 76–7, 173). Moll introduced yet more

possibilities. He wrote that an individual might be 'seized from time to time with homosexual desires', even when a 'heterosexual urge' predominates within him, or be attracted to one particular man even though he was 'quite normal sexually' the rest of the time (Moll, 1931: 139). In other words, same-sex attraction might be of the most fleeting and impermanent duration, or a man might vacillate between his desires for men and those for women.

As a result of these multiply differentiated forms of individual sexual desire, the sexologist would observe a wide range of cases, 'from a simple trace of homosexual love to the most acute form of Uranism' (Moll, 1931: 139). Such a variety of possibilities arose because the line between 'normal' and 'inverted' sexuality was a very fine one. Not only did Moll provide the genesis for the later continuum of Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, but he also defined sexual desire in terms more extensive than a straightforward focus on the gender of an individual's sex partners would suggest. If a man was attracted to both men and women, he might seek out 'a certain type and the sex of that type is . . . of no importance at all', or he may be interested in particular types of men ('vigorous men with blond hair, for example'), and desire women only if no such men were available (Moll, 1931: 139–41). The Russian Benjamin Tarnowsky offered a further twist, arguing that various individuals – some fetishists, for instance – were not attracted to either men or women (Tarnowsky, 2001: 30).

Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* was published in 1896 and revised during the decades that followed, and further developed the earlier sexologists' ideas, especially the sense in which 'inversion' was as much a universal potential as a property of particular individuals. Ellis argued that all human beings possess both 'male' and 'female' characteristics, and that some have more of a mixture than others. 'Femaleness' was assumed to involve an attraction to men and 'maleness' and attraction to women, and on the basis of this Ellis concluded that every person embodies some degree of 'homosexual' tendency, if only in latent form (Ellis, 1918: 80). Accordingly, he did not conceive of same-sex desire as pathological in any way (Crozier, 2000b: 451).

Some modifications to the existing classificatory systems were necessary. Ellis formulated a new distinction, this time between 'inversion' and 'homosexuality'. The space between these categories was largely a quantitative rather than a qualitative one. Ellis' 'inversion' referred to those cases where 'the sexual impulse is organically and innately turned toward individuals of the same sex' (Ellis, 1918: 4), and the 'true invert' conducted himself according to 'his own inborn nature' or 'congenital predisposition' (1918: 49, 83, 144). In contrast, 'homosexuality' included 'all sexual attractions between persons of the same sex, even when seemingly due to the accidental absence of the natural objects of

sexual attraction' (1918: 1), and so it was likely to increase in prisons or during wartime (1918: 9, 25).

Within the logic of this distinction, some forms of same-sex desire expressed an innate force but others were the result of cultural context. Ultimately, though, even the ostensibly innate forms of sexuality were made possible by cultural shifts. Ellis thought the existence of inversion might be traced from the beginning of the Christian era in Europe, especially among 'men of exceptional ability and criminals' (1918: 24), and wrote that same-sex desires had been widespread throughout 19th-century China and ancient Greece (Ellis, 1918: 14, 58–9). Among young European men, Ellis identified a relatively widespread 'homosexuality of youth' that could last until age 15 or 20, whereupon the sexual instinct would usually be directed toward the opposite sex (1918: 75, 79, 86). As boys became men and went out into the world, Ellis suggested, 'the instinct usually turns into the normal channel' (1918: 81).

While, like Moll, Ellis rejected the dichotomy between 'congenital' and 'acquired' inversion on the vague grounds that it had 'ceased to possess significance', he restructured it into a division between 'homosexuality' – 'a relationship of unspecified nature to persons of the same sex' – and 'inversion' – 'more specific' – (Ellis, 1918: 83). This, in turn, reflected a continuum of 'sex characteristics' (1918: 83). Rather than something an individual either may or may not experience directly, Ellis' 'homosexuality' was more diffuse and omnipresent:

The real distinction would seem, therefore, to be between a homosexual impulse so strong that it subsists even in the presence of the heterosexual object, and a homosexual impulse so weak that it is eclipsed by the presence of the heterosexual object. (Ellis, 1918: 87)

In this sense, Ellis built upon Krafft-Ebing's idea that all men contained both 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' instincts. As it turned out, Ellis wondered whether this co-existence of impulses in any given individual made futile any attempt to classify his actual case histories in any definitive way:

While therefore the division into heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual is a useful superficial classification, it is scarcely a scientific classification. In the face of these various considerations, and in view of the fact that, while I feel justified in regarding the histories of my cases as reliable so far as they go, I have not been always able to explore them extensively, it has seemed best to me to attempt no classification at all. (Ellis, 1918: 88)

Although Ellis wrote about homosexual and heterosexual impulses, he did not for a moment suggest that individuals might be divisible into homosexual or heterosexual category types. Instead, he offered two forms of homosexuality, one of which was particularly porous and could

incorporate men who usually developed relationships with women, but who might engage in sexual relationships with other men in particular contexts. Given Ellis' evocation of a multiplex homosexuality, when heterosexuality did appear in his writing it did so as something of a fuzzy-edged category, containing whichever behaviours and individuals remained outside of his varieties of same-sex desire. The complexities of such definitional boundaries were further recast by Sigmund Freud, a friend and competitor of Ellis, in his 'Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex', first published in 1905.

Ellis and Freud did not share the same basic approach. Ellis championed sex psychology, in the mould of Krafft-Ebing and Moll, while Freud developed a psychoanalytical perspective based upon the importance of the unconscious. These positions jostled for prominence in the decades that followed (Crozier, 2000b: 450). This said, in his 'Three Contributions' Freud described different forms of same-sex desire, as his predecessors had done (Freud, 1920: 2). He named three types of 'contrary sexual' or 'invert': those attracted solely to the same sex as themselves expressed 'absolute inversion', an attraction to either sex signified 'amphigenous inversion', while 'occasional inversion' referred to a preference for same-sex partners under particular circumstances.

Freud was more ready than the earlier writers to draw out the implications of such a variation in sexual forms. He argued that the very possibility of 'occasional' inversion rendered unlikely the existence of 'congenital' sexual attraction, something Ellis could not quite accept (Ellis, 1918: 83). While both Moll and Ellis found the dichotomy between 'congenital' and 'acquired' inversion unsatisfactory but could not quite explain why, let alone bring themselves to jettison it entirely, Freud clearly enunciated what he saw as its limitations (Crozier, 2000b: 454). 'One is forced to assume', he wrote, 'that the alternatives congenital and acquired are either incomplete or do not cover the circumstances present in inversions' (Freud, 1920: 6). He came to this conclusion because he presumed that every individual is born with a polymorphous sexuality, and can potentially desire either sex:

[W]e are forced to the conclusion that there is indeed something congenital at the basis of perversions, but it is something *which is congenital in all persons*, which as a predisposition may fluctuate in intensity and is brought into prominence by influences of life. (Freud, 1920: 34, emphasis in original)

Thus, Freud thought that everybody's sexual 'drive' was *both* 'congenital' *and* culturally shaped. Although Ellis had inched toward such a conclusion, he was reluctant to adopt it *in toto*.¹³ This had posed something of a dilemma for him: if everybody possessed innate 'characteristics' of the opposite sex which, in turn, conditioned the direction of their

desire, were not therefore *all* forms of sexual attraction congenitally based, at least in part? Not only did Freud resolve this point by suggesting that everybody's fundamental sexual impulses arose from the same type of basic process, but he also argued the converse: that the specific forms taken by all broadly undifferentiated individual sexual 'drives' are 'acquired', in a sense, through the processes by which we are socialized as we approach maturity (Freud, 1920: ch. 3; for a discussion of this process and its underlying essentialism, see Jackson, 1999: 33–39; Rahman, 2000: 57–62). Freud broke down the congenital/acquired distinction itself, and reformulated its terms.

Although he proposed a teleological path toward sexual maturity, Freud conceded that such socializing processes might prove to be neither linear nor consistent. It was entirely possible, he wrote, that an individual could experience inverted sexual feeling late in life in the absence of any earlier manifestation (Freud, 1920: 3). Like some of the earlier writers, Freud suggested that war and prison life – as well as celibacy and 'sexual weakness' – could precipitate inversion among individuals (1920: 6). He did however reject the contention that inversion might reflect a degenerate heredity, precisely because such desires represented a universal potential:

Wherever the conditions are favorable such a perversion may for a long time be substituted by a normal person for the normal sexual aim or it may be placed near it. In no normal person does the normal sexual aim lack some designable perverse element, and this universality suffices in itself to probe the inexpediency of an opprobrious application of the name perversion. (Freud, 1920: 24)

Given the omnipresence – Freud even uses Sedgwick's term 'universality' – of a 'perverse element', it is unsurprising that he separated the question of sexual object choice from that of gender presentation. While many an invert 'feels himself like a woman and seeks a man', he wrote that others 'have retained the psychic character of virility' (Freud, 1920: 11). In this way, widespread tendencies to sexual inversion could lurk underneath the surface of a society, even one in which most men adhered to conventions of masculine deportment, and so the sexually transgressive could not be readily identified. Once again, the heterosexual and the homosexual were unable to be cleanly separated. Not only was the invert sometimes physically indistinguishable from the 'normal person', but the 'normal' individual contained elements of the perverse.

As this juxtaposition of several key sexologists demonstrates, Freud was not the only one to present a rather more complex picture than the one brought to mind by the homo/hetero binary. For instance, the idea of an 'undifferentiated sexual attitude' emerged some time before Freud, as Ellis argued in 1934 (Crozier, 2000b: 462). Its antecedents can be seen in the ever-expanding category of 'acquired' sexual inversion established

by Casper, in Krafft-Ebing's concern that society might descend into rampant sensuality, in Moll's discussion of fleeting same-sex desires, and in Ellis's argument that all individuals contained 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements with their attendant potential for precipitating same-sex attraction.

At various times others fed in to similar ideas. During the 1880s Tarnowsky wrote that some men might resort to active or passive pederasty only occasionally. The desire might seize a man two or three times in a year on an ongoing basis even though he desired women the rest of the time, or he might turn to sex with other men if coitus with women was 'too often repeated' and his 'sexual potency has begun to wane' (Tarnowsky, 2001: 92, also ch. 6). Marc André Raffalovich argued in 1895 that although some children were born with a propensity to same-sex or opposite-sex desire, others were born sexually indifferent and malleable, to be influenced by later life experiences (Rosario, 1997: 103). Several years later Otto Weininger suggested that every individual possessed the rudiments of 'both homo-sexuality and hetero-sexuality', and even contended that all male friendships have an 'element of sexuality' in them (Weininger, 2003: 49; for a discussion, see Greenaway, 1998).

Continuities and confusions

So far I have argued that a thread of sexual indeterminacy runs through the works of several important sexologists, and in places exists side-by-side with the idea that some forms of same-sex desire emerged from within the individual organism. This complex indeterminacy took various forms, each taken up and modified by subsequent writers. As a principle it did not vanish after Freud, however, only to reappear in postmodern society. Instead, it was expressed in various ways throughout the 20th century.

For instance, in 1933 Wilhelm Stekel argued forcefully that all persons are inherently capable of attraction to men and women, but that most suppress either the same-sex or opposite-sex components of their desire. This suppression, he thought, resulted in forms of neurosis that those who recognized their bisexual nature and lived accordingly managed to avoid (Stekel, 2003: 27–8, 40). More voluntaristic approaches, too, retained a certain influence. Psychologist Lewis Terman reproduced Casper and Krafft-Ebing's supposition that curiosity could motivate otherwise opposite-sex attracted men to try sex with other men (Minton, 1986: 12), and during the 1940s some doctors thought illicit sex might be attempted by young men who assumed such things merely 'boyish pranks' and were ignorant of their status as criminal acts (Brickell, 2005: 128). Meanwhile, Ellis further developed his idea about a homosexuality of adolescence in the 1933 edition of *Psychology of Sex*, in which he argued

that 'homosexual affection' among boys or 'enthusiastic devotion for other girls' were 'inevitable' during the 'youthful phase' of a person's life (1948: 203). While a failure to pass through the phase resulted in permanent bisexuality or homosexuality, success required the sublimation of homosexual instincts through comradeship, sport and so on.

This idea proved popular in the middle of the 20th century, and was advanced by students of sexuality as well as writers in the field of education and adolescent development (Anonymous, 1936: 239, 256; Griffith, 1944: 195; Spurlock, 2002). One of the latter, for instance, expressed the difficulty of ascertaining 'just what degree of activity or feeling is sufficient to label a person as homosexual', but added reassuringly that 'as long as the phase is a temporary one, it cannot be regarded as a deviation' (Bibby, 1946: 30–1). Writers of sex education pamphlets for young people adopted the idea too, well into the 1960s (Brickell, 2005). It is possible that the homosexual phase idea served a useful function during a time when many young men did live in boarding schools and army camps, as it allowed homosexually active young men in these gender segregated contexts to be exempted from the social stigma applied to sex between adult men.

The theory of the 'homosexual phase' lives on even now. For instance, some conservative writers reassure parents that some 10 to 16 per cent of adolescents go through such a phase, but that most of them do – or can be made to – emerge out the other end heterosexual (Nicolosi and Nicolosi, 2002: 123). Notably, such a recent application involves minoritizing the theory's original universalizing tendency, presumably in order to signal the social containability of the 'problem'. Even in such examples, however, a hard and fast boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty.

In 1948 Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin published their *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, which advanced the now famous seven-point continuum on which individuals scored a 0 value for exclusive opposite-sex sexual activity, a 6 for exclusive homosexuality, and a 1 to 5 for anything in between (Kinsey et al., 1948: 638–55). The study was shocking when it was published, particularly for its claim that 37 per cent of adult men had engaged in sex with other men to the point of orgasm (1948: 650). In recent years this work has been heralded as a revolutionary expression of the idea that sexual object choice varies across a scale and is capable of change across time (Epstein, 1996: 148; Hall, 2003: 40; Irvine, 1996: 222–3; Seidman, 1997: 87). However, we can read the Kinsey continuum in another way: as a modification of older sexological ideas, including Krafft-Ebing's undifferentiated bestial sexual nature, Moll's fleeting attractions, and Ellis' rudimentary continuum of homosexual attachment.

The theory that every individual's make-up was either polymorphous or included a homosexual component, as popularized by Freud and Ellis, remained influential during the mid-20th century, even though it had its detractors as well as its adherents (Minton, 1996: 453; Rado, 1940; Spurlock, 2002). As late as 1968, Pomeroy advised boys and young men that all individuals are born with a polymorphous sexuality, and that the form this takes in later life depends entirely on one's responses to social circumstances. Sexual relationships between young men, Pomeroy suggested, are greatly facilitated by the opportunities presented in homosocial settings, and sex between boys is 'so easy and pleasurable' that many could be tempted to forgo the 'opportunity to develop a heterosexual life' (Pomeroy, 1976: 58). In the final analysis, Pomeroy argued, 'it is pretty difficult to determine who is a "homosexual" and who is a "heterosexual"' (1976: 56). While these categories were well and truly available for use by this time, Pomeroy argued they did not represent the complexities of human sexuality, and he wrote that many individuals could not be assigned to them with any degree of surety.

During the early 1970s ideas about the fluidity of sexual experiences and classifications were adopted outside of sexology, by the nascent international Gay Liberation Movement (Adam, 1995: 84). Dennis Altman, for instance, argued that true liberation involved all members of society embracing their polymorphous sexuality so that ultimately 'everyone is gay, everyone is straight', a move that would dissolve the line between homo- and heterosexuality and allow the creation of a new consciousness (Altman, 1971: 236). Several years later, Lindsay Taylor argued for the need to dissolve the 'assumption that the two forms of sexual behaviour cannot be found in the same person', thus freeing individuals from the stifling restrictions of social categorization (Taylor, 1977: 128). By this stage the homo/hetero binary was firmly embedded in society, but these writers echoed elements of late 19th- and early 20th-century sexological discourses, as well as their subsequent variants, in order to press their own claims for social progress. They argued that human emancipation lay in embracing sexual fluidity, and the attendant erosion of rigid moralities. Although these ideas receded shortly afterwards, in favour of a model of gay subcultures as quasi-ethnic minorities (Seidman, 1997: 90), they were later rehabilitated at the sharp end of queer theory's deconstructive impulses.

Conclusion

Social constructionist writers generally agree that by the end of the 19th century a 'recognisably "modern" male homosexual identity was beginning to emerge' (Weeks, 1989: 115), accompanied by a new binary that counterposed homosexuality and heterosexuality. While such a homosexual

identity was indeed beginning to emerge, it did so but slowly, and some time passed before this binary started to displace (although not obliterate entirely) the more complex schemas represented by the sexologists' texts.

I would like to suggest that just as sexuality constitutes a 'messy' field of study nowadays (Plummer, 1998: 612), so it did then, and that the expert creators of sexual knowledge offered up not a homo/hetero binary but something much more complex and unruly. Within the interstices of prevailing medico-moral divisions between 'normal' and 'perverse' sexualities lurked liminal forms of desire.

Sometimes these sexological texts are read as key moments in defining 'homosexuality' as an 'inborn' phenomenon, or in any case as something with a singular aetiology (for examples, see Felski, 1998: 4; Garber, 1995: ch. 9; Oosterhuis, 1997: 71; Weeks, 1989: 104). In contrast, I suggest that their writers did not ask whether 'homosexuality' was 'congenital' or 'acquired', because they did not regard same-sex desire as a unitary phenomenon in the first place. Same-sex desires may have been assumed to be congenital *and/or* acquired, depending on the individual case in question. Such distinctions, modified by each succeeding writer and gradually replaced by a continuum model that emphasized *degrees* rather than discrete (if porous) *types* of same-sex desire, provided gateways through which sexually complex attractions and activities might enter into the writers' nosologies. 'Sensuality' and 'acquired antipathic sexual instinct', in particular, were internally fractured states into and out of which individuals might move.

The man with a congenitally based, life-long sexual desire for other men was one figure offered up for consideration in the sexologists' texts, but there were others. Although some men's same-sex desires were assumed to result from bad heredity, others' were said to be brought on by a lack of self-control, masturbation, sexual excess or seduction. Those suffering from degenerate heredity possessed 'tendencies' or 'taints' that might be enlivened by propitious circumstances, while he who was satiated with 'normality' and overcome with curiosity turned to perversity and sank back into his own bestial nature. Some men's same-sex attractions were fleeting, others long-lasting; some were attracted to men alone, others to both men and women; while there were a few individuals who were not sexually attracted to other people at all.

What emerged was not so much a dichotomy between 'perversion' and 'normality' or (later) 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality', but something more complex and contradictory. The 'acquired' pole of the acquired/congenital distinction could – and did – account for those men who did not express a particular commitment to a homosexual role, but had sex with other men regardless. The early years of the 20th century were littered with such characters: Bloch's athletes who were primarily

interested in women but could succumb to other men's charms under the thrall of curiosity or 'genuine sexual excitement', Chauncey's navy personnel who were sexually involved with other men but thought of themselves as 'straight' rather than 'queer', and the cast of students, sailors and queue-loiterers in Quentin Crisp's memoir who did have sex with other men but were nowhere considered 'homosexual', least of all by Crisp himself (Bloch, 1908: 507–8, 518; Chauncey, 1991; Crisp, 1981).

In such moments 'homosexuality' became something of a synecdochical term, standing in for some – but not all – aspects of same-sex desire (Halperin, 1990: 46). The slow emergence of the homo/hetero binary notwithstanding, an identifiable strand of sexual fluidity survived throughout the 20th century, albeit in changing guises that reflected particular social and ideological circumstances: the presumed importance of 'self-control', the segregation offered up by all-male environments, and the increasingly assertive demands for socio-sexual reform. In this way, social organization, prevailing moralities and sexological schemas operated in mutually-reinforcing ways.

With this in mind, we might decentre our concern with the birth of 'homosexuality', 'heterosexuality' and the homo/hetero binary, and more assiduously interrogate historical knowledge claims in the field of sexuality. We might search not only for the identifiably 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' individual, but also think about the ways in which sexual subjects in past times might have taken up rather more fluid conceptions of desire. We can, for instance, set out to look for those who lived their lives on the borders of concepts such as 'inversion', 'antipathic sexual instinct', or 'homosexuality'.

We might carefully unearth the patterns of sexual complexity at play, all the while bearing in mind that inversion, homosexuality and so on were not defined in unified ways in any given historical moment. As we do this, we see the emergence of a set of multiple, overlapping and shifting modes of classification that individuals could take up, to varying degrees, in the context of their own lives. By retaining a healthy scepticism about the reach of the homo/hetero dualism, we can carefully inspect the nuances of male sexual categorization in the past and on into our own time.

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Notes

1. I focus solely on male sexuality here not only because 19th-century sexologists paid relatively little attention to women, but also because male and female 'homosexual' histories and experiences are somewhat distinctive,

- even though they are often yoked together (Chauncey et al., 1991: 6; Oram and Turnbull, 2001: ch. 1; Weeks, 1989: 98). The scope of this article is such that I cannot do justice to both.
2. 'Sexology' refers to the 'science of sexuality' which emerged during the 19th century. Its antecedents are to be found primarily in medicine and psychology (Bristow, 1997: 12–61).
 3. Other authors who generally follow similar presumptions, either implicitly or explicitly, include Crompton (2003), Dynes (1992), Robb (2003), and Weinrich (1992).
 4. Foucault may have overstated Westphal's argument here. The psychiatrist analysed two cases: that of a young woman who desired other young women and thought herself a man, and that of a man who had no desire for other men but expressed an 'effeminate demeanour' and dressed in women's clothing. Westphal viewed both as cases of 'contrary sexual feeling', but did not equate this with same-sex desire *per se*. He did not formulate a theory of sexual object choice, but instead negotiated reasonably fluid relationships between madness, desire and gender presentation (Westphal, 1870; see also Crozier, 2000a: 132, n. 27). Interestingly, Prosser (1998) has suggested Westphal's 'contrary sexual feeling' might be better understood in terms of what we would now call 'transgender' rather than homosexuality. Westphal did cite a discussion of men who 'feel like women [but] whose sexual tendency is directed towards their own sex' (1870: 92), however he took this not from his own cases but from the writings of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (see Ulrichs, 1994).
 5. In contrast, some constructionist writers trace modern homosexuality's genesis to 18th-century molly subcultures (McIntosh, 1968; Trumbach, 1988). Further discussion of such subcultures can be found in Greenberg (1988); McIntosh (1968); Norton (1997); Padgug (1992); Robb (2003); Weeks (1989).
 6. Such a reading would dovetail with (a) Greenberg's suggestion that 19th-century psychiatry did not invent individual sexual subjectivities, but instead granted credibility to notions about sexual selfhood that were already circulating subculturally (Greenberg, 1988: 408); and (b) the writings of Chauncey (1982, 1991, 1994) and Fone (2000), who argue that we ought not take medicine as the only influence on the construction of same-sex desire during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There is one problem with Halperin's reading, though: if institutional discourses and strategies were 'carefully isolated' from 'popular moral attitudes and behaviors' (Halperin, 2002: 30), then how were they effective as modes of social regulation?
 7. In fact, Halperin's periodization varies. He argues that 'people belonged henceforward to one or other of the two exclusive categories' from the late 19th century (1990: 16), but also that the new conceptualization did not enter popular discourse until some time in the early 20th century (1990: 17). In another chapter, he dates this shift to the 18th and 19th centuries more generally (1990: 43).

8. Along with Ulrichs, who started writing in 1864, Karoly Maria Benkert (1869, translated in Benkert, 1997) and John Addington Symonds (1975 [1891]) were also important. Although a detailed consideration of the lives and works of private individuals and public activists is beyond the scope of this essay, I do not mean to underplay their importance to a consideration of sexuality during the period. For more discussion, see Robb (2003: ch. 5).
9. Rosario (1997: 77) offers a discussion of degeneracy theory, developed by Benedict Morel. A curious combination of environmental and congenital ideas about disease, it was popular in the late 19th century.
10. In this respect Krafft-Ebing's views echoed those of Moreau, who wrote in 1877 that poverty, poisoning, masturbation, 'wounds', or an excess of sexual love were likely to set off a predisposed organism (Symonds, 1975: 123). August Forel agreed that a weak tendency to inversion could be aggravated by seduction (1908: 248). On the centrality of masturbation to 19th-century sexual ideology, see Laqueur (2003: passim) and Weeks (1977: 23–5).
11. The concept of 'inversion' reflected the assumption that a 'manly' desire necessitated an attraction to women and that, as a result, a man attracted to other men must possess the 'sex instinct' of a woman. What was inverted was the sex instinct itself, not necessarily the whole gendered personality. Thus, the relationships between 'inversion' and a conventional masculine comportment *per se* were complex: one's sexual predilections were related to, but did not entirely determine, whether or not one would express a conventional masculine social role. For an illustration, see the varied cases reported in Krafft-Ebing (1932); a discussion is offered by Copley (1989). Academic accounts which posit a more interdependent relationship between inversion and conventional masculinity than I am proposing here include Chauncey (1982) and Halperin (1991).
12. For the argument that Moll was broadly sympathetic to same-sex love early in his career, but much less so by the 1930s, see Herzer (1985: 19).
13. For further discussion on some of the tensions in Ellis' work, see Chauncey (1982).

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