

**POPULAR AND MEDICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEX CHANGE
IN 1930S BRITAIN**

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Abstract

This thesis considers how understandings of the sexed body changed in Britain during the 1930s. Popular versions of sex changeability were grounded in medical science and I examine how medico-scientific research into hormones changed understandings of where sex was located in the body. I examine the historically specific concept of normality, which medics employed to ascertain whether or not individuals ought to have their sex reclassified. I focus on L. R. Broster, a surgeon at London's Charing Cross Hospital. I analyse Broster's case studies, published in 1938 as *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, which showed the markers medical professionals were using to assign sex. The thesis investigates how Broster's work in the burgeoning field of endocrinology generated distinctive narratives of sexual mutability and locatedness in the body. Broster was an important figure in the press stories about changes of sex and provides a link between them and the medical research occurring at Charing Cross.

During the 1930s the popular daily, local and Sunday newspapers contained numerous articles about individuals whose sex had changed. These accounts were treated in a mostly positive tone and were held up as being symptomatic of scientific modernity. I argue that this concept of 'sex change' does not neatly map on to present day categories, be they intersexuality, transsexuality, transgender or any other. Older categories such as that of the 'man-woman' persisted into the 1930s as a way to conceive of sexual ambiguity and changeability. That sex could change, and in particular that women could become men, was an idea that had a wide reach across popular culture.

New concepts of hormones and of sex change were also taken up in special-interest magazines, adverts, fiction and popular science. I explore the dissemination of ideas about sex changeability and the role of hormones beyond the press and medical studies to show their pervasiveness. I pay particular attention to two very different magazines, *Urania* and *London Life*. These magazines extended the life of articles about changes of sex by reprinting and recontextualising them. They point to the interest that such stories attracted and the ways in which they were harnessed to competing ideological ends.

Women's increased participation in sport also changed understandings of the sexed body, having an impact on gender roles and the sexed and gendered meanings ascribed to physical features such as muscles. Women's athleticism suggested that competitiveness could also be a female trait, and that muscularity was not exclusively male. I consider how the achievements of sportswomen, and the more typically masculine bodies they developed, challenged the received differences between men and women.

Attention to the sexed body as a site of cultural concern expands the remit of queer historiography beyond sexual identities and practices. I argue that scientific developments and popular culture coalesced to create an environment in which sex characteristics were not fixed and the sexed body was seen as mutable.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Introduction



Figure 0.1:
'Sex Determination',
News Chronicle,
1 January 1932, p. 1.
Cutting in FD 1/3108
The National Archives,
Medical Research
Council,
Sex Hormone
Committee,
Lennox Ross Broster,
1932.

An article in the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormone Committee (1930-1934) archive announced that 'A new discovery which may throw fresh light on the determination of sex has been made as the result of research at Charing Cross Hospital.'¹ While not fully detailed, the journalist suggested that something innovative and significant had occurred. Readers were informed that a child (who remained unnamed), certified as a girl at birth, had developed into a boy and had

¹ The National Archives (TNA): FD 1/3108: Sex Hormone Committee. Research: Dr L. Broster, London (1931-1934).

now been reregistered as such. The veracity of this account was underlined by the involvement in the case of a 'high medical authority' and an 'eminent specialist'. Although the article was keen to stress the unusual nature of events, the child who had experienced a 'change in sex' was placed alongside 'a number of cases in which girls who have been normal females up to a certain age have suddenly developed into males.' In this way, the phenomenon of changing sex was at once portrayed as both new and an established fact. The new element was the medical research conducted at Charing Cross Hospital, which had entailed operations on six patients, and had identified the suprarenal glands as the cause, when 'girls change into youths'. That changes in sex were an incontrovertible fact was reinforced by the explanation that sex changes in humans were a natural occurrence also seen in other mammals. The symptoms of a change in sex from female to male were identified as a deep voice, a muscular build and facial hair. Medical diagnosis and intervention were posited as important; local authorities had been unable to determine the child's sex and were forced to consult a national specialist. Sex was portrayed as potentially changeable or ambiguous but, with medical expertise, supported by as prestigious a body as the Medical Research Council, sex changes were shown to be knowable and understandable.

This account of sex change was just one of many to appear in the popular press during the 1930s. The article contained many of the features that would typify such reports: it described changes in sex in a prosaic manner, it dealt with an individual who had been declared female at birth but had later been designated male, it emphasised the legitimacy of the change by citing a revised birth certificate, it referenced medical authority, specifically researchers at London's

Charing Cross Hospital, and it appealed to modern medico-scientific discoveries while also seeking to contextualise sex change as part of everyday life – unusual but not unheard of. In short, sex was changeable in 1930s Britain and a topic that engaged both medics and the popular press alike.

This thesis argues that sex was seen to be changeable in 1930s Britain and that a historical account of these modern understandings of changeability of sex in Britain is best grounded in the intersections of the popular and medical spheres. As Oram has argued, there were numerous newspaper accounts of sex being changed throughout the 1930s, and sex was portrayed as changeable.² Simultaneously, medics at London's Charing Cross Hospital were seeing an unprecedented number of patients whose sex was in question. By considering the popular discourse of sex change that was widely disseminated in the press in relation to the medical discourse of sex change that arose from scientific research, I demonstrate the significance of new medico-scientific ideas to popular discourse about the sexed body. The receptiveness towards these new ideas, I argue, allowed for popular acceptance of sex being changeable. My analysis of the press stories concurs with Oram's findings that the notion of 'sex change' was quite established in 1930s Britain, and my reading of the medical sources substantiates the press stories with information about the material results of the ideas circulating about sex change.³

² Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!: Women's Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 109.

³ Alison Oram, "'Farewell to Frocks' - 'Sex Change'" in *Interwar Britain: Newspaper Stories, Medical Technology and Modernity* in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds.), *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 114.

When I started the PhD in 2007, my initial question was how new medical explanations of ambiguities of sex and gender impacted at a socio-cultural level in the first half of the twentieth century in Britain. I understand queer history to be both an examination of sexual and gender variance and a troubling of our very categories of sex, gender and sexuality. I wanted to produce a queer history that focussed more on sex and gender than on sexuality, to consider how sexual ambiguity might be understood beyond the framework of (homo)sexuality.⁴ I have been influenced in this by work on transgender subjectivities, such as Prosser's call for a transsexual reading of Stephen, the protagonist in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), as opposed to the predominant interpretation of lesbianism.⁵ In *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (2007), Valentine poses the question: 'how is it possible to extract certain actors from the categorical embrace of "homosexuality" into "transgender"?'⁶ I wanted not so much to replace a label of 'homosexual' with one of 'transgender', but to bring sex changeability and unfixity to the fore. I was struck that there had not been much research arguing that in instances of sexual ambiguity, a person's sex or gender might have been in question, not their sexuality.

When I state that I wanted to examine sex and gender as much as sexuality, I am referencing a notion of sex relating to the biological and gender to the social. A more nuanced appreciation of sex, gender and sexuality has been integral to

⁴ On this tendency of queer history to denote 'lesbian and gay history', see Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 13.

⁵ Jay Prosser, "'Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition": The Transsexual Emerging from the Well', in Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (eds.), *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 129-44.

⁶ David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 31.

feminist and queer scholarship, and has come to the fore in transgender studies as well. Before the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s, it was widely held that sex and gender were inextricably linked, so that a female anatomy would result in feminine behaviour and a male anatomy in masculine behaviour.⁷ Butler, in particular, has asserted that anatomy need not dictate behaviour or life opportunities; even if sex were portrayed as fixed, gender was more mutable.⁸ In *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea* (2009) Germon has historicised the category of gender and argues that the idea of gender arose out of John Money's research into intersexuality in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹ 'Gender' may not have been a recognisable concept in the 1930s, but I am employing it here to mean, as does the transgender scholar and activist Susan Stryker, 'the social organization of different kinds of bodies into different categories of people.'¹⁰ So by 'sex' I do not mean sexual relations, but the designation of male, female, both or neither, which is made (predominantly) on the basis of anatomical and physiological markers. This need not be connected to 'sexuality', which Clark defines as: 'the desires, relationships, acts, and identities concerned with sexual behaviour.'¹¹ I wanted to consider sexual ambiguity not for its relation to sexual identities, but for what it could reveal about understandings of the body.

⁷ Katrina Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority and Lived Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 12.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), pp. 9-10. Butler goes further in unsettling the supposedly fixed foundations of sex in Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁹ Jennifer Germon, *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

¹⁰ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), p. 11.

¹¹ Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 3.

A work that has been central to how I treat the sexed body is Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000). Fausto-Sterling, a biologist and feminist scholar, has surveyed medico-scientific concepts of how bodies are perceived to be sexed. She has argued that sex, rather than being taken as an objective and empirical truth, ought to be understood as socially and politically constructed, just as gender has been:

Our bodies are too complex to provide clear-cut answers about sexual difference. The more we look for a simple physical basis for "sex," the more it becomes clear that "sex" is not a pure physical category. What bodily signals and functions we define as male or female come already entangled in our ideas about gender.¹²

This description of sex as unstable and open to social and cultural interpretation has been fundamental to my thesis. I had been impressed by the work of Laqueur and Schiebinger, who had each made a case for the historical contingency of the ways in which bodies have been sexually differentiated in early-modern Europe.¹³ I wanted to apply those ideas of the constructed nature of sex to Britain in the first half of the twentieth century and Fausto-Sterling's configuration of sex as changeable gave me the theoretical space to do so. Following her argument, I have taken biological sex to be a category as open to interpretation as gender and sexuality have been. Fausto-Sterling's ideas are the foundation of my project of thinking about queer history in terms of the uncertainty of sex.

When I first started this thesis, it was with a notion that understandings of the sexed body had changed in the first half of the twentieth century and with a

¹² Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 4.

¹³ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990); Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

desire to grasp the impact of such changes on popular thinking about sexual ambiguity. I spent a great deal of time searching the indices of the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* (this was before the digital versions were available to me) for discussions of sex and gender. I found that while there were hardly any references to ‘intersex’ and only a few for ‘hermaphrodite’, references to hormones and glands did bring up extensive coverage of the sexed body.

This led me to look more closely at hormones and their effect on where sexual differences were thought to be located within the body. I found that from the 1920s the study of hormones – endocrinology – had challenged ideas of the duality and fixity of sex:

The new model of sex in which sex differences [were] ascribed to hormones as chemical messengers of masculinity and femininity, agents that are present in female as well as male bodies, made possible a revolutionary change in the biological definition of sex. The model suggested that, chemically speaking, all organisms are both male and female.¹⁴

Influenced by Oudshoorn’s critical approach to the sexed body, specifically in her examination of interwar research into sex hormones, *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archeology of Sex Hormones* (1994) and Sengoopta’s history of sex and hormones up to mid-century, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life: Sex, Glands, and Hormones, 1850-1950* (2006), I started thinking through the implications of a loss of confidence in being easily able to define bodies and their constituent parts as male or female. My interest in endocrinological developments led me to concentrate on the interwar period, as this was when those new theories were being formulated.

¹⁴ Nelly Oudshoorn, *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archeology of Sex Hormones* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 39.

I had also been influenced by work such as Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (2001), which pointed to the late 1920s and early 1930s as an important time for shifts in British understandings of women's gender expressions – I wondered if and how this affected understandings of the body as sexed.¹⁵ I wanted to know how the cultural and social change in discussions of gender and sexuality in interwar Britain connected to medical changes in thinking around sex.

Not long into my project Oram's book on women's gender-crossing in the British popular press appeared, *Her Husband Was a Woman!: Women's Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (2007). This proved to be immensely helpful for my own work. The section of *Her Husband Was a Woman!* on 1930s sex change stories helped me crystallise the crucial connection between the medical material I had been studying and developments in the field of popular culture.¹⁶ Here were accounts that dealt with bodies being sexed and which mentioned hormones. A further piece of research by Oram – "'Farewell to Frocks' – 'Sex Change' in Interwar Britain: Newspaper Stories, Medical Technology and Modernity' – published in 2011, argued that sex changeability was an idea that had been supported in British popular culture since the 1930s, a finding that tallied with my own research thus far.

In 'Farewell to Frocks', Oram has traced the presence of popular press stories of medically-assisted changes of sex back to the 1930s rather than the 1950s when it has often been assumed that they first appeared. In this article Oram has

¹⁵ Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. xxiii.

¹⁶ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 109.

made the case that stories of sex change permeated the 1930s popular press in Britain and that considering popular cultural forms such as the Sunday newspapers is crucial for understanding gender, sex and sexuality.¹⁷ Although Oram and I have addressed some of the same material, our approaches were different and this has resulted in subtly divergent conclusions.

Oram's article charts how: 'the representation of sex change in British popular culture [...] gradually developed from the years before the First World War through to the 1930s,' and sets this development in the context of new scientific ideas and pre-existing discourses of the freakish and wondrous.¹⁸ My research is different because it does not take a genealogical approach – I am not trying to chart the development of 'sex change'; I do not take 'sex change' to be any one fixed entity. Oram treats 'sex change' as a known entity that was allied to particular medical practices: 'the early establishment in popular culture of "sex change" as a potential medical procedure, long before it was actually possible in practice.'¹⁹ I am pointing to the unfixity of sex more generally and arguing that sex cannot be taken for granted, that it was open to change and uncertainty. Oram refers to the accumulation of references to sex changeability in the 1930s popular press and I agree that this self-referential emphasis on each case being one of many was an important element of the stories.²⁰ There were a plethora of references to 'sex change' in the 1930s British popular press and this reiteration of the idea contributed to a new body of popular knowledge.

¹⁷ Oram, "'Farewell to Frocks" - "Sex Change" in Interwar Britain', p. 102.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 102-03.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 104.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 108.

I proceeded to trawl through the microfilm and digital copies of popular newspapers from the late 1920s and the 1930s. By systematically going through long runs of different titles, I started to pick up on stories about individuals, as well as getting a sense of how sex and its (un)fixity were a feature of the popular press at this time. By locating accounts of people who had their sex changed or questioned, I was then able to study how their stories were treated across a range of national and local papers. This showed that it was not just isolated newspapers that ran the stories; they also appeared across a range of newspapers, so a large proportion of the population were likely to encounter them, and they may encounter the same story in different permutations a number of times.

The first account I came across was that of Evan Burtt. In the *Sunday Pictorial*, a popular Sunday paper, there was a story from 30 March 1930 titled 'Evan Burtt Married'.²¹ For some reason I read on past this nondescript headline and saw that here was an account of someone who had been raised as a woman, but had now been declared to be a man. Further investigation showed that other newspapers had also covered Burtt's change of sex and his marriage. The paper's headline – which gave the reader no information as to who Burtt was or why his marriage might be of note – confirmed my approach of looking across a broad range of the popular press. The *Sunday Pictorial* headline seemed to assume that readers were getting their news from elsewhere during the week – looked at in isolation, the Sunday newspapers could not give a rounded picture of the

²¹ 'Evan Burtt Married', *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 March 1930, p. 2. The *Sunday Pictorial* had the third highest circulation of British Sunday newspapers after the *News of the World* and the *People*, Political and Economic Planning (PEP), *Report on the British Press* (PEP: London, 1938), p. 84.

newsscape. This incident also helped me see that accounts of sex change were being picked up multiple times by a variety of newspapers.

I began to concentrate on the popular press stories of sex change. Oram had identified many of these cases, and I was able to use these as starting blocks to delve deeper into cases across a range of newspapers, but was also able to uncover more accounts that were published in the 1930s. British popular newspapers had phenomenal circulation in the 1930s – by 1938 the average British family bought 1.5 Sunday papers a week and by 1939 two thirds of Britons regularly saw a daily paper – and they played an important role in shaping public opinions.²² Bingham's *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press* (2004) together with Oram's work have shown how integral the mass-circulation media was to the formation and dissemination of ideas about gender and modernity. The mass-circulation press, they claim, symbolised and produced a sense of modernity.²³ I draw on Bingham and Oram's analyses to consider a narrower research topic – sex change – across a wider array of newspapers: the national daily and Sunday papers as well as the local press. This spread of types of print media has allowed me to demonstrate the pervasiveness of sex change reports, revealing their presence across the country throughout the week, liable to be seen by a mass audience, often encountering the same story in different permutations across different papers, on successive days.

Bingham's case for the significance of the interwar press for histories of gender has informed my project. Following Bingham, I hold the popular press to

²² PEP, *Report on the British Press*, pp. 86, 33; Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 3.

²³ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!* (2007), p. 6; Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 49.

have been an important vehicle for presenting and framing a range of debates and representations concerning gender.²⁴ The popular press is a useful source for thinking about sex changeability because, by printing accounts of changes of sex, it brought them to a mass audience and positioned them as newsworthy events that were part of a broader discussion about gender and modernity that was played out in its pages.

My chronology of these sex change stories opens in March 1930 with the articles about Evan Burtt. His was the first case I found that referred to a change of sex that was framed by references to medical science. There were stories of sex changes published each year of the decade, but the greatest number appeared in 1936, with coverage of the changes of sex of the athletes Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek, coupled with alarm about 'man-woman' athletes at that summer's Olympic Games in Berlin. There were far fewer reports after the advent of war in 1939 and I take the final one to be that of Harry Weston in July 1942. In many respects Harry Weston's story looked back to the 1930s – a good deal of the interest in the story was attributed to Harry having been the brother of Mark Weston. I also look at popular dissemination of ideas about glands and hormones and a change in women's leisure and fashion brought about by sport in the 1920s, as these impacted on understandings of the changeability of the body and gender in the 1930s.

Scrutinising the pages of the popular press has had the unexpected effect of alerting me to the links between ideas of women's athleticism and notions of sexual

²⁴ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, pp. 6-7, 12.

ambiguity. The press dedicated a great deal of consideration to women's sporting achievements and to discussions about the social and cultural implications of such achievements. Extensive press coverage was given to women aviators such as Amy Johnson and Amelia Earhart, swimmers such as Gertrude Ederle and athletes such as Helen Stephens.²⁵ Sport was changing how women's bodies were perceived and challenging notions of what was exclusively achievable by men. Since sport, like prisons, operated along lines of segregation by sex, any uncertainty as to which sex someone belonged was thrown into sharp relief in these arenas. Questions of how to distinguish between male and female bodies became a pressing issue during the 1936 Olympic Games.

Zweiniger-Bargielowska's research has provided me with ways of thinking about the body as a site of management and self-fashioning.²⁶ Her engagement with sport and fitness regimes has stressed the perceived modernity of the athletic female body.²⁷ Drawing on Zweiniger-Bargielowska's work, my examination of women's sport in interwar Britain engaged with the idea that women were being prompted by the press to control their own bodies through fitness regimes.²⁸ However, while the image of the modern woman was becoming one of health and fitness, too much exercise was seen to threaten gender and sexual boundaries by

²⁵ Amy Johnson made headlines with her solo flight to Australia in 1930; Amelia Earhart received extensive press coverage for her trans-Atlantic flight in 1932, the first by a woman; In 1926 Gertrude Ederle was the first woman to swim across the English Channel and was much feted by the press; Helen Stephens's athletic achievements in the 1936 Olympics prompted many column inches.

²⁶ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 241.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 1.

potentially making women too masculine and their bodies too male.²⁹ In relation to sex changeability then, sport was an area in which gender and sex were already fiercely debated qualities that raised questions about whether a female body could be made more male and masculine.

The anxiety about the perceived masculinisation of women's bodies in sport echoed medical discourses around virilism – a condition in which women undergo 'masculinisation'. The leading figure associated with research into virilism was Lennox Ross Broster at Charing Cross Hospital in London. Broster was frequently referenced in the press reports of changes of sex and thus became my point of connection between the interest in hormones with which I had started out, and the press stories, which I was now pursuing. At the intersection of hormone research and press stories of sex change was Mark Weston, who was a patient of Broster's and whose change of sex was the subject of a medical case study and many newspaper articles. Broster's work on virilism tallied with the press accounts of changes of sex that were reversed. Broster carried out his study in conjunction with a team of colleagues from different disciplines, and they published their findings in 1938 as *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*.³⁰ This book holds great significance for its combination of clinical and psychological assessments of patients and its negotiation of what it was that constituted sex. The case studies show Broster, and the psychiatrist Clifford Allen, trying to demarcate what it was that made a body male or female, and what behaviour and attributes ought to accompany the male

²⁹ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, 20, no. 2 (2011), 299-317, p. 301.

³⁰ L. R. Broster, Clifford Allen, H. W. C. Vines, Jocelyn Patterson, Alan W. Greenwood, G. F. Marrian and G. C. Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1938).

or female body. The case study format of distinctive patient histories allows for iteration and development. Instances of sexual ambiguity became understandable and treatable along prescribed lines.

In researching Broster I examined the archive of the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormone Committee. It was amongst the papers of that committee that I found the *News Chronicle* cutting (figure 0.1). This cutting provides a neat illustration of the intersection of medical and popular discourses around sex change during the period. Just as hormone research was permeating the popular press, the popular press claimed the attention of hormone researchers.

Significantly, the *News Chronicle* cutting is preserved in the Sex Hormone Committee archive, in connection with a letter from E. Lonsdale Deighton of the British Sexological Society – a campaign group for progressive sexual reform – who had seen the press account and wanted more information.³¹ Sir Walter Fletcher of the Medical Research Council, responding to Deighton, distanced the Committee from the sensationalism of the press and from Broster in particular:

The Medical Research Council are assisting some work by Mr. L. R. Broster, a surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital, on the relation of tumours and other abnormalities of the suprarenal glands to secondary sex changes in women. Some reference, not to be taken as accurate, was made to this work in the recent article in the press which you appear to have seen, but it is not known whether the case that formed the main subject of the article was one coming under Mr. Broster's care.³²

The language and explanatory frameworks expounded by the popular press were at odds with those of the medical experts. Medics treated the popular dissemination of notions of sex change with alarm and disdain. (A degree of disdain that Broster

³¹ There is further information about the British Sexological Society in Lesley Hall, "Disinterested Enthusiasm for Sexual Misconduct", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30, no. 4 (1995), pp. 665-86.

³² TNA: FD 1/3108.

also received from others working in the field.) However, it was the press accounts that were finding their way into British popular culture and were being incorporated into accessible ideas about hormone research. The Sex Hormone Committee might try to dismiss the claims made in the *News Chronicle*, but they were nonetheless faced with a multiplicity of press coverage, which accelerated throughout the 1930s. Deighton's letter was dated the 5 January 1932. Between 1 January and 5 January, the *News of the World* and *Daily Herald* (twice) had done the same as the *News Chronicle* and printed articles about a Sussex boy who had been raised as a girl, mentioning Broster and his work at the Charing Cross Hospital in conjunction with the case.³³

The subject of my research, and the field in which medical researchers like Broster practised, was frequently ambiguous and uncertain.³⁴ What the ambiguity of my subject has meant is that it complements Doan's call for queer history to be attentive to (un)naming. I have had the good fortune of researching this thesis while Doan has been working on *Disturbing Practices* and the ideas raised in her book are an important element of my own project. As Doan has put it:

For scholars of modern sexuality, the challenge of putting identity aside – or inside *and* outside the framework of historical investigation – seems a trickier maneuver, demanding perhaps that we reconsider the value of unknowability and vagueness as a way of knowing differently.³⁵

These ideas of unknowability and unnamings are keenly felt in relation to sexual ambiguity. Unknowability is a productive way to think about my topic. The medical

³³ 'Girl of 14 Turned into a Youth', *Daily Herald*, 1 January 1932, p. 1; 'Girl Becomes a Boy', *News of the World*, 3 January 1932, p. 5; 'Surgeon Prevents Six Women Becoming Men', *Daily Herald*, 4 January 1932, p. 9.

³⁴ This is not to suggest, however, that the people studied necessarily experienced their lives or bodies as ambiguous.

³⁵ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, p. 140.

case study is a format that aims for a precisely delineated knowledge of its subject, but which offers little or nothing of the subject's sense of self-knowledge. My own subject matter is open to uncertainty if we try to define it under current categorical understandings; it is neither an intersex nor a transgender history. Doan's formulation of unknowability allows me to deal with this ambiguity productively rather than seeing it as a weakness.

My thesis has also taken shape alongside the burgeoning field of intersex studies.³⁶ This thesis engages with the ideas emerging from intersex research, but is not in itself an intersex history. The category of 'intersex' is not the focus of my thesis. Oram, in 'Farewell to Frocks' has examined questions of self identity, a move which resonates with the focus on a sense of the self in Mak's history of intersexuality, a rich area for exploration, but not my own line of enquiry.³⁷ I focus on those who have been understood in terms of sex change and/ or have been designated the title of the sexually ambiguous 'man-woman'. I take as a model Oram's *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, which does not describe its subject in contemporary terms of transgender, or lesbian, or intersex, but focuses instead on what she has termed 'women's gender crossing'. This principle of unknowability manifests itself in this thesis as the ambiguous subject of my work, which does not correspond neatly to any modern identity categories we now recognise, be it

³⁶ This includes, but is by no means limited to, Katrina Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority and Lived Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Morgan Holmes, *Intersex: A Perilous Difference* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2008); Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vásquez García, *Hermaphroditism, Medical Science and Sexual Identity in Spain, 1850-1960* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Geertje Mak, *Doubting Sex: Inscriptions, Bodies and Selves in Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite Case Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); and a journal special edition, Iain Morland (ed.), 'Intersex and After', *GLQ*, 15, no. 2 (2009).

³⁷ Oram, "'Farewell to Frocks' - 'Sex Change' in Interwar Britain", p. 109; Mak, *Doubting Sex*, p. 1.

intersex, transsexual, transgender or homosexual. As Oram has argued: 'such stories carried quite different meanings, far from the scientific categories of modern sexual identity.'³⁸ I have taken the idea of 'sex change' as a guiding theme and I deploy 'sex change' because that was the dominant expression employed by the press in the 1930s.³⁹ There is a temptation to engage in an etiological project of assigning present-day identity categories or diagnoses, but the point of my project is not to label individuals according to our own understandings. I do not want to reinstate 'sex change' as a description of present day transgender or intersex experience, rather, my intention is to point to how the term was used historically during the interwar years.

Studying people whose sex was seen as ambiguous has raised the issue of how to describe those people when the English language so often demands gender-specific terminology. In my pronoun usage I have mostly followed Meyerowitz's in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2002). As

Meyerowitz has put it:

In most cases I use the pronouns that accord with a person's public presentation of gender. If someone lived as a woman, I use "she," "her," and "hers" regardless of anatomy, and if someone lived as a man, I use "he," "him," and "his." When writing of those undergoing change in bodily sex or presentations of gender, I use the pronouns that accord with the public presentations they ultimately chose rather than the ones they were assigned at birth.⁴⁰

³⁸ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 2.

³⁹ Today 'sex change' has come to be associated with the phrase 'sex change operation', a term that is considered to be an inaccurate and disrespectful description. I am employing 'sex change' in its historic usage.

⁴⁰ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 13.

I favour this approach because, as far as possible without personal testimony, it recognises chosen subject positions and reflects the information given – if someone is said to be have been living as man, I understand him to be a man. In some instances I have found it hard to ascertain gender identity, for example, in the cases of Violette Morris and Joe Carstairs, who both had masculine presentations but did not, to my knowledge, identify themselves as men. In these instances I have used gender-neutral pronouns, such as ‘ze’ and ‘hir’.⁴¹ The potential clumsiness of these ahistorical terms reflects the difficulties of thinking about sex beyond binary oppositions in the English language.

So, having navigated medical and popular notions of sex change, I believe that the 1930s marked a very particular time in which hormone research brought sexual fixity into question and the wide reach of the popular press could popularise the idea of sex change. The medical and popular discourses were mutually constitutive and helped create an understanding of the unfixity of sex – what Stryker terms the ‘interpretive fiction’ of the sexed body.⁴² This was borne out in press coverage, in medical decisions, in popular culture and in the field of sport, as I demonstrate in the chapters that follow.

Chapter One, *Sexual Ambiguity in the Clinic*, considers the medical background to the press stories of sex change. Frequent points of reference in those articles were Charing Cross Hospital and Broster. I argue that Broster occupied a pivotal position in relation to sex changeability in Britain because of his

⁴¹ Stryker, *Transgender History*, pp. 21-22.

⁴² Susan Stryker, ‘Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question’, in Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (eds.), *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, Second Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 62.

treatment of so many patients and the publicity he attracted. I examine Broster's research through his major publication, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (1938), and his fringe involvement in the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormone Committee (1930-1934). There has been little scholarship on this book and I argue for its significance not just in terms of the number of case histories it contained, but also on account of its multidisciplinary approach, assessing patients from clinical and surgical, psychological, pathological and biochemical perspectives. Broster's book showed that the research into sex changeability, vaguely alluded to in the press, was primarily on the adreno-genital syndrome, now known as the intersex condition congenital adrenal hyperplasia. Broster's focus was on this condition, which was characterised by the appearance of male sexual characteristics in women, but he and his colleagues also saw many patients with other forms of sexual ambiguity. In their diagnoses, Broster, who carried out the clinical and surgical analysis, and Clifford Allen, who carried out the psychological analysis, relied on highly subjective concepts of normality to distinguish between male and female. Their joint project makes for an illuminating example of how normality was constructed through ideological and regulatory concerns with and material consequences involving the allocation of sex based on stereotypical gender attributes.

Chapter Two, *Changing Sex in the Popular Press*, examines the twenty or so changes of sex reported in the 1930s British popular press, including those of Burtt, Weston and Koubek. I argue that the popular press devoted a considerable amount of space and energy to the topic of sex change and that it was a concept with far more currency in 1930s Britain than has usually been recognised. The tone of the

coverage was largely positive and changes of sex were given a degree of credibility. Articles of this sort often cross-referenced previous cases, creating an impression of the ordinariness of sex change as a feature of modern life. Modernity was an important element in these stories, with the wonders of modern medicine frequently referenced as explanations for the changes that occurred. Although medical developments were frequently invoked, an older register of sexual ambiguity was present in the term 'man-woman'. 'Man-woman' referred to what would now be seen as a variety of sexual and gender histories, from those who had lived as a different sex to the one designated at birth, to those perceived to be neither wholly male nor female and those whose sex had been misdiagnosed. The long-standing category of the 'man-woman' did not conflict with the new medical ideas of sex being changeable; it provided a framework for comprehending such changes. The extensive press reporting of sex change in the 1930s as a medical fact meant that instances of sexual and gender variance were not necessarily understood in terms of sexuality, while queer histories have had a tendency to focus almost solely on sexuality.⁴³

Chapter Three, Glands, Hormones and Popular Culture: Contextualising Sex Change, looks beyond the press reports and the medical case studies to argue that accounts of sex change were not marginal or isolated events, but were enmeshed

⁴³ Doan has noted that queer history as a field has concentrated on homosexuality while transsexuality and intersexuality remain understudied, Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, p. 13. An example is Brian Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). It is an important collection of recent research but it is striking that the 'queer' of the title refers primarily to (homo)sexuality and the collection has little consideration of queerness in relation to sex or gender rather than sexuality. This omission is conveyed by Brian Lewis's discussion of the book's topic, in which queerness is reduced to sexuality: 'queer is indeed a useful category of analysis for students of modern British history and sexuality', Brian Lewis, 'Introduction: British Queer History' in Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History*, p. 3.

in broader forms of popular culture during the 1930s. My focus here is the public interest in glands and hormones, and the ways in which the specialist interest magazines *Urania* and *London Life* refashioned accounts of sex change to support their own beliefs. The first part of the chapter explores the position of glands and hormones in British popular culture in the 1920s and 1930s, to help explain the acceptance of medical explanations of sex change from the early 1930s. I cover popular fiction, newspaper features, and adverts, which relied on the readership's familiarity with glands, and later hormones, as meaningful entities associated with behaviour, personality and sexual characteristics. I argue that popular discussions of hormones conveyed a sense of scientific modernity, which was transferred to the idea of changing sex. The chapter's second section looks at two magazines that differed greatly in ethos, but which both reproduced stories of sex change. *Urania's* editors were set on challenging sexual essentialism and reprinted articles on changes of sex as proof of their beliefs. I consider *Urania's* main editor, Irene Clyde's own personal investment in the accounts of sex change that were proliferating in the press. In stark contrast to the feminist and spiritual philosophy of *Urania*, *London Life* was a glamour magazine that covered a range of fetishisms. *London Life* also featured many items on sex change, but with more of an interest in them as prurient entertainment. I bring these two disparate titles together to show the myriad ways that stories of sex change were being circulated and co-opted in 1930s Britain. Sex change and the possibilities offered by new hormone research could be harnessed to very different ideological ends.

Chapter Four, *Sport Changes Sex*, deals with the association with sport that featured in a number of articles on sex change and with how sport was seen to

change the way women's bodies were sexed. The chapter details the growth of women's sport in the 1920s and 1930s. It moves from the anxieties of commentators such as Dr. Arabella Kenealy that sport was robbing women of their feminine qualities to the widespread participation of women in sport and the more androgynous fashions in women's clothing that stemmed from sportswear. I argue that by practising sports, women were challenging gender expectations and physically shaping themselves into what were deemed to be more masculine forms. I take the sports theorist Jennifer Hargreaves's concept of 'musculinity' and extend it to argue that muscles were held to be a male secondary sex characteristic, and that by developing muscles, women were physically altering the sex of their bodies. The chapter includes a reading of Gilbert Frankau's middlebrow novel, *Christopher Strong* (1932), for its treatment of sex and gender with regard to women and motor sports. In 1936 two of the highest profile men to have had their sex changed, Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek, had both previously found some measure of fame as women athletes. The chapter concludes with an examination of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. There was a deal of concern expressed in the press that, following Weston and Koubek's changes of sex, games officials were at a loss as to how they could distinguish female athletes from male ones. These debates have been attributed to homophobic sentiments, but I make the case that it was sex, as much as sexuality, that drove these apprehensions as to what constituted a woman athlete. Sport was not gender-neutral and it helped to change received notions of sex and gender; it was a contested arena that demanded sex segregation and as such, was a significant site of debates around changes of sex.

My contention is that the possibility of sex change coalesced during 1930s

Britain, borne out by the cases reported in the popular press, which is why my second chapter examines those newspaper articles. Integral to the experience of modernity of the 1930s were media representations of people whose lives had been changed by medicine. Evan Burtt and Mack Hutchison received medical opinions that they were men not women, as they had been led to believe. Mark Weston and Donald Purcell had medical interventions to render them legally male. These case studies suggest that individuals whose sex was called into question were portrayed positively as 'success' stories of modern medicine, stories that challenge our notions of 1930s sexuality and gender.

Chapter One: Sexual Ambiguity in the Clinic

Mark Weston: A Medical Case Study

In 1938, two years after Mark Weston's change of sex had attracted widespread press attention, a description of his case, accompanied by a photograph, was published, not in the press but in a medical text, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality (Adrenal Cortex (1938))*, edited by Lennox Broster.¹ Weston appeared under the heading 'M. W. Case 41. Fig. 19. 31 years. Undescent of Testes.' This brief description gave more information as to his medical condition than any of the newspaper stories had done. According to the case study, Weston was unequivocally a man, despite having been raised as a girl. The reader was informed that:

The patient looks manly with a well-formed muscular body. He has the normal distribution of male hair, and shaves. The breasts have never developed, menstruation has not occurred, and his voice has cracked. He has a moderate hypospadiac penis with a cleft vagina-like scrotum. In each of his labia two small undescended testes are palpable and testicular sensation is present.²

The use of gendered pronouns reinforced Weston's maleness, with the gender-neutral language of 'the patient' being tempered by the consistent use of male pronouns. The description of Weston's genitalia and gonads acknowledged the supposedly female features whilst emphasising an interpretation of them as male.

¹ I have abbreviated *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality to Adrenal Cortex (1938)* to distinguish it from L. R. Broster and H. W. C. Vines *The Adrenal Cortex: A Surgical and Pathological Study (1933)*.

² L. R. Broster, Clifford Allen, H. W. C. Vines, Jocelyn Patterson, Alan W. Greenwood, G. F. Marrian and G. C. Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1938), pp. 47-48. 'Hypospadias is a condition whereby the urinary opening of the penis falls somewhere other than at the tip.' Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 163 n. 4.

Such an account helped to explain why Weston had been raised as female. An incorrect interpretation of the genitals could be explained since the scrotum was 'vagina-like' and the penis was hypospadiac – a condition which meant that the urethra was not at the tip of the penis and which could result in the penis not being recognised as such. But the analysis made it clear that expert scrutiny could identify Weston's male characteristics. The 'labia', although ostensibly a female characteristic, revealed to the expert's examination undescended testes, evident to touch but not to sight. Similarly, breasts and menstruation figured as phantom features – feminine possibilities that never materialised. Broster's account stressed that Weston's innate maleness had prevailed, and had led him, by instinct, to become a man: 'this man succeeded in attaining male sexuality against every disadvantage. He is a triumph of instinctual development.'³ Weston was cast as a fine example for the medics, and as someone to be admired in his own right. The medical judgment apparently accorded with Weston's own desire to live as a man.

This case study pointed towards the complex interplay of factors that made a person a man or a woman. Broster's description of Weston concluded: 'In his personality, his psychosexual life and in every way he was a complete male – it was only the misfortune of his environment which prevented him showing it.'⁴ Sex could be ascertained not just by the physical markers of sex – the gonads and genitalia – but also by mental outlook and behaviour. 'Sexuality', as Broster applied the term, connoted what we might term both sexuality and gender; the different elements were intertwined in this analysis. The patient's 'sexuality' helped determine the

³ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 48.

treatment received. This was not laid out explicitly, but could be inferred when Weston's case study was considered together with the three other cases that were grouped alongside his own.

In the analytical schema outlined in the *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), Weston's case study was included under the heading 'Intersexuality', and under the subgrouping 'Bilateral Undescent [of testes]'.⁵ Of these four case studies, each of which presented very similar physical characteristics, Weston was the only patient to be reassigned as a man. The other four patients were supported in their wishes to remain as women.⁶ Broster stated that in intersex cases, the patient's 'sexuality' should direct the treatment they received, and thus whether they were to continue as men or as women:

From the practical point of view the sexuality of the individual has been followed as a guide to treatment; that is, where abdominal or inguinal testes have been present in a person with a feminine psychology, they have been removed; and where they have been undescended in a person brought up as a female but with male psychology, a plastic repair of the urethra to a hypospadiac penis has been performed, and the sex changed.⁷

Broster's advice clearly laid out the procedures that were followed for Weston. It was here that the language of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) came closest to the press language of 'sex change'. The account of sex being changed appeared to refer to the patient's official status being altered, rather than to a sense that sex had been altered at a somatic level. Sexuality – meaning gendered presentation – was taken as the measure of sex and to a large extent this allowed the patients' wishes to be

⁵ Ibid, p. 21.

⁶ One case study, Case 40, was of twins who were considered together; hence four patients from three case studies.

⁷ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, pp. 19-20.

respected. However, none of these patients displayed an attraction for those of the same gender. Given the focus on sexual object choice as part of Broster's description of gendered characteristics, it seems unlikely that he would have recommended a patient live in their preferred gender if it meant their sexual orientation were then homosexual. Thus supporting patients' wishes might have been contingent on them maintaining heterosexuality, rather than on allowing patients any autonomy over their own bodies.

Weston's official reclassification from female to male, so vaunted in the press, was not medically inevitable. It was due in no small part to Weston's sense of himself as a man. Expert opinion was required to make the diagnosis, but decisions as to which sex the body belonged were not based on sexual characteristics alone.

Intersexuality and Medical Discourse

The Weston case introduces one of the key concerns of this chapter, namely the interwar medical developments behind the press stories of sex change that will be discussed in Chapter Two. In those press articles, many of the references to the medical aspects of changing sex were left vague, but Lennox Broster (1889-1965) was mentioned with some frequency.⁸ In this chapter I examine Broster and the way that *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), which he edited and contributed to, handled medical ideas about sexual ambiguity and the criteria used to determine a person's

⁸ Broster was mentioned by name in the following articles: 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7; 'Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark', *Daily Express*, 29 May 1929, p. 19; "'Girl" Athlete's New Life After Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3; Anon., 'Change of Sex', *Time*, 24 August 1936, p. 33; 'Can Sex in Humans Be Changed?' *Physical Culture*, January 1937, p. 16; 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1938, p. 2; 'Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward', *News of the World*, 8 May 1938, p. 7.

sex. I argue that one of the major claims that *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) made for itself was that many of the patients were also assessed by a psychiatrist, Clifford Allen (1902-?).

Broster began his career as a house surgeon at Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary, and then moved to London, where he was to practice for the rest of his career, first as a surgical officer at Guy's Hospital, then as an assistant surgeon at the Queen's Hospital for Children in 1922, and then as a surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital in 1924, where he remained for the rest of his working life. He was admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons in England in 1921. He also maintained an elite private practice in Harley Street. Clifford Allen was a psychiatrist and member of the British Medical Association, and like Broster, had a private Harley Street practice.⁹

My analysis of Broster and Allen's work in this chapter emphasises the ways in which medical research and practice shaped ideas of the body as sexed and gendered. I consider the role played by Allen in juxtaposing psychological assessments alongside physical examinations and the effect this joint consideration had on deciding which features correlated with which sex. The chapter engages with the ideas emerging in intersex histories, which have examined the medical protocols that developed around treating intersex patients, and the impact on concepts of sex and gender.¹⁰ However mine is not in itself an intersex history as I am not looking directly at intersexuality, but am looking instead at sexual ambiguity more generally. I propose that the focus of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) complicates the

⁹ Clifford Allen, "Getting Married", *British Medical Journal*, 21 March 1959, p. 785.

¹⁰ Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Geertje Mak, *Doubting Sex: Inscriptions, Bodies and Selves in Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite Case Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

idea of looking at intersex in isolation from sexuality and gender. My focus here on Broster and *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) allows a line of enquiry that joins the popular and the medical to create a study of the relation of the scientifically sexed body and popular perceptions.

This focus on the 'scientifically sexed body' means that this chapter resonates with recent debates about histories of intersex and of transsexuality, although it is a history of neither category. In one of the first histories of intersex to appear, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*, Dreger has argued that in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain and France there was a shift in how sex was defined. Her research suggested that it was the gonads that came to determine whether someone whose sex had been called into question was designated male or female in England and France.¹¹ *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) suggests that the gonads were certainly not the definitive measure of sex in 1930s Britain since the book showed that a variety of factors were taken into account in the treatment at Charing Cross hospital. This discrepancy need not contradict Dreger's findings since historians of intersex have identified a variety of markers of sex for different times and in different locations. In her study of intersexuality in the USA, Reis has emphasised the importance of the cultural context in which medics operated.¹² Mak has taken a divergent tack to Dreger in her study of nineteenth-century intersex case studies in French, German, English and Dutch. Whereas Dreger dealt with theories of intersex as espoused by medics, Mak has focussed on

¹¹ Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*, p. 12.

¹² Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, p. x.

the testimonies of those whose sex was put into doubt. Mak's rationale is to explore the emergence of a sense of an inner sexed self.¹³

A move towards medics considering patients' sense of self is a phenomenon that a number of historians have highlighted. In 'Farewell to Frocks' Oram shares Mak's interest in the development of a sex of self, noting how a description of the subject's innate masculinity became an essential component of newspaper accounts of men whose sex had been changed.¹⁴ Oram's focus on concepts of the sexed nature of self identity has lead her to consider whether changes of sex came about through the desires of the patient or through changing medical protocols.¹⁵ This question of patient agency is a critical one in transsexual histories. Hausman's *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (1995) put forward the contentious argument that although transsexuals presented life narratives that emphasised their sexed sense of self as a symptom that proved their need for medical intervention, it was in fact the advent of those medical technologies that allowed people to think of themselves as transsexual.¹⁶ This stance has been criticised by subsequent scholars for denying transsexual subjects agency.¹⁷

In looking at *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) I do engage with the intersections of the physical and psychological because these distinctions were made in the structure of the case studies. I am not, however, looking to make claims about patients' sense

¹³ Mak, *Doubting Sex*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Oram, "'Farewell to Frocks' - 'Sex Change' in Interwar Britain", p. 110.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 103.

¹⁶ Berenice L. Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 7.

¹⁷ See for example: Mak, *Doubting Sex*, pp. 10, 158-60; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 5; Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 133.

of self or the relative agency of patients or medics. I take from Mak the idea that there is no one such thing as an intersexed person and contend that it is not particular bodies or conditions but doubting more generally that exposes the impossibility of relying on fixity.¹⁸ My access to the narratives of those whose sex was called into question is highly mediated through press stories and medical case studies; I am interested not in locating a sense of self but in how bodies were being interpreted as sexed. These intersex and transsexual histories have each in their own ways insisted that 'like gender and sexuality, biological sex has a history.'¹⁹ While mine is a history of neither intersexuality nor transsexuality, interrogating sex is also central to my project.

In the press accounts, Broster was the sole named medic in relation to sex change. In this chapter I look at the existing scholarship on Broster to show how individual elements of his legacy have been noted, before drawing those strands together to argue for his significance. I then consider his reception amongst his medical colleagues, suggesting that his legacy has centred more on his social activities than on his work. Broster's reputation and his position in the British medical community can be further assessed from the records of the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormone Committee. An appraisal of the Committee's archive shows how Broster's work was treated with misgivings by some of the leading lights of British interwar endocrinology. Having given this background to Broster, I move on to examine how *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) negotiated notions of

¹⁸ Mak, *Doubting Sex*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 21.

sexual ambiguity. Broster and Allen were applying their own notions of sex and gender norms to ascribe sex onto their patients' bodies.

Lennox Ross Broster

For all Broster's work and the press coverage it garnered, he was hardly championed by his contemporaries and has received very little critical attention since. This is a serious omission as, I contend, Broster was pivotal in debates around sex changeability in Britain. His work generated many of the newspaper stories and his medical research, in particular the book *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (1938), was the leading piece of research on sexual ambiguity in 1930s Britain. It was his position in both medical and popular texts that helped to locate discussions of sex change in both registers.

There are a few scholars who have identified Broster's work as a site of significant interest. Oram has discussed Broster's work at Charing Cross as part of her study of women's gender-crossing in the British popular press. Broster entered her narrative in her account of the 1930s medicalisation of gender-crossing:

Medical science was the vector through which sex transformation was enabled and legitimised. The hospitals and surgeons involved were frequently named, including the London Hospital, and Dr Lennox Broster at the Charing Cross Hospital, which was established as a leading player in the advancement of science [...].²⁰

Oram's focus was on how Broster was treated in the popular press. Broster was named as a scientific mediator of sex change, but the popular press made only

²⁰ Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women's Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 113.

veiled allusions to quite what Broster's work was. This vagueness in the press provides a starting point for my desire to investigate the background to these newspaper stories.

King has discussed Broster in the context of research on the treatment of sex change in the British press, having identified two newspaper articles from 1939 and 1943 relating to changes of sex.²¹ King has placed Broster's work at Charing Cross and in *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) as precursors to a history of transsexuality in Britain stemming from the 1950s.²² In his 2006 book *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life*, Sengoopta also examined Broster. Sengoopta studied the way in which what were termed 'glands', then 'internal secretions', then 'hormones' controlled the function of the body as a whole. These late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century developments were argued to have had a profound effect on the understanding of the sexed body, and the role of sex in the body. It is in this context of endocrine research that Sengoopta encountered Broster:

In the London of the 1930s, Lennox Broster was even more profoundly concerned by the social consequences of adrenal virilization. Adrenal virilism did not make men out of women but produced something far more troubling – "the intersex type," a creature that was neither fully male nor fully female.²³

Sengoopta's Broster was a scientist negotiating the boundaries of somatic sex with a new set of understandings engendered by hormonal theories. Broster posited that everyone was reliant on the balancing act of hormones and that human bodies

²¹ Dave King, 'Cross-dressing, Sex-changing and the Press' in Richard Ekins and Dave King (eds.), *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 143.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²³ Chandak Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life: Sex, Glands, and Hormones, 1850-1950* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 144-45.

could be masculine, feminine, or neither. Sengoopta outlined Broster's research but did not go into detail as to its application and discourse.

In the existing literature then, Broster has appeared in three different contexts. In histories of popular understandings of women's gender crossing and the point at which that passing was medicalised; in transgender histories for the ways in which medical research and technologies allowed for bodies to be altered; and in the history of how endocrinology affected the way in which sex was viewed in relation to the body. Broster is at this intersection of endocrinological research, surgical capabilities and gender theory. His importance has been in bringing together these strands and making flesh the ideas of the time.

One of Broster's enduring interests was the adrenal glands and their role in the adreno-genital syndrome. To aid his studies, he pioneered a new surgical method for operating on the adrenal glands by unilateral adrenalectomy. This technique was as follows:

a high kidney incision was employed; the muscles below it are incised, the last rib fractured at its neck and the whole sub-costal flap retracted upwards. [...] The gland itself is lightly clamped and dissected out intact from its bed.²⁴

Although it did not receive great publicity, Broster's method was subsequently named after him as the 'Broster operation' and passing reference was made to it in contemporary medical literature in a manner that suggested it was common knowledge and had been adopted, as in this report from the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ):

²⁴ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 14.

a follow-up has shown that the procedure is useless where hair growth of definitely masculine type exists. For such cases I have tried irradiation of the suprarenal area, but the effects are only temporary, and the Broster operation would seem to be the sole hope for such people.²⁵

The technique was an improvement on previous methods of removing adrenal glands. It required a degree of skill to perform, but Broster had the opportunity to practice on a large number of patients. In a discussion of adrenalectomy in the *BMJ* it was opined that: '[Broster] is undoubtedly the most distinguished exponent of adrenalectomy in this country.'²⁶

Broster was author or co-author of three books, *The Adrenal Cortex: A Surgical and Pathological Study* (1933), *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (1938) and *Endocrine Man: A Study in the Surgery of Sex* (1944). He also wrote a number of articles on adrenal surgery and the adreno-genital syndrome, which appeared in journals such as the *British Journal of Surgery*, the *Lancet* and the *BMJ*.

The Adrenal Cortex (1933) was written by Broster and H. W. C. Vines, a pathologist who also worked at Charing Cross. Broster appears to have been the instigator of their joint research – he started the research on his own but later brought in Vines to help with the histological aspects.²⁷ *The Adrenal Cortex* summarised the state of endocrinological research regarding the adrenals and their effect on sex characteristics. It emphasised that all female foetuses passed through a 'brief male phase', but was able to rationalise this universal sex dualism by

²⁵ F. Hernaman Johnson, 'Treatment of Superfluous Facial Hair', *British Medical Journal*, 4 April 1936, p. 723.

²⁶ P. M. F. Bishop, 'Indications for Adrenalectomy', *British Medical Journal*, 2 June 1945, p. 787.

²⁷ The National Archives (TNA): FD 1/3108: Sex Hormone Committee. Research: Dr L. Broster, London, (1931-1934).

carefully detailing the parameters of what constituted normal sex characteristics.²⁸ Part of the significance of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), Broster's second book, was that although it discussed similar territory to the previous volume, it did so in much more depth. It drew on far more research than the earlier book did, reflecting the rapidly growing developments in endocrinology. Unlike the first two books, Broster's last book, *Endocrine Man*, did not set out individual case studies and was aimed at a more general readership. It outlined Broster's Darwinist thinking and investment in theories of evolution for understanding his own practice.²⁹ This was coupled with a strong sense of the undesirability of variations from what was held to be normal, however fragile the parameters of normal were that he set out.

Broster appears to have been considered something of a maverick by his contemporaries. In his 1988 memoir, *Biologist at Large*, the reproductive biologist A. S. Parkes opined: 'Mr L. R. Broster, a London surgeon [was] well known for his work on adrenalectomy – a pretty bloody business in those days – and for his unconventional ideas.'³⁰ Parkes mentioned Broster in connection with a vasectomy that Broster had agreed to perform in 1929, a time when the legality of the procedure for the purposes of contraception was unclear and the surgeon risked being sued for mayhem – the crime of intentionally maiming someone – should the patient later change his mind.³¹ It is an interesting side note that, given his association with changing patients' sex, Broster was unafraid of falling foul of laws

²⁸ Broster and Vines, *The Adrenal Cortex*, p. 87.

²⁹ A Darwinist focus on primate studies was a feature of many works in the field; as well as influencing Broster's work, it was a strong element of Allen's, who based many of his theories on primate studies.

³⁰ A. S. Parkes, *Biologist at Large: The Background to Off-Beat Biologist* (Cambridge: A. S. Parkes, 1988), p. 137.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 137-38.

relating to mayhem, since it was these laws that later had to be surmounted before medics would offer genital surgery to transgender people.³²

The archives of the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormone Committee relating to Broster also pointed to his being an outsider, for his research topic and methods frequently came under scrutiny.³³ This is neatly illustrated in a letter Broster wrote to his acquaintance, Lady Helen D'Abernon, entreating her to intervene officially on his behalf. Broster complained about a perceived slight he had received from the late Secretary of the Medical Research Council and detailed various hardships he felt himself to have suffered, before concluding:

I do not want you to think that I feel this work has received no recognition. That is far from my thoughts, because since the publication of my work, the Royal College of Surgeons have made me Hunterian Professor and have elected me to their Court of Examiners, and I feel all this is a great honour from my own colleagues.³⁴

His determination to pursue what D'Abernon termed his 'perhaps imagined grievance', and his need to prove his own worth, detracted from his actual achievements.³⁵ Broster was connected to the heart of the British medical establishment through his appointments, collaborations and commitments, but his research and his techniques meant that he simultaneously operated on the peripheries.

Originally from South Africa, Broster was not alone in his status as a foreigner amongst those working on sex hormones during the interwar years. Other leading names in endocrinology had emigrated to Britain, for example Vladimir

³² Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 47, 120-21.

³³ TNA: FD 1/3108.

³⁴ TNA: FD 1/3108.

³⁵ TNA: FD 1/3108.

Korenchevsky, who had left Soviet Russia, was an integral part of British research.

South African Dr. L. Mirvish of the London School of Economics was dismissed by the leading geneticist F. A. E. Crew on the grounds of his nationality:

Mirvish is a South African who does not really belong to us. One may assume that he is returning whence he came, and I would rather do what I can to encourage the very many young people we have of our own to train themselves for further work in the same field.³⁶

Broster's nationality was not used against him, even though such a form of stigmatisation was used elsewhere, as Crew's comments demonstrated.

At Oxford University, then during his war service in France with the Field Ambulance and as a medical administrator for the Tank Corps and through his involvement with various British medical institutions, Broster integrated himself into the higher echelons of British society.³⁷ His obituaries, and the subsequent recollections of acquaintances in major publications such as the *Lancet*, the *BMJ* and *The Times*, stressed his support for his old university sports clubs – especially rugby.³⁸ His conviviality and connections across the Commonwealth were emphasised:

He was blessed with great personal charm and he had a host of friends. He made his impact in many different ways. He was always full of ideas and full of good works. For whatever he had on his agenda at any moment, he always had a team of collaborators who were just as enthusiastic as he was.

³⁶ TNA: FD 1/3091: Sex Hormone Committee: minutes of meetings; membership; report on oestrin standard (1930-1931).

³⁷ 'Mr. L. R. Broster', *The Times*, 17 April 1965, p. 10.

³⁸ Anon., 'L. R. Broster', *British Medical Journal*, 24 April 1965, p. 1130; Anon., 'L. R. Broster', *British Medical Journal*, 15 May 1965, p. 1318; Anon., 'L. R. Broster', *British Medical Journal*, 22 May 1965, p. 1384. Praise for Broster's skills on the rugby field was not universal, an account in the *Observer* of a 1909 match castigated Broster's poor performance, describing him as: 'something of a failure', 'How Oxford Beat the Taylors', *Observer*, 24 October 1909, p. 12. The juxtaposition of the brute strength needed for rugby and the intricate dexterity required for surgery, was one some journalists latched on to as a means of underlining the peculiarities of Broster's work: 'Dr. Broster, Rugby-playing specialist with the hands of a woman', 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1938, p. 2.

It might be to do with adrenal glands, or with his surgical firm at Charing Cross, or with his Commonwealth friends at London House, or with the rugby representatives at his old university, tuning up his successors to the annual task of beating Cambridge. He was just as enthusiastic whether he was unravelling the intricacies of the adrenal hormones, or helping his friends from overseas, or fulfilling one of the many offices that came his way.³⁹

The picture given by Broster's obituaries in the *Lancet* and *The Times* is of a man to be remembered as much for his part in the social and sporting side of medical life as for his professional achievements.⁴⁰ The surgical operation he devised, which was named after him did not even merit a mention. In the moment of compiling his obituaries, of ordering the significance of his achievements, his work on adrenal hormones was put on a par with his social activities. There were fond recollections of Broster, but his research was not put forward as his lasting legacy. Broster's work on sexual ambiguity was not to dictate the direction of his field; the relative lack of attention given to his work has made it less noticeable for those studying the histories of the sexed body.

Broster amongst the Endocrinologists

The archives for the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormones Committee (SHC) are one of the few archival traces of Broster's work. He was peripherally involved with this organisation, arguably the most important in British interwar sex hormone

³⁹ Anon., 'Lennox Ross Broster', *Lancet*, 1 May 1965, pp. 966-67.

⁴⁰ *The Times* obituaries of other leading figures involved in research into intersexuality, such as William Blair-Bell, *The Times*, 27 January 1936, p. 17; F. H. A. Marshall, *The Times*, 7 February 1949, p. 7; Alexander Cawadias, *The Times*, 23 November 1971, p. 17; F. A. E. Crew, *The Times*, 30 May 1973, p. 20 and Guy Marrian, *The Times*, 29 July 1981, p. 16 gave more attention to their medical achievements. Jocelyn Patterson, a co-contributor of Broster's to *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* died, like Broster, in 1965, but Patterson's obituary in *The Times* focused far more on his research work than did Broster's, 'Prof. Jocelyn Patterson', *The Times*, 9 September 1965, p. 12.

research. Broster's place within the medico-scientific community speaks not just of how he was personally received, but also how the subject of sexual ambiguity sat awkwardly with the broader field of British hormonal research.

The Medical Research Committee was set up by the Government in 1913 and became the Medical Research Council (MRC) in 1919, the same year that the Ministry of Health was created.⁴¹ The stated aims of the MRC, which the Council upheld, albeit under a slightly different bureaucratic structure, were: 'the extension of medical knowledge with the view of increasing our powers of preserving health and preventing or combating disease.'⁴² The MRC looked to advance biomedical research in the national interest. Special advisory committees were formed to consider specific areas of medical science, such as that concerned with sex hormones. These committees were established to reflect contemporary biomedical concerns and the need for expert advice.⁴³ Each committee consisted of experts in the field and had the power to distribute funds for research. Alongside the MRC there was the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR), which served as a dedicated centre for undertaking research related to the interests of the Council and showed the emphasis being placed on contemporary laboratory techniques.⁴⁴ The addition of its various departments also reflected where value was being placed within the biomedical field. The NIMR formed a department for the

⁴¹ Joan Austoker and Linda Bryder (eds.), *Historical Perspectives on the Role of the MRC: Essays in the History of the Medical Research Council of the United Kingdom and its Predecessor, the Medical Research Committee, 1913-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. v.

⁴² A. Landsborough Thomson, *Half a Century of Medical Research*, Vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1973), p. 28.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 99.

⁴⁴ Thomson, *Half a Century of Medical Research*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

physiology of sex hormones in 1932, with the arrival of the reproductive biologist Dr A. S. Parkes.⁴⁵

The first meeting of the MRC's Sex Hormone Committee was held on 31 May 1930. Present were Dr. Marshall (Chair), Professor Crew, Professor Dodds, Dr. Dudley, Dr. Korenchevsky, Dr. Parkes, Sir Walter Fletcher and Dr. A. L. Thomson.⁴⁶ During the 1920s the MRC had received a large number of grant applications for research related to the burgeoning field of sex hormones.⁴⁷ The setting up of a committee at the beginning of the decade suggested the importance given to the topic by the British medico-scientific establishment. It also suggested that researchers were identifying sex-hormone research as fruitful and timely.

The men involved in the committee included some of the leading figures in sex-hormone research in Britain. Crew was the influential head of the Department of Animal Genetics at the University of Edinburgh. Korenchevsky was working at the Lister Institute and maintained many high profile European contacts.⁴⁸ Marshall had written the influential textbook, *The Physiology of Reproduction* (1910).⁴⁹ Parkes, the SHC secretary, was a reproductive biologist who was also concerned with social questions and was involved with – and honoured by – myriad institutions. The international standing of the SHC can be seen not just in its membership, but also in

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 121.

⁴⁶ TNA: FD 1/3091.

⁴⁷ A. S. Parkes, *Sex, Science and Society: Addresses, Essays, Lectures and Articles* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Oriel Press, 1966), p. 33.

⁴⁸ Medical Research Council Archive TNA: FD 1/671: Professor V. Korenchevsky's Research: Work on Sex Hormones Committee (1920-1932). Nelly Oudshoorn, *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archeology of Sex Hormones* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 35.

⁴⁹ Diana Long Hall, 'Biology, Sex Hormones and Sexism in the 1920s' in Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and Philosophy: Toward a Theory of Liberation* (New York: Putnam, 1976), p. 85.

their collaborations with leading international scientists such as the Canadian Dr Collip, who had been part of the Toronto group that first isolated insulin.⁵⁰

Although the SHC included some of the top figures in British endocrinology, the Committee as a body did not hold many meetings and did little towards their original remit of offering expert advice and furthering the field. In total there were only twelve meetings of the SHC, from the first in June 1930 to the last in July 1934.⁵¹ The SHC was then replaced by the Hormone Committee, which held seven meetings between 1936 and 1943.⁵² Correspondence from 1935 shows that there was a feeling amongst committee members that sex hormones no longer merited a separate focus of study and that instead, research should be focussed on hormonal research more broadly.⁵³

The SHC got off to a strong start with four meetings in 1930 and the same number again in 1931 and three in 1932, but there were none in 1933 and only one in 1934, suggesting that the earlier enthusiasm and *raison d'être* of the Committee had waned. A sense of frustration emerged from key figures, such as Parkes and Korenchevsky, that the SHC did little other than approve grants and it was certainly true that the SHC met out of necessity when it had to consider the grant applications it had received.⁵⁴ But the process of allocating grants was fraught in itself. In a letter to Landsborough Thomson in April 1931, Crew wrote about how difficult he found it to select grant applications for approval in such a small field

⁵⁰ TNA: FD 1/3091.

⁵¹ TNA: FD 1/5289: Sex Hormones Committee; minutes of twelve meetings (1930-1934).

⁵² TNA: FD 1/5295: Hormones Committee (1936-1943).

⁵³ TNA: FD 1/3092: Sex Hormone Committee: Agendas; papers; correspondence (1931-1935).

⁵⁴ TNA: FD 1/3092; FD 1/3093: Sex Hormone Committee: applications for research on sex hormones, report, 1936 (1936-1937).

where most of those concerned knew each other so well.⁵⁵ With the setting up of the Hormone Committee in 1936 Korenchevsky wrote with a touch of despair of:

the former Sex Hormones Committee which only had occasional meetings when special advice was asked and which had no part in the most important events occurring in sex hormone research, such as organisation of the International Conference for the Standardisation of Hormones or for working out an international capon unit.⁵⁶

The SHC and its successor consisted of leading lights in the field and had access to MRC funding and the prestige official sponsorship brought with it, but they spent much of their time deliberating over which proposals merited MRC funding. Therefore the SHC could only partly shape the field of sex hormone research, crucially by deciding who did and did not get access to grants. Although an important source of funding, the MRC was not the only option for aspiring researchers and the SHC cannot be said to have constituted a dynamic research hub in the UK.⁵⁷

Broster did receive funding from the SHC but not all his applications were successful, with the SHC's perception of both his work and his working methods restricting his success. In 1931 he was awarded a grant of £175 per annum for 'expenses and assistance in studies of the relation of pathological changes in the suprarenal glands to the condition of virilism in women.'⁵⁸ This grant ran until March 1933 and appears to have formed the basis for Broster's 1933 book, the

⁵⁵ TNA: FD 1/3091.

⁵⁶ TNA: FD1/5295 Hormones Committee (1936-1943).

⁵⁷ Another major source of funding, and one from which Broster benefitted, was financial support from affluent individuals, such as Lord Wakefield of Hythe. Other potential sources of funding were pharmaceutical companies and wealthy institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation. See Lindsay Granshaw, 'The Hospital' in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (eds.), *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine, Volume Two* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 1197.

⁵⁸ TNA: FD 2/19, p. 84: Annual Reports and Publications, 1932-1933.

Adrenal Cortex. Although he did receive funding on this occasion, the SHC were unsure about his proposal and, unusually for the Committee, did not accept it until he had redrafted it a number of times. Various members of the SHC displayed a frustration with Broster that bordered on contempt. In a 1931 letter to Parkes, Thomson wrote: 'The council have of course not granted Broster's application.'⁵⁹ Thomson then extended his treatment of Broster's application as self-evidently unacceptable to imply that Broster's work in general was unreliable: 'if any more acceptable proposal should by chance emerge from his ideas.'⁶⁰ Broster and his work were treated as unfathomable and possibly part of a world separate from that of the other scientists. This was seen again in a letter from Green to Parkes:

B., unfortunately, seems incapable of setting out his proposals with any explicitness. I wonder if you could find time to guide his hand (or head) in making out a more detailed application in order that we may discover exactly what he is driving at?⁶¹

By all accounts Broster was lucky to eventually have his grant approved, given the attitude he evoked from the various SHC members.

While Broster did get a grant from the SHC in 1931, this grant took a good deal of revision before it was approved and Broster faced hostility from SHC members and criticism of his use of the grant. Broster was keen to get this 1931 grant extended and through 1932 he kept the SHC briefed as to what he had achieved and why he needed further funds.⁶² Broster and Vines carried out a demonstration of their work at the December 1932 meeting of the SHC and piqued

⁵⁹ TNA: FD 1/3108.

⁶⁰ TNA: FD 1/3108.

⁶¹ TNA: FD 1/3108.

⁶² The main problem Broster mentioned was the lack of patients, or at least the 'material' they provided, upon whom his team could try out his new techniques, perhaps surprising when the sheer number of case studies in his 1938 book is taken into consideration.

the interest of the members, but they also raised questions about their own methods. Following the meeting Parkes wrote to Green that:

At the Meeting on December 13th the Sex Hormones Committee saw a demonstration by Mr. Broster and Mr. Vines. They were much interested in the work, but noticed the absence of a number of very obvious control preparations. This seemed to indicate that insufficient care had been taken in making certain that the special stain really is as specific as described; a serious matter in view of the fact that the whole of the histological work turns on the special staining technique.

In addition, they gathered from Mr. Broster's original application that the grant was meant to support a young histologist for the work, whereas actually it seems to have gone to increase the resources of Mr. H.W.C. Vines, Pathologist to the Charing Cross Hospital.⁶³

However impressive Broster and Vines's work might have appeared, the prevailing mood conveyed by Parkes's letter was of frustration at the lack of proper control procedures. Broster's 1934 application to the SHC to fund H. W. C. Vines and Jocelyn Patterson – two of Broster's co-authors of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) – 'to try and obtain a physiological extract of the new fuchsinophil reaction' was, perhaps unsurprisingly, unsuccessful.⁶⁴ Regarding Broster's 1934 grant application, Parkes wrote to Green that:

Korenchevsky and Marshall are mildly in favour of Broster's application, the rest of the members against. Our previous experience of Broster was not satisfactory, and there is little doubt that the Committee as a whole would recommend against.⁶⁵

Broster appears to have been treated as an irregular character who was something of a nuisance, not the top-flight medic at the cutting edge of sex-hormone research that the press implied.⁶⁶ His work did not represent an established area of scientific

⁶³ TNA: FD 1/3108.

⁶⁴ TNA: FD 1/3092.

⁶⁵ TNA: FD 1/3092.

⁶⁶ See Chapter Two, Changing Sex in the Popular Press for how Broster was depicted in the press.

research in Britain, and though he had a series of colleagues working with him, they were certainly not operating at the centre of British endocrinology.

The focus of much of the research carried out under the patronage of the SHC was connected to fertility and reproduction and Broster's approach and subject area were somewhat at odds with this. The topic of sex hormones needed to be treated delicately with respect to social mores since it challenged popularly held social notions of the fixity of sex and gender roles. It also threw up questions about the capability of sex hormones to prevent or terminate pregnancies, a socially contentious issue.⁶⁷ The 1934 MRC report described the SHC as: 'a special committee to assist them in promoting researches into the nature and action of the chemical substances in the body which control the various phases of the reproductive function'.⁶⁸ The phrase 'reproductive function' showed how the role of sex hormones in the body was considered only in terms of reproduction, not allowing for acknowledgment of non-reproductive function or the application of hormones. Broster was researching sex hormones for applications beyond their main scientific area of assisting fertility.

It is difficult to say exactly why Broster remained a marginal figure within the SHC circle. Yet he and his research certainly were prominent in the popular press and its coverage of sex hormones, despite being out of favour in the professional world of the SHC. Attempting to synthesise hormones was a concern

⁶⁷ For example, a letter from Dr H. H. Dale to Prof. Mellanby dated 15 June 1938, expressed concern that the newly synthesised ethanol-oestradiol could prevent or terminate pregnancy and due to these potentially undesirable sociological affects, ought to be considered for classification as a poison. Medical Research Council Archive TNA: FD 1/3096: Sex Hormone Committee: Dangers of misuse; report, 1938 (Dr A. S. Perks) (1938-1946).

⁶⁸ TNA: FD 2/20, p. 27: Annual Reports and Publications (1933-1934).

from the beginnings of the SHC. The commercialisation of that synthesis work grew as the decade progressed and caused increased tensions between commercial and theoretical work. A number of pharmaceutical companies were involved in sophisticated laboratory work. There was an impetus to carry out research that was commercially viable – although only to a certain extent, and A. W. Spence was forced to leave the SHC in 1941 after it was revealed that he was working for the Ciba drug manufacturing company.⁶⁹ The possibility remains that Broster was sidelined partly because his work was not perceived to offer much by way of commercial application. There were myriad reasons, personal and professional, why Broster was not at the centre of British sex hormone research. He held positions of authority within the medical establishment, and collaborated with a range of researchers, but his work placed him on the peripheries of endocrinology in Britain.

The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality (1938)

Adrenal Cortex (1938) analysed an unprecedented number of case studies of ‘departure from normal sexual development’.⁷⁰ The book contained fifty-six cases, including some, such as that of Mark Weston, which resulted in an official change of sex.⁷¹ The text advanced a holistic approach to the body. The chapters mapped out responses to the same case studies from the standpoint of different disciplines and

⁶⁹ TNA: FD 1/3095: Sex Hormone Committee: General Correspondence (1939-1950).

⁷⁰ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. ix.

⁷¹ Broster and Allen described fifty-six different case studies between them, but the numbering of the case studies ran up to one hundred, suggesting that they had seen many more patients than were detailed in *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*.

methodologies, and were divided into the areas of 'Clinical and Surgical', 'Psychological', 'Pathological' and 'Biochemical'. In his foreword, Sir Walter Langdon-Brown (1870-1946), a British physician commonly held as the founder of clinical endocrinology, highlighted this multidisciplinary.⁷² He commented: 'it is this combined attack by medical, surgical, psychological, histological, and biochemical methods which gives this research its peculiar value.'⁷³ Langdon-Brown emphasised not just the varying approaches of practitioners from different specialisms, but also the impact of such medico-scientific research beyond its own sphere and into wider society:

Nor does this new light concern medicine alone. It is a fact familiar to all physicians that any departure from normal sexual development produces a degree of psychological distress quite incommensurate with the physical abnormality. Moreover, those concerned with social problems are equally aware that the injury is not confined to the victims alone, their influence in the community must also be taken into account [...].⁷⁴

By including a psychological element, *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) was seen not just to address a medical problem, but also to offer insight into a social problem. Langdon-Brown praised the book for tackling a difficult issue, but the exact nature of that issue was not made clear.

The foreword acknowledged the indebtedness to Lord Wakefield of Hythe as the benefactor of the research, and stressed the importance of the book and its

⁷² D. V. Hubble, 'Brown, Sir Walter Langdon- (1870–1946)', rev. Michael Bevan, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34401>], accessed 10 October 2013.

⁷³ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. x.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. ix.

approach, but it was hesitant to actually name its subject.⁷⁵ Langdon-Brown employed a number of allusions to describe the authors' undertakings. The generous funding had 'enabled light to be thrown into a dark corner of medicine.'⁷⁶ The reader was not informed as to what this dark corner of medicine *was*, only that it had been illuminated and where it once was dark, it was no longer. Alongside this metaphor of finding light in the dark, Langdon-Brown evoked the image of being lost at sea. Salvation was to be found in the form of the fuchsin staining cell discovered by Dr Vines: 'Amid the sea of controversy which surrounded the subject [was] one definite fact that provided some anchorage'.⁷⁷ The 'definite fact' was a palatable one, both in terms of social sensibilities and in terms of scientific verification. Focus on the fuchsin stain (the application of a staining reaction that caused the cells in the adrenal cortex of a woman with virilism to stain red but those of an individual without virilism to generally stain blue), lent the research more credibility than an explicit focus on the particulars of sexual ambiguity might have done.⁷⁸ The staining device had the advantage of being subject to scientific

⁷⁵ Lord Wakefield of Hythe gave money to Charing Cross Hospital to facilitate the research that became *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*. Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 6; TNA: FD 1/3108.

⁷⁶ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. ix.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 5. In his book, *Endocrine Man: A Study in the Surgery of Sex* (London: William Heinemann, 1944), p. 85, Broster offered an account of what he meant by virilism: 'Virilism may be defined as the appearance of secondary male characters in the female with a concomitant retrogression of the feminine characters and sex function. The changes toward the male sphere are expressed in the growth of hair, according to the masculine type in texture and distribution, alterations in bodily contour towards broad shoulders and narrow hips, the development of muscle and coarsening of the skin, often with acne. There may be enlargement of the clitoris, and deepening of the voice. Feminine retrogression is shown by the lack or absence of breast development, loss of normal contour by lessening of the subcutaneous fat, lack of development of the genitalia both internal and external, and degenerative changes in the ovaries resulting in ovarian dysfunction such as amenorrhœa, either primary or secondary. In addition there may be alterations in the normal sexual outlook and conduct of the individual.'

proof rather than relying on notions of social and cultural normality. However, the stunning discovery that Langdon-Brown so trumpeted in the foreword had already been reported by Broster and Vines five years earlier in their monograph, *The Adrenal Cortex*.⁷⁹ It was not a new development, but it was a tangible fact and consequently was put forward to emphasise the credibility of the research.

The subject matter of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) was multifarious and described in ambiguous terms by its authors. The terminology of 'change of sex', favoured by the popular press, did not translate into the medical setting. Some patients, such as Weston, did have their sex officially changed, but the focus of the book was more complex than is conveyed by the idea of 'sex change'. As the book's title implied, intersexuality was a major aspect of the research. However, although the title referred to it, none of the chapter headings identified intersexuality. Instead, the book was organised into two parts: 'The Clinical Study of the Adreno-Genital Syndrome' and 'The Scientific Study of the Adreno-Genital Syndrome', so it was the 'adreno-genital syndrome' that was the focus and organising principle. Broster's description of the adreno-genital syndrome was that it: 'is essentially bisexual in nature, and may be defined as the appearance of male secondary sex characters in the female, accompanied by a retrogression in the female secondary sex characters and sex function.'⁸⁰ Now commonly known as the intersex condition Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia [CAH], the adreno-genital syndrome was characterised by masculinisation in women due to the adrenal glands.

⁷⁹ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 7.

Intersexuality appeared as a subsection of the part of the book devoted to the clinical study of the adreno-genital syndrome. Broster noted that ‘Our work on the adreno-genital syndrome has brought unusual opportunities for studying the question of intersexuality in a more comprehensive form.’⁸¹ Mark Weston, for example, did not have adreno-genital syndrome, but was nonetheless classified as intersexed. The topic of the book, then, was the adreno-genital syndrome – which might be seen as an intersex condition – and intersexuality more broadly, although ostensibly only within the context of the adreno-genital syndrome. In other words, the topic was difficult to pinpoint; it was about a specific medical condition and about a specific part of the adrenal gland – the adrenal cortex – but it was also concerned with intersexuality more generally. Langdon-Brown, in the book’s foreword, settled on the formulation: ‘departure from normal sexual development’.⁸² In many senses this ambiguity regarding the book’s subject was apt, as it was concerned with ambiguity.

I have chosen ‘sexual ambiguity’ as the best way to describe the topic of this chapter, but it is not without its problems as a description. One issue with using the term ‘sexual ambiguity’ is that it bears a similarity to ‘genital ambiguity’, which has been employed as synonymous with ‘intersex’, but has been much criticised by intersex activists for being reductive.⁸³ In using ‘sexual ambiguity’ I am reflecting

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 19.

⁸² Ibid, p. ix. Interestingly, this catch-all formulation of ‘departure from normal sexual development’ is very similar to the current terminology proposed for intersex conditions: ‘disorders of sex development’. Both ‘disorder’ and ‘departure from normal’ carry a degree of stigmatisation. How the practice and language of intersex management continues to rely on notions of the normal is discussed in Ellen K. Feder, ‘Imperatives of Normality: From “Intersex” to “Disorders of Sex Development”’, *GLQ*, 15, no. 2 (2009), pp. 225-47.

⁸³ For example, intersex scholar Morgan Holmes has commented: ‘The term “genital ambiguity,” though commonly used in both medical literature and in the few social science and humanities

the language of ambiguity employed by Broster et al, and the scope of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), which extended beyond the confines of what the authors perceived to be intersexuality.

Commentators on intersex history have highlighted the work of Hugh Hampton Young, urologist at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. His 1937 textbook *Genital Abnormalities, Hermaphroditism and Related Adrenal Diseases* has been held up for particular attention.⁸⁴ In this work, Young considered fifty-five case studies, slightly fewer than Broster et al did the following year in *Adrenal Cortex* (1938). Young set out his cases in a methodical fashion, accompanied by instructions on the latest techniques for treatment.⁸⁵ Young's far more prominent place in history has also been assured by his part in the genealogy of treatment at Johns Hopkins, Baltimore. During the mid-to-late-twentieth century, Johns Hopkins emerged as the epicentre of intersex medicine under Lawson Wilkins and then John Money, whose protocols dominated the field.⁸⁶ *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) did not fulfil the same functions as *Genital Abnormalities*, but its scale and approach merit a greater consideration. Broster and Allen seem to have been seeing more sexually ambiguous patients than any other surgeon or medic at the time.

papers on the subject, is a misnomer, because there are presentations of intersexuality in which the genitals appear quite clearly as one or the other of the two recognized sexes. Furthermore, the use of the term "ambiguous" implies that intersexed genitals do not look like anything.' Morgan Holmes, *Intersex: A Perilous Difference* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2008), pp. 32-33.

⁸⁴ Cheryl Chase, 'Hermaphrodites with Attitude', in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 301; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 42; Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, p. 91.

⁸⁵ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, pp. 43-44.

⁸⁶ Chase, 'Hermaphrodites with Attitude', p. 302.

Not Changing Sex

This chapter started with Mark Weston's case study and the diagnostic and surgical corroboration of his own sense of himself as male. The other individuals who were categorised alongside Weston as having had undescended testes were described as having been very similar to Weston physically, but, in contrast to Weston, they were given surgery to enhance their female, not male, characteristics. These particular patients did not see Clifford Allen for a separate psychological evaluation, but Broster's assessment of their psychological state formed an integral part of his analysis nonetheless. The case studies of the group of patients with undescended testes show how bodily features were interpreted as male or female at a variety of levels. Broster incorporated his perception of the gender and sexuality of these patients into how he read and instilled meaning on their bodies.

In each of these case studies there was mention of the absence of both breasts and menstruation. The patients' bodies were described as a mixture of male and female characteristics, for example: 'On examination her torso was that of a male, the limbs feminine, the larynx enlarged, a slight moustache was present, the pubic hair was female, and the skin fairly smooth.'⁸⁷ The sexed body was portrayed as a mixture of components; different features beyond the primary and secondary sex characteristics were thought to carry a sexed interpretation. The limbs could be masculine or feminine, as could the torso. The location and type of body hair was

⁸⁷ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 46.

seen to correspond to being masculine or feminine. Even the skin could convey maleness or femaleness.

The language used to describe the genitalia drew on a sexual division of penis or clitoris, labia or scrotum. However, although there was an opposition of male or female with regards to genitalia, a combination of male and female could be present in one body. As Broster put it: ‘there were two fairly well-developed testes lying in the labia majora, and enlarged clitoris and a pseudo-vagina.’⁸⁸ In this case, ‘E. D. Case 39’, and unlike others in this group, the patient was described in terms of a more typically female anatomy – labia, clitoris, (pseudo-)vagina – but the commentary still went on to state: ‘Laparotomy revealed no internal female genitalia’.⁸⁹ The other patients with undescended testes were said to have male genitalia: ‘There is hypospadias with a moderate-sized penis’ and ‘there is a fairly large hypospadiac penis with a cleft scrotum. No female genitalia are present.’⁹⁰ The analysis of these patients’ anatomies pointed to them being male; this was explicit in the discussion of the twins, ‘N. P. (twin). Case 40’, who were referred to as ‘undeveloped males brought up as females’.⁹¹ Yet against all this reiteration of these patients having predominantly male bodies, four of the five people with undescended testes – i.e. all bar Weston – were supported in their choice to continue living as women. Neither genitalia nor gonads necessarily corresponded to the sex assigned to the patient; the crucial factor appears to have been sexuality.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 46.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 46.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 46, 47.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 46.

The patients with testes who wanted to remain as women had their wishes respected in a very matter-of-fact manner: ‘Orchidectomy was performed as she and her family wished her to remain feminine.’⁹² ‘She wished to remain feminine, so a bilateral orchidectomy was performed.’⁹³ ‘As she and her family wished her to remain feminine, the penis was amputated and testis removed.’⁹⁴ Orchidectomy – surgical removal of the testes – was implicitly posited as a means of rendering the body feminine, and this not just on one exceptional occasion. The women in question, or their families, had questioned their sex – that was why they had come into contact with medics – but, by Broster’s account they wanted to be women.⁹⁵ Of the twenty-three-year old twin, ‘N. P. (twin). Case 40’, Broster wrote: ‘Psychologically she is feminine.’⁹⁶ He emphasised the significance of the psychological attributes of the patient in addition to the physical ones. In another instance, however, the thirty-two-year-old cook, ‘E. D. case 39’, the psychological judgment was that: ‘her outlook was more or less neuter.’⁹⁷ The suggestion was that these patients did not have to prove themselves psychologically to be able to continue as women. The case studies implied that these patients had a degree of agency in asserting the outcome of their encounter with the medics.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Broster and Allen’s patients were able to *choose* medical assistance to alter their bodies to better suit their own

⁹² Ibid, p. 46.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 46.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

⁹⁵ The patient whose family was credited with a say in whether she was to remain as a woman, ‘H. H. Case 38’, was, at sixteen years of age, the only patient in this group not to have reached the age of majority. This may explain the family’s input in the decision.

⁹⁶ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, pp. 46-47.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 46.

sense of sex. Surgical or endocrinological assistance was only offered to those patients whose sexual ambiguity was believed to be physical as well as psychological. Broster and Allen's work was substantial enough to attract potential patients who sought surgery to better align their bodies with their own sense of their sexed selves. Patients presented themselves saying they wanted to be 'changed into a man' or 'converted into a complete male'.⁹⁸ 'W. L.', presented Allen with a similar narrative to some of the five patients who did have their sex reassigned.⁹⁹

Regarding 'W. L.', readers were informed: 'She was anxious [...] to be converted into a complete male – not a woman.'¹⁰⁰ This sense of being a man in spite of being designated female, and of wanting medical assistance to attain manhood, was also expressed by 'E. S.': 'This patient was brought up as a female but always had male tendencies and wished to become a "gentleman."¹⁰¹ The accounts share many features, but 'W. L.' showed no sign of glandular abnormality and so was labelled a 'pure psychic homosexual' and refused any help in becoming a man.¹⁰² 'E. S.', by comparison, upon surgical investigation, was revealed to have 'no female internal genitalia [...] and two fairly well-developed testes lying in the position of the ovaries'.¹⁰³ Testes did not have to equate to being male, as in the cases of those patients grouped alongside Weston, but supported in their female status. Yet when, as in the case of 'E. S.', the patient desired to live as a man, that wish could be acted upon. The desire of someone to live as a man rather than as a woman

⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 105, 106, 103.

⁹⁹ For those patients who did have their sex reassigned, in each case from female to male, see: Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, pp. 27, 42, 44, 47, 82, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 103.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 44.

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 103-04.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 44.

might be supported only if they presented with some degree of intersexuality. The pleas of those who wanted to be 'changed into a man' went unheeded if they did not have any male sexual characteristics.

Body and Mind

The connection between body and mind is crucial in understanding the value of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938). In the text the physical body was inserted into accounts of sexual abnormality, when so much current theory and later queer history has focussed on the developments in sexology's psychological 'understandings'.¹⁰⁴ On the one hand, sexologists concerned with sexual ambiguity, such as Magnus Hirschfeld in *Die Transvestiten* (1910), assigned causes for cross-gender behaviour primarily with the psychological rather than the physical.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, popular books outlining the concept of glands, such as Louis Berman's *The Glands Regulating Personality* (1921), argued that glands and their secretions were paramount in explaining a person's actions and feelings. Berman's schema left little room for psychology: 'But what has [psychology] to offer our quest for light on the future of the species? Nothing very much', as he put it.¹⁰⁶ Clifford Allen's psychological chapter in *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) argued against leading European

¹⁰⁴ For example such important works of sexual history as: Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds.), *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989).

¹⁰⁵ However, Hirschfeld did devote one chapter of *Die Transvestiten* to a study of the physiology of intermediate types. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress*. trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ Louis Berman, *The Glands Regulating Personality: A Study of Internal Secretion in Relation to the Types of Human Nature* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 20.

sexologists such as Gregorio Marañón, Magnus Hirschfeld and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who, respectively, wrote extensively on intersexuality throughout the 1920s and 1930s, ran the Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin, and wrote the canonical classic of European sexology, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). Allen posited that psychical sex need not correspond to somatic structures and therefore to endocrinology.¹⁰⁷ Hugh Hampton Young's *Genital Abnormalities, Hermaphroditism and Related Adrenal Diseases*, the US study published just before *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), covered its case studies in considerable depth, but offered nothing by way of psychological assessment. *Adrenal Cortex* (1938)'s focus on the interconnections of the physical and psychical was, then, a fresh approach that built on a new understanding of the physical and psychical forces regulating the body.

The combination of surgical, endocrinological and psychological studies was highlighted as one of the great strengths of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) by its authors, as was emphasised in the foreword: 'this correlation of physical and psychical aspects has led to some valuable results.'¹⁰⁸ Allen offered a psychological examination of Broster's patients in a joint consideration of the physical and psychical. He emphasised the importance of sexuality – that is to say, gendered presentation – to scientific understandings of the body and wrote of the great advances in both endocrinology and psychology:

... there is no doubt that this relation of psychical and physical is one which is crying aloud for investigation.

¹⁰⁷ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. x.

Both endocrinology and medical psychology have made enormous advances in the last forty years but the essential correlation between the two has not yet been made.¹⁰⁹

Allen's psychological examination of his patients looked to fill this gap in medico-scientific studies, providing what he claimed was pioneering work:

It is usual in a study such as this to start with an historical review of all the previous work which has been performed on the subject. Unfortunately this cannot be done satisfactorily, for the reason that no previous studies in the adreno-genital syndrome have had any psychological investigation.¹¹⁰

Allen was making a strong claim for the importance of his psychological analysis as a new and necessary development in instances of sexual ambiguity that had a seemingly hormonal origin.

This differentiation of 'body and mind' was a terminology that structured the book, especially in Allen's chapter on the psychological assessments. The body and the psyche were treated as distinct entities that interacted to shape the whole of the human subject. Allen gave more importance to the physical in this book than he did in his later works, most likely because almost all the cases he described were patients who came to him on account of physical complaints.

Allen repeatedly stressed the interdependence of body and mind: 'the real basis of all behaviour is to be found somewhere in the combination of endocrine and reflex', 'there are two elements in sexuality. There is a psychical one and an endocrine one' and 'the endocrine and psychical elements are mutually stimulating'.¹¹¹ The distinction between physical and psychical was similarly present

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 55.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 73.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 56, 60, 65.

in understanding how men and women developed along sexed lines: 'The individual is psychically capable of developing into a male or female just as it is physically'.¹¹² Treatment had to tackle both the body and mind: 'She felt that the operation had been a success from both the psychical and physical points of view.'¹¹³ This opened up questions about the changeability of sex as being more than an endocrinological feature. The corporeal manifestations of sex were of great importance – patients were unable to get their sex reassigned if they did not show physical signs of sexual ambiguity – but where physical sexual ambiguity was present, a patient's 'psychical sex' was also a significant consideration.

Allen's conclusion to the dual consideration of the physical and the psychical was that the two were interlinked:

It was soon realised such abnormalities as are here described may be either endocrine or psychological in origin, while often both factors are involved. [...] But the practical outcome is that surgery may help one type and psychotherapy the other.¹¹⁴

Allen was quite adamant, however, that homosexuality was not dependent on physical sexual abnormality: 'One frequently finds that the strongest homosexuals are the most perfect physical specimens and have well-developed masculine bodies with no traces of glandular disease.'¹¹⁵ The overall understanding of the relation between the physical and psychical that can be gleaned from the *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) showed slippage between what would now be termed sex, gender and sexuality. Allen stated that homosexuality – considered abnormal – was not

¹¹² Ibid, p. 62.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 97.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. x.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 68.

necessarily linked to an abnormally sexed body. Homosexuality, Allen suggested, as a psychological disorder, could be treated by psychotherapy alone.¹¹⁶ Physical abnormalities though, could, and often did, lead to sexual abnormality, whereas homosexuality was as much about gendered behaviour as it was about sexual object choice.¹¹⁷

Allen further developed the initial research in *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) in his 1940 book *The Sexual Perversions and Abnormalities*. Here, he claimed the field of sexual perversions and abnormalities – a category that included homosexuality, autosexuality and fetishisms – for the psychiatrist and not the endocrinologist. Great emphasis was laid on the concept of the ‘normal’, for Allen argued that perversions were an illness, not a feature of the normal and that a normal environment should lead to a normal sexuality, to a male person being masculine and a female one feminine.¹¹⁸ Pursuing a theme from *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), Allen claimed that ‘the proper psychological development is to some extent dependent on normal endocrine growth’, but that most patients with sexual anomalies did not display any endocrinological abnormalities.¹¹⁹ Allen was adamant that most sexual abnormality was a result of an ‘abnormal’ upbringing and almost entirely psychological. This meant, according to Allen, that most patients displaying sexual abnormalities could be ‘cured’ through psychotherapy.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 69.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 73.

¹¹⁸ Clifford Allen, *The Sexual Perversions and Abnormalities* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 16, 11.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

These views were elaborated upon in Allen's later works, *The Problem of Homosexuality* (1958) and *A Textbook of Psychosexual Disorders* (1962).¹²⁰ Both argued that homosexuality, and heterosexual perversion, were part of a larger picture of sexual abnormalities and were illnesses, which ought to be responded to with psychotherapy. Each of these texts, pushing the notion of the inherent *illness* and therefore lack of legitimacy in having abnormal sexual behaviour or identity, were influential. *The Problem of Homosexuality* had legislative implications as it accompanied the Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (1957), which recommended the partial decriminalisation of sex between men.¹²¹ That *A Textbook of Psychosexual Disorders* was a textbook meant that Allen's perspective on the field of psychiatry was being imparted to train students in the field before they went on to incorporate the ideas in their own practice. *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) saw Allen starting to develop these ideas that would inform his later work.

A section of Allen's questions, which were designed to gauge personality, related to hobbies and clothing preferences. The questions went into considerable detail, enquiring as to which types of fabric, cosmetics and hairstyle were favoured.¹²² Allen described patients as having heterosexual or homosexual personalities according to whether their responses to these questions were felt to be sex-appropriate:

¹²⁰ Charles Berg and Clifford Allen, *The Problem of Homosexuality* (New York: Citadel Press, 1958); *A Textbook of Psychosexual Disorders* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹²¹ On the Wolfenden report, see Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 139-96.

¹²² Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, pp. 127-28.

Her personality was heterosexual and she showed an interest in feminine activities. Her hobbies were sewing and knitting. She liked bright colours and looking in shops, particularly drapers and furnishers, liked babies, dancing, music, reading love stories, and walking pleased her, was fond of frilly feminine clothes, evening dress and pretty lingerie. Her hair was worn long. Jewellery and cosmetics were not liked very much, but she used some powder.¹²³

Her personality showed some homosexual traits – she dressed in a somewhat severe masculine fashion and showed a quite exceptional wish to ride, so she had saved for many months to buy a riding outfit (she rode astride) [...] Did not use cosmetics and was not fond of feminine pastimes.¹²⁴

His manner and to some extent his style of dress was completely homosexual. He was fond of cats and birds, crochet and art. [...] Wore a soft shirt and tie, but no underclothes.¹²⁵

In these descriptions it is evident that sexuality and gender were seen to be interlinked. Heterosexuality was allied to gender-appropriate behaviour, whilst homosexuality was allied to gender-inappropriate behaviour. The minutiae of each patient's interests were put forward as indicative of their 'true' gender identity. Seemingly innocuous details could be interpreted as sexed and gendered. A style of dress could be homosexual, showing that homosexuality was not operating just at the level of sexual object choice, but that it was manifested at a psychological level – the choice of what to wear, and at a physical level – the demeanour and outward appearance of the body.

Sex-hormone research offered the potential for sex-, sexuality- and gender-changeability, but practitioners like Allen nonetheless maintained very rigid notions of gender roles. 'Normal' women should like love stories and handicrafts, 'normal' men should not. 'Normal' men should dress and wear their hair in particular ways

¹²³ Ibid, p. 94.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 108.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 111.

that 'normal' women should not. Choices regarding hobbies and appearance were significant indicators of sex. Allen's assessments of a 'normal' – heterosexual, or 'abnormal' – homosexual or autosexual, character, based on social standards of gendered behaviour, were not just highly subjective, but anachronistic. The extensive criteria by which Allen evaluated appropriate behaviour included patients' use of tobacco and what style of haircut they sported. Correspondingly, success post-operation was measured by changes in these areas, such as smoking less or choosing a different hairstyle.¹²⁶ Allen demonstrated a series of prejudices as to proper behaviour that were out of step with contemporary mores. The suggestion that smoking was the preserve of men, for example, was not a reflection of practice in the 1930s. Tinkler has argued that by 1930 cigarette advertising was targeting all classes of women, and that the average number of manufactured cigarettes women bought per annum increased from 180 in 1930 to 500 in 1939.¹²⁷ Cigarette advertisers in interwar Britain were reaching out to women as consumers and smoking came to be associated with the modern woman.¹²⁸ Allen's reference points for normality were predicated on an outmoded ideal. To prove themselves normal, patients had to be exceptional.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp. 128-29.

¹²⁷ Penny Tinkler, *Smoke Signals: Women, Smoking and Visual Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 56, 42.

¹²⁸ Some brands, such as 'Minors', with their images of modern women and their 'Mine's a Minor' slogan, were specifically targeting women as smokers; see for example: *Daily Sketch*, 1 June 1936, p. 8.

Ab/normality

A striking element of Broster and Allen's analyses in *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) was their reliance on a concept of normality as a diagnostic tool. A consideration of the concept of normality is especially apt in relation to these case studies as it demonstrates the ideological and regulatory forces at work in deciding how the sexed body was understood and treated. Normality for Broster and his co-workers did not just function as an ideal in relation to the case studies, it was seen to have a material effect on the lives of those concerned as it helped shape who was and who was not deemed to be healthy.

Doan has delineated the tendency in queer historical work to consider normality as an ahistorical entity to which the queer is opposed.¹²⁹ She has proposed a different starting point for queer histories, a move away from the model of a hetero/ homo binary, which has been understood as normal/ abnormal, to a critique of the logic of considering sexuality in those binary terms at all.¹³⁰ I want to extend Doan's critique to consider how normality has figured in discussions where sex, gender and sexuality were all under consideration and interwoven. In Broster and Allen's formulations of normality, normal did not equate to any one sex, sexual orientation or gender, as we might now understand them. Normality was located in a range of physical and psychological markers, which had material effects as they were used as a diagnostic tool determining patients' treatment.

¹²⁹ Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 170.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 18.

Questions of normality, and subsequently of abnormality, were at the heart of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938). There were continual references to normal bodies and behaviour. These references suggested that normality was a desired and value-laden state. This was laid out in the book's foreword: 'It is a fact familiar to all physicians that any departure from normal sexual development produces a degree of psychological distress quite incommensurate with the physical abnormality.'¹³¹ There was something of a contradiction here in that departing from 'normal sexual development' was frequent (i.e. normal) enough that all physicians were presumed to be familiar with the scenario. Normality was not strictly delineated, but measured by its opposite: those instances when an individual behaved abnormally.

The concept of the normal in its modern sense of 'regular or usual' was barely a century old in the 1930s.¹³² 'Normal', coined in 1840, and its younger relative, the 'norm', c.1855, were a product of statistics' rise to dominance.¹³³ In a worldview governed by statistics, life was quantifiable and subsequently explicable in terms of degrees of variation. Statistics needed a benchmark, the norm, against which to measure variety. Previously, bodies had been measured against a concept of the ideal.¹³⁴ By its very nature as mythical state, no body could achieve the ideal, whereas the norm as an average was meant to be a concrete embodiment that was shared by the many. Lochrie has appropriately called this power exerted by the normal as 'majoritizing, that is, a way of thinking geared toward measurement that

¹³¹ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. ix.

¹³² Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 3.

¹³³ Lennard J. Davis, 'Constructing Normalcy' in Lennard J. Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, Third Edition (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

would naturalize certain qualities, behaviors, and groups at the expense of others'.¹³⁵ This 'majoritizing' power rendered the norm a quantifiable average in theory, but in need of exceptions to be understood in practice.

A neat example was seen in the 1921 book, *Taboo and Genetics: A Study of the Biological, Sociological and Psychological Foundation of the Family*. Author M. M. Knight relied on the idea of the average to specify what constituted male or female characteristics, and to imply that bodies must be male or female:

But the average physical make-up which we find associated with the male and female sex glands, respectively, is distinctive in each case, and a vast majority of individuals of each sex conform nearly enough to the average so that classification presents no difficulty.¹³⁶

Yet this average, or norm, that allowed for and justified classification into separate sexes, was an ideal that many bodies did not meet:

Each of these sex types, male and female, [...] are not so far apart but that they may overlap occasionally in some details. For instance, some women are larger than are some men – have lower pitched voices, etc. The whole bodily metabolism, resting as it does upon a chemical complex, is obviously more like the male average in some women than it is in others, and *vice versa*.¹³⁷

Broster and Allen shared this belief in being able to attribute particular characteristics to each sex in the face of contradictory evidence.

In a section entitled 'Estimation of Sexuality', Allen explained how he had been able to glean the sexuality – meaning both sexual orientation and gender – of

¹³⁵ Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies*, p. 3.

¹³⁶ M. M. Knight, Iva Lowther Peters, Phyllis Blanchard, *Taboo and Genetics: A Study of the Biological Sociological and Psychological Foundation of the Family* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1921), p. 25.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

his patients.¹³⁸ He wrote of his experiential method of distinguishing male and female traits.¹³⁹ His was an idealistic and highly subjective measure of normality. In the same section he pointed to a quantitative method for determining masculinity or femininity, which had appeared too recently for Allen to have applied it to his own research.¹⁴⁰ This method was the Masculinity and Femininity Test (M-F Test), devised by Lewis M. Terman and Catharine Cox Miles in the USA, and published in their book *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity* (1936).

Terman had previously helped devise the Stanford-Binet Test, an intelligence test that was taken up as a standard.¹⁴¹ Like intelligence testing, the M-F Test was also designed as a tool for determining who was and who was not normal, by reference to standard deviation from a predetermined norm. Terman and Miles identified masculinity and femininity as categories without definite values; vague concepts that needed to be quantitatively assessed and standardised.¹⁴² The underlying principles of the M-F Test were that there were definite differences between men and women, that these could be identified, and that masculinity and femininity could still be demarcated once other factors such as age, education and occupation had been accounted for.¹⁴³

Allen expressed his admiration for the M-F Test, but had one reservation. This was that it 'had no means of calculating autosexuality, but is concerned only

¹³⁸ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, pp. 124-26.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 126.

¹⁴¹ Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, p. 131.

¹⁴² Lewis M. Terman and Catharine Cox Miles, *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), p. vi.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 6.

with homosexuality and heterosexuality in any given individual.¹⁴⁴ Allen defined autosexuals as having an immature sexuality and loving nobody but themselves.¹⁴⁵ What was significant about his reservation was that firstly he did not see sexuality as a binary between heterosexual and homosexual in the way that Terman and Miles did; and secondly, he collapsed the distinction between masculine and feminine into one between heterosexual and homosexual. Terman and Miles stated that they did not see the M-F Test as tantamount to a test of homosexuality: 'It does not measure homosexuality, as that term is commonly used, but it does measure, roughly, degree of inversion of the sex temperament, and it is probably from inverts in this sense that homosexuals are chiefly recruited.'¹⁴⁶ Although careful to distinguish between 'inversion of sex temperament' and 'homosexuality', Terman and Miles did reinforce the intersection of what might now be termed gender and sexual orientation. Allen appears to have conflated any discussion of deviation from sex-appropriate masculinity or femininity with homosexuality.

The M-F Test was a large-scale manifestation of the drive to calibrate sex. In compiling it, Terman and Miles anticipated some of the research issues at the heart of *Adrenal Cortex* (1938):

In view of the myriad known physiological and biochemical differences between men and women, any degree of overlap of the sexes on a masculinity-femininity test of the type used in the investigations to be described must be regarded as psychologically and sociologically very significant.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p.126.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 61, 87.

¹⁴⁶ Terman and Miles, *Sex and Personality*, p. 467.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

Allen's questionnaires, endeavouring to ascertain normal or abnormal sexuality, were part of a move, exemplified by Terman and Miles, to gauge a patient's behaviour according to its deviation from a standard proposed by the researcher.

Disability theorist Lennard J. Davis has examined how bodily variations that fall short of the normal are labelled as disabled and deemed in need of correction.¹⁴⁸ The patients' bodies Broster and Allen described in *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) were held to be abnormal and therefore in need of intervention. The patients' normal features were outlined as the natural path that could hopefully be offered up following expert treatment. Hence, normality was predicated in Broster and Allen's work on desired outcomes and ideal growth patterns of a healthy body, that is, one not affected by adrenal complaints:

Under circumstances where there is an abnormality such as an enlarged clitoris in a female child, exploratory laparotomy is justifiable, and an enlarged adrenal should be removed so as to give normal development its best chance of taking place.¹⁴⁹

In this instance, 'normal' development was a process that needed to be forced into being through invasive action. The various operations, hormone treatments and psychotherapy were all designed to counteract abnormality and foster normality.

In Broster and Allen's work, ideas of normality were closely tied to dominant social and cultural ideals. So being overweight would also be mentioned as a deviation from normality: 'At the age of sixteen she became fat for some three to four years, and then became normal again.'¹⁵⁰ Normality referred to an ideal, but

¹⁴⁸ Davis, 'Constructing Normalcy', p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ Broster, Allen, Vines, Patterson, Greenwood, Marrian and Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 40.

not an absolute one. Patients could display a range of characteristics and behaviours and still be considered normal: 'She had no gross glandular disease, but did show a little fine down on the upper lip, such as one frequently finds in normal women.'¹⁵¹ A certain feature, facial hair on a woman, for example, could be read as normal or abnormal depending on other indicators.

Behaviour that might merit in someone else a diagnosis of abnormality could be brought within the realms of the normal when properly contextualised:

Menstruation has always been normal since the age of sixteen. The breasts are normal. The external genitalia are normal, and the voice is definitely feminine. Psychologically she is apparently fairly normal, except for schoolgirl infatuations with members of her own sex until she went for a cruise in the Baltic with a girl friend, and with whom she was in love, and with whom she attempted intercourse.¹⁵²

The apparent homosexuality displayed here was portrayed as an aberration in an otherwise normal person. This apparent normalisation of homosexuality was evident in other case studies as well. In his description of a patient who had his sex registered from female to male, Broster wrote of a boy whose male identity stood up to scrutiny: 'He said that he preferred to become a man than a girl even when it was put to him that girls have the better time.'¹⁵³ Within this case study, which substantiated the patient's male identity, homosexuality could be incorporated into a narrative of normality: 'It appeared that he was passing through the mild homosexual stage which appears about his age.'¹⁵⁴ Similarly, in Allen's account of a girl who had had marked adrenal virilisation, he referred to a homosexual stage

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 108.

¹⁵² Ibid, pp. 32-33.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 43.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 43.

being normal: 'It was difficult to determine this girl's sexuality because there is often some evidence of homosexuality in normal girls at the age of puberty.¹⁵⁵ In their desire to establish a coherently sexed identity for their patients, Broster and Allen's version of normality could encompass sexual behaviour deemed abnormal in others.

For Allen, normality was a fragile state that a patient's body could rebel against:

He was a normal married adult, so that one might conclude that he had reached a completely normal heterosexual level only attainable to those whose psyche and gland [sic] are both functioning normally. With the failure of his glands he changed back from a heterosexual to a complete autosexual.¹⁵⁶

Or which might have to be learnt:

She seemed to have great difficulty in controlling her new-found heterosexuality and had a number of liaisons with various men. To try to prevent her being excessively sexual she had a short course of psychotherapy [...]. She has now become married and is presumably finally adjusted to normal sexuality.¹⁵⁷

Normality was not a natural process, but one that was variable and could often only be achieved through intervention. Ultimately, it was Broster or Allen who designated what was normal and what was abnormal, but adherence to a notion of the norm ran as a guiding force throughout their work.

Returning to Doan's call for queer history to be more attentive to normality as a historically contingent category, *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) exemplified how scientific ideas of normality were being configured in 1930s Britain. The ways in

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 83. Broster discussed this patient's adrenal virilism: *ibid*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 72.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 109.

which normality also meant average and healthy were especially germane to this medical text.¹⁵⁸ Sex was not just measured against indices to determine typical features, as in Terman and Miles's tests, it was also measured against cultural norms, as in Allen's criteria for normality that were based on cultural and social values of appropriate behaviour.

Conclusion

During the 1930s scores of people found their way to Lennox Ross Broster at Charing Cross Hospital with questions and problems about their sex. He was a link between the press accounts of sex change and the medical treatment of sexual ambiguity. Broster was not at the heart of the British endocrinological establishment, but was in a position to answer questions as to what constituted male and female. This he did in conjunction with psychological, pathological and biochemical specialists. His case studies, published in 1938 as *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), offered an unprecedented number of case studies of individuals who were variously diagnosed as suffering from the adreno-genital syndrome, being intersex and/ or being homosexual. The understanding of how the body was sexed that emerged from the book depended on a combination of physical and psychological criteria. The exact classifications were somewhat hazy, but a concept of normality was a strong thread running through *Adrenal Cortex* (1938), and was presented as a measure for determining treatment. Patients deemed physically intersex could exert some agency in determining whether or not they had their sex reassigned,

¹⁵⁸ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, p. 171.

but those without physical signs of intersexuality who arrived at the clinic wishing to change sex were denied surgery.

Following Doan's call for queer histories to be attentive to the construction of normality, *Adrenal Cortex* (1938) points to the ways in which a medical perspective on sex, sexuality and gender had material impacts on how people were treated. The developments in endocrinology were significant in shaping ideas about sex and the sexed body. As the next chapter will explore, the press accounts of sex change were very simplistic – whereas what was occurring at Charing Cross Hospital was a formulation of how sex could be measured and determined.

Chapter Two: Changing Sex in the Popular Press

Introduction

Throughout the 1930s, the British popular press featured accounts of people whose sex was reported to have changed. These stories employed some of the same terminology and tropes of older accounts of ‘gender-crossing’, such as the figure of the ‘man-woman’, but the sex change stories differed from their predecessors in claiming that their subjects’ sex had officially changed.¹ These changes of sex were framed as marvels of modernity, examples of the wonders of modern science. That sex could change was given credence and the people concerned were, for the most part, positively portrayed. The popular press, with its massive reach, placed sex change in the public sphere and made it part of the backdrop to 1930s British life. As the decade progressed, the idea of sex change was treated as increasingly quotidian, a phenomenon with which readers would be familiar.

This investigation of accounts of sex changeability has entailed an extensive search through the popular press. I wanted to survey both the daily papers – as had Bingham, and the Sunday ones – as had Oram.² My approach was to firstly find different press accounts of the changes of sex discussed by Oram in *Her Husband Was a Woman!*. Broadening my search to daily and local coverage allowed me to build up a picture of whether this was a story that had extended beyond the Sunday press, whether and how the story had been conveyed locally, whether

¹ I take the term ‘gender-crossing’ from Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 5, as a way to describe a range of gender variance. The wide scope of the term, as defined by Oram, is useful because it does not rely on specific identity categories and therefore allows for differences in sex and gender to be understood in relation to each other.

² Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*.

there was sustained interest in the story over a number of days and whether and how the story was handled differently by newspapers with varying editorial stances. As well as examining how stories that were already known had been reported upon, I wanted to get a sense of how ideas of sex changeability were being disseminated in the press across the 1930s. My method was to take a newspaper that had not been studied by Bingham or Oram – initially the *Sunday Pictorial* – and to select particular months and examine them for each year of the decade. Since the majority of the newspapers I was using were available only on microfilm, this was a lengthy process. As more newspapers became available digitally – first the *Daily Mirror* and later the *Daily Express* as well, I was able to refine my searches by looking for particular names or phrases across a much wider body of material. As I accumulated more references I would then search for stories from that date in the other local, daily and Sunday papers. In this manner I have been able to build up a textured picture of stories of sex change that were circulated nationally as well as locally and across a range of titles, creating a richer picture than has previously been available.

During the course of the 1930s there were some twenty instances of a ‘change of sex’ reported in the British popular press.³ The first of these was in 1930 and concerned Wiltshire’s Evan Burtt, formerly Eva Mary Burtt.⁴ In 1931 and again

³ See the Appendix for a list of articles about ‘sex change’ in the British popular and local newspapers. As well as setting out the frequency of stories, this table also gives the time span over which each case was reported. The Appendix bears testimony to the wide reach stories had across the national and regional papers and to the variation as to how long an individual might remain in the press’s spotlight.

⁴ There was extensive coverage of Burtt’s sex reassignment. It was front-page news in the following articles: ‘Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman’, *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1; ‘Mystery of the Man-Woman’, *Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 1; ‘Man’s

in 1933 there were brief reports of Lili Elbe's change of sex.⁵ In 1932 there was some coverage of a Sussex schoolboy, Maurice, who had previously been called Margery.⁶ A 1932 article about a student from Amritsar who was 'changing into a girl', also referred to the Sussex case and to a 1931 instance of a boy from Manchester who had lived as a girl until the age of eighteen.⁷ In 1933 there was an article about Mark Woods, who had gone into prison as Mary Woods.⁸ In 1934 Margaret Hutchison from Fife became Mack Hutchison.⁹ 1936 brought the story to receive the greatest coverage, that of Mark Weston, who as Mary Weston had achieved a deal of fame as an athlete.¹⁰ Some newspapers' coverage of Weston also referred to a Devonshire girl who had been raised as a boy.¹¹ Weston's story appeared alongside a number of other cases of sex change from 1936, including those of Czech Zdenek Koubek and Polish Witold Smetek, formerly Sophie Smetkovna, who had also found fame as women athletes before announcing

Twenty-Nine Years as a Woman', *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1930, p. 1. "'Woman Bridegroom" Married', *Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald*, 29 March 1930, p. 1; 'Ex-Woman Bridegroom's Wedding', *Sunday Express*, 30 March 1930, p. 1; 'Man-Woman Wed', *Wiltshire News*, 4 April 1930, p. 1.

⁵ On Lili Elbe, see for example: 'From Man to Woman', *News of the World*, 1 March 1931, p. 5; 'The Man Who Turned into a Woman', *Daily Express*, 4 August 1914, p. 14; 'Changed into a Woman', *News of the World*, 6 August 1933, p. 13.

⁶ On Maurice, see for example: 'Girl of 14 Turned into a Youth', *Daily Herald*, 1 January 1932, p. 1; 'Sex Determination', *News Chronicle*, 1 January 1932, p. 1; 'Girl Becomes a Boy', *News of the World*, 3 January 1932, p. 5.

⁷ 'Boy Becomes a Girl', *People*, 20 March 1932, p. 13.

⁸ On Mark Woods, see: 'Sex Change Drama', *People*, 10 September 1933, p. 3.

⁹ On Mack Hutchison, see for example these articles from the Australian press: 'Amazing Change of Sex', *Singleton Argus*, 4 May 1934, p. 8; 'Girl Becomes a Boy', *Mercury*, 25 June 1934, p. 9. I have not found British coverage of Hutchison from 1934, but his case was subsequently referred to in coverage of Mark Weston's change of sex, for example: 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7.

¹⁰ There was extensive coverage of Weston's sex reassignment. The following articles were front-page news: 'Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew', *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1936, p. 1; 'Man Who Was Once a Girl', *Daily Mirror*, 30 May 1936, p. 1; 'Man-Woman Weds Friend of Girlhood', *Daily Express*, 11 August 1936, p. 1.

¹¹ 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7; 'Doctors and Sex Changes', *Daily Mail*, 29 May 1936, p. 6; "'Girl" Athlete's New Life After Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

themselves to be men.¹² Other Eastern Europeans reported in 1936 to have undergone a change of sex from female to male were the Bulgarian Bosilko Stoyanoff and the Hungarian Jolan Kun.¹³ A 1938 report in the *Daily Mirror* recounted how a woman who had had her sex changed from male to female the previous year had now given birth.¹⁴ A 1937 account told of a male prisoner who had been registered as a woman.¹⁵ In 1938 the *People* ran two articles in the same issue about Hannah/ John/ Gene Joynt, who, unusually for sex change stories, was in something of a limbo, unhappy as a man or a woman.¹⁶ 1938 also saw articles about Doris Purcell, soon to be Donald Purcell, who was portrayed as just one of many people to have had their sex changed from female to male at Charing Cross Hospital.¹⁷ The accounts of David and Mark Farrow that made the papers in 1939 implied that a change of sex was no longer necessarily newsworthy in itself, but that this case merited attention as it was both siblings who had transitioned from

¹² On Zdenek Koubek, see for example: 'Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew', *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1936, p. 1; 'Women Who Change Sex', *Daily Sketch*; 30 May 1936, p. 8; 'New Operation On the Woman Athlete Who Became a Man', *Daily Mirror*, 26 October 1936, p. 25. On Witold Smetek see for example: 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *Daily Mail*, 15 April 1937, p. 6; 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *News Chronicle*, p. 3. The British press reports did not state what name Smetkovna subsequently went under as a man, but the Australian press gave the male name Witold Smetek ('Woman-Man Wants to Be Woman Again', *Mirror*, 6 May 1939, p. 13).

¹³ On Basilko Stoyanoff, see: 'Boy to Be a Girl – Again', *People*, 6 December 1936, p. 2. On Jolan Kun, see: '[Untitled]', *Daily Express*, 23 May 1936, p. 2; 'Hungarian Parallel', *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3; 'Changed Her Sex and Her Age', *People*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

¹⁴ On N. Tenenbaum, who was reported to have had her sex changed from male to female, see: 'Nine-Pound Child Born to Ex-Soldier a Year After "He" Changed "His" Sex', *Daily Mirror*, 7 August 1936, p. 3.

¹⁵ On the prisoner, see: 'Gaol Secret of Man-Woman Tests', *Daily Mirror*, 23 March 1937, p. 15.

¹⁶ On Joynt, see: 'Man-Woman Reveals "Her" Sufferings', *People*, 4 September 1938, p. 1; 'No Happiness Either As Man or Woman', *People*, 4 September 1938, p. 3.

¹⁷ On Donald Purcell, see for example: 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1938, p. 2; 'Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward', *News of the World*, 8 May 1938, p. 7.

girls into boys.¹⁸ In 1942 the suicide of Mark Weston's brother, Harry Weston, brought to light that Harry had also undergone a sex change operation.¹⁹



Figure 2.1: 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1.

On 24 March 1930 the front page of the *Daily Express* (figure 2.1) proclaimed: 'AMAZING MYSTERY OF A MAN-WOMAN. SEX CHANGED AT THE AGE OF 29. ENGAGED TO MARRY A GIRL FRIEND' (figure 2.1).²⁰ Evan Burt, the subject of the article, was labelled a 'man-woman', much as Colonel Barker, Peter Stratford

¹⁸ On David and Mark Ferrow, see for example: 'Vanished Sisters Return As Boys' *Daily Herald*, 26 August 1939, p. 9; '2 Sisters Became Brothers', *Daily Mirror*, 26 August 1939, p. 5; 'Sisters Are Now Brothers', *News Chronicle*, 26 August 1939, p. 11; 'Two Sisters Are Brothers Now', *News of the World*, 27 August 1939, p. 6.

¹⁹ On Harry Weston, see: 'Oreston 'Girl's' Suicide After Sex Change', *Western Evening Herald*, 29 July 1942, p. 3; '2 Sisters Became Brothers', *Daily Mirror*, 30 July 1942, p. 8; 'Were Once Sisters', *News of the World*, 2 August 1942, p. 3.

²⁰ 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1.

and William Holton had been the previous year.²¹ However, Burt's story differed from those of the preceding year in that the subjects of the 1929 stories were portrayed as women who had chosen to pose as men, whereas the press claimed that Burt was not posing – he really was now a man.

A number of the elements of gender-crossing stories, as identified by Oram, were present, in particular an emphasis on the extraordinary nature of the events. It was an 'amazing mystery', 'an astonishing story' and a 'remarkable development.'²² Alongside this sense of wonder at the news of a change of sex, was an emphasis on the validity of Burt's new status as a man. Burt, the reader was informed, had come to doubt whether he was a woman, and had sought medical and legal advice. He had attained medical and legal recognition that he was a man and was now planning to marry a longstanding friend, Sarah Edwards. Unlike many other reported 'men-women', Burt was substantiated rather than exposed by an encounter with medical or legal authorities: 'Eva Mary Burt, the woman, was erased from the official records, and Evan Montagu Burt, the man, took her place.'²³ As the headline stated, Burt was not just a 'man-woman' – he had changed sex, and was now officially a man.

The *Daily Express* explained Burt's change of sex as 'one of the most amazing cases in the history of medical science'.²⁴ Rooting Burt's change of sex in medical *science* gave validity to Burt's change of sex through the association with

²¹ For example: 'Exploits of "Man-Woman"', *Daily Herald*, 7 March 1929, p. 1; 'Screen Man-Woman', *Sunday Pictorial*, 5 May 1929, p. 6; 'A New Man-Woman', *Daily Mirror*, 11 May 1929, p. 1.

²² 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, pp. 1-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Spellings of Burt's name vary – many newspapers favoured 'Burt', but it is as 'Burt' that he appears on the birth and marriage registers.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

established and testable field of scientific knowledge. Change of sex was depicted as a medical reality, a facet of an era of new scientific understandings that could be transformative. This emphasis on medical corroboration was to be a distinctive feature of sex change stories in the popular press.

Beside the column detailing Burt's sex change and marriage, the *Daily Express* front page carried a variety of 'human interest' stories (figure 2.1). The article sat alongside more serious pieces about Russian politics and Lord Balfour's will, but the greatest space on the page was given over to headlines and pictures concerned with sensational or light-hearted topics such as the Prince of Wales' close encounter with an elephant, some young women going cycling and a tale of elopement and suicide. The sex-change article fell into this mould of 'human interest' reporting, stories designed to lure in readers and create a 'feel good factor'.²⁵ The 1938 Political and Economic Planning (PEP) *Report on the British Press* identified human interest as:

what people like to gossip about, and the popular national dailies find that human interest news attracts the greatest number of readers, and accordingly write up most of their news-items with a human interest slant and give prominence to some items for no other reason than their human interest appeal.²⁶

The popular press elevated the status of human interest stories, literally putting them on a level with major affairs of state.²⁷ The line between 'news' and 'human interest' became blurred:

many welcome a newspaper that under the guise of presenting the news, enables them to escape from the grimness of actual events and the effort of

²⁵ Kevin Williams, *Read All About It!* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 151, 160.

²⁶ Political and Economic Planning (PEP), *Report on the British Press* (PEP: London, 1938), p. 17.

²⁷ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 10.

thought by opening the back-door of triviality and sex-appeal. They thus keep up the illusion of following what is going on in the world without in fact being in a position to know what is significant.²⁸

The *Daily Express* could frame Burt's change of sex as an example of medical advances, but it still served a clear purpose as entertainment. The content, tone and position of reports all had an effect on how the idea of sex being changeable circulated in 1930s British culture and society. The popular press, across local and national, daily and Sunday papers, had an enormous reach, as the next section will elucidate.

In this chapter I examine the popular press articles in order to argue that the idea of sex change was a part of the fabric of everyday life in 1930s Britain, that sex change was portrayed as a facet of modernity and that, for the most part, those who changed sex from female to male were treated positively and their status as men respected. The accounts of sex change were an element of 'human interest' reporting, but they were not insignificant. As Bingham has argued, the pages of the popular papers presented human interest stories alongside accounts of grave political concern, lending them a comparable significance.²⁹ The repetition of these stories across papers and days added further import to them. Before looking at individual cases, the next section details the background to the British popular press to help contextualise the dissemination and reception of newspaper accounts of sex change.

²⁸ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 34.

²⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 10.

The Popular Press's Power and Reach: Disseminating Sex Change

The popular press was an integral part of the fabric of 1930s Britain, a commonplace in the lives of most people. Newspapers were factored as a necessity not a luxury in a 1936 budget calculation for everyday living.³⁰ To quote A. J. Cummings in *The Press and a Changing Civilisation* (1936), newspapers were 'almost as much a part of our lives as the houses we live in.'³¹ PEP's *Report on the British Press* found that for every hundred families in 1934, ninety-five morning (and fifty-seven-and-a-half evening) papers were sold each day. For Sunday papers the figure was a hundred and thirty papers sold per hundred families.³² Whether people bought newspapers themselves or had access to those purchased by others, the press had a considerable reach into the lives of Britons and played an important role in the nation's cultural life. The wide impact of the popular press meant that the sex change stories were not just peripheral.

By the start of the 1930s Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of titles including the *Daily Mail*, had revolutionised newspaper presentation. The *Daily Mail* pioneered a style of snappier headlines, shorter articles, bolder layouts and better marketing.³³ These innovations were taken up by Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* and subsequently by other popular titles such as the *Daily Mirror*.³⁴ The reader was expected to have a shorter attention span and a cinema-induced need for the

³⁰ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 3.

³¹ Quoted in Williams, *Read All About It!*, p. 155.

³² PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 43.

³³ Williams, *Read All About It!*, p. 141.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

visual.³⁵ The content and design of the popular press marked a very conscious effort to attract and cater to readers. Newspaper staff fashioned their papers to appeal to readers who might have only basic literacy skills, and who would not want to expend energy to get to the crux of a story. Stories were pitched in terms of their ‘human interest,’ a quality to be found in stories of the extraordinary, the comic, or the sentimental, stories relating to celebrities or those accompanied by photographs of attractive young women.³⁶ Hugh Cudlipp, who joined the *Daily Mirror* as features editor in 1935, recalled that the paper was drastically modernised, following the logic that ‘human interest was at a premium, and that meant sex and crime.’³⁷ Although there was a move towards greater sexual frankness in the popular press, there were still many risqué topics that were freely discussed, but which newspaper proprietors were unwilling to print.³⁸

In the 1930s, following Northcliffe, populism became a pervasive value of the majority of the popular daily papers.³⁹ 1938’s *PEP Report on the British Press* outlined how the emphasis on entertainment influenced the way news was identified and reported:

Popular news must be based on some happening somewhere or other, and wherever possible should appear startling or unusual. This is not to say that all news in popular newspapers is unusual or “sensational,” but that unusual or “sensational” features are pulled to the forefront of the story, or if necessary efforts are made to discover such details.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 158-59.

³⁶ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 155.

³⁷ Hugh Cudlipp, *Publish and Be Damned!: The Astonishing Story of the Daily Mirror* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1953), p. 64.

³⁸ Hugh Cudlipp, *At Your Peril: A Mid-Century View of the Exciting Changes of the Press in Britain, and a Press View of the Exciting Changes of Mid-Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. 27.

³⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 22.

⁴⁰ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 154.

More cynically, and succinctly, Evelyn Waugh in *Scoop*, his novel about journalists, also published in 1938, wrote: ‘news is what a chap who doesn’t care much about anything wants to read.’⁴¹ The popular press targeted a mass audience and sought mass appeal. Whatever political line a paper might adopt, it required as many readers and advertisers as possible. The popular press was in the business of pushing boundaries. In trying to present readers with what they wanted, it fed the desire for the risqué. 1938’s PEP report into the state of the British press lamented that:

it is unhappily true that what readers want appears in some cases to be as near the unprintable as printers, advertisers and editors are willing to go, and the financial reward to proprietors for excursions into this territory is apt, in present conditions, to be large.⁴²

Newspaper circulation grew rapidly throughout the 1930s, the decade which saw the greatest expansion of press readership and sales in Britain.⁴³ The ‘circulation wars’ of this period had rival daily newspapers outdoing each other in their ever more extravagant efforts to sell more copies. Papers employed elaborate canvassing schemes and free gifts or discounted products were offered with subscriptions.⁴⁴ This may have taken a heavy financial toll on the newspapers, but for those titles that survived, it meant huge increases in circulation figures. Sales of daily newspapers more than doubled between 1926 and 1939.⁴⁵ The *Daily Herald* was the first to sell 2 million copies a day, achieving this feat in 1933. By 1937 the *Daily Express* had managed to outstrip the *Daily Herald*, with sales of 2.37 million

⁴¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop: A Novel About Journalists* (London: Penguin, 2000 [1938]), p. 66.

⁴² PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 33.

⁴³ Williams, *Read All About It!*, p. 153.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 154-55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 153.

copies a day.⁴⁶ The *Daily Mirror* also achieved increased circulation, from a little over a million copies a day in 1930 to in excess of 1.36 million copies a day in 1937.⁴⁷ The popular Sunday press also recorded increased circulation from 1930 to 1937, with the *News of the World* moving from 3 million copies a week to 3.75 million, the *People* from 2.4 million to over 3 million and *Reynolds's Illustrated News* from 420 thousand to 500 thousand copies a week.⁴⁸

Newspaper reading was more prevalent in Britain than almost anywhere else in the world, and increased leisure time led to a greater level of press consumption.⁴⁹ The ruthless competition for readers meant endeavouring to forge a sense of community amongst the readers of individual titles.⁵⁰ The attempts to inspire loyalty to a newspaper brand did not necessarily extend to exerting political influence on readers.⁵¹ Readers took what they wanted from the papers, and need not concur with the opinions offered. Indeed, many papers offered contradictory opinions within the pages of an issue.⁵² Press consumption by ordinary readers became increasingly sophisticated.

Editors may not always have been able to influence their readers, but different papers did represent different political stances. The *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* both adhered to a conservative politics. The *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle* – which merged in 1930 to form the *News Chronicle* – represented a

⁴⁶ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 43; Williams, *Read All About It!*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Williams, *Read All About It!*, pp. 6, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵¹ Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties: 1930-1940 in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1940), p. 81.

⁵² Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 16.

liberal political viewpoint. The *Daily Herald*, a struggling trade union paper during the 1920s, was relaunched in 1930 with more photographs and human interest stories and rapidly achieved mass market success, but maintained its allegiance to the Labour party.⁵³ The *Daily Mirror* was launched as a woman's paper in 1903 by Northcliffe, a venture that failed, and was relaunched in 1904 as the self-proclaimed first daily pictorial paper.⁵⁴ As part of Northcliffe's stable, the *Daily Mirror* held loosely conservative values but from 1935 it took on a new anti-Establishment stance and put stories of sex and crime to the fore.⁵⁵ The *Daily Sketch* was also a pictorial paper aimed at the popular market, but was less sensational than the *Daily Mirror*.⁵⁶ Of the Sunday papers, the *News of the World* was the paper whose readers were least concerned with its political stance; it held a conservative editorial line, but had a readership that was majority Labour-supporting.⁵⁷ The *People*, like the *News of the World*, was popular for its gossip and scandal.⁵⁸ *The Sunday Pictorial*, one of the highest selling Sunday papers after the *News of the World* and the *People*, had a readership little interested in serious news, who favoured it for its pictures.⁵⁹ *Reynolds's Illustrated News* was distinguished from its competition by holding a strong left-wing appeal over a

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁴ Williams, *Read All About It!*, pp. 132-33.

⁵⁵ In their 1948 report, Mass Observation found that *Daily Mirror* readers were less aware of their paper's politics than readers of any other paper, Mass Observation, *The Press and Its Readers: Prepared by Mass Observation for the Advertising Service Guild* (London: Art and Technics, 1949), pp. 110-11. Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London: Vintage, 2009), pp. 327-28; PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 120.

⁵⁶ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 121.

⁵⁷ Mass Observation, *The Press and Its Readers*, p. 113.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 114.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 114.

variety of social backgrounds.⁶⁰ These different political outlooks and readerships are important to bear in mind as they were a part of the context of each press story. The popular press encompassed myriad stances and demographics. Since stories of sex change were published by the whole gamut of popular newspapers, they were reaching readers from a broad political and social spectrum.

In this chapter I draw upon two studies of the inter-war British press: Oram's study of women's gender-crossing and Bingham's of gender and modernity. While Oram has based her analysis on the two Sunday newspapers with the highest circulation figures, the *News of the World* and the *People*, Bingham has focused on a selection of top-selling national dailies representing a variety of political standpoints to argue against a post-war backlash in gender discourse. The popular press's eagerness to consider sex changes helps substantiate Bingham's hypothesis. The press approach to sex changes was driven by possibilities of the modern and not censure.

Oram has argued that 'one important route into popular culture is the mass-circulation press, since it reached almost every home and both reflected and informed the everyday landscape of gender and sexuality.'⁶¹ I extend this premise by also looking at the daily press. The Sunday papers did have a larger readership than the dailies, but by considering them in conjunction, a picture emerges of these stories; they were not just being pored over on a Sunday, but throughout the week,

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 116.

⁶¹ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 3.

at the breakfast table, on people's commutes, in their lunch breaks and at the library.⁶²

My strategy for using the popular press is different to Oram's or Bingham's in that I have not restricted myself to specific newspapers but have sought as many instances of sex change as I could find across as many popular papers as possible. This has allowed me to build up a sense of how individual stories were present in British society and culture. Oram's work draws on the popular press in order to access working-class and lower middle-class culture. My intention has been to examine the press not just as a point of access to particular demographics, but as a medium in itself, in the ways Bingham has recommended. The press was not just reporting changes of sex, but was a part of people's lives that was placing the idea of sex changeability into the fabric of everyday life.

Many of these accounts of sex change do not appear in the more highbrow press, in papers such as *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Manchester Guardian*.⁶³ Such stories may not have matched the news values of these papers, and their absence from them meant that certain sections of society, especially those from higher income groups would not see them, but the presence of stories of sex change in the popular press meant that the majority of the population was likely to encounter them.⁶⁴

Light-hearted discussions of sex and gender differences were a seam that ran through the 1930s popular press. A 1926 instruction book advised aspiring

⁶² Reading location is mentioned in: Mass Observation, *The Press and Its Readers*, pp. 19-28.

⁶³ These titles gave very little space to the sex change stories, but they did not pass entirely unnoticed.

⁶⁴ Based on the analysis of newspaper readership in Mass Observation, *The Press and Its Readers*, pp. 112-13.

freelance journalists that they could rely on stories that followed the formula of highlighting gender differences – or the lack thereof, and this formula was commonly applied.⁶⁵ During the 1930s light-hearted pieces on the science of sex were added to this repertoire. The 1938 PEP report bemoaned the lack of informed science coverage in the popular press, but there were attempts to introduce scientific developments as elements of stories about the old stalwarts of sex and gender.⁶⁶

‘Wilts “Woman” Who Is a Man Now to Marry Nurse’: Evan Burt⁶⁷

The first 1930s case reported in terms of ‘sex change’ was that of Evan Montagu Burt, whom we encountered at the beginning of this chapter. Twenty-nine year-old Burt came to the attention of the press on 24 March 1930 with the announcement of his upcoming marriage. The reason this was newsworthy was that Burt had hitherto been known as a woman, Eva Mary Burt. Burt and his fiancée, Sarah Matilda Edwards, lived in the Wiltshire town of Tisbury and had been close friends since childhood. Some three or four years previously, and for reasons left rather unclear by the press, Burt had come to question his sex and had written to the Salvation Army in London to seek help. At this point medical authorities became involved, namely a doctor in Salisbury who examined Burt. This led to an appeal to legal authorities, as Burt’s medical verdict was taken up by the Salvation Army solicitors. The verification of Burt’s new sex status came when Somerset

⁶⁵ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 39.

⁶⁶ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p. 288. I explore this further in Chapter Three: Glands, Hormones and Popular Culture: Contextualising Sex Change.

⁶⁷ ‘Wilts “Woman” Who Is Man Now to Marry Nurse’, *Western Daily Press*, 24 March 1930, p. 7.

House, the national seat of the Registrar General of Births, Marriages and Deaths, agreed to change the registration of Burtt's birth from female to male.⁶⁸ The announcement of the wedding brought this series of pronouncements regarding Burtt to the public attention and the story was concluded by the marriage itself on Saturday 30 March 1930.

⁶⁸ 'Bridegroom on His "Girlhood"', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11; 'Cheering Crowds at Marriage of "Man-Woman"', *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, 30 March 1930, p. 3.

THE DAILY MIRROR, Tuesday, March 25, 1930.
MANY INSURANCE CLAIMS PAID: REGISTER NOW

**WIRELESS
PROGRAMMES
ON PAGE 21**

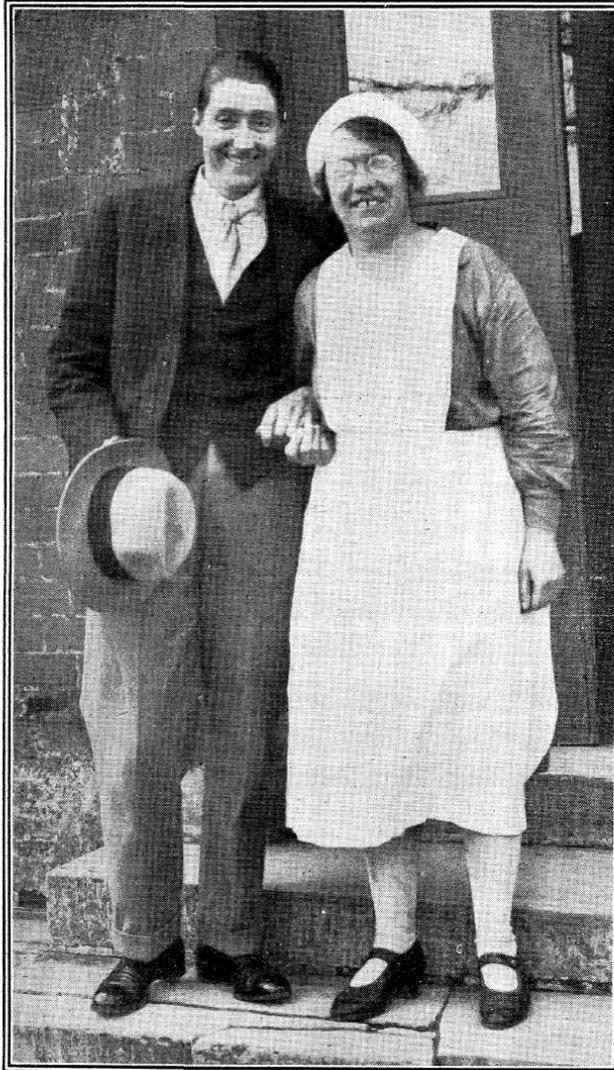
Daily Mirror

THE DAILY PICTURE PAPER WITH THE LARGEST NET SALE

**£100
CROSSWORD
PUZZLE**

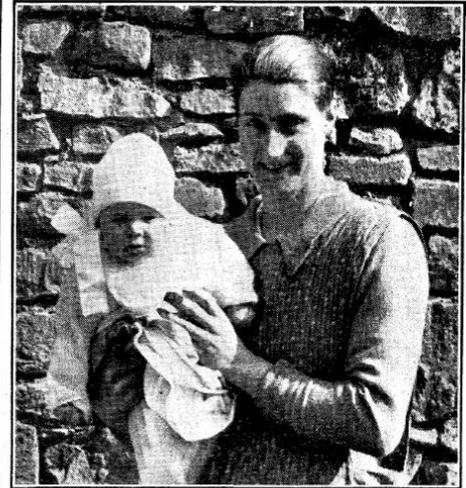
No. 8,221 Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper. TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 1930 One Penny

MAN'S TWENTY-NINE YEARS AS A WOMAN



Mr. Evan Montague Burt, and his fiancée, Miss Sarah Edwards, a nurse.

The revelation of the true identity of Mr. Burt has caused amazement at Tisbury, Wiltshire, where he had lived as a woman for twenty-nine years. At the same time as he declared himself a man he announced his engagement. He found many admirers as



As a woman, holding up a baby friend.



Miss Edwards with Mr. Burt before he had assumed masculine attire.

a woman Wesleyan preacher and a woman singer, and his employer for the past eighteen months regarded him as an ideal maidservant. His birth certificate has been amended following a statement by doctors.—("Daily Mirror" photographs.)

Figure 2.2: 'Man's Twenty-Nine Years as a Woman', *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1930, p. 1.

Accounts of Evan Burt's official change of sex and his wedding appeared in the daily, Sunday and local papers. The daily press covered the story extensively,

picking it up on Monday 24 March and then following it up over the course of the next week. The *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* (figure 2.2) both ran it on the front page.⁶⁹ Since the story broke on a Monday and then developed during the course of the week, the Sunday papers, in order not to be offering a regurgitation of old news, assumed their readers had a familiarity with the background of the case and focussed on the wedding that had taken place the previous day. This is a clear demonstration of the advantage of looking beyond the Sunday press since this kind of human interest story needs to be seen as part of a wider process of the circulation of stories. A case in point is the *Sunday Pictorial*, whose headline was: 'Evan Burttt Married', an article that can only be meaningful to readers already familiar with the case from other sources.⁷⁰ A number of the local papers also took up Burttt's story.⁷¹ Regional newspaper sales had been on the wane since the 1920s, but there were still a number of titles covering Wiltshire and the South West.⁷² Those regional papers to cover the events at Tisbury did so in much the same tone as the national press. Burttt was placed in a local context, but the official elements

⁶⁹ 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1; 'Transformed!', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 1; 'Man's Twenty-Nine Years as a Woman', *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1930 p. 1.

⁷⁰ 'Evan Burttt Married', *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 March 1930, p. 2.

⁷¹ Some local papers did not give any column inches to Burttt, his change of sex or upcoming marriage, especially those whose primary function was as 'advertisers'. These newspapers include the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, the *Wiltshire Times and Trowbridge Advertiser*, and the *Warminster Journal*. It may be that the requirement for these papers to attain respectable sales figures and the demands of publishing weekly dictated policies of eschewing 'sensational' news for the strictly informative and that they therefore did not want to be associated with accounts of sex change. The *Wiltshire Gazette*, which claimed to be 'the most influential paper in the county', did not feature the Burttt story either, but since it came out every Thursday, it may just have been that the revelation of the Burttt's change of sex was old news by 27 March, and that the wedding was no longer deemed newsworthy by the 3 April edition. It is hard to know whether decisions not to cover stories of sex change were down to a belief that it was an unsuitable subject matter, or whether they resulted from far more pragmatic concerns.

⁷² Williams, *Read All About It!*, p. 9.

of the case that elevated it to a story with significance beyond the local, mainly the involvement of the Registrar-General at Somerset House, were emphasised.⁷³

Tisbury was no metropolitan site of modernity, nor liminal holiday resort where transgressions might be embraced or at least be anonymous. Foregrounded in the reports of Burttt was the small town locale, where the lack of modernity cast it as a somewhat old-fashioned location – backwoods and backwards. Tisbury was ‘a little market town’ and ‘this sleepy town’.⁷⁴ Burttt had to go beyond the limits of the town to get official recognition. First Burttt turned to the Salvation Army in the capital, then he had to go to Salisbury, the nearest city, for the medical assessment, and finally the legal resolution of the case lay with the Registrar-General in London. Tisbury’s status as a small, out-of-the-way place, lent itself to a suggestion of naivety. Many newspaper accounts implied not a physical change of sex so much as sexual ignorance. Burttt was quoted as saying: ‘I suppose it was the mistake of my mother when I was born [...] and I was brought up in petticoats.’⁷⁵ The 1933 case of Mark Woods drew on a similar notion of sexual ignorance: ‘I should have known long ago that I was not as other women were; but my mother died young and I had no other woman relatives to advise me.’⁷⁶ This was not, however, a defining feature of sex change stories. As the transforming power of medical science became a more prominent theme, so the explanation of ignorance became less commonplace.

⁷³ For example, ‘Mystery of the Man-Woman’, *Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 1; ‘Wilts “Woman” Who Is Man Now to Marry Nurse’, *Western Daily Press*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; ‘A Tisbury Sensation’, *Salisbury Times*, 28 March 1930, p. 10.

⁷⁴ ‘“Gir!” Who Is a Man’, *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1930, p. 9; ‘Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman’, *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1.

⁷⁵ ‘Bridegroom on His “Girlhood”’, *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11.

⁷⁶ ‘Sex Change Drama’, *People*, 10 September 1933, p. 3.

The official legal ratification was a key element of the reports, establishing as they did that Burt was not a trickster making false claims. The *Daily News'* coverage succinctly demonstrates the recourse to official rulings in understanding the story:

Legally and sartorially, Evan Montagu Burt, of Tisbury (Wilts), is a man now. He has discarded the name of Eva Mary Burt, in which he was registered as a girl at birth 29 years ago; with it he has discarded his woman's clothing, including the domestic servant's apron he has worn recently; and Somerset House, following medical evidence, has agreed to his re-registration as a man.⁷⁷

Within this short passage the paper asserted that Burtt 'is a man now', a truth confirmed legally and medically. That Somerset House agreed to the change of legal documentation – the birth certificate – reinforced the veracity of the change at the heart of the story. The *Daily Chronicle* paid similar attention to the official ratification: 'Mr. Burtt recently consulted a solicitor, and after a doctor's certificate had been obtained the position was regularised, the birth certificate was amended, and the original name was changed to Evan Montague Burtt.'⁷⁸ These points of contact with official judgment were emphasised time and again: the birth certificate, the change of name, the marriage register.

It was explained to an *Evening Advertiser* representative to-day at Somerset House that the original certificate of birth could not now be obtained except under a court order.

"That certificate," the official said, "is superseded and the correct certificate will eventually be filed."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ 'The Man-Woman – as He Is – and as He Was', *Daily News*, 25 March 1930, p. 9.

⁷⁸ "'Girl' Who Is a Man', *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1930, p. 9.

⁷⁹ 'Mystery of the Man-Woman', *Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 1.

A number of newspapers, carrying identical copy, included details of the actual signing of the legal document, the marriage register. Legal intervention played a very different role in these cases to its repressive function in queer histories of sexuality.⁸⁰ The law might be embraced rather than evaded, so as to achieve an official change of sex.

The emphasis on the legal and medical authority precludes any explanation as to exactly what has occurred to prompt Burttt to apply to have his sex officially changed. Although this was a time when research into the medical basis for sex, especially the hormonal aspects, was at its peak, there was no reference to this knowledge. The press posed official rulings as proof rather than seeking medical explanations, although the reader might try to intuit meaning and events from the text. That medical authorities had certified that Burttt was a man following an examination, was as explicit an explanation as readers received. The papers were presenting a classic human interest story, with a suggestion of the sexual, without having to include anatomical details. The assertion that Burttt was a man, with little by way of explanation as to what had happened to bring about this change, helped prevent refutation and drew on the older traditions of wonder and marvel that Oram has identified with the gender-crossing genre.⁸¹

Burttt's masculinity and right to proclaim himself a man were almost unanimously reiterated. The medical diagnosis was reinforced with the enumeration of Burttt's male sex characteristics. Readers learned that Burttt had a

⁸⁰ See for example, Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 37. This connection between sex and legal repression was influentially posited in Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (London: Penguin, 1998).

⁸¹ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 5.

masculine voice, a masculine walk, masculine hands, masculine manners and was generally 'a fine specimen of manhood.'⁸² This authenticated his claim to *be* a man, viewing 'maleness' in Burt's body and suggesting traces that were present as clues had people known how to interpret them: 'I studied Mr. Burt as he was talking. His shoulders were broad – much broader than mine, and I am over six feet in height.'⁸³ 'Burt had quite a good voice, a kind of baritone. I remember, once that a visiting minister gave a great start when he heard it.'⁸⁴ There was a great willingness to accept Burt as a man, reading characteristics into his person that authenticated his sex assignment.

Interestingly, this did not for the most part connote that Burt was therefore inauthentic or deceptive when he had been living as a woman. There were elements about him that could be seen to have been mannish, but these were readily countered by an overall impression of femininity normal to a woman: 'when a room was full of women it sounded odd to hear her speaking in her husky, mannish voice, but nobody suspected her real sex. Indeed, I would have said she was a very feminine girl.'⁸⁵

Those who had known Burt as a woman were keen to stress that he had always behaved fittingly: 'Burt has preached at our church as Miss Evelyn Burt, and

⁸² 'Woman-Man to Be Bridegroom', *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; "'Girl" Who Is a Man', *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1930, p. 9; 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 2; 'Girl Becomes a Man', *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 13; 'Man-Woman to Marry', *Daily News*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; "'Woman" Said to Be a "Man"', *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1930, p. 9; 'Lived as Woman for 29 Years', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 March 1930, p. 12; 'Wilts "Woman" Who Is Man Now to Marry Nurse', *Western Daily Press*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; 'Bridegroom on His "Girlhood"', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11; 'A Wiltshire Man-Woman', *Wiltshire News*, 28 March 1930, p. 2; 'Man-Woman Marries', *News of the World*, 30 March 1930, p. 11.

⁸³ 'Bridegroom on His "Girlhood"', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11.

⁸⁴ 'Girl Becomes a Man', *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 13.

⁸⁵ "'Girl" Who Is a Man', *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1930, p. 9.

there was nothing that was not womanly and befitting to the part.⁸⁶ The *Daily Mail* quoted some local residents who reinforced Burt's masculinity: 'Burt was noted for a rather masculine walk and masculine manners', while another resident reaffirmed Burt's authenticity as a woman: 'there has never been the slightest hint that she is not a woman. [...] She has always worked and acted as a woman, and a quiet, modest one at that.'⁸⁷ The regional paper the *Wiltshire News* went the furthest to place the case in its local context. The interviews showed desire to understand Burt's change of sex in retrospect and to adjust: 'I always admired the girl very much, but I never once guessed, of course, that she was a man, or was becoming a man. She once played a male part in a little play in Tisbury, which suited her.'⁸⁸ There was uncertainty as to whether Burt had always been a man, or had changed to become one.

Clothing played a prominent role in many of the newspaper stories as a marker of sex. Burt's sexual ambiguity was matched by ambiguity of dress. The moment at which he was entitled to exchange his female clothing for male clothing was offered as recognition of a new status. However, Burt was found to be clad in a mixture of male and female garments. Those journalists who had arrived in Tisbury when the news of the upcoming wedding first broke found Burt still attired in women's clothes.⁸⁹ Burt was pictured in a 'before and after' style of juxtaposed photos, which was achieved by showing him in first feminine, and then masculine

⁸⁶ 'Girl Becomes a Man', *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 13.

⁸⁷ "'Woman' Said to Be a 'Man'", *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1930, p. 9.

⁸⁸ 'A Wiltshire Man-Woman', *Wiltshire News*, 28 March 1930, p. 2.

⁸⁹ 'Girl Becomes a Man', *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 13; "'Woman' Said to Be a 'Man'", *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1930, p. 9; 'Man-Woman to Marry', *Daily News*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; 'Wilts "Woman" Who Is Man Now to Marry Nurse', *Western Daily Press*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; 'A Tisbury Sensation', *Salisbury Times*, 28 March 1930, p. 10.

dress, but the distinctions were not necessarily that clear. Burt's incongruity was underlined by journalists in descriptions of sexually mismatched attire: 'as a little girl I used to change into boy's clothes in my own room just for fun. But I would still feel most at home in a dress and apron, the clothes, after all, which I have worn for twenty-nine years.'⁹⁰ 'A reporter who called at the house before the ceremony found the bridegroom taking the wedding ring from the handbag which, from force of habit, he still uses.'⁹¹ These were jarring moments when categories and expectations did not match.

Not all the articles about Burt phrased the narrative in terms of a change of sex, but many did suggest a natural process of change had taken place – a 'metamorphosis' – that had a medico-scientific explanation. Articles described 'one of the most amazing cases in the history of medical science', 'this strange alteration of sex', a 'sex transformation', 'sex reversed' and a 'change of sex'.⁹² This effectively marked out Burt's case from other stories in the press about 'men-women'. The change of sex found a nascent language of medical explanation and was introduced as a plausible concept: 'cases of sex-change in human beings are rare,' said a medical authority, 'but I should not call them extraordinarily rare.'⁹³ This sense of

⁹⁰ 'Bridegroom on His "Girlhood"', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11.

⁹¹ 'Evan Burt Married', *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 March 1930, p. 2. The handbag offers an evocative image of femininity, but the veracity of this account seems questionable. Most of the articles rely on the same phrasing, suggesting they have taken their copy from a press association report. That the *Sunday Pictorial*, which makes no claim to a special correspondent on the scene, would have been the only paper to include this observation seems highly unlikely.

⁹² 'A Wiltshire Man-Woman', *Wiltshire News* 28 March 1930, p. 2. 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1-2. 'Man-Woman Marries', *News of the World*, 30 March 1930, p. 11. 'Girl Who Is a Man', *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1930, p. 9. 'A Wiltshire Man-Woman', *Wiltshire News*, 28 March 1930, p. 2; 'A Change of Sex', *Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard*, 29 March 1930, p. 13; 'Man-Woman Marries', *News of the World*, 30 March 1930, p. 11.

⁹³ 'The Man-Woman – as He Is – and as He Was', *Daily News*, 25 March 1930, p. 9; 'A Wiltshire Man-Woman', *Wiltshire News* 28 March 1930, p. 2.

plausibility meant that accounts of sex change could be presented as fact and did not need to be defended at every telling. Sex changeability was now an imaginable idea.

The question of the relationship between Burt and Edwards was dealt with rather cautiously. The two were shown to have been fast friends since childhood, even 'devoted companions', but the dynamics and nature of their relationship were largely clouded over: 'She had many girl friends, but her best was Miss Sarah Matilda Edwards, who is to be "her" bride. They were seen together constantly and that must have been their courting.'⁹⁴ There was a retrospective interpretation, but it was very matter of fact and there was no explicit judgment passed. Deviant sexuality was not implied, a state of affairs that appears to have been helped by the official approval and popular affection for Burt. Burt's wife was given the opportunity to rebuff any suggestion of impropriety herself:

"We want to be forgotten," said Mrs. Burt to me, "to be left alone happy together as I am sure we shall be. We have nothing to be ashamed of, but it was not pleasant to be the subject of so much curiosity as we have experienced of late."⁹⁵

Newspaper articles allowed Burt and his wife to express distaste at prurient responses to their story and thus directed readers to sympathise with their wishes.

The start and finish points of the story were a validation of heterosexuality in the form of a wedding, whose legitimacy was stressed. The final article concerning Burt appeared in the *Wiltshire News* almost a week after the wedding,

⁹⁴ 'Bridegroom on His "Girlhood"', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11; 'Cheering Crowds at Marriage of "Man-Woman"', *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, 30 March 1930, p. 3; 'Man-Woman Wed', *Wiltshire News*, 4 April 1930, p. 1. 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 2. "'Girl" Who Is a Man', *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1930, p. 9.

⁹⁵ 'Wedding of the "Man-Woman"', *Daily Express*, 31 March 1930, p. 3; 'Man-Woman Now a Husband', *Bristol Times and Mirror* 31 March 1930, p. 7.

and described Burttt as ‘registered at birth as a girl, but in reality a boy’, an interpretation that reinforced the heterosexuality of the partnership.⁹⁶ Press coverage of Mark Weston’s change of sex in 1936 also highlighted that a change of sex had brought a happy resolution in the form of marriage. A wedding meant official recognition of the changed sex and a neat outcome for society in the form of the married couple.

Evan Burttt did not appear in the press again after the reports of his wedding – a contrast to later cases such as Mark Weston’s and Zdenek Koubek’s. I have found no subsequent trace of Burttt in either the popular press or the official records. Following the 1930 wedding there was no mention of either Evan (nor Eva) Burttt on the Tisbury local register of electors, but in 1939 a Sarah Edwards reappeared at the Edwards family home, which suggests that Sarah had returned to her parents and her maiden name, and so was hardly a positive sign for the marriage. The intense press interest that Burttt brought to Tisbury has not lived on in the popular history of the town. The local history society history of Tisbury makes no mention of Evan Burttt or the week in March 1930 when Tisbury was on the front page of the national newspapers.⁹⁷

““Girl” Athlete’s New Life after Change of Sex’⁹⁸

The British ‘sex change’ case to garner the most press coverage was that of Mark (previously Mary) Weston. Weston, a British women’s champion at the shot put

⁹⁶ ‘Man-Woman Wed’, *Wiltshire News*, 4 April 1930, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Rex Sawyer (ed.), *A Tisbury Jubilee Book* (Tisbury: Tisbury Local History Society, 2002).

⁹⁸ ““Girl” Athlete’s New Life after Change of Sex’, *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

and javelin, received cursory press coverage throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Weston was, however, destined to receive far more press coverage off the field than on it. In late May 1936 the popular press picked up the story that, in the words of the *Daily Express*: ‘Woman Turns into Man: Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark’.⁹⁹ For a week the British tabloids teemed with interest in Mark Weston. Readers were informed of the two operations he had undergone at Charing Cross Hospital, his long-standing sense of ‘a certain strangeness in being a woman’ and the possibility of marriage to the woman who was ‘marvellously helpful to me in my transition.’¹⁰⁰ In August 1936 Weston was once again the focus of press stories, this time with the news of his marriage to Alberta Bray, the friend who had been so helpful throughout his change.

The first report of Weston’s change of sex appeared in the local *Western Evening Herald*, with two stories on 28 May 1936. The first article pitched sex change as one of a string of misfortunes to have befallen the Weston family: ‘Fortune has been unkind to the Weston family during the last few months. Mr. Weston, the father, died; the youngest daughter was taken into hospital with peritonitis, and then “Mary” underwent her operations.’¹⁰¹ While these three misfortunes were of a different order – neither Mr. Weston’s death nor the daughter’s peritonitis merited press coverage – the linkage of commonplace events with sex change appeared to have a normalising effect, bringing a change of sex into a framework of family upsets. The impact of including sex change alongside other family difficulties was heightened by its description – as undergoing

⁹⁹ ‘Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark’, *Daily Express*, 29 May 1936, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Man-Woman Finds New Life “Very Startling”’, *People*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ ‘Her “Sister” Has Become Her Brother!’, *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 5.

'operations', an unnerving but common enough occurrence to which readers might well relate. The story's status as 'human interest' was emphasised by the narrative perspective of Weston's sister. The 'strange experience' of the headline was not Mark's, but his sister's, who 'return[ed] from hospital to find her "sister" had become her brother'.¹⁰² The point of interest for the reader became not the change of sex itself, but how it was treated within the domesticity of the family home.

While the article on page five of the *Western Evening Herald's* 28 May 1936 edition took a local and domestic tack, the coverage on page seven concentrated more on the medical aspects. The medical process was outlined, from consulting a specialist, to undergoing two operations and then convalescing for seven weeks. The operation was obliquely suggested to have involved surgery on the adrenal glands.¹⁰³ What is striking is that in both articles this local paper situated the change of sex as part of a wider phenomenon. The press coverage of Evan Burt six years earlier had implied that a change of sex was not an entirely unknown phenomenon, but not one that could be contextualised by reference to other instances, nor one whose medical details could be elaborated upon for readers. The coverage of Mark Weston was strikingly different, despite the similarities between the two cases, which included their West Country location and the press format of an official change of sex followed by a marriage to a longstanding friend.

Obviously Burt and Weston were different people who may have had very different conditions that prompted their 'change of sex' and there is no reason why their treatment in the press should be uniform, but the emphasis and references

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7.

suggest a shift between 1930 and 1936 in how a change of sex could be portrayed for a general readership.¹⁰⁴ Weston's case was treated as remarkable but not exceptional, placing the change of sex within the realm of the medical made it intelligible. Burt's had been described as 'one of the most amazing cases in the history of medical science', and was pitched as exceptional: 'such occurrences are rare even in medical records.'¹⁰⁵ The sexual ignorance that was implied in some of the press coverage of Burt was another factor missing in articles about Weston.¹⁰⁶ Instead, Mark Weston was situated in an established medical framework from those first articles to appear in the *Western Evening Herald*.

The *Western Evening Herald* reported that the change of sex had been the result of two operations, that these had occurred at Charing Cross Hospital and been undertaken by Mr. Lennox Broster.¹⁰⁷ Although a hospital representative was quoted as saying that 'it was a very unusual operation', the overall tone of the article was not of the extraordinary but of contextualising changes of sex as understandable and relatively frequent occurrences:

Mr. Broster in recent years has performed several operations on women who find themselves changing into men. [...] Many remarkable sex operations have been carried out at Charing Cross Hospital [...]. A growing number of cases of so called "sex reversal" has been reported in Britain in recent years.¹⁰⁸

This local paper was keen to stress the modernity of sex change – 'in recent years' – and its established status – 'many remarkable sex operations', 'a growing number

¹⁰⁴ Weston's condition is elaborated on at length in the findings of his surgeon, L. R. Broster in 1938's *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, by contrast, I have been unable to uncover any information as to Burt's medical background.

¹⁰⁵ 'Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ For example: 'Bridegroom on His "Girlhood"', *Daily Express*, 25 March 1930, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

of cases'. The national press followed suit in painting a picture of the routine nature of sex change operations.

Many papers ran the same copy of the quote from Charing Cross hospital, but others offered their own elaborations. The *Daily Mail* reported Weston's change of sex under the headline 'Doctors and Sex Changes', making the focus the general possibility of changing sex rather than Weston's particular case. It informed readers that:

The case of a woman athlete who has become a man after two special operations at Charing Cross Hospital is not the first of its type dealt with at the institution.

It is understood that more than a score of operations, similar to those performed on Miss Mary Edith Louise Weston, the athlete of Oreston, Plymouth, who is now Mr. Mark Weston, have been successfully carried through.¹⁰⁹

The coverage of Mark Weston promoted the idea in the popular imagination that changing sex was a modern possibility and could be achieved with specialist medical intervention, delineated as 'sex operations' or 'special operations', carried out on the adrenal glands. The case for the ordinariness of sex changes was reinforced in many articles by reference to other examples of changes of sex from the early to mid-1930s.¹¹⁰ Weston's story was also a cue for papers to report other contemporary cases of a change of sex, running these articles alongside those concerning Weston.¹¹¹ The press coverage of a (minor) public figure like Mark Weston offered readers an identifiable image of sex change and a context in which

¹⁰⁹ 'Doctors and Sex Changes', *Daily Mail*, 29 May 1936, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7; 'Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew', *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1936, p. 1; 'Doctors and Sex Changes', *Daily Mail*, 29 May 1936, p. 6; "'Gir'" Athlete's New Life after Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

¹¹¹ "'Gir'" Athlete's New Life after Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3; 'Man-Woman Finds New Life "Very Startling"', *People*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

to comprehend the phenomenon. Following the initial accounts of Weston's change of sex, 1936 came to be a major year for popular discussion of sex change, as will be examined further in Chapter Four: Sport Changes Sex.

That Weston had made an impact in the popular press, is apparent in the subsequent references to him. During the Berlin Olympic Games, the International Amateur Athletic Federation issued a call for medical examinations to 'tackle that "man-woman" problem'.¹¹² Although Weston had ceased competing in 1932, some four years earlier, he was still mentioned in newspaper accounts of this announcement.¹¹³ Weston remained a point of reference, such as in a short *Daily Mirror* article about the change of sex of Sofia Smetkovna in 1937, which mentioned Weston as context for this new case.¹¹⁴ Whether Weston lingered in the public imagination, or whether his experience was simply a neat example of the sex-change narrative, he continued to be a crucial representative case of sex change.

On 10 August 1936 the *Daily Mirror* reported the call for sex testing in women's sport, and on 11 August 1936 the name of Mark Weston appeared in its pages once again – this time with the news of his marriage. Weston's was not enough of a household name to feature in the headlines, but the articles honed in on the marriage rather than devoting much space to reminding readers of the details of his transition earlier that summer. Each headline emphasised the idea of contradictorily gendered relationships. The *Daily Express* ran with 'Man-Woman Weds Friend of Girlhood', the *Daily Mail* opted for "'Girl" Who Is Now a Husband',

¹¹² 'Women Athletes Tackle That "Man-Woman" Problem"', *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1936, p. 7.

¹¹³ [Untitled], *Manchester Guardian*, 1 March 1932, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ 'This Woman Will Be a Man Next Week', *Daily Mirror*, 15 April 1937, p. 23.

the *Daily Mirror* chose ““Woman” Athlete Who Became Man Married to “Girl in a Million””, and the *News Chronicle* went with ‘Man, Once Woman, Weds “Girlhood” Friend’.¹¹⁵ The headlines suggested discordance and a potentially inappropriate match. Weston’s position as a man was portrayed as changeable and his relationship with a woman could have been read retrospectively as a same-sex union. However, the papers were overwhelmingly positive, even celebratory, regarding the marriage. Oram has argued that heterosexual desire cemented the legitimacy of these 1930s sex change cases and this certainly seems to be an aspect of the coverage of Weston.¹¹⁶ The marriage, with its necessary legal ratification of Weston’s status as a man, was pitched as the ultimate achievement of manhood.

As reported across the papers, there had been a relationship between Weston and Alberta Bray prior to Weston’s change of sex. The *Daily Mirror*, *News Chronicle*, *News of the World* and *People* all printed a candid shot of Mark Weston and Bray walking along arm in arm, accompanied by captions along the lines of ‘With His Girl Friend’.¹¹⁷ Once he was married, Weston reflected that being a man had changed the footing of this longstanding friendship:

Through all the anxious time of my change, from 1928 to the actual operations in May this year, she has been my real helpmate. Our friendship as girls together changed to a deeper feeling when I found myself a man, but even after everything was completed I did not think marriage would come so soon.

¹¹⁵ ‘Man-Woman Weds Friend of Girlhood’, *Daily Express*, 11 August 1936, p. 1; ““Girl” Who Is Now a Husband’, *Daily Mail*, 11 August 1936, p. 7; ““Woman” Athlete Who Became Man Married to “Girl in a Million””, *Daily Mirror*, 11 August 1936, p. 28; ‘Man, Once Woman, Weds “Girlhood” Friend’, *News Chronicle*, 11 August 1936, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 116.

¹¹⁷ ‘Man Who Was Once a Girl’, *Daily Mirror*, 30 May 1936, p. 1.

It is only due to my wife's complete faith in herself and me.¹¹⁸

This account fended off suggestions of homosexuality by stressing that the nature of the relationship changed once Weston was a man; the idea of a 'deeper feeling' paid heed to ideas of romantic married love. However, there were also elements of continuity in Weston's relationship with Bray as a woman and as a man, and these were not glossed over. What was important was trust – Weston's belief in himself as a man, Bray's faith in Weston as a man and partner, and trust that Weston's male body communicated a truth. Weston was discussed in the press in terms of truth and a sense of the truth having won out: 'MY TRUE ELEMENT: "I realize I am now in my true element. Before I was going about abashed, but now I can keep my head up and look everyone in the face," he said.'¹¹⁹ The burgeoning field of endocrinology was not referenced in these sex change articles, though stories included some of the key concepts of the new scientific ideas. The truth of the body was one such notion, highlighting the need to remove doubt: 'the anxious times when I was wondering what my sex really was'.¹²⁰ Another important element, as discussed in Chapter One, was the idea of normality. An emphasis on normality may have eliminated any sense of sexual impropriety. Press accounts moved from Weston having been a normal woman: 'For 30 years Miss Mary Edith Louise Weston, of Oreston, near Plymouth, has lived the normal life of a woman, and in addition won the British women's championship for putting the shot and throwing

¹¹⁸ "'Woman" Athlete Who Became Man Married to "Girl in a Million"', *Daily Mirror*, 11 August 1936, p. 28.

¹¹⁹ 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7.

¹²⁰ 'Man, Once Woman, Weds "Girlhood" Friend', *News Chronicle*, 11 August 1936, p. 14.

the javelin' to the impetus for change: 'I began to realize that I was abnormal'.¹²¹

Living as a man and being able to marry his long-term friend rendered Weston's life 'normal' again.

GAOL SECRETS OF MAN-WOMAN TESTS¹²²

In March 1937 the *Daily Mirror* ran an article about Richmond Harvey's book detailing his time in Wormwood Scrubs, *Prison from Within*, under the headline 'Gaol Secrets of Man-Woman Tests'.¹²³ The presence of a 'man-woman' prisoner, a brief incident in the book, was noted and singled out for attention. The description of this man followed many of the features that had become familiar from previous sex change stories, an opaque yet nonetheless conclusive physical change accompanied by specialist medical intervention. The unnamed prisoner had lived as a woman for twenty years before 'some strange change took place in her organism and the woman became a man.'¹²⁴ He now visited a Harley Street specialist on a regular basis. There were, however, elements to this article that hinted at a cynical approach by the journalist, missing in other stories of sex change. The piece began with the information that the Harley Street visits were at the behest of the Prison Commissioners, and finished with Harvey's general condemnation of the prison service. There was an undercurrent of scorn and disapproval running through the

¹²¹ 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7. It is also interesting to note the wide scope of 'normal' here, including as it does the sometimes stigmatised position of the topflight woman athlete. 'Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 7.

¹²² 'Gaol Secret of Man-Woman Tests', *Daily Mirror*, 23 March 1937, p. 15.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

article. The prisoner was described in pointedly feminine terms as ‘beautiful, with luxuriant wavy hair and great brown eyes.’¹²⁵ This femininity contrasted with the assertions of masculinity in coverage of men such as Burt and Weston. Another important contrast was the information, in bold type in the article, that the man in question had married another man. While the marriages of Burt and Weston had won them praise – what Oram has termed ‘proof of true sex and heterosexual normality’ – the prisoner’s marriage to a man marked him out as abnormal.¹²⁶

The account given in the *Daily Mirror*, for all that paper’s reputation for salaciousness, was rather guarded. Readers whose interest was aroused sufficiently to read Harvey’s book would have been treated to a far more graphic account of the ‘perversions’ taking place within prison walls:

Perhaps the most notorious figure of all this obscene collection was a man who lived in the hospital and worked in the tailors’ shop. There was nothing amiss with his general health, but it was deemed advisable to keep him under constant supervision on account of the sexual abnormality with which he was afflicted.¹²⁷

Harvey’s account consistently treated this prisoner as a man. He was referred to with male pronouns throughout and, although he was portrayed as feminine, it was in the context of a section of the book describing the femininity of a number of ‘sexual perverts’. Harvey described the prisoner ‘speaking in the mincing tones of a young girl in her teens’ and walking with ‘the exaggerated mincing of a woman in high-heeled shoes’.¹²⁸ Harvey made it clear that his disapprobation was on account of the prisoner’s sexual desire for men. Homosexuality in prison aggravated Harvey

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 126.

¹²⁷ Richmond Harvey, *Prison from Within* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 262.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 263.

greatly: 'to my mind it was a disgraceful state of affairs that homosexualists should have been allowed to mix with ordinary prisoners.'¹²⁹ The issue was not this man's sex but his sexuality. The attribution of feminine mannerisms was in keeping with Harvey's description of other 'sexual perverts', whom he also described in terms of feminine behaviour: 'some of them were attired in women's clothes, and behaved with all the boldness of common harlots.'¹³⁰ Harvey's account suggested that those who had undergone a change of sex from female to male could be widely understood as men. While the newly cemented heterosexuality of Burt and Weston was celebrated, and, as Oram has argued, reiterated their status as men, same-sex desire need not negate one's status as a man. Homosexuality rendered this prisoner a less acceptable type of man, but a man nonetheless.

With its strict sex segregation, prison reinforced the legitimacy of the new sex designation. The single-sex environment of the prison had been at the heart of revelation in the cases of Colonel Barker and Mark Woods. Barker had been diverted from a men's prison, and Woods had been found not to be suited to a women's prison. Just as athletic competition demanded a strict designation of male or female, so did prison, and as such played a part in revelations of gender crossing.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 259.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 261.

¹³¹ I use Oram's term 'gender crossing' as a discussion that encompasses Colonel Barker – whose story did not include a corporal change of sex – does not fit into a classification of 'sex change'.

The 'Tragic Misfit'¹³²

Oram has argued that the press were prone to employ the language of tragedy when covering stories of intersexuality, especially in relation to coverage of John/ Gene/ Hannah Joynt.¹³³ Joynt's story of an inconclusive change of sex only appears to have been picked up by the *People*. Across two pages, the *People* in September 1938 revealed that Joynt had been raised as a woman, but had experienced doubts as to hir sex and at the age of twenty two had sought medical advice.¹³⁴ The doctors declared Joynt to be a man and so Hannah Joynt became John, or 'Gene' Joynt. The article then told of how Joynt faced a series of hardships that shook any faith as to hir correct sex. A subsequent visit to a Harley Street specialist saw Joynt being declared to be physically a woman. The story ended with Joynt wanting to live as a man but forbidden to do so by a furious father.

Every element of the story was presented as tragedy, from the title 'Tragic Misfit', which was applied to both articles about Joynt, to the recurrent quashing of hope that marked the structure of the story. Joynt was presented as entirely without agency, unable to pursue hir own desires on account of external forces – hir father – and internal ones: hir body was deemed not to be definitively either male or female. The overriding tone was of the tragedy of ambiguity, and the need for authoritative – medical – salvation: 'unless science can help her – and doctors

¹³² 'Tragic Misfit in Life: Man-Woman Reveals "Her" Sufferings', 'Tragic Misfit: No Happiness Either as Man or Woman!', *People*, 4 September 1938, pp. 1, 3.

¹³³ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, pp. 116-17.

¹³⁴ Joynt's sex and gender are unclear in the *People*'s coverage so I am employing the gender-neutral pronoun 'hir', which allows for Joynt to have been female, male or neither. For more on gender-neutral pronouns see: Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007), pp. 21-22.

are once again studying the facts of her case – she seems doomed to be happy as neither man nor woman.’¹³⁵

This tragic model, however, was atypical of the reporting of 1930s sex change. The only other stories to close with a return to the original sex were those of Sophie Smetkovna/ Witold Smetek and Basilka/ Bosilko Stoyanoff. The only reference I have found to Smetkovna casting aside a male identity is in a piece from the Australian press – there does not seem to have been any discussion of it in the British popular press.¹³⁶ Stoyanoff’s return to womanhood was noted in Britain’s press, but like Joynt’s story, was only covered by the *People*. Stoyanoff’s life was presented not with tragedy but with humour at Stoyanoff’s expense. Stoyanoff came across as an indecisive fool, an individual who did not claim agency over himself: ‘he is suing the doctor who turned him into a man for damages. He alleges the doctor made a mistake.’¹³⁷ There were also hints of humour in the account of Joynt. The name ‘Gene’, one of Joynt’s male names, had a slang meaning akin to ‘hermaphrodite’. The year before, in the summer of 1937, Colonel Barker had been part of a Blackpool attraction and Mass Observation recorded a woman giving the verdict that Barker was a ‘Gene’: ‘he’s not a proper man, he’s a bloody Gene.’¹³⁸ Attributing the name ‘Gene’ to Joynt, invited the reader to participate in a joke at Joynt’s expense.

Joynt’s and Stoyanoff’s stories were also striking for their wilful and persistent use of pronouns that were at odds with the subjects’ professed sex.

¹³⁵ ‘Tragic Misfit: No Happiness Either as Man or Woman!’, *People*, 4 September 1938, p. 3.

¹³⁶ The Australian article was ‘Woman-Man Wants to Be Woman Again’, *Mirror*, 6 May 1939, p. 13.

¹³⁷ ‘Boy to Be a Girl – Again’, *People*, 6 December 1936, p. 2.

¹³⁸ Quoted in James Vernon, “‘For Some Queer Reason’: The Trials and Tribulations of Colonel Barker’s Masquerade in Interwar Britain”, *Signs*, 26, no. 1 (2000), p. 54.

Although other newspaper reports were not consistently respectful in their choice of pronouns, they tended to reflect the subject's current identity at least by the conclusion of the article. While the majority of sex change stories could be classified under the rubric of human interest, these two fell under that of tragicomedy. These articles in the *People* appear to have been exceptional in their portrayal of sex change and cannot be read as indicative of a wider picture. This narrative of tragicomedy was a response to the accounts of sex change, though, even if it did not predominate. Bingham has found that the interwar press in Britain espoused a range of opinions as far as gender discourse was concerned, and this is clear in these stories.¹³⁹

'SISTERS ARE NOW BROTHERS': Mark and David Ferrow¹⁴⁰

In late August 1939, with the country on the brink of war, the *Daily Herald*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *News Chronicle* and the *News of the World* each offered a heartening tale of two siblings who had been raised as sisters but were now making their way in the world as brothers.¹⁴¹ In discussing the coverage of the Ferrow brothers, Oram has explored the model of tragedy averted, in which the benevolent medics rescue the siblings from gender uncertainty and hence misery.¹⁴² There was certainly a sense in the accounts of the Ferrow brothers that

¹³⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ 'Sisters Are Now Brothers', *News Chronicle*, 26 August 1939, p. 11.

¹⁴¹ 'Vanished Sisters Return as Boys', *Daily Herald*, 26 August 1939, p. 9; '2 Sisters Become Brothers', *Daily Mirror*, 26 August 1939, p. 5; 'Sisters Are Now Brothers', *News Chronicle*, 26 August 1939, p. 11; 'Two Sisters Are Brothers Now', *News of the World*, 27 August 1939, p. 6.

¹⁴² Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 116.

their former ambiguity was a problem: 'Marjorie remained inside for nearly a year and a half rather than be stared at',

Mark, now 17, won a scholarship to a central school, but had to leave at the age of 13 when his voice deepened and masculine characteristics began to appear. Later he tried to study at Yarmouth Art School, but so many embarrassing incidents occurred that he left.¹⁴³

There was more here than the brothers' gender ambiguity. Those interviewed in conjunction with the story were universally positive about the brothers and their conduct. These were not stories of tragedy averted but of personal resilience in the face of hostility. The *Daily Herald*, in particular, pushed this angle with its subheading 'Mark and David Brave Gossip'.¹⁴⁴ The Ferrow brothers were credited with a degree of agency that the *People's* 1937 articles would not allow Joynt.

Although I agree with Oram that the language of tragedy marked some coverage of sex change, I see scope for other readings. Readers were invited to sympathise with the trials and tribulations of the two siblings, rather than share in the abuse they received. This was a marked contrast to the *People's* coverage of Joynt.

The change of sex was not questioned in any way, and the acceptance of it as an unremarkable fact was put forward by the *News of the World* as the desired outcome:

His mother told me, "People stare at us as if we had committed a crime. I am only thankful that the boys take it so well."
A neighbour said that David was splendid when he returned.
"There has been gossip for years, but he just came out in men's clothes and went everywhere he had gone as a girl," the neighbour added.

¹⁴³ '2 Sisters Become Brothers', *Daily Mirror*, 26 August 1939, p. 5; 'Sisters Are Now Brothers', *News Chronicle*, 26 August 1939, p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ 'Vanished Sisters Return as Boys', *Daily Herald*, 26 August 1939, p. 9.

“People will soon get used to the brothers.”¹⁴⁵

The impression here was of a heroic narrative of riding out residual prejudice at a modern phenomenon. The testimony suggested that it was those who treated the brothers poorly who were at fault and were out of step with the times.

The medical aspect of the brothers’ change of sex was emphasised in each article. These medical procedures were treated as very matter of fact, as if they were standard procedures. The *Daily Herald* stated simply: ‘they had undergone a sex change’, elaborating: ‘Mark was operated on at a London hospital to complete his transformation. David has yet to undergo an operation.’¹⁴⁶ The *News Chronicle* and the *News of the World* were no more specific than saying the brothers entered hospital for ‘treatment’, a quotidian description for such a life-changing occurrence. The *Daily Mirror* was slightly more specific, alluding to Mark entering the London Hospital for ‘injections’. The references to an operation and to injections point towards some of the earlier stories of sex change that detailed hormone research and adrenal surgery, but were not any more explicit in communicating what had taken place at the hospital.¹⁴⁷

The brothers, including David, who had not yet undergone any ‘treatment’, were both described as unequivocally male: deep-voiced and ‘masculine’. Their ease with gendered accoutrement was highlighted: ‘5ft. 10in., Smokes a Pipe’ and ‘he wears boy’s clothes as naturally as if he had never known skirts’.¹⁴⁸ Being a man lay partly in their physical embodiment and their comfort in male clothing, but also

¹⁴⁵ ‘Two Sisters Are Brothers Now’, *News of the World*, 27 August 1939, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Vanished Sisters Return as Boys’, *Daily Herald*, 26 August 1939, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Such as those of Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek.

¹⁴⁸ ‘2 Sisters Become Brothers’, *Daily Mirror*, 26 August 1939, p. 5. ‘Two Sisters Are Brothers Now’, *News of the World*, 27 August 1939, p. 6.

stemmed from the brothers' conviction that they were men: 'I've always been a man at heart', 'I suppose, I have always been a man'.¹⁴⁹ The brothers were allowed agency by the press, which expressed no prurient interest. There were no 'before and after' style photographs that might undermine their maleness. If anything, as David Ferrow suggested, changing sex made him a luckier person than most: 'I have a personality such as few others can have. I have a knowledge of male and female psychology that anyone might envy.'¹⁵⁰ The Ferrow story was a tale of triumph over adversity. The readership was assumed to have a decent familiarity with the elements of sex change. The story's special interest was that both siblings were undergoing a change of sex, as spelled out by the *News of the World*, which acknowledged that a change of sex might not be newsworthy by itself: 'changes of sex have become known on several occasions, but this is believed to be the first case of two sisters changing sex together.'¹⁵¹ By 1939 the popular press-reading public might be suitably *au fait* with accounts of sex change that another dimension was needed to render the story newsworthy.

Here was a case of brave young people. The *News of the World* recorded Mark speculating about whether he and David would be eligible for military service, and how he wanted to play his part.¹⁵² In the only other reference to the threat of war looming over the front pages of these newspaper issues, the *Daily Mirror* pictured Mark Ferrow and David Ferrow holding a painting of Chamberlain.¹⁵³ The

¹⁴⁹ 'Two Sisters Are Brothers Now', *News of the World*, 27 August 1939, p. 6. '2 Sisters Become Brothers', *Daily Mirror*, 26 August 1939, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ 'Two Sisters Are Brothers Now', *News of the World*, 27 August 1939, p. 6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ '2 Sisters Become Brothers', *Daily Mirror*, 26 August 1939, p. 5.

photograph's caption expressed incredulity that the manly Mark and David were ever girls, and one reading is that the two brothers stood up to scrutiny against a leader of men. Of course readers might interpret the photograph in any number of ways, but the brothers were definitely placed in the current moment. These were not tragic figures but admirable modern men looking to make the most of difficult circumstances.

Donald Purcell and the Desire to Change Sex

In May 1938 the *Daily Mirror* and the *News of the World* reported that Doris Purcell was at Charing Cross Hospital for the operations that would see him become a man, Donald Purcell. The *News of the World*, in particular, stressed the element of astonishment that the events prompted. The choice of language suggested that the events were remarkable: 'an amazing change', 'a surprise reunion', 'strange though it seems'.¹⁵⁴ There was a focus on how Purcell's relationships with his friends and family would have to be reconfigured. This was the classic human interest angle – exploring an established phenomenon, here changes of sex, through one individual's personal experiences.

The terms of disbelief at the beginning of the article provided drama to entice the reader, but other sections of the report contextualised Purcell's sex change as one of many similar operations taking place at Charing Cross:

Doris went into Charing Cross Hospital a fortnight ago and has already undergone one operation. This was carried out by Dr. Lennox R. Broster, the

¹⁵⁴ 'Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward', *News of the World*, 8 May 1938, p. 7.

famous surgeon, who has brought new hope and happiness into the baffled lives of many men and women who were desirous of changing their sex.¹⁵⁵

The nature of this operation was not elaborated upon, but it was mentioned not as remarkable or dramatic in itself. The surgeon, Broster, was portrayed as a hero, a famous figure whose fame stemmed from the hope and happiness he and his work had generated. The subjects of his operation were seemingly diverse and plentiful – men and women who had wanted to change sex and had had their uncertainty rectified at the hands of Broster.

Page 2 THE DAILY MIRROR Thursday, May 5, 1938

DOCTOR CHANGES SEX OF 24: PATIENTS HAVE MARRIED



Waiting for Doris to return as Donald... twenty-year-old Charlotte Bannister.

Going to the Dogs

Lamp-posts to make streets more beautiful, instead of spoiling them, are urged by Sir Cyril Huroomb, chairman of the Electricity Commission. He suggests an approach to the Royal Fine Art Commissions.

*The Lights of London oil have made
Fronzies lift an eye-brow,
But times are changing; I'm afraid,
Because they're going highbrow.*

*Twelve feet of iron, a little glass,
Is all the lamp-posts seem like,
But viewed through artists' eyes, the mass
Is beautiful and dream-like.*

*So let the labourer's bloodstream boil
And curse those artist blighters;
We shall not rest till we've a Royal
Academy of Lighters!* E. M. D.

LET'S HIS BOY STOP OUT TILL MIDNIGHT

HAVE you a twelve-year-old son?
What time does he have to be in at night?

When asked at East Ham Juvenile Court yesterday whether he thought it right that his son should roam the streets until "eleven and twelve" at night, a father replied:

"Yes, I certainly do."

The father had refused to allow his son to enter into the recognisances enforced when the boy was placed on probation for two years. He was said to have told a probation officer: "I'll manage the boy, not the Court."

Less weak the boy had been accused of breaking into a hut and stealing cash and a stove. The case was remanded for a week.



She's always wanted to be a boy. Now, at twenty-four, her hopes are being fulfilled... Doris Purcell.

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

TWENTY-FOUR English men and women have had their sex changed in the past few years. The man who has brought new hope and happiness into these baffled lives is Dr. Lennox Ross Broster, surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital London.

Most of his operations are amazingly successful. A number of his patients have married and had children.

The happiness of two girls depends on his next operation—an operation to make Doris Purcell, twenty-four, of Monton Green, Manchester, into a man, who will call himself Donald.

Doris's Girl

Doris's girl friend, Charlotte Bannister, twenty, of Peel-green, Manchester, is anxiously awaiting her return.

While the little dog which Doris gave her played around her feet, Charlotte said to me last night:

"Doris has always meant everything to me. Our friendship has been different from the usual companionship of girls.

"If she wants me as a sweetheart when she comes back as a young man I am willing. I am even willing to marry.

"I love Doris and that is all that matters. Not until she returns will I be really happy."

Doris's mother told me that her daughter had always been a man "at heart."

"Did a Man's Job"

"She hated housework, frilly frocks, paint and powder. She preferred to dress in overalls and work with machinery."

She liked to do a man's job, too. For a time she worked as a chauffeur. When she

KEPT DIARY OF PAIN FOR FELLOW-MEN

PAIN . . .

THE stuff that shoots through your body, driving you to despair, smashing at your sanity . . .

But pain didn't interfere with the clear thinking of Mr. Percy Furnivall, famous British surgeon.

Mr. Furnivall, one-time consulting surgeon

Figure 2.3: 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', Daily Mirror, 5 May 1938, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

The *Daily Mirror* (see figure 2.3) went even further in framing Purcell's story as part of a larger medical success story. Its headline focused not on Purcell's necessary readjustment in personal relations, as did the *News of the World's* – 'Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward' – but on the number of people whose sex Broster had changed, and the successful outcomes he had brought about. Purcell's future happiness, and that of his potential girlfriend, were placed in the hands of Broster, the 'Rugby-playing specialist with the hands of a woman'.¹⁵⁶ This description of Broster pointed to some gendered contradictions – a man who played the archetypally *masculine* sport of rugby, yet whose *feminine* hands equipped him to be such a skilled surgeon – contradictory qualities that contributed to his special position as the man who could change a person's sex.

The *Daily Mirror's* celebration of the fact that some of Broster's patients had married, supports Oram's assertion that 'the psychological and physical "truth" of correct sex assignment was thus demonstrated by heterosexual desire in these patients.'¹⁵⁷ Both the *News of the World* and the *Daily Mirror* used the potential for future romance between Purcell and his girl friend, Charlotte Bannister, as an angle to engage readers' interest in the story. The potential for marriage, and perhaps, as was claimed for some of Broster's other patients, having children, were posited as a validation of the sex-change operations.

What is striking in both of these articles, I argue, is the degree of agency Purcell was allowed. As Oram has discussed, the masculine qualities of the people

¹⁵⁶ 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1938, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 116.

who were to become men were underlined, and described as innate.¹⁵⁸ Purcell's family testified not just to his inherent masculinity: 'Doris was always a tomboy, and my brothers called her Donald. [...] She never used paint or powder, and she smoked like a man', but his inherent *maleness*: 'Doris's mother told me that her daughter had always been a man "at heart"', 'she's always wanted to be a boy. Now, at twenty-four, her hopes are being fulfilled'.¹⁵⁹ Masculine traits were identified and retrospectively interpreted as Purcell being more fittingly a man than a woman. There was also, however, a strong sense of a desire to change sex. Purcell was shown to actively seek out the operations and, since his story was told in the context of twenty-four other patients also having had sex-changing surgery, the implication was that those who knew their bodies not to match their own sense of their sex could find a positive outcome at Charing Cross Hospital.

The coverage of Purcell portrayed medical intervention not as an imposition but a desired solution. A change of sex was depicted as an appropriate and approved procedure that would reap positive changes. If Broster and the press could rejoice at the subsequent marriages, there was no suggestion that the patients did not too. The press did rely on a strategy of foregrounding heterosexual relationships and viewing cases favourably for the heterosexual resolutions they might bring, but this needs to be seen in relation to the pleasure patients may have felt following their changed sexual status. What Broster was doing at Charing Cross

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 115-16.

¹⁵⁹ 'Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward', *News of the World*, 8 May 1938, p. 7. 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1938, p. 2.

was offering, as the papers phrased it, an opportunity for 'new hope and happiness.'¹⁶⁰

Police tell wife: Your husband was a woman



DONALD PURCELL
"So cheery."

LILIAN PURCELL found out last night that her husband Donald she married 15 years ago was a woman.

Mrs. Purcell, aged 37, was told the news six hours after her 43-year-old husband died in hospital. She said:—

"I was stunned when police came to tell me. Is it possible my husband changed sex? I don't know."

"I knew he was terribly ill when he was taken to hospital. "But when they told me he was not a man, it seems too fantastic."

Mrs. Purcell, comforted by a sister, sobbed as she went on: "I can't think of Donald as anyone but my husband. We were married at Shrewsbury Register Office on May 2, 1942.

"Donald was very strong. He always did the handyman sort of jobs about the house that you would expect a husband to do."

Mrs. Purcell has a 12-year-old adopted son, lives in a terraced house in Eland-street, Gorton, Manchester, where she moved with her husband 12 years ago. Her husband ran his own small business. On Saturday he collapsed at home and was taken to hospital.

"He had been in poor health with heart trouble for two years," said Mrs. Purcell.

Slightly built, fair-haired Donald Purcell was known to the neighbours as "the cheery little man who lives on the corner."

Purcell's mother kept a small general store and off-licence in Eland-street until 13 years ago. Said the present shopkeeper last night:—

"We all knew Don very well. He used to call in quite often."

Figure 2.4: 'Police Tell Wife: Your Husband Was a Woman', *Daily Express*, 27 January 1958, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ 'Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married', *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1938, p. 2; 'Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward', *News of the World*, 8 May 1938, p. 7.

The degree of recognition of the concept of changing sex and of the new status of those who had undergone operations in the 1930s, was reinforced by a press report of Donald Purcell's death in 1958 (figure 2.4). Almost twenty years after the positive and matter-of-fact accounts of Purcell's change of sex, the *Daily Express* ran a front-page article describing the shock of Donald Purcell's widow on learning that 'her husband Donald [whom] she married 15 years ago was a woman.'¹⁶¹

While in 1938 the *Daily Mirror* had accepted that sex could be changed and that Purcell was to become a man thanks to medical treatment, in the *Daily Express* article two decades later, Purcell was described as a woman. In the 1958 account it was the police and hospital authorities who got to decide Purcell's sex. The possibility that one might change sex was raised: 'is it possible my husband changed sex?' but sexual mutability was not given any further credence, as Purcell had been declared to be 'not a man' and, therefore, 'a woman'.¹⁶² Different newspapers proffered an array of opinions, and even writers working for the same paper took multiple tacks, but despite the variations between newspapers, there was a marked shift between the 1938 and 1958 coverage. In the 1930s there was a far greater belief in the power of medicine to change sex and in the authenticity of those who had their sex changed.

¹⁶¹ 'Police Tell Wife: Your Husband Was a Woman', *Daily Express*, 27 January 1958, p. 1.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Men-Women

The dominant expression in these accounts of sex change was ‘man-woman’, an obsolete term that is hard to pin down.¹⁶³ It does not correspond to any one specific identity position as we might now understand it. Indeed ‘identity category’ is an inexact description in itself as no subject was depicted as self-identifying as a man-woman; it was a term ascribed by those in the business of categorising others, here the press. Sometimes the phrase appeared in inverted commas as if to point to its nature as an approximation, but most commonly it was used in a matter-of-fact fashion without the inverted commas. It was a label that the press seemed comfortable to assign.

The category of ‘man-woman’ is an excellent example of how distinctions between sex, gender and sexuality, and understandings of sexual ambiguity, were mutable and incommensurable with current classifications. The ‘man-woman’ was neither a woman nor a man, nor a woman *and* a man – what it meant to be a man or woman was subject to change. ‘Man-woman’ appeared frequently in the popular press, yet there has been little to no scholarly consideration of ‘man-woman’ as a category.

Those who came under the auspices of ‘man-woman’ included: (a) those who had been designated female at birth but had passed periods of their lives as men; (b) those who had been designated female at birth but were subsequently officially declared to be men; (c) individuals who had been declared male at birth

¹⁶³ I have found 39 references to ‘men-women’ in the British press from 1929 to 1942. There were nine mentions in 1929, sixteen in 1930, two in 1932, two in 1933, eight in 1936, one in 1937 and one in 1938. These are just the references I have happened upon – I am sure that a more comprehensive search would reveal considerably more instances.

but were accused of masquerading as female; (d) sideshow performers advertising themselves as ‘half-man, half-woman’; and (e) people who had been raised as girls but had later lived as men and then women.¹⁶⁴ ‘Man-woman’ was also employed to mean not sufficiently female, especially in the discussions of sex testing that arose from the 1936 Olympic Games.¹⁶⁵ Here we have a range of identity categories that might be intelligible today as transgender, transsexual (ftm/mtf), intersex and/or genderqueer. These cases were linked by the terminology of the ‘man-woman’ but did not necessarily reference each other, and are quite different in other respects.

As Doan has argued in *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s*

Experience of Modern War:

¹⁶⁴ (a) For example: Colonel Barker: ‘Exploits of “Man-Woman”’, *Daily Herald*, 7 March 1929, p. 1; ‘Man-Woman Released’, *Daily Herald*, 9 March 1929, p. 1; ‘Man-Woman Developments’, *Daily Herald*, 12 March 1929, p. 5; ‘Charge of Perjury Against “Col. Barker”’, *Daily Herald*, 16 March 1929, p. 1; ‘Widowed Man-Woman’, *Daily Herald*, 21 March 1929, p. 3; ‘Man-Woman for Trial’, *Daily Mirror*, 28 March 1929, p. 1; ‘Trial of the Man-Woman’, *Daily Mirror*, 25 April 1929, p. 25. Peter Stratford: ‘Screen Man-Woman’, *Sunday Pictorial*, 5 May 1929, p. 6. William Holton: ‘A New Man-Woman’, *Daily Mirror*, 11 May 1929, p. 1.

(b) For example: ‘Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman’, *Daily Express*, 24 March 1930, p. 1-2; ‘Man-Woman to Marry’, *Daily News*, 24 March 1930, p. 7; ‘Mystery of the Man-Woman’, *Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald*, 24 March 1930, p. 1; ‘The Man-Woman – as He Is – and as He Was’, *Daily News*, 25 March 1930, p. 9; ‘A Wiltshire “Man-Woman”’, *Wiltshire News*, 28 March 1930, p. 2; ‘Man-Woman Marries’, *News of the World*, 30 March 1930, p. 11; ‘“Man-Woman” Weds’, *People*, 30 March 1930, p. 11; ‘Cheering Crowds at Marriage of “Man-Woman”’, *Reynolds’s Illustrated News*, 30 March 1930, p. 3; ‘Man-Woman as a Bridegroom’, *Sunday Graphic*, 30 March 1930, p. 3; ‘Man-Woman Now a Husband’, *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 31 March 1930, p. 7; ‘Wedding of the “Man-Woman”’, *Daily Express*, 31 March 1930, p. 3; ‘“Man-Woman” Married’, *Daily Mail*, 31 March 1930, p. 11; ‘Wedding of the Man-Woman’, *Daily News*, 31 March 1930, p. 7; ‘Man-Woman Wed’, *Wiltshire News*, 4 April 1930, p. 1; ‘Man-Woman Finds New Life “Very Startling”’, *People*, 31 May 1936, p. 3; ‘Man-Woman Athlete to Appear in Revue’, *Daily Mirror*, 23 July 1936, p. 8; ‘Man-Woman Weds Friend of Girlhood’, *Daily Express*, 11 August 1936, p. 1; ‘Man-Woman Athlete’, *Daily Mirror*, 18 November 1936, p. 3; ‘Gaol Secret of Man-Woman Tests’, *Daily Mirror*, 23 March 1937, p. 15.

(c) ‘Home Secretary and Amazing Man-Woman Case’, *Reynolds’s Illustrated News*, 3 January 1932, p. 5; ‘Sentence on Man-Woman’, *Reynolds’s Illustrated News*, 10 January 1932, p. 3.

(d) ‘Man-Woman Denies Allegations’, *Manchester Evening News*, 24 October 1930, p. 1.

(e) ‘Tragic Misfit in Life: Man-Woman Reveals “Her” Sufferings’, *People*, 4 September 1938, p. 1

¹⁶⁵ ‘Men-Women Problem for Sport Chiefs’, *Daily Herald*, 30 May 1936, p. 3; ‘Women Athletes Tackle That “Man-Woman” Problem’, *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1936, p. 7; ‘Man-Woman Athletes Test Decision’, *Daily Mirror*, 11 August 1936, p. 2; ‘Cloud over Olympic Games’, *News Chronicle*, 11 August 1936, p. 1.

negotiating the past in relation to gender and sexuality forces us to raise our tolerance for conceptual messiness as we engage in the pleasures of conjecturing about what may in the end prove unknowable and irresolvable.¹⁶⁶

This call to be attentive to the unknowability of the past finds resonance in the idea of the 'man-woman'. Present day meanings of sex, gender or sexuality cannot be mapped onto the category of 'man-woman' and this illuminates its nebulous quality. The 'man-woman' is a way of exploring ambiguous sex that does not try to view the past through the identities of the present.

The 'man-woman' was by no means solely a modern phenomenon. The pamphlet *Hic Mulier; or, the Man-Woman* was sending up 'the Masculine-Feminines of our Time' in 1620.¹⁶⁷ The 1930s was the period in which the term achieved the most usage, but 'man-woman' was a concept that had been used in the British press since at least the 1850s. In different newspaper articles from 1856, there was the 'extraordinary' discovery of a man-woman in Birmingham – Rebecca Kennedy – portrayed as a cruelly neglected daughter with slight facial hair; while an unnamed 'man-woman' from Oxford was described as 'a man in the garb of a female.'¹⁶⁸ These snapshots, a few months apart, suggest how 'man-woman' covered categories we might now hold to be separate: perhaps, but not exactly, intersex and trans. Manchester's Harry Stokes, a 'man-woman' in the news in 1859,

¹⁶⁶ Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 104.

¹⁶⁷ *Hic Mulier: Or, the Man-Woman* was an anonymous satirical pamphlet condemning women for behaving like men, and in particular, for dressing like men. It was printed in London in 1620. See: Sandra Clark, 'Hic Mulier, Haec Vir, and the Controversy over Masculine Women', *Studies in Philology*, 82, no. 2 (1985), 157-83.

¹⁶⁸ 'Extraordinary Occurrence in Birmingham – Discovery of a Man-Woman', *Morning Chronicle*, 14 April 1856, p. 3; 'The Birmingham Man-Woman', *Morning Chronicle*, 21 April 1856, p. 5; 'A Man-Woman Servant – Singular Case', *Morning Chronicle*, 30 June 1856, p. 7; 'A Man-Woman Servant', *Lloyd's Weekly*, 6 July 1856, p. 9.

garnered a confusion of gendered descriptions within one article, from ‘the most remarkable woman of this century’ to ‘a journeyman and master-bricksetter’ and the pointedly gender neutral ‘an extraordinary person.’¹⁶⁹ With the introduction of photographs into the popular press, accounts of ‘men-women’ could be embodied by images, such as a 1905 *Daily Mirror* photo, which bore the caption ‘The Man-Woman’ and showed Edith Shillson, who had ‘led the life of fraud dressed as a man.’¹⁷⁰ By offering images of ‘men-women’, the press gave a visual lexicon of the nature of a ‘man-woman’ and in so doing rendered this ambiguous term more concrete for its readers.

Colonel Barker was commonly referred to in the press as a ‘man-woman’, as were many of the passing women/ female husbands who received press coverage in the 1920s and early 1930s. Evan Burtt was also dubbed a ‘man-woman’ in many newspaper headlines, creating a link between his distinctly physical change of sex and the masquerade attributed to passing women. The press treatment of those who changed sex was, as Oram has argued, markedly different to that meted out to cross dressers; physical changes of sex were treated as products of scientific modernity rather than as part of an older tradition of wonderment.¹⁷¹ Articles about cross-dressing women would refer back to the Colonel Barker case to situate them in that tradition.¹⁷² No mention was made of the Barker case in the articles about Evan Burtt, even though they were only separated by a year. In Burtt’s case, the ‘man-woman’ could be someone who had ‘*changed sex*’, and who was legally

¹⁶⁹ “‘Harry’ Stokes, the Man-Woman’, *Glasgow Herald*, 25 October 1859, p. 2; ‘The Man-Woman’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 October 1859, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ ‘The Man-Woman’, *Daily Mirror*, 30 November 1905, p. 9.

¹⁷¹ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 125.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 67.

recognised as a man, and so could marry a woman and have their birth certificate changed, but who carried their earlier identity in the ambiguous title of ‘man-woman’.¹⁷³ What linked the sex change stories with other forms of sex/ gender variance was the appellation ‘man-woman’.

Augustine Hull came to the attention of the popular press in November 1931 when prosecuted for gross indecency, and again in January 1932 when the British Sexological Society petitioned for Hull’s release.¹⁷⁴ *Reynolds’s Illustrated News* described Hull variously as ‘a man masquerading as a woman’, an ‘anti-type’, and ‘one of “Nature's mistakes” [who] experiences all the emotions of a woman, and, when dressed in ordinary male attire, is liable to come under suspicion by the police because of his womanish ways.’¹⁷⁵ This article, and others like it, were impassioned appeals on Hull’s behalf, drawing on new theories of psychology and sexual identity reminiscent of later narratives of transsexuality. This developing notion of a woman’s emotions in a man’s body fell under the older category of ‘man-woman’, blurring distinctions based on sex and gender that we might now make between, for example, Augustine Hull, Colonel Barker and Evan Burt. People who were assigned male at birth could also come under the rubric of ‘man-woman’.

As medical treatment for intersex conditions developed, ‘man-woman’ seems increasingly, though not exclusively, to have been applied to those who might have been intersex, but the lines between intersex and trans were becoming

¹⁷³ Barker, by contrast, was penalised for marrying a woman as a man.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Home Secretary and Amazing Man-Woman Case’, *Reynolds’s Illustrated News*, 3 January 1932, p. 5; Lesley A. Hall, “Disinterested Enthusiasm for Sexual Misconduct”: The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30, no. 4 (1995), p. 677; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 164; Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries 1870-1930* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 207-31.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Sentence on Man-Woman’, *Reynolds’s Illustrated News*, 10 January 1932, p. 3.

more distinct. Whereas Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek had each frequently been labelled a 'man-woman', and the discussions about sex testing that arose from the 1936 Olympics were reported in terms of 'man-woman tests', neither Donald Purcell in 1938, nor the Ferrow brothers in 1939 were described as 'men-women'. It is too simplistic to suggest a progressive shift in understanding away from older ambiguous categories to modern modes of explanation, but 'man-woman' does seem to have faded away from the popular press from 1938 or so.

One of the latest uses of 'man-woman' I have found is from the 1938 coverage of Hannah/ John/ Gene Joynt.¹⁷⁶ In describing Joynt as a 'man-woman' the *People* reflected Joynt's uncertain sex and gender role. While in 1938 Donald Purcell received medical treatment that affirmed his male status, that same year treatment was apparently not able to resolve Joynt's situation. The figure of the 'man-woman' testified to the co-existence of different subjectivities and understandings of sex and gender in the same place and time.

'Man-woman' was a designation premised on ideas of ambiguity and non-fixity and of a middle ground. Vernon's call to appreciate the unclassifiable nature of Colonel Barker resonates with how the 'man-woman' might be understood:

in a sense Barker's sexual and gender orientation has to remain indeterminate, undecidable and unknowable. It is the very ambiguity of Barker's story that makes it so interesting, for it enables one to shift attention away from the classification of Barker as an object with a "real" gender and sexuality to be discovered and revealed to a concern with how Barker was understood and made knowable by his own contemporaries.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ 'Tragic Misfit in Life: Man-Woman Reveals "Her" Sufferings', *People*, 4 September 1938, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ Vernon, "'For Some Queer Reason'", p. 38.

As Oram concluded her chapter on sex change in the interwar popular press: 'scientific modernity had not lost the gloss of enchantment.'¹⁷⁸ The idea of the 'man-woman' was a grappling with the intricacies and contradictions of sex and gender and yet also a neat label at the public's disposal to classify a spectrum of cases. New ideas were rendered comprehensible by way of older categories.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the coverage of some of these sex-change stories to demonstrate how their dissemination through the popular press – in terms of their frequency and style – placed sex change in the public arena as a modern phenomenon. The popular press in this period conveyed a sense of the modern as positive and exciting; Bingham has observed: 'newspapers are essentially records of modernity, and they inevitably focus attention on the new and unusual.'¹⁷⁹ Sex-change stories tended to be portrayed as modern on account of the medical and scientific discoveries behind them. An idea of scientific modernity was referenced to make sense of the claim that sex could change, and the social implications that arose from such mutability.

Sex change was not a hidden element of 1930s Britain. The wide reach of the press and the widespread reporting of sex change stories across different newspapers meant that the sex change narrative became part of the cultural and social fabric of 1930s British life. As the decade went on and cases accumulated, the

¹⁷⁸ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 127.

¹⁷⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 50.

emphasis on exceptionality diminished. Many press accounts were presumably drawn from press association reports as different newspapers offered near identical copy, and similar descriptions were used by newspapers across a number of stories. One effect of this was to reify the idea of sex change through repetition or ubiquity, depending on how many newspaper articles any given reader encountered. Readers might have read accounts of sex change in local, national, daily and/ or Sunday newspapers.

Oram has argued that tragedy and the resolution of heterosexuality were important elements to many of these articles, but it is also important to note that those who changed sex were for the most part allowed a good deal of agency, and readers were prompted to view them positively.¹⁸⁰ Although heterosexuality was a celebrated result of a number of the sex change stories, it was sex and gender – not sexuality – which were at the heart of understandings of sex change. This chapter points to a reappraisal of popular understandings of sex changeability and its implications for understanding sex and gender in the interwar years. Popular understandings of hormones and sex changeability are explored further in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁰ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, p. 116.

Chapter 3: Glands, Hormones and Popular Culture: Contextualising Sex Change

Introduction

A feature in the glamour magazine *London Life*, from May 1932 proclaimed:

‘SCIENTISTS SEEK TO SOLVE THE SECRETS OF SEX’ (see figure 3.1).¹ Under the subheading ‘Why Some Women Become Men’ the article began:

A curious fact in connection with modern scientific research is that beliefs that were regarded as nonsensical superstitions by learned men a generation or so ago are now regarded by the successors of the savants who derided them, as proven facts.²

According to the article, science offered incredible possibilities that could force society to change its preconceptions. Scientific explanations for changes of sex, and operations to reverse such changes, were heralded as marvellous modern discoveries:

GIRL’S CHANGE INTO A BOY ARRESTED
These amazing phenomena and the discovery of their causes [...] may have as important results for the welfare of humanity as the recent splitting of the atom.³

The hyperbole employed here – comparing research into changes of sex with splitting the atom – pointed to the enthusiasm with which scientific discussions of sex change were treated, even if the claims were exaggerated. The scientific angle lent the accounts a degree of respectability and authority. Scientists were portrayed as being at the forefront of modernity: the dramatic and fast-paced developments in society.

¹ ‘Scientists Seek to Solve the Secrets of Sex’, *London Life*, 21 May 1932, pp. 23-24.

² *Ibid*, p. 23.

³ *Ibid*.

SCIENTISTS SEEKING TO SOLVE THE SECRETS OF SEX.

BY SOME WOMEN BECOME MEN.
 A curious fact in connection with modern scientific research is that beliefs that were regarded as non-scientific superstitions by learned men a generation or so ago are now regarded by the successors of the scientists who derided them, as proven facts.

One of the most prevalent of the so-called "superstitions" of the Dark Ages was that women who, though the dreadful arts of Black Magic, had sold their souls to the devil, were able to transform themselves into men and thus avoid the punishment of bringing forth their children in sorrow, to which their souls were doomed in Genesis.

MEN-WOMEN "BURNT IN THE DARK AGES."

The history of demonology and witchcraft abounds with instances of "men-women" being burnt at a stake for having "by the aid of the devil changed the sex in which they had been created." Thirty years ago medical men declared that change of sex was an impossibility, and that the superstition grew merely because certain males in rare instances developed masculine traits and abnormal growths, such as hair on the

SEX CAN CHANGE.

To-day the possibilities of a change of sex are admitted by the medical faculty and, owing to remarkable operations that have been performed at Charing Cross Hospital, the cause and cure of these extraordinary physical changes have been explained scientifically and simply.

EVOLUTIONARY DISCOVERIES.

As a result of these operations, there is little reason to doubt that medical science is on the eve of solving the mysteries, not merely of sex change, but of sex determination which would ultimately determine whether boys or girls should be brought into the world at the will of their parents or the requirements of the State, but also the prolong-enjoyment of bodily youth and the abolition of senile decay! Here is the account of the investigations and operations carried out at Charing Cross Hospital by Mr. E. B. Broster, the honorary surgeon, and his colleague, Dr. Gardiner Hill, of St. Thomas's Hospital, upon three women who were rapidly changing into men.

GIRLS CHANGE INTO A BOY ARRESTED.

The following description of these striking phenomena and the discovery of their causes, which may be of as important results for the evolution of humanity as the recent discovery of the splitting of the atom, is quoted from "The British Journal of Surgery":—"One case investigated was that of a girl who began to grow a masculine general build at the age of 14, rather than a girl, and her voice was low-pitched. Her mentality was that of a normal girl.

"In another case hair grew on the face of a girl at 16, and she was definitely of a masculine bodily type. She habitually shaved. Her facial expression was feminine, and she "thought" that her mental outlook was feminine. She was extremely self-conscious as to her condition.

RESULTS OF OPERATIONS.

"A third case was that of a girl aged 18, who grew side whiskers and had hair on her limbs. Her voice was feminine.

"An operation was performed in the second case, the adrenal gland being removed. The girl made a complete recovery, and is now in good health. The beard and moustache began to disappear, and clus-

"An American woman whose sex was changed recovered her sex when a tumour which was affecting a gland was removed. In another case a Danish artist who married a woman was recognised as a woman, and the marriage was annulled.

"It was stated that recently in England a girl who was changing into a boy 'could almost sing bass'."

Males are also affected but, until recently, more rarely than women.

THE CAUSE OF SEX CHANGE.

The cause of these extraordinary sex changes is stated by biologists to be the effect upon the cells of which the body is composed by the secretions from certain glands. The male is exclusively built up

GLAND SECRETIONS AND CHARACTER.

The importance of the adrenal gland is that it secretes the substance which is responsible for the male characteristics, and upon the amount of the secretion depends the speed of the development of these characteristics.

The actual cause of effeminacy, and even degeneracy, in men is a deficiency of the secretion in the pituitary gland. Hence it appears that many of those whom the law condemns as criminals are in reality invalids and victims.

If medical men could obtain an extract of the secretum of that gland and introduce it into a male so affected it should restore him to the normal.

Similarly an extract of the adrenal gland fluid should cause a woman to develop masculine tendencies, and an extract of the pituitary gland should theoretically "feminise" her.

But complete changes of sex would not be accomplished.



FRANCES DEE AND CHARLIE RUGGLES IN "THIS RECKLESS AGE."

ters of hair could be pulled out without causing pain. She also recovered normal feminine tendencies.

"The two other cases were also operated upon. Case 1 recovered normal tendencies, but in Case 3 there has been no change since the operation.

"During the research work at Charing Cross Hospital six women who have taken on male characteristics have been operated upon.

OTHER STRANGE CASES.

"Where girls change into boys it is the suprarenal gland (above the kidneys) which determines the sex. Where boys develop feminine characteristics the actual gland is the pituitary gland (near the base of the brain).

"There have been many cases where sex changes have not been discovered until later in life than these cases.

of male cells, and the female of female cells, differing from each other essentially in structure. However nearly a male comes to resemble a female in external appearance or habit of mind, the cellular structure remains the same and unalterable.

All the manifestations of sex are dependent on the activity of the ductless glands, and normal development on the proper balance between the secretions of these glands.

Undue activity of the pituitary results in precocity, whether in the boy or the girl. Excess of suprarenal, on the other hand, produces "virility," so that the boy becomes excessively male and the female characteristics of the girl are masked by hair on the face and deepening of the tone of the voice.

The earlier this excessive secretion acts, the more fundamental are the changes produced.

These glands are a highly interesting study. The giant type of man like Carnera is really the result of over-secretion of the anterior part of the pituitary, and there is little doubt that science in the near future, by utilising the secretions of this gland, will add, if required, cubits to one's stature.

WHAT THESE DISCOVERIES PORTEND.

The possibilities of developing giant food animals, such as sheep, by this method, cannot be overlooked.

It has taken hundreds of years of careful breeding to evoke the modern Southdown sheep from its scraggy wild ancestor. It may be shortly possible when knowledge of gland functions becomes complete, to so much improve the size and wool of the Southdown sheep in one

(Continued on next page.)

Figure 3.1: 'Scientists Seeking to Solve the Secrets of Sex', *London Life*, 21 May 1932, p. 23.

It was not just the individuals who changed sex that were reported upon, the science behind such cases was also covered in popular culture. Sex change was associated with glands and hormones and these entities were widely tackled in newspapers, magazines, novels and in the burgeoning field of popular science. Over

half of the *London Life* article quoted above was given over to detailing the biological processes involved, with an assumption that readers would be interested in glands, and could grasp their functions and significance. Changes of sex were rationalised through matter-of-fact descriptions of the relevant glands: “‘Where girls change into boys it is the suprarenal gland (above the kidneys) which determines the sex. Where boys develop feminine characteristics the actual gland is the pituitary gland (near the base of the brain).’⁴ That girls might become boys, and vice versa, was not contested, the issue at stake was identifying the biological processes that caused such changes. Scientific research was translated into accounts that could more readily be understood by the general public.

This 1932 feature from *London Life* was an example of how sex change, and lay understandings of endocrinology, were connected and were circulating beyond the popular newspapers. It was printed under the banner of ‘fiction, films and future fashions’, situating it as a facet of popular culture, an effect heightened by the accompanying photo of film stars. The article positioned scientific notions of sex change alongside the latest gossip and entertainment news, making them part of popular culture.

While the previous two chapters dealt, respectively, with scientific developments in relation to sex changeability and with sex change stories in the popular press, this chapter steps back to consider the wider context of the science and the coverage of sex change in 1930s Britain. This involves two distinct, but interrelated issues: the context in which press stories of sex change appeared, and

⁴ Ibid.

the ways in which these stories were socially and historically contextualised. I will examine how glands and hormones found their way into popular culture and how two peripheral magazines, *Urania* and *London Life*, reworked press accounts of sex change for their own, very different purposes. I am concerned with how scientific notions of sex change entered into the public consciousness through the popular press, popular science, fiction and special interest publications. Through discussion or ubiquity, these ideas then gained cultural currency. There was a banal accumulation of references to glands and hormones, which came to carry associations with rejuvenation and sexual characteristics through their discussion in the press. I will demonstrate how accounts of sex change were read in a context of popular awareness of glands and hormones, which already carried an association with sexuality.

My approach to reading these texts is influenced by reception theory, in that I understand the texts to be actively negotiated and shaped by their audiences.⁵ Hall's contention was that a text is produced and disseminated through a number of stages. The initial coding or intent of the message does affect its reception, but only obliquely. An idea must be conveyed through discourse, be situated as a story, for it to be transmitted to an audience.⁶ How this message is received can be influenced, and there will be 'dominant' or 'preferred' readings, but these dominant readings will not be held by all and readers' responses cannot be wholly controlled.⁷ I am not claiming to know to how accounts of sex change

⁵ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding' in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 507-17.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 508.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 513.

were received because that is something as to which I can only speculate. I do not know what effect these stories had on their readers. My argument is not that there was necessarily a greater acceptance of sex change – something I cannot substantiate – but that it was significant that there were a variety of texts circulating in popular culture that tackled the idea of sex changeability.

In Bingham's engagement with the interwar popular press he has also drawn on Hall's theories of reader reception to consider the ways in which ideas were transmitted:

The final product was the outcome of complex series of decisions which balanced what proprietors, editors, journalists, and outside contributors wanted to produce, what they assumed their target audience wanted to read, and what was (perceived to be) required for financial success.⁸

Certainly there may have been an effort to foster a dominant meaning regarding sex change, but, as Bingham goes on to argue, '[t]he press did not wield an overwhelming power over its audience.'⁹ By contrast, Sigel's research into the dispersal of stories about sexuality into popular culture does endeavour to assess readers' responses:

This project takes the idea of impact a step further, past the circulation of narratives in the press, past social reactions to the spread of popular culture, and into the circulation of people's own responsive iterations.¹⁰

⁸ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 11.

⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Lisa Z. Sigel, *Making Modern Love: Sexual Narratives and Identities in Interwar Britain* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), p. 4.

Sigel makes a claim for access to subjective reactions using readers' letters. Magazines such as *Urania* and *London Life* were targeted at different audiences, but exactly who those audiences were, or how they responded, we cannot know. What is important is the variety of ways sex change and hormones were discussed across a range of publications and therefore how sex changeability was framed and reiterated in different contexts for audiences' consumption.

Although they had less reach than the popular press, *Urania* and *London Life* were also part of the culture of 1930s Britain. They each tried to foster a sense of audience community around shared interests. I will elucidate what these interests were and how they related to ideas of sex change. The format of each magazine played a part in recycling stories from the popular press and articulating the publication's own ideas about sex and gender. I will argue that the treatment of sex change in these marginal publications demonstrates the impact of the popular press stories and the possibilities for the stories to be restyled in the service of the magazines' interests. They were marginal in that they catered to distinctive groups, in the case of *Urania*, those who opposed the division of humanity into two opposing sexes, and in the case of *London Life*, those who were interested in fetishism and titillation. The magazines' ideologies were largely oppositional, yet both commented on many of the same stories and found interest and meaning in them. By looking at both titles, I am able to consider the multiple readings that were being taken from accounts of sex change, and how these were fostered in different or similar ways. I examine the coverage in each magazine to show the impact that ideas of sex change were having on those who were attracted to these

new scientific and sexual possibilities, such as those who had, or wished to, change sex.

The ways in which information about glands was disseminated, and the fascination with sex change beyond the newspaper articles, are exemplified in the 1932 *London Life* feature discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Although there were such instances in which the general interest in science and the circulation of sex change stories coalesced, this chapter is organised around each element individually. The first part of the chapter will examine the ways in which glands and hormones featured in popular culture in the 1920s and 1930s, exploring the context of popular scientific knowledge in which sex change stories appeared. The second part of the chapter will look at the specialist magazines *Urania* and *London Life*, to explore how they recast sex change stories to suit their own journalistic or political interests.

There have been a number of detailed readings of the different components of this chapter, but none that consider them together, nor in the same context as I do. Sengoopta's *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life* (2006) provides an excellent and wide-ranging study of the changing understandings of glands and hormones in relation to sex. Oram has unpicked different aspects of *Urania's* format, focus and significance in a series of articles. Sigel in her 2012 book *Making Modern Love* considers the topics covered by *London Life* and the relationship between the magazine and its readers. I draw on each of these areas, but situate them together to show how, despite their apparent differences, they were all connected to the sex change stories in the popular press and worked to variously influence and reprocess those stories. By considering the dissemination of notions of glands, hormones and

sex change across different elements of society, I aim to show how each aspect was part of a bigger picture: that sex change was not an entirely marginal subject in 1930s Britain.

Glands and Hormones in Popular Culture

The British interwar public encountered glands and hormones in a range of contexts and as part of a wider discourse of scientific modernity. Scientific modernity was the attribution of progress to science, making science a driving element of the modern world, creating the new possibilities that fuelled contemporary life. Glands and hormones were an aspect of this 'Brave New World', as Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel ironically termed it.¹¹ 'Glands' and 'hormones' each referred to different scientific understandings – hormones replacing older notions of glands. That the two were muddled and used counterfactually points to the degree of symbolism they held in the popular imagination, as opposed to the degree of their nuanced comprehension.

The popular press conveyed new scientific ideas as and when they were seen to constitute an engaging story. Although there were some prominent figures such as Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane who combined reputable scientific careers with press commentary, much of the popular scientific writing was produced by journalists with no scientific expertise. Their main concern was entertainment as

¹¹ *Brave New World* included references to sex hormone research, including mentions of freemartins and of sex hormone chewing gum. A description of human freemartins echoed some of the contemporary reports of adrenal virilisation: 'The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they're decanted as freemartins – structurally quite normal (except, he had to admit, 'that they *do* have just the slightest tendency to grow beards)', Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Flamingo, 1994 [1932]), p. 10.

part of a wider news agenda, rather than accuracy or academic significance.¹² Many scientists distrusted the popular press and were anxious not to be (mis)represented in its pages.¹³ Therefore, popular press accounts of scientific research cannot be read as representative of general scientific opinion. Appeals to science were used as part of a wider interwar media culture of entertainment and sensation. What these press stories offer is an insight into which scientific developments were perceived to have broad popular interest, and how they were formulated in order to generate that interest. Notions of glands and hormones provided the press with especially strong stories as, implicitly or explicitly, they referenced the journalistic staples of sex, human – often criminal – behaviour and the quest to resist ageing.

Although the term ‘hormone’ had been coined in 1905, the older reliance on the terminology of ‘glands’ remained prevalent in popular culture and in some scientific practice well into the 1930s. Scientists came to argue that it was not the glands themselves that were effective, but the chemical messengers – hormones – they excreted. Further research, by scientists like L. R. Broster (see Chapter One), revealed the role of glands other than the gonads, such as the adrenal glands, in producing the so-called sex hormones. The term ‘sex hormones’ proved to be inadequate to describe the various hormones affecting sex, but the term remained. I explore the ways that ‘glands’ and their successor, ‘hormones’, were dealt with in the popular press and in fiction. Each term had varied connotations and was not

¹² Peter J. Bowler, *Science for All: The Popularization of Science in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 4. Haldane and Huxley each published a number of idealistic science books for a general readership, such as J. B. S. Haldane, *Possible Worlds and Other Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928) and Julian Huxley, *What Dare I Think?: The Challenge of Modern Science to Human Action and Belief* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931).

¹³ Bowler, *Science for All*, p. 201.

necessarily used in its correct scientific sense. There was a chronological shift from the language of 'glands' to that of 'hormones' as the significance of the distinction trickled into the popular domain, but a great deal of slippage remained between the two terms. Outmoded scientific ideas continued to influence popular discussions. Since references to glands and to hormones were linked, I explore the ways in which both figured in popular culture of 1920s Britain in order to contextualise their place in the 1930s.

As I explored in Chapter One, the 1930s saw the acceleration of research into sex hormones. As a result, there was a change in how bodies were understood to be sexed; from what determined a person's sex, to the location of sex in the body, to the stability of sex. Sex came to be seen as complex and variable. The nuances of these developments were not, however conveyed by the popular press. There was not a great deal of science reporting in the interwar press, and those stories that did make it into print tended to be sensationalised in order to compete with and emulate the demand for events that had a sensational and immediate impact.¹⁴ Popular scientific articles appealed to recognisable themes and ideas. In the case of endocrinology, the 1920s popular press found its story in the form of the rejuvenation experiments of figures such as the Austrian physiologist Eugen Steinach and the Russian surgeon Serge Voronoff, whose experiments entered into the public consciousness and popular vocabulary.¹⁵ 'The Steinach (operation)', and 'being Steinached', became part of the English language, with various meanings

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 186-87.

¹⁵ Chandak Sengoopta has argued for the importance of rejuvenation to understanding the overall development of endocrinology, even though theories and methods of rejuvenation came to be rejected, Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life*, p. 8.

attached to this redundant method of rejuvenation. The operation, in effect vasectomy, gained publicity through high profile patients such as Yeats and Freud, and the support of medics such as Harry Benjamin.¹⁶ Voronoff's work became understood via the dubious rubric of 'the monkey gland'. During the 1920s Voronoff achieved notoriety for his experiments transplanting grafts of monkey testicles into men to promote rejuvenation, understood as youthfulness and sexual vigour. Voronoff was an ardent self-publicist and ensured that newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic were kept abreast of the latest developments in his experiments.¹⁷ Rejuvenation proved to be an attractive prospect for the popular press, combining as it did elements of sexuality, the quest for eternal youth and depictions of the monstrous.

A page-long article in the glamour magazine, *London Life*, from 1928 exemplified these elements, and was in keeping with *London Life's* propensity for sexualisation. The article used shorthand and more sensational language to pose its question: 'Is the Monkey-gland Idea Dangerous?', then a subheading to point to a wider and more philosophical question: 'Dr. Voronoff claims to indefinitely prolong life. Would rejuvenation benefit humanity?'¹⁸ The claims made here for Voronoff's work were exaggerated even by his estimation, but they tied enormous possibilities to the disturbing notion of the 'monkey gland'. The article managed to combine ideas of immortality and sexuality:

¹⁶ See Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life*, p. 87; David Hamilton, *The Monkey Gland Affair* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), p. 46. In her 1932 memoir, successful novelist Gertrude Atherton described visiting Benjamin's 'Steinach clinic' in New York, Gertrude Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), pp. 538-40.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *The Monkey Gland Affair*, pp. 51, 77.

¹⁸ 'Is the Monkey-Gland Idea Dangerous', *London Life*, 14 July 1928, p. 14.

Voronoff and Steinach have now proved that senile decay is due solely to the declining activity of the sex glands; and the fact that eunuchs are deprived of these organs is the cause of their predisposition to premature old age, which is also noticeable among normal persons who in their youth and manhood have practised excessive sexuality.¹⁹

In this article the imprecise terminology of 'sex glands' acted as a euphemism for the testes. The scientific language of 'glands' could be substituted for more explicit language. The narrow definition of 'sex glands' employed here showed how the idea of 'glands' could be mapped on to older understandings rather than being applied in a scientifically accurate manner. The supposition that excess sexuality was emasculating was outdated and referred back to Victorian proscriptions against masturbation. However, there was a popular notion of glands and sexuality that could counter-factually link Voronoff and Steinach and ideas of glands as rejuvenating and sexual. In addition, the cross-species element gave the idea of gland research a spectre of the bestial. The *London Life* article quoted a concerned opponent, Dr. Edward Bach:

when the glands of an ape are grafted on to a human being the characteristics of the ape are also bound to be transplanted. The very basis of the claim of Dr. Voronoff is that he is able to transplant into the human organisation – weakened perhaps by civilisation – the virility of the primitive ape stock. But virility is not the only characteristic that will be transplanted. Characteristics possessed in a high degree by the anthropoid apes are cruelty and sensuality.²⁰

Accounts of monkey gland experiments evoked the risk of primate traits infusing humans – a sort of reverse Darwinism, and a retrogressive turn for humanity. The

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

progressive aspects of modern science could also be seen in a dystopian light, with the potentially degenerative effects highlighted.



Figure 3.2: 'What Should We Do with Our Grandfathers?', *Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1928, p. 9.

A cartoon in the *Daily Mirror* in June 1928 asked: 'There has been much talk of late about "rejuvenation" and prolonging the span of human life. If these dreams come true what would become of the really young?'²¹ Comic strips offering a wry comment on current affairs were a regular feature of the *Daily Mirror* during the

²¹ 'What Should We Do with Our Grandfathers?', *Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1928, p. 9.

interwar period and an attraction for readers.²² This cartoon depicted a world in which the rightful heir, the young man, has been usurped by the older generation, whose dominance is at once comic and tragic. There was ironic comedy in the post of *junior* clerk going to an elderly man and the implication of sexual comedy in the young woman's engagement to him. Then there was the tragedy of the young man becoming obsolete, especially for readers in a context where the idea of the sacrifice and loss of a generation of young men during the war was a large part of the national consciousness.²³

Popular reporting on endocrinology in the 1920s, then, focussed on the idea of glands and rejuvenation, and evoked sentiments of distaste, salaciousness and comedy. These associations would be encountered beyond the pages of newspapers and magazines as they extended into middlebrow literature.

Sengoopta has already identified these literary works that deal with glands and hormones. My contribution is to consider them as part of the broader dissemination of ideas of hormones and sex changeability in British popular culture and how they fit into the culture of newspaper stories and medical case studies.

The popular genre of detective fiction made use of monkey glands as a plot device. In Arthur Conan Doyle's 1923 Sherlock Holmes story, 'The Adventures of the

²² Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press* (London: PEP, 1938), pp. 120, 129. Cartoons were one of the defining characteristics of the paper, which allotted them more space than did any of the other national dailies.

²³ On the place of male loss and the Great War in the British popular imagination, see: Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 1965); Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2007); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Creeping Man', an eminent professor began to act strangely following his engagement to a woman many years his junior.²⁴ The professor's curious behaviour was explained by the discovery that a scientist, Lowenstein, had been supplying the professor with a monkey serum:

Lowenstein! The name brought back to me the memory of some snippet from a newspaper which spoke of an obscure scientist who was striving in some unknown way for the secret of rejuvenescence and the elixir of life. Lowenstein of Prague! Lowenstein with the wondrous strength-giving serum, tabooed by the profession because he refused to reveal its source.²⁵

Lowenstein, who might be read as a fictional version of Steinach, Voronoff, or one of their followers, was rendered all the more sinister for not revealing the source of his serum – something of which Voronoff could not be accused as he actively sought publicity for his various monkey farms.²⁶ However, a connection was made in the text between monkey glands, deception and unsavoury physical transformation. This was communicated in fiction, and its entrenchment in popular culture was reinforced by the reference to the newspaper snippet conveying the outline of the scientific facts. Notions of monkey glands as a sinister force of sexualisation and rejuvenation were put forward in literature and, it was suggested, stemmed from press coverage. The impact of the newspaper clipping in this story is an example of the role I ascribe to newspaper accounts of sex hormones and sex change in taking on added significance as they circulated.

²⁴ I am indebted to Sengoopta *The Most Secret Quintessence of Sex*, pp. 111-12 and Hamilton *The Monkey Gland Affair*, p. 67 for reminding me of Conan Doyle's treatment of monkey gland rejuvenation in this Sherlock Holmes story.

²⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Leicester: Blitz Editions, 1992 [1923]), p. 1082.

²⁶ For discussion as to the identity of Lowenstein, see Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life*, p. 273 n. 274 and Hamilton, *The Monkey Gland Affair*, p. 67. Both point to readings of Lowenstein as Steinach.

When endocrinology was not being discussed in terms of rejuvenation, it most frequently appeared in interwar popular culture as a deciding factor in the understanding of personality. The titles of endocrinology books aimed at the general reader reflected this emphasis, for example: Louis Berman, *The Glands Regulating Personality* (1922); Ivo Geikie Cobb, *The Glands of Destiny: A Study of the Personality* (1927, 1936, 1947); and L. R. Broster, *Endocrine Man* (1944). This take on the application of endocrinology followed interwar science writing by blurring distinctions between the biological and social sciences.²⁷ As the press focus on monkey glands waned from the late 1920s onwards, glands were more likely to appear as determinants of behavioural and/or sexual characteristics. Glands were hailed as the basis of personality, so it followed that experimenting with glands held the potential to change seemingly innate physical and mental traits.

In another popular detective narrative, the 1928 Dorothy L. Sayers novel, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, the science enthusiast, Mrs Rushworth, proposed a doctor's gland therapy as a miracle cure to physical and societal ills:

what [young criminals] really needed was a little bit of rabbit-gland or something to make them as good as gold. Quite terrible, isn't it? And all those poor freaks in side-shows, too – dwarfs and giants, you know – all pineal or pituitary, and they come right again.²⁸

This commentary played on the effect of glands on personality, but it also referred to the physical effects of glands, (although not specifically to intersexed people), who also found themselves in freak shows. In Sayers' account, the gland doctor ultimately proved to be something of a bounder, and gland research was portrayed

²⁷ Bowler, *Science for All*, p. 49.

²⁸ Dorothy Sayers, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (London: New English Library, 1968 [1928]), pp. 167-68.

as murky and opportunistic. The popular demand for stories about glands – ‘Glands are news, you know’ – was one of the very things that was marked out as undesirable in the novel, because it was sensationalist.²⁹ Gland treatments were portrayed as akin to quackery, involving false promises and misplaced promises. Sayers suggested that there was a generational divide in attitudes to rejuvenation and extending the lifespan, with a dissonance between younger characters who were marked by shell shock from the Great War and an older generation who could be nostalgic for a pre-war age and sought to prolong their lives through rejuvenation.³⁰ Glands could hold promise of a cure for ‘all those poor freaks’, but their application to benefit those who were already outside the bounds of society was shown to be inappropriate and even distasteful.

The theme of glands and the personality was central to Cobb’s *The Glands of Destiny: A Study of the Personality*, which was sufficiently popular to go through a number of editions after its 1927 debut. The second edition (1936) contained a chapter detailing how glands had shaped famous figures, from Henry VIII to Mussolini.³¹ *London Life* magazine took up Cobb’s work in a series of articles that appeared in May-June 1937. In a page-long letter praising and elaborating on Cobb’s hypothesis, entitled ‘Glands and Your Destiny’, ‘Dr. X’ concluded of sex glands: ‘Mothers who notice strange changes in their adolescent children should consult a medical man at once. The destiny of your child lies in his glands; and no

²⁹ Ibid, p. 172.

³⁰ This is touched on in Ariela Freedman, ‘Dorothy Sayers and the Case of the Shell-Shocked Detective’, *Partial Answers*, 8, no. 2 (2010), pp. 376-77.

³¹ Ivo Geikie Cobb, *The Glands of Destiny*, Second Edition (London: William Heinemann (Medical Books), 1936), p. vii.

parent can afford to forget it.³² Attending to glands was portrayed as imperative and yet also beyond the control of the lay person, needing to be dealt with by the professional medic. Glands in interwar popular culture were thus a source of entertainment, mystery and a degree of salaciousness and, crucially, they endorsed the power of the expert.

Having canvassed the treatment of glands in popular culture, I now turn to examine the related construction of hormones. Tracing coverage of hormones in one daily paper, the *Daily Mirror*, across the course of the decade allows a study of the ways in which the paper employed notions of hormones for its readers.³³ How was this new hormonal world being conveyed to the general public? There was scarcely a mention of hormones in the *Daily Mirror* throughout the 1920s, but the 1930s saw the budding interest translate into a slew of articles and adverts. Hormones became part of an increasingly familiar public vocabulary. An appreciation of quite what function hormones played, or the implications thereof, was skirted around, but the employment of the term 'hormone' seems to have lent scientific repute by association and a sense of the cutting edge to journalistic claims.

The author of a 1929 article on a potential cancer cure felt the need to explain to readers what was meant by hormones: 'Growth is promoted by hormones (substances given off into the bloodstream by glands)'.³⁴ But adverts for

³² 'Glands and your Destiny', *London Life*, 19 June 1937, p. 26.

³³ The *Daily Mirror* makes for a good case study as it was such a widely circulated popular daily newspaper and its being digitised allows for easy and effective analysis of instances of set words over a large period. The word 'hormones' appeared twenty-one times between January 1930 and December 1939.

³⁴ 'Cancer Cure: New Theory', *Daily Mirror*, 4 November 1929, p. 18.

beauty products that ran in the 1930s, debuting in 1931, readily utilised the language of hormones to promote their products to the buying public:

Leichner, famous throughout the world for the high standard of their Beauty Aids, have now introduced their entirely new and remarkable Leichner Beauty Hormones. This preparation has the special function of stimulating the formation of new and perfect cellular tissue, which means nothing less than complete rejuvenation of the skin and outlines of the body.³⁵

The advert drew on older notions of glands with its mention of 'rejuvenation', but the rationale of a 'Beauty Hormone' involved the allusion to scientific developments and modernity. These 'hormones' were hailed as 'entirely new and remarkable' and their legitimacy was conferred by their scientific status, as the advert put it: 'Numerous scientists confirm the value of Leichner Beauty Hormones.'³⁶ Hormones had entered popular parlance as scientific facts with the allure of being futuristic. Articles envisaged the future as hormonal, and therefore holding the promise of solutions to life's problems:

Vitamins and hormones will be made in the laboratory.
The chemist will be able to prolong the span of human life.
Childbirth will lose its horrors for the women of to-morrow
The era of pain and suffering will be over,
Even the secrets of life and death may be unveiled.³⁷

This article attributed a series of increasingly impressive claims to hormones, which would act not just at an individual level, but would improve society as a whole. The article envisaged hormones and vitamins too (although the effects listed, such as improvements in childbirth, applied more to hormones than they did to vitamins), having an effect on the social body, eradicating suffering and paving the way for a

³⁵ 'An Amazing Advance in Beauty Culture', *Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1931, p. 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ 'You Will Eat Sawdust, Wear Birchbark – And Like It!', *Daily Mirror*, 16 April 1936, p. 14.

utopian future. Hormones, and their synthesis, were an image of scientific progression, helping to alleviate societal ills.

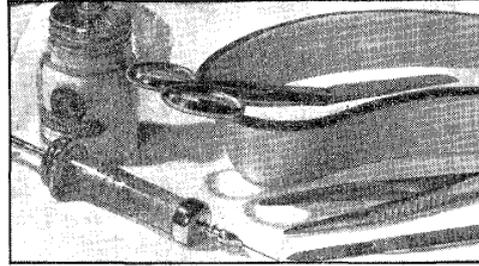
Adverts by design drew on readily comprehensible concepts and appealed to contemporary concerns. An advert from 1934 for Okasa Brand Tablets extolled the virtues of hormones, playing on their sex-differentiated nature and marketing separate tablets for the 'womenfolk' and the 'menfolk':

The Dawn of a New Vitality
To the WOMENFOLK
Why do some women age more quickly than others? [...]
Lack of "Hormones" ... that is the cause! Hormones... which Science has discovered to be the Basis of Health and the secret of Youth and everything connected therewith! A women's most Beautiful age is when her blood is plentifully supplied with these very "Hormones"! [...]
To the MENFOLK
Are you losing (or have lost) your "manliness"? [...]
Do you lack that Vital "Surge of Life" which is the chief characteristic of the MAN ?
The cause is a lack of Vital "Hormones" in your blood. Some men have an abundant supply of "Hormones," and they are the Youthful, Strong, Healthy, Virile "Young at any age" men!³⁸

The advert clearly mobilised gendered stereotypes and located these in sex-specific hormones. Such discourse promoted the idea that although there were ideal gender qualities, these were not static within the body, and could be acquired from outside sources, but that, conversely, the sexes were innately different. The appeals to both sexes drew on the youthful ideal, but in the women's case it was so as to remain beautiful and in the men's it was to, rather euphemistically, regain 'that Vital Surge of Life.' The references to virility, youth and hormones in the blood evoked the claims made for rejuvenation.

³⁸ 'The Dawn of a New Vitality', *Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1934, p. 7.

A KNIFE AND A SYRINGE



By Dr.
Moderni

★
The "Daily Mirror" has commissioned a remarkable series of articles which will bring new hope to thousands of unhappy people. They have been written by Dr. Fritz Moderni, great Central European medical authority — who will bring to you the fruits of the accumulated knowledge which is making medicine a new art! In this series Dr. Moderni will discuss GLANDS — a new wonder treatment; THE SKIN—how you

REMEMBER Lucy?
Of course you do. Poor Lucy! Sometimes you used to call her Luke, just for fun. Because Lucy looked so masculine. Broad, flat chest, deep voice, suspicion of a moustache. "Only a blind man would marry Lucy," you used to say; "and then it would have to be a foggy day."
Now turn from Lucy to one of those glamour girls you admire and envy a little. Charming girls who always seem to have a crowd of admirers in attendance. Seems a whole world of difference between Lucy and the glamour girl, doesn't there?

CAN BUILD A NEW WOMAN!

★
eat and they change into perfectly normal individuals.
★ ★ ★
Another of the hormones produced by the pituitary is the one I mentioned earlier: the gonadotropic hormone. This controls the whole of your sex life. It acts indirectly by stimulating your sex glands to produce their own hormones, which do the actual work. It is also easier to obtain than the actual sex hormones.

Figure 3.3: 'A Knife and a Syringe Can Build a New Woman!', *Daily Mirror*, 15 March 1938, p. 12.

In the latter half of the 1930s, medically-themed articles dealt specifically with the effects of sex hormones. In March and April 1938, shortly before *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* appeared, the *Daily Mirror* published a series of articles written by the improbably, but appropriately, named 'Dr. Moderni' – the name driving home the sense of modernity at the heart of these developments. The initial article covered the new discoveries in hormones, and their effects on the body. The 'New Woman' referred to in the title, courtesy of a few injections of female hormone, and possibly, but less prominently, a little surgery, could be transformed into an ideal female type. As the text put it:

REMEMBER Lucy?
Of course you do. Poor Lucy!
Sometimes you used to call her Luke, just for fun.
Because Lucy looked so masculine. Broad, flat chest, deep voice, suspicion of a moustache.
"Only a blind man would marry Lucy," you used to say "and then it would have to be a foggy day."
Now turn from Lucy to one of those glamour girls you admire and envy a little. Charming girls who always seem to have a crowd of admirers in attendance.
Seems a whole world of difference between Lucy and the glamour girl, doesn't there?

And once upon a time that difference could never be bridged.
BUT TO-DAY . . .
We can give Lucy an attractive feminine figure.
We can get rid of that moustache.
We can get rid of her hoarse voice.
We can glamorise Lucy-by gland injections.³⁹

In this coverage the woman, Lucy, was saved from the undesirable outcome of being unattractive to achieve the desirable outcome of looking like a glamour girl. Being a woman was positioned on a spectrum in this popular text from being masculine to being a glamour girl. According to the advert, a woman could have the features normally associated with men: a flat chest, a deep voice and facial hair. There was no suggestion that Lucy was not a woman to start with, but in 'building a new women', surgery and hormones were able to turn the masculine into the feminine. The article's accompanying image of surgical instruments highlighted the medical intervention involved in such procedures. The article employed some of the utopian sentiments of earlier hormone coverage to suggest that science could now create the ideal type of woman. Implicit in this argument, was the idea that secondary sexual characteristics were not innate and fixed, but could be altered or induced.

A 1933 opinion piece in the *Daily Mirror* posited hormones as the least comprehensible aspect of health for the layman: 'By reason of our own pains and aches, together with a little common sense and interchange of observation, we know a good deal about it [health], although we may not bother about such things as hormones, for example.'⁴⁰ By 1939, an article in the same paper, entitled

³⁹ 'A Knife and a Syringe Can Build a New Woman!', *Daily Mirror*, 15 March 1938, p. 12.

⁴⁰ 'Medical Progress', *Daily Mirror*, 21 November 1933, p. 13.

'Medical Mysteries', did not simply assume that its audience was familiar with the concept of hormones, but aimed to discuss them in some depth:

The bearded lady usually has a tumour in one of her suprarenal glands.
Stimulation of a part of this gland causes a woman to begin to assume the appearance of a man.
Her sex, in fact, is partly changed.
She grows a beard, and often gets a deep voice.
She is flat-chested, and muscular.
Recently, operations to remove the tumour have produced almost miraculous changes in people like this.
Within a few weeks, the beard has gone, and the whole body assumed once more a soft feminine outline.⁴¹

Such articles as this offered explanations for the types of sex change that readers encountered in the paper. Hormones had become sufficiently familiar as a concept that the popular press expected readers to understand and engage with references to them. In this article, the occurrence of male features in women was treated as a familiar, comprehensible and rectifiable problem, that happened to a particular type of person – 'the bearded lady', 'people like this' – and therefore was not a complete rarity. Sex was portrayed as being changeable – 'her sex, in fact, is partly changed' – but by describing such changes in terms of hormones and tumours, the article could also offer surgery as a dependable remedy to such changes. If readers could grasp the concept that sex change was linked to hormones, that hormones were linked to tumours, and that tumours could be removed, then sex change could be understood not as abstract, but as the result of chemical processes.

References were made in the press to hormones as representative of modern notions of the body. Hormones held out the possibility for moving beyond

⁴¹ Ivor Beaumont, 'Medical Mysteries', *Daily Mirror*, 21 September 1939, p. 6.

fatalism by taking charge of individual bodies to restore or enhance them to a desired state of being, as in the feature detailing the transformation of Lucy into a glamour girl. Articles pointed to the potential for synthesis and consequently for easier alteration of a person's own hormonal constitution. The coverage of glands and hormones in the *Daily Mirror* demonstrated how developments in endocrinology were finding their way into popular culture. Hormones went from being the domain of learned scientists to being a concept that was well known enough to be used to sell beauty products or to explain bodily changes to a lay audience. Hormones became part of the popular lexicon and were associated with behavioural and corporal changes.

Having elaborated on the background to the popular articles about sex change by examining how popular understandings of glands and hormones found a place in interwar popular culture, I now turn to how the press stories were received and refashioned by the magazines *Urania* and *London Life*. They took up the journalistic stories and repositioned them to create new meanings for their readerships. The second part of this chapter explores how these two publications negotiated accounts of sex change and extended the reach and significance of the press stories.

Retelling Stories of Sex Change

Urania and *London Life* demonstrate the complex afterlife of press stories of sex change. Both magazines seemed to find interest and significance in the idea of sex changeability. They reproduced newspaper accounts as part of their wider offerings

on related topics. In the case of *Urania*, the editors envisaged a society free of sex distinctions and consequently pitched the sex change stories as steps towards fulfilling this goal. In the case of *London Life*, the sex change stories were presented as part of its standard fare of sex-themed stories. Considering each magazine in turn, I examine some of the wealth of material each carried in relation to sex change and what their rationale was for retelling the press stories. Both magazines showed themselves to be keen consumers of the press stories of sex change and then proceeded to regurgitate those accounts in line with their own outlooks. I show how the interest *Urania* and *London Life* expressed in sex change was part of a popular engagement and familiarity with sex change that extended beyond the popular press.

Urania and *London Life* have each been discussed by other historians but not in conjunction, an angle that promises to yield new insights about the myriad afterlives of press stories and their recirculation. Moreover, by reading one magazine against the other I am interested in examining what we learn when we look exclusively at the coverage of ideas about sex changeability, an treat this as a topic in its own right. Honing in on the issue of the sexed body lends greater clarity to questions about how changes of sex were being discussed as scientific possibilities rather than just abstract ones. The two magazines were quite particular in the amount of coverage they gave over to instances and ideas of sex changeability.⁴² Other feminist journals, *Modern Woman* and *Time and Tide*, did

⁴² On *Urania* see Nicky Hallett, *Lesbian Lives: Identity and Auto/Biography in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pluto Press, 1999); Emily Hamer, *Britannia's Glory: A History of Twentieth-Century Lesbians* (London: Cassell, 1996); Alison Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', *Media History*, 7, no. 1 (2001), 57-70; Alison Oram, "'Sex is an Accident': Feminism,

not share *Urania's* preoccupation with the topic of sex change and did not print reports on Evan Burt, Mark Weston or Zdenek Koubek, to whom *Urania* devoted a good deal of attention.⁴³ Popular titles of the time such as the *Illustrated London News*, *Tatler*, *Women's Own* and *Tit-Bits* did not do as *London Life* did and tell readers about those whose sex had been changed or about the debates concerning sex changeability.⁴⁴ *Urania* and *London Life*, I argue, were niche publications, whose concerns were not broadly reflected in the rest of the British publishing landscape, but which exemplify the interest and investment placed in accounts of sex changeability from diverse viewpoints.⁴⁵

Science and the Radical Sexual Theory of Urania, 1915-40', in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds.), *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram, 'Fantasy and Identity: The Double Life of a Victorian Sexual Radical' in Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889-1939* (London: University of North Carolina Press); Sonja Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Sonja Tiernan, "'It Should Not Be So Easy to Construct a Man: A History of Female to Male Transsexuality in the Journal *Urania*' in Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds.), *Sapphists and Sexologists: Histories of Sexualities Volume 2* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); On *London Life* see Sigel, *Making Modern Love*; Peter Farrer (ed.), *Cross Dressing between the Wars: Selections from London Life. Part II, 1934-1941* (Garston: Karn, 2006) and H. G. Cocks, *Classified: The Secret History of the Personal Column* (London: Arrow Books, 2009).

⁴³ I make no claim that my exploration of *Urania* and *London Life* encompasses every piece relating to sex changeability or hormones that they published. I am more interested in examining the discursive construction of sex changeability than in undertaking an exhaustive survey of the print media. Moreover, I make no claim that these findings are representative. Instead, my purpose in returning to terrain already covered in recent historiographical work is to build on and complicate earlier interventions. That said, I have examined *Modern Woman* and *Time and Tide* as they, like *Urania*, were explicitly feminist periodicals. The feminist focus of neither *Modern Woman* nor *Time and Tide* did not encompass a focus on sex changeability. At the points during the 1930s when there was the most coverage in the popular press and in *Urania* – news of Evan Burt in March 1930, of Maurice, the Sussex youth in January 1932 and of Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek in May to August 1936 – there was no mention of those cases nor of sex changeability more generally.

⁴⁴ I chose to look at *Illustrated London News*, *Tatler*, *Women's Own* and *Tit-Bits* as they were each popular magazines with different styles and readerships. This provided me with a comparison to *London Life* to gauge whether other titles – such as *Illustrated London News*, with its reputation for sensation, or *Tit-Bits*, which reprinted stories of interest – were choosing to publish stories of sex changes. I looked for items on sex changeability at the times when the topic was receiving a good deal of discussion in the popular press, namely in March 1930, January 1932, and May to August 1936.

⁴⁵ My survey of these magazines makes no claim to be exhaustive – there may well be other relevant pieces that I have not mentioned. My bibliography lists the articles from *Urania* and *London Life* that I have consulted; a future line of enquiry might be to document all the discussions pertaining to sex

Urania

In the existing scholarship *Urania* has been used to validate identity categories, both as an example of lesbian organising and as an important primary source for histories of female-to-male gender reassignment.⁴⁶ Oram has analysed *Urania* from a variety of angles, highlighting its theosophical roots, its rejection of sexology and its investment in the idea that gender was socially constructed and that sex was not fixed within the body.⁴⁷ My interest in the journal is for its ethos of rejecting sexual differentiation and for its appropriation and reframing of the popular press accounts of changes of sex. I do not consider *Urania's* interests to be lesbian or transsexual in nature; rather this journal seemed more interested in troubling the system of categorisation. It filtered accounts of sex change through a lens of gender and sexual unfixity. *Urania* then is significant because it shows that newspaper stories of changes of sex were being noticed and re-appropriated.

The interest paid by *Urania* to newspaper accounts of sex change demonstrated the ways in which those stories were taken up as part of wider pre-existing understandings of the mutability of sex and gender. The make-up of the journal was significant to this endeavour. The editors, who already sought to disprove dominant theories of sexual fixity, took on and reworked press stories so that these 'popular' texts were repositioned and recontextualised to reinforce and

changeability in these titles, but that is beyond the scope of my project as I am not endeavouring to study either magazine in its entirety.

⁴⁶ On *Urania* as a lesbian source see: Hallett, *Lesbian Lives*; Hamer, *Britannia's Glory*; Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex between Women since 1500* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007). On *Urania* as a site for accounts of transmen see: Tiernan, "It Should Not Be So Easy to Construct a Man".

⁴⁷ Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', p. 58; Oram, "Sex is an Accident", pp. 214, 221.

reaffirm marginal identities and ideas. *Urania* was a privately published magazine that ran from 1915 to 1940. It was estimated to have had a readership of between 200 and 250 and was sent free of charge to anyone who requested it.⁴⁸ Although *Urania* had a limited reach and was highly esoteric in outlook, it enjoyed a degree of longevity afforded few other contemporary feminist periodicals.⁴⁹ There were five key editors, the feminists and social activists Irene Clyde, Eva Gore-Booth, Esther Roper, Dorothy Cornish and Jessey Wade. Of the named editorial team, Irene Clyde appears to have had the greatest involvement with, and to have been the guiding force behind, *Urania*. These were people who were politically and personally invested in notions of sexual ambiguity, especially in the case of Clyde, as will be examined below.

Urania's bricolage style, digesting and repositioning the popular press, was, as Oram has attested, a means of projecting a broader sense of fellowship to those interested in questions of sex changeability.⁵⁰ The magazine was testimony to the possibilities for reading the popular press against the grain. It appropriated newspaper articles about changes of sex to highlight interpretations that corroborated its own ideas. The magazine's content was mostly passages taken from books and from the international press. The selection process for newspaper articles appears to have been whatever caught the editors' attention – selections came from a range of countries, with Britain, Japan and India being especially well

⁴⁸ Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', pp. 57, 62.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 67. *Urania's* reach beyond its limited readership was suggested by Gifford Lewis in her biography of Gore-Booth and Roper, Gifford Lewis, *Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper* (London: Pandora Press, 1988), p. 5, in which she asserted that the magazine had a certain notoriety that meant its ethos was the subject of wider discussion.

⁵⁰ Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', p. 60.

represented – as well as from local and national papers. The preponderance of articles from Japanese and Cumberland sources points the central role played by one of the editors, Irene Clyde, who came from Cumberland and lived in Tokyo. Added to this scrapbook of articles was editorial commentary, which was limited and formed only a small portion of the magazine's content. The editorial mediation rested largely in the choice of articles for inclusion. *Urania* acted as a specialist news digest, the editors sifting through the press available to them to identify those stories that confirmed their philosophical ethos. There were also excerpts from works such as the letters of Carlyle to Emerson and Mill, Greek lyric poetry from Alcman to Simonides and the recollections of the music hall male impersonator Vesta Tilley, which exemplified *Urania's* opposition to gendered conventions. The range of eclectic erudite references and the ability to draw on them to illustrate and reinforce other stories, added legitimacy to the more ephemeral newsprint and refashioned the press stories as part of a body of knowledge that incorporated more prestigious cultural sources.

Contributors to *Urania* argued that gender was entirely socially constructed.⁵¹ This position was highlighted by the magazine's oft-repeated motto: 'Sex is an Accident', along with its statement of intent:

URANIA denotes the company of those who are firmly determined to ignore the dual organization of humanity in all its manifestations. They are convinced that this duality has resulted in the formation of two warped and imperfect types. [...] There are no "men" or "women" in Urania.⁵²

⁵¹ Oram, "'Sex is an Accident'", p. 221.

⁵² This statement was printed towards the beginning of most issues.

The dismissal of duality opened the possibility for identities that were neither male nor female (those categories having become obsolete) and it suggested the irrelevance of ideas of biological determinism. *Urania* adopted and adapted the latest scientific, not sexological, research to illustrate a move towards its own vision of a world in which sex distinctions were meaningless.⁵³ Materialism, or biological determinism, a major trend in contemporary biology, was reviled as it precluded *Urania's* treasured precept that the physical body did not determine gendered behaviour.⁵⁴

Throughout the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, accounts of cross-gender behaviour, successful impersonation and scientific theories of sexual variation were staples of *Urania's* coverage. These sometimes disparate stories were tied together under the mantra of sex being an accident and they were awarded significance as a connected body of evidence. An article from 1925 entitled 'Change of Sex' was a report that Japanese school girls envied the position of schoolboys.⁵⁵ A 1926 front-page story, 'No Sex in Nature: Right Again' reported the findings of the German biologist Professor Max Hartmann that 'sex is relative not absolute'.⁵⁶ A 1931 article, 'And Many More?', followed up previous pieces concerning instances of 'highly successful assumption of the dress and habits of the contrary sex' by detailing a number of new cases, including that of Evan Burttt, the Wiltshire man whose change of sex was covered in the press in March 1930.⁵⁷ This

⁵³ Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania* 1916-1940', p. 60.

⁵⁴ Bowler, *Science for All*, p. 43; Oram, "Sex Is an Accident", p. 223.

⁵⁵ 'Change of Sex', *Urania*, September-December 1925, p. 7.

⁵⁶ 'No Sex in Nature: Right Again', *Urania*, January-April 1926, p. 1.

⁵⁷ 'And Many More?', *Urania*, May-August 1931, pp. 5-6.

piece was a prime example of *Urania's* ability to combine texts and imbue them with a new significance. Here articles from Britain and Japan, relating events in Argentina, Britain, Germany and France, were combined to create a picture of the international, and seemingly universal, nature of sex-crossing. The 1931 article dismissed 'change of sex' as an explanatory framework: 'The newspapers talk about a "change of sex," but that (*pace* the medical man) would have been so extraordinary that in all probability that was only the recognition of a mistake.'⁵⁸ The disbelief shown as to the possibility of a person's physical sex changing, or at least the terminology that implies as much, had waned in the magazine by 1935. In a feature called 'From "The Cherag"' various instances of 'sex-changing' were detailed.⁵⁹ In contrast to the 1931 stance that 'changing sex' was a misleading and unscientific turn of phrase, this article described three people whose sex had been reassigned, including Lili Elbe, as a 'change of sex' and 'case of sex-changing'.⁶⁰ This receptiveness to the notion of a change of sex was forefront in the coverage from 1936 of Zdenek Koubek. The extensive coverage of Koubek was swiftly followed by coverage of Mark Weston and other reports of sex change, which were heralded as a turning point for *Urania* in its quest to establish the arbitrary nature of sex.

News of Czech athlete Zdenek Koubek's change of sex merited front-page coverage in the January-April 1936 issue under the title 'Authentic Change of Sex'. This was followed up on the front page of the May-August 1936 issue with news of Weston's sex change under the jubilant headline 'Another Extraordinary Triumph'.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵⁹ 'From "The Cherag"', *Urania*, January-April 1935, pp. 3-4. *The Cherag* appears to have been a theosophist magazine.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

The article consisted of a short explanatory introduction and then a reproduction of an article about Weston from the local *Cumberland News*. Following the piece was the single line: 'Any further comment of ours is superfluous.'⁶¹ The implication here was that for interested parties such as *Urania's* editors and readers, press reports of sex change were affirmations of their own interests and identities; their meaning was a self-evident reiteration of shared beliefs. The accumulation of these disparate stories contributed to this process of reiteration and created within the pages of *Urania* a worldview in which sex change might be 'extraordinary', but was also evidence of an androgynous ideal:

And now that it is proved that sex is changeable, there can be little further need to elaborate the contention. So long as bodily sex was supposed to be inveterate and inherent in the individual there was some shred of excuse for fancying that it was necessary fetter to the mind. Now, it is obvious to the meanest capacity that a changeable thing like this can constitute no such imperious fetter.⁶²

The sense that this news of sex change carried personal validation is especially pertinent in relation to editor Irene Clyde, who was also known by her given name, Thomas Baty. Baty worked for the Japanese Foreign Office in Tokyo (a point that most likely explains the wealth of material in *Urania* concerning Japan), and published a number of feminist works as Irene Clyde.⁶³ Not much is known of Clyde/ Baty, but her writing provides insights into her understanding of sex and how her ideas influenced the editorial process of *Urania*.⁶⁴ In her 1934 book, *Eve's*

⁶¹ 'Another Extraordinary Triumph', *Urania*, May-August 1936, p. 2.

⁶² 'Lightning!', *Urania*, January-April 1936, p. 2.

⁶³ Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', p. 61.

⁶⁴ The most comprehensive study of Clyde is Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram, 'Fantasy and Identity: The Double Life of a Victorian Sexual Radical' in Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889-1939* (London: University of North Carolina Press).

Sour Apples, Clyde argued against the insistence on two sexes and also against the inculcation of children into one strict regime or the other based on supposed biological sex. She looked to a future devoid of dualistic ideas of sexuality, a future where there was no sex distinction and men had been eliminated.⁶⁵ Clyde's vision was at once for the repudiation of sex difference and, perhaps ironically, a reiteration of a sexually differentiated type, since she called for the male type to be eliminated. Clyde looked to scientific advances to deliver these spiritually-inflected notions of sexual non-fixity. Current scientific topics were woven into the hope of a pre-figurative future without sex differences:

Parthogenesis [sic] or ectogenesis may become possible. The diversity in character between the sexes may disappear. Sex itself may become alterable at will.⁶⁶

It may be, again, that processes may very shortly be discovered whereby, as in the case of chickens and oysters, individuals may be enabled to change their sex.⁶⁷

References to technical terms such as parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction) and ectogenesis (the growth of an organism outside the body), and a familiarity with research into sex variation in animals, suggested a keen interest in the latest scientific research on the nature of sex. The lack of clarification for readers regarding these ideas implies that the *Urania* editors imagined their readers to be similarly immersed in these scientific developments. Such appeals to science provided Clyde with a validation of her views, just as *Urania* drew on the authorising power of science when it suited. *Urania* praised research that

⁶⁵ Irene Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples: On the Relations between the Sexes* (London: Eric Partridge, 1934), p. 108.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

denounced sex differentiation, and railed against what it termed 'The Slimy Enemy' – biological determinism.⁶⁸

In addition to harnessing science for the reiteration of beliefs about the ambiguity of sex, Clyde argued that sexual non-fixity was self-evident, drawing on examples that suggested her own personal experience. In *Eve's Sour Apples*, Clyde gave a detailed description of how a man might come to be seen as more feminine. This implied a familiarity with and investment in the methods mentioned and the process of trial and error needed to arrive at the results:

There is no reason why man's hair should not be long, or women's short. The razor leaves a bluey patch; but tweezers do not – and barium sulphide is cheap. As for the hard features of men, which was a complaint alleged against the impersonation of Betty the Maid by Prince Charles Edward – that is a matter of training and expression. The same may be said of postures of walking and personal carriage. The voice also is largely modified by the idea of the appropriateness of a gruff bass to a man, and of the piping treble to a woman. The many cases of undetected and unsuspected impersonation which have actually occurred, from d'Eon to the latest newspaper gossip, could never have existed if the use of the medium tones of voice had not been easy and natural.⁶⁹

Difficulties were anticipated and countered. Here Clyde offered an analysis of the areas in which she saw sex to be differentiated – hair, facial features, gait and voice – and demonstrated that neutrality could be achieved in each of these areas. Such information, particularly regarding hair removal, could be read as advice gleaned from personal experience – 'the razor leaves a bluey patch; but tweezers do not' – whilst being able to speak in a sexually-ambiguous vocal pitch was described as natural. Designated male and living alternately as a man and as a woman (not

⁶⁸ 'The Slimy Enemy', *Urania*, January-April 1930, p. 2; Oram, "'Sex Is an Accident'", p. 223.

⁶⁹ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*, pp. 80-81.

something alluded to directly in her writing), Clyde had particular experience of and investment in the ways in which prescriptive gender roles could be evaded.

These aspects of self-presentation described by Clyde as sexed but open to ambiguity were also those that were highlighted as significant in newspaper accounts of sex change. An article in the local Wiltshire press describing Evan Burt's change of sex, for example, recounted:

But on Friday last she bought an outfit of masculine clothing, and to-day she may be seen wearing a smart lounge suit, trilby hat, and carrying a walking stick as though to the manner born. Her bobbed hair has been cropped short, and she speaks in the deep voice of a man. The metamorphosis is complete!⁷⁰

In this description it is the masculine attire, the deep voice, short hair and gait – as signalled by the walking stick – that confirmed Burt in his maleness. In its coverage of Mark Weston, the *Daily Express* placed in bold the following: 'His chin showed he had been shaving – indeed, for the past seven years, although he was then "Miss" Weston, he has found this necessary. He has a manly figure, a deep voice.'⁷¹ The *Daily Express's* emphasis on hair, gait and voice was repeated time and again. Such traits were replicated as physical markers of sex. Clyde, and by extension *Urania*, given Clyde's pivotal role with the publication, also put value on these features, but as proof of her own views of sex changeability.

Urania involved an ongoing refashioning of material that was available to the editors to further their aim to shake off sex and gender conventions. The content of the magazine was shaped by the editors according to the material they could access and it was shaped by the press in terms of whether they printed

⁷⁰ 'A Wiltshire Man-Woman', *Wiltshire News*, 28 March 1930, p. 2.

⁷¹ 'Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark', *Daily Express*, 29 May 1936, p. 19.

relevant material. The accumulation of articles reiterated the central message of abolishing sex difference and elevated the significance of each individual feature by placing it as part of a greater whole, *Urania's* claim for a sexless society.

BAFFLING SEX MYSTERIES
NATURE PLAYS A STRANGE TRICK IN THE STORY OF THIS
METAMORPHOSIS

Not all the research of brilliant scientists have plumbed the depths of the abyssal well of Sex. Nature herself plays strange tricks upon us all, and seems to take a delight in proving Rules by providing notable exceptions.

It has long been established fact that in districts where the death-rate is high, the birth-rate is of even greater proportions; and Nature seems to delight in letting the unfit propagate their specie. A common example of this is revealed by the great disease consumption always have large families. This is just an illustration of how Nature fights to keep herself from extinction in this way.

All the discussions that have taken place in medical circles in recent years have helped to shed light upon this absorbing subject, and it is commonly acknowledged now that a change of sex can take place in human beings as easily as it does in the case of oysters, which are alternately male and female.

INDETERMINATE SEX OF CRUSTACEANS.

Deep-sea shellfish, like crabs lobsters, and mollusca, are of indeterminate sex. Oysters are male and female by turns, and thus propagate their specie rapidly, as one oyster will produce 3,000,000 per annum.

Bees, wasps and ants can determine the sex of their larvae and can cultivate it or not by will. If it is desired that the female larvae are cultivated, they feed the larvae on food containing sugar and honey.

Think how delighted hopeful mothers-to-be would feel if they knew that the power of determining the sex of their unborn child was theirs! It makes me think that Nature has been more kind to wasps and bees than to human beings by granting the insects these privileges!

FEMALE IMPERSONATORS AND MASQUERADERS.

All through history there have been examples of either a man masquerading as a woman (notably the notorious Chevalier D'Eon, among others), and still more cases of women donning men's clothes and living the life of a man.

An outstanding example of this was Queen Christiana of Sweden, who lived the rough life of a trooper for many years and could endure the rough trials of a soldier's life with the greatest fortitude. Impersonation and masquerade are not new things, for examples stretch back into the very earliest histories of our planet.

Although the male sex is usually called the dominant sex, it is quite common to hear the quotation of Kipling, "The female of the species is more deadly than the male." Especially is this marked in the case of spiders; for the male spider is small, and the female spider is twice as big as her mate; and she usually seizes the first chance of eating her unfortunate husband immediately after the marital act has taken place.

The sex of unborn spiders can be changed by interfering with the

eggs. So can eggs of frogs be turned from male to female by piercing the eggs with a needle.

SEX-CHANGE DRAMAS.
Three cases of the changing of sex have been reported recently from

Charing Cross Hospital. In one case a woman who had lived a feminine life to a mature age suddenly became a man, and the next case was a man becoming a woman.

Baffling as this seems upon the surface, it opens up immense avenues of research for the biologist, for it hints that human beings, both male and female, have capabilities of stumbling in their bodies. Freakish as these changes appear at first sight, there is no doubt that science is on the verge of discoveries.

Madeleine Woods went into Holloway Gaol at the age of 28 as a woman. To-day she has been declared by an eminent specialist to be a man. Madeleine Woods stated that for years she had never felt about life in general just as other women

felt. Even when she was young she had never chosen feminine companions, but had palled up with and been a boy among boys.

"She" never considered marriage as other girls did. Her chief worry was about getting a job along with her men friends. Although she was brought up as a girl, she always felt that she wanted to be a boy; and so when the prison doctor told her of the change that had taken place and advised her to wear men's clothes in future, "Miss" Woods felt rather more pleased than sorry.

So "Madeleine"—Woods changed her name to Mark Woods, and donned plus-fours, heavy brogue and men's socks; for an astonishing thing had taken place within her, and she was no longer a woman. Now "she" has gone to open a little home-made cake-shop in the heart of the West Country, where no one will know that husky Mark Woods had ever lived his amazing early life as a woman.

WITHOUT A MOTHER'S CARE.

Mark Woods now says that if his mother had not died when he was young, no doubt he would have realised earlier in life that he was not as other women, and perhaps the mortifying years that he had spent in petticoats would have ended sooner than the day when the prison doctor revealed to him the amazing metamorphosis that had taken place.



A pretty Universal player massages her legs with cold cream every day.

The Mystery of the MONA LISA.

Since the article on another page on the romance of the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, the following has appeared in the "Daily Express": Has the real Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci's priceless masterpiece, supposed for more than 100 years to be a baronial hall of England?

Lord Brownlow considers that he has the genuine Mona Lisa in his collection at Beiton Park, Gresham, which forms one of his treasured heirlooms.

He bases his faith on a private catalogue of the Brownlow collection, dated 1824. It states that Sir Joshua Reynolds, at whose sale the portrait was purchased, judged this to be the original, and the one now at Paris to be not genuine—on opinion which others, who have subsequently examined it, also entertain.

Lord Brownlow, in an interview, related the romantic story of the portrait.

"First let me say," he began, "that it is only my opinion. I am simply the owner. I am not an art expert, and it is purely my view.

"An important point is that Leonardo da Vinci stated that his portrait was unfinished.

"Well, in my Mona Lisa it can distinctly be seen that just about the hands of the sitter, the work was left unfinished. A pupil probably completed the portrait later.

"Now this is the quotation from the 1824 private catalogue of the Brownlow collection, on which I build my faith:

"The Mona Lisa—2ft. 2in. by 1ft. 8in. She was the wife of Francesco Giocondo, a Florentine gentleman.

"Sir Joshua Reynolds, who judged this to be the original, observed that the hands were probably coloured by Raphael or Giulio Romano."

Figure 3.4: 'Baffling Sex Mysteries', London Life, 30 September 1933, p. 32.

In stark contrast to the ideals of the privately circulated *Urania*, *London Life* was a mass-market glamour magazine with a focus on the titillating and bizarre. It had a genealogy that could be traced back to *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, founded in 1861.⁷² The magazine was available on newsstands and had a circulation in the tens of thousands.⁷³ Its style was reminiscent of the feuilleton, which had gained popularity in Weimar Germany. The feuilleton combined the gossip column, fashion essays, amusing articles about everyday life, and the serialised novel to produce a form that did not demand long spells of attention.⁷⁴ *London Life* mixed different journalistic forms, gossip, letters, serialised fiction, articles, cartoons, adverts etc, adding bold illustrations that often had no relation to the text they accompanied. Figures 3.1 and 3.4 provide good examples of this juxtaposition of arresting – but unrelated – images accompanying feature articles. The pictures broke up longer bodies of text and provided immediate interest regardless of whether consumers were inclined to read the article. Stories and letters were largely shot through with a sexual tone; favourite topics being high heels, cutting hair, masquerades, women wrestlers/ boxers, amputee and wasp-waisted women, corsets, tattoos, discipline and domination, rubber, mackintoshes and ear piercing. The style of *London Life* invited the reader to cast their eye over the pages and select their own site of interest.

⁷² Peter Farrer, *Cross Dressing between the Wars: Selections from London Life. Part II, 1934-1941* (Garston: Karn, 2006), p. 7.

⁷³ Sigel, *Making Modern Love*, p. 110. Sigel cites David Kunzle's estimate that *London Life's* circulation had topped 55,000 by 1914, a figure that increased throughout the interwar years, Sigel, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Mila Ganeva, *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), p. 27.

Sigel's *Making Modern Love* (2012) has provided the most extensive scholarly consideration of *London Life* to date. Sigel has identified *London Life's* letters pages as her focus of attention. They were important, and a big selling point for the magazine, but I want to argue for the significance of *London Life's* extensive coverage of sex change, which was touched upon in the letters pages, but mostly appeared through the gossip columns and articles.

There was little to situate the magazine in the city of its title. 'London' appears to have been more a shorthand for a glamorous cultural epicentre. The world portrayed in its pages spoke of desires arising from a quotidian version of modernity. *London Life* did, though, have a wide geographical reach. The magazine was distributed through conventional channels and more casually amongst social networks. It could be bought at newsstands or by subscription and the magazine found its way across Britain and the empire. Displayed at newsstands at street corners and railway stations, the magazine was seen by many and was carried across the transport network.⁷⁵ The significance is that, circulated in these fashions, copies of *London Life*, with its extensive coverage of sex change, was not ephemeral to the extent that a newspaper was. Newspapers relied on immediacy, they were almost immediately outdated. The pleasures of magazines such as *London Life* did not expire in the same way, so accounts of sex change in such a magazine might circulate much further, and for much longer, than would the newspaper accounts of the same stories. In this way, *London Life* bore similarities to *Urania*. Both had networks of distribution that spanned out across the empire, bringing collated and

⁷⁵ Sigel, *Making Modern Love*, p. 80.

reformulated accounts of sex change to the Anglophone world, as Sigel has suggested.

Although there were photos celebrating athletic, boyish women's bodies and stories of historic instances of women's masquerade, accounts of changes of sex were relayed with mixed levels of enthusiasm and credulity by the writers. Accounts of the male impersonation of characters such as James Barry, along with numerous women who had fought as men, were frequent features that celebrated their protagonists.⁷⁶ The modern-day 'man-woman', who sought to change sex, not impersonate the other sex, was portrayed as having less active agency, and being at the mercy of medical authority.

Sex change appeared most frequently in *London Life* in its features compiling gossip and stories from home and abroad. These features, called variously 'Talk of the Town' and 'London Calling', were relatively prominent, typically being on the third or fourth page of the magazine.⁷⁷ They presented up to date news of royalty with unusual human interest stories. Stories with similar themes would be grouped together, so that often when sex change articles did appear they were not isolated, but were placed alongside other similar accounts, implying connections between them. Sometimes the parallels with other cases

⁷⁶ James Barry served as military surgeon in the first half of the nineteenth century. After death, Barry was found to have female anatomy. *London Life* presented Barry's life as an exciting story of intrigue, 'The Astounding Deception of Dr. James Barry', *London Life*, 4 June 1938, pp. 12-13. For more background to James Barry, see Rachel Holmes, *Scanty Particulars: The Scandalous Life and Astonishing Secret of Queen Victoria's Most Eminent Military Doctor* (New York: Random House, 2002); Olga Racster and Jessica Grove, *Dr. James Barry: Her Secret Story* (London: Gerald Howe, 1932); or for a fictional treatment of Barry's life, see Patricia Duncker, *James Miranda Barry* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2003).

⁷⁷ 'Talk of the Town' was also the name of a feature in *New Yorker* magazine, and it may have been that *London Life*, in replicating the name, was seeking to evoke a trans-Atlantic metropolitan glamour.

were made very explicit, such as an article in May 1929 titled ‘Colonel Barker’s Recent Rivals’.⁷⁸ This feature made scant mention of Barker, but by association linked Barker to the American Peter Stratford, who had been named Beth Rowland at birth, to the New Zealander Jenny Price, who, the article stated, admitted that she was a man, to the Australian Minnie Drewett, who had fought as a man during the war, and to the British Sidney Holton, who had a wife, but had now been declared to be a woman. These different cases were grouped together, illuminating the connections between these geographically dispersed people. In 1939, ten years after first coming to public prominence, Colonel Barker was still being referenced as part of a recognisable trend of passing women/ men-women/ men who had been declared female at birth, here under the heading ‘Outrivals “Colonel” Barker’.⁷⁹ In this instance the person in question was Annie Payne, a Briton who had lived as a man and husband in Australia for some eighteen years. A story’s pedigree was enhanced by being set alongside similar accounts, a practice that would have made for a more coherent agenda for the editor. In this way *London Life’s* gossip pages transformed sex change from a novelty to a recognisable trend.

Some events, particularly foreign ones, made repeat appearances through the years when the story seemed prescient. An issue from 6 August 1927 reported:

Girl Changes into a Boy

Verona finds itself in a quandary. It does not know whether to apply the term “Signor” or “Signoretta” to Renata Graziana, who is, or was, an 18 year-old girl, writes the Rome correspondent of *The Sunday Chronicle*.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ ‘Colonel Barker’s Recent Rivals’, *London Life*, 25 May 1929, p. 27.

⁷⁹ ‘London Calling’, *London Life*, 15 July 1939, p. 3.

⁸⁰ ‘The Talk of the Town’, *London Life*, 6 August 1927, p. 4.

The article ran to four paragraphs, the others headed 'The Girlhood of Renata', 'Mysterious Change of Sex' and 'Neither Boy Nor Girl.' A 'The Talk of the Town' feature, this time in January 1929, almost a year and a half later, conveyed the story of Renata Graziana again, word for word apart from the slight variations in these first few lines:

STRANGE SEX MYSTERY

Verona finds itself in a quandary. It does not know whether to apply the term "Signor" or "Signoretta" to Renata Graziana, who is, or was, an 18 year-old girl, writes a correspondent.⁸¹

The second time the story appeared it did not contain a reference to a named newspaper, meaning it could not be verified as easily as when it was first printed in 1927. Otherwise the piece carried the same focus on the categorical confusion Graziana posed to others. The focus was not on establishing a definitive interpretation of Graziana's body, but on the uncertainty and puzzle it cast over the people of Verona in knowing how to relate to Graziana.

The repetition rendered the story generic – the second time it appeared, at least, it could not be accurate. The interest was not in the veracity of the account but in the details and the questions the story raised for the imagination: why were the people of Verona unable to make this decision? What was it about Graziana that was so ambiguous? What were the definitive markers of sex? What was being sold to the reader was not Renata Graziana's story, but the story of changing sex. The repetition detracted from the authenticity of accounts of sex change. If the reader noticed the repetition they would have inferred that at least the latter

⁸¹ 'The Talk of the Town', *London Life*, 12 January 1929, p. 2.

account could not be strictly true, and if it was not, that the former may not have been either. But to notice this discrepancy meant being sufficiently familiar with these stories of sex change, published over a year apart, that the reader may well already have been seeking out instances of sex change.⁸² Readers did not have to believe everything they saw in the pages of *London Life*, the stories and images could act as snapshots of possibility. The lack of authenticity did not mean that the idea of sex change was not being promulgated relatively frequently in the pages of *London Life*.

Some of *London Life*'s accounts of sexual ambiguity, however, were deemed to be authentic. An item in 'The Talk of the Town' from June 1929 proclaimed:

WOMAN BECOMES MAN

An extraordinary and seemingly authentic instance of an almost complete change of sex is reported from the United States. Dr. John Abel, one of America's foremost medical men, and Professor of Pharmacy at Johns Hopkins University, has revealed that a woman patient who sought treatment at the Carnegie Institute's station for experimental evolution, found herself almost completely changed into a man.⁸³

Naming a particular medic lent authenticity to the story as it was a detail that could be corroborated. The next item carried on with the gender crossing theme:

A CASE IN LONDON

The eminent English physician, Sir William Arbuthnot Lane, relates an equally extraordinary instance of a "man-woman" who came to him for advice.⁸⁴

This story in turn was followed by a lengthy description of 'the Evesham man-woman', William Sidney Holton, whose story had been covered in the popular

⁸² It may well have been that some readers sought out and identified with accounts of sex changeability, but I have no way of gauging this. I am conscious that different readers will have had different investments in such stories, but this is not my focus.

⁸³ 'The Talk of the Town', *London Life*, 22 June 1929, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

press. Collections of stories such as these drew connections between cases of ambiguous sex, which appeared under a medical blueprint that portrayed the subject as the victim of a deceptive body, and the older genre of masquerade, which played on the subject's agency in choosing to cross dress.⁸⁵ This tendency of *London Life's* to group stories, and to remind readers of precedents, helped build a tradition of sex changeability.

London Life relied on articles culled from the popular press for many of its gossip features. Popular journalistic articles about sex change became gossip features in *London Life*:

GIRL MAY BECOME A MAN!

Miss Zenka [sic] Koubkova, of Prague, woman champion of the world over 800 metres, has (says the "Sunday Express" correspondent) given me surely the strangest interview ever given by a woman. For she has discussed the prospect that in a few days she may be a man. [...]⁸⁶

The popular press was mined by the magazine's editors to find accounts of sex change to reprint or retell. They took such stories on board and managed to relate them to other trends, including scientific research:

ATHLETE'S ASTOUNDING CHANGE OF SEX.

One of the peculiarities of the oyster is that this succulent bivalve has the property of changing its sex from male to female at different seasons. This abnormality it has now been definitely proved occurs – rarely, it is true – with the higher animals, and even with man. Within the last five years there have been at least six authenticated cases in this country of women becoming men, and men becoming women. Now comes the marvellous story of the slender, 21-years-old Mlle. Zdeneka Koubkova, Czechoslovakia's champion girl athlete, who last year established the world's 800 metres

⁸⁵ Oram distinguishes between cross-dressing and sex change stories, arguing that the sex change stories relied on a medical narrative about an unstable body, whilst cross-dressing stories often framed their subjects as daring tricksters. Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 23, 111.

⁸⁶ 'The Talk of the Town', *London Life*, 4 January 1936, p. 3.

record at White City, London, [...] and has become a man through a surgical operation to change her sex that was successfully performed at Prague.⁸⁷

The same story, here Koubek's change of sex, was told and retold, being positioned in different contexts each time it appeared. The way the story was framed, with the reference to the 'succulent bivalve' was self-consciously eccentric; there was a sense of amused knowingness in the elaborate description of the oyster. The writer emphasised the connection between this story of human sex change and biological phenomena; Koubek's achievements and humanity were comically undercut by the parallel drawn between him and the demonstrably peculiar oyster. The repetition within the stories, and of the stories, drew more attention to accounts of sex change. Newspapers might only cover an instance of sex change once, but *London Life* reminded its readers of particular stories by retelling them and using them as references for subsequent pieces, making them more of an aspect of everyday discussion.

Occasionally topics associated with sex change would be dealt with in longer articles covering a whole page or more. An article from 1932, 'Scientists Seeking to Solve the Secrets of Sex', drew on scientific research, including a mention of Broster's work, to explain 'Why Some Women Become Men'.⁸⁸ Despite its frivolous nature, *London Life* gave more space to such scientific research than did other publications, because of the human interest of the story and its connection to sex.⁸⁹

A lengthy article from September 1933 entitled 'Baffling Sex Mysteries' probed

⁸⁷ 'Modern Society Gossip', *London Life*, 18 January 1936, p. 3.

⁸⁸ 'Scientists Seeking to Solve the Secrets of Sex', *London Life*, 21 May 1932, p. 23.

⁸⁹ Other magazines did devote space to scientific discussion; *Time and Tide* ran various features on scientific developments, as did the *Illustrated London News*. However, in neither title have I found anything on hormones and sex changeability.

further into scientific research on 'indeterminate sex', before moving to the subject of masquerade and coverage of 'sex-change dramas' at Charing Cross Hospital.⁹⁰

The idea of 'metamorphosis' was a recurring theme in the pages of *London Life*, as a way of explaining and understanding changes of sex. An article 'Mysteries of Sex Metamorphosis' in the 29 August 1936 edition, carried headings such as 'Twenty-five Cases in Ten Years' and 'Metamorphosis a Habit with Athletes!' This came in the wake of the sex-verification problems at the Olympic Games of that year and the news of the sex changes of Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek.

Magazine discussion centred on the frequency with which cases of sex 'metamorphosis' had been reported recently, and also their legitimacy. The article ranged from mentions of Weston's change of sex through Broster's position at Charing Cross, to convoluted descriptions of experiments on unborn spiders and to a 'still more marvellous case' of 'Man Turns Into a Girl and Has a Baby!'⁹¹

Statements like 'Surgery is coming to the aid of those who in the past have been dismissed as freaks of nature' might have offered hope to readers who felt their bodies to be at odds with their sense of themselves, but the mixture of vague and more specific information in each article made it hard for readers to ascertain quite what was and what was not possible. In a problem-page-type feature from 1940, someone who had written in wanting advice on becoming a woman, was told:

you are a man. Your body is that of a man, and your glands are masculine in their action and formation. You must give up this delusion that, in your case,

⁹⁰ 'Baffling Sex Mysteries', *London Life*, 30 September 1933, p. 32.

⁹¹ 'Mysteries of Sex Metamorphosis', *London Life*, 29 August 1936, p. 33. The case referred to here, although not named, was presumably that of Tenebaum, the ex-soldier who gave birth, as reported in: 'Nine Pound Child Born to Ex-Soldier a Year After "He" Changed "His" Sex', *Daily Mirror*, 7 August 1936, p. 3.

a mistake was made by nature. You are a man – and, as such, must get rid of your fantasies.⁹²

The investment in sex change found in the pages of *London Life* need not translate into practical information for readers with whom such material struck a chord.

Whether the reader agreed or not with the tone taken by *London Life*, the sheer volume of material it published connected to sex change could act as a reiteration that such things could be possible.

London Life, like *Urania*, sought out items of interest in the press and in the wider culture. However, the magazine was not presenting these stories as proof of a broader theory, but as entertainment. In seeking out these forms of entertainment, *London Life*, created a remarkable repository of sexual ambiguity that covered more cases than perhaps any other publication, and which recognised links between different cases to form a broad picture. The presence of sex change in the popular newspapers was amplified in *London Life* to forge a rich variety of stories, albeit without necessarily offering advice or encouragement for others to follow suit. However, in keeping with its modus operandi of titillation, *London Life* offered tantalising glimpses of the science behind sex changing, but was vague about the actuality and unwilling to explicitly corroborate such desires in its readers, as in the 1940 case of the reader who wrote in wanting advice on becoming a woman. The veracity of the sex change stories was not always certain, for example in the two reports of Graziana of Verona, but even if readers were presented with quite vague accounts of sex change, they were certainly presented with a large number and variety of accounts. In that sense *London Life*

⁹² 'A New Idea', *London Life*, 17 February 1940, p. 24 (italics in original).

demonstrated the wide reach of, and interest in, stories of sex change in interwar Britain.

Conclusion

The sex change stories that appeared in the British popular press throughout the 1930s appeared in the context of a growth in public interest in science and increased awareness of glands and hormones. Operations such as those occurring at Charing Cross Hospital under Broster received a good deal of coverage in the newspapers and had a complex afterlife as those same articles were taken up and reprinted in specialist magazines. *Urania* and *London Life* recontextualised those articles and instilled them with broader meanings as they connected them to other events and stories. The negotiation of new concepts of glands and hormones in popular culture created an awareness of endocrinology, if not an understanding of this branch of science. The extensive coverage of glands in the 1920s lent glands a reputation for being able to change the body in a dramatic fashion. As hormones took over from glands as a central term of reference in the 1930s, understandings of hormones retained some of the sensationalism associated with glands and rejuvenation. Hormones came to be promoted as an aspect of scientific modernity and were positioned at the cutting edge of new possibilities.

Consequently, sex change could be presented as a triumph, and became part of popular culture as a phenomenon, in connection with developments in hormone research. In *Urania* and *London Life*, the magazine editors and readers were able to increase the significance and meanings attributed to the press

accounts of sex change. When viewed together, the popular coverage of glands and hormones coupled with the niche magazines *Urania* and *London Life* show how sex change in 1930s Britain was not just a marginal concept appearing in the occasional news item, it was rooted in popular culture through scientific speculations and through the repackaging and redistribution of press stories.

Chapter Four: Sport Changes Sex

Introduction

Sport is a useful site for the historian of the sexed body because it presents a physical engagement with the body that employs the policing mechanisms of sex segregation and gender expectations. As Dworkin and Messner have succinctly put it: 'it is the very centrality of the body in sport practice and ideology that provides an opportunity to examine critically and illuminate the social construction of gender.'¹

Sport was intimately involved with the changing nature of women's gender presentation in the 1920s and 1930s. Women's increased participation in, and democratisation of, sports such as tennis necessitated less restrictive – and more traditionally masculine – attire, a trend which also caught on away from the tennis courts. Sport, and its ethos of competition and physical betterment, encouraged the idea of what Jensen has called 'self-madeness'.² Sport prompted both men and women to change their bodies through practice as their sport demanded, yet sportswomen's bodies were subjected more intently to the scrutiny of the media and health officials, sometimes with opprobrium. In effect, this changed sport, women and perceptions of the body itself. In addition to the lens sport turns on gender, this chapter interrogates the ways in which 1930s sport also helped to shape understandings of 'sex change'.

¹ Shari L. Dworkin and Michael A. Messner, 'Just do... what?' in Sheila Scraton and Anne Flintoff (eds.), *Gender and Sport: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 17.

² Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes Gender, and German Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 5.

The physical changes that sport wrought were widely associated with male bodily features such as musculature. In addition to adapting their bodies along, as some claimed, more masculine lines, sportswomen were having successes that seemed to lessen or even eliminate the physical differences between men and women. In this way, sportswomen were changing the differences that were ascribed to men and women. Men could no longer be thought of as innately stronger than women in the face of Gertrude Ederle's 1926 swim across the English Channel, which had been completed in less time than had any of the men who had previously attempted the feat. Similarly, with the development of motor sports, disparities between the sexes were potentially erased, as the machine also eliminated physical difference – and motorboat racers such as Joe Carstairs and pilots such as Amy Johnson attracted many column inches. Sport was a testing ground for ideas of femininity and the feminine. Women's inclusion in organised sport marked the changing nature of (acceptable) femininity. The sex segregation necessitated by women-only sporting events drew attention to the new research on sex differences and instigated rulings based on those differences.

I understand the notion of 'Sport Changing Sex' in three different ways, each of which informs this chapter. Firstly, there is the way in which sport changed from being predominantly the preserve of men to being a popular pursuit for women as well. Interwar Britain saw a great uptake in sport for women. Women's sports teams flourished, especially in the 1920s, and sports organisations, sometimes begrudgingly, started to allow women to participate. Secondly, sport, in its myriad forms, brought about changes to women's bodies at a variety of levels. Through engaging in sport, women actively reshaped their bodies, building muscle and

increasing lung capacity. Women's greater muscularity was a source of comment and contention. Muscles were, I argue, viewed as akin to a male secondary sex characteristic. Women's cultivation and display of muscles was viewed as a masculinising trend. The growth of motor sports allowed women to mechanically enhance their bodies and compete alongside men in feats of flying, motor boat racing and car racing. Sport also transformed how women looked – the fashion for sports attire meant that women were dressing in a more unisex style, with fewer gendered differences between their clothing and men's. Thirdly, 'changes of sex' were associated with sport, and sport – high-level athletics in particular – was associated with 'changes of sex'. Two of the highest profile people to have 'changed sex', Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek, had both found fame as women athletes. This was emphasised in press coverage and a connection was drawn between women athletes and changing sex. These debates were to the fore around the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where officials and reporters considered the need to test the sex of women athletes. This chapter will examine these three interconnected strands to show how integral sport was in 1930s Britain to changing notions of how bodies were sexed, to redefining the boundaries of what constituted a woman, and to understandings of people changing sex.

Sport and the Prospect of Feminism and Sex Extinction

While some found strength an appealing aspect of women's sporting bodies, others stigmatised sport for women and argued that it corrupted women's bodies, in effect robbing them of their femininity. The writings of Dr. Arabella Kenealy, for

instance, are interesting because although she was writing in 1920, the ideas she put forward continued to resonate throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, some of the concerns raised by Kenealy were echoed in the 1939 enquiry of the National Advisory Council for Physical Training and Recreation's Medical Sub-Committee on the Desirability of Athletics for Women and Girls.³

Kenealy's concerns that sport rendered women unfit mothers and was therefore a racial and national threat, continued to have currency and shape the terms of debate into the 1930s. Zweiniger-Bargielowska has shown how sport was promoted for women in the form of 'keep fit' classes, whose rationale was that they would increase health without challenging femininity. Competitive sport was frowned upon as undermining reproductive capacity. This ethos contradicted Kenealy by suggesting that exercise could make women better mothers. However, there was still an engagement with the terms of Kenealy's arguments because suitability for motherhood and the efficiency of the nation remained key factors in assessing the suitability of sport for women.⁴ Bingham, similarly, has pointed to the tendency of newspaper articles about women's fitness to debate whether sport for women could be 'compatible with a certain degree of "femininity."' ⁵ Kenealy's arguments, although written prior to the 1930s, are very important for understanding how the press conceptualised sport for women.

³ The National Archives (TNA): Public Records Office (PRO) ED 113/49 National Advisory Council for Physical Training and Recreation Medical Sub-Committee on the Desirability of Athletics for Women and Girls.

⁴ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, 20, no. 2 (2011), 299-317, p. 301; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 278.

⁵ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 74.

In *Feminism and Sex Extinction* (1920), Kenealy argued that sport for women was neutering in how it gendered the physical body and affected women's reproductive capacities. Kenealy's opposition to sports resonates with many of this chapter's central ideas, such as the disruption to established gender categories caused by women playing sports, as seen in the cultivation of competition in women, and the physical masculinisation of women's bodies through sport, especially through the development of muscles.

Kenealy was born into an upper middle-class household, studied medicine at the London School of Medicine for Women and practised as a physician from 1888 to 1894.⁶ As a doctor she pursued a relatively radical path for a woman, but her passionate beliefs, which she dedicated much of her life to expressing, were more conservative. She took a vehemently conservative stance in her opposition to 'female emancipation' but her promotion of 'race improvement' as a facet of eugenics was at odds with a simple differentiation between conservative and progressive. Early twentieth-century eugenics encompassed some progressive strands that advocated sexual freedom and strove for a healthier future, albeit with a belief that some people were inherently better than others.⁷ In arguing for the separate roles of women and men, Kenealy echoed a tenet of many feminists, but her application of these views to call for women to eschew any claims for equality,

⁶ Angelique Richardson, 'Kenealy, Arabella Madonna (1859–1938)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50057>, accessed 18 June 2013].

⁷ Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 67.

and her fervour for racial protection, showed a decidedly unprogressive position.⁸

Feminism and Sex Extinction reflected her preoccupations in its intensely anti-feminist and eugenicist tone. Kenealy accused sportswomen, and by extension women's sport as an entity, of subverting the prescribed differences between men and women and consequently damaging the continuation of the race. She believed that man and woman were entirely different, and accordingly destined for different roles. She furthered this view to argue that by engaging in physical pursuits, women were expending the energy they should be holding in reserve for future sons:

A woman who wins golf or hockey-matches may be said therefore to energise her muscles with the potential manhood of possible sons. With their potential existence indeed, since over-strenuous pursuits may sterilise women absolutely as regards the male offspring.⁹

Women's sport featured here as an explicit threat to the continuation of the race and as incompatible with healthy womanhood.

Sporting competitiveness was at odds with the value of female passivity, which was held to be an important counter to male competitiveness in the post-WW1 environment. Kenealy stressed a doctrine of not just 'separate spheres' but of entirely differentiated body types and personalities between men and women. Furthermore, she saw this distinction as crucial to her eugenic ideals. Kenealy posited the new enthusiasm for sport among women as one of the chief threats to unambiguous sex and gender:

A proportion [of school and work girls], one is thankful to say, are normal and healthful and charming, endowed with the attributes and graces, personal and mental, for which Nature is shaping in the sex. Others are,

⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 162.

⁹ Arabella Kenealy, *Feminism and Sex Extinction* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1920), p. 69.

biologically speaking, mere lamentable “spoiled copies”; amazons of the hockey, football, tennis or hunting-fields, only just distinguishable in general characteristics from the male, and lacking more or less wholly in womanly psychology and aptitude, and in all the fairer and nobler attributes of their sex.¹⁰

Kenealy saw playing sport or entering into the competitive spirit of sport as tantamount to masculinisation, which is to say besmirchment, at both a psychological and biological level.

For Kenealy, sport was less an indication of masculinisation than a *cause* of masculinisation, as seen in her criticism of a girls’ college, which she blamed for encouraging sport and ‘mannishness,’ the two inextricably linked:

There is a well-known Girls college which makes pre-eminently for the cult of Mannishness. And here are seen, absorbed in fierce contest during the exhausting heat of summer afternoons, grim-visaged maidens of sinewy build, hard and tough and set as working-women in the forties; some with brawny throats, square shoulders and stern loins that would do credit to a prize-ring.¹¹

These girls had been educated in sport, and the concomitant mannishness had left them undesirable as the prospective mothers of the next generation.

Kenealy wove these ideas into a scientific framework, drawing on the burgeoning field of ‘sex glands’ to explain and reinforce her argument:

All of which masculine developments are stigmata of abnormal Sex-transformation precisely similar in origin to male antlers in female-deer; namely, deterioration of important sex-glands, with consequent obliteration of the secondary Sex-characteristics arising normally out of the functional efficiency of these.¹²

The muscular physicality of sportswomen was posited as an aberration of sexual development, as akin to an intersex condition. Kenealy appealed to a familiarity

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 128.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 139.

¹² Ibid, pp. 139-40.

with zoological instances of intersexuality to imply an animalistic quality to sportswomen, as if such women formed a distinct subgroup. The zoological reference gave her argument weight by alerting readers to a scientifically verified precedent of sexual variation.

Kenealy was quite extreme in her vitriolic condemnation of sport for women, but her ideas both influenced and echoed the views of other medics and commentators, whose ideas circulated in medical journals and the occasional opinion piece in the popular press. A *Daily Mirror* article from 1934 reiterated many of Kenealy's themes of separate sexes, the dangers of sport and going against the laws of nature:

Nature created men and women radically different for obvious and excellent reasons. There is a certain class of women — they go in for specialised athletics — who seem to resent these reasons, taking the attitude that Nature is a benign, unsophisticated mid-Victorian old lady and should be either disregarded or improved upon.¹³

It was an intentionally provocative piece, underpinned by sarcastic humour, as seen in the headline, 'Amazons of 1934 – A Mere Man's View'. Even those opposed to the type of views espoused by Kenealy hinged their arguments on many of the same points: 'the well-built and sturdy school girls of to-day. Indeed, man will have to beware or he will soon discover that by the time he is a grandfather women will be the dominant sex.'¹⁴ In this article from the *Manchester Evening News*, 'Women to Dominate the World?', similar in genre to the *Daily Mirror's*, but wildly divergent in opinion, the author tackled the themes of the advisability of sports for

¹³ Geoffrey Soutar, 'Amazons of 1934 – A Mere Man's View', *Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1934, p. 10.

¹⁴ Lady Schwabe, 'Women to Dominate the World?', *Manchester Evening News*, 13 January 1932, p. 3.

schoolgirls, the effect of sports on eventual motherhood and the desirability of eliminating sex differences through sport, much as Kenealy had done over a decade previously. These were recurring anxieties in relation to women and sports that carried on shaping the debate well into the 1930s.

The 'Self-Made' Body

Before I turn to thinking about how women fashioned themselves beyond dress, it is useful to look at the idea of 'change at the whole-body level'. Jensen, in his innovative study of athletes, gender and modernity in Weimar Germany, *Body by Weimar*, coined 'self-madeness' to convey the way in which sportsmen and women took charge of their own bodies, building up their muscles and sculpting their own figures, and, in the light of the widespread media attention they received, their own public images.¹⁵ This drive to construct one's own body was a particular feature of athletes, whose sport, be it running, jumping or throwing, had a purity of form that sought to refine and improve an action to its greatest potential. Jensen has linked this phenomenon to Taylorism, in terms of mechanical bodies that could be shaped.¹⁶

Developing muscles through targeted exercises, increasing lung capacity through training, learning to throw further or to run faster and treating one's body as a machine that could be programmed to work to a greater capacity were ways in

¹⁵ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, pp. 6, 141.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 105.

which women athletes could build themselves up. Hargreaves, in her study of women's sport, has stated:

Athleticism is to do with action, power, speed and strength, suggestive of a qualitatively new notion of womanhood. Whereas the bicycle had symbolized the freedom of women to escape by mechanical means to a new form of independence, the new freedom for women experienced through participation in athletics was at the level of their own bodies.¹⁷

By the 1930s, although cycling was still popular with women in Britain, women were no longer reliant on the symbolic and actual freedom granted by the bicycle, but could fashion their own bodies into instruments of greater freedom.¹⁸ Jensen has echoed this, highlighting the new gender roles that saw women focussing on change at a whole-body level.¹⁹ Women athletes were forging a new mode of womanhood that gave centrality to the body at a time when popular and scientific discourses were reporting new ways of understanding the body as sexed and gendered.

Muscularity and 'Musculinity'

Drawing on Jensen's concept of the 'self-made body', I want to turn to the idea of 'musculinity', as coined by Hargreaves, to point to the potential for sportswomen to build up their own muscles and thus forge a more 'masculine' body.²⁰ Hargreaves has argued that women in sport can only be read in relation to their ever present other, men in sport:

¹⁷ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 131.

¹⁸ Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 77.

¹⁹ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 108.

²⁰ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, pp. 145-73.

The idealized male sporting body – strong, aggressive and muscular – has been a popular symbol of masculinity against which women, characterized as relatively powerless and inferior, have been measured.²¹

This is a compelling argument, especially when considered alongside the 1930s shift from women competing under the auspices of autonomous women's sporting organisations, such as the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale, to sporting bodies catering primarily to the interests of sportsmen, such as the International Olympic Committee, taking control of men's and women's sporting events. This move reinforced the position of women's high-level sport as an also-ran, a marginal pursuit that functioned as an unfavourable comparison to the main event of the men's competition.

Hargreaves has proposed the term 'musculinity' to highlight the strength of the association between sports women who develop their muscles and dominant understandings of masculinity. She has called for feminists to consider the power of musculature for women, as a source of bodily strength and as an antidote to a male monopoly on physical power.²² This focus on the physical and ideological strength of women's muscles is intriguing. 'Musculinity', for me, points to the ways that muscularity has been treated as the preserve of men, and can be seen as tantamount to a male secondary sex characteristic. Sutton, in her illuminating account of masculine women in Weimar Germany, has examined sport and the possibilities it gave masculine women for self-construction.²³ Sutton has conflated muscles with masculinity, and although this is an interesting reading, it does not

²¹ Ibid, p. 145.

²² Ibid, p. 173.

²³ Katie Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2011), p. 86.

consider how definitions of what it meant to be a woman changed in the 1920s and 1930s as more women started to develop and display their muscles.²⁴

One of the most visual ways in which sports women changed their bodies was through their developing muscles. Muscularity refers to the growing consciousness of women's muscles from the 1920s in Britain, and the trend towards seeking to actively cultivate them. Kenealy held that muscularity was akin to masculinity and therefore a source of great menace in women:

The militant Feminist movement was as much an explosion of suppressed muscularity in young women deprived of other outlets for accumulated muscle-steam, as it was an ebullition of masculine mentality on the part of its leaders.²⁵

Muscularity is central to Jensen's concept of the 'self-made body'. Muscles, which implied strength, became a desirable attribute. Muscles were a product of athletes' focus on their sport, but muscles also became a byword for good looks and capability:

Competitive athletes did more than just reaffirm the body, though. They reinvented it. By the end of the 1920s, a trim, taut, and efficient muscularity had come to define the modern ideal for both women and men.²⁶

Since developed muscles were not just an end in themselves, but provided increased strength, the shift towards muscularity, especially for women, also meant a symbolic and literal move towards greater emancipation. Winifred Holtby, writing for the *Yorkshire Post* in 1935 opined:

The actual discovery of her muscles has affected the contemporary woman's mentality, too. It was always realized that the poorer classes had

²⁴ There were also interesting class dimension to this display of muscles, which point to new readings of muscles on women away from simply marking out manual labourers.

²⁵ Kenealy, *Feminism and Sex Extinction*, p. 141.

²⁶ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 135.

limbs, that housewives could lift heavy weights and handle levers; but when this reign opened, though the secondary schools for girls had initiated hockey and lacrosse, we were still unacquainted with the bronzed, muscular young athlete, hiking, swimming, cycling, jumping, known today as 'the out-of-door-girl'.²⁷

By Holtby's reckoning, women had become conscious of the power of their own bodies through their muscles, and learnt how to harness their own power.

Muscularity also generated commercial opportunities. In the front of the Board of Education's 1937 book, *Recreation and Physical Fitness for Girls and Women*, an advert for Ellman Athletic Rub proclaimed: 'Muscle Users Must Use Ellman Athletic Rub'.²⁸ The designation 'Muscle Users' hinted towards a new market, as if those seeing the advert might identify as newcomers to muscles, in need of advice as to how to maintain their recent acquisition, as if using muscles were a new phenomenon requiring new products. The rationale may seem ludicrous, but the 1920s and 1930s were a time when women came to appreciate and cultivate their own muscularity.

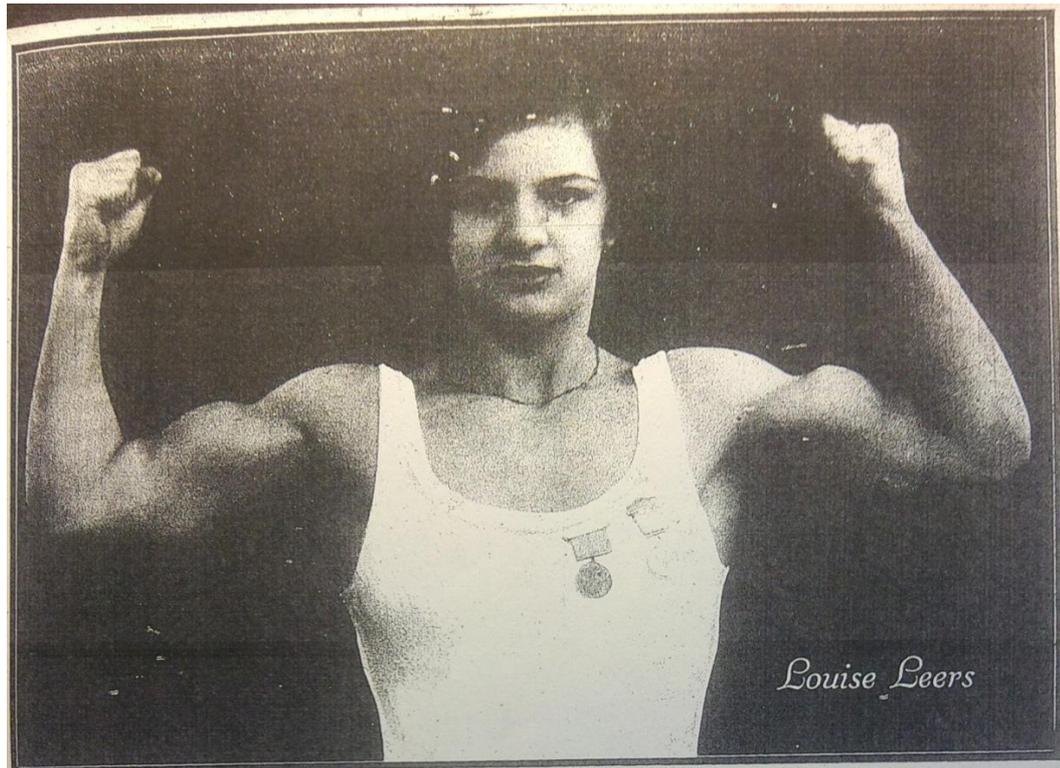
This muscularity was for the most part practised in moderation. Even if approved of, muscularity was still connected to masculinity and men's reported higher muscle mass, which women had to negotiate carefully to maintain social respectability. For some, though, fetishisation could mean embracing the figure of the muscled woman, finding pleasure in her unconventional form. Accounts of women's boxing and wrestling bouts appeared frequently in *London Life*, as Sigel has noted: 'The physicality of these sports [boxing and wrestling] tested new

²⁷ Winifred Holtby, 'A Generation of Women's Progress, *Yorkshire Post*, 6 May 1935', in Paul Berry and Alan Bishop (eds.), *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 93.

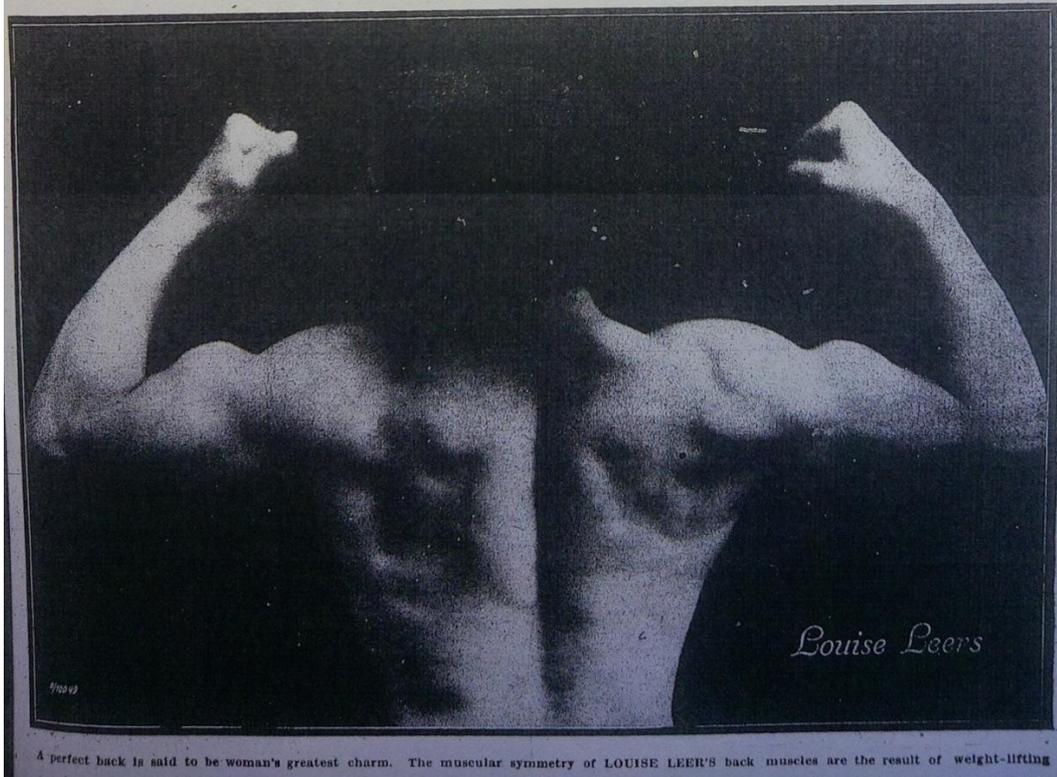
²⁸ Board of Education, *Recreation and Physical Fitness for Girls and Women* (London: HMSO, 1937), p. viii.

models of corporeality for women in ways that writers found strange and compelling.²⁹ Muscularity was celebrated, as in this pin-up of a woman weight-lifter (see figure 4.1 below). Stylised shots of women performing sports moves were a staple of *London Life*. There was an eroticisation of the image in the close attention to the body and the sense that the subject was posed for the viewer. Louise Leers was at once powerful with her well-developed muscles and exposed as she offered herself up to the camera. Muscularity was claimed as a facet of typically womanly qualities: Louise's beauty, and the charm of her back. The reader was directed to her arms and back so as better to admire the spectacle, fetishising her muscles.

²⁹ Lisa Z. Sigel, 'Fashioning Fetishism from the Pages of London Life', *Journal of British Studies*, 51, no. 3 (2012), p. 674.



Miss LOUISE LEERS is as beautiful as she is strong. Note the muscular development of her arms.



A perfect back is said to be woman's greatest charm. The muscular symmetry of LOUISE LEER'S back muscles are the result of weight-lifting.

Figure 4.1: '[Miss Louise Leers]', *London Life*, 19 January 1929, p. 17. The captions read: 'Miss LOUISE LEERS is as beautiful as she is strong. Note the muscular development of her arms' and 'A perfect back is said to be a woman's greatest charm. The muscular symmetry of LOUISE LEER'S [sic] back muscles are the result of weight-lifting.'

Muscularity allowed women to expand the markers of femininity and create stronger bodies for themselves that might once have been the preserve of men. Muscles continued to be associated with men, but some women were challenging this configuration of 'musculinity' and thus strengthening themselves literally and figuratively. This uneasy differentiation between appropriate and inappropriate muscularity for women had material implications, as seen in medical investigations into how bodies were sexed, which referred to musculature and sports participation as determining factors.

Inscribing Sport on the Body

In examining the concept of 'musculinity', I have argued for a medical understanding of muscularity as a physical indication of masculinity. Medics were reading musculature as an indication of masculinity, and offering their diagnoses accordingly. There was a public fascination with sport for women, but also distrust of it, which continued into the 1930s, influencing medical discourses of the sexed body. Old-fashioned social understandings of sport as antithetical to femininity made their way into medical analysis. In *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (1938), Lennox Broster and Clifford Allen each drew on participation in sport to gauge whether their patients were masculine or feminine. An interest in sport was employed as an official gauge of masculinity or femininity – but predominantly masculinity; it was imbued with psychological significance, and the effects of sport on the body were given further credence as signs of masculinity. A notion of the unsuitability of sport for women had material effects on people's lives, as it was

incorporated into decisions on the psychiatric or surgical treatment that patients might receive.

In the clinical and surgical chapter of the *Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, Broster drew on the effects of sport as something for the medical professional to identify and interpret. Broster referred to musculature as a mark of masculinity in his patients:

Her general appearance is somewhat masculine and muscular.³⁰
This patient was brought up as a female but always wanted to become a “gentleman.” He has a strong muscular frame,³¹
The patient looks manly with a well-formed muscular body.³²

Sport for women, which developed muscles, was portrayed as masculinising by implication. Playing sports was given physical and psychological significance. In his description of Mark Weston, the former woman athlete whose sex change was widely reported in the summer of 1936, Broster emphasised Weston’s sporting success as an illustration of innate gender identity:

he was regarded as a “tom-boy” because he instinctively preferred the company of boys to that of girls. At a later date he competed in the Olympic Games, throwing the discus as a girl.³³
He wanted to wear men’s clothes at the age of eighteen, and play men’s games, such as football, etc.³⁴

Broster treated Weston’s involvement with sport as confirmation of his masculinity, a symptom that the medical professional could interpret as the manifestation of a male instinct in one who had been encumbered with a female upbringing, yet who

³⁰ L. R. Broster, Clifford Allen, H. W. C. Vines, Jocelyn Patterson, Alan W. Greenwood, G. F. Marrian and G. C. Butler, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1938), p. 33.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 44.

³² *Ibid*, pp. 47-48.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 47.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 48.

was 'a triumph of instinctual development.'³⁵ In Broster's configuration, sports, even if practised by women, were masculine activities and therefore Weston's participation in them was a telling expression of his maleness.

In the context of psychological analysis, Allen used a questionnaire to investigate what patients' behaviour revealed about their gender. The framing of the questionnaire suggested that patients' interests could readily be interpreted to show whether the patient was behaving appropriately for their sex. Under the section 'personality', sport was a key concern: 'Type of person – whether feminine or masculine in behaviour. Hobbies, sports, pleasures. (Dancing – with which sex. Reading identified with hero or heroine, etc.)'³⁶ While some of these pastimes needed to be elaborated upon to discern their gendered nature – dancing alone need not be gendered, it was a question of with whom one desired to dance – sport was not treated as gender-neutral. In spite of the wide take up of women's sport in the 1930s when these case studies were being gathered, Allen viewed participation in sport as a marker of masculinity. This was made explicit in a description of one patient who was categorised as a man who had been brought up as a girl: 'He showed no interest in masculine things such as sport.'³⁷ Sport was treated as having gendered meanings that could provide significant insights for diagnosing his patients.

For Clifford Allen, interest in sport was a key determinant, conferring inappropriate behaviour in women and appropriate behaviour in men. Thus Allen notes with approval of women whom he described as 'heterosexual': 'Her

³⁵ Ibid, p. 48.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 127.

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 115-16.

personality was a feminine one. Was fond of knitting and sewing, had danced when she was younger and liked swimming, but no other sport' and 'Dancing and swimming were liked, but were taboo because of the hirsutism.'³⁸ In these instances swimming, although a sport, could be qualified as acceptably feminine by connection with the resolutely feminine pursuit of needlework, and by emphasising the patient's modesty, respectively. Although Allen deemed sport in general to be masculine, participation in certain sports, such as swimming, could be portrayed as more acceptable if those women conformed in other ways. References to sport helped to establish whether the patients behaved appropriately for their sex, and ratified Allen's diagnoses. 'E. D. Case 67' was diagnosed as a homosexual without glandular disease and was correspondingly described as veering from normal feminine behaviour. An interest in cricket was symptomatic here: 'Preferred cricket to girls' games (except skipping), disliked knitting and sewing.'³⁹ Playing sport was read as a sign of deviancy and cricket as a sport as marked as especially masculine – not a girl's game.⁴⁰

For Broster and Allen, sport did not just carry cultural or social associations with masculinity. Playing sports, even watching sports, were observable as physical traces on the body. Manifestations of sport were treated as sexual characteristics

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 97, 99.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 104.

⁴⁰ The ascription of certain sports as especially masculine was, if not arbitrary, certainly variable. Games such as tennis and golf were less stigmatised, possibly because of their prominence in (upper-) middle-class social life. The lack of bodily contact that women's cricket entailed helped endear it to the wider public, J. Lee, 'The Threat of Robust Mothers', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24, no. 11 (2007). Its status was complicated, however, by it having different class connotations in different contexts. Two separate organisations, the Women's Cricket Association and the Women's Cricket Federation, represented middle- and working-class teams, respectively, Judy Threlfall, 'Women's Cricket and the "Clothing Problem" in Interwar Britain' (paper given at the *Sporting Bodies* Conference, University of Leeds, 24 May 2013). The more ambiguous class status of women's cricket may have contributed to Allen's portrayal of cricket as unsuitable for women.

that could help distinguish between masculine and feminine physiques and psyches.

Boys' Suits: Unsexing Sports Attire

In addition to its considerable impact on the physicality of women's bodies, sport also affected the outward appearance of women in interwar Britain, changing some of the visual signifiers that had distinguished men from women. An important element of the emancipatory effect of sports on women was the influence of sportswear on mainstream fashion in the 1920s. Wilson has termed this 'the migration of sports clothes to the city', and has framed it as part of a move to modernity with streamlined and more practical styles.⁴¹

Bingham and Doan have both used the example of a *Daily Mail* article from April 1927 titled 'The Boyette' to explore the prevalence and acceptability of boyish women.⁴² The article described a new type of woman who wore her hair short 'like a boy', wore masculine-inflected clothing such as sports jackets – 'boy's suits' – and all this, the reader was informed, gave her the freedom of movement for sports such as cycling, golf and walking.⁴³ This article was part of a genre of articles that actively fabricated a phenomenon and claimed it as modern and in stark contrast to mores of years gone by.⁴⁴ This reiteration associated positive images of modern

⁴¹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 43.

⁴² Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 70; Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 103.

⁴³ 'The Boyette', *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1927, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Bingham placed the *Daily Mail's* 'Boyette' article alongside numerous similar ones from a variety of newspapers, Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, pp. 70-72.

women, especially young women – the new generation – with a distinctive style of dress said to be beneficial through its relation to sporting activities. Sport and its accoutrements functioned as a conduit for modernity.

The tennis courts permitted more androgynous clothing that allowed for movement. Having been adopted for sport, these styles found their way in to everyday wear for women, helped in no short measure by the endorsement of leading sporting celebrities such as Suzanne Lenglen.⁴⁵ The foremost woman tennis star of the interwar years, Lenglen achieved fame not just in her native France, but across Europe and North America. Janet Flanner, the Paris-based correspondent for the *New Yorker* magazine, wrote a piece marking Lenglen's death in 1938. Lenglen had achieved a level of fame that attracted transatlantic interest. Sports stars were major interwar celebrities and held a great deal of influence.

In an article on women's sport in France, Terret has argued that:

the champions of the inter-war period were seen as exceptional phenomena who could not serve as models, as confirmed by the discourses accompanying the exploits of tennis player Suzanne Lenglen, the swimmer Suzanne Wurtz or the pilots Hélène Boucher and Maryse Bastier.⁴⁶

Of course, the nature of celebrity was to render the individual as someone exceptional, someone to be celebrated, and in the case of sports champions, the achievements of celebrities were quantifiably greater than anyone else, but women like Lenglen nonetheless operated as role models. Lenglen's achievements and innovations were admired and copied by other women. Such sportswomen had 'tastemaker status, capable of influencing fashion and behavior in realms far

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 161-62.

⁴⁶ Thierry Terret, 'From Alice Milliat to Marie-Thérèse Eyquem: Revisiting Women's Sport in France (1920s-1960s)', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27, no. 7 (2010), p. 1160.

beyond the tennis court.⁴⁷ Writing in 1938, Flanner reminded her readers that in 1914, at the time Lenglen became world champion, the tennis star still had long hair.⁴⁸ This was worth stressing because over twenty years later, it was contrary to Lenglen's popular image. From 1920, Lenglen:

shocked post-war Wimbledon with her revolutionary court wear. She bounded on to the court minus stockings, petticoat and sleeves; but before long women dressed like this all the time; Lenglen's clothes in the mid-1920s – designed by Patou – were much the same off court as on.⁴⁹

Flanner pointed to how much fashions for women had changed, and the degree to which this was tied to sports. In the 1920s women's beauty standards were athleticised.⁵⁰ Skillen has noted that in each edition, the high-class fashion magazine *Tatler* informed its women readers of the latest wear for prestige sports like tennis, golf, horse riding and skiing.⁵¹ In its circular manner, the fashion market took inspiration from the tennis court and created fashions that might even be fit for the tennis courts.

The popularity amongst women of sports such as tennis drove the move for women to play unhindered and added impetus to the trend towards less restrictive dress that had begun in the nineteenth century. Although these styles were not unisex, they drew on the greater functionality of men's sportswear.⁵² Tennis had a reputation as a middle-class pursuit in interwar Britain, but was played by a great many women of different class backgrounds on the public tennis courts that sprang

⁴⁷ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Janet Flanner, *Paris Was Yesterday: 1925-1939* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 226.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, pp. 160-62.

⁵⁰ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 36.

⁵¹ Fiona Skillen, "'Woman and the Sport Fetish': Modernity, Consumerism and Sports Participation in Inter-War Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29, no. 5 (2012), p. 758.

⁵² Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 35.

up in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵³ This widespread take up of sport, with its concomitant shifts in fashion, meant that the dressed female body bore a greater resemblance to the male one than previously.

If Suzanne Lenglen was the glamorous image of French sportswomen, Violette Morris was her antithesis. Lenglen's choice of sportswear was trend setting, but Morris's insistence on wearing trousers resulted in a court case. Morris surpassed the acceptable limits of masculine attire for sports women and demonstrated where the boundaries were.

Violette Morris was an all-round sports star who played football for France, boxed, threw the shot putt, swam, played water polo, cycled and raced motorbikes and cars.⁵⁴ Morris would later gain notoriety in France for defecting to Germany in the mid-1930s, collaborating with the Gestapo and eventually being assassinated in 1944 by the French Resistance.⁵⁵ While Morris's wartime activities have come to dominate her popular legacy, she was one of France's leading interwar sportswomen, certainly one of the most versatile and successful. There were appraising mentions of Morris's sporting success in the British media. A *Daily Mirror* front cover from August 1924 celebrated the women's games the paper was sponsoring under the jubilant headline: 'Seven World Records for Women's Sport!' One of the photos showed Morris poised to put the shot, with the caption 'Mlle. V. Morris (France) winning the shot putting contest.'⁵⁶ A Pathé newsreel clip from 1922, entitled 'French Lady Footballers', showed Morris captaining a French

⁵³ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, pp. 79-80.

⁵⁴ Marie-Josèphe Bonnet, *Violette Morris: Histoire d'une Scandaleuse* (Paris: Perrin, 2011), p. 48.

⁵⁵ Wendy Michallat, 'Droit au But : Violette Morris and Women's Football in "Les Années Folles"', *French Studies Bulletin*, 26, no. 97 (2005), pp. 14, 16.

⁵⁶ 'Seven World Records for Women's Sport!', *Daily Mirror*, 5 August 1924, p. 1.

women's football team against the hugely popular Preston factory-based team 'Dick Kerr's Ladies' in front of a capacity crowd.⁵⁷ In each of these sources Morris was attired in sportswear, shorts and a t-shirt for shot putting, a blazer, shorts, shirt and a beret for playing football. Neither outfit was especially feminine, but Morris was dressed just the same as the other competitors. The sportswear was a far more unisex style but Morris was far from alone in dressing that way for sport; she was suitably attired for her purposes.

Another article from August 1924, this time in the *News of the World*, sang the praises of Morris's physique: "Her nerves, like her muscles, must be like iron, and those who saw her at Stamford Bridge will agree that she is one of the finest-built women on the face of the earth."⁵⁸ The *News of the World*, along with the *Daily Mirror* and *Sporting Life*, was a sponsor of the event at which Morris was competing, informally called the 'Women's Olympiad', so there was an impetus for the paper to report favourably on the competitors, but it is striking that Morris was singled out for such rapturous praise. The reporter focused especially on Morris's muscles, a feature typically associated with men, as the very thing that precipitated her to the highest ranks of women.

In March 1930 Morris attracted another flurry of British media attention this time to report her defeat in court. Morris had claimed for damages against the leading sports organisation the Fédération Sportive Féminine de France (FSFF) after they expelled her. The FSFF argued that Morris's habit of wearing 'masculine attire'

⁵⁷ British Pathé, 'French Ladies Football Team Aka French Lady Footballers' (1922) <<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/french-ladies-football-team-aka-french-lady-footba/query/01044700>> [Accessed 18 December 2012]. On 'Dick Kerr's Ladies', see Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 142.

⁵⁸ *News of the World*, 10 August 1924, quoted in Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 132.

made it inappropriate for her to be part of a women's association. A *Daily Herald* article positioned the story as a question of whether or not a sportswoman was permitted to wear trousers: 'A sportswoman's right to wear trousers was formally condemned by a Civil Tribunal in Paris to-day.'⁵⁹ Trousers were not an unusual choice for sportswomen and the suggestion that they were forbidden seemed anachronistic and positioned the FSFF as out of sync with the popular mood, not Morris.



Figure 4.2: 'Woman in Trousers Case', *Daily Mirror*, 28 February 1930, p. 1.

The *Daily Mirror's* headline, 'Woman in Trousers Case', also pointed to some of the tensions as to whether a woman in trousers was fashionably modern or frighteningly mannish. As an epithet, 'Woman in Trousers Case' need not have implied anything untoward, but there was a suggestion that Morris was

⁵⁹ 'Trousers Ban Upheld', *Daily Herald*, 27 March 1930, p. 9.

transgressing appropriate gender boundaries. The caption to the *Daily Mirror's* story emphasised that Morris was wearing men's clothes: 'dressed in men's clothes', 'wearing men's Trousers'.⁶⁰ Although trousers for women were seen as unusual in 1930, they were promoted as a desirable, if daring trend. In February and March of 1930 the *Daily Mirror* printed fashion shots of women in trousers, alerting readers to the new trend for wide-fitted trousers.⁶¹ It was not simply wearing trousers that put Morris at fault; rather it was that the outfits crossed the line from being those of a modern woman to those more suitable for a man. Nor was the *Daily Mirror* chastising women generally for their achievements in the public sphere. Alongside the front page photo of Morris was one of Dr. Winifred Bridge, whom the paper hailed as heroic for her part in rescuing miners. A fellow doctor said of Bridge:

Dr. Bridge was a very gallant woman [...] She is a fine athletic girl and she kept her head.

She worked very hard in the depths of the pit and I cannot speak too highly of her. I should think she is the first woman who ever did it.⁶²

Women's professional and personal achievement could be held up as exemplary. Bridge's athleticism was singled out for praise and new feats for women could be celebrated. Morris's transgression then was neither simply wearing trousers, nor being successful as a sportswoman. Morris's fault was in how a number of factors coalesced to produce an unapologetic masculinity, as evidenced in the insistence on wearing 'men's trousers' and defying the authorities.

⁶⁰ 'Woman in Trousers Case', *Daily Mirror*, 28 February 1930, p. 1.

⁶¹ See for example 'Blue and White', *Daily Mirror*, 14 February 1930, p. 12; 'Riviera Women's Trousers', *Daily Mirror*, 19 March 1930, p. 1.

⁶² 'Girl Doctor in Pit', *Daily Mirror*, 28 February 1930, p. 24.

The *Daily Chronicle's* report of the court verdict framed Morris as more culpable. The headline 'Male-Clad Woman Non-Suited. Sporting Guild's Right to Expel. Mannish Ways' emphasised the discordance created by Morris's attire.⁶³ She was at odds, not suited, the play on words conjuring up images of men's suits. The issue of rights, according to the *Daily Chronicle*, was not Morris's right to wear trousers (or a suit), but the FSFF's right to expel her as their prerogative. The combination of ideas linked wearing 'masculine attire' with being 'mannish' and having 'a deplorable habit of doing things which tended to bring her sex into disrepute.'⁶⁴ The article conflated masculine sartorial choices with a gender-inappropriate demeanour and alluded to bad behaviour being connected to this. Standard women's sportswear – Morris was described as 'the "up-to-date" sportswoman' – was implied to be symptomatic of those 'things which tended to bring her sex into disrepute.'⁶⁵ The objectionable actions included challenging referees' decisions and cheating, which the press detailed, but extended to a wider set of gender-deviant behaviour about which the papers would not be explicit. Wearing trousers became a symbol of mannishness that the FSFF could publicly tackle; they were shorthand for the disrepute Morris was felt to bring to the FSFF and women's sport through a voluntary mastectomy, placing advertisements for attractive young women, and unabashed womanising.⁶⁶ The accumulation of these details painted women's sportswear as potentially more masculine than neutral and lent sinister overtones to Morris's insistence on wearing a suit. In Morris's case

⁶³ 'Male-Clad Woman Non-Suited', *Daily Chronicle*, 27 March 1930, p. 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Bonnet, *Histoire d'une Scandaleuse*, pp. 44-45; Michallat, 'Droit au But', p. 16.

sportswear could be used as a representation of socially unacceptable female masculinity.⁶⁷ The more unisex styles of sportswear need not be read as masculine, but if they were coupled with 'mannish' deportment, their meaning shifted to become more problematic. Morris elected to have a mastectomy ostensibly so as to better fit in her racing car; she modified herself to erase sexual difference and transgressed gender boundaries. Morris's engagement with sport seemed to be an effacement of sex differences and that was punished by a public denouncement of her clothing, a more socially acceptable subject to air than objections to what she did with her body.

Machine-Enhanced Women: Women's Motor Sports

As a racing-car driver, Morris participated in a sport that seemed to banish physical difference between the sexes. Since the car provided the power, it could operate as an extension of Morris's body, compensating for any lack of bodily power. The logic of Morris's mastectomy was that it allowed her to drive unhindered by her own form, to become sexless just as the car was sexless. This section explores how women's motor sports were treated in 1930s Britain, and especially how they were seen to affect the gendered meanings of women's bodies. In addition to looking at newspaper coverage of women in motor sports, I analyse Gilbert Frankau's 1932 novel *Christopher Strong* because it brings to the fore many of the contemporary

⁶⁷ The coverage of Morris's court case was the same week as the papers were poring over accounts of Evan Burt's change of sex, meaning that Morris's case was received in a context of greater public awareness of sex being unstable.

concerns surrounding the gendered behaviour of women who raced cars, boats and aeroplanes.

With the development of motor sports, physical differences between the sexes were potentially erased, as the machine compensated for any physical differences and placed the emphasis on the driver's nerves and judgment. Clarsen has expressed this well in her description of women motorists:

As they climbed on, in, and under their dispatch motorcycles, ambulances, lorries, taxis, delivery vans, and touring cars, British women were exploring and exploiting the transformative possibilities of a new technology, through which they aspired to create themselves as new kinds of women.⁶⁸

This concept of 'the transformative possibilities of a new technology' is prescient for women racing cars, speedboats and aeroplanes. These vehicles, with women at the helm, allowed those women to augment their bodies, to become a part of machines built to travel the fastest, furthest, highest – in short, to be superlative. The top-flight drivers, as they 'aspired to create themselves as new kinds of women', were granted literal freedom, to travel great distances as and when they wished, unaccompanied, but also a figurative freedom from the constraints of their own bodies. Becoming cyborg-like, the driver was enhanced by machinery that eliminated differences of sex by creating a new frame, a machine that greatly expanded an individual's capabilities.

These motor sports were, for the most part, the domain of the upper-class.⁶⁹ The required wealth and access to the specialist machinery and training marked boundaries to women's participation and confirmed the gendering of these

⁶⁸ Georgine Clarsen, *Eat My Dust: Early Women Motorists* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 35.

⁶⁹ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 369.

pursuits as male.⁷⁰ Motor sports may not have been open to the majority of women, but press accounts of women's triumphs behind the controls were a staple of 1930s press reporting, and created heroines with support from broad swathes of the population. Women pilots, in particular, received a great deal of press coverage and showed that they were eminently capable of feats of great daring. Britain's Amy Johnson, Beryl Markham and Peggy Salaman and the USA's Amelia Earhart all became household names in Britain, the newspapers recounting their exploits and providing readers with interviews and gossip and carrying the adverts that featured their images to endorse household products.

Car racing for women captured the popular imagination far less than did female aviators; the newer pursuits seemed to fire the public's imagination and better cement the connection between modernity, speed and technology. There were fewer reports of women speed-boat racers than of women aviators, but one in particular, Joe Carstairs, did generate some press reports. Carstairs, named Marion Barbara Carstairs at birth, went by the name 'Joe', forging a more masculine persona.⁷¹ After a spell financing a women-run garage in London in the early 1920s, a venture that also subverted gender norms, Joe turned to motorboat racing.⁷² Carstairs' biographer, Kate Summerscale, claims that the press behaved in a more hostile manner towards Joe by 1930, but this was certainly not uniform.⁷³ A piece in the *Sunday Pictorial* in March 1931 described Joe as 'Britain's foremost woman

⁷⁰ Barbara Burman, 'Racing Bodies: Dress and Pioneer Women Aviators and Racing Drivers', *Women's History Review*, 9, no. 2 (2000), p. 308.

⁷¹ Kate Summerscale, *The Queen of Whale Cay* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), p. 8; Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p. 105.

⁷² Clarsen, *Eat My Dust*, pp. 42-43.

⁷³ Summerscale, *The Queen of Whale Cay*, p. 113.

speed-boat expert. She delights in speed and drives her boat with nerves of steel.⁷⁴

This was high praise and the stress on Carstairs's love of speed and strong nerves marked Joe out as overcoming the possible hindrances ascribed to women – fear of speed and weak nerves, therefore suggesting that Joe could transcend being female through speed-boat racing. Summerscale reported that Joe was proud to have been dubbed 'the greatest sportsman I know' by one of Britain's leading motorists, Malcolm Campbell, the gender reversal conferring admiration and prestige.

Conversely, Summerscale related, when looking to insult Campbell, Joe commented that Campbell drove: 'like an old woman.'⁷⁵ Motor sport here was still coded as essentially male, with all the attributes of speed, nerve and sportsmanship that entailed. By rising to the top ranks of motor sports, women were subverting their sex and changing the meaning of what it was to be a man or a woman.

In light of the intense press interest in women, machines and speed, it is hardly surprising that there was a popular audience for literary and cinematic depictions of such women. A key example is *Christopher Strong*, first a novel (1932) and then a film (1933), which dealt with many of the issues surrounding women motorists and aviators in Britain and whether they could compete with men. The novel, by Gilbert Frankau, told the story of a Lady Felicity Darrington, a racing driver-cum-motorboat racer-cum-aviatrix, and her married lover, Sir Christopher Strong.⁷⁶ The film, directed by Hollywood's pre-eminent woman director of the

⁷⁴ 'Girl's Speed-Boat Bid', *Sunday Pictorial*, 8 March 1931, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Summerscale, *The Queen of Whale Cay*, p. 118.

⁷⁶ Gilbert Frankau was a popular author with working-class audiences – according to Ronald F. Batty's *How to Run a Twopenny Library* (1938) his works were some of the most popular novels of the time, Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39: A Round of Cheap Diversions?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 106, 245, 247.

period, Dorothy Arzner, starred Katharine Hepburn.⁷⁷ The film maintained many elements of the novel, but there were some key differences.⁷⁸ The novel offers more fruitful territory for exploring my interest in the cultural meanings of the woman motor-sport expert in Britain than does the film, as it showed Lady Darrington participating in a range of motorsports and did more to emphasise the apparent dangers of being a sporting woman. The character of Lady Darrington illuminated important issues surrounding the topic at hand, especially the connections between gender, sports, machines and the body. I have opted to analyse this novel at some length because it demonstrates the reach into popular culture of ideas concerning women, sport and technological assistance, and enables an exploration of how these themes were expressed.

⁷⁷ Dorothy Arzner was a lesbian with a masculine-inflected style of dressing, who was always pictured wearing trousers. It is outside the scope of this chapter, but there is an interesting analysis to be made of the intersection of Arzner's own gender expression with her fashioning of the character of Lady Darrington as a strong woman following typically male pursuits. See Judith Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) for more on Arzner. In her 1991 memoir, Hepburn described and dismissed the film thus: 'Dorothy Arzner – popular woman director. She had done many pictures. Was very good. This picture was fun to do but no extraordinary happenings. A story of an aviatrix and her affair with a famous man. It seems odd now, a woman director, but it didn't seem strange to me then. Several of the best cutters in the business were women. Dorothy was very well known and had directed a number of hit pictures. She wore pants. So did I. We had a good time working together. The script was a bit old-fashioned and it was not really a successful picture. Colin Clive played the man', Katharine Hepburn, *Me: Stories of My Life* (London: Viking, 1991), pp. 144-45. Hepburn identified herself with Arzner as trouser-wearing, a modern attribute, dismissed the script as old-fashioned, made no comment on the theme being a female aviator, from which one might infer that aviatrix was not so extraordinary a position to hold, whereas having a female director was treated with retrospective incredulity. Hepburn's comments point to prominent sportswomen becoming more acceptable and assimilated than prominent women in the film industry.

⁷⁸ Lady Darrington was given the less hackneyed name of Cynthia, and was an aviatrix from the start rather than progressing through motor racing on land, then sea, then air, as she did in the novel. Frankau was very heavy-handed in naming his characters. Christopher Strong has his strength tested, and Felicity has her happiness tested, this connection spelt out for the reader: 'Felicity! Out-of-the-way name. Meaning happiness', Gilbert Frankau, *Christopher Strong: A Romance* (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1932), p. 39. Arzner's film had less of the conservatism and nationalism of Frankau's novel. The film was also unconcerned with Frankau's account of foreign business interests encroaching on an idealised England, or with Christopher's desire for a son. The investment in having a son also links back to the debates surrounding eugenics and race continuation with which Kenealy was concerned.

Lady Felicity Darrington embodied many of the contemporary characteristics of the sporting woman. As was typical in motor sports, she had financial and social capital, signalled by her title. The quest to win 'The Triple Crown' – the land, sea and air record – was a preoccupation of interwar Britain and pursued by such luminaries as Henry Segrave.⁷⁹ Felicity's sport-mindedness was linked to a new world order based on proven individual achievement, just as the winners in a sports competition are meant to be those who are the most capable and strive the hardest.⁸⁰ An all-round sportswoman, Felicity beat Christopher in a game of mixed doubles tennis, newly popular in the interwar years on account of, according to Graves and Hodge, the much improved standard of the women playing.⁸¹ Christopher admired Felicity's tennis skills by likening her to a talented male player, 'She played like a man – better than most men.'⁸² Over a race of some two miles, Felicity's swimming – the modern crawl stroke to Christopher's old-fashioned side-stroke – was good, but not as strong as Christopher's, who won the race and so flattered his own sense of manhood.⁸³ This victory for Christopher confounded the contemporary trend towards women out-performing men in long-distance swimming, as, for instance, in Gertrude Ederle's celebrated record-breaking cross-Channel swim.⁸⁴

Following a traditional narrative form and taking a conservative worldview, *Christopher Strong* nonetheless featured the distinctly modern figure of the woman

⁷⁹ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London: Hutchinson, 1985 [1940]), p. 229.

⁸⁰ Frankau, *Christopher Strong*, p. 317.

⁸¹ Graves and Hodge, *The Long Week-End*, p. 233.

⁸² Frankau, *Christopher Strong*, p. 52.

⁸³ *Ibid*, pp. 128-29.

⁸⁴ Gertrude Ederle was a US swimmer who in 1926 became the first woman to swim the English Channel.

aviator. Frankau was one of the most popular writers of interwar Britain, producing novels that offered fast-paced action and sexual intrigue and conveyed his strong anti-socialist sentiments.⁸⁵ Frankau's output can be seen as typically middlebrow – popular fiction that was at some remove from modernism. Writing in 1942, Virginia Woolf derided Frankau's target readers, the middlebrows, as 'betwixt and between'.⁸⁶ Woolf's point was that the highbrow and the lowbrow each had their distinct cultures and merits, but that the middlebrow was a more ad hoc, mercurial, opportunistic form that could not lay claim to any fixed values. This idea of the 'betwixt and between' was levelled by Woolf as a criticism, but fits neatly with the figure of the sporting woman's body as adhering to fixed notions of neither masculinity nor femininity. *Christopher Strong* is an interesting example of how the sportswoman was sexed. Middlebrow in form, *Christopher Strong* was neither one thing nor the other.⁸⁷

Felicity emblematised youth, speed and modernity: 'her young heart being dedicate, even as her young body was dedicate, to higher adventure, to the lure and the thrill and glamour and the headlong risk of speed.'⁸⁸ The antithesis of the traditional wife and mother, Felicity stood a breed apart from Christopher's wife,

⁸⁵ R. J. Minney, 'Frankau, Gilbert (1884–1952)', rev. Clare L. Taylor, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33243>, accessed 20 January 2013]; Lawrence Napper, *Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), p. 73.

⁸⁶ Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middle/brow Culture* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. xiii; Virginia Woolf, 'Middlebrow', in Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 115.

⁸⁷ This makes an interesting contrast to Woolf's own work of sexual shifting, Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Penguin, 1993 [1928]), whose ambiguity was presented in a resolutely highbrow modernist style.

⁸⁸ Frankau, *Christopher Strong*, p. 18.

Deirdre, whom he realised quite emphatically ‘wasn’t modern’.⁸⁹ Felicity by contrast, was distinctly undomestic: ‘And how could one have a home, children, with one’s life dedicate to other gods – to the quiet god of one’s working table, to the loud god of speed?’⁹⁰ Her role as a racing driver excluded her from the gendered domestic life of family and children. The narrator stated that her living quarters were masculine, symbolic of her wider status as masculine. On first seeing her home, Christopher reflected:

The hanging light in the centre of the ceiling was the sort a man rather than a woman would have chosen. [...] Yet the whole effect, though bizarre and quite unfeminine, did not displease; reminding Strong, somehow or other, of a man’s rooms at some university;⁹¹

This reference to the masculinity of Felicity’s home reflected her masculine appearance and occupations, but these traits, while incongruous, were not a source of opprobrium; Christopher experienced Felicity’s rooms as peculiarly masculine, but contextualised them and found pleasure in their difference. Women racing drivers may have cut a distinctly different appearance in terms of gender presentation, but, for the most part, they were embraced by a public who judged them as intriguing, as was evident in the popular press coverage of Felicity Darrington’s real-life counterparts.

Felicity was described in terms of her masculine appearance: ‘How lovely she is. More like a boy than a woman’, ‘She was faintly brown too, that other-golden brown – slim as a boy – glorious in her youthful beauty.’⁹² In these appraisals her boyishness was appealing; it corresponded to the modern fashion for

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 60-61.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 42.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 20-21.

⁹² Ibid, pp. 83, 127.

women to cultivate a boyish figure. However, a later description of Felicity raised concerns: 'More like a young man than a girl, she looked in that moment, hardly any softness about her.'⁹³ This comment showed that women could cross a line and shift from embodying an attractive and youthful boyishness to losing their allure, their feminine softness. This was the slippery boundary that distinguished acceptable female masculinities from unacceptable ones; it was akin to the court verdict that deemed it inappropriate for Violette Morris to wear trousers to her sports club. Boyish styles, which had been the height of fashion for women in the 1920s, became suspect after the 1928 *Well of Loneliness* trial, so that by the early 1930s masculine attire for women was both out-of-date and more suggestive of lesbianism.⁹⁴ Boyishness in women held meanings that were changeable and dependent on context.

Felicity imagined herself transcending her sex and gender through motor racing, echoing the notion of motor sports eliminating sex difference. She had yearned for this as a child: 'Always, in her dreams, she had seen herself, woman, travelling faster than any human being had ever travelled before', prefiguring her later achievements in beating the female and male record altitude records.⁹⁵ Although Felicity managed to achieve success by beating records, she ultimately failed because she could not reconcile her love for Christopher with her quest for speed. The risks and commitments of her sport mediated against her being a contented mother or wife: 'Racing, one would be sexless – only a brain pitted

⁹³ Ibid, p. 332.

⁹⁴ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p. 125.

⁹⁵ Frankau, *Christopher Strong*, p. 18.

against other brains. Why, then, couldn't one always be sexless?'⁹⁶ 'Sexless' in this instance, was both free of sex and free of sexual desire. Felicity being sexual did not tally with her continued racing, harkening back to warnings from medics that sport would damage women's bodies for motherhood; as Kenealy had observed in 1920:

The Greeks, with their intuitive apprehension, portrayed [sic] both Athene, goddess of Intellect, and Artemis, goddess of Sports, as sexless, passionless, unwedded and childless; scorers of men, devoid of all womanly impulse and sentiment.⁹⁷

In 1932, the year the novel was first published, the *Lancet* reported a study on the effect of menstruation on women athletes. The study found that, contrary to popular belief, women need not stop all physical exercise during menstruation, but that for some women it would be for the best.⁹⁸ In 1938, articles still appeared in the medical press in which the question of sport for women focussed on concerns about uterine damage.⁹⁹ Frankau evoked some of these fears and debates through Felicity's body becoming less capable of sporting competition once she has been animated by Christopher's love. She could not stand up to love, just as she could not hope ultimately to beat a man at sport: 'In sport, as in love, man still held the mastery.'¹⁰⁰ Having lost the car race through no real fault of her own, she lost the boat race because she realised her nerves were not up to it, nor would she risk herself when she had a man waiting for her; she beat the altitude records in her plane, but at the cost of her own life. Just as Kenealy warned, Felicity sacrificed her potential motherhood to sport.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 81.

⁹⁷ Kenealy, *Feminism and Sex Extinction*, p. 129.

⁹⁸ Anon., 'Menstruation and Athletics', *Lancet*, 13 February 1932, p. 357.

⁹⁹ 'The Physiological Approach to Fitness', *British Medical Journal*, 6 August 1938, p. 275.

¹⁰⁰ Frankau, *Christopher Strong*, p. 328.

As Felicity took her last, fatal flight, she was pregnant with the son Christopher craved. She had become almost mechanical as her body was integrated into the technology of the plane – the technology of the plane sustained her:

She tested the oxygen again; was again aware of that faint exhilaration; turned off the tap; felt for the switch that connected the battery with her clothing; tested that, too.

But even as she did these mechanical things thought stabbed her to the very womb.¹⁰¹

Felicity's womb became her central point, the element of her that broke the illusion that she was at one with the plane. In an especially mawkish passage, Felicity's unborn son appeared to her and directed her to break the men's altitude record. She had already gone some way to downplaying the significance for women of it being a woman to break the record by apportioning the credit to her plane: 'Beat the man's record too. Help to prove that planes can travel the stratosphere.'¹⁰²

Felicity's lack of agency and achievement for her sex were underlined as her unborn son dismissed her own power, 'The boy – her boy by Christopher – had wings, not like her own, but real wings', implying the artifice of her own machine.¹⁰³ The unborn son took charge of her and spurred her onwards and upwards. This male, an unborn one at that, gave Felicity the power to continue in her record attempt she could not have mustered for herself: 'For my son's sake – not for my own'.¹⁰⁴

Felicity flew too close to the sun, and was burnt; and thus the reader understood that women's success in sport meant she must sacrifice her proper function as a woman. The next section considers women's sports organising in

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 334-35.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 338.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 339.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 341.

Britain and how women were both supported in their endeavours and mistrusted for their successes.

Athletic Women

While motor sports allowed women to be part of a machine, athletics prompted women to develop their own bodies like machines. Women's athletics was one of the most visible and debated of women's sports. Track and field provided sportswomen with the chance to perfect some of the purest forms of exercise; the competition was a straightforward test of who could be superlative – who could run fastest, throw furthest, jump highest. The commencement of the modern Olympics in 1896 brought an ethos and order to athletics, but one that explicitly excluded women. The founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, was ideologically opposed to women competing in the games.¹⁰⁵ He called on an ancient tradition of athletics that excluded women. In response to the hostility and exclusion emanating from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), women formed their own sports organisations. The most significant of these was the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI), founded by Alice Milliat in 1921.¹⁰⁶ While this was a French organisation, it staged international track and field events that helped forge an international community of women athletes. Since the IOC was hostile towards women, it was the FSFI that created a series of women's international games. These occurred in Monaco in 1921 and 1922, then every four

¹⁰⁵ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁶ Anita L. DeFrantz, 'The Changing Role of Women in the Olympic Games', *Olympic Review*, 26, no. 15 (1997), pp. 18-19.

years from 1922 to 1934 in Paris, Gothenburg, Prague and London, respectively.¹⁰⁷

In addition to the participation of British women in each of these games, British newspapers sponsored women's athletics events during the 1920s. These were seen as popular and lucrative enough by the press barons to be worth their while. The effect of all this activity was that athletics not only prompted women to train their bodies to be more powerful, it also provided a platform for self-organising and having a stake in their burgeoning sports. Women athletes were accused of imitating men, but they were able to develop their own specifically female competitions.

The positive stance on women's sport by some writers was accompanied by negative opinions from others. The same people, sports and phenomenon were described at the same time by different commentators from wildly varying perspectives. There was no one definitive position on women's sport's merits or otherwise at any one time, as is neatly illustrated by five articles included in the files of the British Olympic Association press cuttings for the 1928 Olympics.

The first article, from the *Daily Mail*, treating this information as mostly positive, observed that: 'A striking feature of this Olympiad is the greater prominence of women competitors. For the first time they are taking part in the track and field events with the men.'¹⁰⁸ The second article in the BOA press cuttings book, also from the *Daily Mail* but published a week later, took a far more negative stance:

¹⁰⁷ Ghislaine Quintillan, 'Alice Milliat and the Women's Games', *Olympic Review*, 26, no. 31 (2000), pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁸ The University of East London: British Olympic Association Archive: BOA/PC/3: Press cuttings, 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games (1928): 'Women at the Olympiad to Compete with Men', *Daily Mail*, 28 January 1928.

WOMEN'S PERIL AS ATHLETES

[...]

It is urged that these events for women serve no useful purpose and besides being extremely harmful to those who take part are beset with racial evils.¹⁰⁹

The third article, from the *Daily Sketch*, provided a counter to the negative view, expressing annoyance at the hysterical press coverage of women's sports and demonstrating an unwavering faith in women as athletes.¹¹⁰ Finally, there were two articles from the *Evening Standard* that sounded a cautious note: 'They [women] do not go in, save by way of freak, for boxing or for Rugby football: the attendant dangers are too obvious to make either a feasible proposition.'¹¹¹

These divergent opinions were generated at most days apart but demonstrate the different ideas circulating about women's suitability for sport. Since these opposing articles were gathered together in a press cuttings file it is likely that they were viewed in conjunction with each other, but for the general reader they were opposing ideas in the public sphere suggesting athletic competition as a site of tension and debate.

The 1924 Olympics in Paris and the 1928 ones in Amsterdam saw marked increases in the number of events open to women. This was arguably more a bid by the IOC to gain power over the female-dominated bodies organising women's games than a statement as to the merit of women's athletics.¹¹² The IOC's move to include some women's events took power away from the FSFI and once the IOC

¹⁰⁹ BOA/PC/3, 'Women's Peril as Athletes', *Daily Mail*, 4 February 1928.

¹¹⁰ BOA/PC/3, 'Women Athletes', *Daily Sketch*, 4 February 1928.

¹¹¹ BOA/PC/3, 'Women in Athletics', *Evening Standard*, 4 February 1928.

¹¹² Florence Carpentier and Jean-Pierre Lefèvre, 'The Modern Olympic Movement, Women's Sport and the Social Order during the Inter-War Period', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23, no. 7 (2006), p. 1115.

could exert more power over women's athletics it started to limit them. The women's 800m race is a case in point.

The 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam forged a longstanding belief as to women's unsuitability to run 800m races. Women's Olympic events had only gained an equal status to men's in 1924.¹¹³ However, the exhausted state of some of the competitors after the women's 800m caused uproar and resulted in the women's 800m race being banned at the Olympics until it was eventually reinstated in 1960.¹¹⁴ Images of women collapsed after the race were employed by some in the press to generate disgust and argue that women were putting themselves, and therefore the 'race', at risk. After the debacle, H. M. Abrahams, who himself had a position as something of a leading sporting figure, wrote begrudgingly in the *Sunday Sketch*:

Æsthetically, we may think the women (or many of them) look hideous in full flight; athletically, we may think the contrast in seeing a woman run 100 metres immediately after a man is pathetic, but logically we must now put up with it.

Having suggested that we men have really no logical argument against the inclusion of women's track and field events in the Games, what about the events themselves? The 800 metres has been dropped. That is from sheer panic.¹¹⁵

Although opinions differed as to whether the removal of the women's 800m race from the Olympics was right, it was to be absent from the Games until 1960, ushering in a period when the official limitations on women's physical abilities in

¹¹³ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 210.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 216-17.

¹¹⁵ H. M. Abrahams, 'If Women Will Run', *Sunday Graphic*, 12 August 1928, p. 19.

sport were tightened.¹¹⁶ Women's athletics competitions continued to include 800m and 1000m races, but they lost out to the cachet of the Olympics and so these distance events became less common for women. The Olympics, as it pushed out the self-organised women's sporting events, created a new orthodoxy, according to which, women's bodies should not be put to feats of endurance.

Athletics relied on strength and competitiveness, both qualities that had not traditionally been associated with women. The athletic body was exceptional and being extraordinary, having a body that lay outside the common bounds for a woman's body, meant that women athletes were already changing the expectations governing their sex. As a result, a connection between women athletes and sexually changeable bodies could easily be forged.

'Metamorphosis a Habit with Athletes!': Sport Changing Sex¹¹⁷

1936 was a pivotal year for creating a lasting connection between women's sporting bodies and ambiguously sexed bodies. In popular histories the root of this enduring connection is the Summer Olympic Games in Berlin. The 1936 Olympics, the largest athletic event to date, was an arena in which questions of what constituted a woman athlete came to the fore. Questions of ambiguous sex have become a part of the mythology of the 1936 Olympics. However, as Heggie has argued, the story of gender fraud that has been forged around the Berlin games rewrites events to account for later revelations, overlooking the influence exerted

¹¹⁶ Sylvain Ferez, 'From Women's Exclusion to Gender Institution: A Brief History of the Sexual Categorisation Process within Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29, no. 2 (2012), p. 276.

¹¹⁷ 'Mysteries of Sex Metamorphosis', *London Life*, 29 August 1936, p. 33.

by the reports of Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek's 'sex changes'. Instead, stories of Stella Walsh, Helen Stephens and Dora Ratjen have been employed to illustrate and explain the important role played by the 1936 games in the formulation of 'sex testing' or 'gender verification' in sport.¹¹⁸ In this final section I examine how the fact that Weston and Koubek were both athletes was incorporated into accounts of their 'sex changes'.

The wide reporting of Weston and Koubek's changes of sex in the summer of 1936 coalesced with coverage of the Olympic Games in Berlin to initiate a preoccupation with 'sex testing' that has surrounded the Olympic Games, and women's athletics more generally, ever since. That Weston and Koubek, who had both competed on the international stage as women athletes, had now officially 'changed sex', did not go unnoticed by sports officials or commentators. The potential for women athletes to emerge as male athletes upset the foundations of sex-segregated sport. This challenges the widely received genealogy of sex testing in sport. It also complicates the assertions by some sports theorists that it was homophobia that governed attitudes towards 'masculine' woman athletes.

A number of writers on the history and sociology of sport have pointed to the role of homophobia in governing responses to women in sport. Lenskyj, an historian, has written about the preponderance of masculine-looking women athletes from the 1940s to the 1960s, attributing some of these instances to intersexuality. She states that sports administrators became concerned with biological definitions of femininity but she then extrapolates to argue that sexual

¹¹⁸ Vanessa Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports', *Endeavour*, 34, no. 4 (2010), p. 157.

ambiguity was threatening in part because it raised the spectre of homosexuality.¹¹⁹ There may well have been fears that masculine-seeming women athletes were lesbian, but the possibility of biological sexual ambiguity is obscured when sexuality becomes the focus – the sexual unfixity is an issue in itself and need not be allied to sexuality. Griffin's sociological study, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*, has also conflated masculinity with homosexuality, as has Cahn's *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*.¹²⁰ This tendency to read sex as sexuality has subsequently been applied to debates about sex changeability in the 1930s.¹²¹

I am concerned with how sexual ambiguity might be viewed in terms of sex rather than as a manifestation of sexuality. The tangible fear that officials might not be able to definitively determine the sex of athletes, or that woman athletes might be(come) men, played a significant part in shaping attitudes towards sex testing in sport. Fears of same-sex desire may have factored in this response at various times, but concern about the sex of women athletes also stemmed from instances of 'sex change' in the 1930s.

¹¹⁹ Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 87.

¹²⁰ Pat Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1998), pp. 18-20; Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 175.

¹²¹ Ian Ritchie, 'Sex Tested, Gender Verified: Controlling Female Sexuality in the Age of Containment', *Sport History Review*, 34, no. 1 (2003), pp. 85, 92.

Mark Weston

As detailed in Chapter Two, Mark Weston's was one of the major cases of 'sex change' reported in the 1930s British popular press. That Weston had been a woman athlete, and a relatively prominent one at that, was a significant factor in newspaper coverage. In the treatment of Weston as an athlete, we see many of the tropes of athletic women already discussed. Coverage of his 'sex change' drew heavily on his status as a former 'woman athlete.'

Weston had appeared occasionally in the press during the 1920s and early 1930s. Featuring in round ups of sporting gossip, someone who might do well, but who was not guaranteed to be the national champion:

Miss Mary Weston, the Devonshire wonder, is strongly fancied for all three field events since she won them so easily three weeks ago, but Miss Birchenough, Miss L. Fawcett and Miss Willis will take some beating.¹²²

The tone of sports coverage of Weston had been predominantly positive:

I should say that Miss Weston is unquestionably the strongest of the women athletes in the field events, and it is quite on the cards that she will win the javelin, discus and shot putt for the club. [...] Miss Weston, who lives in the West, found that she could only spare one day this year to compete and so forwent her almost certain victories in those events in the W.A.A.A. individual championships at Stamford Bridge last week in order to help her club.¹²³

Weston was portrayed as a competent athlete with team spirit, whose retirement from sport in 1932 merited some coverage:

¹²² 'Latest Sporting Gossip', *Daily Mirror*, 9 July 1929, p. 25.

¹²³ P. J. Moss, 'What I Think', *Daily Mirror*, 15 July 1931, p. 22.

Miss Mary Weston, who has held the British records for shot putting, javelin throwing, and throwing the discus, has decided to retire from competitive events and to take a position as physical training instructress.¹²⁴

Weston's career is remembered here as one of national achievement in a range of disciplines. Prior to the revelation in May 1936 of his change of sex, readers of the sport pages may have been familiar with Weston's name, but mostly due to a few lines concerning the larger sporting events for women. Weston was a leading figure in one branch of women's sport, but was certainly not a national celebrity.

Weston's change of sex was first reported in the local *Western Evening Herald*, which ran two articles on the same day and made a great deal of the significance of Weston having been an athlete. The headlines of the first of the two articles initially took the angle of the resulting gender confusion from the perspective of Weston's sister, but Weston was introduced and contextualised as a 'FAMOUS ATHLETE', the legitimacy of whose championships was now in question.¹²⁵ The story was therefore set up as interesting through its association with celebrity and the new conundrums that arose from changes of sex. Weston was quoted as saying: "I won them all in good faith, believing at the time that I was a woman," "Of course I am quite willing to give up the records."¹²⁶ This raised the question of what a woman athlete was – did it take more than just believing oneself to be a woman? Weston was also shown to have been instrumental in local athletics, having founded the South Devon Women's Athletic Club. It was ultimately age, not sex, which influenced Weston's sporting pursuits: 'He is not taking an

¹²⁴ [Untitled], *Manchester Guardian*, 1 March 1932, p. 4.

¹²⁵ 'Her Sister Has Become Her Brother!', *Western Evening Herald*, 28 May 1936, p. 5.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

active part in sport in the future, although “I was always fond of football, but I think I am now too old.”¹²⁷

The headline of the second article in the same issue focused more on the athletic angle: ‘Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man.’¹²⁸ Although there was this focus on Weston’s athletic past, it worked more to establish him as a celebrity. The opening sentence was at pains to stress his fame (and therefore newsworthiness): ‘A well-known British athlete who gained international honours as a woman has, as the result of two operations, changed her sex and become a man.’¹²⁹ The accompanying photo showed Weston as rather Byronesque, and cast doubt on Weston’s femininity with its caption ‘A photograph taken as Miss Mary Weston.’¹³⁰ The use of ‘as’ can denote playing a role, that Weston was a simulacrum of a woman. The text, however, stressed the normality of Weston as a woman:

For 30 years Miss Mary Edith Louise Weston, of Oreston, near Plymouth, has lived the normal life of a woman, and in addition won the British women’s championship for putting the shot and throwing the javelin. Now “she” is Mr. Mark Weston, and has discarded skirts, blouse, and silk stockings for trousers, shirt, and collar and tie.¹³¹

This description of a star before and after made for a dramatic narrative, but also rendered women’s sport rather mundane – something that could be part of ‘the normal life of a woman’. There was no explicit suggestion that putting the shot or throwing the javelin were masculine per se. The femaleness of Weston was

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 7.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

emphasised in the string of gendered middle names and the distinction of the *women's* championship titles.

The following day the national papers took up Weston's story. What is striking about much of this coverage, across popular newspapers of various hues, is how the text did not deal explicitly with any possible connection between the two facts that were repeated from article to article – that Weston had been a woman athlete, and that his sex had changed. There was no commentary on what Weston's change of sex might say about women athletes more generally, despite the contested nature of woman athletes having long been a keen topic for discussion.



Christened . . .

. . . Mary Edith Louise Weston and brought up as a girl, the person seen here has at thirty years of age undergone a series of operations in Charing Cross Hospital and become Mark Weston, a man.

Miss Weston, having set up as a masseuse in Plymouth ten years ago, became an athlete and represented Britain in the international games a few months ago. He will now become a massener.

Figure 4.3: "She" Now a Man', *Daily Mirror*, 29 May 1936, p. 6.

The *Daily Herald's* opening line described Weston as an athlete – ‘Brought up as a girl, Mary Weston, the 30-year-old British athletic champion is now Mr. Mark Weston’ – but the rest of the article made no mention of this.¹³² Neither the *Daily Express* nor the *Daily Mirror's* headlines mentioned Weston's sporting activities.¹³³ The *Daily Mail* minimised the significance of Weston's change of sex by placing it in the context of other similar cases: ‘The case of the Woman Athlete who has become a Man after two special operations at Charing Cross Hospital is not the first of its type dealt with at the institution.’¹³⁴ It was unclear from this opening whether it was women athletes who were changing sex or women more generally, perhaps a deliberate ambiguity on the part of the journalist. The *Daily Sketch's* article echoed the *Western Evening Herald* in stressing the normality of Mary Weston's life: ‘Mark Weston, aged 30, of Oreston, near Plymouth, who is well known as Mary Weston, an international athlete, has lived until now the normal life of a woman.’¹³⁵ The interest was partly in the contradictions – ‘Mark Weston is well-known as Mary Weston’, ‘woman has become man’ and so on. This contradiction extended to the idea of the woman athlete – putting that composite under question and implying it was also contradictory.

While the debates around women athletes, sex and masculinity were not tackled in these initial articles, each was accompanied by a photo of Weston in sportswear throwing a javelin or shot putt. It makes sense that at short notice it would be these older photos of Weston on file, but the overall effect was to

¹³² ‘Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew’, *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1936, p. 1.

¹³³ ‘Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark’, *Daily Express*, 29 May 1936, p. 19; ‘“She” Now a Man’, *Daily Mirror*, 29 May 1936, p. 6.

¹³⁴ ‘Doctors and Sex Changes’, *Daily Mail*, 29 May 1936, p. 6.

¹³⁵ ‘Woman Who Has Become a Man’, *Daily Sketch*, 29 May 1936, p. 3.

inscribe the body of the woman athlete as a man. The combination of photos of Weston in action on the athletics field with the headlines “‘She’ Now a Man’, ‘Woman Who Has Become a Man’, or ‘Woman Turns Into Man’ visually communicated a link between Weston as a woman athlete and becoming a man.¹³⁶

The Sunday papers had more time to prepare their approach to the story and subsequently highlighted the connections between female athleticism and becoming a man. As well as the banner headline emphasising Weston’s status as an athlete – “‘GIRL’ ATHLETE’S NEW LIFE AFTER CHANGE OF SEX’ – the first line of the *News of the World*’s article reiterated the idea: ‘This is the amazing story of a well-known “woman” athlete, winner of international honours, who after 30 years as a woman has now become a man.’¹³⁷ This stress on Weston having been an athlete continued in the next paragraph: ‘The athlete whose sex has changed in this extraordinary fashion is Mary Edith Louise Watson, of Oreston near Plymouth, who in 1924 won the British women’s championship for throwing the javelin.’¹³⁸ Until this point in the article, Weston had not been mentioned by name – the fact of his being an athlete was perhaps more noteworthy than any of his other attributes as an individual.

The *News of the World* worked hard to associate Weston’s athletic status with sexual abnormality:

HER FIRST DOUBTS

“She” was a born athlete. When in “her” teens she joined the Plymouth Women’s Athletic Club, and after a couple of months’ training it was

¹³⁶ “‘She’ Now a Man’, *Daily Mirror*, 29 May 1936, p. 6; ‘Woman Who Has Become a Man’, *Daily Sketch*, 29 May 1936, p. 3; ‘Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark’, *Daily Express*, 29 May 1936, p. 19.

¹³⁷ “‘Gir!’ Athlete’s New Life after Change of Sex’, *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

discovered “she” could put the shot exceedingly well. “Her” long and notable career in women’s athletic championships followed. “It was in 1928, when competing in the world games at Prague, that I began to have doubts about my sex,” Mr. Weston continued.¹³⁹

The date falsely attributed to the world games may have been an example of slack fact-checking at the *News of the World*, but it also pointed to the obscurity of the women’s world games – the dates were not necessarily known by the general public. In Weston’s new status as a man, the reader was told ‘he does not intend to enter seriously into athletic competitions.’ This did not receive any further comment, but could have been pointing to the different standard between the men’s and women’s competitions. Being a woman champion was one thing, but it did not equip one to compete against the top men.

The *People* made no mention of Weston’s past as an athlete or of sport in general, however there was a suggestion that Weston’s body was exceptional: ‘Since 1928 I have been aware of a certain strangeness in being a woman. I have shaved and then used powder like other girls.’¹⁴⁰ Although no mention was made of Weston as an athlete at this time, those who had read of the story earlier in the week would have been aware of this and so may have extrapolated that, whilst competing as a ‘woman athlete,’ he did not feel himself to be entirely a woman; a woman athlete was not what she appeared to be.

The *Sunday Dispatch* article played on Weston’s medals as an element of the confusion thrown up by his change of status:

MAY RETURN THE MEDALS SHE WON IN ATHLETIC CONTESTS

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Man-Woman Finds New Life “Very Startling”’, *People*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

Mr. Mark Weston – until a few days ago Miss Edith Marie Louise [sic] Weston, a champion British woman athlete – is trying to solve two of the strangest problems ever faced by a man or woman. Should he retain the medals he won in women’s British and International championship contests? Can he continue his former relationships with his men and women friends as though nothing has happened?¹⁴¹

The question, implicit or explicit, was this: was Weston a woman when he won the women’s athletic contests? And subsequently, how could one tell if a woman athlete were a woman? Might she change into a man? Might she be a man?

That Weston’s sport had been the throwing events was not without significance. As previously discussed, women’s athletics came in for particular criticism, but within that subgroup, shot putting was especially ill-received. An opinion piece in the *Daily Mirror* from 1934 stated: ‘a woman who prides herself on being able to throw the hammer so many yards and swaggers across the field like a man, is, to my mind [...] deplorable.’¹⁴² Weston was linked to a sport that already had an especially masculine image. This association of ideas may have helped cement a connection in the public consciousness between these events and a questionably sexed body.

¹⁴¹ ‘Marriage: By Man Who Was a Woman’, *Sunday Dispatch*, 31 May 1936, p. 7.

¹⁴² Soutar, ‘Amazons of 1934 – A Mere Man’s View’, *Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1934, p. 10.

Zdenek Koubek

Zdenek Koubek was a Czech athlete whose 'sex change' was also reported in the British press in 1936.¹⁴³ Some newspapers linked Weston's and Koubek's stories from the start:

It will be recalled that a few months ago a well-known Czecho-Slovakian "woman" athlete underwent a series of operations to change her sex. Eventually "she" assumed the name of Mr. Kdenek Konbek [sic]. As a woman, this athlete competed in the women's World Games at the White City in 1934, when she set the world's record for the 800 metres race.¹⁴⁴

The article then went on to list other instances of sex change, but these received less prominence than Koubek, with his connection of also having been a woman athlete. The *Daily Herald* mentioned Koubek's change of sex on the day it first covered Weston's story.¹⁴⁵ Koubek's change of sex was reported in this article with no explicit reference or connection made to Weston's, but the juxtaposition of these two 'girl-athletes' raised a question mark over the sex and gender identity of women athletes.

¹⁴³ Spellings vary, I am using 'Koubek' throughout for consistency, except where I am quoting directly.

¹⁴⁴ "'Girl' Athlete's New Life after Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 31 May 1936, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ 'Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew', *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1936, p. 1.



Miss Z. Koubkova, Czechoslovakia, setting up a world's record in the 800 metres. Four world's records were broken in all.

Figure 4.4: 'Girls Who Set Up New Records at World Games', *Daily Mirror*, 13 August 1934, p. 24.

Koubek, reflecting the international nature of interwar sport, had received press coverage in the British press as an athlete. Known then as Koubková, Koubek had won the 800m race at the 1934 Women's World Games in London. Being an athlete, and in some ways Koubek was more successful than Weston, became key to the way Koubek's change of sex was discussed in the press. This was reinforced by the constant references to Mark Weston when discussing Koubek. Koubek's specialism, the 800m, was the distance that had been banned from the Olympics after 1928, so there was the added layer to the story that Koubek had been performing in a discipline that had been deemed unfit for women by the most powerful organisation in sport. The athletic disciplines of both Weston and Koubek, shot putting and the 800m, were already seen as incompatible with feminine appearance or stamina, emphasising the two athletes' position as outside the bounds of femininity.

The coverage of Polish athlete Sofia Smetkovna's change of sex in April 1937 was made into a story by the press through connecting it to the cases of Koubek and Weston.¹⁴⁶ More than eight months after the coverage of Weston and Koubek's sex changes, journalists referred back to those cases, returning them to the popular consciousness and reiterating the association between women athletes and changes of sex. The *Daily Mail*, *News Chronicle* and *News of the World* each used their headlines to make a point of Smetkovna having been a woman athlete. The *Daily Mail* and the *News Chronicle* both declared: 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', while the *News of the World* went further in stressing the incidence of sex change amongst former women athletes with its headline: 'Change of Sex. Another Young Woman Athlete to Become a Man'.¹⁴⁷ The idea of 'another' linked changes of sex in athletes as part of a growing trend. This sense that Smetkovna, Weston and Koubek's cases shared recognisable features, that this was 'another' in a sequence of cases, was also employed in the *News Chronicle* article, which stated: 'Another distinguished woman athlete, Sofia Smetkovna (23), woman javelin-throwing champion of Poland, is to undergo an operation to change her sex.'¹⁴⁸

Smetkovna's change of sex was understood in relation to Weston and Koubek's, who figured as part of the articles in the *Daily Mirror*, *News Chronicle* and *News of the World*.¹⁴⁹ The *Daily Mail* piece, which did not mention Smetkovna's

¹⁴⁶ The British press reports did not state what name Smetkovna subsequently went under as a man, but the Australian press gave the male name Witold Smetek, 'Woman-Man Wants to Be Woman Again', *Mirror*, 6 May 1939, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *Daily Mail*, 15 April 1937, p. 6; 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *News Chronicle*, 15 April 1937, p. 3; 'Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 18 April 1937, p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *News Chronicle*, 15 April 1937, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ 'This Woman Will Be a Man Next Week', *Daily Mirror*, 15 April 1937, p. 23; 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *News Chronicle*, 15 April 1937, p. 3; 'Change of Sex', *News of the World*, 18 April 1937, p. 9.

antecedents Weston and Koubek, still implied a connection between the desire to change sex and being an athlete. Smetkovna was quoted as saying:

I have made up my mind to undergo an operation to change sex. I long ago became a great enthusiast for football, and later on went in for other strenuous sports, and finally I became the champion javelin-thrower of Poland.¹⁵⁰

The decision to seek an operation to change sex was combined with the description of a progressive immersion in sports, suggesting that sex change and sport were related and that the move from an enthusiasm for football to being a top-flight athlete mirrored the realisation that a sex change operation was needed. Each of these articles about Smetkovna drew an association between being a successful woman athlete and changing sex. Strikingly, Smetkovna was given a fair amount of agency in seeking out a sex change operation; there was no reference to any rationale for Smetkovna wanting an operation, just a narrative of a choice supported by experience as an athlete. These articles about Smetkovna suggest that by 1937 the idea of a sex change operation and the propensity of former women athletes to undergo them were established. Although the newspaper articles about Weston, Koubek and Smetkovna did not necessarily spell out any correlation between women athletes and sex changes, the frequency with which stories appeared meant that the possibility of women becoming men would have been associated with women's athletics.

¹⁵⁰ 'Woman Athlete to Change Sex', *Daily Mail*, 15 April, 1937, p. 6.

Sex Testing and the 1936 Berlin Olympics

Newspaper coverage of Weston and Koubek's sex changes was concurrent with the 1936 summer Olympic Games in Berlin. The British popular press reported that Olympic Officials had called for sex testing for women athletes at future Games.¹⁵¹ These reports were in close proximity to each other, and played off each other, leading to further connections being made, implicitly or explicitly, between sex change, sport and the difficulty of policing the blurry boundaries of sex differences. 'Sex testing', or 'gender verification' was not officially introduced to the Olympic Games until 1968, but in the summer of 1936 the press reported a proposal that all women competitors should be subject to medical testing. So why was sex testing not introduced after the 1936 games? And why, when such a strong link was drawn between the widely publicised sex changes of Weston and Koubek, has their influence on the decision to police the sex of women athletes been so widely ignored?

Heggie's 2010 article, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sport; Reinventing, Reimagining and Reconstructing Histories', is one of the few works to recognise the significance of Koubek and Weston to the history of sex testing in sport.¹⁵² Heggie has debunked the mythology that has developed around the 1936 Olympics and questions of 'gender fraud'.¹⁵³ The conclusion to Heggie's article calls for Weston to be written in to histories of sex testing in sport and for the debates around his

¹⁵¹ See for example: 'Men-Women Problem for Sport Chiefs', *Daily Herald*, 30 May 1936, p. 3; 'Women Who Change Sex', *Daily Sketch*, 30 May 1936, p. 8; 'Changed Sex Sequel', *Daily Express*, 1 August 1936, p. 9; 'Women Athletes Tackle That "Man-Woman" Problem', *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1936, p. 7.

¹⁵² Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports', p. 158.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 157.

status as an athlete to be appreciated in the context of the scientific and popular interest in sexual differentiation and hormones in the 1930s.¹⁵⁴ This is my project and in elaborating on Heggie's work I am able to analyse many more newspaper and magazine accounts that discussed how Weston and Koubek had competed in women's athletics and to point to the official concern that was generated. Beyond the newspaper stories about the International Olympic Committee holding urgent meetings to clarify their position on 'man-woman athletes', I have found no archival traces of these meetings. There may be popular vestiges of the anxieties over sex at the 1936 Olympics but not official ones. My engagement with Heggie sets out the myths surrounding the Berlin Olympics and sex testing and then shows that the doubts raised by Weston and Koubek's changes of sex were extended to make the woman athlete a figure of general suspicion occupying a fraught and contradictory position. The wide reach of the popular press meant that these ideas were being consumed by a massive audience.

The 1936 Olympics holds an especially mythologised position in the history of sport. It was controversial before it began, with various countries, including the USA, debating whether they ought to boycott the games, since Hitler was arguably using them as a propaganda tool.¹⁵⁵ These were highly contested games, ideologically as well as athletically, and part of their legacy has been stories of Dora Ratjen, the German high-jumper who was supposedly a man masquerading as a woman, and Stella Walsh, the Polish sprinter who would later prove to have had

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 163.

¹⁵⁵ Guy Walters, *Berlin Games: How Hitler Stole the Olympic Dream* (London: John Murray, 2006), p. 26.

“ambiguous” sexual features’.¹⁵⁶ As Heggie has shown, Ratjen’s was not a case of deliberate sex fraud and was not reported to the British public until 1957, so did not influence the debate around sex change and athletics in the 1930s.¹⁵⁷ An autopsy following Walsh’s death in 1980 found her to be intersex. Walsh, who had been a champion sprinter, first for Poland and then for the USA, had been subject to questions surrounding her sex in the 1930s, but these arose from the climate of suspicion surrounding women athletes, not from knowledge of Walsh’s sexual anatomy. Anxiety about policing sex at the Olympics has not just been retrospectively ascribed to the 1936 Olympics in the light of information about Ratjen and Walsh, there were concerns at the time, arising from a different source: Koubek and Weston’s sex changes.

Just as the juxtaposition of photos of Weston as an athlete created new meaning alongside copy about the change of sex, the timing of the news stories concerning Weston, Koubek and the call for sex testing at the Olympic Games led to them being grouped together, and/ or appearing on adjacent pages of the same newspaper. This created a momentum for each story and a sense of a wider phenomenon than a single instance could generate. An article in *London Life* from August 1936 pondered ‘Mysteries of Sex Metamorphosis’ in light of the coverage of Weston and Koubek and proclaimed: ‘Metamorphosis a Habit with Athletes!’ and ‘Girl Athletes Suspect.’¹⁵⁸ That Koubek and Weston had been women athletes was extrapolated upon to cast doubts over women athletes more generally.

¹⁵⁶ Heggie, ‘Testing Sex and Gender in Sports’, p. 158.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 163; ‘High Jump She Is a He’, *Daily Mirror*, 24 July 1957, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Mysteries of Sex Metamorphosis’, *London Life*, 29 August 1936, p. 33.

The call for medical examinations for women athletes was widely reported in August 1936. Some articles made a direct link between athletes who had changed sex and the need for tests:

An American proposal that all the women competitors at the Olympic Games should be medically examined in view of the Koubek case, was put forward at today's meeting of the Olympic Games Committee.¹⁵⁹

The precedent of a woman athlete having become a man meant that a woman athlete could not be accepted as such simply by presenting herself as a woman; expert testimony was needed to determine what qualified as a woman's body. As well as the International Olympic Committee, the International Amateur Athletic Federation and the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale were also reported to be calling for medical testing for women athletes, citing the problem of 'man-woman athletes.'¹⁶⁰ The need for testing was portrayed as a pressing one:

Some of the women in Berlin last week looked more like men and the fact that there have already been two cases of women athletes being changed by a series of operations, into men, is held to make such a discussion very necessary.¹⁶¹

Koubek and Weston's widely reported changes of sex had foregrounded the potential instability or illegibility of bodies – they could not be assumed to permanently remain in demarcated categories such as 'woman'. That both men had been women athletes helped make the figure of the woman athlete even more suspect, and in need of surveillance.

¹⁵⁹ 'Changed Sex Sequel', *Daily Express*, 1 August 1936, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ 'Women Athletes Tackle That "Man-Woman" Problem', *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1936, p. 7; 'Man-Woman Athletes Test Decision', *Daily Mirror*, 11 August 1936, p. 2; 'Cloud over Olympic Games', *News Chronicle*, 11 August 1936, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ 'Women Athletes Tackle That "Man-Woman" Problem', *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1936, p. 7.

Avery Brundage, the President of the American Olympic Committee at the time of the Berlin Olympics, who went on to become President of the International Olympic Committee in 1952, was seemingly the instigator of the move to introduce sex testing in 1936. The US news magazine, *Time*, reported in August 1936 that:

Next day International Olympic Committeeman Brundage, at his first Committee meeting, roundly recommended that all women athletes entered in the Olympics be subjected to a thorough physical examination to make sure that they were really 100% female. Reason: two athletes who recently competed in European track events as women were later transformed into men by sex operations.¹⁶²

The article quoted Brundage claiming he wanted women competitors to be '100% female.'¹⁶³ Interestingly, given that it was Weston's sport, Brundage reserved particular distaste for women shot-putters.¹⁶⁴ In the international arena of the Olympics, individual European instances of sex change gathered import on both sides of the Atlantic. International sporting competitions were predicated on 'fair play', a central tenet of which was that men's and women's bodies were fundamentally different, and so should be strictly segregated for competition. The idea that some women were not entirely women, or that a 'sex operation' could change a person's status from being a woman to being a man, shook the foundations of international sporting competition. Yet there is little record of these 1930s attempts to instigate sex testing.

¹⁶² 'Olympic Games', *Time*, 10 August 1936, p. 42.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁴ Allen Guttman, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 194.

The personal papers of Avery Brundage contain no reference to his alleged desire to instigate medical examinations of women athletes in 1936.¹⁶⁵ Nor does the official report of the 1936 Olympics make any mention of medical examination for women athletes. Yet those reporting the Berlin Olympics were conscious of the prospect of sex testing for women competitors. In 1938 Paul Gallico, surveying his time as a US sports journalist, recalled with laughter the difficulties surrounding defining sex that had become part of women's sport. His anecdote related to the US sprinters Helen Stephens and Stella Walsh, two of the names associated with ambiguous sex in the subsequent mythology that has built up around the Berlin games. Gallico wrote:

the mores and morals of the times have made possible deliciously frank and biological discussions in the columns of the newspapers as to whether this or that famous woman athlete should be addressed as "Miss," "Mrs.," "Mr.," or "It." Miss Helen Stephens, a big rangy schoolgirl from Mississippi, out-galloped all the best women sprinters of the world at the late Olympic Games in Berlin, including Poland's favourite, Stella Walsh. The Poles, with that sterling if peculiar sportsmanship for which Europe is famous, immediately accused Miss Stephens of being Mr. Stephens. There had been two cases, one in Czechoslovakia and one in England, where a masculine lady had, with the aid of a surgeon, succeeded in transforming herself into a not too feminine gentleman. The Poles thought they had spotted number three.¹⁶⁶

Gallico described an atmosphere in which women could be masculine and men feminine, and a medical operation could bridge the gap between the two. This familiarity with the idea of women athletes undergoing surgery to become men was also seen in the remarks of a French journalist. Roger Mahler of the *Petit Parisien* speculated on 4 August 1936 as to whether the US sprinter Helen Stephens 'had yet

¹⁶⁵ Personal correspondence with the archivists at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, January 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Gallico, *Farewell to Sport* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1988 [1938]), pp. 233-34.

agreed to the operation that would make her a man, as “this is the fashion right now.”¹⁶⁷ There was a sense that (male) commentators believed that certain women athletes were especially masculine and could therefore be changed into men, rendering their participation in women’s sports events unfair.

The press coverage of the women’s events at the 1936 Olympics focussed on the appearance and femininity of the athletes, in part to castigate those women athletes who did not live up to this ideal. A piece by Paul Bewsher in the *Daily Mail* entitled ‘Lipstick Atlantas in Olympic Games’ exemplified this, describing:

Beautiful women runners with delicate make-up on their faces and their hair exquisitely curled and waved provided a picturesque and feminine interlude in the stern and grimly masculine ardours of the Olympic Games to-day.¹⁶⁸

This tone was similar to earlier approval or condemnation meted out to women athletes according to how well they negotiated being a woman participating in a stereotypically masculine pursuit, but it was also informed by the possibility that women athletes might now feasibly be proven to be imposters. Bewsher contrasted the femininity of the pretty Canadian and US sprinters with the most successful of their number, Helen Stephens:

Incidentally, Miss Stephens, although an American, is not one of the exquisite beauty queens, being rather masculine in appearance. This swiftest woman in the world is more than 6ft. tall and rather lean, and runs with an amazing quick, long stride. She finished about 10 yards ahead of the next competitor in both heats she ran to-day.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Roger Mahler quoted in William Murray, ‘France: Liberty, Equality, and the Pursuit of Fraternity’, in Arnd Krüger and William Murray (eds.), *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 102.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Lipstick Atlantas in Olympic Games’, *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1936, p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

There is nothing 'incidental' in the way in which Stephens's success was linked to her 'masculine' body type. The phenomenal success of Stephens, whose sexual status was being questioned by various commentators, was attributed to her masculinity, but in the light of the Koubek and Weston cases, such correlations implicitly referred to the spectre of sex change that now hung over women athletes.

Conclusion

Women's sport was not just peripheral to the story of sex change in 1930s Britain, but helped shape new ideas of what constituted sex and gender, and instituted new concerns over how to control them; similarly, sex change helped shape women's sport. Various writers on sex testing have emphasised the role of homophobia in prompting sex testing and in designating some women 'too masculine'.¹⁷⁰ It can be difficult to distinguish sexuality from sex and/ or gender, and I agree that there is a degree to which divergent sex or gender is incorporated into divergent sexualities, but I want to argue that homophobia does not adequately explain the suspicion directed at 'masculine' women athletes from the 1930s onward. An important aspect of the anxiety around ascertaining whether women athletes were sufficiently feminine was not just predicated on gender or sexuality, but on the widely publicised idea that a person's sex could change and be changed.

¹⁷⁰ See for example: Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*, p. 175; Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality*, p. 87; Ritchie, 'Sex Tested, Gender Verified: Controlling Female Sexuality in the Age of Containment', p. 92; Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*, p. 79.

The idea of the sporting body provides a productive way of thinking about anxieties and uncertainties around the sexed body in 1930s Britain. Focussing on sport entails looking at the body as a site of historical research that is not static but dynamic. Sport is a valuable way of thinking about the body because it is concerned with the actions, capacity and limits of the body. What this chapter has shown is that the practice of sport altered understandings of what it was that distinguished men's bodies from women's. If muscles were taken to be a male characteristic, then women could develop their bodies to become more male, threatening ideas of sex as a binary opposition between male and female. In developing muscles, in eradicating differences between the sexes, sport changed perceptions of sex and gender, and changed how bodies expressed sex and gender, and how they were interpreted. If competitiveness were a masculine trait, by participating in competitive sports, women were also becoming more psychologically masculine. Moreover, technology associated with sports, especially with motor sports, was eliminating differences between the sexes. Sports fashions too meant that women were dressed in more unisex styles, further reducing the visual signifiers of sex difference.

Two of the most publicised cases of sex change were both in men who had been women athletes, Mark Weston and Zdenek Koubek. This chapter has unpicked the recurring connections between sport and unconventional gender presentations in the 1930s. As well as those athletes whose sex was officially changed, sport provided a means for people designated female at birth to cultivate masculine bodies and personas. Joe Carstairs and Violette Morris could be understood as proto-trans characters who actively used sport as a facet of their masculinity. Sport

is an important area for considering not just sexuality – a good deal of work has been done on sexuality and sport – but for thinking about the sexed body in ways that grant agency to those developing their own bodies through sports practice. As an arena in which people ‘work out’ sport offers the historian new perspectives for working out how it was possible to develop gendered identities through the body.

Conclusion

Quite a number of people, who are psychologically abnormal, in that they are attracted to their own sex instead of to the opposite sex, read such sensational articles [reported in the newspapers as “Boy Changes into Girl,” “Woman Changes Her Sex,” “Sisters may become Fathers,” and so on] and apply to surgeons to change their sex for them. From what they have read, they firmly believe that such a change is possible, and it is often difficult to convince them that they are mistaken.¹

In *Everyday Sex Problems* (1948) sexologist and gynaecologist Norman Haire lamented the influence of press stories proclaiming changes of sex.² Such articles, he suggested, had appeared often enough – they were an ‘everyday problem’ – and were sufficiently persuasive that they prompted readers who wished to change sex to implore doctors and surgeons for assistance. Haire’s frustration takes us to the heart of the discussion in this thesis: that press stories of sex change were manifold and additionally that they were part of a number of discourses emerging around sex change in the 1930s. In looking at sport and the medical, alongside press stories, this thesis has made the case that in 1930s Britain, sex was an unstable category, the sexed body was portrayed as changeable and officiating as to who was male or female was a fraught task.

This thesis is concerned with the popular and press stories as a way to access what was making up popular discourse about sex changeability at that time. In exploring 1930s popular culture further – by examining magazines, fiction and films – I discovered that sport, hormone research and medicine were key areas contending with ideas of sex changeability. This thesis therefore builds on Oram’s argument that sex change emerged

¹ Norman Haire, *Everyday Sex Problems* (London: Frederick Muller, 1948), p. 18.

² Norman Haire (1892-1952) was one of the leading sexologists in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s. He was involved with organisations including the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology and the World League for Sexual Reform, Frank M. C. Forster, ‘Haire, Norman (1892–1952)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/haire-norman-10390/text18409>, accessed 15 December 2013.

as a concept in Britain in the 1930s by situating press stories alongside other emergent or existing discourses on sex change.³ What this research reveals is that people in fields such as sport, medicine, feminist debate and popular cultural production found different meanings and significance in sex changeability, and these different realms informed each other. For example, the Medical Research Council's Sex Hormone Committee knew that Broster's research was being referenced in the popular press and sports officials were aware of Weston and Koubek's changes of sex on account of newspaper features. This thesis shows that ideas of sex changeability, promulgated by the popular press, found their way into different spheres of everyday life in 1930s Britain with a variety of results.

In this thesis I have played close attention to sex hormone research and to the medical treatment of sex ambiguity to demonstrate how they informed the press stories and how they shaped understandings of sex changeability. Lennox Broster, a surgeon at London's Charing Cross Hospital, was a key figure in this intersection of popular and medical ideas of changing sex. *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (1938), which he co-authored and edited, is an important text in the history of the sexed body in Britain. The book's sheer number of case studies and its multi-disciplinary approach, combining surgical and psychological appraisals, offers an insight into how male and female, masculine and feminine were being assessed. As well as being a surgeon, Broster was concerned with endocrinology. Hormones were treated as a facet of scientific modernity and were central to how sex was conceptualised and how sex changeability was

³ Alison Oram, "'Farewell to Frocks' - 'Sex Change'" in *Interwar Britain: Newspaper Stories, Medical Technology and Modernity* in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds.), *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 102.

portrayed. Endocrinology has not often found its way into queer histories, but it prompted new notions of what constituted sex: a less rigid definition that allowed for more changeability. Medico-scientific formulations of sex form an instructive, but understudied, aspect of queer history. If the sexed body is understood to be, in Stryker's words, a 'culturally intelligible construct', then medico-scientific research offers a valuable insight into how bodies were rendered legible, through what mechanisms, and with what material effects.⁴

I have been able to show the reach of ideas of sex change in popular culture. By studying accounts of sex changeability across different types of newspapers – national and local, daily and weekly – I have found that stories were appearing multiple times across different formats, so the public would have had diverse opportunities to encounter these articles. The ready availability of the newspaper stories meant that their depiction of the sexed body as a site of unfixity found its way into the realm of popular perception. I have brought together various, seemingly incongruent, cultural artefacts, such as the magazines *London Life* and *Urania* and the novel *Christopher Strong*, to demonstrate how ideas of what constituted male and female, and notions of sex changeability, were being developed across a range of cultural registers. Questions of sex changeability found their way into many diverse areas of British social and cultural life in the 1930s. This study has shown that sex change discourse was by no means a marginal interest in the 1930s, but instead was a preoccupation.

Through my newspaper research it became clear that the female sporting body was a site of contention because it challenged sex distinctions and fixity. Sport generally

⁴ Susan Stryker, '(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies' in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 12.

demands sex regulation and it has corporal effects, so it is an arena in which questions concerning sex differentiation and the stability of those sex differences are particularly germane. The development of sport for women in the 1920s and 1930s seemed to presage a decline in the differences of capability of female bodies compared to male ones. My engagement with the 1936 Olympic Games demonstrates how anxieties about sex differentiation could manifest themselves, with officials uncertain as to how to distinguish female bodies and aspersions being cast against competitors in the women's events. With this in mind, this thesis has argued for the pertinence of looking at debates around the sporting body as they emerged alongside scientific developments in locating sex in the body. I have argued that there was a reliance on anachronistic notions of the suitability of sport for women, as seen in the *Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality*, in which sporting interest or participation was held as a marker of sex and gender, predominantly of maleness and masculinity.

Overall, this thesis has demonstrated the importance and the benefits for queer history of thinking about the sexed body, and not just sexuality, as unstable and open to reinterpretation. My turn, in this thesis, to thinking about sex as much as sexuality, opens new possibilities for studying the sexual past. In the 1930s the sexed body was not seen to be stable; indeed the case studies I have investigated show that people need not have understood their own sex to be fixed. Some individuals had their sex officially changed, some were perceived to be neither wholly male nor female, and some sought to have their sex changed. The wealth of sex change stories with which I have engaged, points to the importance and diversity of ideas of sex changeability and ambiguity in Britain during this period.

Coming to terms with the prevalence of sex change discourse allows more nuanced historical understandings of sex, gender and sexuality in the early twentieth century. By heeding Fausto-Sterling's argument that sex has been socially and politically constructed, historians can study the sexed body as an entity that has been understood and experienced in myriad ways. This thesis points to the importance for queer history to trouble the fixity of the sexed body and interrogate what it meant to have a sex in 1930s Britain. I suggest that a person's sex need not be understood as static and cannot be taken for granted.

The main intervention of this thesis is to consider how significant and wide-reaching was the idea that sex was changeable in 1930s Britain. I have not sought to produce an intersex or trans* history, although my research does engage with these fields. I have benefitted from not pursuing an etiological project: I am not trying to trace a modern category into the past. This thesis is testimony to the value of ambiguity and unknowability. The understandings of sex change in 1930s Britain do not map onto current understandings and they require the researcher to think about sex and gender in different ways. Medico-scientific concepts of sex were changing how bodies were understood to be sexed, and women's cultivation of their own physiques through sport, were challenging the scope of what the category of 'woman' could incorporate. These changes and ambiguities require a historical practice that is open to pursuing lines of enquiry that may seem at times tenuous. Adrenal research and women's sport might not initially appear to be obvious sites for exploring sex change, but I show how they were interrelated.

Doan calls for 'a queer critical history that seeks to understand the multiple, contradictory, and overlapping configurations of the sexual that are unmappable within

the epistemological apparatus of modern sexuality.⁵ My work endeavours to realise this vision. The ready and positive acceptance of sex change in 1930s Britain only makes sense if we appreciate that sex and gender were configured differently at that time. Mine is a queer critical history that seeks not only to understand sex as subject to different and variable epistemologies, but to challenge the prominence of sexuality. I intend this to be a critical project that extends the focus of queer history to understand ideas of the sexed body as 'multiple, contradictory, and overlapping'.

⁵ Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 198.

Appendix

Press stories in the British local and popular press

Evan Burt: Thirty-seven mentions over twelve days			
'Woman-Man' to Be Bridegroom	<i>Bristol Times and Mirror</i>	24 March 1930	7
'Girl' Who Is a Man	<i>Daily Chronicle</i>	24 March 1930	9
Amazing Mystery of a Man-Woman	<i>Daily Express</i>	24 March 1930	1
Man-Woman Mystery	<i>Daily Express</i>	24 March 1930	2
Girl Becomes a Man	<i>Daily Herald</i>	24 March 1930	13
"Woman" Said to Be a "Man"	<i>Daily Mail</i>	24 March 1930	9
"Man-Woman" Stories	<i>Daily Mail</i>	24 March 1930	15
Man-Woman to Marry	<i>Daily News</i>	24 March 1930	7
"Woman" Becomes Man	<i>Dundee Courier and Advertiser</i>	24 March 1930	4
Mystery of the Man-Woman	<i>Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald</i>	24 March 1930	1
"Woman" Said to Be a "Man"	<i>Gloucester Citizen</i>	24 March 1930	7
Wilts "Woman" Who Is Man Now to Marry Nurse	<i>Western Daily Press</i>	24 March 1930	7
Tisbury "Woman" Bridegroom (photo)	<i>Bristol Times and Mirror</i>	25 March 1930	12
Transformed! (photo)	<i>Daily Express</i>	25 March 1930	1
Bridegroom On His "Girlhood"	<i>Daily Express</i>	25 March 1930	11
"Woman" Bridegroom (photo)	<i>Daily Herald</i>	25 March 1930	16
Man's Twenty-Nine Years as a Woman	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	25 March 1930	1
The Man-Woman – As He Is – And As He Was (photo)	<i>Daily News</i>	25 March 1930	9
The Man-Woman	<i>Daily News</i>	25 March 1930	9
A Tisbury Sensation	<i>Salisbury Times</i>	28 March 1930	10
A Wiltshire "Man-Woman"	<i>Wiltshire News</i>	28 March 1930	2
"Woman Bridegroom" Married	<i>Evening Advertiser and Evening North Wilts Herald</i>	29 March 1930	1
A Change of Sex	<i>Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard</i>	29 March 1930	13
Man-Woman Marries	<i>News of the World</i>	30 March 1930	11
"Man-Woman" Weds	<i>People</i>	30 March 1930	11
Cheering Crowds at Marriage of "Man-Woman"	<i>Reynolds's Illustrated News</i>	30 March 1930	3
Ex-Woman Bridegroom's	<i>Sunday Express</i>	30 March 1930	1

Wedding			
Man-Woman as a Bridegroom	<i>Sunday Graphic</i>	30 March 1930	3
Evan Burt Married	<i>Sunday Pictorial</i>	30 March 1930	2
Man-Woman Now a Husband	<i>Bristol Times and Mirror</i>	31 March 1930	7
Ex-Woman Marries	<i>Daily Chronicle</i>	31 March 1930	11
Wedding of the "Man-Woman"	<i>Daily Express</i>	31 March 1930	3
"Man-Woman" Married	<i>Daily Mail</i>	31 March 1930	11
"Woman-Bridegroom" (photo)	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	31 March 1930	15
29 Years as Woman	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	31 March 1930	23
Wedding of the Man-Woman	<i>Daily News</i>	31 March 1930	7
Man-Woman Wed	<i>Wiltshire News</i>	4 April 1930	1
Lili Elbe: Four mentions over a five-year period			
From Man to Woman	<i>News of the World</i>	1 March 1931	5
The Man Who Turned into a Woman	<i>Daily Express</i>	4 August 1933	14
Changed into a Woman	<i>News of the World</i>	6 August 1933	13
"Girl" Athlete's New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Maurice [Sussex Youth]: Six mentions over a four-year period			
Girl of 14 Turned into a Youth	<i>Daily Herald</i>	1 January 1932	1
Sex Determination	<i>News Chronicle</i>	1 January 1932	1
Girl Becomes a Boy	<i>News of the World</i>	3 January 1932	5
Boy Becomes a Girl	<i>People</i>	20 March 1932	13
Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	28 May 1936	7
"Girl" Athlete's New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Augustine Hull: Two mentions over a week			
Home Secretary and Amazing Man-Woman Case	<i>Reynolds's Illustrated News</i>	3 January 1932	5
Sentence on Man-Woman	<i>Reynolds's Illustrated News</i>	10 January 1932	3
Sikh Girl from Amritsar: One mention			
Boy Becomes a Girl	<i>People</i>	20 March 1932	13

[Manchester Boy]: Three mentions over a four-year period			
Boy Becomes a Girl	<i>People</i>	20 March 1932	13
Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	28 May 1936	7
“Girl” Athlete’s New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
M. Woods: One mention			
Sex Change Drama	<i>People</i>	10 September 1933	3
Mack Hutchison: Two mentions over four days			
Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	28 May 1936	7
“Girl” Athlete’s New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Jolan Kun: Three mentions over nine days			
[Untitled – “Zoltan Kun”]	<i>Daily Express</i>	23 May 1936	2
Hungarian Parallel	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Changed Her Sex and Her Age	<i>People</i>	31 May 1936	3
Mark Weston: Twenty-eight mentions over a six-year period			
Surgery’s Triumph Over Sex	<i>Nottingham Evening Post</i>	28 May 1936	5
Her “Sister” Has Become Her Brother	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	28 May 1936	5
Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	28 May 1936	7
Miss Mary Is Now Mr. Mark	<i>Daily Express</i>	29 May 1936	19
Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew	<i>Daily Herald</i>	29 May 1936	1
Doctors and Sex Changes	<i>Daily Mail</i>	29 May 1936	6
‘She’ Now a Man	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	29 May 1936	6
Girl Becomes Man (headline only)	<i>Daily Sketch</i>	29 May 1936	1
Woman Who Has Become a Man	<i>Daily Sketch</i>	29 May 1936	3
(photo)	<i>Daily Express</i>	30 May 1936	20
Men-Women Problem for Sport Chiefs	<i>Daily Herald</i>	30 May 1936	3
Woman Athlete Becomes a Man	<i>Daily Mail</i>	30 May 1936	12

Man Who Was Once a Girl	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	30 May 1936	1
Women Who Change Sex	<i>Daily Sketch</i>	30 May 1936	8
(photo)	<i>News Chronicle</i>	30 May 1936	18
“Girl” Athlete’s New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Man-Woman Finds New Life “Very Startling”	<i>People</i>	31 May 1936	3
Marriage: By Man Who Was a Woman	<i>Sunday Dispatch</i>	31 May 1936	7
Women Athletes Tackle that ‘Man-Woman’ Problem	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	10 August 1936	7
Man-Woman Weds Friend of Girlhood	<i>Daily Express</i>	11 August 1936	1
‘Girl’ Who Is Now a Husband	<i>Daily Mail</i>	11 August 1936	7
‘Woman’ Athlete Who Became Man Married to ‘Girl in a Million’	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	11 August 1936	28
Man, Once Woman, Weds “Girlhood” Friend	<i>News Chronicle</i>	11 August 1936	14
Change of Sex	<i>Western Mail</i>	17 September 1936	28
Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	18 April 1937	9
Oreston ‘Girl’s’ Suicide After Sex Change	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	29 July 1942	3
2 Sisters Became Brothers	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	30 July 1942	8
Were Once Sisters	<i>News of the World</i>	2 August 1942	3
[Devon Girl]: Three mentions over four days			
Woman Athlete Who Has Become a Man	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	28 May 1936	7
Doctors and Sex Changes	<i>Daily Mail</i>	29 May 1936	6
“Girl” Athlete’s New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Zdenek Koubek: Eleven mentions over one year			
Woman Changed to Man Faces Life Anew	<i>Daily Herald</i>	29 May 1936	1
Men-Women Problem for Sport Chiefs	<i>Daily Herald</i>	30 May 1936	3
Women Who Change Sex	<i>Daily Sketch</i>	30 May 1936	8
“Girl” Athlete’s New Life After Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	31 May 1936	3
Man-Woman Athlete to Appear in Revue	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	23 July 1936	8

Changed Sex Sequel	<i>Daily Express</i>	1 August 1936	9
Women Athletes Tackle that 'Man-Woman' Problem	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	10 August 1936	7
"Woman" Athlete Who Changed Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	25 October 1936	2
New Operation On the Woman Athlete Who Became a Man	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	26 October 1936	25
Man-Woman Athlete	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	18 November 1936	3
Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	18 April 1937	9
Basilko Stoyanoff: One mention			
Boy to Be a Girl Again	<i>People</i>	6 December 1936	2
N. Tenenbaum: One mention			
Nine-Pound Child Born to Ex-Soldier a Year After "He" Changed "His" Sex	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	7 August 1936	3
[Man in Wormwood Scrubs]: One mention			
Gaol Secret of Man-Woman Tests	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	23 March 1937	15
Sofia Smetkovna/ Witold Smetek: Four mentions over four days			
Woman Athlete to Change Sex	<i>Daily Mail</i>	15 April 1937	6
This Woman Will be a Man Next Week	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	15 April 1937	23
Woman Athlete to Change Sex	<i>News Chronicle</i>	15 April 1937	3
Change of Sex	<i>News of the World</i>	18 April 1937	9
Donald Purcell: Three mentions over twenty years			
Doctor Changes Sex of 24: Patients Have Married	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	5 May 1938	2
Drama of Girls' Surprise Meeting in Hospital Ward	<i>News of the World</i>	8 May 1938	7
Police Tell Wife: Your Husband Was a Woman	<i>Daily Express</i>	27 January 1958	1

Hannah/ John/ Gene Joynt: Two mentions on one day			
Man-Woman Reveals "Her" Sufferings	<i>People</i>	4 September 1938	1
No Happiness Either As Man or Woman	<i>People</i>	4 September 1938	3
Mark and David Ferrow: Six mentions over three years			
Vanished Sisters Return As Boys	<i>Daily Herald</i>	26 August 1939	9
2 Sisters Become Brothers	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	26 August 1939	5
Sisters Are Now Brothers	<i>News Chronicle</i>	26 August 1939	11
Two Sisters Are Brothers Now	<i>News of the World</i>	27 August 1939	6
2 Sisters Became Brothers	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	30 July 1942	8
Were Once Sisters	<i>News of the World</i>	2 August 1942	3
Harry Weston: Three mentions over five days			
Oreston 'Girl's' Suicide After Sex Change	<i>Western Evening Herald</i>	29 July 1942	3
2 Sisters Became Brothers	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	30 July 1942	8
Were Once Sisters	<i>News of the World</i>	2 August 1942	3

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