

DEBATING THE FIELD

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Rethinking Periodization, Priorities, and Liberalism in British Queer History

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Abstract

This article revisits the development of the field of British queer history to argue that the division that began in the later 1970s—between works focused on the periods before and after the late nineteenth century—has obscured underlying methodological unities that developed within the scholarship since the 1990s. The failure to emphasize common cultural history methodologies that have been the hallmark of the best works analyzing same-sex desire and transing gender for the period from the late seventeenth century onward is due in part to the separating off of histories of same-sex desire between women from those studies focused on men. This article argues that a Foucauldian understanding of power, the liberal public sphere, and liberal political systems, all dating from the late seventeenth century, provide a unified context for the formulating and unraveling of a wide range of self-understandings in relation to gender and sexual desires. What explains the developments of the late nineteenth century stems from the first such self-understandings being formulated for the requirements of a rights-bearing subject within a liberal political system. This approach highlights the ethical component of public political identities, and the consequences of this for British queer history going forward.

This article provides an argument for why our understanding of the late nineteenth-century origins of modern homosexual identity might be incorrect in ways that have distorted our approach to and analysis of same-sex desire in the modern era more broadly. It does so by examining the historiography of British queer history, starting with the origins of the field in the 1970s, in order to revisit the rift that developed early on between scholars who examined same-sex desire in the eighteenth century and those who followed a more Foucauldian understanding of subject formation that placed the origins of homosexual identity in the late nineteenth century. The intensity of that contest left a stark division between the work pertaining to those two periods, with little effort made since to highlight the continuities that span that division.

Ideally, elements of this argument would have been in the introduction of either my first or second book, which examined aspects of same-sex desire and sex between men in Britain, primarily focusing on the first half of the nineteenth century. With the first, I set out to investigate what seemed to be one of the most neglected periods in the historiography

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of British queer history. I recovered over a thousand newspaper reports focusing on sex between men that appeared in major London newspapers between 1820 and 1870. I used these and other sources to write a history of how average individuals reacted to instances of sex between men in their communities and families. My second book covered roughly the same period as the first, but in this case I presented evidence of what I was able to identify as an almost entirely forgotten parliamentary effort between the 1820s and the early 1840s to end the death penalty for sodomy. That book focused on reconstructing the political events in a thematic and chronological way and on highlighting the efforts that had been made at the time and since to obscure this law reform effort.¹

In each case, I avoided aligning my findings too closely with the interpretive frames associated with either the origins of homosexual identity in the late nineteenth century or the sodomite subcultures of the eighteenth century, as neither seemed a good fit for the evidence I had amassed. For the former group, events that occurred earlier were of secondary significance, while for the latter, no interpretive frame was as hegemonic as the Foucauldian model for subject formation, leading to a fragmented field comprising works that often seem disconnected from one another in their questions and methodologies. I was not ready to venture a broad reinterpretation of the period based on my findings, hoping that the quantity and uniqueness of my primary source material would be enough to attract interest. Further research for my next book project, *“Called It Macaroni”*,² and my teaching of LGBTQ+ history in a way that has exposed me to the wide range of work carried out within the fields of queer and trans history, has changed that.

In the pages that follow, I argue that a version of the process of subject formation associated with the late nineteenth century was in operation from at least the late seventeenth century onward, and that much already-published work supports this assertion. This argument builds from the observation that Foucault’s model of subject formation is based on his concept of power, which begins to operate in fundamentally new ways from the late seventeenth century. Foucault made his arguments about the uniqueness of the texts that sparked the late nineteenth-century developments fifty years ago, when the recovery of the history of sexuality for earlier periods was only just beginning.³

Key elements of this argument have already been put forward by Anna Clark in the 1990s, albeit without references to Foucault’s definition of power, in an article in which she analyzed how Anne Lister thought of herself in relation to her desires.⁴ If the uniqueness of the Lister archive limited the degree to which Clark argued for the broader applicability of her methodology, a range of works focused primarily on lesbian history have shown how such a wider application is possible using source material less rich in introspective detail than the Lister diaries. Many of these works, discussed below, focus on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and build their arguments from the idea that the primary mechanism for thinking about how individuals relate to their desires is through the creative recombination of the cultural texts to which they have access. The strength of the epistemological division established early on, though, between the work focused on the late nineteenth century onward and what came before, has marginalized the significance of this work.

¹ Charles Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex between Men in Britain’s Age of Reform* (California, 2009); Charles Upchurch, *“Beyond the Law”: The Politics of Ending the Death Penalty for Sodomy in Britain* (Temple University, 2021).

² Charles Upchurch, *“Called It Macaroni”: A British Queer History of the Revolutionary Era* (forthcoming).

³ Michel Foucault, Michel Senellart and Collège de France, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁴ Anna Clark, “Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 1 (1996): 23–50.

Something significant did occur in the late nineteenth century, but it was not the first time that individuals appropriated cultural texts to argue that same-sex desire (or trans-gender) was fundamental to how they understood themselves and their desires. That process had been occurring and unraveling for many individuals and groups, in a range of different ways and configurations, for generations before. What changed was that one of those configurations of self-understanding was constructed in a way that was tailored to the constraints and requirements of liberal political systems, and so as to be a subject position from which to argue for a liberal political reform.⁵ The term “homosexual” has been used by scholars to denote an identity of far greater fixity than previous terms that denoted a predilection for same-sex desire, such as a “taste.” Up until now this fixity has been explained as a result of how that term was defined in specific medical texts, which were themselves embedded in an increasingly dense and intrusive web of regulatory discourses. Decade after decade, so the argument goes, those regulatory discourses intruded on more aspects of previously unregulated behavior in an uneven but intensifying process that built from the late seventeenth century onward. Since sexuality is defined as a regulatory mechanism, and sexual identity a product of this process, a sexual identity occurring earlier is not possible, according to the standard application of the Foucauldian formulation.

But the rigidity associated with the characteristics of the term “homosexual” can also be explained if we understand such fixed characteristics as a requirement of subjects recognized within liberal political systems. The term “homosexual,” and the specifics of what it denoted, was defined first within political discourse more than a decade before it appeared in the medical literature. An earlier term with related characteristics—“urning”—circulated within the German public sphere from the 1860s. As Douglas Pretsell has recently shown, likely thousands of men, primarily in German-speaking lands, adopted and debated the term “urning” to explain their sexual desires and gendered identities.⁶ Some of the first recorded usages of the term “homosexual” were in the context of this German debate, begun by the lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, in the interests of legal reform. The terms “homosexual” and “urning” were first defined and utilized by men who were aware of the ancient terminology for sexuality and desire, but who needed a new term, one specifically tailored to making a rights-based argument within a liberal political system. The process of defining a certain social category to receive differential treatment under the law was not dissimilar to how liberal systems of government in British colonies created categories through which they interacted with their subjects. These categories were similarly often an ill-fit for the colonized individuals who nevertheless chose to inhabit them for strategic purposes, to gain benefits, or more often to escape some forms of coercion.⁷ The rigidity and fixity of the category of “the homosexual,” and the characteristics it described, had far more to do with the requirements of being a recognized *ethical rights-bearing subject* within liberal political systems, as it was only from such a subject position that it was possible to argue for a type of reform (the mitigation of the laws against sex between men) within liberal political systems, which were themselves evolving and becoming potentially more responsive to such arguments. Although medical discourse helped to propagate the term “homosexual,” leading to its own systems of regulation, so many of its unique characteristics stemmed from its origins within the context of liberal politics, building from the public debates over the ethics of punishing sex between men that had been ongoing (fitfully and fragmentedly) within the liberal public sphere for generations.⁸

⁵ Hubert Kennedy, *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Alyson, 1988).

⁶ Douglas Pretsell, *Urning: Queer Identity in the German Nineteenth Century* (Toronto, 2024).

⁷ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Foundation Books, 1998); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (California, 1997).

⁸ Upchurch, *Beyond the Law*.

Liberal and Foucauldian Frameworks

This combination of liberal political and Foucauldian frameworks is the context within which we need to understand the development of modern British queer history, a context that extends from the late seventeenth century to the present. That context is defined in part by the process of subject formation based on the Foucauldian understanding of power in general, and biopower in particular. It is also defined by the establishment, also in the late seventeenth century, of the liberal public sphere, where ideas could be debated and circulated, and liberal political systems, where, however imperfectly, ideas within society could influence governing systems.⁹ The concept of biopower focuses on how societies that generate sustained surpluses manipulate those surpluses, withholding them from some and directing them towards others, through state and other institutions, shaping individual actions in often subtle ways while generating less resistance than outright coercion would. This process of exercising power is also engaged in by centers of power/knowledge outside the state, from a school, to a publication, to a professional association, that use a range of often subtle techniques to direct resources and the energy of individuals away from certain goals and activities, and towards others. This form of exercising power is intertwined with the development of liberal economic and political systems, and liberal individualism. Foucault's final works, on the origins of biopower, were specifically about political economy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and how states allowed greater freedoms in certain areas that were believed to be necessary for wealth generation.¹⁰ This led to a freer flow of information, necessary for commerce, and more autonomy for the individual in some areas, even as that autonomy was purchased by submitting to greater discipline in other areas.

To be sure, these mechanisms existed earlier. Foucault uses the medieval courts as his first example of the development of the sort of power he is interested in. But the sustained and increasing surpluses, both of material goods and of publicly circulating ideas, mark the period from the late seventeenth century onward as uniquely dynamic. So too do the new ideas of contract theory of the state, which supported the supremacy of parliament over the hereditary claims of monarchs, and the theories of liberal individualism that defined the type of individual who might participate in the governing of the state in absence of the primacy of the hereditary principle.¹¹ The eighteenth-century liberal individual, with increasing access to a multiplicity of often contradictory cultural texts that might be used to understand and interpret desires, and with increasing material resources to act on those desires, needs to have a more prominent place in our understanding of British queer history. As Harry Oosterhuis has recently argued, the propagation in the eighteenth century of the idea that an individual, rather than the church or the state, owned their own body has necessary implications for how an individual might think of internal desires as the truth of the self.¹²

From the very beginnings of the emergence of the liberal public sphere in Britain, the propriety of the existing laws and social norms around same-sex desire were debated. Even when the debate was simply between advocates of one punishment versus another, such a public debate was political, and generated cultural texts encountered by others.¹³

⁹ Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (Yale, 2009); Bruce G. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton, 1996).

¹⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (Pantheon Books, 1978).

¹² Harry Oosterhuis, "Sodomy, Possessive Individualism, and Godless Nature: Eighteenth-Century Traces of Homosexual Assertiveness," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 32 (2023): 288–312.

¹³ Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (Oxford, 2012); Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700–1830* (GMP, 1992).

This was similar to the ways in which the proper role of women was debated. As Joan Scott has recently reiterated, all critiques of the Enlightenment tradition that point out the ways in which lived practices within states do not live up to professed principles on which those states are organized, are indebted to the feminist critics of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries who pioneered and propagated these arguments.¹⁴ So too did antislavery efforts develop “cautiously and haphazardly.” Christopher Brown has demonstrated, that “various individuals and groups found through their challenge to the Atlantic slave trade an opportunity to establish new identities, new self-conceptions, to create for themselves a new place within society and a new role in public life.”¹⁵ As Seymour Drescher argued, in his sweeping survey of abolitions of slavery that occurred outside the context of all-out warfare, two factors were central: a liberal public sphere, where ideas could be debated and challenged, and a political system that was to some degree responsive to political pressure and political movements.¹⁶ The public debate that ran throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries over the nature of same-sex desire and the proper societal reaction to it should be seen as a central part of queer history, and queer politics, just as such debates around gender, race, and class were also the first steps that made possible later political mobilizations to address injustices.¹⁷

An untold number of self-understandings came out of this process of debate within the public sphere, as individuals used the cultural texts that they had available to try and reconcile their internal desires to the requirements they faced within the communities in which they lived. Most of these self-understandings ended with those who created them, while others were picked up for a time within a friend group, a local community, or a subculture, sometimes spawning words that might even become broadly recognized, at least for a time, including “female husband,” “female genius,” “molly,” “jack,” “sodomite,” or “pretty sort of gentleman.” The words and concepts that persisted brought benefits to those who adopted them, such as helping them to find other like-minded individuals for emotional or physical connection, or to categorize a stranger just met. Other terms persisted because they became embedded in regulatory or other systems of knowledge. The words “urning” and “homosexual” were initially ephemeral terms, much like many others. However, their ability to become established within liberal political debates and political systems, holding out the possibility of enhanced rights for those who conformed their self-presentations and self-understandings to the requirements of the category, helped to ensure their widespread adoption and prominence within circulating discourses. Individuals cannot gain political rights in nineteenth-century and later liberal political systems because they feel a certain way, no matter how strongly, but they can come to those who “are” a certain thing or within a certain category.

Grounding the field of modern queer history in these ways has implications that go far beyond addressing the historiographical issues discussed below. It not only better explains the evidence from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, but it

¹⁴ Joan Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, 2017); Karen O’Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2009); Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage Occasion’d by the Duke & Dutchess of Mazarine’s Case, which is also Considered* (London, 1700).

¹⁵ Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (North Carolina, 2006), 2.

¹⁶ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford, 1988).

¹⁷ In relation to the lower classes, historians have recovered these debates at the local level, as well as those that appeared in the public sphere. E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New Press, 1991); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Pelican, 1968); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983); Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (California, 1995).

also addresses developments in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As draconian laws and rigid requirements for political inclusion have given way (to some degree) in certain states, individuals within those states have had less need to identify with the rigidities of Victorian categories. The greater public prominence of a range of differing genders and sexualities in more recent decades can be seen as the continuation of the process by which individuals creatively appropriate texts and ideas to form self-understandings that align with their social contexts. To the degree to which the state withdraws from certain forms of overt regulation of gender and sexuality, a greater range of individual and group self-understandings and self-presentations outside of the categories recognized and policed by the state gains greater prominence, especially as individuals have less reason to police themselves to conform to state-recognized categories.

In addition to better explaining the evidence throughout the modern period, the framework proposed here sets new questions and concerns at the center of modern British queer history, emphasizing some projects for further research and sidelining others. It also further reinforces the importance of queer history in maintaining the liberal structures and institutions within which the public political arguments for queer inclusion have always existed.

The Earliest Framings of the Field

What became the field of British queer history, which took shape in the 1970s and 1980s, grew out of a rich and experimental moment, as scholars grappled with how best to recover and understand the history of homosexuality and lesbianism. Material from across Europe, from other parts of the world, and from periods ranging from ancient to modern, were brought into the conversation, as were direct references to and borrowings from the fields of anthropology, psychology, and sociology.¹⁸ From the perspective of fifty years later, it can be surprising to see the literary evidence that had already been identified as relevant to the project of the history of homosexuality in these early stages, such as the papers of Horace Walpole, passages from John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, or Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random*, Thomas Cannon's *Ancient and Modern Pederasty Investigated and Exemplified*, passages from Montesquieu, Beccaria, and Voltaire, as well as many texts from ancient Greece and Rome. Perhaps more significant than any other single body of source material in shaping the early work, though, were the records resulting from state prosecutions of sodomy, allowing in some cases the ability to track (or project) patterns in behavior over extended periods. The volume of these prosecution records put the punishment of sex between men by the state at the center of the field of the history of homosexuality, even as, from the start, the distortions this might cause were acknowledged, given the highly selective nature of state prosecutions and disagreements among scholars over what fluctuations in prosecution rates for any given period might mean. Another central concern of the field in these earliest years, coming from the discipline of sociology, focused on when homosexuality as a social category first came into being.¹⁹ The first important intervention in this area was written by Mary McIntosh, in 1969. The same-sex desires of individuals in the past had previously been investigated; McIntosh's innovation was to use the theories of sociology to demonstrate how defining a stigmatized group, and policing the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, allowed for the greater regulation of the society as a

¹⁸ Jan Löfström, "The Birth of the Queen/the Modern Homosexual: Historical Explanations Revisited," *The Sociological Review* 45, no. 1 (1997): 24–41.

¹⁹ Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago, 2000), 241.

whole. Drawing on evidence related to the molly houses and the public discussions that surrounded them, she identified the emergence of a “homosexual role” in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.²⁰

More scholars brought evidence into the conversation and attempted to identify patterns of change and the reasons for them. Factors such as urbanization, the rise of industrial capitalism, the influence of religion, shifts within gender relations, the rise of expert knowledges, and the rise of free wage labor were all invoked to try and explain perceived patterns in the evidence.²¹ Reflecting the influence of McIntosh and other sociologists, attention was focused on the question of when homosexual subcultures first developed within major cities. Some dated these back as far as the late Middle Ages, while others emphasized late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century developments. Others argued over whether or not such communities were continuous, the degree to which they were necessary for men to pursue sexual relations with other men, and the extent to which individuals within them thought of themselves as different from others.²²

The Arguments for the Late Nineteenth Century

Two works, published at about the same time, put forward compelling and soon-to-be widely accepted answers to some of these questions. Jeffrey Weeks, also coming from the field of sociology, argued that the late nineteenth century saw “new definitions of homosexuality and the homosexual” that resulted in large part from “the triumph of urbanization and industrial capitalism.” Yet when listing the “recognizably modern form for concepts and meanings which are now commonplaces of public discussion,” he included “the notion of ‘the housewife’, ‘the prostitute’, ‘the child’; and the concept of ‘the homosexual’.”²³ In Weeks’s framing, “the homosexual” is a social category operating like many others and shaped within the context of the broader social forces of the time. Weeks argued that, unlike homosexual behavior, “homosexual identity [was] historically specific—and a comparatively recent phenomenon in Britain” and that while “there are signs of the emergence of this role from at least the seventeenth century in Britain, it crystallized into a modern form only in the late nineteenth century.”²⁴ Although in volume 1 of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, the argument is built on examples dating from the late seventeenth century onward, later scholars most often cited his dating of the origins of homosexual identity to the late nineteenth century and his assertion that “[h]omosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”²⁵ Independently but sympathetically, Weeks and Foucault brought forward a range of evidence in support of their argument that the late nineteenth century was the critical moment when acts became understood as identities, even as both of their arguments acknowledged the importance of earlier developments.

Subsequent works built on this framework. Its explanatory power seemed to consolidate in the 1990s across fields and historiographies, and likely gained momentum within British studies as it coincided with the hundredth anniversary of the Oscar Wilde trials.

²⁰ Mary McIntosh, “The Homosexual Role,” *Social Problems* 16, no. 2 (Autumn, 1968): 182–92.

²¹ Löfström, “The Birth of the Queen/the Modern Homosexual.”

²² Randolph Trumbach, “London’s Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Social History* 11 (1977): 1–33.

²³ Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Quartet Books, 1977), 2.

²⁴ Weeks, *Coming Out*, 4.

²⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43.

Two academic works in particular, both using the methodologies of literary studies, captured scholarly attention at that moment: Ed Cohen's 1993 *Talk on the Wilde Side* and Alan Sinfield's 1994 *The Wilde Century*. In different ways, both authors argued that Wilde's case "significantly altered the shape of the Victorian sexual imagination...not only had Wilde been confirmed as *the* sexual deviant for the late nineteenth century, but he had become the paradigmatic example for an emerging public definition of a new 'type' of male sexual actor: 'the homosexual'."²⁶

Also appearing at this time, and firmly grounded in the sources and methodologies of social and cultural history, was George Chauncey's 1994 book, *Gay New York*. Chauncey's work was internationally influential for its thoroughness and originality, as he documented the "gay world that flourished" in New York between 1890 and 1940, which had "been almost entirely forgotten" in popular memory and academic work.²⁷ Building out from the experience of the working class, among others, Chauncey expressed skepticism over "some recent social theories" that had attributed "almost limitless cultural power" to medical discourse, arguing instead that "the invert and the normal man, the homosexual and the heterosexual, were not inventions of the elite but were popular discursive categories before they became elite discursive categories."²⁸ Chauncey left the door open to the possibility of continuities between his evidence and the eighteenth-century molly houses of London, but the ability to make such connections, he argued, fell out of the scope of his study. He explained that it "will take another generation of research" before such connections might be made, even as "we should never presume the absence of something before we have looked for it."²⁹ The chronology of Chauncey's study reinforced the growing emphasis on the importance of the late nineteenth century as a transitional moment, even as he stressed the unevenness of a process of change across the categories of class, race, and ethnicity that played out over decades.³⁰

The Plurality of Approaches for the Eighteenth Century

As scholarship focused on the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries seemed to be consolidating around a core set of methods and questions, arguments over how to approach material in the earlier period also advanced. In 1982, Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* built directly on the methodologies of McIntosh, Weeks, and Foucault, demonstrating the ways in which "homosexuality" (which he used in a "directly physical—and hence culturally neutral"—sense) was understood "in the mental universe of the people" and "in the social structure" of Renaissance England. Most of the chapters of his book described Renaissance-era expressions of same-sex desire and the reactions sparked by those acts, while the final chapter identified very different understandings of that behavior that seemed to date from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Reinforcing McIntosh's earlier observations, Bray argued that what "had once been thought of as a potential in all sinful human nature had become the particular vice of a certain kind of person, with their own distinctive way of life."³¹

²⁶ Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (Routledge, 1993), 1–2; Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (Columbia, 1994). Also influential with academic and popular audiences was the earlier work of playwright Neil Bartlett: Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man: A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde* (Serpent's Tail, 1988).

²⁷ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (Basic Books, 1994), 1.

²⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 5–6, 27.

²⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 12.

³⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 27.

³¹ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (Gay Men's Press, 1982), 10, 17, 104.

Concurrently, through a series of journal articles and chapters, beginning in 1977 and extending through the 1980s, Randolph Trumbach articulated arguments that historicized the development of new gender roles in this same period. Trumbach argued that in “traditional European societies, men who did not restrict their sexual experience to marriage usually had sex with both adolescent boys and female whores. But as modern Western societies emerged in the late seventeenth century this pattern began to change. By 1700 there were appearing ... a minority of markedly effeminate men whose most outstanding characteristic was that they desired to have sex only with other males.”³² Trumbach argued that this transition occurred in London, Paris, and Amsterdam, and cited “the development at that time of the companionate marriage and the domesticated family” as causal, arguing that “the appearance of the English molly and his European counterparts would therefore indicate that male and female roles had begun to grow nearly equal.” This final point built on his observation that in “most other cultures that produce an adult male transvestite group ... the role usually serves as a bridge between the male and female roles in societies where those roles are not radically differentiated.”³³ The works of Trumbach and Bray became the most cited for this earlier period.

By the early 1990s, the tide was turning decisively in favor of the methodologies that stressed that gender and sexuality were socially constructed. The methodologies of cultural history, which became increasingly predominant in histories of gender and sexuality, stressed the importance of contextualizing historical subjects and of understanding concepts in the context of the time and place within which they arose.³⁴ As these ideas took hold, works that used the term “homosexual” to describe a less historicized understanding of the self in relation to sexual desires came under increasing criticism. John Boswell, Louis Crompton, and Rictor Norton faced such criticism, even as each made important contributions to the field in the 1980s and early 1990s.³⁵ Not only was the possibility of a homosexual identity before either the late seventeenth or late nineteenth centuries questioned, but so too was the idea of an authentic desire outside of cultural influences. The idea that the law constituted desire became common, focusing attention on how systems of power and knowledge, because they structured a culture, influenced not only how individuals thought of their desires, but what shape those desires ultimately took.³⁶

A further rift developed in the mid-1990s when Emma Donoghue’s *Passions between Women* pointed to a set of questions and approaches to the history of same-sex desire that was not framed by the idea of substantial transformation in either the late seventeenth century or the late nineteenth century. In a 1994 article, Trumbach had dated, rather precisely, the origins of the modern lesbian role in the Western gender system to the middle of the eighteenth century. Donoghue directly challenged Trumbach’s approach, arguing that “I am dubious about any attempts to tie such a profound shift in attitudes to a particular decade or half century ... When seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts are full of women loving each other and playing a variety of roles, it makes no sense to try and

³² Randolph Trumbach, “The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660–1750,” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. George Chauncey, Martha Vicinus and Martin B. Duberman (NAL Books, 1989), 130, 140; Randolph Trumbach, “Sodomitical Subcultures: Sodomitical Roles, and the Gender Revolution of the Eighteenth Century: The Recent Historiography,” in *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Cambridge, 1987).

³³ The text left out of the quote reads: “—whether the North American berdache, the Polynesian mahu, or the Omani xanith—”: Trumbach, “The Birth of the Queen,” 140.

³⁴ Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (California, 1989).

³⁵ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980); Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th-Century England* (California, 1985); Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House*.

³⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 85.

track down the birth of a single lesbian role.”³⁷ Donoghue also contested the idea that “only after the publications of late-nineteenth-century male sexologists such as Havelock Ellis did words for eroticism between women enter the English language.” She explains that her work is “urgently committed to dispelling the myth that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lesbian culture was rarely registered in language and that women who fell in love with women had no words to describe themselves.”³⁸ Donoghue argued that the abundant evidence she had uncovered did “not seem to refer only to isolated sexual acts, as is often claimed, but to the emotions, desires, styles, tastes, and behavioural tendencies that can make up an identity.”³⁹

Donoghue directly challenged the major analytical and chronological divisions shaping the history of sex between men at the time, but her arguments did not significantly alter the direction of those historiographies. A few years later, Trumbach published volume 1 of *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, in which he focused on providing “the history of extramarital sexual relations between men and women in eighteenth-century London” as framed by his thesis that “[a] revolution in the gender relations of Western societies occurred in the first generation of the eighteenth century” resulting in “a system of three genders composed of men, women, and sodomites” and that “a comparable minority of masculinized women who exclusively desired other women did not appear until the 1770s.”⁴⁰ Trumbach did not reconsider his thesis in light of Donoghue’s findings, which he discounts in two footnotes, arguing that she “writes from a declared lesbian feminist view ... rejects any comparison ... refuses to see” and again “fails to see.”⁴¹ What might have been a more robust and clarifying debate between Donoghue and Trumbach, given their starkly contrasting positions, was cut short when Donoghue transitioned to a highly successful career as a novelist, screenwriter, and playwright.

As more individuals worked exclusively in the period from the late nineteenth century onward, they often cited the late nineteenth-century origins of homosexual identity in their introductions, as part of the temporal justifications for their studies, reinforcing the strength of the consensus around this point. Scholars in the developing interdisciplinary field of LGBTQ+ studies, many of whom were primarily grounded in contemporary concerns, repeated and reinforced the division. Trumbach and Norton became known for defending the idea of the eighteenth-century origins of the homosexual role. Norton, writing as an independent scholar, did so by amassing an enormous quantity of historical evidence documenting the prevalence of same-sex desire and the discussion of it in the eighteenth-century public sphere, questioning the necessity of theoretical models for interpreting it.⁴² Trumbach argued for the interpretive frame he had developed, writing that “Foucault’s argument that modern homosexuality was a product of the late nineteenth century... was simultaneously made by Jeffrey Weeks ... [and] has been used by Jonathan Ned

³⁷ Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1995); Randolph Trumbach, “The Origin and Development of the Modern Lesbian Role in the Western Gender System: Northwestern Europe and the United States 1750–1990,” *Historical Reflections* 20 (1994): 287–320.

³⁸ Donoghue, *Passions between Women*, 2–3.

³⁹ Donoghue, *Passions between Women*, 3.

⁴⁰ Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, vol. 1, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, 1998), 3–4, 8, 65.

⁴¹ Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 432, n. 5; 471, n. 13.

⁴² Norton received his PhD in English in the early 1970s and remained outside of the academy, publishing *Mother Clap’s Molly House* as an independent scholar with Gay Men’s Press in 1992. He has made much of his evidence freely available on his website: <https://rictornorton.co.uk/>. His paper, “F*ck Foucault: How Eighteenth-Century Homosexual History Validates the Essentialist Model,” based on a 2010 public presentation, is also available on his website.

Katz and Kevin White ... But all four of these historians fail to see that the late-nineteenth-century discussion of homosexuality and heterosexuality (in which the words were first coined) did not invent the roles that they considered.”⁴³ This debate did not consider the idea that a false dichotomy might be being created, and that the evidence and interpretations from the two periods could be reconciled. Works that did point in this direction, such as Alan Bray’s *The Friend*, had resonance with the questions and concerns of Donoghue and other historians writing about lesbians in the period before the late nineteenth century. *The Friend* built from questions raised by Bray’s first book, but it was published posthumously and did not have a significant impact on subsequent historiography.⁴⁴

The Consolidation of Lesbian History as Cultural History

The most successful cultural histories of same-sex desire in the period before the late nineteenth century focused on women. Yet much of this work (due to the emphasis on the late nineteenth-century moment) was not seen as representing the dominant paradigm for the history of same-sex desire. Being divorced from the story of identity formation (despite what scholars like Donoghue argued)—and removed from direct engagement with questions of state power—these studies failed to capture historical attention to the degree that the histories of sex between men had. Histories of lesbian relationships and identities written in this period focused on analyzing clusters of primary source evidence; limited the analysis to a particular time and place; did not attempt to explain shifting patterns of prosecutions; and drew on source material less defined by state concerns. These were assets when analyzing the self-understandings of subjects in the context of their time and place, although this was not widely recognized at the time.

The clearest and most comprehensive statement on the methodology for work that focused on the period before the late nineteenth century was Anna Clark’s 1996 article “Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity.”⁴⁵ Clark built from a unique primary source, the twenty-six volumes of Anne Lister’s diaries, in which Lister recorded her inner feelings about her sexual and emotional attractions to other women, notably stating that “I love the fairer sex and thus, beloved by them in turn my heart revolts from any other love but theirs.”⁴⁶ In her opening pages, Clark recounted the Foucauldian argument that homosexual identity only became possible in the late nineteenth century, but then cited work by Donoghue, Trumbach, and others to contest this idea. Directly quoting the work of Jeffrey Weeks, she amplified his argument that “the modern self ... is a reflexive process, made and remade by the person in terms of his or her own experience.” Clark then added that individuals “deliberately construct their own identities with three elements: their own temperaments and inherent desires; their material circumstances; and the cultural representations available to them.”⁴⁷ Using the Lister diaries, Clark demonstrated how Lister drew on the cultural texts from her time, such as Rousseau’s arguments concerning the unique inner self, to justify her own break with conventional behavior, following her own heart, and placing her desires for other women at the center of her self-understanding.

The most successful work implementing the methodology set out by Clark, but over a broader temporal span and using a wider variety of source materials, was Martha Vicinus’s 2004 *Intimate Friends*. Vicinus, who was “convinced that all categories and definitions must remain provisional,” argued “against transformative moments, or a linear history, or even

⁴³ Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 18–19; Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1997), 6, 8, 9–10, 25, 30, 37–38, 61–64, 71, 77, 136, 178.

⁴⁴ Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago, 2003), 5–7.

⁴⁵ Clark, “Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity,” 23–50.

⁴⁶ Clark, “Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity,” 23.

⁴⁷ Clark, “Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity,” 27.

the necessity of a shared community of lesbians for the history of the lesbian.” Although her chapters were largely chronological, she maintained that the organization of the book “emphasizes different types of relationships.”⁴⁸ With this statement, Vicinus underscored her distance from the ideas that had structured much of the historiography of sex between men since in the 1970s, eschewing the idea of a break in the early eighteenth century or in the late nineteenth century and the search for identifiable types like “the sodomite” or “the homosexual,” and questioning the importance of a subculture for facilitating connections between individuals.

Intimate Friends did not primarily use state records, which meant that not only was it not weighed down by the attempt to discern patterns in state practices but also that it was not in dialogue with state definitions of sex. While not denying the importance or presence of sex acts between women, Vicinus argued that “[p]hysical consummation was less important than the mutual recognition of passion. The intricate interplay between the spirit and the body is central to understanding women’s intimate friendships.” Sex acts recede in importance in this formulation, as “[r]egardless of their circumstances, for the women discussed here, same-sex love was their primary emotional bond.”⁴⁹ Vicinus offered not only a more contextualized understanding of sex, but of desire as well, arguing that “[a] multiplicity of same-sex desires has always existed, and the task of the historian is not to simplify, but to illuminate the complexities and the contradictions in the various texts and documents that have survived.”⁵⁰

Vicinus, like Anna Clark, analyzed the ways in which historical actors drew on existing cultural texts, creatively recombining them to fashion self-understandings that better fit their internal desires. In *Intimate Friends*, Vicinus “traces how women took elements from two separate categories, romantic friendship and Sapphic sexuality, to fashion something new—a personal identity based upon a sexualized, or at least recognizably eroticized, relationship with another woman. Even though they did not use the word lesbian, women self-consciously sought to understand their feelings, their actions, and their relationships apart from men.”⁵¹

This careful attention to this sort of contextualization was a feature of other lesbian histories, such as Valerie Traub’s 2002 *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, in which she attempted “not only to demonstrate the existence of a cultural awareness of women who desired other women in the early modern period,” but also how “it is precisely a historicized understanding of discourses of eroticism that allows us to claim certain representations as, if not exactly lesbian, then as crucial materials in a genealogy of female homoerotic desire.” This type of contextualization was also evident in George Haggerty’s work on Horace Walpole, which, like the lesbian history from the same period, was built from an archive that was constructed independently of state categories and concerns.⁵² Thomas Laqueur’s 2003 cultural history of masturbation also shares some of these qualities, demonstrating how a regulatory regime grew up around a practice in a way independent of the state.⁵³

⁴⁸ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago, 2004), xxiii–xxiv. See also Martha Vicinus, “‘They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong’: The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity,” in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality? International Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies*, ed. Dennis Altman et al. (GMP Publishers, 1989).

⁴⁹ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xix.

⁵⁰ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xxiii–xxiv.

⁵¹ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xviii.

⁵² Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2002), 6, 13; George E. Haggerty, *Horace Walpole’s Letters: Masculinity and Friendship in the Eighteenth Century* (Bucknell, 2011); George E. Haggerty, “Queer Feelings: Love and Loss in the Letters of Horace Walpole,” *Humanities (Basel)* 10, no. 4 (2021): 108.

⁵³ Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (Zone Books, 2003).

While among the most innovative works on same-sex desire in the modern period, many scholars did not see lesbian histories as representative of the paradigm for how to work on issues of same-sex male desire before the late nineteenth century. Their greater separation from questions of state power, since for the most part they were not based on state prosecutions or state definitions of sex as were the histories of sex between men, likely contributed to this. Vicinus, Clark, and Donoghue used the term “identity” to discuss the women they examined but this did not have a significant impact on the works that argued (overtly or implicitly) for the late nineteenth-century origins of homosexual identity.⁵⁴ The best new works on the history of sex between men from the late nineteenth century onward, published in the early to mid-2000s, used these same cultural history methodologies to emphasize the complexity of notions of identity, although they stressed the differences between this work and lesbian history, rather than the methodological similarities.

“The New Gay History” as Cultural History

In the early 2000s, a new wave of British queer history monographs consolidated the focus of the field on the late nineteenth century onward. These works included Laura Doan’s 2001 *Fashioning Sapphism*, Matt Cook’s 2003 *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, Harry Cocks’s 2003 *Nameless Offences*, Sean Brady’s 2005 *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain*, Morris Kaplan’s 2005 *Sodom on the Thames*, and Matt Houlbrook’s 2006 *Queer London*.⁵⁵ The works of Cook, Cocks, and Houlbrook especially stood out for their innovative use of sources and methodologies, and these quickly became among the most cited and assigned of the new works. Cocks drew attention to the ways in which sex between men was prosecuted throughout the nineteenth century, calling into question many of the arguments made about the significance of the 1885 Labouchere Amendment. Cook stressed “the impossibility of conjuring a unitary ‘gay’ metropolis or a single ‘gay’ urban type, and indicate[d] instead the uncontrolled plurality which characterizes the relationship between London and homosexuality.”⁵⁶ Houlbrook similarly argued for the need to move “beyond simplistic invocations of the city as a queer space, and of a unified ‘homosexual’ experience to explore the complex interrelationship between modern urban life and the organization of sexual and gender practices.”⁵⁷ Like Donoghue, Clark, Vicinus, and Traub, these scholars stressed the rigorous contextualization of their subjects. Cook also noted—albeit only in a passing reference—that while the late nineteenth century was “marked by a crisis in, and discursive elaboration of, sexuality and sexual identifications, *identities* and subcultural forms associated with homosexual acts can be seen well before.”⁵⁸ Yet many of these works also mirrored Houlbrook when he declared that because “lesbianism remained invisible in the law and, in consequence, in the legal sources,” lesbian history “demands its own study.”⁵⁹ Accurate in many ways, such observations also elided underlying methodological unities that might

⁵⁴ In *Disturbing Practices*, Laura Doan critiques Donoghue and other scholars for reading modern understandings of lesbian identity into the past, rather than asking what forms of knowledge made certain identities possible. Clark’s 1996 article on Anne Lister would seem to address this issue, but it was not a work that Doan discussed. Laura L. Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War* (Chicago, 2013).

⁵⁵ Laura L. Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (Columbia, 2001); Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (Cambridge, 2003); Harry Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Speaking of Male Homosexual Desire in Nineteenth-Century England* (I.B. Tauris, 2003); Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Cornell, 2005); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2006).

⁵⁶ Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 5.

⁵⁷ Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 11.

⁵⁸ Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 7. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 10.

have brought together “the new gay history,” as most of these works were dubbed in a review article in this journal, and existing lesbian histories.⁶⁰

The state of the field of British queer history as understood at that moment was captured in a collaborative volume, *A Gay History of Britain*, which brought together authors of some of the most influential recent works. Individual chapters were by Matt Cook, Harry Cocks, Robert Mills, and Randolph Trumbach and, while strong in many ways, that work also highlighted issues that sprang from the differing methodologies of its authors.⁶¹ Numerous arguments made in lesbian history covering the period from 1500 to 1800 would have been more methodologically compatible with the arguments of the other chapters in *A Gay History of Britain*, but with none of those authors purporting to explain the entire period, as Trumbach’s work did, they may have been seen as insufficiently explanatory for this type of overview. Or perhaps the divide between gay and lesbian histories seemed too stark by that point to put forward a *queer* history of Britain, rather than a *gay* one.

Trumbach wrote the chapters on both the 1500 to 1700 and 1700 to 1800 periods in part because his argument regarding sexual systems hinged on transitional events around 1700. The argument he presented was largely restated in a 2012 article in *Signs*, where Trumbach writes that:

This article has sought to make two points, both of which are hard to believe. The first is that sexual life in Europe was very different before 1700 than it was after 1700 ... The second hard point to accept is that this change happened fairly quickly, within a single generation... But why did these changes occur? This, alas, I do not find a terribly interesting or profitable question... I have a more modest brief: to try to show that a change occurred on the level of the Revolution in France or of industrialization, to establish this by studying actual behavior as it appears in legal sources and in the biographies of individuals, and to follow the reception of these sexual systems on the public stage and in paintings and prints. If one must look for causes, however, it would be important to note that the sexual change occurred simultaneously in England, France, and the Dutch Republic, and that it occurred simultaneously across all social classes.⁶²

It is hard to imagine any other early twenty-first century scholar arguing that such a profound change happened in such a short period of time, across all social classes, in three different countries. Engagement with the idea that cultural change is an uneven process, or an analysis of possible causal factors for the changes identified, would have helped Trumbach’s argument. In many ways it was a product of the 1970s, when such sweeping statements were more common.⁶³ Bold attempts to theorize a just-emerging field are in keeping with the best practices of scholarly exploration. Restating the same thesis, largely unaltered by decades of subsequent scholarship, is less understandable. Trumbach’s work lacked a broader interpretive framework for assimilating the increasing number of more focused studies on same-sex desire between women (and between men), while in turn

⁶⁰ Joseph Bristow, “Remapping the Sites of Modern Gay History: Legal Reform, Medico-Legal Thought, Homosexual Scandal, Erotic Geography,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 1 (2007): 116–42, at 120.

⁶¹ Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach and Harry Cocks, eds., *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men since the Middle Ages* (Greenwood World Publishing, 2007).

⁶² Randolph Trumbach, “The Transformation of Sodomy from the Renaissance to the Modern World and Its General Sexual Consequences,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 4 (2012): 832–48. For the earlier argument, see Randolph Trumbach, “Modern Sodomy: The Origins of Homosexuality, 1700–1800,” in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. Cook et al., 77–78.

⁶³ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago, 1988).

almost no significant work by other scholars adopted its language of a third gender or its framework of sexual systems.

Writing my own first book as these debates were playing out, I felt that the evidence I collected did not support either Trumbach's eighteenth-century "gender revolution" thesis or the consensus that the late nineteenth century should be the starting point for thinking about self-understandings centered on same-sex desire. However, my focus on the early nineteenth century meant I did not have to define myself so strongly against earlier work to make a space for my own. Of the earlier generation of scholarship on sex between men, only Louis Crompton's *Byron and Greek Love* focused on my time period. I had not yet figured out how to directly relate my findings to the work of Martha Vicinus or Anna Clark. Of the new generation of work, only Harry Cocks's overlapped mine temporally. However, our works were not duplicative. Cocks shared his just-completed dissertation with me when I arrived in London to begin my dissertation research in 1999, and because of this I shifted my focus to analyzing the frequency with which sex between men was referenced in the newspapers. This allowed me to understand which events captured public attention and which did not. I avoided dwelling on the questions of identity, while still arguing that "[t]he self-understandings forged by any group or individual are always unique to their time."⁶⁴

The Growing if Unrecognized Consensus

Within the field of British queer history, the 2010s saw a continued questioning of the importance of the late nineteenth century to the establishment of homosexual identity, but this occurred primarily within works that pushed the date of that identity formation forward in time, while stressing the unevenness of the process across different groups within society. Internationally influential in shaping this trend was Margot Canaday's 2009 *The Straight State*, which demonstrated how military, welfare, and immigration agencies helped to establish the categories of "the homosexual" and "the lesbian" within American culture over the course of the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Laura Doan's 2013 *Disturbing Practices* called "for analytical frameworks alert to meanings outside the context of identity" and asked "what a 'queer' critical history of sexuality might look like were it to embark with an unknowingness about the past to discover what is now 'unheard of'."⁶⁶ Doan's work was driven in part by her observation that while "no one in [her] case studies, either during the war or through the 1920s, appear to understand sexuality as an orientation or a category of being," when "the reformulations of wartime events and experiences [were] recounted later in interviews conducted in the 1960s ... interviewees readily latched on to the labels and habits of thought familiar to us now."⁶⁷

Matt Cook's 2014 *Queer Domesticities* similarly demonstrated "that people in the past were unpredictable in the ways they related to ideas about the self and sexuality circulating at any particular time, and so to those discourses—of medicine, the law, and the media most especially—which have been shown to wield such power in these respects." In describing the subjects of his analysis, Cook focused on "the multiple dimensions of their identities and identifications, and also the complicated ways in which their understandings of their desires were entwined with the particular material, economic, cultural and social circumstances of their lives."⁶⁸ Also in the 2010s, Joseph Bristow critiqued the ways in which Ed

⁶⁴ Upchurch, *Before Wilde*, 205.

⁶⁵ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, 2009).

⁶⁶ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 4.

⁶⁷ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 5.

⁶⁸ Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

Cohen and Alan Sinfield had argued that “the Wilde trials played a crucial role in fashioning the image of an unforeseen, distinctly modern type of homosexual identity.”⁶⁹ Bristow argued that “Sinfield’s assertion that the court proceedings for the first time correlated homosexuality with effeminacy is ... strained” and offered the observation that “scholarship from the 1990s proved ‘very short on historical evidence and long on Foucauldian speculation’.”⁷⁰

New work on earlier periods also continues to call into question the idea of a late nineteenth-century transition. Anna Clark’s 2017 *Alternative Histories of the Self* uses a consistent set of criteria to assess how a range of individuals (including the Chevalier d’Eon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and Edith Lees in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) thought of themselves in relation to their sexual desires and gender identities.⁷¹ Jen Manion’s 2021 *Female Husbands* mixes a social history of individuals who transed gender with a cultural history of the rise and fall of the category of the “female husband.” Manion describes the cultural conditions under which that category had meaning, how it spread within the public sphere and was adopted by others, and finally how it unraveled as new systems of meaning undercut its underlying premises.⁷² Rachel Hope Cleves, in a 2018 article, demonstrates the power of using multiple overlapping cultural contexts as a way to write trans histories of individuals before the development of modern categories of trans identity.⁷³ Simon Goldhill’s 2025 *Queer Cambridge* also contributes to this growing body of literature, examining a multigenerational community of scholars at Cambridge with its own ideals, its own systems of regulation, and its own methods of thinking about and acting on same-sex desires.⁷⁴

There is also a growing body of scholarship that emphasizes liberal understandings of the self as they relate to same-sex desires. Most important due to its explanatory scope is Faramerz Dabhoiwala’s 2012 *The Origins of Sex*, in which he reflects on the observation of Lawrence Stone that “the period between 1660 and 1800 marked a momentous watershed, ‘a great secular change in sexual attitudes and sexual behavior’, the birth of the modern mind-set.” And yet, Dabhoiwala observes, “its origins remained unexplained.”⁷⁵ Dabhoiwala then offers an explanation for that broad shift in relation to sexuality, using some factors long discussed by others, such as urbanization. He also adds new explanatory detail, such as in relation to the breakdown of previous systems of policing sexual morality, and over the impact of the Enlightenment, understood as “a series of social and intellectual changes, across society, which altered almost everyone’s conceptions of religion, truth, nature, and morality.” While focused on changes across British society as a whole, Dabhoiwala indicates a “hope that my analysis will provoke other scholars to explore further its varied implications for ... same-sex relations.”⁷⁶

Harry Oosterhuis does exactly that in his 2023 article “Sodomy, Possessive Individualism, and Godless Nature,” as does John McCurdy in his 2024 *Vicious and Immoral*, which richly contextualizes a single incident to demonstrate how languages of liberal individualism might

⁶⁹ Joseph Bristow, “The Blackmailer and the Sodomite: Oscar Wilde on Trial,” *Feminist Theory* 17, no. 1 (2016): 41–62, at 52.

⁷⁰ Bristow, “The Blackmailer and the Sodomite,” 53, 54.

⁷¹ Anna Clark, *Alternative Histories of the Self: A Cultural History of Sexuality and Secrets, 1780–1917* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

⁷² Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge, 2021).

⁷³ Rachel Hope Cleves, “Six Ways of Looking at a Trans Man? The Life of Frank Shimer (1826–1901),” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 27, no. 1 (2018): 32–62.

⁷⁴ Simon Goldhill, *Queer Cambridge: An Alternative History* (Cambridge, 2025). See also Dominic Janes, *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain* (Oxford, 2015).

⁷⁵ Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, 2.

⁷⁶ Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, 3, 4.

be used to defend an individual's right to control their own body.⁷⁷ Finally, my own "*Beyond the Law*" describes a range of strategies used (with varying degrees of success) in the early nineteenth century to oppose the death penalty for sodomy, bringing same-sex desire into reformist politics, in a period before any one argument became hegemonic.⁷⁸ Words and identities suited to liberal politics such as "urning" or "homosexual" came a few decades later, when, in an effort to preserve the liberal laws regarding sex between men in his native Hanover, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs began to coin and propagate a new vocabulary. Bentham had contemplated doing something similar, using the phrase "Attic taste" to describe same-sex desire in his early nineteenth-century writing.⁷⁹

For quite some time now, the best scholarship on same-sex desire and transing gender from the late seventeenth-century onward has been the work that follows the methodological practices of cultural history, carefully contextualizing the ideas that shaped an individual's understanding of their sexual desires, and limiting their arguments as applicable only to specific times and places. It is time we foreground this, and leave behind the idea that a certain type of text (medical or otherwise) makes this process operate in a fundamentally different way from the late nineteenth century onward. Contextual issues, such as the rise of new economic or political systems, as first suggested by Weeks (or a thickening web of regulatory discourses, as described by Foucault) can and did have an impact, but in Weeks's formulation the modern homosexual category was likened to the modern housewife, child, and prostitute. Weeks's formulation involves no "hermaphrodisism of the soul," which was also absent from Foucault's broader discussions of power, and thus both might be used as tools for thinking through the impact of different cultural contextual systems in earlier (or later) times and places.

A Statement of the Broader Project

Questioning the idea of a late nineteenth-century epistemological break in the ways indicated above suggests one central and overarching new approach for modern British queer history going forward, as well as other more specific ones. The most important and overarching project builds from what many in the field are already doing: mapping all the ways that individuals combined cultural texts to formulate self-understandings that gave a central place to sexual desire and gendered identifications, but doing so in a way that is attuned to the continuities in this process from the late seventeenth century to the present, building on Foucault's understanding of power and the development of the liberal public sphere as framing mechanisms underpinning the process across the entire period. This project does not center on or begin with the white male subject. Instead, it seeks to document the widest possible range of self-understandings, the cultural texts they were based on, and the degree to which they extended beyond the individuals or groups that initially crafted them. The project then is to document these "effervescent bubbles" (if you will) of self-understanding, a phrase that emphasizes the multiplicity of configurations and the ephemeral nature of so many of them, and that draws attention to the contextual medium within which they are formed.⁸⁰ While there are certainly significant differences across this period, there are

⁷⁷ Oosterhuis, "Sodomy, Possessive Individualism"; John Gilbert McCurdy, *Vicious and Immoral: Homosexuality, the American Revolution, and the Trials of Robert Newburgh* (Johns Hopkins, 2024).

⁷⁸ Upchurch, "Beyond the Law."

⁷⁹ Pretsell, *Uring: Queer Identity*; Upchurch, "Beyond the Law," 32–6.

⁸⁰ I use the phrase "self-understanding" rather than "identity" to leave space for a distinction between more and less developed formations, with the idea that "identity" is often more appropriate for periods closer to the present. Determining which term to use is best done according to the evidence for a given time and place. I would like to thank Chris Waters for his insights and conversations in relation to this point.

also continuities in the process of formulating understandings of the self that constitute an underlying unifying field for analysis.⁸¹

The Argument for Liberal Politics as Context

A second project is more specific, operating within the framework described above. It offers a new answer to the question of what was unique about modern homosexual identity as it developed from the mid-nineteenth century onward, explaining it as the consequence of individuals making rights-based arguments within liberal political systems. While discussion of this second project might be better left for my next book, which traces this theme from the late seventeenth century to the mid nineteenth, it seems appropriate to briefly sketch it here for two reasons. The first is that asking the questions driving this project led to the exploration of the continuities and connections described in the preceding pages. The second is that the preliminary findings for that new project posit a different relationship between liberal political systems and the evolution of what came to be called homosexual identity. Currently, much of the scholarship in queer history and queer studies emphasize the coercion and violence propagated within liberal political systems against queer individuals. This is a vitally important project and needs to continue. But this new line of research suggests additional approaches that scholars of queer history might explore in relation to liberal political systems.

Modern politics in relation to same-sex desire, as with feminist politics and abolitionist politics, began with the origins of the public sphere in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth- century, as the ethics of then-current practices were debated, propagating a range of explanations, justifications, and criticisms that shaped individual perceptions and influenced future debates. Scholars have already uncovered a multitude of examples in the eighteenth-century public sphere where same-sex desire was discussed, almost always being condemned or disparaged. But scholars often make little effort to distinguish between the various types of condemnations, or to track whether or not the underlying premises on which those condemnations are based shifted over the course of the century.⁸² Greater sensitivity to the nature of those arguments helps us to track the growing range of ideas related to what same-sex desire and same-sex acts represented, both for the individuals involved in those acts and for the communities within which they operated. Doing this shows how the spread of liberal notions of the self, and liberal notions of the relationship of the individual to society, had an impact on how individuals might think of certain acts of same-sex desire as permissible, and even ethical, within the framework of liberal political systems.

The need for this sort of project has become more pressing now that it is known that there was at least one prominent public argument for toleration publicly circulating from the late 1780s onward. Historians have known since Louis Crompton's 1978 articles in the *Journal of Homosexuality* that Jeremy Bentham privately wrote over seventy manuscript pages arguing against the punishment of sex between men.⁸³ Crompton, and other scholars

⁸¹ Scholars have convincingly argued that this application of cultural history can be done in earlier periods, for times and places that saw proliferations of competing cultural texts. For example, Traub has argued that "the increased availability of textual references to female intimacies, the graphic explicitness of some of these depictions, and the range of themes and tones expressed therein all initiate a profusion and variety of representations unique to the early modern era," Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 8.

⁸² For a recent study that demonstrates the value of distinguishing between types and degrees of condemnation on a topic, see Jacob Bloomfield, *Drag: A British History* (California, 2023).

⁸³ Jeremy Bentham and Louis Crompton, "Offences Against One's Self," *Journal of Homosexuality* 3, no. 4 (1978): 389–406; Jeremy Bentham and Louis Crompton, "Jeremy Bentham's Essay on 'Paederasty,'" *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 1 (1978): 91–107.

since, have argued that Bentham kept these aspects of his thought secret, for fear of discrediting the whole of his utilitarian philosophy. But we now know that that is incorrect, and that in his most influential work on legal reform, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789, Bentham included a handful of paragraphs that, when taken together, made it clear that he reasoned that consensual sex between men should be punished with, at most, a small fine.⁸⁴ Historians have long quoted the few paragraphs from William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* that condemn crimes "against nature," taking them as representative of the feelings on sex between men within the legal profession in the later eighteenth century and after. What is now clear, though, is that a far more tolerant understanding, based on liberal philosophical principles, was also being circulated at roughly the same time by an equally prominent individual. Evidence overlooked or previously undervalued might take on new significance if we understand the ways in which an increasingly influential liberal politics, liberal philosophy, and liberal understanding of the self might be underlying discussions within the public sphere related to sex between men.

My preliminary research into these questions for the eighteenth-century material leads me to believe that we can track the influence of liberal ideas of the self, and the right of the liberal individual to bodily autonomy, so long as they hurt no one else. This factor—the requirement for ethical treatment of others as a necessary component of socially acceptable liberal autonomy and experimentation—is something that this methodology highlights, and something that heretofore has been underappreciated as an aspect of homosexual identity. While there were many words and concepts from the ancient world that could be used to demonstrate the earlier social acceptance of forms of same-sex desire within those cultures, many of those ancient practices involved what would be considered by modern standards as the unethical treatment of others.

Scholars of same-sex desire most often focus on elements within the Christian tradition that have been used to condemn sex between men, while downplaying a central concept within that religious tradition (and one absent from the ancient world), namely the idea that every individual was a soul of worth, of equal value to every other individual.⁸⁵ This concept was incorporated into Enlightenment political philosophy, secularized as part of the concept of the bounded, autonomous individual. This religious legacy underpins Enlightenment political and ethical theory, with scholars such as Uday Singh Mehta in *Liberalism and Empire*, Roy Porter in *The Creation of the Modern World*, and Jeremy Waldron in *God, Locke, and Equality* drawing attention to these religious roots of supposedly universal and secular Western ethical systems.⁸⁶

While many ancient texts include representations of same-sex desire, many of those ancient practices violated religious and Enlightenment prohibitions against sex without consent. A Roman man might sexually penetrate members of his household, male or female, without their consent and without fear of legal consequences. So long as he was the dominant partner in the encounter, the sex (or the consent) of his partner did not impact his status.⁸⁷ Pederasty, while accepted in the ancient world, is considered profoundly unethical in the modern era, in that it involves sex with an individual under the age of consent. Sex without consent was understood as an act of violence and thus a crime deserving of

⁸⁴ Upchurch, "Beyond the Law," 17–22; Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. Printed in the Year 1780, and Now First Published* (T. Payne, and Son, 1789).

⁸⁵ Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Belknap Press, 2014); William J. Bulman, *Anglican Enlightenment: Orientalism, Religion and Politics in England and Its Empire, 1648–1715* (Cambridge, 2017).

⁸⁶ Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999); Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (W. W. Norton, 2000); Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁸⁷ Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford, 2010).

punishment.⁸⁸ Many ancient practices were beyond the pale of ethical conduct. No public argument for tolerance or inclusion operating within the ethics of liberal political discourse could condone same-sex behaviors without consent.⁸⁹ Thus, shaped by the context within which it functioned, homosexual identity is defined by the desire for consensual relations among “adults,” a category that was itself shaped by debates over sexuality. As Jana Funke has shown, work to ensure that the public category of “the homosexual” was compatible with the ethics of the liberal public sphere was carried out by individuals such as John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis, as they distanced the concept from ancient practices that might have implied coercion or lack of consent.⁹⁰ New terms were needed for a context that was new, crafted for the liberal political system within which those terms were to operate. “The homosexual,” like “the urning,” is at its core a public political identity. Ascribing to the ethical tenets of the political category gives an individual the right to make political arguments in the public sphere, and exist within a political community. Likewise, a refusal to accept those strictures and limits removes those rights and abilities.

Desires may give an individual the impetus to assemble self-understandings in a way only limited by the cultural texts available, but desire alone does not itself validate unethical behavior. As a public statement of a commitment to public ethical behavior within a liberal political system, the homosexual identity should be seen as defined in a precise and rigid way against unethical practices such as pederasty, rather than as somehow adjacent to or imbricated in them.⁹¹ David Halperin has argued that pederastic discourse was one of four strands that modern homosexual identity evolved from, while Rachel Hope Cleves has argued that scholars need to investigate pederasty as a part of the project of investigating homosexuality. I would, respectfully, call these arguments incorrect. The homosexual was first and foremost a modern political disciplinary category committed to the ethical treatment of others, defined against unethical practices that cause harm to others, as defined by the society within which it operates.

The concept of the homosexual, as well as the earlier “urning” identity, was originally defined in political discourse, with sharply prescribed boundaries in relation to certain

⁸⁸ Linda Martin Alcoff, “Dangerous Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Pedophilia,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. Susan J. Hekman (Pennsylvania State, 1996), 99–136; Louise A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Routledge, 2000).

⁸⁹ The issue of consent will be fully explored in the larger book project, including the degree to which these new understandings of the individual in the eighteenth century might have influenced women’s ability to control their bodies within marriage. Lisa Forman Cody has shown that the idea that women consented to sex with their husbands in perpetuity by their marriage contracts, in a way “which she cannot retract,” was contested, sometimes successfully, in the eighteenth-century courts, and that “representational shift[s] may have helped to make some cases of marital rape more imaginable than in earlier decades.” Lisa Forman Cody, “‘Marriage is No Protection for Crime’: Coverture, Sex, and Marital Rape in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal of British Studies* 61, no. 4 (October 2022): 809–34, at 812, 832. See also Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857* (Cambridge, 2005); Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present* (Virago Press, 2007); Anna Clark, *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770–1845* (Pandora, 1987).

⁹⁰ Jana Funke, “‘We Cannot Be Greek Now’: Age Difference, Corruption of Youth and the Making of Sexual Inversion,” *English Studies* 94, no. 2 (2013): 139–53. The political nature of determining the age of consent, for both men and women, and the relationship between the two, will be fully explored in the larger book project. See Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse*; Victoria Bates, *Sexual Forensics in Victorian and Edwardian England: Age, Crime and Consent in the Courts* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992); Padma Anagol-McGinn, “The Age of Consent Act (1891) Reconsidered: Women’s Perspectives and Participation in the Child-Marriage Controversy in India,” *South Asia Research* 12, no. 2 (1992): 100–18; Weeks, *Coming Out*; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (Longman, 1981); Brian Lewis, *Wolfenden’s Witnesses: Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Samantha Caslin and Julia Laite, *Wolfenden’s Women: Prostitution in Post-War Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁹¹ David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 2002), 104–37; Rachel Hope Cleves, *Unspeakable: A Life beyond Sexual Morality* (Chicago, 2020).

unethical behaviors necessary for participation in political debate. Many individuals felt as if they naturally fit within those parameters of acceptable behavior, while others required greater efforts to conform to and fit its constraints.⁹² As these terms circulated and were taken up within other discourses, the categories became susceptible to alteration and reconfiguration. Richard von Krafft-Ebing and others grafted ideas of debility and degeneration onto the terms in their medical texts. Yet as Harry Oosterhuis has demonstrated, individuals from across Europe wrote to Krafft-Ebing, recognizing themselves in part of his descriptions, but rejecting and contesting other parts that would have defined them as somehow infirm or diseased.⁹³ This, too, was a political contest, between a public and a center of knowledge, power, and authority. Over time, as Oosterhuis documented, Krafft-Ebing responded to his readers, evolving his characterizations of his categories into something more compatible with the self-understandings of many of his readers over the multiple editions of his *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

When thinking about “the homosexual” and other categories through which individuals are recognized politically by institutions that exercise power, we need to keep in mind how those categories are imperfect fits in relation to individual self-understandings, as are the categories through which states and institutions interact with almost all individuals, regardless of their sexual desires. While individuals can and must work to make the categories through which they are recognized more aligned with their lived experience, it is also true that those public identities will always have some distance from individuals’ self-understandings, existing as they do within a political system that must (ideally) reconcile the diverse claims of all its members. Few, if any, subjects get perfect recognition or representation within liberal political systems. How individuals understand themselves, and how subjects are recognized by institutions, are two separate things.

Conclusion: Summary and Implications

This article has suggested that reconfiguring our current interpretive frame for modern British queer history allows us to see continuities inherent in much of the work already produced within the field, and suggests some new questions and new concerns for the future. It has argued that many of the mechanisms adopted by scholars to understand subject formation in relation to sexual desires for the period starting in the late nineteenth century can be, and have been, applied for an earlier era, dating from at least the late seventeenth century. Aspects of this approach are evident in much eighteenth-century lesbian history, as well as in many other works. Emphasizing the often-ephemeral nature of these self-understandings—how they were formulated and how they dissipated, in the context of a web of cultural texts and discourses that thickens by the decade—might result in thinking of the process as one of documenting “effervescent bubbles” of self-understanding, rather than looking for any transitional moment or text that ultimately impacted the whole of the society. I have argued that what makes such ephemeral constructions more long-lasting was their being taken up by and embedded within groups, communities, or institutions.

Thus, the category of “the homosexual” was less about anything particular to the medical discourse that helped to propagate it and was more about its construction for use within a rights-based argument within an increasingly responsive liberal political system. The rigidities of that category reflected the requirements of liberal political discourse in a process akin to that explored in the literature on the creation of categories within liberal

⁹² Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (Vintage, 2015); Pretsell, *Urnings*.

⁹³ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*.

imperial systems of power.⁹⁴ A key and previously neglected aspect of homosexual identity, an aspect necessary to its functioning as a vehicle for a rights-based argument within a liberal political system, is a definitional commitment to the ethical treatment of others. In this way, the characteristics of the identity were shaped by the liberal political context within which it formed. While public political identities are not the place to look for exact representations of the self in all its complexity, they nevertheless provide an important and necessary subject position from which to engage with the range of other individuals and political categories within the shared space of a liberal political society.

Finally, it is worth considering the implications of placing the origins of modern British queer history in the late seventeenth century, grounded in the formative processes of liberal individualism, as opposed to setting it in the late nineteenth century. In the current understanding, homosexual identity is the result of a fully formed liberal state and an outgrowth of disciplinary mechanism that must be resisted. Queer history, and to a greater extent queer studies, often positions itself as a disruptive force, resisting the discipline of coercive categories specifically and of the state in general, and calling such systems of power into question.

If, however, we see queer history's founding moment as concurrent with the origins of liberal politics and the liberal public sphere, and related to the form of power relations that came to dominate from the late seventeenth century onward, the narrative might look different. These mechanisms of power and circulating cultural texts might be seen to support all manner of self-understandings divorced from the more coercive aspects of state power. Liberal politics and liberal debate become the tools that allow long-standing injustices that predate such liberal institutions to be challenged, around laws and customs that discriminate based on gender, race, class, and sexual preference.⁹⁵ It is a perspective that underscores the fragility of liberal states and liberal systems, and reminds us of the often-unsavory systems that are, historically, the regimes that most frequently replace liberal political systems when they falter. Furthermore, within this understanding, once a subject is recognized within the system, they share in the sovereignty that resides in the citizen, and in the responsibility for the maintenance of that system, defending the context within which real gains against historic injustices can be achieved. While critique can strengthen a system, so too can cooperation with and participation in that system, informed by an awareness of the limitations and obligations of liberal inclusion in a pluralistic society.

⁹⁴ Analysis of the attempts by European powers to control colonial subjects through the creation of state-recognized identity categories was pioneered in works such as Cooper and Stoller, *Tensions of Empire* and Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*. For a detailed study of how the British used such techniques to regulate colonial subjects that they sought to define by gender and sexual practices, and the reactions of individuals to that effort, see Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c.1850-1900* (Cambridge, 2019). Other influential works exploring the regulation of homosexual acts within the British Empire, employing a range of methodologies, include Enze Han and Joseph O'Mahoney, *British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality: Queens, Crime and Empire* (Routledge, 2018); Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (Routledge, 2003); Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester, 1990). This theme will be more fully explored in the larger book project.

⁹⁵ The range of possibilities for what liberalism might mean, and the degree to which gender shaped those meanings and the struggles over them, is analyzed by Michelle Tusan. After first examining the ideas and arguments that resulted from the collaborative intellectual work of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Hardy Taylor, Tusan then addresses the subsequent efforts by Friedrich Hayek to purge what he considered to be Taylor's corrupting influence from Mill's writing, in order to frame Mill as a heroic, masculine, and independent intellectual who could be used as support for Hayek's libertarian form of liberalism as set out in *The Road to Serfdom*. This argument was presented as Tusan's Presidential Address to the North American Conference on British Studies in November 2025. It subsequently appeared as "What Liberalism Requires: The Very Victorian Marriage of J.S. Mill and Harriet Hardy Taylor," *Journal of British Studies* 65 (2026): e10.

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Cite this article: Charles Upchurch, “Rethinking Periodization, Priorities, and Liberalism in British Queer History,” *Journal of British Studies* 65 (2026): e32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2026.10206>