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The Changing Representation of Gay Politicians in the UK Press

Thesis

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The Changing Representation of Gay Politicians in the UK Press

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ABSTRACT

The changing representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers is an area which is underrepresented in political and media studies. It is an important subject because press representation of gay politicians has personal and public consequences; not only can the politicians concerned have their political and personal lives negatively affected, democracy can be compromised. Indeed, gay politicians may be less inclined to speak out on gay issues and free expression may be constrained.

The thesis demonstrates:

1. How gay MPs in the UK are represented in newspapers

2. How representation has changed

3. An overarching frame of representation.

Newspaper articles are analysed and politicians and campaigners interviewed. A literature/historical review contextualises analysis, taking into account socio-political factors.

The thesis demonstrates that the press representation of gay politicians is governed by three interconnected frames:

1. *The move towards recognition*

    According to the premise of 'recognition,' marginalised groups are entitled to equal rights and respect, rather than a grudging tolerance, alongside recognition of their particularity. This thesis suggests society has moved from intolerance, to

tolerance, to partial recognition of homosexuality; this process has been a halting one, although it is generally unidirectional.

2. *Acceptability over time (in relation to heterosexual public space)*

   Sexuality/sexual acts can be rated in terms of public acceptability (as in the acceptance of society) and heterosexual public space. Generally, public homosexuality has become more acceptable over the last fifty years (again, this has been a halting process), although still has some way to go to reach full acceptability.

3. *Mediated personas as 'constructed reality'*

   Gay politicians are represented in the media through the use of binary themes; using these themes, their personas (gradients of negative and positive) are created by and mediated through newspapers.

The third frame helps to maintain negative and stereotypical representations of gay politicians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

This thesis explores the changing representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers. Key issues include the mediated personas of gay politicians, their acceptability within public/private spaces, and their recognition. The thesis's coverage stops at 2005 in order that a defined period of analysis is possible (see Chapter 1 for more detail on the selection of material); a brief introductory comment on some more recent cases might help to illustrate the core of the argument. Post-2005 there have been three major stories involving gay politicians and/or politicians caught up in a gay scandal, all of which can be understood in relation to the theories espoused by this thesis and which are a useful introduction to its themes: in 2006 Mark Oaten (Liberal Democrat MP for Winchester and the Meon Valley 1997-) was reported as having slept with rent-boys while married with a young family; in 2006 Simon Hughes (Liberal Democrat MP for Bermondsey 1983-) was 'outed' as bisexual while standing for party leadership (he had previously denied being gay or bisexual); and in 2006 Greg Barker (Conservative MP for Bexhill and Battle 2001-) was exposed as having left his wife to live with another man.

The cases of Barker and Oaten are good examples of positive and negative mediated personas, a key concept of the research; Barker was presented as a 'good' (*i.e.* comfortable with himself, open and relaxed - an easy to categorise/recognise gay man) and 'safe' (*i.e.* his sex life was unthreatening and private) gay politician, and Oaten a 'bad' and 'dangerous' gay politician. This is partly due to the nature of their cases (Oaten's was more 'sleazy,' to use a term often employed by the press), but also to do with public/private spheres. Indeed, Oaten's sexual life was at the forefront of his story, whereas Barker's was not; Barker's sexual life was private and Oaten's public, thus Barker's mediated persona leant towards the positive, as opposed to Oaten's negative persona. It should be noted that Barker's press coverage was not 100% positive

(particularly in the Right-wing newspaper the *Daily Mail*); however, his and Oaten's cases are excellent examples of the ways in which gay politicians are categorised.

Hughes's press coverage is also of note in this respect. Hughes had previously denied being gay or bisexual, and as such, when 'outed' by the press received negative press coverage in many tabloid newspapers; he was a 'bad' gay/bisexual politician because he was not upfront about his sexuality (while Barker was also 'outed,' he had not previously lied about his sexuality to the press, making his 'transgression' less severe). These cases demonstrate that while gay politicians have either a negative or positive persona, these categories are graduated; Oaten's press coverage was more negative than Hughes's because he met more negative binary themes. Barker's case is also a good example of the greater acceptability of gay politicians in recent years; his more positive press coverage (apart from the exceptions mentioned above), and indeed the fact that in some newspapers his situation did not receive much comment at all, shows that the press representation of gay politicians has improved. However, the private nature of his sex life, in comparison to Oaten and Hughes's, once again emphasises the fact that public expressions of gay sexuality are frowned upon and recognition has only been reached *partially*; while Barker's homosexuality is accepted (generally) and he was allowed to stay an MP, his particularity - his homosexuality - was only acceptable because certain criteria were met. These themes are explored across the thesis, with case studies demonstrating that the press representation of gay politicians can be examined using an overarching frame of representation, with mediated personas, acceptability within public space and recognition, key components.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES AND BACKGROUND THEORIES

"I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify." (Goffman 1974: 10f).

This chapter explores the thesis's theoretical base. There are four main sections to the chapter:

1. A statement of intent (objectives, design and why the subject is important), followed by a brief account of the literature which directly relates to the thesis

2. A more detailed study of 'political' literature pertinent to the thesis

3. A more detailed study of 'media' literature pertinent to the thesis

4. An introduction of an overarching frame of representation through which the press representation of gay politicians can be discussed.

Thus, the chapter explores theory related to the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press, leading to the introduction of an overarching frame of representation in section 1.4 (Figure 1.10, below). The frame of representation is made up of three sub-frames, and is a product of inductive work. It is presented as both a preview and as the result of my research; it is both a way of organising (a concept suggested by Goffman (1974), above) the press representation of gay politicians as discussed in the thesis, and an account of why the representation takes the form it does. In particular, the chapter explores theory central to the three sub-frames:

- The move to recognition (Frame 1)

- The changing acceptability of homosexuality in relation to heterosexual public space (Frame 2)

- The public/private binary and mediated personas (Frame 3).

The frames show how a move from intolerance to tolerance to partial recognition of homosexuality impacts upon the acceptability of homosexuality in heterosexual public space (and vice versa), with these processes then affecting the representation of gay politicians in the press. Frame 3 then shapes (the character/particularly of) and mirrors (particular moments of) Frames 1 and 2, highlighting that public/press opinion and change is not simply enforced by outside factors such as the media: instead, the media influences while *being* influenced, as part of a circular process. In relation to Frame 3, the chapter makes clear that what was private has now become public, pointing to the fact that gay politicians, like celebrities, have mediated personas (through which binary themes operate); their private lives, and sexualities, are lived in/presented through the media.

The changing representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers is intrinsically linked to the way the press works and how it treats politicians in general. Indeed, the intense focus on the private lives of politicians did not begin until the 1960s and 1970s. From this time onwards, politics has become more and more personalised, with scandal a prime focus of press attention; in terms of news values, scandalous (gay and/or 'outed') politicians are front-page news. The press attention paid to the private lives of gay politicians over the course of the 1950s to 2000s (the period studied by the thesis, as detailed below), points to the fact that the private morality of politicians (and individuals generally to some extent) - both heterosexual and gay - is now defined as a

public act; if a politician's personal life does not meet strict moral criteria, the press may comment about it. As an aspect of the personal, the homosexuality of politicians has thus become a legitimate area of press focus. This chapter will explore these issues, paying particular attention to the public/private dichotomy.

1.1 Objectives of the Thesis and Current Literature

"The media have power: they determine the fate of politicians and political causes, they influence governments and electorates. They are, therefore, to be numbered with other political institutions - parliaments, executives, administrations and parties." (Street 2001: 231).

The changing representation of gay politicians in the press is an important subject because a) it has implications for democracy and b) there is a gap in the current literature which means that the implications for democracy are not explored/addressed. Indeed, while there has been much focus on the representation of homosexuality generally, gay politicians have not been discussed in any great detail.

The below sub-sections discuss the objectives and design of the thesis and why its chosen subject is important, followed by a brief account of literature that relates to the thesis and any resulting gaps.

1.1.1 Objectives and Intents: Defining the Research

Research Objectives

The thesis explores the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press. The thesis has three main research objectives:

1. To analyse how gay politicians in the UK are represented in newspapers

2. To examine how the representation of gay politicians press has changed

3. To map the analysis using a devised overarching frame of representation.

Research Design

The research objectives were met using qualitative methodology. When doing qualitative research in an interpretivist framework (see below for more on interpretivism) there are choices to make about research design. In particular, whether a shallow but broad analysis takes place, or a deep and narrow one. I have chosen the second option: a comprehensive analysis of a narrow subject. Thus, the thesis examines gay politicians *in the UK* rather than, for example, a comparative analysis between the UK and other countries, or the differences between the press representation of gay politicians and gay celebrities. The advantage of a deep but narrow approach is that the case studies can be examined in greater detail, with a fixed focus. It also allows for themes identified to be applied more closely and specifically. It also acknowledges the fact that conceptions of homosexuality and public/private spaces, for example, are not necessarily universal (*e.g.* there may be differences between the UK and USA, or between gay politicians and gay celebrities); a broader study would need to take account of this fact, perhaps to the disadvantage of actual newspaper analysis, in relation to available space and detail. This said, many of the themes identified in the research may have a broader application than gay politicians (as acknowledged below and in Chapter 5 in particular).

Objective 1

The first objective was met through the sourcing and examination of relevant newspaper articles. As part of this process it was necessary to select pertinent case-studies. It was

decided early on that the thesis would focus on Members of Parliament (MPs) rather than Lords representatives (although I do look at the significant press coverage received by Peter Tatchell, a Labour Party by-election candidate in the early 1980s, as explored in Chapter 3). I also decided to focus on case-studies up to 2005 in order that a defined period of analysis was possible.

There is of course a certain irony in writing a thesis which explores the negative consequences of the press discussion of the sexuality and private lives of gay politicians, and then writing about their private lives in some detail. This is something that cannot be avoided. However, to avoid unnecessary intrusion it was decided that the thesis would only concentrate on MPs who were either openly gay or who had received press coverage focusing on their sexuality. Thus, gay MPs *rumoured* to be gay, but without publicly available confirmation/press supposition (based on, for example, a court case), are not focused on.

The thesis does not examine the press representation of every known gay MP; apart from the need to focus on MPs whose sexuality was publicly commented on, some MPs - particularly in more recent years - were not selected for the thesis because there was no relevant press coverage to study (*i.e.* they had only just been elected). While the thesis examines a wide range of gay politicians, there are long case studies of certain politicians/political figures: Peter Tatchell, Chris Smith, Harvey Proctor and Peter Mandelson. These case studies are important because their press coverage is particularly representative of their era.

It is also important to note that while the focus of the thesis is the sub-dynamic of gay politicians, the thesis says more than something about the representation of gay

politicians in the press; the issues raised may be applicable elsewhere, for example, in the representation of the personal lives of heterosexual politicians and sexuality as a whole.

As suggested above, it was decided early on that a qualitative rather than quantitative approach to reading newspapers was appropriate; reading newspapers quantitatively (*i.e.* analysing how many times particular words are used over time) does not necessarily reveal an increase or decrease in homophobia and/or use of binary themes, because words used to describe gay people/homosexuality change over time. Indeed, just because a particular word is no longer used, it does not mean that tolerance has increased; it may just mean that that word is no longer in fashion. Thus, a qualitative approach was taken - identifying key themes and words in relation to their context. Once the articles were sourced and read, key words were highlighted in relation to each politician. Over time, it became apparent that these words suggested the use of common themes (leading to the development of the binary themes in Figure 1.10). The words used in relation to each politician were recorded using an Excel spreadsheet, leading to the development of Figures 3.2 and 4.1, which show how many binary themes each politician analysed by this thesis meets, and whether their mediated persona is negative or positive.

Articles pertinent to the thesis were primarily sourced from the researcher's own hard-copy collection and online sources. The main online source utilised was *Nexis UK*, available through the Open University's electronic library; this database contains full text articles from major UK newspapers (and many regional and non-UK titles as well) often back to the early 1980s, and allows researchers to search by date, keyword(s) and source. A small number of articles were sourced from books/articles; thus, the thesis

utilised a combination of primary and secondary sources (although the vast majority of sources were primary). Where secondary sources were used (primarily earlier articles unavailable online or in accessed libraries), the articles concerned were either printed as photos/plates in the sources (thus providing a photographic record of the article concerned), or substantial sections of the articles were printed, thus allowing for the context of key words/themes to be provided and analysed.

Objective 2

A literature review sourced academic research relating to the representation of gay politicians over the last fifty years and related issues; thematic analysis looked for commonality of research findings and how representation had changed over the years, paying particular attention to changing socio-political factors and relevant media and social-scientific theory. The review was divided into two sections: Chapter 1 (theory) and Chapter 2 (history). The literature review, as presented in Chapter 2, identified four periods of time as sharing characteristics (Pre-1980; 1980-1990; 1990-1997; 1997-2005); the newspaper analysis utilised this time frame as well.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with politicians and campaigners, thus enhancing the above-mentioned newspaper analysis of case studies and literature review. Their comments helped to show how the press representation of gay politicians has changed over the years, as well as the impact such press coverage can have, in conjunction with the above-described newspaper analysis. It is important to note that numerous newspaper journalists were also asked for interviews (for example, the current and previous four editors of *The Sun* newspaper), in the expectation that their views would provide a useful counterbalance to the interviews with politicians/campaigners. However, all either declined or did not respond despite various

attempts to speak to them. The only exception was Matthew Parris, although he was originally a politician and his interview focused on this part of his career.

Objective 3

An overarching frame of representation was devised over the course of the research. Once the case studies had taken place, alongside theoretical explorations of surrounding subjects, key themes were identified:

1. Recognition theory

2. Acceptability/public spaces

3. Binary themes/mediated personas as 'constructed reality.'

These themes were brought together as a unified frame and applied to the empirical chapters.

The frame of representation derives from a) a literature and historical review and b) in-depth case-studies of the press representation of gay politicians, alongside the identification of key theory. Indeed, the thesis contains theoretical assumptions and an explanatory framework. The explanatory framework, previewed in Figure 1.10, is built up iteratively over the course of the thesis through detailed examination of the press representation of gay politicians. Alongside this, symbols, categories, meanings, the press and other actors are explored utilising a form of interpretivist approach, leading to the identification of theory. The theory and the framework come together to provide an explanation - as Bryman (2001) notes, patterns are revealed over time through qualitative analysis - for the press representation of gay politicians.

Appendix I contains more detail on the thesis's methodological approach (research instruments, timetable, budget, ethics and terminology).

Interpretivism

The thesis explores the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press using a form of interpretivist approach. Interpretivism rests on the notion that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation. In order to understand the social world, the ways in which social actors use language and symbols to construct reality need to be examined. The thesis does this through the study of press representation and the meanings it engenders. In the thesis, newspapers are considered social actors. By examining the language, symbols and themes used in the press when writing about gay politicians, the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press, and the socio-political context of homosexuality, is made clear; this aspect of the social world is understood. Interviews with individual social actors (gay politicians and campaigners) also form part of the research. Their experiences - in terms of how they interpret events - further contextualise the research and inform discussion on how the social world, in relation to the representation of gay politicians and homosexuality, is constructed.

It is important to note that there has been a debate about interpretivism and its role (both between proponents of the approach and those critiquing it). Indeed, a common criticism of the interpretivist approach is that the results, while providing contextual depth, are not valid and reliable (Kelliher, 2005). Dowding (2004), for example, suggests that accounts from the actors themselves (gay politicians in this instance) can be unreliable. However, the triangulation of my research through use of multiple data sources (newspaper articles, interviews with relevant figures, parliamentary debates for example) and qualitative research methods (newspaper analysis, semi-structured

interviews, a literature review) validates the data gathered and the thesis's conclusions. Indeed, Denzin (1970) states that multiple, independent research methods/sources should have a greater reliability than a single methodological approach. As an interpretivist, it is also important to acknowledge and address my own subjectivity in relation to the research. Indeed, I have remained open to the research process; as demonstrated by the frame of representation (below), the research is inductive, with observations *becoming* theory. Thus, any pre-conceived ideas are supplanted by reliable, triangulated evidence.

Subject Importance and Relevance

As noted above, such research is important because a) the representation of gay politicians has implications for democracy, and b) there is a gap in the current literature which means that the implications for democracy are not explored/addressed. The second issue is explored in more detail in sub-section 1.1.2. The quote from Street (2001), above, highlights the power of the media, and the impact media institutions/sources can have on democracy. This thesis addresses this important issue. It demonstrates that a focus on the private lives of gay politicians may impact upon the amount of attention the press pays to more serious issues, such as policy and debate. Secondly, a focus on the personal can affect the ability of politicians to do their job - they may have to resign from their ministerial positions or even from Parliament if their personal lives do not live up to the expectations of the media. For gay politicians this can be seen as having an extra edge to it; as there are relatively few 'out' gay MPs, the destruction of one in the press, and the resulting consequences of this, may contribute to the democratic deficit for gay men and women: fewer gay MPs may lead to poorer parliamentary representation of gay people and issues. Negative press representation of homosexuality and/or gay politicians may also discourage gay people from trying to

become politicians in the first place, from being 'out' (this was particularly relevant when homosexuality was illegal and/or considered very immoral), or from talking about 'gay issues.'

1.1.2   Gaps in the Market: the Place of the Thesis in Current Literature

There has been academic discussion of various topics related to the press representation of gay politicians over the years, but scant literature on the actual subject itself:

Gay politicians

Gay politicians have at times been the subject of academic attention. Rayside (1998), for example, focused on the experiences of three gay politicians (from the UK, USA and Canada), their place in the political world and their impact. There have also been numerous (auto)biographies written about gay politicians, one example being Macintyre's (2000) informative study of Peter Mandelson. However, while these texts touch on press representation, they do not go into any great detail. Storr's (1999) analysis of changing notions of privacy and acceptable/unacceptable behaviour in relation to gay politicians explores the press coverage of gay politicians in 1998 (a time of numerous 'outings,' as explored in Chapter 4), but it lacks the element of *changing* and *historical* representation (*i.e.* how representation has changed over the years).

Media representation of homosexuality

The representation of homosexuality in the media (press and television) has been the subject of much press attention. Indeed, Sanderson's (1995) exploration of the treatment of homosexuality in the UK media is a comprehensive study of this issue. However, such studies have only touched on gay politicians, rather than examining them in detail,

with a greater focus on celebrities and homosexuality generally. This suggests a significant gap in the literature, because gay politicians have been the focus of much press attention over the years, much of it controversial and negative.

Issues of public/private and homosexuality

The study of the press representation of gay politicians leads to discussion of public/private boundaries: what they are; whether they exist; implications; how they are present in the press etc. Again, there has been much written on issues of public/private (both independent of and relating to homosexuality, the press etc); indeed, this thesis discusses the ideas of Habermas (1989), Fraser (1992) and Steinberger (1999) among many others. Such writers help to inform the thesis's discussion of the representation of gay politicians in the press: why gay politicians are represented in particular ways; what such representation means; how representation changes. The thesis takes these ideas forward, and applies them to gay politicians and the press.

1.2   'Political' Literature: Definitions/Issues of Public and Private

"Since... the arrival of the 'mediated society' in all its forms, sexualities have become more and more entrenched within media forms. People increasingly have come to live their sexualities through, and with the aid of, television, press, film, and more recently, cyberspace." (Plummer 2003 a: 275).

The press attention paid to the private lives of politicians over the course of the 1950s to 2000s (as explored in Chapters 3 and 4) points to the fact that the private 'morality' of politicians (and individuals generally to some extent) is now defined as a public act. According to this premise, if a politician's personal life does not meet strict moral criteria (in line with socio-political factors relating to the time in question), the press may comment about it, and will feel justified in doing so. In many respects, the press (and the media in general), as a public space, is an area in which personal lives can be

played out. As an aspect of the personal, the homosexuality of politicians has in the minds of the press become a legitimate area of press focus.

In order to elucidate the thesis's overarching frame of representation, the following sub-section identifies the ways in which public and private spaces have been defined and the press's role in this, relating to Frame 2 of the overarching frame in particular, but also the binary themes of Frame 3. An interlinked exploration of recognition (Frame 1) also takes place in this sub-section.

1.2.1   Private Acts Made Public: How Public/Private Spaces Have Been Defined

Definitions and Boundaries

The above quote from Plummer (2003 a) illustrates that the press is now a public space in which sexualities are discussed, defined and even disputed - a place in which private morality is defined as a public act. This process took place over many years, with the 1960s a key stage. It is essential to recognise at this point that although this thesis upholds the notion of the public/private binary (at least in relation to the idea that society generally has about 'appropriate' behaviour in public and private), in many ways this division is an artificial one. As Plummer (2003 b) notes, the personal and the public cannot be spilt up so easily; in fact, they actually shape each other. However, UK governments have attempted to regulate homosexuality in terms of the public and private. Indeed, in 1967 when homosexuality was partially decriminalised (see Chapter 2 for more detail), the notion of privately acceptable but publicly unacceptable homosexuality came to the forefront. As noted by Weeks (2000), the role of the law was to enshrine and maintain proper standards of order and decency *in public*. While the private and public domains were legislated against in this strict way in the mid-

twentieth century, the public has encroached on the private (and vice versa). As Weeks (2000) goes on to state in relation to sexuality as a whole, while sexuality is a private and personal activity, it is a very public one as well; while many people may speak about it (quietly) with a sense of embarrassment, at the same time it is sensationalised and publicised in newspapers, on television, film, radio and the Internet, in the pulpit and on the streets.

Although the parameters of the public/private binary (in relation to sexuality and in general) can be debated, for the purposes of this thesis Habermas's definition, although a contested one, will be used to define the public:

> We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs. (Habermas 1991: 1).[1]

An individual's homosexuality, although something which can be discussed and viewed *by* the public, and discussed and viewed *in* public, can thus be considered a private matter in that it is not something that the public ordinarily has any part in.[2] A definition of the private realm of use to this thesis comes from Inness (1992: 140): 'privacy is the state of possessing control over a realm of intimate decisions.' One can also think in terms of public and private *morality*. Public morality refers to ethical standards within a society (which may become laws and regulation). Private morality refers to the idea that individuals can decide for themselves what is moral, although decisions may be influenced by the ideas of, and understood by, others. There is also a distinction between 'sexual morality' and other types of morality (*e.g.* behaviour towards others), although this thesis concerns itself with sexuality and its acceptance in society. The

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[1] Habermas published *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in German in 1962 and subsequently in English in 1989. This version is from 1991.
[2] Of course, people often make highly ('political') celebrations of their sexuality with the aim of *making it a public issue*.

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difference between public and private morality does not necessarily relate to different *values*, but how they are applied in different situations. What is defined as acceptable public behaviour, and moral private behaviour, can of course differ from person to person, but there is a general shared definition of, or consensus about, what is 'right' or 'wrong' in society (something which changes over time, as explored later in the chapter). Of course, laws may not always reflect the general consensus (they may be more or less liberal than people would like), and the consensus may be strong or weak.

It is also important to note that it is not just the notion of the public/private binary which is disputed: the notion of 'spheres,' 'spaces' or 'realms' has also been contested. Indeed, Steinberger believes that the public/private binary needs to be considered in relation to 'acts' performed:

> [it is better] to think of public and private as denoting not primarily - perhaps not at all - separate realms of endeavour but different ways of being in the world, what I shall call different 'manners of acting.' (Steinberger 1999: 294).

This is not to say that Steinberger believes the distinction between the public and private should be abandoned altogether. Indeed, he goes on to state that this difference is a very important one, and thus, our job is to work out how the distinction between public and private can be maintained, while acknowledging that for many people such a rigid separation is unsustainable (Steinberger 1999). For Steinberger it is the act performed rather than the space in which it is performed that is important. As he (1999) notes, there are no spaces that are specifically public or private, but there are *manners of acting* that are distinctly public or private. Steinberger takes marriage as an example and notes that it is not an entirely private event between two people or within a family; the 'realm of marriage,' in common with all realms or spheres, is instead a mixture of private and public manners of acting (Steinberger 1999). Thus, a private marriage has implications of a public nature - laws, political and religious issues *etc.*

Steinberger (1999) also writes about sexual intimacy, and notes that while in many ways sex is a private matter, it can become a public one (*e.g.* the sexual abuse of a minor is a matter for the police). However, while society tends to agree that sexual intimacy is a private matter (aside from issues such as sexual abuse or incest), 'we are much less inclined to agree about... sodomy or sadomasochism' (Steinberger 1999: 310). Thus, some types of sexual intimacy and even sexuality are more public rather than private to begin with. Indeed, society can turn a private activity into a public one if it decides that interference is needed (Steinberger 1999). Therefore the public can override control 'over a realm of intimate decisions' (Inness 1992: 140). As discussed later in the thesis, the media play a big role in this process and can decide when something is a public rather than private matter, according to the socio-political factors of the time.

Heterosexual Public Space and Acceptability

Homosexual sexual intimacy has certainly been dragged into the public realm over the last hundred or so years (one example being the fervent discussion, both in Parliament and the press, surrounding the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, as explored in Chapter 2), much more so than heterosexual sexual intimacy. As Steinberger (1999) suggests when he mentions sodomy, society has regarded, and perhaps still regards to an extent, homosexuality as an issue of 'public concern' (hence the reams of political and press discussion about issues such as the age of consent and homosexuality's place in society). In fact, one could go as far as to say that homosexuality equals public sexuality and linked to this, the public is a 'heterosexual space.' Of course, this is not to say that heterosexuality is not discussed in public; what is of importance is that homosexuality has had its very acceptability debated and judged in public, in a way in which heterosexuality has not: heterosexual sex is 'natural' and the 'norm' to many people.

In fact, one could argue that it is not 'being' gay in itself that is or has been problematic for gay people (gay men in particular, as lesbianism has never been directly legislated against, as Chapter 2 explores), particularly in recent years; more accurately, it is the actual act of sodomy. Thus, homosexual penetration can be categorised as not only a breach of 'normal' sexuality, and in the past law, but as a breach of the 'proper' way of acting in 'heterosexual society'; even though homosexual sexual acts may be carried out in private, they become public acts, something to be judged by 'heterosexual society' in what could be called 'heterosexual public space.' As much then as it is not homosexual identity in itself which is problematic (at least in recent times), private/public spaces or manners of acting may be a secondary issue; as noted above, it may be the homosexual sexual act which is of concern in the first instance, whether that takes place privately or publicly, if one uses those terms.[3] Of course, homosexual sexual intimacy which takes place in the privacy of, for example, a home, is generally less problematic (at least in relation to the *visibility* of homosexuality) than *public* homosexual sexual intimacy, showing that the public/private binary is still important. This is explored in Figure 1.1 below, which has been influenced by Steinberger's ideas: sexuality/sexual acts can be rated in terms of public acceptability and 'heterosexual public space.' Figure 1.1 is a more detailed version of the ideas contained in Frame 2 of Figure 1.10, shown in section 1.4 below:

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[3] It is important to note that the sexual act does not necessarily equal sexuality; a man may have sex with another man, but it does not mean that either of them identify as gay or bisexual.

Heterosexual public space

Heterosexuality (identity)

Heterosexual sexual acts (private)

Heterosexual sexual acts (public)

Homosexuality (identity)

↕----*Acceptability threshold (in terms of acts 'becoming' public)*----↕

Homosexual sexual acts (private)

Homosexual sexual acts (public)

'Alternative' sexual acts (*e.g.* sadomasochism)

Thresholds affected by socio-political factors (*i.e.* times and conceptions of homosexuality)

↕-----------------------*Legality threshold* ----------------------------↕

Illegal sexual acts

(y-axis label: Public/press acceptability)

Figure 1.1: The relationship between sexuality, sexual acts and public space (c2000s).[4]

Of course, what is acceptable has changed over the years (*i.e.* the acceptability of homosexuality in itself has differed according to the socio-political climate) hence the dating of the above diagram; in the 1950s, for example, all homosexual acts would be below the legality threshold. Concepts of the public/private and acceptability may also be different for the press and for individuals (whether public figures or not). One also has to take into account that heterosexual opinions of acceptability are not one and the same; while some heterosexual people are fully accepting of homosexuality, others are not. Plus, there may be differences between different *types* of public space: rural versus urban spaces, local versus national newspapers, or tabloid versus broadsheet newspapers. Thus 'heterosexual public space' as a concept, can be debated, analysed and contextualised (in relation to time, space etc). However, it is an idea which is engaged with in the thesis.

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[4] It is essential to recognise that people have *multiple* identities. This research talks about a homosexual or heterosexual identity, but this goes hand in hand with a gendered identity and other types of identity, all of which impact on each other.

The acceptability threshold is also of its time; while it could be argued that private homosexual sexual acts should be categorised as being above the acceptability threshold in Figure 1.1 and certainly, private homosexual sexual acts have moved very quickly in recent years in this direction, I do not think they are quite there yet in terms of *full* acceptability, something suggested by the amount of recent press attention given to issues such as the age of gay consent: this issue has been regarded as being still of public concern. As the above diagram suggests, legality and acceptability may not tie in with one another; something may be legal, but considered unacceptable by the press (sadomasochism perhaps?)[5] or illegal, but considered acceptable. Generally, in the contemporary UK legality and acceptability have moved in one direction: towards liberality, as explored later in the chapter via public opinion surveys (although in the 1980s the appearance of HIV/AIDS affected public opinion negatively, as demonstrated in Chapter 2).[6] This prompts the question: what role do the media play in this? This issue is explored in sub-section 1.3.1.

While the heterosexuality of public space(s) can be debated and must be contextualised, it is a concept well discussed in academia (Binnie 1997; Duncan 1996; Johnston 1997; Myslik 1996; Namaste 1996; Valentine 1993; Valentine 1996), as suggested by the above diagram and Frame 2 of Figure 1.10. Brickell (2000) suggests that that public space is heterosexual in two ways:

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[5] Sadomasochism has a complicated legal status. I have termed it 'legal' because while it is illegal to leave a lasting mark on the skin, other sadomasochistic behaviour (*e.g.* punishments which do not leave a lasting mark, humiliation etc) is legal (Spanner Trust 2000).

[6] This is certainly true in the UK (at least in a *general* sense when it comes to public opinion), although it can be argued that in other countries laws and public attitudes towards homosexuality have regressed, or at least have not progressed as much as in the UK. One only has to think of middle and Republican America, and the hardening of attitudes towards issues of 'morality' and recent attempts to constitutionally legislate against gay marriage.

- Heterosexuality is regarded as unproblematic in public spaces, unlike homosexuality which is policed

- Heterosexuality is not marked in public in the same way as homosexuality.

Interestingly, the idea of a dominant heterosexual public space can be read in relation to the feminist notion of the feminine private sphere/masculine public sphere dynamic. Indeed, feminist writers have suggested that this is what the feminist struggle is all about. One writer, Pateman (1988), suggested that through a 'sexual contract,' men control women; through marriage and sex, patriarchy is upheld. The public sphere can be interpreted as a patriarchal space through which women are dominated, thus relegating them to the private or domestic sphere. Heterosexuality/homosexuality can be understood in a similar way; through the domination of public space, homosexuality is pushed into the private sphere; the public sphere is a dominant, heterosexual space. For this reason, it is not surprising that gay women were excluded from many of the early laws relating to homosexuality (see Chapter 2 for more detail); not only is public space predominately heterosexual, it is (or was particularly so in the past) a male space, thus contributing to the 'invisibility' of gay women in society.

Even though the private lives of gay politicians have become more public over the last fifty years, and the dominance of heterosexuality in the public sphere is being challenged, gay politicians and gay people as a whole may still be expected to limit public 'displays' of their sexuality (*i.e.* campaigning about gay rights (something explored in the empirical chapters), kissing a partner in public *etc.*). The notion of 'displaying' sexuality does not usually apply to heterosexual people, unless their actions are considered inappropriate. As Brickell (2000: 166) notes, 'The boundaries of permissibility are set in different places for homosexuality...' Indeed, as he goes on to

recognise, same-sex expressions of affection, unlike heterosexual ones, are not common to the front pages of newspapers. In fact, as noted above, heterosexuality is 'unmarked' within society (Brickell 2000; Young 1990); it is not noticed, even though it is ever present. One can relate the notion of heterosexual public space to newspapers. As something written for and mediated by the mostly heterosexual public (if one understands sexuality in terms of homo/heterosexual identities, something which can of course be disputed), newspapers can be seen as a heterosexual space, contributing to the publicness of heterosexual sexual intimacy and relegation of homosexual sexual intimacy. For example, the vast majority of articles are written by/about heterosexual people/issues (reflecting the intense heterosexual presence in society as a whole, of course). Indeed, *Gay News* (1982 Cited Sanderson 1995: 1-2) noted in an editorial in1982:

> A free press they say is the greatest defence against tyranny. There is no freedom of the press in this country for homosexuals. Apply a simple test: who can you think of who writes for the quality or popular press, whenever it would be relevant, as an out gay? If people cannot be open about their homosexual viewpoint to the same degree that heterosexual writers are about their viewpoint, then a significant section of opinion finds no expression in Britain's 'free press' and that press is not free.

Of course, there are many more openly gay journalists now than in than the 1980s, and positive articles by/about gay people do now appear in the press (although negative articles about gay people increased in earnest post-1982 as a result of the appearance of HIV/AIDS). In fact, a gay 'public sphere' (one overlapping with/existing alongside the heterosexual public sphere) has begun to emerge, as Clarke (2000) notes in relation to America. Thus, while heterosexuality dominates the press, 'alternative' voices are coming through, challenging the dominance of heterosexuality. As Plummer (2003 b) recognises, the gay and lesbian movement is developing its own culture while making inroads in public culture more generally, therefore bringing gay public spheres into the

'mainstream' public. Thus, the representation of gay politicians and gay people as a whole has improved as gay voices and experiences have penetrated the heterosexual media. However, while this is of course positive, to a certain extent the public/private dichotomy of 1967 still exists; while the press (particularly the tabloid press) likes gay people to be vocally 'upfront' about their homosexuality, private 'acts' or 'displays' of homosexuality are more acceptable than public ones. Further to this, certain 'types' of gay people/behaviour are more acceptable than others, *i.e.* 'safe' sexual behaviour is acceptable, 'dangerous' sexual behaviour (which does not fit a sexual 'norm') is not (again, particularly in the tabloid press). In this respect, definitions of public/private spaces or acts can be used to frame the changing representation of gay politicians in the (mainly tabloid) press:

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'Acceptable' gay politicians    = 'Out' gay politicians
                                = Private acts/spaces

'Unacceptable' gay politicians = 'Closeted' gay politicians
                                = Public acts/spaces
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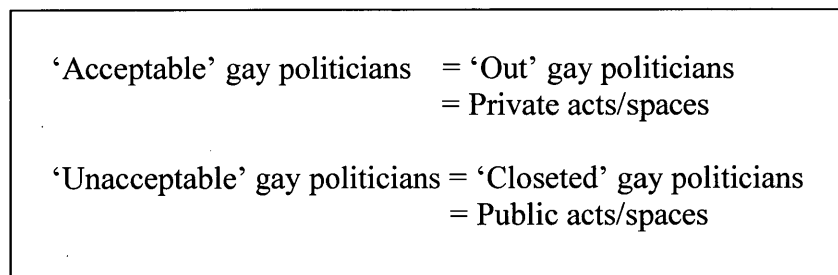
Figure 1.2: The public/private frame.

Out/in and private/public (and safe/dangerous) are of course key binary themes, as identified in Frame 3 of Figure 1.10. A third category exists: 'acceptable' also equals gay politicians who are known or believed to be gay, but who do not publicise their sexuality, *i.e.* they believe their sexuality to be a private matter. This category is also representative of the old Conservative mantra of keeping homosexuality private. Indeed, there have always been gay politicians in the Conservative Party, an unproblematic fact (privately, the Party was always very tolerant); problems only arose when the sexuality of gay Tory politicians became publicly known/exposed (the public/private 'boundary' -

if one uses that term - was transgressed[7]). See later chapters for more discussion of this issue.

It is important to note at this point that the legitimacy of a binary or dichotomous approach has been challenged. Indeed, Prokhovnik (1999) suggests that dichotomy can entrench division, and Grosz (1994: 3) states that this approach 'hierarchises and ranks the two polarised terms' so that one is deemed negative. As an alternative to binaries, a 'relational' theory and practice has been proposed; a relational approach eschews twofold difference and instead allows for other possibilities. However, people often *do* see the world through binaries or by using binary reasoning, with one binary ranked higher than its opposite: a gay politician is good *or* bad, safe *or* dangerous for example, with the latter binaries deemed negative.[8] The press certainly uses binary reasoning, as demonstrated through the binary themes of Frame 3 (Figure 1.10), and discussed above. By doing so, they simplify matters and can 'sell' their argument more easily (as noted in sub-section 1.3.1 in relation to tabloids and broadsheets).

Thus, while gay people and politicians have become more visible over time in what could be called the dominant, heterosexual public sphere, certain norms of behaviour are still expected of them. It is still the case that the (tabloid) press and perhaps society as whole defines the private sexual acts of gay people in terms of the heterosexual public. Following on from Padgug (1992) and Richardson (1996), Brickell (2000) suggests that if gay people try and inhabit public spheres, an insupportable breach

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[7] Indeed, if one thinks of Oscar Wilde's arrest and trial, he was punished not just because he was partaking in illegal sexual acts, but because his behaviour transgressed boundaries, or to use Steinberger's (1999) terminology, because his manner of acting (in relation to his homosexual sexual behaviour) was inappropriate. He almost *forced* the police to arrest him! Wilde's case is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

[8] The journalists Michael Brown and Suzanne Moore both used the terms 'good' and 'bad' in the late 1990s: Brown (who was himself 'outed' as an MP and is in fact discussed in Chapter 4) in a 1998 newspaper article and Moore in a 1999 political magazine.

occurs. It is no surprise that gay men and women often prefer to 'exist within' the gay public sphere (*i.e.* the gay media, gay leisure spaces *etc.*). Of course, it could certainly be stated that Brickell goes too far in his statement; in some public spaces displays of same-sex affection *are* tolerated (one only has to think of the central London location of Soho, or a liberal broadsheet such as *The Guardian*). Perhaps it is the case that some gay people do not want to be fully tolerated; after all, in order that the gay community and gay public spaces are strongly defined, there has to be some appreciation of difference within heterosexuality. And, as much as an appreciation of difference does not necessarily equal homophobia on the part of heterosexual people, an acknowledgement of difference does not necessarily mean that gay people want to withdraw from 'mainstream' society.

Recognition and Norms of Behaviour

The norms of behaviour which gay men and women are supposed to uphold in relation to heterosexual public space can be related to 'recognition', as identified in Frame 1 of Figure 1.10, as can the idea of acknowledging difference. Recognition is well-discussed in literature, with Taylor (1992) at the forefront of what has been called the 'politics of recognition.'[9] According to this theory, marginalised groups are entitled to equal rights and respect rather than a grudging or reluctant tolerance, alongside recognition of their own particularity. Indeed, acceptance suggests that full approval has not been given because if it has, there is nothing to accept. We can see the 'acceptance' of gay politicians in the case studies of Chapters 3 and 4. For example, gay politicians are accepted by the press if they are asexual, private individuals: their sexuality must not be

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[9] It should be recognised that Taylor's Québécois nationality gives him a particular inflection in these debates; French Canadians (the Québécois in particular) have put forward a case for distinctness, as noted by Taylor (1992), highlighting their desire to protect their language and culture and have autonomy in self-government.

overt, and they must certainly not 'flaunt' it in public; if they do, they lose their acceptance. Thus, they are not recognised as 'whole' or 'full' sexual individuals.

The politics of recognition is an extension of the politics of equal dignity (Abbey 1999; Taylor 1992) or identity politics, the belief that people are entitled to equal rights and respect. Indeed, recognition of individual difference can be thought of as a logical consequence of treating people as equal (Abbey 1999; Taylor 1992). Identity politics calls for marginalised groups, identified by shared characteristics, to gain equality, or at least advance towards it, via political action. It is important to note that there is tension between the politics of recognition and identity politics; the politics of recognition calls for distinct identities rather than equality (although people should of course be treated equally in common practice). One could call it *normalising* (identity politics) versus *difference* (recognition). Indeed, Taylor (1992: 38) writes:

> With the politics of equal dignity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else.

A good example of this dichotomy is UK civil partnerships. Some gay activists believe that the legislation does not go far enough; while it gives the same legal rights to gay couples as marriage gives to heterosexual couples, *it is not marriage*: it does not give absolute equality in relation to its name or religious context; Tatchell, for example, called it a 'watered down version of marriage' (Daily Post, GAY MARRIAGE PLANS DON'T GO FAR ENOUGH, 30 June, 2003). However, some gay activists do not want 'gay marriage' legalised; they are satisfied with civil partnerships in name and as a legal

device because they do not want to be the same as heterosexuals.[10] Indeed, as gay men and women they want a distinct identity, to celebrate their difference at the same time as gaining *legal* equality. The move towards recognition suggests that homosexuality has become increasingly tolerated as time has gone on (allowing for setbacks such as public/press opinion towards HIV/AIDS, as discussed in Chapter 2). However, *full* recognition has not yet been reached; in the case of gay politicians, they are generally accepted but not yet recognised as whole individuals, certainly in relation to public spaces. This idea is explored across the thesis.

It is important to note at this point that Taylor's concept of recognition is not unproblematic in itself or when applied to gay people/politicians. Indeed, in his work Taylor suggests that for minority groups/sub-cultures (such as the Québécois) there is 'one' recognition. However, this suggests that all the members of the group share the same characteristics at an individual level and have the same goals/opinions *etc*; however, this may not necessarily be the case. This leads on to the question: who decides what those characteristics should be? It is almost certainly the case that some people will disagree with the characteristics identified, leading to a two-tier system of identification, with minorities within a so-called homogeneous group. In relation to homosexuality, it has to be asked whether group recognition works for gay people. It is demonstrated within the case studies and newspaper representation (see Chapters 2 and 3) that the press presents gay people as having different characteristics and lifestyles (demonstrated by the binary themes highlighted in Frame 3, Figure 1.10), but gay men and women may also not see themselves as a homogeneous group. Thus, expecting recognition from others can be difficult if the members of the group concerned are not settled on what it means to be a member of the group. Although this is the case,

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[10] The singer and activist Elton John, for example, expressed this in relation to debates surrounding gay marriage in the USA (*USA Today*, ELTON JOHN: WHERE PROP 8 WENT WRONG, 13 November, 2008).

Taylor's concept of recognition can still be applied to the press representation of gay politicians. Indeed, the thesis talks of recognition of particularity; gay politicians do not necessarily have to share all of the same characteristics as part of this process (although the presence of negative binary themes affects the likelihood of recognition). In relation to the themes of the thesis, recognition of particularity equals recognition of the fact that someone is a *gay individual*.

Politics of Presence

An exploration of recognition and 'groups' leads on to discussion of who represents groups and how it is done. The 'politics of presence' (Phillips 1995) centres on the notion that the gender and ethnic makeup of political representation is of concern; whereas with the politics of *ideas* people are elected based on their political philosophies, with the politics of *presence* people are elected in order that they represent a particular group. This idea can be related to homosexuality and gay politicians. Phillips (1995) argues that a new combination of the politics of ideas and the politics of presence is needed rather than one or the other. In relation to such ideas, not only could gay politicians receive recognition based on their particularity as a gay individual (or group), they could in turn represent a particular group in parliament/politics. Mansbridge (1999: 628) notes that descriptive representatives should be evaluated in terms of context. Specifically, Mansbridge (1999: 628) states four ways in which disadvantaged groups may value being represented by a representative from their group:

> (1) Adequate communication in contexts of mistrust... (2) Innovative thinking in contexts of uncrystallized, not fully articulated, interests... [Plus two more functions] (1) Creating a social meaning of 'ability to rule' for members of a group in historical contexts where the ability has been seriously questioned... (2) Increasing the polity's de facto legitimacy in contexts of past discrimination.

All of these points can be said to apply to gay politicians and their representation of gay people/issues. This issue is explored in more detail in Chapter 5 (and Chapter 4 briefly) in the context of surrogate representation, described by Mansbridge (2003) as when politicians from minority groups represent people from outside of their constituency (*i.e.* a gay politician could represent gay people from across the country, rather than just their electoral constituents). However, as the thesis goes on to show, many gay politicians do not want to be seen as 'single-issue' politicians. There is also the issue of whether gay individuals are able to adequately represent gay people as a whole; as with recognition, differences within such a 'group' may be stronger than the overarching similarity of sexuality.

Intimate Citizenship

In many ways, the private sphere as a whole has shrunken (or, if one uses Steinberger's terminology, what were private acts are now public ones); private lives are now defined in and judged by the public. As Plummer (2003 b: 68) notes in relation to 'intimate citizenship':

> In the late modern world, the personal invades the public and the public invades the personal.

Is this problematic? What effect does a shrunken private sphere, to use that term, have on the way society works? It could be argued that the erosion of the private sphere impacts upon the freedom that people have to live their lives the way they want to, free from public interference (assuming that their actions are legal). Thus, privacy is actually undermined unless there is a strict boundary between the public and private, something articulated by Arendt (1958). Equally, it could be maintained that people should be allowed privacy in their lives: just because something is private or not discussed in

public (for example, a gay politician's sexuality), it does not mean that the public will necessarily suffer.

It can be argued that by denying the existence of a wholly private realm, privacy is 'always enjoyed only at the sufferance of public authority' (Steinberger 1999: 312). Steinberger denies this, noting that privacy, as a fundamental aspect of life, can be defended against public life. Steinberger's analysis is rather optimistic; one could certainly state that it is very difficult to defend privacy in the face of the move to the personal and mediated society described above. Steinberger is, however, correct to note that the distinction between the public and private is a fluid one today, although one could maintain it is (or should be) more robust than he presumes; while, of course, private acts often become public ones if they require public judgement and accountability, Steinberger (1999: 310) comments that 'No such [private] realm exists.' However, the opposite could be stated: the private realm *does* exist, and only in extreme cases should it be violated. For, how do we assess when public judgement and accountability are needed?

Also, it must be acknowledged that society acts as if there *are* strict boundaries, something supported/influenced by time-specific moral 'codes' and laws focusing on what is and is not appropriate (public) behaviour; it is all well and good for Steinberger to say that these strict boundaries do not exist, but in practice many believe that they should. Another criticism of Steinberger's work relates to his comment that 'any act is presumed to be private unless shown otherwise' (1999: 312). However, I would argue that the press as an institution believes that any (sexual) act is a *public* one unless shown otherwise; the press can easily argue - and has done on numerous occasions - that a politician's homosexuality is a public matter because the public has the right to know

about the private lives of politicians. Indeed, it is often claimed that the public interest overrides any right a politician has to a (relatively) private life. The politician concerned, however, is likely to disagree.

Mediated Society

The erosion of the public/private boundary goes hand in hand with the notion of a mediated society; people's private lives, including those of gay politicians, are lived in and presented through the media. In fact, one could go as far as to say that many people in the public eye, including gay politicians, now have 'mediated personas,' something discussed by Evans (2005) in relation to celebrity and Corner (2000) in relation to politicians (and as suggested in Frame 3 of Figure 1.10). Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis explore the mediated personas of gay politicians in the UK press. The notion of private lives being lived through the media - what one could perhaps term a (re)presentation of reality - is not a new one. Baudrillard (1995) judged that reality and meaning within society had been replaced by symbols and signs; what society thinks is real is just a simulation of the real - the 'hyperreal.' The media can be seen as a space in which the hyperreal - or artifice - is presented.[11] In Baudrillard's world, communication becomes a means to an end, something which impacts upon the public/private and sexuality. As Wulf (2005) notes, the private and public spheres are disappearing under one dimension of information, making sexuality too visual.

In order to highlight the importance and power of communication in the twenty-first century, these ideas can be linked to Castells (1996). The notion of a single dimension of information is something discussed by Castells, albeit at the beginning of the 'information age' (the Internet, cyberspace *etc*). He (1996) writes that the global

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[11] Baudrillard's musings on scandal are actually another interesting way of examining political scandals; scandals are simulations of scandal, engineered to strengthen morality (Baudrillard 1995: 15-16).

economy is now defined by the exchange of information and cultural communication: a 'network society.' In a 1999 interview, Castells, using the language of hypertext, suggested that in the 'information age' the way society communicates has changed/will continue to change (bearing in mind different cultural/economic experiences) (Castells speaking to Gerstner 1999). Society depends on these new modes of information, and the people who control them are therefore in a position of great power. In fact, Castells (1996) declares that the main political arena is now the media, who are not politically answerable. The move to the personal and the introduction of mediated society thus has more than just an immediate, day-to-day impact: while individual political scandals may be forgotten within a week, they are symbolic of an intense media power - a situation in which democracy can be affected and individual lives can be destroyed by a click of a computer mouse. The 'information age' and all it entails, while beneficial in so many respects, suggests a world in which hyperreality is more powerful than reality, and privacy is expendable in the face of the overwhelming 'need' for information. Sub-section 1.3 goes into more detail on 'mediation' and how the media works.

1.3   'Media' literature: the Press, 'the Personal' and Mediation

"In the immediate postwar period the British people knew little; political leaders were looked up to as moral leaders, and the public and the press did not pry into their private affairs...[it was not until] the scandal-ridden 1960s and 1970s, deference collapsed and the veil of secrecy which protected the privacy of the political class was torn." (Baston 2000: 8-9).

As suggested by the above discussion of mediated society, the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press cannot be fully examined until changes in the way the press works are explored. Indeed, up until the 1960s, the private lives of politicians - heterosexual and gay - were not discussed in any great detail. Of course, significant sexual scandals, including the court cases of gay politicians arrested for public sexual

acts, were mentioned in the press as far back as the 1940s, but as noted by Baston (2000) above, it is certainly the case that the intense focus on the private lives of politicians that we see in the twenty-first century began in the 1960s and 1970s.

The following sub-sections examine the press focus on the private lives of gay politicians, paying particular attention to the personalisation of politics/politicians and notions of scandal and news values, as well as mediated personas (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10), thus further elucidating the overarching frame of representation identified by the thesis. The opening sub-section of the chapter also examines in more detail why it is important to study the representation of gay politicians in the press, with emphasis on the structure of the press, public opinion and the democratic consequences/impact of the press representation of gay politicians.

1.3.1 Media Cause and Effect: Press Structure, Impact and Consequence

The Structure of the Media

The media is a disaggregated configuration which can be broken down into two main categories: print and broadcast media. Broadcast media includes television and radio (regional and national, and in the case of radio, local). The print media consists of magazines, journals, and the focus of this thesis, newspapers (local, regional and national). It is important to note that this thesis does not focus on television, radio, non-newspaper print media and publications, or new technologies such as the Internet. Much of radio news is connected to television (*e.g.* the BBC's radio output), as is the Internet's 'mainstream' news output. There are many 'unofficial' sources of news on the Internet, such as blogs and gossip sites, but these media, often produced and maintained by members of the public, deserve their own thesis.

This thesis primarily concentrates on the press, rather than television news, for a variety of interconnected reasons. Firstly, the representation of gay issues in the press has been particularly damaging in the last fifty years. There is a 'contemporary intensity' in the press coverage of gay politicians, in that there have been a lot of recent changes in the positivity of coverage, and extreme test cases, something this thesis explores. As this suggests, the press is able to pay greater attention to the personal than television news programmes. As Seaton (2003: 178) notes:

> In the making and destroying of reputations, broadcasting and the press play opposed but symbiotic roles. While television exposure, in general, constructs the positive aspects of public lives - or at least, provide them with the vehicles for recognition and al [sic] the power that has come to endow - it is the press that destroys and pulls down these lives.

The press then, much more so than television, is a public space where the private can be portrayed as negative. As Thompson (2000) writes, focusing on the sexual transgressions of public figures is routine.

Newspapers are also able to present a political viewpoint, rather than sticking to an impartial agenda: the *Daily Mail*, for example, has presented a Right-wing Conservative ethos traditionally, the *Daily Mirror* a left of centre Labour agenda. While news stories are supposed to be 'apolitical' in that they present the facts, leaving columnists and opinion columns to present opinion, as the below sub-section on news values discusses in more detail, all news is infused with an (often purposeful, although sometimes unconscious) agenda, something recognised by Fowler (1991). Thus, the press has the freedom to comment and can engage in a more personal way with the public (*i.e.* a newspaper such as *The Sun* presents itself as representative of its reader). This is in stark contrast to an institution such as the BBC, which has to be careful to present an unbiased, apolitical view (although, of course, the BBC's impartiality is often disputed

by those unhappy with its coverage): it holds the middle ground (McQuail 2005). The BBC also has internal guidelines which are supposed to prevent it from focusing on the personal lives of politicians and other public figures, a policy which came to the forefront of public knowledge when Peter Mandelson (MP for Hartlepool 1992-2005) was 'outed' on *Newsnight*, as explored in Chapter 4.[12] Television output is also regulated independently by Ofcom,[13] the Office of Communications, unlike newspapers which are entirely self-regulated in terms of their content via the Press Complaints Commission or PCC. The PCC's Code (2007) states that the 'public interest' can override the rights of the public in relation to particular criteria (such as Clause 3 Privacy) if the following criteria are met:

i)   Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety.
ii) Protecting public health and safety.
iii) Preventing the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.[14]

Thus, while rigorous *external* analysis of television news content is thus the norm, with unfair intrusion into private lives regulated much more strongly in this medium, the press has more freedom.

Newspapers are also commercial products in a much more immediate sense than television news programmes, even those on commercial channels such as ITV; a programme such as ITV news is shown on a television *channel* (bought as part of a television package, through the licence fee), rather than being an *individual* product bought independently of other products which may live or die by its popularity, with

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[12] The presenter of Newsnight actually delivered a note to Mandelson's house apologising for his 'slip,' and as Chapter 4 explores, a BBC executive circulated a memo asking programme makers not to focus on Mandelson's sexuality, something many journalists thought unacceptable as they deemed it an appropriate and 'of the moment' news item.
[13] Ofcom regulates the UK communications industry: television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services.
[14] See Appendix II for the full public interest criteria and PCC clauses.

advertisers as well as readers (although, of course, audience and advertising levels are important, not just for specific programmes, but also for television channels as a whole, and newspapers themselves are usually part of a bigger organisation). As a product which relies on a strong readership, newspapers have to think about their popularity, and sex sells; as Fowler (1991) and Thompson (2000) note, newspapers, as businesses with an eye to the market, publish stories which will benefit them financially. Of course, it is important to recognise that newspapers may not always take financial gain into account when publishing articles which focus on sexual scandal. In fact, Thompson (2000) states that a motivation of this kind is the exception rather than the rule; indeed, articles may be politically rooted or may fit in with the general morality of a newspaper. As they are supposed to be impartial, television news programmes should not take issues of politics or morality into account in their coverage and, as stated above, popularity and related commercial issues are of less importance to television news programmes than to the press, at least in terms of number of viewers compared to readers. Economic and commercial motivations for publication are explored in more detail in sub-section 1.3.2. All of the these issues mean that newspapers are more likely than television news programmes to focus their attention on the personal lives of gay politicians/public figures, therefore making the press, rather than television news, the appropriate medium to explore in this thesis.

Tabloids and Broadsheets

As mentioned above, newspapers exist on a local, regional and national level. This thesis concentrates on the national press because it generally focuses on countrywide, 'bigger' political issues, including issues of personality, as opposed to local concerns. National newspapers can be split into two categories: broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Tabloid newspapers include 'red-tops' such as *The Sun*, and 'black-tops'

such as the *Daily Mail*. 'Black-tops' generally take a more serious tone and cover political issues in greater detail than 'red-tops' (they may present themselves as of broadsheet style in a tabloid format). Broadsheet newspapers, such as *The Guardian* and *The Times*, tend to cover political stories in more depth, with less focus - generally - on entertainment and personal stories than tabloid newspapers. The word 'tabloid' actually describes the size of paper traditionally used by tabloid newspapers: half that of broadsheet newspapers. However the tabloid/broadsheet division is more about style and tone than size or format:

- Tabloids tend to focus on issues of personality and celebrity, the personal and the so-called 'trivial.' Although serious issues are reported on, a colloquial style is often used (with news related to the everyday lives of readers)

- Broadsheets are more likely to 'self-regulate' content and thus focus on more serious issues (or at least the serious consequences of trivial issues). A more formal style is used when covering news stories.

Tabloid newspapers also tend to have one major front-page headline/story, whereas broadsheets usually have more than one. The tabloid format therefore lends itself to sensationalist stories; tabloid newspapers have to grab reader attention using a small amount of space. Some commentators claim that broadsheet newspapers are 'dumbing down': this may be in terms of content (*i.e.* covering political private lives and personal issues rather than policy) or in tone or presentation (*i.e.* taking a trivial approach to a serious issue). As explored in sub-section 1.3.2, the broadsheets are often said to have become increasingly tabloid-like in their approach and style (in fact, some broadsheet newspapers have in the last few years adopted a tabloid sizing). However, as section 1.3.2 explores, 'trivial' coverage can expose political wrongdoing: the 'light' can be

very serious. This thesis explores newspaper articles from both tabloids and broadsheets, although the focus of much of the thesis is tabloid newspaper stories, for the simple fact that they are more likely to cover the personal lives and sexuality of politicians and present gay politicians in a 'scandalous' manner using colloquial language. As noted by McQuail (2005), tabloids (or 'popular' newspapers) have always focused on these issues, although they are still a key medium in political terms. Indeed, contemporary political parties take great care to gain the support of popular tabloid newspapers, particularly *The Sun* (possibly influenced by the power of the paper's owner, Rupert Murdoch, as well as its mass audience). In fact, *The Sun* has long been seen as deeply influential when it comes to general elections; memorably, the paper claimed that 'It Was The Sun Wot Won It' when the Conservative Party hung on to power in 1992. Of course, many people claim that this was not the case at all, particularly if one buys into the notion that newspapers reflect public opinion, rather than setting it (an issue explored in more detail below). However, the belief that many politicians have in the power of the tabloid press when it comes to agenda-setting, potentially makes a tabloid like *The Sun* a very powerful political player.

Many of the articles this thesis examines are from Sunday tabloid newspapers such as the *News of the World* or *The People*. Sunday tabloids have a tradition of focusing on scandalous public figures; they have the time and resources to research a story and build a case against a politician or a celebrity. As such, daily newspapers are more 'news' papers than Sunday ones; they react to news on a day-to-day basis. In fact, the *News of the World*, for example, is actually advertised on the basis that it contains scandalous stories; this is what the reader expects when they sit down to read it (alongside news, sport and comment). Sunday newspapers are a good example of binary themes (Frame 3, Figure 1.10) in action: they use binaries to sell mediated personas and thus stories and

newspapers. In this sense, the financial benefit of using binary themes and personas is made clear. Indeed, negative binary themes are scandalous in themselves; they are used to draw the reader in through the use of strong themes and sensationalism. For example, a 'closeted' gay politician caught engaging in public sex with a prostitute can be presented as inherently more scandalous than an 'out' politician alleged to have broken up with his civil partner, in terms of the words used (as well as the actual situation of course).

TV Representations of Homosexuality

As noted at the beginning of the sub-section, this thesis does not examine the representation of gay men and women on television. However, it should be noted at this point that non-news mediums, such as television entertainment programmes and magazines, often focus attention on gay men and women; gay characters have been the subject of television dramas for many years, and often feature in human interest stories in magazines (the stories may focus on celebrities or non-celebrities). The representation of gay men and woman in these media formats often follows the representation of gay men and woman in the press (see Chapters 3 and 4 for more detail). Gay characters in television programmes were for many years stereotypically presented (the effeminate character of Mr Humphries in the BBC's 1970s sitcom *Are You Being Served?* is a typical example). Of course, this may have had a positive effect; without this type of representation, later, more progressive portrayals of homosexuality may have taken longer to appear. In the 1980s television programmers were under increasing pressure to improve representations of homosexuality (in both character and amount of airtime). As Sanderson (1995) notes, studies in the mid-1980s suggested that only a small percentage of airtime focused on gay and lesbian representation and the vast majority of those representations were negative ones. In the 1980s programme

makers began to include more gay characters in television programmes, accepting the 'validity of the complaints from gay people' and responding 'with more and better air time' (Sanderson, 1995: 21). Contemporary programmes feature many positive gay characters, although charges of stereotypical or problematic characterisation still exist. Indeed, the gay man/heterosexual woman partnership in the American television sitcom *Will and Grace* is criticised by Shugart (2003: 87) as manifesting 'heteronormative masculinity':

> their [gay men's] sexuality is distilled as the strategy via which heterosexual male privilege is enacted and heteronormativity is renormalized... affording gay male identity legitimacy by virtue of its sexist prowess... overwrites homosexuality. (Shugart, 2003: 88).

Interestingly, some writers have suggested that gay men are presented as superior to heterosexuals in some modern television programmes. Indeed, Hart (2004) suggests that in America's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, a make-over show in which gay men advise heterosexual men how to improve their appearances and relationships, the power relationship between gay and heterosexual men is inverted. While this may be the case, the stereotype of gay men being interested in appearances and what could be called the 'superficial,' is maintained in this show, even if it is on an unconscious level. The gay rights campaigning organisation Stonewall believes that gay men and women are still underrepresented on television and, further to this, their portrayal is often negative. Stonewall (2006 a) research on BBC1 and BBC2 output found that gay people and their lives were five times more likely to be described or represented in negative than positive terms on the BBC and that the channel uses clichéd stereotypes. The report also states that lesbians receive hardly any press coverage; as discussed later in the thesis, lesbian women are often invisible (Stonewall 2006 a).

The Media and a Democratic Deficit

As Seaton (2003: 174) highlights, the press focus on the private lives of politicians has potentially democratic consequences:

> A key defence of the media is that they are there precisely to expose, reveal, complain and attack. Healthy democracy depends on vigorous scrutiny, and the examination of the ways in which public power is used to further private ends is a vital aspect of this process. Yet the media - just like everything thing else in political systems - change. The problem is whether the role, impact and obsessions of the media have now become a democratic liability.

Indeed, Deacon (2004) recognises that focusing on politics *through* the personal can inhibit the media's democratic performance. Of course, press attention on the personal can be positive; it can expose wrongdoing, hypocrisy and illegal behaviour. It is also the case that politicians themselves have played a part in the attention paid to their private lives, through somewhat excessive media management ('spin') and promotion of political private lives for public gain. However, excessive press attention may impact upon the amount of attention the press pays to more serious issues, such as policy and debate (an issue explored below); it may affect the ability of politicians to do their jobs; negative/excessive press representation of homosexuality and/or gay politicians could in theory discourage gay people from becoming politicians in the first place, leading to a democratic deficit (fewer gay MPs may lead to poorer parliamentary representation of gay people and discussion of gay issues), or from being 'out,' or from talking about 'gay issues'; gay politicians may feel they have no choice but to deny their sexuality; a focus on 'scandalous' gay politicians may also encourage negative public opinion of gay politicians (either individual politicians or gay politicians as a whole) and gay people in general. Of course, the points relating specifically to gay politicians are less likely to be an issue in the early 2000s than, for example, the 1980s or before, but they are still relevant. In relation to the possibility of a democratic deficit, one counter-method could be the active representation of gay people by gay politicians in order that

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their concerns and beliefs are fully represented - as discussed above in relation to Phillips (1995) and Mansbridge (1999).

Media Impact: Mirroring and Shaping

Discussion of the democratic consequences of the press focus on the personal lives of gay politicians leads to a debate on how much influence the press has on public opinion. There are different models relating to media power, one being the sender to receiver model, which can be characterised thus:

Sender ⟶ (other factors) ⟶ message ⟶ (other factors) ⟶ receiver
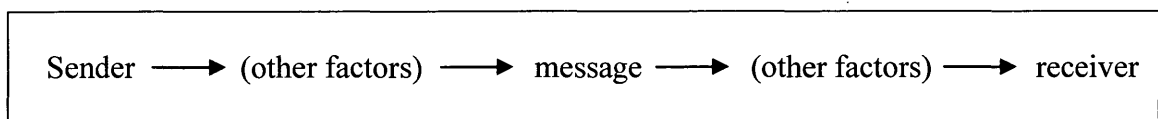
Figure 1.3: Sender to receiver media power (sourced from Livingstone 2005: 31).[15]

Critiques of this model (the main one being that it suggests a 'passive' audience) led to the development of different audience models, perhaps the most well known one being Hall's 'encoding/decoding' model:

TV programme as a
'meaningful discourse'

encoding   decoding

meaning structure 1   meaning structure 2

frameworks of knowledge   frameworks of knowledge
relations of production   relations of production
technical infrastructure   technical infrastructure
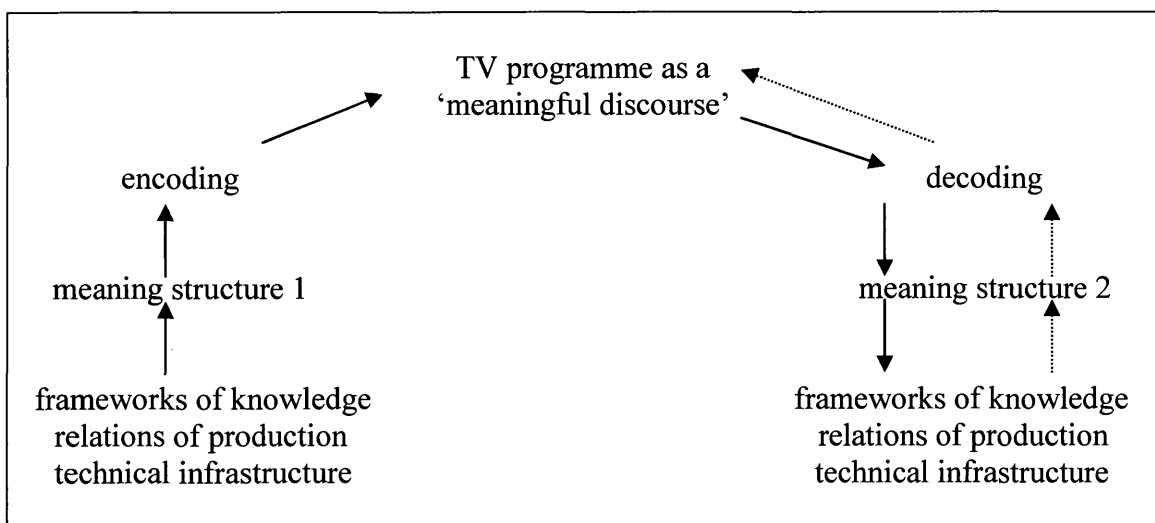
Figure 1.4: Hall's encoding/decoding (Sourced from Livingstone 2005: 33).

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[15] This path was first characterised without the 'other factor' stages. Later interpretations have added further stages, although the sender to receiver notion retains its importance.

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This approach was originally devised in relation to television, but it certainly applies to the press as well. Using the language of semiotics, Hall suggests that the process of communication relates to how messages are produced and distributed and that there are different positions from which audiences can read or decode messages: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and oppositional position; thus, readers can resist the text's preferred reading. The above models highlight that there are various arguments relating to audience engagement. As Livingstone (2005: 42) notes, it is clear that:

- Assumptions should not be made about how audiences read texts 'from knowledge of the text alone'
- Audiences should be related to social contexts
- Media power is a two-way process.

In relation to gay politicians and their representation, it seems most appropriate to conclude that some readers will agree with what a newspaper writes about gay politicians and some will oppose it, with others taking a mid-way position.

Tabloid and broadsheet demographics come into play here. The demographic of broadsheet readership is, as a whole, different to that of tabloid readership. The tabloid/broadsheet distinction can of course be further broken down in relation to newspaper 'politics' (*i.e.* Left/Right); the readership of *The Sun* is vastly different to that of *The Guardian*, but may also be different to that of the *Daily Mirror*. Newspaper producers are aware of their readership and their place in the market and attempt to ensure that content matches majority audience expectation. It is thus more likely that a *Sun* reader will agree with rather than disagree with what that newspaper presents

because the reader and newspaper are likely to share the same opinions. Of course, many people read newspapers which others members of the household have bought, and may therefore *not* share the opinion of the newspaper. Media 'gatekeeping' (the idea that the media selects the information to be presented to the public, for reasons such as available time/space, moral/political agendas, and the process/structure of news), is not, therefore, an all powerful process. While the media does select and present information (generally, but also in relation to different audiences), readers act as 'gatekeepers' as well; they can not only select what to read (in terms of content and also the newspaper itself), they can also choose to disagree or negotiate with what is being presented (*i.e.* a particular opinion or agenda). In terms of the media's power to set agendas, it is perhaps the case that while the media can determine what readers think *about*,[16] it cannot necessarily always direct people to have particular opinions.

In general, as suggested by Hall's approach, the media has been seen as having the following roles: a) reinforcement (*i.e.* feeding off public opinion and reiterating it) and b) agenda setting (*i.e.* enforcing opinion). However, reinforcement is a much stronger (and easily provable) argument. Indeed, the media has been described as being like a signpost, directing people to where they are already headed (Lazarsfeld 1944). Thus, they do not travel in a new direction just because the signpost may point that way. To take this forward, McQuail (2005: 501) states, the media acts as a 'channel and facilitator' thus reflecting society and providing the means for debate and change; it mirrors and shapes boundaries, to use an important term from Figure 1.10. If newspapers are led by their readers, mirroring and shaping, rather than directly setting public opinion (although there is no doubt that this does sometimes occur), *the move towards the acceptability and recognition of homosexuality has been driven by the*

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[16] This said, alternative media sources such as the Internet are places where 'alternative' versions of news can be presented and accessed. Thus, this statement applies to the 'mainstream' press/media.

public. There are of course other social factors involved in mirroring and shaping (such as families, culture *etc*), but this thesis focuses on the press. As McQuail (2005: 500) states:

> We should... keep in mind that there is a continuous interaction between media and society. The media, whether as technology or cultural change, do not simply have a one-way causal relationship with cultural and social change.

Indeed, the idea of the media as a 'gatekeeper' suggests there is one 'gate,' whereas in fact there are multiple 'gates.'[17] So, the move from intolerance to tolerance suggested in the thesis (and shown in Figure 1.10) is influenced by multiple factors, the press being one (as demonstrated in Chapter 2).

Public Opinion

Opinion polls show that public opinion towards homosexuality has steadily become more liberal over the years (allowing for setbacks as part of the 'halting' process identified above), as shown by the following data (a composite of British Social Attitudes (BSA) responses to various questions about homosexuality):

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[17] It also assumes there is a simple 'supply' of news (McQuail, 2005).

British attitudes towards homosexuality		1983	1985	1987	1989
Homosexual relations always or mostly wrong		62%	69%	74%	68%
Acceptable for homosexual to be teacher	Yes	41%	36%	43%	45%
	No	53%	54%	50%	47%
Acceptable for homosexual to hold responsible position in public	Yes	53%	50%	55%	58%
	No	42%	41%	39%	37%
Lesbian couples able to adopt	Yes	-	13%	11%	18%
	No	-	82%	86%	78%
Gay male couples able to adopt	Yes	-	6%	5%	10%
	No	-	91%	93%	87%

Figure 1.5: British attitudes towards homosexuality 1983-1989.[18]

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[18] Questions asked: a) "What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex?" (Always wrong; mostly wrong; sometimes wrong; wrong; not wrong at all).
b) "Now I would like you to tell me whether, in your opinion, it is acceptable for a homosexual person: to be a teacher in a school; to hold a responsible position in public life." (Yes; no; depends).
c) "Do you think female homosexual couples - that is, lesbians - should be allowed to adopt a baby under the same conditions as other couples?; do you think male homosexual couples...?" (Yes; no; depends). (Brook *et al.* 1992 cited Rayside 1998: 40).

As the data reveals, public attitudes towards the various issues became less liberal in the 1980s – post HIV/AIDS – before becoming more positive as the 1980s ended. The impact of HIV/AIDS is explored in more detail in Chapter 2. It is also apparent that homosexuality is seen as more problematic when issues such as adoption raise their head; another example of the acceptability threshold in action. The figures below (also BSA composite data) highlight that liberality continued in the 1990s and 2000s:

Homosexual relations always wrong	1996	1997	2006
Agree strongly	11.65%	10.61%	7.92%
Agree	12.75%	12.82%	10.27%
Neither agree/disagree	33.57%	36.59%	28.48%
Disagree	27.29%	25.98%	33.78%
Disagree strongly	13.03%	12.88%	18.11%
Don't know	0.03%	0.00%	0.00%
Not answered	1.69%	1.15%	1.48%

Figure 1.6: British attitudes towards whether homosexual relations are always wrong 1996-2006.[19]

Generational change is important when it comes to changing public attitudes. Indeed the data from Figure 1.6 can be broken down further in relation to age. Taking the year 1996 as an example year alongside the 'disagree strongly' category, it is clear that younger generations are generally more tolerant than older ones:

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[19] Question asked: "Please tick one box for each statement below to show how much you agree or disagree with it Homosexual relations are always wrong" (Agree strongly, agree, neither agree/disagree, disagree, disagree strongly, don't know, not answered). Data compiled by (CCESD 2008), sourced from the British Social Attitudes Survey.

Homosexual relations always wrong (disagree strongly)	1996
Age 18-24	28.48%
Age 25-34	22.46%
Age 35-44	13.05%
Age 45-54	10.33%
Age 55-59	3.93%
Age 60-64	3.65%
Age 65+	3.03%

Figure 1.7: Those who strongly disagree that homosexual relations are always wrong (1996) by age group.[20]

It thus follows that as time progresses, attitudes towards issues such as homosexuality are likely to become more liberal. As revealed by the impact of HIV/AIDS, backwards steps are possible; however, it seems unlikely that any regression of liberality would be permanent, as shown by the resurgence of more liberal public attitudes post-HIV/AIDS. The causes of changing generational attitudes are complex, with various social factors working together in a symbiotic process (the mirroring and shaping process noted above). Progressiveness is explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.3.2 From Secrecy to Scandal: Understanding the Press Focus on the Personal Lives of Gay Politicians

From Deference to Exposure

It would be mistaken to believe that the private lives of politicians (gay and heterosexual) have always been subject to press exposure. Indeed, as noted by Baston (2000), up until the 'scandal-ridden' 1960s the press did not typically focus on the private lives of politicians; after this point, and scandals such as the Profumo affair in 1963, deference ended and the private lives of politicians became fair game to media

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[20] Data compiled from (CCESD 2008), sourced from the British Social Attitudes Survey.

exposure.[21] Baston uses the phrase 'veil of secrecy' to describe these times of deference (Baston 2000: 9). This phrase describes a time when those in power were looked up to by the people they were supposed to serve and when their private affairs were hidden from the public. It is important to point out that it is not the case that political misdemeanours were never published in the 'age of deference,' or that if they were exposed, the politicians concerned were not punished; for example, John Belcher (Labour MP for Sowerby 1945-1949), a minister in the early 1950s Labour Government, was forced to resign as a minister and as an MP for accepting gifts from a corrupt businessman, a case not too dissimilar from the Neil Hamilton scandal (Conservative MP for Tatton 1983-1997) in the early 1990s (Baston 2000).[22] But, overall, the 'veil of secrecy' remained firmly in place.

Changes to the communication process were at the heart of the move from 'deference' to 'exposure.' Thompson describes how developments in what he calls the 'cultural sphere' - from the development of the printing press in the early fifteenth century to newspapers and then electronic communication - changed the way society communicated (Thompson 2000: 34). These changes led to a growth in what Thompson calls 'mediated forms of communication' and in turn, changes to the way that people interacted with each other and their elected representatives (Thompson 2000: 34). Thus, information could be transmitted to those who were not witnessing it immediately (face-to-face at, for example, a public meeting) and could therefore become 'open-ended' (Thompson 2000: 34). This 'open-endedness' is even more relevant in the twenty-first

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[21] John Profumo (Conservative MP for Kettering 1940-1945 and Stratford-on-Avon 1950-1963), Minister for War, was forced to resign from Parliament after it was revealed he had lied about an affair with a young woman who was also having an affair with a Soviet military official.
[22] It was alleged by *The Guardian* in 1994 that Hamilton and Tim Smith (Conservative MP for Beaconsfield 1982-1997) accepted money from the controversial Egyptian businessman Mohammed Al Fayed to ask questions in the House of Commons and that Hamilton and his wife also had an undeclared, lavish stay at the Paris Ritz, owned by Al Fayed. Smith ended up standing down as an MP, and Hamilton, after declaring his innocence and refusing to do the same, lost his seat at the 1997 General Election and was then found guilty in a libel trial against Al Fayed.

century, the age of the Internet, a communication tool which has led to an even greater rise in mediated communication, with information stored and dispersed for (potentially) the whole world to access.[23]

Of course, developments in the 'cultural sphere' do not in themselves account for the rise in coverage of the personal lives of politicians: according to Thompson (2000), a new 'publicness' occurred, wherein politicians could be viewed by the public via the media. 'Open-ended' forms of media and communication meant that politicians could become detached from immediacy and extend their reach. This new form of 'publicness' changed the ways in which the media and the public viewed politicians. It was possible for political leaders to reveal aspects of their character and inner lives to the wider public as they were no longer constrained by the limitations of one-to-one contact. This meant, in turn, that politicians could become more 'intimate' and present themselves as 'ordinary' people in touch with their public, rather than be seen as remote and inaccessible figures. Mediated personas (as highlighted in Frame 3 of Figure 1.10) could come into play. This shows that the idea of politicians presenting or 'spinning' their public personas is not a new one. Indeed, Goffman (1959) used the phrase 'impression management' to describe the process of controlling and influencing the impressions that people have about a person (or event, object *etc.*) as part of social interaction. Impression management is related to social settings; people may present different aspects of themselves in different situations (thus a politician can present his or herself as tough while debating in the House of Commons and friendly while visiting school children).[24]

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[23] Clearly, the Internet has not brought *equal* mediated growth and access; many parts of the world do not have access to the Internet, and even if they do, in much of the world a 'liberal democratic' conception of the media does not exist and the public is in fact cut off from the political world/politicians.

[24] Using the imagery of the theatre to describe social interaction, Goffman (1959) analyses the relationship between performers and audiences. According to Goffman, social actors perform in front of an audience ('front' stage). Social actors can choose their stage ('setting'), props and costume, with the

Following on from Goffman, Fenno (1978) demonstrated that a great deal can be discovered about how politics/politicians work, and the process of representation, by studying politicians (here, U.S Congressmen) in their home districts.[25] Drawing on Goffman's ideas, Fenno believes that each politician has his or her own 'home style'; a way of presenting themselves in order to meet three goals: re-election; political power; and good public policy. Each politician has four constituencies - the geographic constituency, the re-election constituency, the primary constituency, and the person constituency (family, friends, advisers *etc.*) - and different strategies for each group. Thus, congressmen can appeal to each of these groups (one way being through presentation of the self - Goffman's idea). Virtual public spaces such as newspapers (which can be seen as another constituency to be used by politicians), through which politicians can stage their public selves, have been important public arenas for politicians since the rise of 'publicness'; through newspapers (and other forms or media), politicians could promote themselves to various audiences in ways both beneficial to the audience and to themselves. The process of impression management is not necessarily a cynical exercise, something suggested by the Goffman's rather cold terminology: while politicians (and people in general) may try to deliberately mislead their audience, they may also genuinely believe in their performance.

Mediated Scandal

By revealing aspects of their character (whether authentic or not), politicians operating within this new field of 'publicness' could be judged in ways which they were not previously: how 'human' they appeared; how well they were perceived to empathise

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main aim of keeping their performance consistent in relation to the audience in question (which can be real or imaginary). 'Backstage,' away from the audience, actors can relax and form their identity. Interaction is thus a performance. Actors can cooperate in performance - in 'teams' - to achieve group goals; each actor must keep up his or her performance in order that the group performance is maintained. In Goffman's terms, the self is public rather than private: it is defined through social interaction.

[25] Fenno made 36 trips over eight years to the constituencies of 18 different U.S congressmen. He travelled with the congressmen and talked with them and their constituents.

with the problems of 'ordinary' people; and their personal behaviour, character and appearance. As Thompson (2000) notes, this led to further problems for a political class used to a 'healthy' distance between itself and the public: their character could be negatively as well as positively judged. Thus, this new visibility and publicness created an environment in which scandal - 'mediated' scandal - was much more likely. As noted by Thompson (2000), mediated scandals do not exist in isolation: they are fed and created by the media. Thompson (2000) suggests that there are three types of political scandal - all of which can be created by and/or enhanced by/through the media:

1. Sexual-political scandals

2. Financial-political scandals

3. Power scandals.

This research is concerned with the first category of scandal (although it is important to note that scandals can cross categories and become, for example, sexual-financial scandals), but what is significant is that all of the above-noted 'types' of scandal involve the transgression of 'norms' and values, even though scandals in themselves can be very diverse. As a result of the new 'publicness' and the process described by Thompson, activities which the 'veil of secrecy' would have hidden from the public (activities which may have conflicted with a public political image) could now be categorised as a ('type' of) scandal and exposed, leading to published conflicts of interest, public scandal, and political disgrace. Of course, this does not mean that there were more political scandals than in the past, but that they were now much more likely to be *revealed* to the public.

John Corner's (2000) work on mediated personas can be read in relation to notions of political scandal. Corner explores mediated personas and notes there are three different spheres of action:

- Sphere of political institutions and processes
- Sphere of public and popular
- Private sphere.

He states it is in the sphere of public and popular that politicians develop reputations, are judged etc. This sphere then relates to the private sphere because the latter sphere is 'used as a resource in the manufacture of political identity and in its repair following misadventure' (Corner 2000: 394). Thus, the private sphere connects to the public spheres, mediated personas can be projected within the private sphere, and importantly the private sphere can also be engaged with in terms of 'risk,' such as repairing a negative mediated persona following a sexual 'scandal' (Corner 2000: 394). Corner goes on to note that personalisation via mediated personas is not necessarily a negative thing, because political personas are a source of 'democratic engagement' (2000: 404). So, while a focus on the personal can have negative consequences for politicians, it can also have positive ones for both them and their audience.

As noted by Corner (2000), his idea of spheres of action connects with Habermas's notion of the public sphere. However, as noted by Steinberger (1999) and discussed in the thesis, above, distinctions between private/public can be debated. Indeed, Fraser (1992) problematises Habermas's definitions, noting that there are no naturally given boundaries between what we think of as public and what we think of as private (she discusses domestic abuse and notes that this once private issue has now become an issue of public concern). Fraser also notes that Habermas's idea of the public sphere is not an

inclusive one; marginalised groups form their own public spheres (counterpublics), which can be seen as a positive thing:

> In stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public. (Fraser 1992: 122).

As noted above also, while boundaries of public/private can be contested, the definition is a useful one in this research because the press itself engages with such a distinction. However, ideas such as Fraser's are interesting because they suggest that the 'move to the personal' - which itself connotes that there are private issues and public ones, and what we define as such has changed over the years - involves notions of public/private which are contestable, and also that there is more than one public. The idea of multiple publics certainly ties in with the notion or emerging gay and lesbian spheres, discussed above.

A 'Lighter' Style of Journalism

The move to the personal points to the fact that there also had to be a willingness on the part of the press to write about the private lives of politicians. Indeed, Thompson (2000) makes the point (in relation to sexual scandal) that this newly emerging focus on the private lives of politicians could be helpful to newspapers; this kind of reporting made easy headlines, grabbed the reader's attention, and most importantly, was considered 'a good story.' This development has a historical basis, one that is broader than the press simply responding to politics and politicians. Indeed, in the mid-1800s journalism can be thought of as entering a new phase. Instead of an ever-present focus on serious news, 'new journalism' focused on the 'light' (Williams 1998). What constitutes a 'good' story (*i.e.* one thought to appeal to readers) is not historically static; it responds to the

socio-political factors of the time, public tastes and industry developments (*e.g.* industrial changes, press ownership *etc.*).

Indeed, the rise of the 'popular' press and 'lighter' stories from the mid-1800s onwards (itself a result of factors such as higher levels of literacy, new technology such as the telegraph, the abolition of press taxation and the industrialisation of the press) saw stories focus on scandal, romance, crime and sport, instead of independent political commentary (Williams 1998). The rise of campaigning journalism in the 1880s, characterised by W. T. Stead's work on child prostitution, saw more socially responsible topics discussed in the press. However, these stories were still written in a 'popular' fashion, utilising, for example, interviews, personal testimony and lurid headlines (Williams 1998), demonstrating that a 'lighter' style was becoming the norm, even if the subject matter itself was serious. Indeed, Williams (1998) notes that changes in the economics and content of newspapers were accompanied by changes in layout, style and typography. Some newspapers resisted the changes more than others, leading to differentiation within the media market, as explored below.

Tabloidization

As noted by Thompson (2000), 'humanization' extended to political coverage as well. One can think of this as an emerging 'tabloidization,' a term Franklin (1997) uses, albeit in reference to the 1980s and 1990s. Franklin (1997) notes that contemporary newspapers, echoing this earlier period, are now much more likely to adopt a tabloid agenda, with emphasis on the sensationalist and the scandalous. Indeed, Franklin's writings about 'lighter' contemporary journalism could just as easily be related to the nineteenth century. Thus, the 'serious' reporting of politics has been replaced by a focus on the 'less serious' side of politics: personality, private behaviour and character, rather

than parliamentary debate, political analysis and comment. As the term 'tabloidization' suggests, this change has in fact moved on to broadsheet newspapers as well, a form of media Franklin refers to as 'broadloids' (1997: 7-10). Indeed, Franklin (1997) notes that parliamentary journalism (journalism focusing on reports and debates from the Houses of Parliament) has declined and been replaced by humorous and less serious sketches by politicians turned journalists. Thus, when Parliament is reported upon, it is often trivialised. As Thompson (2000: 238-239) writes, the result has been 'a "tabloidization" of the media and a "privatization" of the public sphere.'

Media Economics

This section has shown an observable link between a changing media and communication process, a new publicness, a decrease in serious political coverage and a greater focus on the personal lives of individual politicians, and will now explore what the media got out of this change. Indeed, why change focus at all? Well, one answer is the commonly held belief that 'dumbing down' is exactly what the readers of newspapers want. As Franklin (1997: 4) supposes:

> Journalists are more concerned to report stories which interest the public than stories which are in the public interest.

They are, of course, also more likely to write stories that interest themselves. So, one can observe a move from the serious reporting of politics and parliamentary debates, to a focus on sex, scandal and personality. Essentially, the customer drives the market. Street (2001) likens the reporting of politics to a soap opera, which in turn strongly emphasises the idea of media as 'infotainment.' Entertainment is deemed to be of more interest to the public and more likely to sell newspapers. Certainly, Franklin (1997) claims that the vast majority of journalists he spoke to believed that the decline in

reports from the House of Commons and Lords was demand led. Franklin goes on to note that news is delivered in snippets which do not demand too much of the audience (Franklin 1997). This argument is emphasised by Street (2001), who not only notes the increased demand for space in newspapers (between political and sports coverage for example), but also challenges by other forms of media and the competition for readers that this brings.

As noted in the above sub-section, media economics is an important factor in the increased focus on the personal lives of politicians in UK newspapers. It should not be forgotten that newspapers are a commercial enterprise: owners of newspapers want their products to sell. Focusing on the personal is another commercial decision which may reap benefits; at the very least, it differentiates publications within the media market. Thus, some publications (such as the *News of the World*) have decided to focus their content on 'lighter' stories (Thompson 2000). Indeed, it is important to note that newspapers (and different media formats as a whole, as explored in the above discussion on television and the press) have different agendas, such as political (supporting one party above another); moral (presenting a particular way of life as correct); and intellectual (presenting itself as 'highbrow'). Therefore, a broadsheet newspaper such as *The Guardian* is not just concerned with pleasing its readership when deciding to have a greater focus on 'serious' issues than 'light' ones: it is trying to present an image of gravitas and social conscience to the market as a whole.

In relation to discussion of media economics, Thompson (2000) notes that there are four reasons why the press may focus on mediated (political) scandals (scandal being a way in which the personal lives of politicians may be presented):

1. Financial gain

2. Political objectives

3. Professional self-conceptions

4. Competitive rivalries.

The first and fourth points are of most importance when discussing the relationship between media economics and the rise of the focus on the personal. Thompson (2000) notes in relation to financial gain that scandals equal sales. Political scandal stories thus make financial sense. Of course, as noted above, it may not be the case that journalists are necessarily thinking about financial gain when they focus on scandal/aspects of the personal. Indeed, it may be more the *structure* of the media which has ensured that these kinds of stories are written about, rather than individual personnel (Thompson 2000).[26] Competition (point four, above) is the key issue. As Thompson (2000: 83) writes:

> Media organizations do not exist in isolation: they stand in complex relations - often competitive in character - to other media organizations... [This has] a bearing on the production of mediated scandal.

In audience terms, it therefore makes sense for a newspaper to expose, for example, the sexual proclivities of a politician: this type of article will probably be more interesting and gratifying to read for many readers than the details of a complicated political issue. 'Structure' (competition, economics and technology) and 'agency' or 'agents' (consumers, reporters *etc.*), are key components in the production of news and mediated scandals. Outside organisations also play a role (perhaps the police) (Thompson 2000), as do the subjects of the news: those whose 'scandalous' activities are being written

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[26] The market concept in itself is also problematic: it treats audiences as consumers rather than a public. As McQuail (2005: 399-400) writes: 'It links sender and receiver in a 'calculative' rather than normative or social relationship... People in audiences do not normally have any awareness of themselves as belonging to markets, and the market discourse in relation to the audience is implicitly manipulative.'

about. And, it should not be forgotten that news takes place within a socio-political context.

Reader Demand and Expectation

Interestingly, Street (2001: 45) notes in relation to the reporting of the personal lives of politicians, 'Readers are there to be amused rather than informed; they are expected to laugh and mock.' This is a claim about how readers are treated, rather than how they actually are, suggesting that readers may not necessarily want 'infotainment,' but are fed a diet of it by sections of the press anyway. Research has suggested that journalists think that 'infotainment' is what readers want. Indeed, Franklin (1997: 246) states that the journalists he wrote to described readers as 'bored' and 'uninterested.' However, newspapers may not actually need to focus on 'lighter' (political) stories in order to sustain their readerships; to echo Thompson (2000), they have become a routinized feature of newspapers, rather than an audience-required one. An important note: even if readers *do* want to be entertained by the articles they read, and are interested in the personal aspects of politics, one can contend that it is certainly not the case that 'the trivial has triumphed over the weighty' (Franklin 1997: 4) in a *complete* sense. Indeed, just because an article is phrased and presented 'lightly,' it does not mean that it cannot expose, for example, political wrongdoing: while the presentation may be entertaining, the message may be very serious (as suggested, above, in discussion on W.T Stead).[27] Plus, as the below diagram shows, personal issues can be serious ones:

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[27] Indeed, research has shown that 'while there has been changes in news reporting it is not strictly one way and down; indeed, there is some evidence to indicate an upmarketing amongst the tabloid press and television.' In this article material is presented from *The Sun, The Daily Telegraph, The Times* and a number of television channels for comparison. (Cole 1997: abstract).

Serious issues	Non-serious issues	
Serious personal	Non-serious personal	*Personal*
Serious Public	Non-serious public	*Public*

Figure 1.8: Serious/non-seriousness versus personal/public issues.

Indeed, a story about a 'personal' matter (the lifestyle of a celebrity for example) could actually end up raising serious issues. Alternatively, a story which is about a 'serious' matter (say, the economy) could become a personal one by focusing on an individual at the centre of the story. One could in fact state that the idea of personal issues as serious issues is the essence of politics. As Downs (1957) famously argued, politicians want power first and foremost. The personal, as something which can increase the possibility of this, is thus an extremely serious issue: think 1994 and Tony Blair's (Prime Minister 1997-2007 and Labour MP for Sedgefield 1983-) promotion as a family man, over the then single and childless Gordon Brown (Prime Minister 2007- and MP for Dunfermline East 1983-). While it can be debated how much this mattered to the actual public (and the politicians), it was something discussed in the press, even if it was on an oblique level. Indeed, the idea that 'personalisation' (the notion that the personal side of politics - image *etc* - is at the forefront of politics, rather than policy) takes away from politics is not necessarily the case. As Van Zoonen (2005: 146) notes, personalisation is a way in which people can engage with politics; through 'political personas' (a combination of a politician's personality and the responsibilities that are projected onto them), similar to mediated personas (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10), political selves are revealed and perceived by other people. In fact, personalisation may offer a way into

politics for people otherwise disengaged (Van Zoonen 2005). However, it should be noted that there is a vast difference between personalisation and invading privacy.

It may also be the case that modern readers do not actively choose their media, something noted by McQuail (2005), and above: people may read newspapers chosen by other people in their household or circle. Thus, the readership numbers of a 'light' newspaper such as *The Sun* may be as much to do with its easy availability and commonplaceness rather than people actively choosing it - and its content/message - over another newspaper. The way the modern media works is certainly a key factor in the move to the personal. Indeed, we now live in a twenty-four hour media age, meaning that news is available more quickly and there is a greater demand on the journalist by the industry and on the product by those who buy it. Certainly, Street (2001) notes that the media focuses on the personal because of the organisation and structure of the media, limited space for stories and tight deadlines. Thus, it is much easier to report on a political sex scandal, with column inches taken up by sensationalist paparazzi photographs and lurid quotes, than to report on a complicated international development debate in the House of Commons. This could be thought of as a circular process: the more the public knows, the more the public's appetite needs to be fed.

There are also social and cultural factors to consider. As mentioned above, the distance between politicians and the public has narrowed. Although many politicians today have had a good education and benefit from the opportunities that follow on from this, and it is the case that they often come from similar, 'advantaged' backgrounds (Moran 2005), it is certainly no longer the case that politicians are automatically of a different class or upbringing; theoretically, anyone can become a politician today. This means that many

voters will be able to see themselves represented in the person they have elected (even if this relates to some, rather than all, politicians). As Ridley (1995: 72) notes:

> If John Major [whose father worked in the circus] can become Prime Minister then Jack will be inclined to say he is as good as his master - and entitled to criticise the behaviour of those who rule him.

The move to the personal and the collapse of deference that this necessitates means that the public have different expectations and demands of politicians. The public as a whole will no longer allow misdemeanours to be swept under the carpet, and expects politicians to remain sleaze free. As suggested above in relation to Goffman (1959), it is imperative to note that politicians themselves have played a big role in the move to the personal. Indeed, many politicians and political parties have portrayed themselves as, for example, family orientated in order to gain favourable media coverage and more public support. It is legitimate to argue that by portraying themselves in this way (*i.e.* by consciously utilising 'impression management'), politicians are actively encouraging the media's focus on their private lives. Indeed, many people argue that politicians do not have the right to complain if their personal lives become the focus of the media's attention because they have often played such an active role in this process.

1.3.3   Homosexual Political Scandal: Homosexuality and News Values

Historical News Value

It is no surprise to note that press focus on gay people/homosexuality as a whole is greater in the twenty-first century than the early to mid-twentieth century, or that contemporary articles on gay people are more positive than at any other time; the press (both tabloid and broadsheet) now publishes articles focusing on gay public figures (*e.g.* celebrities and politicians) and members of the public, which either positively highlight

homosexuality or ignore it altogether (for homosexuality is now so 'normal' there is no need to draw attention to it). However, as Chapter 4 illustrates, even in the twenty-first century gay people are regularly depicted in the (often 'popular' tabloid) press in a derogatory manner. Homosexuality has certainly always had great news value.

Indeed, as far back as 1889 and the Cleveland Street scandal, when Lord Arthur Somerset and the Earl of Euston were accused of visiting a male brothel, 'scandalous' tales of homosexuality have always caught the attention of the press and the public.[28] As homosexuality was illegal in the late 1800s, the news value of the Cleveland Street scandal was immense. The rumours surrounding Somerset and the Earl of Euston were mentioned in the press after the trial of two other men for gross indecency had taken place; it was suggested that these men had received relatively light sentences in return that men in 'high places,' including Somerset and the Earl of Euston, were not implicated in the scandal (one defendant had suggested when arrested that they had visited the brothel). In late 1889, the *North London Press* (a small, radical paper concerned with workers and the poor) printed an article headed 'THE WEST END SCANDALS' (1889 cited Thompson 2000: 56), in which Somerset and the Earl of Euston were named in connection with the 'indescribably loathsome scandal in Cleveland-Street.' The article suggested that Somerset and the Earl of Euston had escaped prosecution because it would have disclosed:

> the fact that a far more distinguished and highly placed personage than themselves was inculpated in their disgusting crimes. (1889 cited Thompson 2000: 56).

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[28] In the late 1800s a house on Cleveland Street in London was run as a male brothel. The brothel came to police notice when a fifteen-year-old boy called Charles Swinscow was accused of having an unusual amount of money on his person (money had been stolen from the Central Telegraph Office where he worked as a telegraph messenger). When questioned, the boy admitted that he had earned the money by 'going to bed with gentlemen' in the house on Cleveland Street.

As these short extracts show, while condemning the crimes, the newspaper promotes their 'shocking' and 'scandalous' nature: the article's news value is based around the fact that homosexuality was illegal at the time. Thompson (2000) notes that the Cleveland Street scandal was one of many scandals presented in the late nineteenth-century English press which involved sexuality (heterosexual and homosexual) shaped by the morals and laws of late Victorian England. The legal status of homosexuality has always been a major factor in the press treatment of homosexuality. Due to the fact that it was once illegal and the age of consent for gay men has frequently changed (and until recently has always been higher than the age of heterosexual consent), the press has had plenty of opportunity to write about public figures caught in 'compromising' situations. In fact, the Cleveland Street 'scandal,' along with Oscar Wilde's trial for gross indecency in the 1880s (see Chapter 2 for more detail), are representative of a time in which sex and sexual 'scandals' became relevant subjects for the press. As Chapter 2 explores, these events occurred at a time when the private was regulated against (in the form of, for example, the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act), the public became involved in private sexuality, and homosexuality itself became a criminally punishable, public identity.

Selection

Although homosexuality has strong news value, particular stories/issues are the subject of press attention: stories are *selected* (part of the 'gatekeeping' process explored above). Indeed, Critcher *et. al.* (1997) note that the media chooses news rather than simply reports events as they happen: events are sorted and selected according to socially created categories. While news values may be unconscious in actual editorial practice (Fowler 1991), news is still an active process. As Philo (1983: 135) notes:

> News is not 'found' or even 'gathered' so much as made. It is a creation of a journalistic process, an artefact, a commodity even.

Thus, a married politician caught in public having a private affair with another man *becomes* a news story, even a scandal; the situation does not naturally and automatically present itself as a smoothly packaged news item. Indeed, their mediated persona would almost certainly be *presented* as a negative one, utilising negative binary themes (Frame 3). It is important to note at this point that stories can be categorised as being reported (*i.e.* a newspaper reports 'outside' events as they happen, for example, reports on a court case involving a politician) or manufactured (*i.e.* a newspaper manipulates events in order to produce a story, for example, purposely 'outs' a politician), a division which echoes the difference between reporting on the sexuality of a gay politician and actually 'outing' them. Although there can be some crossover between manufacturing and reporting, it is useful to think in terms of such a division because it helps to understand the motivations of the press, as well as the impact of press representation. The case studies in Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate the reporting/manufacturing difference.

In relation to the idea of categorisation (and the frames noted above), Fowler (1991: 17) notes that newspapers make reference to 'frames' (see my below comments on framing), 'paradigms,' 'stereotypes,' 'schemata' and 'general propositions.' Indeed, he (1991) believes that newspapers are preoccupied with categorising people and putting discriminatory frames on them. So, a married but secretly gay politician has news value as a stereotype: he may be presented as a scandalous, amoral, and 'bad' gay man. Galtung and Ruge (1973) identify 12 actual news values: the more a story meets, the greater news value it may have:

1. Frequency (the time span of an event - how quickly meaning can be arrived at)

2. Threshold (the size of an event)

3. Unambiguity (the clarity of an event)

4. Meaningfulness (cultural proximity and relevance)

5. Consonance (the predictability of/desire for an event)

6. Unexpectedness (the unpredictability/rarity of an event)

7. Continuity (the running time of an event)

8. Composition (the mixture of different kinds of event)

9. Reference to elite nations (linked/well-known nations are likely to be reported upon)

10. Reference to elite persons (it is assumed their activities are more relevant)

11. Personalization (events are linked to particular people)

12. Negativity (bad news equals good, interesting news).

News values 10 (reference to elite persons), 11 (personalisation) and 12 (negativity) are very important to this thesis: they are particularly applicable to the representation of gay politicians in the press. Indeed, in relation to 'reference to elite persons,' it is assumed by the press that the activities of gay politicians and other public figures are more important than the activities of 'ordinary' individuals; this is one of the reasons why the press often references the 'need to know' argument in relation to the publication of articles on homosexual political scandal. And, as Hartley (1995) explores, the actions of famous, 'elite' people such as gay politicians can serve as representative actions: the reader can see their own lives within the press through these people. In relation to 'personalization,' Hartley (1995: 78) notes that 'events are seen as the actions of people as individuals.' Further than this, as individuals are easier to identify with than institutions, institutions are often personalized. Therefore, individual people can be

presented as representative of institutions. Thus, a gay politician caught up in a sex scandal and described by the press as 'sleazy' and lacking in morals, can be used to symbolise a 'sleazy,' morally bankrupt government. 'Back to basics' in the early 1990s is a good example of this, when the individual peccadilloes of Conservative MPs (some gay, some heterosexual) came to be seen as representative of a failing, morally unsure government (see Chapter 4 for more detail on 'back to basics').

In relation to 'negativity,' without doubt, most sexual scandal stories involving gay politicians are presented in a negative light: for the individual concerned, their families if they are married, and their political party (but not for the newspaper concerned, for whom the story is very positive). It does not occur to the press (particularly the tabloid press) that stories concerned with homosexuality may turn out to be extremely positive for the person concerned. For example, a politician may have finally become comfortable with his or her homosexuality after many years of struggle and embarked upon a loving, happy relationship with someone of the same sex. Galtung and Ruge's (1973) ideas are explored in more detail in Chapter 4. Within Galtung and Ruge's structure, Hartley (1995) notes there are maps which assume society to be:

1. *Fragmented* into spheres

2. *Composed* of individuals in control of their lives; actions are the result of personal choices

3. *Hierarchical*: some people/spheres are more important that others

4. *Consensual.*

Homosexual 'Deviancy'

While the categorisation of people in this way does not necessarily reflect the personal views of journalists (news is often an impersonal process), groups outside consensus (gay men being an obvious example) are often portrayed by the media as dissenters or deviants (Hartley 1995).
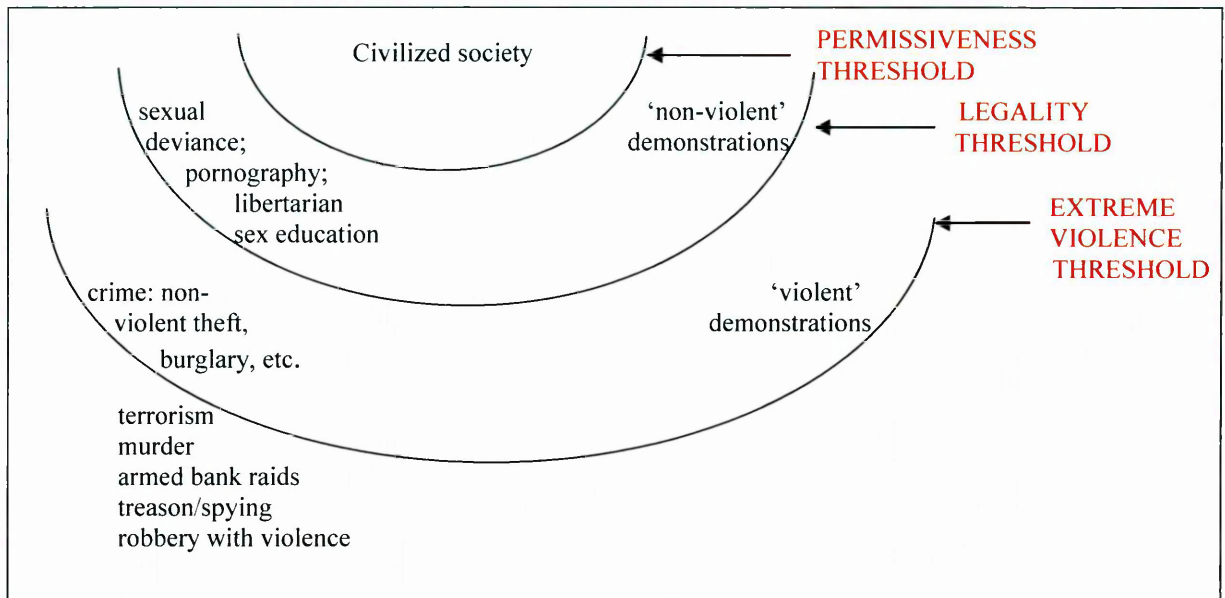
Figure 1.9: Hall (1978) cited Hartley (1995: 85).

Homosexuality can be mapped using the ideas contained in Figure 1.9; it can be seen as a threat (bearing in mind the acceptability threshold) to what Hall calls 'civilised society', or at least deviant when compared to it. At times homosexuality has of course fully breached the legality threshold (*i.e.* pre-1967 when homosexuality was completely illegal); the further away from civilized society homosexuality has existed, the more newsworthy homosexuality has been. Hartley (1995) notes that moral disapproval (which is beyond civilised society but within law) can be applied to non-family sexuality. As suggested by 'moral,' other factors besides its legal status have placed homosexuality outside of civilized society; HIV/AIDS, for example, caused gay people

(men in particular) to be seen as a threatening, immoral presence (although as described in Chapter 2, it also gave them a voice).

As the above diagram intimates, politicians caught up in gay sexual scandals and/or 'outed' as gay have been presented as sexual deviants outside the realm of civilized society. The legal status of homosexuality contributed to this process pre-1967, with various aspects of moral disapproval (alongside legal issues) the main driving force post-1967. According to Thompson (2000), sexual political scandals normally transgress moral codes, but this is not necessarily the case: the media can exploit sexual activities. Thus, the media impacts upon Hall's diagram; the media can make issues such as homosexuality and sexual 'scandals' appear to be further away from 'civilized society' than they may initially appear. Linked to the notion of 'civilized society,' it is also important to examine who dominates the press: largely white, middle class, heterosexual males.[29] This undoubtedly has an impact on what is presented as 'normal' and what is seen as 'unusual' and thus newsworthy. As Gillespie and Toynbee (2006) note, dominant social groups have power over others which is in turn reflected through the media. Homosexuality (whether in the form of an 'outed' gay politician or an age of consent debate) is thus a newsworthy topic: it is outside the day-to-day experiences of many of the people who produce newspapers (although this is changing), and for those that read them. This in itself leads to the notion of 'us' and 'them' (or what one could term the 'other') - consensus - being represented in newspapers, something touched on by Fowler (1991: 53) among many others, who notes that people who practise behaviours outside of the consensus are considered 'deviants.'

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[29] For example, of the main daily newspapers in the UK (*The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*), all the editors are white and all are male, apart from the editor of *The Sun*, who is female (Rebekah Wade).

While things have undoubtedly improved since Fowler made the above assessment, it is still true that gay people (men in particular), as an 'outside' group, are often presented in opposition to 'mainstream' heterosexual society. Their news value is thus great, particularly if linked to a sexual scandal. This said, it is important to recognise that in recent times, many 'outed' and/or sexually scandalous gay politicians have received the same kind of press coverage that politicians caught up in heterosexual sexual scandals have received; as Chapter 4 illustrates, while particular stereotypes are often still utilized in the 2000s, explicit homophobia (*e.g.* use of particular words) is less common; it is often the 'kiss and tell' aspect of a gay sexual scandal story which is utilized, rather than its homosexuality. In this respect, there is almost sexual scandal 'equality.' 'Almost' because gay sexual scandal stories are inherently more 'scandalous' than heterosexual sexual scandal stories, for the simple fact that homosexuality is often portrayed by the (tabloid) press and thought of by the public as 'other.' Thus, gay political scandals are not only newsworthy because of the suggestion of political scandal; they are newsworthy because the scandal involves homosexuality.

1.4   The Thesis's Theoretical Approach

"Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters." (Gitlin 1980: 6)

This thesis demonstrates that the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press can be examined using an overarching frame of representation; as suggested by Goffman (1974) and expanded on by Gitlin (1980), above, such a frame, as a form of organisation, is a way of presenting the world - here, the press representation of gay politicians. The frame is built up over the course of the thesis and demonstrated through key case studies, with relevant theory and literature discussed in the previous sub-sections.

The following sub-section previews the frame of representation central to the thesis, building on the above theory and literature.

1.4.1 Unifying key themes: Building a Frame of Representation

The Frame of Representation

It was noted early in the chapter that the thesis identifies three sub-frames within an overarching frame of representation. The three sub-frames can be understood as follows:

1. *The move towards recognition*

   According to the premise of 'recognition,' marginalised groups are entitled to equal rights and respect, rather than a grudging tolerance or acceptance, alongside recognition of their particularity. This thesis suggests society has moved from intolerance, to tolerance, to partial recognition of homosexuality; this process has been a halting one (quicker at some times than others, with some backward steps), although it is generally unidirectional.

2. *Acceptability over time (in relation to heterosexual public space)*

   Sexuality/sexual acts can be rated in terms of public acceptability (as in the acceptance of society) and heterosexual public space. What is acceptable in public and private has changed over the years. Generally, public homosexuality has become more acceptable over the last fifty years (although, again, this has been a halting process), although still has some way to go to reach full acceptability.

3. Mediated personas as 'constructed reality'

Gay politicians are represented in the media through the use of binary themes (defined and explored across the thesis); using these themes, their personas (gradients of negative and positive) are created by and mediated through newspapers.

The frames create conditions of possibility for press representation and are present throughout recent history; while, for example, the representation of gay politicians in the early 2000s is less discriminatory than the early 1990s or earlier, the frames are still in place. While aspects of the three frames have been discussed in literature (as examined in sub-sections 1.2 and 1.3), the ways in which the frames are linked and the application of them to the press representation of gay politicians is specific to this thesis (for example, while recognition is a well discussed concept, its application to gay politicians is new; indeed Taylor (1992), the chief proponent of recognition theory, does not discuss homosexuality at all).

Figure 1.10, below, demonstrates that Frame 1 influences Frame 2 (with Frame 2 also influencing Frame 1), which shapes Frame 3: the move from intolerance to tolerance to partial recognition impacts upon the acceptability of homosexuality in heterosexual public space (and vice versa), with these processes then affecting the representation of gay politicians in the press. Frame 1, recognition, is about public/press attitudes; Frame 2, acceptability, is about behaviour. Frame 3 then shapes (the character/particularly of) and mirrors (particular moments of) Frames 1 and 2, highlighting that public/press opinion and change is not simply enforced by outside factors such as the media: instead, the media influences while *being* influenced, as part of a circular process. Indeed, while the thesis concentrates on the influence of the press, there are other social factors which

are part of the process too (as discussed above). The (predominantly) unidirectional trajectory of Frames 1 and 2 (in that there is generally a move towards liberality, although a move which is halting with some setbacks) is supplemented by Frame 3, which has the most impact on a day-to-day basis: readers can see the binary themes and personas when reading their newspaper. Frame 3 is 'constant' in that the binary themes are always present; however the strength of the binary themes changes over time, and thus links back to Frames 1 and 2.

The interconnected frames used to illustrate the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press show that newspaper coverage is a representation of reality: gay politicians are *filtered through* press representation. This is the key framework the thesis uses to discuss the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press. Through piece by piece theory construction, the frame is built up over the course of the thesis, meeting the research objectives stated above (section 1.1):

Figure 1.10: The changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press: a frame of representation.

Move towards recognition

Intolerance

Tolerance

Recognition

1950s

2000s

ONE

influences

Acceptability/time
(in relation to heterosexual public space)

Public/press acceptability

Acceptability threshold

Homosexual Identity

Homosexual sexual acts (public and private)

Legality threshold

Thresholds affected by socio-political factors (*i.e.* times and conceptions of homosexuality)

TWO

shapes

Mediated personas as 'constructed reality'

Binary themes
or
Meta-Narratives

Mediated personas

Positive   *Negative*

Private   Public
Out   In
Good   Bad
Safe   Dangerous
Clean   Dirty

Weak

(graduations of...)

Strong

THREE

mirrors and shapes
ONE and TWO

82

Although the above process is, overall, a circular one (as highlighted by the arrows), the three sub-frames within Figure 1.10 are demonstrated in a linear rather than circular fashion in order to highlight the movement from Frame 1 to Frame 3 and the impact that each frame has on the one following, and also the fact that Frame 3 is of most importance to this thesis. For the same reason, Frame 3 is superimposed onto Frame 2, and Frame 2 onto Frame 1, giving Frame 3 the most prominence. Indeed, Frame 3 is emphasised in Figure 1.10 (through the superimposition but also its larger size and thicker border) because it is this frame which is central to the thesis; while Frames 1 and 2 provide context and background to the press representation of gay politicians, Frame 3 reveals *how* gay politicians are represented. As such, Chapters 3 and 4 use binary themes/mediated personas as an explanatory tool.

Frame Analysis

One can understand frames as a social-scientific method of understanding the world around us, a concept attributed to Goffman (1974: 10f). Indeed, frames are 'cognitive structures which guide the perception and representation of reality' (CCSR 2007). Frame analysis as a concept is not unified; there are different approaches within the qualitative and quantitative fields. This thesis has taken a qualitative approach, identifying themes and the use of key words (a quantitative approach might count the use of particular key words), categories and concepts.

In relation to media studies, Entman (1993: 52) notes that to frame is to take aspects of a 'perceived reality' and make them more prominent in a text, thus promoting a point of view. While Goffman did not believe that frames were consciously manufactured - he felt they were unconsciously adopted - Entman and other theorists such as D'Angelo (2002) and Tankard (2001) and Reese (2001), suggest that frames are *selected*. A

midway point between these two opposing standpoints seems appropriate in relation to the thesis; while journalists may not actively frame their work, through their training and their immersion in their own newspaper's moral and political environment, the frames are present: journalists see gay politicians in a particular way. The frames shown above (Figure 1.10) can be understood in relation to frame analysis. Indeed, the binary themes I have identified (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10) can be thought of as metanarratives or 'masterframes' (McAdam 1994). These metanarratives/masterframes do not exist in isolation: they draw on codes already present in society; thus, the press draws on public opinion, law, medicine *etc* when employing these themes.

The ultimate aim of the press is frame alignment (a concept discussed by Snow *et. al.* 1986); when the frames employed do not align, or perhaps resonate with the reader, their incongruity is apparent. For example, *The Sun's* coverage of Mandelson and Brown's 'outings' in 1998 (see Chapter 4) was deemed by some broadsheet newspapers, commentators and members of the public to be a step too far (something later admitted by the then editor, also noted in Chapter 4), suggesting that there are perhaps limits to the frame; the binary themes/metanarratives employed were inappropriate. As Cappella and Jamieson (1997) note, and as suggested above in relation to Hall, journalists and the audience may frame news differently. Thus, while newspapers aim to reinforce public opinion and align their frames with the public, they may be unsuccessful. If a newspaper crosses the line, as *The Sun* apparently did in 1998, they have to step back within the frame pretty quickly in order that their press coverage resonates with their readership.

1.5   Conclusions: Introduction, Objectives and Background Theories

"...if it is accepted that changes in how the press and broadcasting break people and institutions are historical realities, not inevitable facts of life, they may be understood - even changed. A great deal in a democracy depends on the quality of the journalism that reflects on it, and even more on the issues we worry about and how we discuss them. The uncomfortable task of arriving at collective solutions to interactive problems cannot be obliterated by merrily treating public life as a fantasy drama. We need better, more robust ways of talking about the media." (Seaton 2003: 183).

This chapter has explored key theory and literature relating to the changing representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers. In particular:

1. How public/private spaces/acts have been defined and the press's role in this, paying particular attention to:

   - The public/private binary

   - Acceptability and heterosexual public space

   - Recognition

   - Mediated society.

2. The way the press works and why it reports on the personal lives of political figures and gay people/politicians, looking at:

   - The structure of the media

   - The press and democracy

   - Media effects

   - Public opinion and generational change

   - The move to the personal

   - Scandal

   - Tabloidization

   - News values.

The chapter emphasises that the press focus on and representation of homosexuality has a theoretical basis and frame which creates conditions of possibility for the ways in which gay politicians are written about. This frame of representation, previewed at the end of the chapter, is made up of three linked frames:

- The move towards recognition

- Acceptability over time (in relation to heterosexual public space)

- Mediated personas as 'constructed reality.'

Chapter 1 has explored theory linked to the frames; the literature review and empirical chapters go on to show both how the frame was induced and how it is applied. This chapter has paid particular attention to Frames 2 and 3 of the overarching frame of representation, and how they are linked. Firstly, sexuality/sexual acts can be rated in terms of acceptability within 'heterosexual public space' (Frame 2 of Figure 1.10). The 'acceptability' referred to is the ability of gay men and women to 'exist in' public space (*i.e.* to live their lives as heterosexual people do, or be treated in the same way). What is acceptable has changed over the years (*i.e.* the acceptability of homosexuality has differed according to the socio-political climate). This impacts upon the representation of sexuality, gay people and issues and, of course, gay politicians. The press, as a heterosexual public space, also contributes to the publicness of heterosexual sexual intimacy and the relegation of homosexual sexual intimacy; it is therefore more acceptable, and less 'marked,' for example, for a heterosexual politician to pose with their opposite-sex partner than for a gay politician to pose with their same-sex partner. Thus, Frame 2 is about *behaviour* in public/private (whereas Frame 1, recognition, is about public attitudes). Definitions of public/private spaces/acts can also be used to frame the changing representation of gay politicians in the press: 'acceptable' gay

politicians are 'out' gay politicians (expressing their sexuality through 'private' acts/spaces); 'unacceptable' gay politicians are 'closeted' gay politicians (expressing their sexuality through 'public' acts/spaces). The press's use of such criteria shows the importance of binary themes (Frame 3) when discussing the press representation of gay politicians.

As suggested in Figure 1.10, the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press can be mapped using the interconnected frames of acceptability over time (in relation to heterosexual public space) and mediated personas/binary themes (which may change according to acceptability/time):
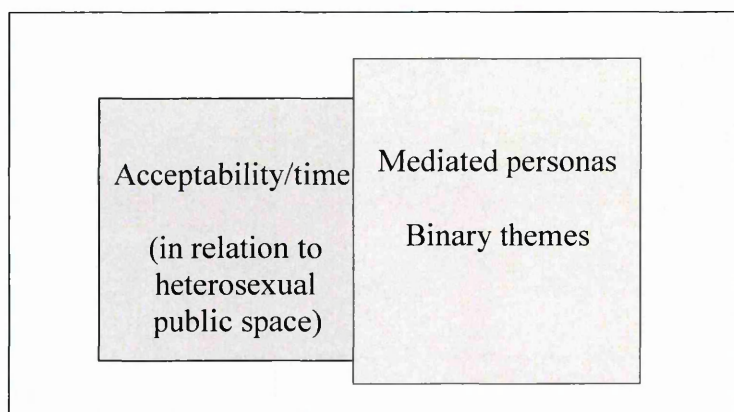
Figure 1.11: Framing the changing press representation of gay politicians: acceptability and mediated personas/binary themes.

The dynamic of acceptability over time shapes the binary themes (and thus the mediated personas which they make up), which in turn shape (the character/particularly of) and mirror (particular moments of) acceptability: the mirroring and shaping process discussed above. The ideas contained in Figure 1.11 will be expanded and built on across the thesis, alongside greater discussion of recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10). As discussed above, we now live in a media dominated society and gay politicians, as public figures, have mediated personas; their private lives are lived in and represented

through the media. Chapters 3 and 4 will explore the mediated personas of gay politicians (Frame 3, Figure 1.10) paying particular attention to the use of binary themes (such as private/public and good/bad).

The chapter has also shown that the changing representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers is inherently linked to the way in which the press treats politicians in general. As explored above, up until the 1960s the private lives of politicians were not discussed in any great detail. From this time onwards, politics has become more and more personalised, with scandal a prime focus of press attention. In terms of news values, scandalous politicians are front-page news; this is particularly true of gay and/or 'outed' politicians, due to the controversial status of homosexuality and the resulting debates surrounding the legality of homosexuality and issues such as the age of consent. The chapter has shown that if a politician's personal life does not meet strict moral criteria (in line with socio-political factors relating to the time in question), the press may comment about it. In many respects, the press, and the media in general, as a public space, is an area in which personal lives can be played out. As an aspect of the personal, the homosexuality of politicians has thus become a legitimate area of press focus.

Why is this important? Well, as the above quote from Seaton (2003) suggests, and as explored in section 1.3, the press focus on the private lives of gay politicians has potentially democratic consequences. Indeed, the case studies in Chapters 3 and 4 reveal that many gay politicians are keen not to be seen as 'single-issue' politicians (*i.e.* they are not just 'gay MPs'). Seaton (2003: 174) proposes that the essential issue is 'whether the... media have now become a democratic liability.' Chapters 3 and 4, explorations of the press attention paid to gay politicians, suggest that this may be the case.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORIES OF HOMOSEXUALITY

"...the recent history of homosexuality could best be interpreted as a complex process of definition and self-definition. On the one hand we could trace the social, cultural and political forces that shaped the creation of homosexuality as a minority, and generally socially execrated, experience: religion, the law, state activities, family ideologies, class consolidation, popular prejudice, the institutions of medicine, psychiatry and even sexology. On the other hand there were forces of resistance: individual struggles, subcultural developments, nascent organizations for homosexual rights." (Weeks 2000: 7).

The changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press cannot be fully examined unless the analysis is contextualised by an exploration of relevant social, political and legal issues, alongside an assessment of how newspapers have portrayed homosexuality generally. As Weeks (2000: 1) notes, it is important to recognise that sexuality is not timeless:

> Who makes sexual history?... It was taken for granted that the truths of sex were timeless. Attitudes, legal forms, religious injunctions, moral codes, literary expressions, subcultural patterns might change, but the substratum of erotic energy and gendered (as it was not then called) relationships remained locked into biological necessity, beyond the realms of history of social science...Today that has all changed.

Homosexuality thus has a complex, multi-layered history. Not only is 'homosexuality' - as a sexuality or perhaps, more accurately, as a concept - particular to a moment in time, legal and medical developments, political and public attitudes and moral ideas also affect each other and thus the definition and perception of homosexuality, as suggested by the opening Weeks (2000) quote. And, of course, these issues also have an impact on the representation of homosexuality in the press (and vice-versa), hence the importance of the chapter in the thesis. In relation to the frame of representation shown in Figure 1.10, Chapter 2 shows a process of intolerance to tolerance to partial recognition (Frame

1, Figure 1.10), with a backward step in the 1980s as a result of HIV/AIDS; at first homosexuality was not tolerated by the press or public, but over the years it has become more acceptable. However, gay people are still expected to fulfil certain criteria and live their lives certain ways. Thus, recognition is only partial.

This chapter examines the historical status of homosexuality, from the mid-twentieth century to 2005, with attention also paid to the late-nineteenth-century when homosexuality first became an 'identity.' It investigates the ways in which legal developments (for example, the criminalization of and then the later legalisation of homosexuality), social issues and public and political attitudes affect the media landscape regarding homosexuality. Much of the chapter relates to male homosexuality, due to the fact that lesbianism has never been directly legislated against. The chapter is spilt into two main sections - pre-1990 and post-1990 - and within this structure, smaller sub-sections: pre-1980 and 1980-1990, and 1990-1997 (*i.e.* up to Labour's victory in 1997) and 1997-2005 (*i.e.* post-Labour's victory). As well as echoing the structure of Chapters 3 and 4, the subsections are representative of the UK's socio-political climate.

2.1   The Socio-political Status of Homosexuality (Pre-1990)

"Although opinion polls taken throughout the 1960s and 1970s confirmed that the general public were increasingly viewing homosexuality with greater tolerance and understanding, by the 1980s there were clear signs that this trend was beginning to be reversed." (Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 5).

From the mid-twentieth-century onwards, UK law has generally moved in the direction of greater homosexual equality. This process has been slow and difficult; while sexual acts between men were partially decriminalised in 1967 (after the 1885 criminalization of homosexual sexual activity), politicians and campaigners continue to fight, to this

day, for further equality. As noted by Jeffery-Poulter (1991) above, up until the early 1980s public opinion towards homosexuality gradually became more liberal echoing advancements in legal rights. However, the 1980s were in many ways a difficult time for gay rights; the AIDS crisis of the early 1980s saw public opinion towards homosexuality become less liberal, and although the legal status of homosexuality became more regularized over this period of time, the introduction of Clause 28 (also known as Section 28) in the late-1980s was seen by the gay community as a direct attack on homosexuality by the Conservative Government (although it was actually more of a reaction against the *assertion* of gay rights, not necessarily gay rights and people themselves, as the Chapter explores).

The following sub-sections survey the early (late-nineteenth century onwards) criminalization of homosexuality, its 1960s legalisation, and the legal and public opinion setbacks of the 1980s, paying particular attention to the onset of HIV/AIDS at the beginning of this decade.

2.1.1   *Definition and Discrimination: the Criminalization and Legalisation of Homosexuality Pre-1980*

The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act

The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 brought forth new restrictions on homosexual activity: for the first time all forms of sexual activity between men were criminalized. Before this point, only sodomy was an actual criminal offence. Indeed, the 1861 Offences Against the People Act saw sentences of ten years to life (replacing the death penalty) introduced for buggery. The 1885 Act did not originally refer to homosexuality at all, and was instead concerned with protecting women through the

suppression of brothels. However, the clause introduced by Henry Labouchere stated that:

> Any male person who, in public or private, commits or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour. (Hansard 1885).

Homosexuality thus became a criminal, punishable, public identity, and the need for gay men to hide their sexuality became more vital. As Weeks (1981 a) notes, before this point it was sexual acts that were the subject of hostile laws, rather than a particular 'type' of person. In direct contrast to this, 'homosexuality' was a legal, psychological and medical category, something which could be the subject of speculation but also a new self-articulation (Weeks 1981 a). The French philosopher Hocquenghem (1978) noted that there is a difference between 'desire' and the psychological category of homosexuality, but here we see the labelling of desire in legal and medical terms.

A Homosexual Identity

Homosexuality became unmentionable apart from when it was being condemned (or 'speculated' against) which, ironically, became more and more prevalent due to lurid press coverage of court cases. Foucault (1998: 36) notes that a 'discursive explosion,' of which the 1885 Act can be considered part, attempted to banish from society forms of sexuality 'not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction.' Through this 'discursive explosion' laws against 'perversions' increased, sexual difference became linked to mental illness and a norm of sexuality developed (Foucault 1998). He describes how figures, such as those who were attracted to the same sex, were made to confess what they suddenly 'were' (Foucault 1998). The 'homosexual' was thus named and had become a sexual identity. Foucault (1998: 43) believes that this process occurred when

sodomy was no longer a forbidden act practised by its subject, but had in fact become part of someone's person, and dates this to 1870 when Westphal wrote an article on 'contrary sexual sensations.' In fact, the actual word 'homosexuality' was not invented until 1869 and did not become commonly used in England until the 1880s and 1890s (Weeks 1981 b). Like Foucault, Weeks (1981 b: 93) argues that sexuality is organised through 'definition and regulation,' rather than repression, through the construction of sexual categories such as the homosexual. As this suggests, sexuality is constructed and 'of its time.' Weeks explores Foucault's theories and notes that the history of sexuality discussed by Foucault is actually a history of *discourses* about sexuality (Weeks 1981 b). Further to this, he (Weeks 1981 b: 100) states that:

> this ever expanding discursive explosion is part of a complex growth of control over individuals, partly through the apparatus of sexuality.

Indeed, if one accepts Foucault's analysis about control and power and the construction of sexuality arising from that, then homosexuality was identified in order to protect a natural, productive heterosexual identity. More than this, power tries to make this process appear natural. However, as Foucault (1998) identifies, what is sexually natural differs according to the period one is referring to. As mentioned above, medicine - which can certainly be seen as a form of control - played a big part in the categorisation of 'the homosexual.' Indeed, the emergence of homosexuality as a concept tied in with the development of new medical terms used to describe people interested in those of the same sex (Weeks 1981 a).

It is of course important to recognise that Foucault's arguments are not universally accepted. Indeed, Sinfield (1994) believes that the change identified by Foucault, while correct, is a gradual one, with medical and legal discourses of less importance than

stated by the author. Sinfield notes that the sexual oppression of working-class women by middle-class men was the main focus of legislation in this period, and the penalization of homosexual men occurred opportunistically within this pattern; as stated above, the Labouchere amendment was 'tacked onto' the original Criminal Law Amendment Act, rather than focusing entirely, and originally, on homosexuality (Sinfield 1994).

1885 Political Opinion

Weeks highlights that the 1885 Act was not universally popular at a political level (at least in relation to its form, rather than the general ethos). Indeed, he notes that there was opposition to the Labouchere Amendment at a government level because it applied to private behaviour, as well as public:

> The Director of Public Prosecutions noted in 1889 'the expediency of not giving unnecessary publicity' to cases of gross indecency; and at the same time he felt that much could be said for allowing 'private persons - being fully grown men - to indulge in their unnatural tastes in private.' (Weeks 1981 a: 103).

Note the distinction between public (unacceptable) and private (tolerable) behaviour. This is exactly the same kind of attitude expressed by some politicians and newspapers as late as the late-twentieth and even twenty-first-centuries (see Chapters 3 and 4), and a binary recognised in the thesis's overarching frame (identified in Frame 3, Figure 1.10).

In the late-nineteenth-century, politicians of all political colours appeared disgusted (publicly and politically at least) with homosexuals and homosexuality as a whole. As Sanderson (1995: 4) notes, the Government echoed the desire of the press to 'look away.' Indeed, he (Sanderson 1995) goes on to note that soon after Wilde's 1895 trial, there were calls for the public mention of homosexuality to be forbidden; in 1896 Lord

Halsbury introduced the Publication of Indecent Evidence Bill into Parliament with the specific aim of suppressing newspaper articles which focused on prosecutions brought under the Labouchere Amendment. The Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, backed the Bill:

> The reason why the publication of that class of cases is so much to be deprecated is not merely because it offends our taste, and makes the reading of the newspapers disgusting, but because it is a well-ascertained fact that the publication of details in cases of that kind has a horrible, though undoubtedly direct, action in producing an imitation of the crime by other people. (Hansard 1896).

Sanderson (1995) notes that the Bill was not passed in Parliament due to pressure exerted by newspaper editors and publishers (demonstrating that even in the nineteenth-century, the press was keen to assert the importance of press freedom), but homosexuality continued to be thought of as an unfit topic for discussion. As Sanderson (1995: 5) notes, there was a 'philosophy of silence.' This certainly applies to the general public as well at this time although, as with issues of a sexual nature today, people revelled in their intimate details. Indeed, the Wilde trial of 1895 saw newspapers double their circulations by reporting on every minutiae of the trial (Sanderson 1995).

The Impact of the 1885 Act

Indeed, one of the results of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act was ever-increasing (negative) coverage of homosexuality. In fact, through sensational reporting of court cases, many people were actually made aware of something that previously they did not even know existed or cared to think about, something Labouchere did not intend (Sanderson 1995). One of the first cases to be subject to garish press coverage was Wilde's court case in 1895. The *News of the World* (1895 cited Sanderson 1995: 4) wrote on 26 May 1895:

> The Wilde case is over, and at last the curtain has fallen on the most horrible scandal which has disturbed social life in London for many years… Society is well rid of these ghouls and their hideous practices… It is at a terrible cost that society has purged itself of these loathsome importers of exotic vice.

And, the *London Evening Standard* (1895 cited Sanderson 1995: 4) wrote:

> England has tolerated the man Wilde and others of his kind too long. Before he broke the law of the country and outraged human decency he was a social pest, a centre of intellectual corruption. He was one of the high priests of a school which attacks all the wholesome, manly, simple ideals of English life… We venture to hope that the conviction of Wilde for these abominable vices, which were the natural outcome of his diseased intellectual condition, will be a salutary warning to unhealthy boys who posed as sharers of his culture.

Note the use of the words 'scandal,' 'ghouls,' 'hideous' and 'exotic' in the *News of the World* article. While warned of the 'hideous practice' of homosexuality, the reader is encouraged to read on: in Wilde's case, sex certainly did sell. Also note the way in which the *Standard* article links Wilde's sexual practices with his intellect; as stated by Foucault, the sexual act had become intrinsic to the person as a whole.

Paradoxically, this was something taken up by those who fitted the new 'category' of the homosexual. As Weeks (1981 a: 103) notes, the Wilde trials were a 'labelling process' which drew a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, but they also gave gay people a self-consciousness and confidence to acknowledge their difference. We can thus see at this time the emergence of a 'whole' homosexual identity. As Foucault (1998: 101) states:

> homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was radically disqualified.

Homosexuality in the late-nineteenth century was irrevocably linked to class identity. As Weeks (1981 a: 113) states, at this time there was a belief that working class people were indifferent to homosexuality because they were 'closer to nature.' It appears that there was a much more defined sense of homosexual identity amongst the middle and upper classes and, as Weeks (1981 a) notes, more possibility of homosexual encounters through money and the mobility that this brought. Crossing the class divide through sexual encounters was common (Wilde being the most famous example). In fact, as noted by Weeks (1981 a), there was a belief that sex across classes was reconciling. The public attitude of much of the 'ruling' class towards homosexuality was in fact rather ironic, for it was this class of men who were key in articulating the homosexual voice (through literature, drama and the early homosexual reform movement) at the end of the nineteenth-century.

Post-1885 Politics

Following the 1885 Act, the law against homosexuality was further strengthened. The 1898 Vagrancy Act tightened up laws in relation to importuning for 'immoral purposes' - in practice, this law was applied against homosexual men exclusively (Weeks 1981 a). Through the subsequent Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1912, the offence was set at six months' imprisonment, with flogging applicable for a second offence, on summary jurisdiction. Interestingly, sexual acts between women were not covered by the 1885 Act at all, and later attempts to legislate against lesbians failed to get through Parliament. It was thought that laws against lesbians would actually do more harm than good (Weeks 1981 a). Indeed, as Weeks (1981 a) notes, when in 1921 this was attempted, Lord Desart (Director of Public Prosecutions when Wilde was charged) exclaimed:

You are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamt of it. I think that is a very great mischief. (Hansard 1921).

So once again, lesbian women remained invisible. While no other legislation against homosexuality appeared in the first half of the twentieth century, sex and sexuality were topics at the forefront of discussion. Indeed, the 'theorisation of sex' (Weeks 1981 a: 141) in the 1920s achieved respectability as a result of the work of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud. In fact, Ellis suggested that 'normal' behaviour was 'no more than what societies defined as the norm' (Weeks 1981 a: 144). A major concern of the 1940s and 1950s was the decline of moral standards, homosexual behaviour being a key part of this concern. Indeed, the police stepped up prosecutions of homosexual behaviour as a result of public and official anxiety, which was in itself related to the post-war stress on monogamous heterosexual relationships and family life, seen as a stark contrast to homosexual 'deviancy' (Weeks 1981 a).

The 1967 Sexual Offences Act

The Criminal Law Amendment Act remained in place until 1967, when the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised private sexual activity between consenting men over the age of 21. The Sexual Offences Act was preceded by the Wolfenden Committee, set up in 1954 to look into the law surrounding homosexuality and prostitution (the two issues still being linked, as in 1885), a response to the moral concerns of the 1940s and 1950s - but paradoxically, as noted by Weeks (1981 a), serving as a 'blueprint' for the permissive movement of the 1960s - and the need to effectively regulate 'deviancy.' From the 1885 Act onwards, homosexual prosecutions were common (as were newspaper stories about the resulting court cases, especially in the 1940s and 1950s). Indeed, the number of recorded offences of indecency between two men reached their highest levels ever in the mid-1950s: 2,034 in 1954 and 2,322 in 1955 (Jeffery-Poulter

1991). While taking part in gay sexual activity was an offence, declaring oneself gay was not, highlighting that it was the *act* of homosexual penetration that was deemed most offensive. The Wolfenden Committee reported in 1957 after 62 meetings at which evidence was gathered from over 200 organisations and individuals. The Committee's report - officially known as *The Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, but more commonly known as the Wolfenden Report - stated that:

> We do not think that it is proper for the law to concern itself with what a man does in private unless it can be shown to be contrary to the public good that the law ought to intervene in its function as guardian of that public good. (Wolfenden 1957: 43).

As this extract suggests, the report was revolutionary in that it debunked so many common ideas about homosexuality. Indeed, the report found that: homosexuality does not menace the health of society; homosexuality (*i.e.* a homosexual husband) was no more damaging to the family than, for example, adultery (*i.e.* if a husband had a heterosexual affair); and, men attracted to a) other adult men and b) young boys tended to be mutually exclusive categories. The report concluded that all forms of homosexual behaviour between adult men in private should be decriminalised. However, adult did not equal 16, the age of heterosexual consent; 21 was considered the appropriate age for men to have homosexual sex as this was the age that 'a man is deemed to be capable of entering into legal contracts...' (Wolfenden 1957: 51).

1960s Political and Public Opinion

During the gap between the Wolfenden Report and the implementation of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, the law surrounding homosexuality was discussed in great detail in the House of Commons. For example: in 1960 a motion asking the Government to 'take early action' to implement the Report's recommendations was defeated by 213

votes to 99[30]; in 1962 a Bill to implement some of the recommendations was talked out in the Commons[31]; in 1965 a Labour member's attempt to introduce the Sexual Offences Bill in the Commons under the Ten Minute Rule was defeated by 178 votes to 159[32]; while the Bill was reintroduced in the Commons in 1965, and passed its first and second reading, Parliament's dissolution for a general election meant that the Bill lapsed (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). However, while the Common's attitude, as a whole, was disappointing, the Sexual Offences Bill was introduced in the House of Lords in 1965 and was passed by the Lords up to its third reading. The Bill was reintroduced in 1966 in the Commons and Lords, and was eventually passed and then given Royal Assent in 1967. Post-1967 campaigns for gay law reform continued, but it was a slow process. Campaigns of note include the struggle to extend the Sexual Offences Act to Northern Ireland and Scotland, discussed later in the chapter.

Many politicians were not in favour of decriminalising sexual activity between men in the 1950s and 1960s and did not hesitate to say so in the Commons and Lords. Indeed, as Jeffery-Poulter (1991) notes, when in 1965 a Labour Member attempted to introduce the Sexual Offences Act in the Commons under the Ten Minute Rule, a Conservative backbencher declared:

> do we wish to encourage sodomy? It is as simple as that... This is an age of lawlessness, violence and crime. What we need is sterner discipline, and not more licence. (Hansard 1965).

Opposition to gay law reform was not limited to Conservative politicians. While the above-mentioned Bill was supported by the Labour Government of the time, many Labour politicians (mostly traditional, trade union supporting figures) opposed it. The

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[30] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 625) 29 June 1960 (Wolfenden Report: Part Two).
[31] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 655) 9 March 1962 (Sexual Offences Bill).
[32] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 713) 26 May 1965 (Homosexual Reform).

politicians' disapproval not only reflected contemporary moral beliefs, but also perhaps the heterosexual 'boys club' atmosphere of the Palace of Westminster and a pronounced public/private divide. Certainly, many heterosexual politicians tolerated homosexuality and gay politicians privately (for example, Tom Driberg, Labour MP for Maldon 1942-1955, as discussed in Chapter 3) but 'visible' homosexuality - whether practiced or discussed - was most certainly not tolerated. Interestingly, even supporters of a change in the law were careful to assert that their backing did not mean that Parliament wished to encourage homosexual activity. As Lord Arran, a Liberal peer and champion of the Bill stated:

> No single Lord or noble Lady has ever said that homosexuality is a right or good thing. It has been universally condemned from start to finish, and by every single member of this House (Hansard 1966 a, and noted by Jeffrey-Poulter 1991).

Thus, once again it is made clear that homosexuality, while permitted in private, had to be banished from the public. Another key supporter of reform, Leo Abse (Labour MP for Pontypool 1958-1983 and Torfaen 1983-1987), also tempered his support:

> The paramount reason for the introduction of this Bill is that it may at last move from our community away from being riveted to the question of punishment of homosexuals which has hitherto prompted us to avoid the real challenge of preventing little boys from growing up to be adult homosexuals. (Hansard 1966 b).

Abse later stated that the approach he took was necessary in order to get measures of reform through a male-dominated, heterosexist Commons (*The Observer*, COMING OUT IN THE DARK AGES, 24 June, 2007).

Public attitudes towards homosexuality gradually improved up to and after the 1967 Sexual Offences Act (Rayside 1998). However, as Rayside (1998) notes, class

boundaries need to be taken into account; from the 1960s onwards better-educated

middle class people became more liberal towards homosexuality and gender issues, but

this did not reach the lower middle classes, who retained their traditional views. Thus,

growing toleration of homosexuality (as suggested in Frame 1, Figure 1.10), did not

necessarily cut across class boundaries (although there are always exceptions, of

course), emphasising the fact that it is right to have two thresholds in Figure 1.1 (legal

and public acceptability).

While the legal changes of the 1960s were obviously regarded by campaigners as

positive, they were actually modest. Indeed, homosexuality was not fully legalised and

there was 'no attempt to create new rights, or... to assert the values of different sexual

lifestyles' (Weeks 2000: 147). The Wolfenden Report instead vocalised the belief that

the law could better protect public decency if it ceased to be concerned with private

morality (Weeks 1981 a), once more emphasising a sharp distinction between the

private and public, and the furtherance of the idea that public homosexuality was

especially problematic and something which needed to be controlled (linked to Frame 2

of Figure 1.10). Of course, for many people (whether politicians, religious leaders or

members of the public) the 1967 Act, even with its limitations, was certainly not a cause

for celebration; instead, it represented the abandonment of moral standards to be

replaced by moral relativism (Weeks 2000). Thus, the permissiveness of the 1960s

became for many a symbol of everything that was wrong with society. Indeed, in the

1970s further attempts to improve gay rights were not successful; in 1977 a Bill to

reduce the age of gay consent to 18 was defeated in the Lords by 146 votes to 25[33], and

in the same year the 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign was launched by the DUP in

Northern Ireland (homosexuality was still illegal at this time in Northern Ireland, as the

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[33] Hansard House of Lords Debates (vol 384) 14 June 1977 (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill).

subsequent sub-section explores). And, in 1972, the Law Lords found a magazine guilty of 'conspiracy to corrupt public morals' for publishing gay contact adverts. However, in the 1960s and 1970s homosexuality certainly became more 'visible' (for example, in the arts), and by the 1970s a public gay liberation movement was in full flow. Indeed, in 1970 the first gay demonstration took place in London, in the same year the London Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was founded, the first UK Pride Carnival took place in London in 1971, and in 1976 the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (later known as Lesbian and Gay Christians) was founded. Ironically, while the 1967 Sexual Offences Act condemned public 'displays' of homosexuality, gay men and women were becoming more and more vocal and political (something which in itself may not have been possible without the 1967 Act).

Press Opinion Post-1967

Sanderson (1995) notes that at the time of the 1967 Act, newspapers had generally supported reform (the *Daily Express* being the exception), recognising the cruelty and of the law and the unfairness of destroying men for no good reason. Indeed, *The Daily Telegraph* (1967 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 10) noted:

> It will end a law that is equally disreputable for being largely unenforceable and often cruel where enforced; it will shift a great fear from many people, no more sinful than most of their neighbours; it will cut the blackmailer's income; not least it will end a controversy that has become unseemly and disproportionate, and rob homosexuality of the false glamour which always attaches to persecuted minorities.

However, while the majority of newspapers were (guardedly) positive about the Act, it did not cause them to change their general attitude towards homosexuality. As noted by Sanderson (1995), newspapers still disliked homosexuality and continued to refer to it using moralistic terms.

Moving on to the latter half of the twentieth-century, as the 1980s approached press coverage of homosexuality slowly began to improve, but heterosexuality still coloured gay representation. As Sanderson (1995: 2) notes:

> Gay events and opinions were certainly being covered in the papers but they were overwhelmingly filtered through straight journalists. We were written *about* rather than being allowed to speak for ourselves.

Gay men and women began to demand representation on their own terms. By the 1960s a few magazines contained contact adverts for gay men, in 1972 the UK's first gay newspaper was founded (*Gay News*), and by the 1970s *Spartacus*, the first magazine to cater openly for gay men, was available in over 200 gay venues in the UK (again, something which may not have been possible without the 1967 Act) (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). *Spartacus* was written by and for gay men; it featured stories, news and articles, and made unapologetic reference to gay sex. The gay press was part of an emerging gay 'public sphere.' The 'mainstream' press and its negative language were finally being challenged; the invisible were loudly demanding visibility and would no longer accept the way that the national press represented them. As noted by Plummer (2001), while this public sphere is still surrounded by hostility, gay public spaces are now part of public life.

2.1.2   The Thatcher Years: the Regulation of Homosexuality 1980-1990

Clause 28 and the Thatcher Government

Soon after coming to power in 1979 the Conservative Party, led by Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister 1979-1990 and MP for Finchley 1959-1992), made it very clear that furthering gay rights was not part of its agenda. In fact, even though Thatcher, like many Conservatives, was said to be privately tolerant of homosexuals (one of her

Parliamentary Private Secretaries was said to be gay), it became clear very quickly that her Government's priorities lay elsewhere. Indeed, in March 1980 a Labour amendment to the Housing Bill, which would have given gay couples security of tenure in their council accommodation, was defeated.[34] The new Environment Secretary described the amendment as 'quite unacceptable... it is not part of the philosophy of this Bill to take the lead on an issue of social policy.' (1980 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 139). This statement was quickly negated.

Indeed, in 1987 Clause 28 - an amendment to the Local Government Bill of the same year, and a response to Left-wing (relatively) pro-gay Labour councils and their assertion of gay rights (Sanderson 1995) - became one of the most controversial pieces of legislation affecting gay men and woman to ever be passed in the House of Commons. The amendment stated that a local authority should not promote homosexuality or publish material with the aim of doing so, or promote the teaching of homosexuality as an acceptable family relationship via such material. Clause 28 did not have an easy journey in the Commons. Indeed, a bill attempting to prevent local authorities promoting homosexuality was first introduced and passed in the House of Lords in 1986. The Bill was then introduced into the House of Commons in 1987, but as the Chamber was not quorate the debate was suspended. Later that year the amendment mentioned above was introduced in the Committee Stage of the Local Government Bill and was accepted without a vote as Clause 28 of the Bill. The Clause was debated and voted on over the next year and became known as Section 28 of the Local Government Act.

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[34] Standing Committee F Official Report, Session 1979-80. Vol IX, Cols 967-968.

Clause 28 was deemed by many gay men and women as a direct assault on their community. Indeed, Stephen Twigg (MP for Enfield Southgate 1997-2005), demonstrating the strength of feeling of many gay people, has gone as far as to say that:

> there is no doubt that what happened in the '80s with Section [Clause] 28 and some of the responses to AIDS and HIV, that the Conservative Party basically turned it's back on the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] community at that time, and it's taken them a very long time to start to recover from that. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Clause 28 was seen by many people as characterising homosexuality as less than normal, something that innocent children needed to be protected from, and as 'an unprecedented politicization of the gay community in Britain' (Sanderson 1995: 66). This politicization can be seen as a backlash to the permissive movement of the 1960s and 1970s (described above), and the liberalism of many individuals and groups in the 1980s which was seen as undermining the hegemony of family life (Weeks 2000). In fact, Clause 28 can be seen as defining homosexuality as 'other' and putting gay men and women 'in their place.' As Weeks (2000) notes, it helped to restrict homosexuality to its 1967 interpretation; anything beyond that was a threat to family.

1980s Legislation

Clause 28 was not the only legal failure of the 1980s for the gay community and campaigners. Indeed, the 1983 Sex Equality Bill (introduced by a Labour MP) sought to, amongst other things, outlaw discrimination in employment on the grounds of homosexuality; the Conservative Government did not support it and it was defeated by 198 votes to 118.[35] This failure was symptomatic of the Government's desire to 'rein in' homosexuality or perhaps to not allow it 'free rein.' There is a distinction between the two: rolling back gay rights, or stopping the advancement of gay rights. As suggested

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[35] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 50) 9 December 1983 (Sex Equality Bill).

above when discussing the attempts of Left-wing councils to assert gay rights, the Government appeared to be more concerned with halting advancement than actually taking away rights (although this does not take away from the belief that many have that Clause 28 was a serious infringement of gay rights).

While campaigners interpreted Clause 28 and the above-mentioned legal failures as insulting to the gay community, it is important to note that the 1980s did see some legal gains regarding gay rights. Indeed, despite the many difficulties and painful experiences endured by gay people at this time, there were some significant legal steps forward, accompanied by the increasing visibility of gay people and causes, as well as political figures, in the media (Weeks 2000). It is perhaps the case that the advancements which were made happened at a slower pace and in an often-hostile environment. Indeed, it is certainly the case that the Government did not enthusiastically push for the gains that were made. For example, the Sexual Offences Act was extended to Scotland in 1980 (as an amendment the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, introduced by a Labour MP, with a free vote allowed by the Government) and Northern Ireland in 1982 (as an Order in Council introduced and thus supported by the Government) after years of legal confusion. However, while the Government's position was officially one of neutrality when Scotland was being debated, the Secretary of State for Scotland tried very hard to indicate that the neutrality of the Government actually equated to disapproval of the proposal (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). In addition to this, the case for extending the Act to Northern Ireland was bolstered by a ruling in the European Commission of Human Rights that the Government's position was illegal; the Government had no choice but to act.

Political and Public Opinion

The Conservative Government of the 1980s did not operate in a vacuum. It was able to push forward anti-gay legislation/oppose pro-gay legislation because the public mood towards homosexuality had also become more negative, something the Labour Party was also sensitive too. Indeed, Labour tried to distance itself from gay issues in the 1980s for fear of being characterised as 'extreme.' As Twigg has noted:

> there was a view, in the 1980s in the Labour Party, that certainly a strong commitment to lesbian and gay rights was a vote loser at that time...' (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

While more supportive of gay rights than much of the Conservative Party, the Labour Party at this time was still heavily influenced by its working class membership (Rayside 1998). Towards the end of the 1980s Labour was more assertive in its support of gay rights (then Labour leader Neil Kinnock (Labour MP for Bedwelty 1970-1983 and Islwyn 1983-1995 and Labour leader 1983-1992) spoke against Clause 28, after initial front-bench floundering), reflecting the growing number of pro-gay Labour politicians (Rayside 1998). However, as Rayside (1998) notes, fears of electoral opinion meant that the pronouncements of party leaders, through the late 1980s to the next decade, continued to be cautious. In fact, Rayside (1998: 32) suggests that Labour leaders were more comfortable with 'tolerantly liberal views' on these matters than 'fully inclusive views' in this period. The Liberals/Liberal Democrats were the most publicly pro-gay rights major political party in the 1980s. However, as Rayside (1998) recognises, while from the early 1960s to late 1980s the Liberals had the most progressive official record, the support for gay rights policies was stronger *outside* the Commons than in. Indeed, Rayside (1998) also highlights that the Liberals no more opposed Clause 28 when it was first being debated than the Labour Party (although both parties became very publicly opposed as time went on). Indeed, Jack Cunningham (MP for Whitehaven 1970-1983

and Copeland 1983-2005), then Labour's Shadow Environment Secretary, actually defended the clause.

Moving on to public opinion, politicians were not alone in finding homosexuality a difficult issue to deal with in the 1980s; public attitudes towards homosexuality worsened at this time (Jeffery-Poulter 1991; Weeks 2000), emphasising the fact that the move towards recognition (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10), while generally unidirectional, is a halting process, with occasional backwards steps. This can be interpreted as a backlash to the permissiveness of the previous decades and, in particular, the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s (see Figure 1.5). HIV/AIDS fed the anti-gay moralistic fever of the 1980s, thus indirectly fuelling homophobic policy such as Clause 28. HIV/AIDS was at first predominately thought of as a gay illness. Indeed, content analysis of the media has found that this was a very strong theme and, further to this, media messages about how easily the disease was transmitted were inconsistent:

> early media accounts of AIDS (during most of 1982) emphasized its association with a life-style outside of the morally acceptable cultural mainstream, so the question of contagion was given less play. (Lilie *et. al.* 1993: 126).

The Government's response was relatively slow. Weeks (2000) believes that the association between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality coloured the Government's response. In fact, the Conservative Government's reaction could be described as confused and even purposely ignorant (although of course one has to allow for the fact that the medical profession's initial reaction towards HIV/AIDS was also relatively uncertain). As Jeffrey-Poulter (1991) notes, HIV/AIDS challenged the very core of Thatcherism: conservative individualism versus state interference in the way people live their lives; a free market economy and a commitment to reduce state spending versus public money spent on an issue linked with a minority group. He goes on to state (1991)

that the Thatcher Government was content to ignore the many warnings about the dangers of the spread of HIV/AIDS because it was seen as a gay issue. In fact, it could be stated that by refusing to be properly involved in the initial debate about HIV/AIDS (which was raging in the media at the time), when it finally *did* get involved the Government could claim that it was reacting to public pressure/opinion (Jeffery-Poulter 1991).

Press Representation and HIV/AIDS

While both politicians and the medical profession genuinely felt that HIV/AIDS was a gay crisis in the early 1980s (it was first officially labelled 'Gay Related Immune Deficiency' or GRID), the press reacted very negatively, very quickly. In fact, the emergence of HIV/AIDS can be seen as the opportunity some sections of the press were waiting for, as it provided a 'genuine' excuse for homophobia. Sanderson (1995: 206) notes that the press created 'categories of blame':

> the innocent (haemophiliacs, children, those who had caught the virus through blood transfusions) and the guilty (homosexuals, drug abusers, prostitutes).

Gay men were presented by the press as selfish and a dangerous presence in society, and their suffering was deemed just punishment for their 'unnatural' behaviour. While tabloid newspapers were at the forefront of this homophobia, typically using stronger and more colloquial language, broadsheet newspapers did not hesitate to play to basic fears. Indeed, *The Times* (1984 cited Sanderson 1995: 206) wrote in an editorial:

> The infection's origins and means of propagation excites repugnance, moral and physical, at promiscuous male homosexuality. Conduct, which tolerable in private circumstances, has, with the advent of 'gay liberation,' become advertised, even glorified as acceptable public conduct, even a proud badge for public men to wear. Many members of the public are tempted to see in AIDS some sort of retribution for a questionable style of life.

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The broadsheet's notion of (relatively) acceptable private behaviour and unacceptable public behaviour is rather ironic considering the fact that much of press was happy to publicly highlight and condemn the private sexual behaviour of gay men at this time. Indeed, Rayside (1998: 36) remarks in relation to the tabloids, they 'were feeding off sensationalist probes into private lives, just as their predecessors had...'

The approach of the tabloid newspapers to HIV/AIDS was somewhat hysterical. For example *The Sun*, the worst culprit, wrote in an editorial in late 1984:

> In the streets of Britain there are an unknown number of men who are walking time bombs. They are homosexuals with the killer disease AIDS. When they volunteer as blood donors they become a menace to society. (*The Sun* 1984 cited Sanderson 1995: 207).

And in response to an extremely anti-gay speech made by James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, *The Sun* stated:

> Three cheers for James Anderton... For the first time a major public figure says what the ordinary person is thinking about AIDS... Their defiling of the act of love is not only unnatural. In today's AIDS-hit world it is LETHAL... The Sun hopes that Mr Anderton will treat these perverts with the contempt they deserve. What Britain needs is more men like James Anderton - and fewer gay terrorists holding the decent members of society to ransom. (*The Sun* 1986 cited Sanderson 1995: 208).

We see here a clear division between 'ordinary' and 'clean' heterosexuals, and 'dirty' homosexuals. In fact, through use of the word 'terrorist,' homosexuals are explicitly presented as a dangerous threat to 'decent' heterosexuals; their mediated personas were thus very negative, with strong use of binary themes (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10).

Of course, one must recognise the fact that many journalists, both tabloid and broadsheet, chose not to echo the above bigotry. Indeed, as just one example, Lucy Hughes-Hallet wrote in the *London Evening Standard*:

> There is a streak of very nasty Puritanism underlying the public fascination with AIDS, a sense of re-assurance that those of us who don't dare indulge ourselves as the frequenters of New York's East Village do are not just timid, but also sensible, a mean satisfaction that they're not getting away with it after all. (*London Evening Standard* 1983 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 178).

It is also important to note that while HIV/AIDS obviously had an enormously negative impact on the gay community (and gay men in particular, with whom the disease was most associated), as the above articles make clear, the debates surrounding HIV/AIDS did have one positive effect. Indeed, as Weeks (2000) recognises, the gay community enhanced its voice greatly, with gay men and women achieving a new openness and presence in the 'mainstream' public sphere. So, an illness that was presented by the press as a gay 'plague' actually increased the visibility of gay men and woman (and even, eventually, humanized them). In fact, gay men and women took part in political debate and were represented in the political field as never before (Rayside 1998).

2.2   The Socio-political Status of Homosexuality (Post 1990)

"The rejection [of the 1994 attempt to equalise the age of consent by MPs] *was a defeat for lesbian and gay activists. But what the activist campaign and even the vote tally on that evening revealed was a significant shift in the balance of forces in the years since the passage of Section 28 of the Local Government Bill, curtailing the 'promotion' of homosexuality."* (Rayside 1998: 45).

The 1990s saw significant improvement in attitudes towards homosexuality, demonstrated by the 1994 votes on the equalisation of the age of consent; a free vote saw 11% (n=37) of Conservative MPs voting for an equal age of consent, something

unthinkable ten years earlier.[36] Although the vote to equalise the age of consent was actually lost, gay issues were on the agenda as never before and, indeed, gay people achieved even greater visibility at this time. Gay activists welcomed the election of Blair as Prime Minister in 1997, and even though the Government made legislative changes at a steady pace rather than immediately (as wished for by many activists), the changes that were made affected every aspect of private and public life: the ending of the ban on gay people serving in the Armed Forces; the repeal of Clause 28; the introduction of Civil Partnerships. While the attitude of the press improved from 1990-2005, even in the 2000s some newspapers (such as *The Sun*) continued to make explicitly disparaging comments about homosexuality, and gay politicians continued to be 'outed,' with their sexuality the focus of press attention.

The following sub-sections survey the attempts to equalise the age of gay consent in the early to mid-1990s, the sweeping legislative changes made by the New Labour government from 1997-2005, and the surrounding socio-political climate.

2.2.1   The Major Years: the Slow Advancement of Gay Equality 1990-1997

The Age of Consent Campaign

Initially, many gay activists saw John Major's (Prime Minister 1990-1997 and MP for Huntingdon 1979-2001) election as Prime Minister in 1990 as a welcome and much needed change, and a good opportunity for further advancements to be made after the Thatcher years; in Major, the UK finally had a leader with more liberal views on homosexuality (albeit not as liberal as many would like). Indeed, as Sanderson (1995) notes, during the 1992 General Election he seemed to send out sympathetic signals to

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[36] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).

the gay community. The presence of European legal rulings encouraged reform in the early 1990s (Rayside 1998), highlighting the ongoing influence of 'outside' factors on domestic policy (following on from the impact of Europe on extending the Sexual Offences Act to Northern Ireland in 1982). The lowering of the age of gay consent to 18 in 1994 was a step forward for gay rights (although a disappointment to many who wanted the age of consent equalised at 16), and was seen by many activists and politicians as the most significant move forward since the Sexual Offences Act of 1967.

The campaign to lower the age of gay consent was fraught with difficulty. The gay rights campaigning organisation Stonewall began the first major campaign to lower the age of consent in 1993; Stonewall launched a legal challenge (Wilde v. UK) in the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of three men - Ralph Wilde, Will Parry and Hugo Greenhaulgh - who believed that the age of consent, which was then 21, was a breach of their right to privacy (Stonewall 2006 b). The Conservative Government had indicated that it was willing to act on the age of consent issue soon after the 1992 election. Indeed, after Major's election Conservative ministers privately expressed that the Government was prepared to allow gay-related reforming amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill (which was expected to be debated in late 1993/early 1994), and Major himself told Conservative Members that he was in favour of reducing the age of gay consent to 18, possibly through an amendment to the Bill (Rayside 1998). The Criminal Justice Bill was included in the Queen's Speech of 1993, and soon after the Government indicated that it would not hinder amendments to the Bill (Rayside 1998). In response to the Government's plans, Stonewall - accompanied by pro-equality MPs of all political colours - began a campaign to lower the age of gay consent to 16. The campaign was led in the House of Commons by Edwina Currie (MP for Derbyshire South 1983-1997). Currie, as part of TORCHE (the Tory Campaign for Homosexual

Equality), decided to campaign on this issue in response to discussion surrounding

Clause 28. Currie states that her decision to become involved in the campaign was

linked to the core Conservative belief of freedom from the state:

> The discussion had really started around how to get rid of the Clause 28 as it
> was known... I was a member of TORCHE... and I said there are more things
> than teaching about homosexuality; the law then was extremely discriminatory
> and that's where we should go... I thought it was particularly helpful that
> Conservatives should try and do that because we were against the state
> interfering in people's private and business lives. (Private interview, 14 August,
> 2006).

Currie also had personal reasons for campaigning for a change in the law:

> I've always taken the line that I was interested in clearing out discriminatory
> undergrowth, and supporting groups that needed attention... As far as I'm
> concerned it would fit into a repertoire where the language was similar and the
> experience could then help to move on to other groups. (Private interview, 14
> August, 2006).

It was important to the campaign that all political parties were on side, something also

noted by Currie:

> When we discussed tactics for the age of consent debate, it made most sense to
> go straight for equality. If we had tried for 18, we would have been arguing in
> favour of another kind of discrimination. If we went for equality, we could win
> the support of Labour and Lib Dem Members. It had to be all party. (Private
> interview, 14 August, 2006).

The Conservative Government indicated that a free vote would be allowed on the age of

consent, and the Labour Party indicated that it was in favour of setting the age of

consent at 16 (Rayside 1998). While many MPs were in favour of equalisation, political

opposition to this move became more visible as time went on. Indeed, in early January a

group of Conservative Members threatened to vote against the Criminal Justice Bill if

the amendment in favour of 16 was passed, and a few days later the then Home

Secretary stated that he intended to support 18 as the age of consent, rather than 16

(Rayside 1998). Currie notes that once Major had voiced support for 18, along with

other front-benches, it became clear that 18 was likely to be achieved but 16 might not.

Currie believes that it was extremely foolish for her party to take this approach, as it

lacked political nous:

> They didn't see the political gain from supporting gay rights, they had no clear
> conception that if 10% of the population was gay, and you could add on to them
> all the supporters, then that amounted to a lot of votes, and we were in danger
> increasingly in that Parliament, the Conservative Party, of alienating large
> chunks of voters, and went on to do it quite comprehensively with 'back to
> basics' and so on... They were complacent. We'd just won a fourth election in a
> row, against the odds, and they convinced themselves that the Conservatives
> were invincible. And moreover, that Conservative gut reactions to all proposals
> were the correct ones. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

There were two age of consent votes when the issue was discussed in the Commons on

22 February 1994. The first amendment voted on - an attempt to lower the age of

consent to 16 - was lost (280 votes to 307). The second amendment - an attempt to

lower the age of consent to 18 - was passed (427 votes to 162).[37] The statistics show

that in relation to the first vote, the Conservative Party mostly opposed total equality,

with 40% voting in effect to keep the age of consent at 21 (Rayside 1998:). 84% of the

Labour Party voted for quality. All the Liberal Democrat MPs present in the Commons

chamber voted for equality (Rayside, 1998).

While the lowering of the age of gay consent to 18 was a landmark move, activists were

disappointed that the first amendment was lost by only 27 votes. Currie herself was

relatively happy with the outcome, even though 16 was her hoped for end result. Indeed,

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[37] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order
Bill – Amendment of Law relating to); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994
(Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill – Age at which Homosexual Acts are Lawful).

she has noted that an important outcome of the whole age of consent campaign was an increase in debate itself (something the above sub-section also notes in relation to HIV/AIDS):

> I didn't see it [18] as a compromise. The huge breakthrough was to get the nation talking about homosexuality and seeing it in a positive light. That was a big shift. Having many more positive role models, having more people in the public eye willing to be recognised as gay. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

Stonewall continued to campaign for an equal age of consent and launched a second case in the European Court of Human Rights (Sutherland v. UK). The Court held that the unequal age of consent was in fact a breach of human rights (Stonewall 2006 b). However, it was not until 2001 that the age of gay consent was finally lowered to 16 from 18.

Interestingly, Currie sees the 1994 age of consent debate as a defining moment for gay MPs:

> 1994 was the turning point; I don't think there's any argument about that. Before there was an excuse for people who didn't want their sexuality known to keep it quiet, but after that the excuses weakened. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

As suggested above, she sees the vote as a sign of modernity (and of course a vote for tolerance). Thus, not only were MPs (whether gay or straight) who voted for 16 forward thinking politicians with an eye on the bigger picture, gay MPs could use the vote as an opportunity to be true to themselves and gay people as a whole. She believes that (closeted) Conservative gay MPs who did not vote for 16 were not taking this line of thinking into account. In fact, Currie goes as far as to say that:

By arguing for the status quo, by sneering at any possibility for change, they made life for gays harder, and that meant that at some future point they were going to be hoisted by their own petard. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

Political Arguments

The age of consent was hotly debated in Parliament, and the types of argument used by politicians when speaking against equalisation reflected the arguments of sections of the press. The sub-section will now explore these arguments, highlighting that politicians opposed to equalisation often employed similar tactics (whether or not this was conscious). Ellis and Kitzinger (2002: 171-175) note that the House of Commons and Lords debates on the age of consent reflected five main arguments[38]:

1. Principles of right and wrong take precedence over equality: there can be no 'equality' between normality and abnormality, moral probity and sin
2. Principles of democracy take precedence over equality: the majority of the population opposes any lowering of the age of consent
3. Principles of care and protection take precedence over equality: young men are immature and vulnerable and need the protection of the law
4. Health risks [*i.e.* gay sex is a health risk]
5. Wedges and slippery slopes [*i.e.* the equalisation of the age of consent would be the first of many requests for further gay equality].

Although, as Ellis and Kitzinger state, arguments for the lowering of the age of gay consent were primarily and initially based on the need for equality, proponents were forced to argue back in relation to the above arguments, meaning that the human rights argument became lost (Ellis and Kitzinger 2002). As noted by Ellis and Kitzinger (2002), many parliamentarians quoted medical evidence when opposing the equalisation of the age of consent. These arguments were seen as spurious by many; both the Council of the British Medical Association and the National Association of Citizens

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[38] Ellis and Katzinger's analysis is based on Hansard transcripts from 1994. However, the 1998 and 1999 debates on this issue and related newspaper articles from these years are also included as part of the analysis. The article does not specify which periods of time or from which sources the arguments are based, and instead takes an overarching approach.

Advice Bureaux were in favour of 16 as the age of consent.[39] The impact of HIV/AIDS was also raised by parliamentarians speaking against attempts to equalise the age of gay consent; Conservative MPs against a lower age of consent for gay men claimed that it increased the chance of young men catching HIV. One member said:

> The second factor that is relevant to health is that, according to the Public Health Laboratory included Service, over 75 per cent of all AIDS cases come from male homosexuals. The AIDS dimension cannot be overlooked if we are removing a protective barrier for vulnerable youngsters. (Hansard 1994).

Currie also notes that some parliamentarians used health concerns as a reason why the age of consent should not be equalised:

> Yes, there were lots of negative arguments or arguments against... [one] wrong association is between homosexuality and dissipation, disease, danger... A lot of people died from AIDS, and they were dying from a dissipated, louche lifestyle. So why would anybody want to encourage kids to take up that lifestyle? (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

However, as pointed out by Stonewall, 'All the discussions about the criminal law have taken place prior to the AIDS epidemic' (Stonewall 1993: 4). As the above-noted arguments suggest, opponents of equalisation often did not accept any arguments to the contrary; for many, the issue was not about equal rights *per se* (because homosexuality should not be seen in these terms), but rather morality and propriety.

Currie mentions two other strong arguments used by people campaigning against the equalisation of the age of consent: a) homosexuality equals paedophilia, and b) the idea that young people can be 'turned' gay:

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[39] And, as far back as 1976 the Royal College of Psychiatrists stated that '...on the whole we agree that it is now appropriate to make no distinction in the age of consent between heterosexual and homosexual practices.' (The Royal College of Psychiatrists 1976 cited British Medical Association 1994: 1).

The strongest emotional argument was the confusion of homosexuality with paedophilia… Another fear was based I think on a misunderstanding: that young people could be brainwashed into wanting to be homosexual and that it was dangerous to encourage that or allow it. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the false association between homosexuality and paedophilia, as presented in the press, in detail.

1990s Legislation

It is important to note that although the battle to lower the age of gay consent dominated the early to mid-1990s, the gay community fought many other battles, including:

- The right of gay people to foster and adopt

- Campaigning against the classification of 'everyday contact' between gay men as a sexual offence

- The recognition of male rape as an offence

- The right of gay people to serve in the Armed Forces.

Indeed, in 1991 activists and pro-gay politicians contested the amendment of paragraph 16 of the Children Act, designed to stop gay people from fostering and adopting: the campaign was successful. In 1991 activists also campaigned against Clauses 1, 2, and 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill. Clause 25 gave power to the courts to view 'everyday' contact between gay men as sexual offences. Due to immense protest from politicians and activists, the Conservative Government removed three offences liable to harsher punishment: homosexual acts between merchant seamen, procurement, and living on the earnings of male prostitution. The Government claimed that the original aim of the Bill was not to punish gay men by labelling them as sexual criminals, but to introduce heavier sentences for offenders seriously threatening public safety. Another successful

campaign was the amendment of the law to recognise male rape as an offence; before this point, in legal terms rape could only be committed by a man against a woman. The amendment was introduced and agreed in the Lords and the Government agreed to include it in 1994's Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

The Armed Forces Bill was also making its way through Parliament in 1991; while homosexuality was legal, homosexual activity between service men or women was still an offence. The Select Committee scrutinising the Armed Forces Bill recommended that the legal prosecution of gay troops should end, but gay people should still be banned from serving in the Armed Forces. Labour MPs were at the forefront of the campaign to change the law on gay people serving in the Armed Forces, and were joined in the campaign by many Conservative politicians. The campaign to change the law continued throughout Major's time in office. Indeed, in 1996, although a Ministry of Defence 'homosexual assessment panel' concluded that homosexual activity should no longer be automatic grounds for dismissal (although active homosexual contact should still be banned), the Government refused to relax its rules on gay people serving in the Armed Forces.

Political Opinion

The above campaigns indicate that the Major Government, while much more pro-gay than Conservative governments of the past, saw gay relationships and gay issues as a whole as politically problematic. Indeed, on the one hand Major changed the Civil Service rules in order that homosexuality was no longer necessarily a bar to advancement. In addition to this, Major welcomed the gay actor Sir Ian McKellen to 10 Downing Street, making him the first Prime Minister to meet a leading gay activist at

this symbolic location. Major's attempts to appease the gay community pleased liberal broadsheet newspapers such as *The Independent*:

> John Major has done a simple and sensible thing in receiving Sir Ian McKellen at Downing Street... The truth of the matter is that Mr Major will probably have gained a few votes... If Mr Major displays a more tolerant approach, and makes some concessions to Sir Ian's agenda in the Conservative Party's manifesto, he will bring back these exiles. (The Independent, AN OPEN-MINDED PRIME MINISTER, 25 September, 1991).

However, in contrast to this liberalness, and as noted above, Major headed a Government which attempted to bar lesbians and gay men from fostering and adopting. It appears that there was a disparity between Major's personal liberalness and that of (many of) his MPs, Party members, and the Conservative supporting press. Indeed, the Conservative Party's ethos of 'family values' was in the midst of being promoted at this time (1993) by Major's 'back to basics' campaign (see Chapter 4 for more detail), something noted by Currie (Private interview, 14 August, 2006) when interviewed for this research.

It is also essential to recognise that although the Labour Party was of course a pro-gay party at this time (campaigning, for example, to lower the age of gay consent), many activists believed that the Labour Party was not as outspoken as it should have been. Of course, a number of Labour MPs were opposed to particular aspects of equality in contrast to their party's stance (as many Conservative MPs were pro-equality), the age of consent being an obvious example. However, in 1996, when an amendment aiming to lift the ban on gay people serving in the Armed Forces was added to a defence bill, Blair allowed a free vote, rather than a whipped vote, something many gay activists saw as problematic (1998). Indeed, Rayside notes (1998: 96) that:

> Eight Labour MPs votes against the... amendment, including... [The] Labour members of the Armed Forces Select Committee... In a radio interview the next day, Blair reiterated his belief 'that homosexual people should not be banned or discharged from the military merely by reason of the fact they are gay,' but added a qualifying note even more troublesome than his past statements, saying that any change would have to be negotiated 'in a way that takes account of the concerns of the military.'

While Blair was stronger on gay rights than the previous Labour leaders of the 1990s, he was not immune to the threat of negative pre-election publicity. Public attitudes towards homosexuality were more tolerant in the 1990s than previous years; Stonewall (1999) notes that the percentage of people in favour of equal rights for gay people steadily increased from 1991 to 1995 (1991 - 65%; 1992 - 71%; 1995 - 74%).[40] This echoed improved political attitudes; while, as noted above, 84% of Labour MPs voted for an equal age of consent in 1994, only 30% were in support of this in 1990 (Rayside 1998). However, as Rayside (1998) also recognises, there was still public opposition to gay issues at this time, reflecting opposition to equality in Parliament. In fact, surveys show that while a majority of people were in favour of equal treatment, there was still a majority disapproval of homosexuality as a whole. Indeed, polling at the time of the 1994 age of consent debates suggested that while the majority of the public supported the principle of equality, only 13 to 16 percent of the public supported 16 as the age of consent (Rayside 1998).[41]

Gaining Visibility

Gay people actually gained visibility as a result of the negativity shown towards them by some quarters. Certainly, the gay community was mobilised by attempts to equalise the age of consent and other campaigns, building on the increased visibility gay men and women gained as a result of political struggles in the 1980s. Indeed, in the 1990s

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[40] Figures based on a NOP poll.
[41] As summarised by Rayside (1998), 74% of respondents to a Harris Poll in 1992 favoured an equal age of consent. But, a 1991 Harris poll in which specific ages were mentioned, found that only 15% favoured 16, with 53% favouring 21.

the gay rights campaigning organisations Stonewall and Outrage! gathered momentum

and became key figures in the fight for equality. Of course, the organisations used

different methods to achieve this; Stonewall engaged with the political structure in

debate, whereas Outrage!, as a radical, Left-wing organisation, took to the streets and

engaged with the media in an antagonistic fashion. In the early to mid-1990s gay people

certainly benefited from more balanced press coverage (in fact, their mediated personas,

as discussed in Frame 3 of Figure 1.10, became more positive), which was in itself a

result of the increased visibility of gay people in public spaces and culture (Frame 2,

Figure 1.10) and more positive public attitudes towards homosexuality (Rayside 1998).

Currie has noted that Stonewall's 1994 age of consent campaign encouraged gay people

to engage with the press:

> Our press contacts and spin were excellent and worked extremely well, and a lot
> of gay people made themselves heard. I don't mean they necessarily came out; I
> mean that having perhaps come out some years before, they girded on their
> armour and marched off to see MPs, and wrote letters to newspapers, and
> generally made a fuss. And it was relentless, dignified, well argued, humane and
> effective. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

In contrast to this, Currie believes that the press were not sure at first how to approach

the age of consent campaign and surrounding gay issues:

> The press floundered a bit on all this I thought... So some of the press at first
> thought that they could have a laugh about all of this, found that they had lots of
> good human interest stories instead. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

In the 1990s liberal broadsheets such as *The Independent* and *Guardian* were now

willing to write about gay issues (although Rayside (1998) suggests that *The Guardian*

only did so in response to claims it had been inattentive in the past). Thus, London's

annual gay pride parade began to receive lots of press coverage, and activist

representatives were afforded the respect of the press and given the opportunity to write opinion pieces (Rayside 1998). As Peter Tatchell, head of Outrage!, noted in 1995:

> Overall the media coverage on gay issues is now much better than it was ten or even five years ago. It's becoming increasingly routine for lesbian and gay spokespeople to be quoted on issues of relevance. Lesbian and gay issues are getting more regularly reported and on the whole reported in a more objective and dispassionate way. (1995 cited Rayside 1998: 59).

The Right-wing broadsheets continued to oppose equality in general terms, but their opposition was balanced by more positive media coverage (Rayside 1998). The tabloid press continued to refer to homosexuality in disparaging terms, but were generally less rabid. However, particular tabloid newspapers, such as *The Sun* and *Daily Star*, continued to cause offence to such an extent that regulatory authorities condemned them. Indeed, in May 1990 the Press Council, the predecessor to the PCC, ruled against *The Sun* and stated that words such as 'poof,' 'poofter' and 'woofter' were no longer acceptable (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). *The Sun* claimed this was an attack on press freedom:

> we know a great deal more about how ordinary people think, act and speak. Readers of the Sun KNOW and SPEAK and WRITE words like poof and poofter. What is good enough for them is good enough for us. (*The Sun* 1990 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 262).

In 1991 the PCC criticised the *Daily Star* for 'riding roughshod over the sensitivities' of gay people in articles about gay people in the Armed Forces. Further to this, the PCC claimed that the *Star's* articles about the Select Committee of the Armed Forces Bill did not distinguish between comment, conjuncture and fact; the *Daily Star* headed its article 'POOFTERS ON PARADE' (*Daily Star*, 24 September, 1991). While these headlines were deeply insulting to gay people, they were not representative of the tabloid press as a whole. Press representation of homosexuality was once again becoming more moderate, after the backward steps of the 1980s, and would continue to improve as the

twenty-first century approached. However, as the thesis reveals, newspapers, particularly tabloid ones, continued to slip up in the late-1990s and beyond; while sections of the press were becoming more tolerant of homosexuality, full recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) had not been reached.

2.2.2 The Blair Years: The Extension of Gay Rights 1997-2005

Labour Legislation

New Labour's election in 1997 heralded a new era for gay legal rights. While, as noted above, writers such as Rayside (1998) have suggested that Blair was too cautious regarding gay issues in his early years as leader of the Labour Party, both when Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister (allowing, for example, free votes rather than whipped votes on some key issues, and legislating for improved gay rights over the course of the 1997 and 2001 parliaments, rather than immediately), the Labour Government has undoubtedly delivered on gay rights. For example, since coming to power in 1997 Labour has:

- Lowered the age of consent for gay men to 16

- Revised the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme to include long-term gay partners as qualifying relatives (fatal cases)

- Amended the immigration rules to allow unmarried gay partners the right to apply for leave to enter/remain in the UK on the basis of their relationship

- Given same-sex partners of a biological parent the right to request a flexible working pattern

- Given same-sex couples the right to apply to adopt a child jointly

- Changed laws to ensure that gay people are not discriminated against unfairly on grounds of sexual orientation; for the first time laws relating to sexual offences are the same for both heterosexual and gay people (the offences of buggery and gross indecency were deleted from the statutes)

- Banned workplace discrimination of gay men and women

- Lifted the ban on gay men and women serving in the Armed Forces

- Repealed Clause 28

- Made Civil Partnerships for same-sex couples legal (giving gay couples the same legal rights as heterosexual married couples)

- Spearheaded social initiatives on combating homophobia.

As with the extension of the Sexual Offences Act to Northern Ireland in 1982, European legal institutions encouraged gay law reform in the late 1990s; in 1997 the European Commission found that the age disparity between the heterosexual and gay ages of consent violated the European Convention of Human Rights, thus pressurising the Government to equalise the age of consent as soon as possible, and in 1999 the Commission overturned the ban on gay people serving in the Armed Forces, giving the Government little choice but to implement this decision in UK law. Ben Summerskill, Chief Executive of the campaigning organisation Stonewall, feels criticism of the speed of which Labour have done things is unfair. He notes:

> I'm not going to criticize the speed at which the Labour Party did things… it's very easy to sneer and people do, but in fairness people say the government doesn't do enough on this or that, but actually government, both ministers and indeed civil servants are under huge pressure to take action on a huge range of things, and there is a huge range of worthy and important issues that was pressing for the Labour Party when it came to power. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Political Opinion

Much of the Government's pro-gay legislation has been politically controversial, with both the Conservative opposition (in the House of Commons and Lords), and large parts of the press, condemning it. Moving on to the opposition parties, the resistance of the Conservative Party to moves to improve gay rights was very strong in the 1990s and early 2000s (although, of course, many Conservative politicians voted for equality at various times), particularly in the House of Lords. When the abolition of Clause 28 was debated in 2000, Conservative MPs were under a three-line whip to oppose the move. The Conservative Party also opposed the lowering of the age of gay consent to 16. Indeed, during the 2000 debate on the issue, the then Conservative Shadow Home Secretary Ann Widdecombe (MP for Maidstone and Weald 1987-) presented homosexuality as 'other' and an opposition to the norm:

> It is… wrong that a young person of sixteen should be free in law to embark on a course of action that might lead to a lifestyle that would separate him, permanently perhaps… from the mainstream life of marriage and family. (Hansard 2000).

Rayside (1998) ponders the Conservative Party's stance on gay issues in the 1990s and notes that William Hague (MP for Richmond 1989- and Conservative leader 1997-2001) voted for 16 as the age of gay consent in 1994 and had been positive towards gay issues on other occasions: he expressed support for gay marriage when campaigning for Party leadership and sent good wishes to gay pride marchers in London. However, as Rayside (1998) also notes, many of the Conservative members who were defeated in Labour's 1997 landslide were pro-equality, leaving the Conservative backbenchers stuffed with traditionalists. The relative lack of outspoken pro-gay Conservative MPs, combined with older, traditional Party members, made any move to the Left on gay issues very difficult for the Conservative Party leaders of the past; Hague's pro-gay

stance both before he became leader and during the Conservative leadership campaign of 1997, slowly diminished as he faced political, membership and media pressure. Twigg says that, for him, of all the Conservative leaders Hague's leadership was the most problematic, due to his changing attitude and the charges of hypocrisy this could bring:

> The period that I found particularly difficult with the Tories was under William Hague's leadership. William Hague had voted for an equal age of consent in '94, and then he ruthlessly exploited issues such as Section [Clause] 28 and the age of consent, which he saw as issues to fire up the Right-wing base. And in some ways I far more negative about someone like that whose own views are probably ok, than someone who just is down and out hostile! (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

It should of course be recognised that many Conservative MPs have disagreed with their party's (often negative) stance on gay rights, as many Labour MPs have disagreed with their party's (usually positive) stance. However, a split of opinion on this issue has been more problematic for the Conservative Party than for Labour; the Labour Party has worked through its policy changes (under Blair's leadership at least), moving from 'old' to 'new' Labour, whereas the Conservative Party is still engaging in this process. David Cameron (MP for Witney 2001- and Conservative leader 2005-), elected as Conservative Party leader in 2005, has attempted to influence his party's attitude towards 'moral issues' such as homosexuality. For example, Cameron made it very clear that he opposed allowing Catholic adoption agencies to opt out from discrimination laws (the Equality Act 2006, which came into effect in 2007, does not allow discrimination on the provision of goods, facilities and services on the basis of sexual orientation; the Catholic hierarchy did not want Catholic adoption agencies to have to consider gay couples as adoptive parents and instead wanted the agencies to pass on their details to non-Catholic adoption agencies). This was a radical move, one opposed by many Conservative MPs, including David Davis (MP for Boothferry 1987-

1997 and Haltemprice & Howden 1997-), an opponent of Cameron's in the 2005 Conservative Party leadership contest. Cameron has also suggested that he wants to move away from the 'traditional' image of a Conservative MP (white, male and middle class) towards a more diverse range of parliamentary candidates, showing once more a desire to appeal to a wider audience. Indeed, the Conservative mantra of 'keep in private' seems to be losing resonance, at least within the Cameron-led liberal side of the Party; it is now possible to be an openly gay Conservative MP (although this is not to say that this is an easy road to choose). See Chapter 4 for further discussion on whether the traditional Conservative belief of homosexuality as a private matter still resonates. Cameron also paid a well-publicised visit to watch *Brokeback Mountain* in 2006, a film focusing on the hidden love of two gay men in 1960s America, a subtle sign to the press and public that he is a modern and liberal individual, at least in relation to homosexuality.

Cameron's support for gay rights has been qualified by his need to keep more traditional voters and MPs on side. This is shown by his decision to give a free vote on the Catholic adoption row (unlike the Labour vote which was whipped) and his public support for marriage; in late 2006 Cameron pushed for tax breaks for married couples and highlighted the importance of marriage when bringing up children. However, Cameron has also previously indicated that gay couples in civil partnerships, if they have children, should receive tax allowances as well. While Cameron's position on issues such as gay adoption is radical when compared to past Conservative leaders, it is more about electability than a desire for absolute equality - the need to appeal to traditional voters while attracting new ones from the middle ground. After all, Hague's stance on as gay rights did not win an election, and Cameron was not known as a gay

rights campaigner before he became leader. In fact, he voted against gay couples adopting as part of the Adoption and Children Bill.[42]

Summerskill says that he has noticed a change in Conservative attitudes over the last few years:

> I think over the last three years actually, a) we've engaged with the Conservative Party and b) we've seen a significant willingness on behalf of the Conservative Party to try and engage with some of our issues... It has certainly made a difference in that there has been a willingness on the behalf on the Conservative Party to listen to those arguments, not least because that puts pressure on the Labour Party to do something as well... we've got four major things through the House of Lords in the last three years; in the previous ten years only two things got through the House of Lords, and part of that has been working with the Conservatives. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Engaging will all political parties, whatever their past actions, is thus an essential factor in improving gay rights policy, as noted by Currie in relation to the battles in the 1990s (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

While extremely supportive of gay rights today, the Liberal Democrat position on this issue has not always been so clear-cut. Indeed, Rayside (1998) states that there have always been more Liberal Democrat members who have been uncomfortable with full equality than the Party has admitted. However, the Liberal Democrats were many years ahead of Labour on numerous gay rights issues in the 1990s and beyond. Indeed, Paddy Ashdown (MP for Yeovil 1983-2001 and leader of the Liberal Democrats from 1988-1999) a politician who had once expressed reservations about particular aspects of gay rights, unveiled a policy statement in 1996 promising a massive overhaul of gay legal rights, including: the equalisation of the age of consent; changes to sexual offences laws; the repeal of Clause 28; the end to the ban on gay men and women joining the

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[42] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 385) 16 May 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - Applications for Adoption).

armed forces; the introduction of equal rights in fostering and adoption; and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation. Labour has implemented all of these policies since 1997. Interestingly, even though the Liberal Democrats do have a pro-equality agenda, Summerskill suggests that the Liberal Democrats need to do more within the Party itself:

> I think it's... deeply regrettable, given that they have the opportunity to appoint their peers, that there is not a single openly lesbian or gay member of the House of Lords who is a Liberal Democrat. They appoint those people; they don't have to wait for the political process to produce them. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Political Arguments

While some politicians condemned homosexuality explicitly, many used more coded terms and strategies. Burridge (2004) notes that many of the politicians against the repeal of Clause 28 used the verbal technique of 'disclaiming,' in which they attempted to deactivate claims of homophobia by explicitly stating that they were not anti-gay, thus giving their arguments greater legitimacy. Indeed, Burridge (2004) goes on to observe that during the debates on Clause 28, many politicians not only attempted to distance themselves from claims of homophobia, they also explicitly stated how tolerant they were:

> Not only are there many examples of an assertion of the absence of prejudice on the part of those resisting repeal, many speakers stressed the presence of tolerance, and 'displayed' evidence for their own. (Burridge 2004: 335).

Interestingly, Burridge (2004) notes that during the debates on Clause 28 in 2000, many anti-Clause 28 politicians attempted to meet their opposition halfway, even though the majority of pro-Clause 28 politicians refused to do the same, thus giving some

legitimacy to anti-repeal claims. In this sense, Burridge believes there was 'acquiescence to the general climate of disclaiming' (Burridge 2004: 338).

Baker (2004) also discusses discourses of homosexuality in the House of Lords (1998-2000) and notes that a particular chain of argument was used by some peers to justify opposition to the lowering of the age of male gay consent: first, homosexuality is not an identity, it is an act; second, anal sex is the homosexual sexual norm; and third, anal sex is dangerous and unnatural. Homosexuality as an act - in opposition to the notion of homosexuality as an identity, as suggested by the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act - suggests that the sexual defines what it is to be gay. Baker (2004) notes that designating homosexuality as an act rather than an identity was an important part of the anti-reform arguments, because it is easier to link criminality to behaviour rather than a social group. As such, the Lords' arguments often moved off the subject of the age of consent, to a more general discussion on the rights and wrongs of gay sex *per se*. Baker (2004) also states that anti-reform peers frequently used particular terms - anal intercourse; buggery; gross indecency; anal sex; and sodomy - and these words suggested that gay sex is wrong and criminal. Linked to this, Baker (2004) states that the sexual act most linked with homosexuality (anal sex) was presented as leading to ruin, *i.e.* the infection of blood supplies through donating blood and HIV/AIDS. The suggestion that gay sex can 'ruin' boys (the use of the word boys, rather than men, being very important in this discussion) was strong, and exemplified the false belief that there is a link between homosexuality and paedophilia. Interestingly, Baker (2004: 100) writes that the anti-reformers refer to girls as well as boys:

> On the one hand, anti-reform is justified as not homophobic because it will result in danger to girls [*i.e.* girls aged 16 would also be allowed to have anal sex] as well as boys. But on the other, girls aren't seen as being at risk because they are 'more mature' and not 'ruined for life' if 'seduced.'

Referring to 'girls' (itself an emotive term) could be seen as another way of disclaiming homophobia.

Ellis and Kitzinger (2002) note that although the age of consent debates (both before and after 1997) can be understood in relation to a human rights argument, proponents of change failed to exploit this line of reasoning and instead let anti-reformers set the agenda, thus allowing heteronormativity to remain unchallenged. The authors also suggest that reformers placed too much emphasis on equality; as equality means different things to different people, the age of consent debates were therefore hijacked by those against change (Ellis and Kitzinger 2002). Epstein *et. al.* note (2000) state that the age of consent debates in the House of Commons (from 1998) focused around three 'story-clusters':

1. Stories that focused on the predatory nature of gay men

2. Narratives about the age at which sexual preferences become fixed

3. Good/bad gay stories (with the good gay man on the margins, and the bad gay man politically active and 'visible').

As noted by Epstein *et. al.* (2000), Sedgwick (1994) has stated that a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' gays is fundamental to cultural definitions of homophobia.[43] Indeed:

> The stress on sexuality as a private matter functions both as a defence (against homophobia) but also as a limitation on open debate and action around sexual inequalities and ways of living. (Epstein *et. al.* 2000: 19).

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[43] Sedgwick's notion of 'good' and 'bad' is not to be confused with the 'good' and 'bad' gay dichotomy aforementioned in this thesis, although the notion of 'bad' gay men being politically active ties in with the notion of unacceptable 'visible' homosexuality.

Epstein *et. al.* (2000) write that in the age of consent debates this 'splitting' is not only repeated, it is also strengthened. Indeed, as Epstein *et. al.* (2000) note, a Conservative MP represented the gay-rights campaigning organisation Stonewall as 'good' and Outrage! as 'bad' (Hansard 1998). Stonewall, as an organisation which engages with the 'mainstream' political process, is presented as superior to the more controversial Outrage!; thus in the way that gay people are defined as 'good' or 'bad' (using Epstein's definition), there is also a distinction made between being gay and heterosexual institutions (Epstein *et. al.* 2000).

Although, as described above, many politicians (and Lords in particular) used pejorative language in relation to homosexuality in the late 1990s, it is important to note that the 1998 age of consent debates highlight that discourses surrounding sexuality had changed over the years: between 1994 and 1998 a 'liberal alliance' emerged, containing both Conservative and Labour members, in place of a hegemonic 'moral-traditionalist sexual Right' (Epstein *et. al.* 2000: 23). Summerskill notes that the political make-up of the Lords changed post-1997, affecting debates on gay rights:

> two material things have happened in the last few years. One is that Lord Alli has been an active member of the House of Lords and just as people find it much more difficult to be racist... people in the House of Lords have found it more difficult to be homophobic when there is someone gay sitting there... I think the other thing that's happened is that even in the House of Lords, some of the more incendiary language that has been used is regarded as increasingly unpleasant and unacceptable, and the departure of a significant number of hereditary peers has certainly made a difference to the tone of debate. But I think also the reality is that... if people look like they are being virulently offensive, they tend to have less chance of wining the argument, so some of the people who I am sure still think deeply unpleasant things about gay people, in the House of Lords, have become house trained... (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Public Opinion

Moving on to public opinion, as noted by Stonewall (1999) (and highlighted in Chapter 1), public attitudes towards homosexuality also significantly improved over the course of the 1990s, and this continued into the 2000s (emphasising the trajectory of Frame 1, Figure 1.10). Indeed, while in 1996 12% of people strongly agreed that homosexual relations were always wrong, in 2006 this had decreased to 8% (Data compiled from (CCESD 2008), sourced from the British Social Attitudes Survey).[44] Importantly, as noted in Chapter 1, younger generations are more tolerant than older ones. Society should theoretically become less prejudiced as time goes on, as older generations die and the tolerant attitudes of younger generations' impact upon subsequent generations (although, of course, as demonstrated by the fall in approval towards homosexuality in the 1980s, this may not necessarily happen). Public attitudes towards homosexuality also improved as HIV/AIDS became less of a 'visible' problem. Indeed, in contrast to much of the 1980s when HIV/AIDS was widely seen as only affecting gay people, by the 1990s and 2000s it was widely recognised that HIV/AIDS was of concern to heterosexual people as well. Indeed, in 2003 prevalent diagnosed infections of HIV/AIDS acquired through heterosexual sexual relations overtook infections acquired through male homosexual sex (Delpech *et. al.* 2005). Weeks (2000) suggests that attitudes towards homosexuality (and sexuality as a whole) have shifted for a number of reasons, including:

- A growing 'secularization' of sex: responsibility for behaviour has moved from external institutions such as the church to the individual
- A gradual desertion of authoritarian values, linked to a growing sense of individual responsibility

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[44] Percentages rounded to whole numbers.

- A new explicitness in the way we talk about sex

- The liberalisation of the legal framework (*i.e.* the 1967 Sexual Offences Act)

- A growing recognition of diversity.

Gay men and women have certainly thrived in the more tolerant atmosphere of the 1990s and beyond, not just in politics - both outside of and inside Parliament (for the first time the Cabinet contained openly gay Cabinet Ministers) - but also in the arts and other areas. As noted by Hattersley (2004) in relation to America, HIV/AIDS actually played a big part in this: it caused gay culture to enter the mainstream. Interestingly, Hattersley (2004: 34) suggests that the rise of gay culture in mainstream society has contributed to 'the gradual extinction of the traditional heterosexual male' (commonly referred to as the 'meterosexual' male in the 2000s). In this sense, it should - theoretically - become 'easier' to be gay as time goes on (although as Hattersley (2004) notes, it is never 'easy' to be gay). Of course, this does not mean that gay men and women are necessarily conferred 'social legitimacy' (Shugart 2003: 87) because they are now more visible in the mainstream media. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 1, Shugart (2003) believes that gay men, when presented as part of a gay male/heterosexual female partnership in contemporary media (*i.e.* Will and Grace), are often framed in a heterosexual context; homosexuality (male in particular) is thus often defined by, and as less than, heterosexuality. This 'shallow' acceptance can be seen in the representation of gay politicians, and gay men and women as a whole, in the (Right-wing and/or populist) tabloid press. Indeed, while gay people are often accorded positive press representation, only certain 'types' of gay people meet with press approval: those who are 'out'; those who have 'discreet' sex lives; and those who are not 'radical' activists.

2.3 Conclusions: Histories of Homosexuality

"...sex is relational, is shaped in social interaction, and can only be understood in its historical context, in terms of the cultural meanings assigned to it, and in terms of the internal, subjective meanings of the sexed individuals that emerge. This in turn demands an exploration of a variety of forces that have shaped and constructed 'modern sexuality,' and these range from the familial and extra-familial forces that shape sexual and gender orientation at the level of the individual, to the social and industrial transformations that have altered class relations." (Weeks 1981 a: 12).

As suggested by Weeks (1981a) above, in order to fully understand the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press, examination of applicable social, political and legal issues, as well as an assessment of how newspapers have depicted homosexuality (*i.e.* gay people and causes) over the decades, needs to take place. This chapter has revealed that homosexuality is 'of the moment'; what is meant by the term 'homosexuality' or the category of the 'homosexual' has changed over time, from the late 1800s when homosexuality became a whole identity (rather than an act), through to the twenty-first century, when homosexuality is often used to reassert heteronormativity. The socio-political status of homosexuality has changed over the decades; law, political and public attitudes, medical matters (*i.e.* HIV/AIDS in the 1980s), political parties, changing House of Commons and Lords cultures, and the gay community itself, have all impacted upon one another and changed the status of homosexuality and gay men and women in society.

Attempts to improve gay rights over the last 50 years have been a passionate fight; both pro and anti-reform/equalisation campaigners have been fervent in their opinions and beliefs, and this has been reflected in political debates in the House of Commons and Lords. UK law has generally moved in the direction of greater homosexual equality from the mid-twentieth-century onwards, echoing public opinion. Apart from the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, the biggest changes in the legal status of homosexuality came

about with the election of the Labour Party to government in 1997; from this point on, much of the previously established 'anti-gay' legislation (such as Clause 28) was overturned, with new legislation introduced (such as civil partnership laws). Of course, efforts to further equality are still continuing, even though much change has already taken place. The identification of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s has had a significant impact on the fight to improve gay rights over the last twenty years, and still impacts now; it has certainly caused a long shadow over public opinion, and as the following chapter reveals, press coverage of homosexuality as well. This said, it is important to recognise that HIV/AIDS actually helped gay men and women to become more visible in the 'mainstream' public sphere and improve their representation; as with the 1885 and 1967 legal changes described above, gay men and women could group together as one and present themselves in a positive manner.

Having surveyed the socio-political status of homosexuality, it is clear that Chapter 2 generally shows a halting process of intolerance to tolerance (with a backward step in the 1980s, and seemingly faster movement towards tolerance at other times such as the 1990s); at first homosexuality was not tolerated (with transgressions of 'boundaries' completely unacceptable), then over the years it became more and more acceptable (taking into account socio-political factors). Of course, one needs to bear in mind 'cohorts' of homophobia and other factors such as religion; particular religious institutions still consider homosexuality (whether it is the homosexual identity as a whole, or more likely the act of male to male penetration) completely unacceptable. The terms 'toleration' and 'acceptance' suggest that homosexuality is still somewhat problematic (*i.e.* it is something that society has to 'put up with') and this idiom has thus been rejected by many theorists.

As stated in Chapter 1, recognition theory, a 'step up' from toleration, suggests that people are entitled to equal rights and respect, rather than a grudging tolerance or acceptance, alongside recognition of their particularity.[45] Chapter 2 can thus be read as presenting a move from intolerance to partial recognition, with Frame 1 of Figure 1.10 focusing on public/press *attitudes*:
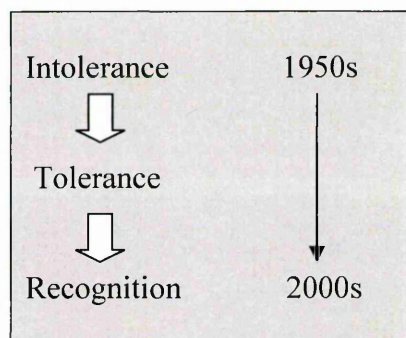
Figure 2.1: The progression of tolerance towards recognition.

It is important to recognise at this point that there are different 'types' of recognition (and also acceptability) rather than one type, as suggested in Chapter 1 when I note that Frame 3 of the frame of representation (Figure 1.10) shapes (the character/particularly of) and mirrors (particular moments of) Frames 1 and 2. Indeed, recognition and acceptability can be thought of as a field of possibilities, the end result of which is influenced by the processes in Frame 1 and the circularity of the frame of representation as a whole. Also, there is an ongoing debate about what recognition actually involves and its legitimacy as a concept (as noted in Chapter 5); thus, when the thesis states that the move towards recognition has been partial, the definition and concept referred to is Taylor's (1992), as discussed in Chapter 1.[46] It is also essential to recognise that the progression of tolerance towards recognition relates to 'stages' of homosexuality (as expressed in Figure 1.1 and related to Frame 2 of Figure 1.10). Indeed, while a

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[45] 'Indifference to difference' (as stated by Thompson (2002: 84) in relation to tolerance and international governance) is of course a form of toleration, thus suggesting that tolerance is not *always* grudging.
[46] Indeed, this thesis discusses recognition as part of a media discourse; recognition can be contested in political theory.

homosexual *identity* may have been accepted decades ago by many people, the actual act of male to male penetration is not. Thus, when the thesis refers to partial recognition, this refers to the fact that gay politicians (and gay people generally) are not recognised as wholly unproblematic figures; aspects of their 'particularity' can be seen as negative (such as active sexuality, as demonstrated by the arguments utilised by politicians against reform in House of Commons and Lords debates).

The ideas contained in Figure 2.1 (and Figure 1.10) are discussed across the thesis; indeed, Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate that the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press, from the mid-twentieth century to the early 2000s, can be understood in terms of a (halting) progression of tolerance towards partial recognition. For example, in the 1950s and earlier, homosexual politicians (and homosexuality as a whole) were not (publicly) tolerated, something reflected in newspaper coverage; however, in the late-1990s and early 2000s, gay politicians were tolerated by many people (the press, public and politicians) and were in fact recognised as equal people/political actors in many - but not all - press articles. However, full recognition has not been achieved; as Chapter 4 makes clear, even in the twenty-first century gay politicians are often depicted in the ('popular' tabloid) press in a derogatory manner, with their sexuality a negative defining feature rather than positive one, with certain binary themes having to be met before a positive representation is possible. What is very clear by using this frame is that while gay people have managed to improve their representation (and mediated personas) over the years (moving *towards* recognition), taking into account of course the differences between tabloid/broadsheet newspapers and other factors, it is still the case that the press defines their private sexual acts in terms of the public (as noted in the previous chapter and Frame 2, Figure 1.10).

Chapters 3 and 4 explore these ideas in more detail, furthering the overarching frame of representation discussed in Chapter 1.

The Changing Representation of Gay Politicians in the UK Press

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Volume 2 of 3

CHAPTER 3

THE TRADITIONAL REPRESENTATION OF GAY POLITICIANS IN THE UK PRESS

"My homosexuality was made into an issue by the tabloids. They repeatedly and gloatingly focused on it." Peter Tatchell, Labour candidate for the 1983 Bermondsey by-election. (Tatchell 1983: 62).

Pre-1980, 'mainstream' press coverage of gay politicians was limited to 'outings' and 'scandals,' all ending unhappily (politically at least) for the politicians concerned. Gay men and women did not have a voice in the 'mainstream' media, and when they were written about - by heterosexual journalists - the language used was predominately negative. The 1980s saw Tatchell's negative campaigning experience (as suggested by the above excerpt) in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election, but also Chris Smith's (MP for Islington South and Finsbury 1983-2005) 'self-outing' in 1984, demonstrating that 'openly' gay politicians could now survive politically (by this I mean: have successful careers; keep the support of their party; or, if unelected, run a proficient election campaign). However, HIV/AIDS also appeared, causing the more positive portrayal of homosexuality which was emerging (in some parts of the press at least), and public toleration, to regress. As Gronfors and Stalstrom (1987: 53) note:

> AIDS drowned the budding optimism. Once again homosexuality and homosexual people were being thought of primarily in negative terms, control policies again dominating the discussion in such volume and ferocity as never before.

This Chapter analyses the press coverage of gay politicians pre-1990 through the detailed study of newspaper articles. The Chapter is split into two main sections, thus echoing the structure of Chapter 2: pre-1980 and 1980-1990. The semi-structured interviews carried out with MPs and related figures contextualise the press coverage and allow for a more in-depth exploration of the representation of gay politicians in UK

newspapers. The chapter explores in more detail the binary themes used by the press when writing about gay politicians, thus putting Figure 1.10 of Chapter 1 and the theory espoused in Chapter 1 into practice, in relation to the context discussed in Chapter 2. In particular, Chapter 3 emphasises that in terms of binary themes and mediated personas (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10), it is clear that gay politicians are represented in the press through the use of particular binary themes/stereotypes; using these linguistic tools, their mediated personas (gradients of positive or negative) are created by/mediated through newspapers. In particular, the case studies show that the following binary oppositions are present in the representation of gay politicians in the press:

Positive	*Negative*
Private (sexual behaviour)	Public (sexual behaviour)
Out	In
Good	Bad
Safe	Dangerous

Figure 3.1: The mediated personas of gay politicians.

The chapter also demonstrates that while public homosexuality continued to be very much frowned upon (Frame 2 of Figure 1.10), press coverage became more moderate over the years. However, recognition (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10), and even tolerance in some respects, was still some way off, even as the 1990s approached.

3.1. Private Lives, Public Consequences: the Press Representation and Experiences of Gay Politicians Pre-1980

'In some ways being a self-confessed lesbian has ruined my political career.' Maureen Colquhoun, Labour MP for Northampton North 1974-1979 (The Knitting Circle 2001).

The representation of gay people and politicians in the press pre-1980 was predominately negative. Heterosexual journalists dominated the 'mainstream' media, leaving gay men and women without a voice. The press coverage of homosexuality had for much of the century been non-existent, apart from when newspapers were given the opportunity to write sensational articles, perhaps as a result of a 'scandalous' court case. This was particularly common in tabloid newspapers in the 1940s and 1950s when homosexuality had yet to be decriminalised and public disapproval was high. When written about, gay people were the subject of discrimination and demonisation, something that continued in later decades. As the 1980s approached, press coverage began to slowly improve - in some parts of the press at least - echoing the improved legal status of homosexuality and more relaxed public attitudes, but a dominant heterosexuality still coloured the press coverage of gay men and women.

The following sub-section surveys the experiences and representation of gay politicians from the mid-twentieth-century to 1980, demonstrating how difficult it was for gay politicians to separate the personal from the political at this time. Indeed, all of the 'outed' politicians mentioned below were either forced to resign or had their careers irreparably damaged by their experiences and press coverage, something highlighted by Colquhoun (The Knitting Circle 2001), above.

3.1.1 Outing the 'Other': Early Innuendo and Sexual Scandal

William Field and Ian Harvey

Before 1980, there was no such thing as good publicity when it came to non-heterosexual political scandal. Indeed, in 1953 William Field (Labour MP for Paddington North 1946-1953) appeared in court charged with importuning men for an immoral purpose after being arrested in a public toilet in Piccadilly tube station. In

1958 Ian Harvey (Conservative MP for Harrow East 1950-1958) was fined for indecency with a Coldstream Guard. Field and Harvey paid with their careers for their misdemeanours; Field was forced to resign a few days after his appeal against his conviction failed (he pleaded guilty when originally arrested) and Harvey chose to resign despite Prime Minister Macmillan (Prime Minister 1957-1963 and Conservative MP for Stockton-on-Tees 1924-1929 and 1931-1945 and Bromley 1945-1964), who wanted to avoid a by-election, asking him to think about it over the weekend (Parris 1995). The press reported the results of their misdemeanours (*i.e.* arrests, court action), thus 'outing' them by default. In fact, journalists placed Harvey's case on their front-pages, but lost interest in his case once he resigned his seat (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). Field and Harvey were both subject to negative press coverage and excluded from political society. In relation to Figure 1.10, Field and Harvey were not tolerated at all (Frame 1); in the 1950s homosexuality was not something which the political and media establishments - and public - would accept, particularly public sexual behaviour (private/public being a key binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10). *The Times* (1958 cited Parris 1995: 125) reported Harvey's case with the line '£5 FINE ON IAN HARVEY. HE WILL PAY TO THE END OF LIFE.' In one short sentence the paper's condemnation of Harvey's actions is very clear: he is classed as a criminal (as indeed he was at the time), a man who will not be forgiven.

Tom Driberg

Tom Driberg's (Labour MP for Maldon 1942-1955) relationship with the press was an unusual one, in that while ostentatiously gay (Parris 1995; Baston 2000), he was never actually 'outed.' Although he went to court on a charge relating to homosexuality before he became an MP, Driberg escaped police prosecution while an elected figure. Baston (2000) notes that Driberg was proud of his life and felt no shame, unlike Field and

Harvey; when questioned, he would react pro-actively, threatening the police with a legal battle. Thus, Driberg's fame protected him (Baston 2000). Driberg's high-placed friends (many of whom were journalists (Parris 1995), as was Driberg before he became an MP) also protected him from adverse press coverage, as did his openness; because he was so open about his sexuality, seemingly not caring what people thought about his life, the importance of 'outing' him was negated. Driberg's case serves to remind us that the press did not expose all gay politicians at this time. Indeed, to be 'outed' in the 1940s and 1950s gay politicians had to commit some kind of contemporaneous sexual misdemeanour which resulted in an arrest and/or court case, *a la* Harvey and Field. However, even though this is the case, the lack of scandalous press coverage of Driberg's personal life is of note; without a doubt, Driberg's activities (as discussed by Driberg (1977) himself in his unfinished autobiography, and by Wheen (2001) his biographer) were far more colourful and newsworthy than anything we know about Harvey and Field.

In relation to the frame of representation (Figure 1.10) discussed thus far, one could state that the press classed Driberg as a 'good' homosexual, and Harvey and Field as 'bad' homosexuals (a binary theme of Frame 3); Driberg was completely open and relaxed about his sexuality (but not 'out,' an important definition: a gay politician can be 'in' but 'good') and was therefore not a threat to the 'norm,' unlike Harvey and Field who had not defined themselves as gay and did not appear relaxed and open (for example, as Parris (1995) notes, Harvey had married in order to be selected as a parliamentary candidate). Their lack of openness (whether expressed privately or publicly) meant that the press could not pigeonhole them into a neat, safe category. By reporting the cases of Harvey and Field, thus suggesting their homosexuality, the heterosexuality - and 'normality' - of the press and public could be reaffirmed. His

political and journalistic contemporaries reacted to Driberg's marriage in 1951 with wry

amusement (Parris 1995), but gaining a wife contributed to the protection of his public

image (the reason why many gay public figures choose to marry). Indeed, marriages of

convenience can be very beneficial for gay politicians; if a husband or wife happily

poses with a suspected - or even 'outed' gay politician - then heterosexuality can be

asserted more successfully.

Jeremy Thorpe

Moving on a few decades, one politician who was not classed as a 'good' homosexual

by the majority of the press was Jeremy Thorpe (Liberal MP for North Devon 1959-

1979 and leader of the Liberal Party from 1967-1976). Thorpe was first alleged to have

had an affair with a young man called Norman Scott in 1976 and then, in a bizarre twist

of events, was accused of incitement and conspiracy to murder Scott in 1979. Thorpe,

having lost his seat, was acquitted after a sensational trial in 1979, and to this day,

denies that he and Scott were anything other than good friends (Parris 1995). Even by

the late-1970s rumours of homosexuality could finish a political career. As Parris (1995:

192) notes in relation to Thorpe:

> The ink had dried on the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, but twelve years on
> homosexuality was barely tolerated, and this respected politician's choice of
> partner made it worse: there was public and press revulsion against the young
> man one judge called a 'spineless neurotic character.'

Scott's original revelation that he and Thorpe were lovers irrevocably damaged

Thorpe's career, perhaps more than the later allegations of conspiracy to murder;

indeed, he was forced out as leader as a result. The tabloid press's reaction towards

Thorpe's alleged gay affair was gleeful in its sensationalism (although the press could

claim to be reacting to outside events, thus reporting rather than manufacturing his press

coverage). *The Sun*, unsurprisingly, told Thorpe he should stand down. The front-page

of the *London Evening News* (29 January, 1976) stated 'MAN'S SEX AFFAIR WITH

JEREMY- COURT STORY,' representative, Jeffery-Poulter (1991) notes, of the

general standard of tabloid press coverage. Through the use of the words, 'sex' and

'affair,' the alleged relationship is reduced to its most basic form with no mention of

possible affection or love; the headline suggests that the supposed relationship consisted

simply of sex and nothing else. *The Times* used a softer tone when Thorpe actually

resigned in 1976, stating 'MR THORPE RESIGNS OVER "PLOTS AND INTRIGUE"'

(1976 cited Parris 1995: 206). Interestingly, some broadsheets appeared relatively

sympathetic towards Thorpe. Indeed, *The Times*:

> was not convinced that the public did believe any longer that 'good personal
> morals' were incompatible with sexual relationships between men. (1976 cited
> Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 117).

Even the traditionally Right-wing *Daily Telegraph* newspaper was relatively supportive;

the paper regretted that Thorpe had become a:

> sacrifice to the well-established convention in British politics that a public man
> must be free from all publicly sustainable suspicion about his personal morals.
> (1976 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 117).

However, note that *The Daily Telegraph's* support seems to be based on the fact that

Thorpe was only *suspected* of homosexual behaviour. An actual admission of

homosexuality may have resulted in a much more dismissive tenor.

Thorpe's trial in 1979 brought more attention on his alleged homosexual affair with

Scott. *The Observer* (1979 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 137-138), a liberal broadsheet

newspaper, commented:

> In an ideal world, Jeremy Thorpe's sexual preferences should not have been of the slightest interest to anyone but his sexual partners. But we do not live in an ideal world. Even today, twelve years after the passing of the Sexual Offences Act... for anyone in public life, let alone a politician, to admit openly that he is a homosexual is to court disaster.

The Observer, while sympathising with Thorpe, actually excused the behaviour of the press; while seemingly understanding, the paper contributed to the wide-scale punishment of Thorpe for his supposed homosexuality. The above quote is also a useful demonstration of the themes of Frame 2 (Figure 1.10), acceptability over time in relation to public space; an admittance of homosexuality in public was seen as crossing the acceptability threshold, even though homosexuality was by then legal.

Maureen Colquhoun

In the mid-1970s Maureen Colquhoun became the UK's first known lesbian MP, after being forced out of the 'closet' by the *Daily Mail*. In 1975 Colquhoun left her husband of 25 years for a woman, Babs Todd, former editor of the lesbian magazine *Sappho*. She did not keep a low profile and in 1976 threw a housewarming party for herself and her partner at their new home. The *Daily Mail* diary columnist Nigel Dempster got hold of one of the invitations and wrote in his column that it featured '"Two entwined females" labelled Maureen and Babs' (Parris 1995: 220), leading to widespread press coverage. Colquhoun did not deny her sexuality and actually took the *Daily Mail* to the Press Council for invasion of privacy (indeed, her initial press coverage was certainly manufactured, *i.e.* the *Daily Mail* made the decision to 'out' her, rather than react to something like a court case). Colquhoun lost the case on the grounds that the public had a 'right to know' (Parris 1995). As Hemmings (1980: 159) wrote at the time, 'Lesbianism is the news, so if you want to stay out of it give it up or stay invisible.' This is another example of the acceptability threshold (Frame 2, Figure 1.10) in relation to public space: crossing the line from private to public was problematic. Other

newspapers were not wholly sympathetic to Colquhoun's case. *The Times* (1976 cited Parris 1995: 220) believed:

> The methods used to obtain information from her were a gross intrusion into privacy, and harassment of a serious kind.

But, as Parris (1995) notes, the paper added that her personal life was relevant as she had been vocal on feminist issues; thus, her decision to move in with a woman after leaving her husband was of public interest. The private is the political according to *The Times*, a fact strengthened by Colquhoun's feminism. Indeed, Seaton (2003: 182) observes that the rise of feminism, and the idea of the private as political, created a 'legislatively constructed "private" life,' demanding consistency between private and public lives: hypocrisy was untenable. Colquhoun can be classified as a 'bad' gay MP (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10) even though she was open and relaxed after her exposure; while it is possible for a gay MP to become 'good' if they react the 'correct' way to an 'outing' (as explored later in the thesis), the homophobia of the time meant that this was not possible for Colquhoun.

Later tabloid stories about Colquhoun highlighted her homosexuality. In December 1976 Colquhoun hit a car-park attendant in an argument about a complimentary parking ticket. Parris (1995: 221) writes that one journalist described her as a 'cheery butch battleaxe.' *The People* headlined the story with 'WOMAN MP SOCKED ME' (1976 cited Parris 1995: 221). The words 'butch' and 'battleaxe' are used to make Colquhoun appear more masculine, and the term 'socked' used to liken her to a boxer. The paper categorises her in order that the reader can understand who and what she is; as Fowler (1991) notes, in order to make sense of the world we categorise people. Colquhoun was no longer allowed to be an individual; she was presented as looking and behaving a

certain way to fit a lesbian stereotype. Interestingly, Colquhoun found that support in the House of Commons came from heterosexual male MPs, rather than female or gay politicians, with support from the Left very lacking, and attributes this to people being threatened by her later openness (Parris 1995). The fear of being labelled 'other' is a common heterosexual reaction to homosexuality (Swim *et. al.* 1999), and is perhaps the reason why some MPs did not support Colquhoun. The reaction of the Left emphasises that homophobia was not limited to Right-wing politicians at this time. The apparent response of gay politicians towards Colquhoun is very striking; it suggests that gay MPs of this era could not only expect negative and discriminatory press representation, but also political isolation, not just from (some) heterosexual politicians, but also fellow gay politicians. It suggests that recognition (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10) was a long way off, not just from heterosexual people, but also in the minds of many gay people; perhaps outside homophobia impacted on self-image and affirmations of solidarity and confidence.

Apart from Driberg who managed to avoid press focus on his sexuality, the above-mentioned politicians all suffered politically when their (alleged) homosexuality became public knowledge; Harvey and Field resigned from Parliament, Colquhoun was deselected by her constituency party (although this was a result of general dissatisfaction with her conduct, Colquhoun's sexuality certainly did not help matters) - a decision eventually overturned by the Labour Party's National Executive - (Parris 1995) and Thorpe, while forced to stand down as Liberal leader because of criminal allegations rather than his sexuality, had his career and reputation damaged beyond repair by Scott's claims of an affair. The press coverage of Thorpe and Colquhoun was more detailed than the coverage of Harvey and Field, and both MPs became defined by their (alleged) sexuality and, in Thorpe's case, sexual scandal. This was partly because

the press focused on their sexuality and sex lives for longer (although their careers were irreparably damaged, both carried on as MPs for a few years after their sexuality became public knowledge), but also because politics had become more personalised generally, and deference towards politicians had collapsed (Baston 2000). Although the broadsheet newspapers did not cover the above-mentioned 'outings' in a sensationalist way (as the tabloids did in the case of Thorpe and Colquhoun in particular), utilizing stereotypes and negative language, they did not ignore the stories: they just presented them in a more 'straightforward' and 'serious' manner. Interestingly, both *The Times* (1976 cited Parris 1995: 220) and *The Observer* (1979 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 137-138) seem to condemn the lurid press coverage of gay politicians, while perpetuating it, emphasising that even for the 'quality' press (Left and Right), the trials and tribulations of (allegedly) gay politicians were too interesting a story to ignore, particularly when the details were as interesting as Thorpe's. Colquhoun told *Gay News*:

> I am not 'Britain's Lesbian MP.' I am the working Member of Parliament for Northampton North and I am carrying on with my job. My sexuality is of no relevance to that work than is the sexuality of heterosexual MPs - something people do not continually question. (1977 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 137).

Unfortunately for Colquhoun, and other gay politicians at the time, dividing private lives from public office was extremely difficult. Indeed, while the Press Council was partially in place to consider public complaints about press behaviour, its ethos was one of protecting press freedom, thus giving more weight to the press than to the subjects of press coverage (PCC 2009). Of course, one can argue that the 'right to know' ensures that political morality is upheld and politicians and political institutions are kept in check. Indeed, Boling (1996) writes that respecting privacy can actually reinforce privilege. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to argue that much of the press coverage described above (particularly since decriminalisation in 1967) was for any reason other

than its newsworthiness and sensationalism (even if the press could fall back on a public interest defence).

3.2 Immoral Sexuality, Moralistic Press Coverage: the Press Representation and Experiences of Gay Politicians 1980-1990

"I have always said that whatever you do in your private life shouldn't get in the way of your public life. And nobody said it did, by the way. In fact, the crocodile tears of the press after the case said just the reverse: I was never criticised for being a bad MP." Harvey Proctor (*London Evening Standard*, MY LIFE IS STILL UNDER SIEGE SAYS SEX SCANDAL MP, 8 November, 1994).

Britain has generally become increasingly tolerant of homosexuality (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10). However, in the mid-1980s there was a backwards shift in public opinion: people were less tolerant than in the early-1980s (Brook *et al.* 1992 cited Rayside 1998; Jowell *et. al.* 1991; Weeks 2000). The increase in disapproval peaked in 1987, before decreasing (Brook *et al.* 1992 cited Rayside 1998; Jowell *et. al.* 1991), and was a result of the emergence of HIV/AIDS (Jowell 1991; Rayside 1998), and a backlash to the permissiveness of the previous decades. Indeed, HIV/AIDS saw the press representation of gay men and women become more vicious (Jeffery-Poulter 1991; Rayside 1998) and an escalation in the use of homosexuality as a political tool in the press (Sanderson 1995) - both tabloid and broadsheet - something that impacted upon public opinion.

The following sub-sections explore the experiences and representation of gay politicians in the 1980s, with in-depth case studies of Tatchell, Smith and Proctor (MP for Basildon 1979-1983 and Billericay 1983-1987), as quoted above. Their press coverage reveals that despite their different 'statuses' (*i.e.* 'closeted,' 'out,' and 'outed'), they all suffered from discriminatory press coverage and the use of negative binary themes. However, Smith's coverage was much more moderate than Tatchell and Proctor's; the fact that he

was a 'good' and 'safe' gay MP who voluntarily 'came out' to the press undoubtedly contributed to this.

3.2.1 Surviving the Storm: Allan Roberts, Keith Hampson and Overcoming an 'Outing'

Allan Roberts

The tabloid press's homophobic campaign against Tatchell in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election, explored below, makes it easy to assume that in the early 1980s it was impossible for any gay or 'outed' politician to survive politically (*i.e.* to be a successful politician, elected or not). However, this would not only fail to take into account the unique circumstances of Tatchell's experience (*i.e.* the fact he was not yet elected; his lack of Party support; and, his unpopular political leanings), but also the experiences of other politicians. Indeed, in the early 1980s, Allan Roberts (Labour MP for Bootle 1978-1990) and Keith Hampson (Conservative MP for Ripon 1974-1983 and Leeds North-West 1983-1997) both managed to carry on as MPs when 'outed' by the press.

In 1981 the *News of the World* (following on from an investigation by *Private Eye* magazine) reported that Roberts had visited a gay S&M club in Germany, and while there had donned a studded dog collar, been led around the floor by a man in an SS uniform, and been repeatedly whipped by other patrons. This led to him needing emergency hospital treatment, paid for, as Parris (1995) notes, by a Conservative MP (emphasising once more that while publicly hostile as a party, many Conservative MPs were privately very liberal). The *News of the World's* splash did not move Roberts; he refused to 'come out' to the press and would only admit to being involved in a 'drunken spree' in the club and nothing more. In fact, the *News of the World* and *Private Eye*

magazine (who originally published details about Roberts's antics in Germany) were forced to pay libel damages to Roberts over later allegations that the police were investigating him over sexual offences (Parris 1995). The luridness of Roberts's exposure demonstrates that his press coverage was not just about sexuality; it was also about the (tabloid) press's love of scandal (whether straight or gay), a focus made possible by the increasing 'visibility' of politicians (Thompson 2000). Indeed, Roberts was 'outed,' and his press coverage manufactured, because it was a good story, rather than in relation to any public interest issue or in response to outside events such as a court case.

Even though Roberts never admitted to being gay, he was still a staunch defender of gay rights. Indeed, he voted to extend the Sexual Offences Act to Scotland in 1980[47] and Northern Ireland in 1982,[48] and to neuter the effect of Clause 28 in 1987[49] and 1988[50] (the latter two votes were unsuccessful). Why then did he survive his adverse tabloid press coverage, eventually becoming a member of Labour's frontbench environment team, when so many of his fellow gay parliamentarians were forced to resign? Undoubtedly, Roberts was very popular with his constituency party (as Parris (1995) notes, his constituency party gave him a unanimous vote of confidence after his travails), but so were other less fortunate gay MPs. Perhaps the answer lies with the fact that Roberts, like Driberg before him, appeared to be comfortable with his sexuality and did not let the press intimidate him. It did not matter what the press threw at him - and it cannot get much more politically embarrassing than being accused of being beaten by a

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[47] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 989) 22 July 1980 (Criminal Justice Scotland Bill - Homosexual Offences).

[48] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 29) 25 October 1982 (Northern Ireland - Homosexual Offences).

[49] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 124) 15 December 1987 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material). There were three votes in total: divisions 116-118.

[50] Hansard House of Commons debates (vol 129) 9 March 1988 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material).

man in a Nazi uniform - Roberts refused to be cowed by the press and continued to speak on gay rights in the Commons.[51] Charges of hypocrisy could not be levelled at Roberts; he had never been married and so could not be accused of misleading his constituents (unlike Colquhoun) and did not make anti-gay remarks or vote against gay rights. Like Driberg, Roberts was a 'good' gay man in terms of his relaxedness, even if he was 'dangerous' sexually (binary themes of Frame 3, Figure 1.10).

Keith Hampson

In 1984 Hampson was accused of indecently assaulting an undercover police officer in a gay club in Soho. He was brought to trial and a verdict of not guilty was recorded after the jury had failed to reach a verdict. The Attorney General announced that there could not be a re-trial due to the widespread publicity of the case (highlighting the fact that his case was reported because of outside events) (Parris 1995). Hampson denied that he had done anything wrong and also denied that he was gay (the press could therefore class him as 'bad' rather than 'good,' using a binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10). The fact he was married helped his case; indeed, his wife loyally stood by him, testifying that he was heterosexual (Parris 1995). He survived the bad publicity and remained an MP until the 1997 Labour landslide; he refused to go quietly, something which undoubtedly benefited him (Parris 1995). Like Roberts, Hampson refused to buckle under his press coverage and survived his ordeal. He was undoubtedly lucky: he had a wife to accentuate his heterosexuality and had no skeletons in his closet. Hampson was also fortunate that the press (tabloid and broadsheet) was unimpressed with his apparent entrapment. As *Gay Times* (1984 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 172) noted, commentators were, 'unanimously favourable in their support for an end to entrapment.' Indeed, even *The Sun* (1984 cited Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 172) stated that:

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[51] For example: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 124) 15 December 1987 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material).

the real crime that worries the public is out on the streets. For most people safety on public transport and in their homes comes before private morals.

While *The Sun's* stance is admirable, the newspaper is somewhat hypocritical; *The Sun* has 'outed' and focused on the sexuality of numerous gay politicians and public figures (as demonstrated by case studies below), suggesting that 'private morals' are of interest to the newspaper, if not the public.

Roberts and Hampson were both very lucky; unlike Colquhoun, both received the support of their local parties, perhaps reflecting growing public tolerance (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10) of homosexuality (before much of the moral and media panic relating to HIV/AIDS). Of course, their constituency parties may have supported them because they denied being gay (or, in Roberts's case, stayed silent on the issue), in contrast to Colquhoun who admitted that she was gay after she was 'outed' by the press. However, while Roberts and Hampson survived politically, staying on as MPs for many years after their negative press coverage, their cases should not be taken as a signal that (allegedly) gay politicians suddenly had it easy. Indeed, while politicians (gay or not) no longer necessarily lost the support of their parties and/or their seats when 'outed,' their private lives were often still ruthlessly exploited. Tatchell's press coverage, explored below, is a prime example of this exploitation.

3.2.2   The Would-be Politician: Peter Tatchell and the 1983 Bermondsey By-election

The Tabloid Approach

The Bermondsey by-election (the actual official campaign - January to February 1983 - but also the pre-campaign as well) is infamous for the slurs, discrimination and outright homophobia faced by Tatchell. The source of much of this homophobia were tabloid

newspapers such as the *News of the World* and *The Sun*, whose journalists took it upon themselves to damn Tatchell not just as a Left-wing politician, but also as a 'suspected' gay man. In fact, Tatchell's pro-gay stance was used to signal that he was part of the so-called 'dangerous' and pro-gay (and therefore anti-family) 'Loony Left,' and thus an unsuitable candidate for the people of Bermondsey to vote for. The Liberals (who eventually won the seat) also courted anti-gay feeling during the campaign (Rayside 1998), indicating that a good historical record on gay rights counts for nothing during a fiercely fought campaign. However, one must not underestimate the impact of the press representation of Tatchell's (then unconfirmed, but suspected) homosexuality; it was used as a way of discrediting him as a politician in an election described by *Gay News* as 'the most homophobic by-election of our time' (1982 cited Sanderson 1995: 100).

The lengths the tabloids would go to get proof of Tatchell's homosexuality were amazing. Indeed, the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* newspapers camped outside Tatchell's house and sorted through his rubbish to try and find 'incriminating' evidence, and the *Daily Mail* apparently compiled a list of 20 supposed ex-lovers from whom they hoped to extract a scandalous sexual story (Tatchell 1983). The articles that *were* published were over-the-top and frequently untrue. *The Sun* decided to construct the story that Tatchell had deserted his constituents to attend the Gay Olympics - something emphatically denied by Tatchell - and printed it under the headline 'RED PETE "WENT TO GAY OLYMPICS"' (1983 cited Sanderson 1995: 100). This story characterised Tatchell as a militant gay man more interested in gay issues than 'ordinary' members of the public. Public homosexuality (Frame 2 of Figure 1.10) was thus unacceptable in relation to active *campaigning*, as well as expressions of sexuality or identity. *The Sun* headlined another story 'MY FIGHT FOR THE GAYS - BY RED PETE' (1983 cited Rayside 1998: 36). The paper damned Tatchell on two fronts: first, he was identified with gay

issues, and second, he was portrayed as Left-wing. The article goes on to describe a trip

Tatchell made to the World Youth Festival ten years earlier:

> In 1973 Mr Tatchell was involved in a violent scuffle in East Berlin when he raised a banner calling for solidarity with East German gays. Fellow members of his student delegation at a world youth rally ripped down the banner and attacked him, reducing him to tears. (1982 cited Tatchell 1983: 62).

As Tatchell (1983: 62) states, this was a 'crude propagandist' effort at promoting the

stereotype that all gay men are 'simpering queens.' Further ammunition came from the

News of the World, which doctored a photo of Tatchell to make it look as if he was

wearing make-up, thus further equating his homosexuality with effeminacy. As

McIntosh (1996) notes, heterosexual people often assume that gay men will be

effeminate. Tatchell (1983) certainly does not make this correlation himself and was

angry that the newspaper pushed this stereotype to its readers. He described further

negative press coverage in his submission to the National Heritage Committee on the

Press:

> There was the constant abusive, sneering and ridiculing tone of the tabloids... 'Red Pete,' 'immigrant upstart,' 'gay rights extremist,' 'a rather exotic Australian canary'... Objectivity was largely abandoned. News became fused with hostile and denigratory comment. Editorial opinion replaced factual reporting. (Tatchell 1993).

The words 'exotic' (often used when describing gay men, as demonstrated in relation to

the press coverage of Mandelson in Chapter 4) and 'canary' characterise Tatchell as

atypical and preening, and the word 'extremist' as out of touch with 'real' issues.

Tatchell is justified in claiming that opinion replaced facts; after the election *The Sun*

ran a full-page editorial headed 'THE TRUTH HURTS - LIES, SMEARS AND PETER

TATCHELL,' blaming Tatchell for his defeat, rather than the 'truthful' journalists

employed by *The Sun* (1983 cited Sanderson 1995: 101).

The Broadsheet Approach

Most of the broadsheet newspapers did not target Tatchell for his homosexuality and instead focused on the politics of his candidacy, *i.e.* his political beliefs; the hostility of the Labour leadership; and the ways in which tabloid newspapers portrayed him. Indeed, the more liberal *Guardian* newspaper noted that Tatchell was 'less exotic' then his opponents alleged (1983 cited Tatchell 1983: 118). There were a few exceptions to the broadsheets' political, rather than personal, focus. For example, the Right-wing *Daily Telegraph* newspaper emphasised that Tatchell was a 'draft-dodger and a supporter of homosexuals' (1983 cited Tatchell 1983: 62), managing to condemn Tatchell for his anti-war views and homosexuality in one line. Echoing the approach of tabloid newspapers, the paper also personalised Tatchell's press coverage, noting that:

> Mr Tatchell, who has the habit of drawing himself erect periodically as he talks, and fingering the wide leather belt atop trendy cord jeans and two-tone wine and beige laced shoes, shows considerable irritation at personal questions. (1982 cited Tatchell 1983: 61).

Tatchell described articles like this as examples of 'trivialisation, ridicule and personalisation,' and also noted that reporters were obsessed with his clothes and appearance (Tatchell 1983: 61). While the appearances of many politicians and public figures - heterosexual and gay - are scrutinized, note the use of the words 'erect' and 'fingering' in the above article; Tatchell is sexualised in order to play on the frequently made correlation between homosexuality and overt sexuality. In fact, one could say that he is almost feminised by the focus on his appearance. As Tatchell himself (1983) notes, it is much more common for the appearances of *female* MPs to be commented on than males.

The Personal as Political

The focus on Tatchell's appearance was not just about sexuality; it was also about his Left-wing views. Indeed, as Tatchell (1983: 61) notes, the press focused on the personal in order to undermine the political:

> We could reasonably ask why the... papers were giving up so much space to such trivia... [well] ridiculing my apparel was just an additional weapon in their armoury to assassinate the character of a Left-wing Labour candidate.

Tatchell (1983) believes that the press attempted to portray gay rights as a personal crusade even though he was only supporting national Party policy. Indeed, the *News of the World* named Tatchell as a key figure in the fight for gay rights policy within the Labour Party:

> The Labour Party was plagued with fresh turmoil yesterday in a row over demands for freedom for homosexuals. The far Left accused Party leader Michael Foot of butchering a plan to sweep away restrictions on the activities of 'gays.' Mr Tatchell is a key figure in a massive campaign to make homosexual rights a dominant issue at this week's Labour Conference in Blackpool. (1982 cited Tatchell 1983: 110).

Rayside (1998) notes that a link with gay issues and rights was disadvantageous for any political party at this time. Indeed, Tatchell's local party advised him to keep quiet about his sexuality in order to avoid negative press coverage (Tatchell 1983), demonstrating that while the already elected (and technically still 'closeted') Roberts received the support of his local party, standing as an 'openly' gay candidate was still unthinkable. Although Tatchell's Left-wing views were the biggest concern of the Labour Party (Tatchell 1983), it is not unreasonable to suppose that the assumed tabloid reaction to his homosexuality contributed to the lack of support he received from Labour headquarters. Indeed, while at this time Labour was committed to protecting gay people from unfair discrimination, it had backed away from a commitment to equal

rights (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). The Labour Party sensed the damage a strong link to gay rights could have, hence the distancing of Tatchell, and was also aware of the more 'traditional' opinions of working class members (Rayside 1998). Recognition (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10) was obviously a long way off, with tolerance of homosexuality not exhibited by all.

In versus Out: Binary Themes

While it is unfair for Tatchell to be criticised for not openly declaring his sexuality (aside from the advice of the Labour Party, the threats made to Tatchell about his sexuality left him fearing for his safety (Tatchell 1983)), this had an unfortunate side effect. As with Harvey and Field decades earlier, his lack of 'openness' meant that the press was unable to define 'what' he was, leading to innuendo and suggestion - maybe more than if he had just followed his heart and 'come out' as gay in the first place – meaning that he was a 'bad' gay man. As Summerskill notes:

> my view is that if Peter Tatchell had come out, and closed down the issue, he might have won the Bermondsey by-election. The reason it turned into a complete pantomime about sexual orientation is actually because he constantly said he wouldn't make a comment on the issue. If he had just said 'well I am homosexual and that's that, and now let's talk about housing and poverty' and that's that, then I think the outcome of that election might have been different.[52]

Tatchell's press coverage demonstrates the good/bad, private/public and out/in binary themes highlighted in Chapter 1 (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). As a 'bad,' 'closeted' gay man - who nevertheless supported gay rights - Tatchell was a threat to 'normality,' leading to his hounding. Paradoxically, while public 'displays' of homosexuality (for example, expressing solidarity with other gay people and causes, something Tatchell was accused of even though he was not 'out') was frowned upon by the tabloid press (in terms of

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[52] Interview with Summerskill (Private interview, 20 June, 2006). In my view Tatchell was unlikely to win the election whether or not he was open about his sexuality, owing to the political climate at the time.

Frame 2, Figure 1.10, this was below the acceptability threshold), 'private' homosexuality (*i.e.* homosexuality unconfirmed in public) was also deemed suspicious. By characterising Tatchell as effeminate and thus gay, the press could right this ostensible wrong.

Defeat

Tatchell's case exemplifies the inherent difficulty of being a gay politician in the 1980s; although homosexuality had a more tolerant legal status, many parts of the press still portrayed it as shameful and somehow indecent. The press's obsession with damning Tatchell contributed to the scale of his defeat (Labour's vote fell from 63.6% in 1979 to 26.1%). In an ironic twist, the candidate who won the election was Simon Hughes; as mentioned in the Preface, he himself was 'outed' many years later. Tatchell (1983) has stated that the tabloid press actually compromised democracy in the by-election; he feels the press abused its power and manipulated the news for political reasons, leading to readers being given a biased view of what he stood for. Even the Labour supporting *Sunday Mirror* condemned Tatchell after his defeat, stating 'WHAT A FREAK' alongside his picture (1983 cited Tatchell 1983: 153). The broadsheet newspapers played a much straighter bat, although, as demonstrated above, hostile newspapers such as *The Daily Telegraph* were certainly not averse to subtly exploiting Tatchell's homosexuality.

As noted above, Tatchell's press coverage was not just about his sexuality; it was also about politics. Indeed, although it is unlikely that his sexuality would have been completely ignored (especially during a by-election when the press focus is on just one constituency and a handful of candidates, rather than hundreds as during a general election), Tatchell would probably have received a more positive press if he had been

more politically 'acceptable' to newspapers. One must also take into account the fact that Tatchell was standing for election, meaning that negative stories about him were potentially much more damaging than for the already elected Roberts and Hampson (*i.e.* the immediacy of the vote meant that the stories would be fresh in the minds of the general public), as well as the fact that he did not have the support of the Labour leadership. These factors destabilised Tatchell, making him extremely vulnerable to negative press coverage.

This said, Tatchell was done a great disservice by the press, the tabloids in particular. Criticism of political views is the norm for any politician, but the press focus on Tatchell's (suspected) homosexuality - whether as a method of attacking his politics or as a signal of general disapproval - not only led to intense homophobia and discrimination, but it can also be seen as leading to democracy being compromised in the by-election (*i.e.* readers were given a biased view of what Tatchell stood for). The articles are hard to justify; they did not fulfil any public interest criteria and are examples of manufactured press coverage. Tatchell's decision to not 'come out' in public (although he was completely 'out' in private with his colleagues and he 'came out' publicly after the by-election) and his Left-wing beliefs, meant that the tabloid press felt able, and even compelled, to constantly mention his sexuality. Of course, the reaction of the press can partly be accounted for in historical terms; although attitudes towards homosexuality were continuing to improve in the early 1980s (before HIV/AIDS), and in some parts of the press representations of gay people and issues were becoming more moderate, gay men and women were still frequently discriminated against. And at this point, although many gay (or suspected to be gay) politicians had been 'outed,' no MPs had voluntarily 'come out' as gay (although Colquhoun did declare that she was gay, this was in response to being 'outed').

'Coming Out'

In the aftermath of Tatchell's homophobic defeat, it was brave of Chris Smith to come out as gay. To a crowd of supporters he declared: 'My name's Chris Smith, I'm the Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, and I'm gay.' Smith's 1984 'self-outing' can be seen as the beginning of a new era for gay politicians, and in some respects, this is certainly true; his declaration - and his homosexuality as a whole - did not receive much press coverage (tabloid and broadsheet), suggesting on first glance that toleration had moved on a step (Frame 1, Figure 1.10), especially in comparison to Tatchell's experiences, even though it was only one year later. However, it is essential to note that Smith was in an advantageous position: firstly, by voluntarily 'coming out' (out/in being a binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10), he pre-empted the press and made a subsequent focus on his sexuality pointless; secondly, 'coming out' after being elected to Parliament gave him more stability than if he had stood for election as an 'openly' gay candidate; and thirdly, he was seen as more politically acceptable - although as Rayside (1998) notes, as a London MP some Labour politicians associated him with the 'Loony Left'.

Interestingly, Smith's press representation was not wholly positive. Indeed, when he identified with gay issues his press coverage became somewhat negative and even homophobic. To counter this, Smith made sure that he was not seen as a single-issue politician; to survive politically, he had to make sure that he appealed not just to his heterosexual constituents, but also the heteronormative press. For example, while supportive of gay rights in the House of Commons (*i.e.* voting in favour of improved

gay rights), Smith took an avid interest in 'mainstream' concerns; indeed, study of Smith's post-1997 voting record reveals that even when he was a backbencher without ministerial responsibilities, he did not take part in every gay rights vote, indicating that he did not feel that it was his duty to be a 'cheerleader' for these issues (at least in his later years as an MP), as explored later in the sub-section.

The press coverage of Smith's 'self-outing' was free of the hostility and outright homophobia faced by Tatchell, and was not even mentioned in the national tabloids apart from a few comments in *The Observer*, although his local paper, the *Islington Gazette*, allowed him to explain his announcement (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). Smith did not have to tolerate a focus on his personal and sexual life, *a la* Colquhoun and Roberts, or cope with the personalisation and trivialisation experienced by Tatchell just one year earlier. The positive (or perhaps indifferent) press reaction to Smith, and the negative press reaction to Tatchell, perfectly demonstrates the 'good' gay/'bad' gay binary theme (Frame 3 of Figure 1.10), and also that the press coverage of gay politicians needs to be read in relation to the 'lifestyle' of the individual concerned. Indeed, unlike Tatchell who did not 'come out' as gay, and who subsequently had the tabloids knocking at his door, Smith's candour meant that the press had no 'sensational' story to put on its front-page. As Smith states:

> Oh I think undoubtedly the decision voluntarily to stand up and say something carries much greater respect. I think it carries greater respect with the public and that rubs off on the press. (Private interview, 2 February, 2006).

In fact, articles on Smith's homosexuality were rendered pointless. After all, how can a politician be scandalised if there is no scandal (*i.e.* a secret life or hypocrisy) to report? As Jeffery-Poulter (1991) notes, Smith's actions meant that the press were unable to smear his name. This not only reveals much about the news values of newspapers

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(tabloids in particular) - the fact that sensationalism is crucial to a good story, and bad news (for an individual) is much more interesting than good news - but it also reveals a great deal about the what the press thinks the public wants: scandal, gossip and a focus on personality rather than politics.

The lack of press focus on Smith's 'self-outing' also suggests that the 'need to know' is a key factor in the 'outing' of gay politicians. As his sexuality was already in the public domain, journalists did not have to go to the trouble of 'outing' Smith themselves. In other words, curiosity had been satisfied. Smith endorses this theory:

> Why they didn't pick up on it [his announcement] I still don't really know. I think it was partly perhaps because I was at that time a relatively unknown backbencher, it was partly also I think that even at that stage they were beginning to recognise that the public mood was changing... I think also they didn't know quite how to handle it, because this was the first time that anyone had voluntarily stood up and said 'look I'm gay.' Before that, any disclosures had been ferreted around for by the press, had happened against people's wishes, and there was the sense of pursuit in the story about it. By deciding simply to stand up and say something voluntarily, I had removed the story from them. (Private interview, 2 February, 2006).

Labour Party Opinion

The Labour Party's support (or rather, lack of disapproval), a result of his tolerable political beliefs (and possibly his constituency party's more middle-class and liberal membership), and his status as an already elected politician, can also be seen as stabilising Smith. Smith has remarked on the considerate attitude of his colleagues:

> On the whole yes, my colleagues were very supportive. I had no hostility at all from other MPs; quite a lot of them deliberately went out of their way to come up to me to say if you need any support, if we can do anything to help, let us know, and of course subsequently quite shortly after that I was appointed to the front bench of the Party and then elected to the Shadow Cabinet in '92. So I have nothing but praise for the calmness of their reaction [to his 'self-outing']. (Private interview, 2 February, 2006).

Indeed, Smith believes the Labour Party as a whole was nonplussed by his sexuality:

> I don't think they were particularly concerned one way of the other. When we came to the subsequent election in 1987 when I held a very marginal seat - I had a majority of 363 votes in 1983 - and it was the top target seat for what was then the SDP in 1987, who threw a lot of resources and effort and work at it, we as a local party had good support from the Party nationally and regionally in that election campaign. (Private interview, 2 February, 2006).

However, as suggested by Tatchell's press coverage, it seems unlikely that the newspapers would have ignored his sexuality if he had 'come out' as gay before or during the campaign. The fact that Smith's sexuality was not scandalous (*i.e.* there was no kiss-and-tell story or evidence of an affair) also contributed to his positive coverage, as did the fact that his sexuality was 'safe' rather than 'dangerous' (another binary theme recognised in Frame 3, Figure 1.10), *i.e.* as Smith did not (publicly) compromise any sexual 'norms' (homosexual ones at least), he was an unthreatening and 'neutered' gay man. This then ties in with Frame 2, acceptability and public space: his sexuality, while acknowledged in public, was not overt, and thus did not 'invade' heterosexual public space.

Left-wing Associations

Interestingly, although Smith was not seen as hard-Left, he was the subject of tabloid press condemnation when he associated himself with gay or other supposed Left-wing causes (Rayside 1998). For example, Smith's trip to the USA to meet with other gay officials was reported by the *London Evening Standard* under the headline 'MP "PUT GAY RIGHTS FIRST"' (1985 cited Rayside 1998: 83). The article noted that:

> Gay MP Chris Smith, who flew to California for a homosexual rights conference last weekend, has been accused of putting Gay Rights before his constituents.... Councillor David Hyams, the leader of Islington's Social Democratic opposition said: 'The people of Islington don't want to read in the newspapers that their MP

has jetted off to America to tell Gay Rights activists that England will one day have a gay king or lesbian queen.' (1985 cited Rayside 1998: 83).

Although the paper is reporting on the comments of another politician, their publication is significant. Indeed, if one looks at the article in terms of news values, this story was deemed to be of interest to the public. As with Tatchell, Smith is presented as being more interested in gay rights than 'ordinary' issues, thus crossing the acceptability divide in relation to homosexuality in public space (Frame 2, Figure 1.10). Indeed, there is no doubt that the 'people of Islington' are considered to be heterosexual rather than gay. In 1986 *The Sun* criticised Smith's comments on Page Three girls:

> Chris Smith is Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury. He is also a self-confessed homosexual... He wants to ban Page Three while at the same time go on allowing homosexuals the right to buy magazines containing sado-masochistic porn. So if Mr. Smith had his way the law would allow nasty minded perverts to buy material that would sicken normal people while denying the healthy-minded majority their favourite dose of glamour. (1986 cited Rayside 1998: 83).

The above passage compares 'normal,' wholesome and glamorous heterosexuality with 'abnormal,' unhealthy and dirty homosexuality. Smith, part of the 'abnormal' homosexual minority, is contrasted to the readers of *The Sun* who are considered part of the 'normal' heterosexual majority. Like Tatchell, Smith is categorised as deviant, unconcerned with the preoccupations of 'ordinary' people. When Smith suggested that there were other gay MPs, *The Sun* (1987 cited Rayside 1998: 83) stated:

> SIXTY FIVE POOFTERS IN THE COMMONS SAYS GAY MP
>
> Parliament is packed with poofters, a leading MP claimed yesterday. As many as 65 homosexuals are camping underground on the front and back benches of the House of Commons.

As noted by Sanderson (1995), in the 1980s the language used by tabloids became more and more pejorative; words such as 'poofter' were used to create a barrier between gay people and society as a whole. Of course, tabloid newspapers took such an approach because they focus on 'scandal,' are sensationalist and were writing for an assumed heterosexual readership which would echo such opinions. Nevertheless, *The Sun's* popularity meant that its (potentially very influencing) stance was of concern to many gay activists and groups at this time, including the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, who actually met with the Press Council to discuss the language used to describe homosexuality (Sanderson 1995).

Single-Issue Politics

As noted above, Smith was aware of the pejorative manner in which the press could represent him and was therefore keen to ensure that he did not become a single-issue MP. As he stated in an interview with *Gay Times* (1986 cited Rayside 1998: 84):

> Obviously I stood up and said what I am and no other politician has done so, and because of that I tend I suppose to be asked to take up issues that relate specifically to lesbians and gays. I want to do that, but I've also consciously tried to take up a lot of other issues as well to make clear to my constituents that I'll fight for all of them, no matter who or what their problems are.

Smith was keen to re-state this when he became Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport after Labour's 1997 landslide election win, after being part of the Shadow Cabinet under Blair (as Shadow Heritage Secretary then spokesman for social security, then health) and before this, part of Labour's Treasury team under John Smith (MP for Lanarkshire North 1970-1983 and Monklands East 1983-1994 and Labour leader 1992-1994). In an article headed 'BEING GAY IS SIMPLY ONE ASPECT OF MY LIFE...' Smith (*Daily Mail,* 27 October 1998) stated:

> The last thing I want to do… is to go on an on about my sexuality because it is only one aspect of my life and character.

As Prokhovnik (1999) notes, gay men and women are often considered 'other' and in opposition to heterosexuality, a dualism which helps to define society, so by 'passing' as heterosexual, gay men can be accommodated. In order to be accepted into the political 'mainstream' and to ensure a successful political career, Smith needed to be accepted by heterosexual society as a 'mainstream' politician; his stated desire to be a politician for all, rather than just gay men and women, thus facilitated his acceptance. Smith's press coverage shows the intricacy of being an 'out' gay politician in the 1980s; it was believed that identifying with 'gay issues' too strongly would alienate heterosexual voters.

'Dangerous' Sexuality

This is not to say that newspapers did not attempt to link gay politicians with so called 'gay issues' such as HIV/AIDS. Indeed, in a clear reference to Smith (Jeffery-Poulter 1991), *The Times* (1984 cited Sanderson 1995: 206) noted that:

> The infection's origins and means of propagation excites repugnance, moral and physical, at promiscuous male homosexuality. Conduct, which tolerable in private circumstances, has, with the advent of 'gay liberation,' become advertised, even glorified as acceptable public conduct, even *a proud badge for public men to wear* [emphasis added]. Many members of the public are tempted to see in AIDS some sort of retribution for a questionable style of life.

By associating Smith's homosexuality with the HIV/AIDS crisis, Smith himself is presented as dangerous and unhealthy. *The Times's* attempt to link Smith to HIV/AIDS was probably the most negative comment a broadsheet directed towards Smith's homosexuality at the time, and should not be considered illustrative of broadsheet newspapers' attitudes. However, the above passage reveals the fear that gay men excited

in the climate of HIV/AIDS, and the fact that the while less sensationalist generally, broadsheets were still capable of homophobia. As Sanderson (1995: 158) notes, homophobia can be found in the more serious Right-wing press only expressed more 'pompously' than in tabloids.

In contrast to the tone of the above-mentioned article, in early 2005 when Smith revealed that he had been HIV positive for 17 years, the vast majority of the tabloid and broadsheet press approached the news in a straightforward and respectful manner, echoing more relaxed attitudes towards HIV/AIDS (especially when compared to the 1980s), and increased tolerance (Frame 1, Figure 1.10). However, some sections of the tabloid press attempted to associate Smith, and thus homosexuality as a whole, with a sense of risk, thus playing upon still existing preconceptions surrounding the illness. Indeed, the *Daily Mirror* was quick to ask Smith how he caught HIV, with the resulting headline 'I HAVEN'T GOT A CLUE WHO GAVE ME HIV' (*Daily Mirror*, 31 January, 2005), suggesting that as a 'dangerous' gay man, he had had multiple casual sexual partners resulting in his damaged health. As with Tatchell, the correlation between homosexuality and overt sexuality is played upon, and Smith is categorised accordingly.

The *Daily Mail* took a rather sour tone, suggesting that Smith's admission was possibly a 'CYNICAL PLOY BY GREY MAN WHO CRAVES PRAISE?' (*Daily Mail*, 31 January, 2005). Hence, HIV/AIDS is presented as a method of gaining political sympathy and privilege. Perhaps the *Daily Mail* took this tone because Smith had refused to give the paper his story and instead 'came out' as having HIV in a self-penned article in *The Times*, thus ruining the *Daily Mail's* exclusive; it has been suggested that *The Mail on Sunday*, the *Daily Mail's* sister paper, actually contacted

Smith and told him a story was being prepared about his illness, prompting Smith to pre-empt the paper (*The Observer*, COMMENT, 6 February, 2005). Of course, it should also be borne in mind that the *Daily Mail* will have assumed that its readers shared this negative take. A story on such a topic is hard to justify; although the PCC's Code of Practice allows privacy to be overridden in order to protect public health (PCC 2007) Smith was most certainly *not* a threat to the public's health. More than 20 years since the virus first made the headlines, HIV/AIDS was still being used by some sections of the tabloid press as a political tool.

Political Activism

Smith's keenness to ensure that he was not seen as a single-issue politician seems to have affected the support he gave gay issues in the Commons. Indeed, while Smith continuously voted for improved rights for gay men and women, and spoke out on these issues in the Commons (particularly pre-1997), his influence was probably greater within the Parliamentary Labour Party itself than in Parliament (Rayside 1998). Smith was most vocal on gay issues during Labour's years in opposition. Indeed, he was one of only a few MPs to speak unequivocally against Clause 28 from the very beginning (Rayside 1998).[53] Although Smith did not ignore these issues once he became a Secretary of State in 1997, his ministerial position limited his ability to speak freely; he did not vote in every division linked to gay rights in the 1997 and 2001 parliaments.[54] Of course, as a busy Cabinet minister he would not have been expected to have a perfect attendance record, as shown by the relatively poor voting records of many Cabinet ministers when compared to backbench MPs. However, it is significant that Smith did

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[53] For example: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 124) 15 December 1987 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 129) 9 March 1988 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material).

[54] For example: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 253) 5 July 2000 (Local Government Bill [Lords] - Prohibition of Promotion of Homosexuality: Bullying); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 325) 10 February 1999 (Sexual Offences Amendment Bill).

not vote in every division when he once again became a backbencher.[55] This is an important point; as one of the most high profile 'out' gay MPs in the Commons, his speeches would most likely have been the subject of media (and activist) interest. Smith has stated that he thinks it is right for gay MPs to concentrate on 'mainstream' issues alongside gay ones:

> I think what most openly gay MPs have done, and this is what I think is absolutely the right thing to do, is to say 'yes I'm gay, yes I will stand up and make speeches and campaign about issues of equality for lesbians and gay men because that is important, but there is a lot more to me than that, and I also want to get stuck into housing policy or health policy or social security policy or foreign policy' or whatever. I think it is very important for lesbian or gay MPs to be active about and identified with a whole range of other non-gay issues as well as being prepared to stand up and be counted on issues that do matter to the gay community. (Private interview, 2 February, 2006).

In many ways, Smith's decision to move away from single-issue politics is representative of the Labour Party's attitude to gay rights under Blair. Indeed, Blair was keen to ensure that the Labour Party, while extremely supportive of gay rights (as seen by the sweeping legislative changes since 1997, and the fight to lower the age of consent in the midst of intense opposition from Right-wing tabloids such as *The Sun*), was not represented in the press as the 'pro-gay rights' and thus 'anti-family' party (as explored in Chapter 2). This partially elucidates why gay rights legislation was spread-out over the 1997 and 2001 parliaments, rather than every issue being addressed without delay in the first parliament, as desired by many gay rights groups and activists; aside from the fact that every government has a packed legislative calendar, it was important for the Labour Party to be seen as interested in issues affecting families, rather than issues affecting 'promiscuous' and 'dangerous' gay men, images still perpetuated by some parts of the press.

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[55] For example: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 373) 29 October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill - Consideration and Third Reading); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 385) 16 May 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - Applications for Adoption).

Political Acceptability

The political establishment's acceptance of Smith after his 1984 'outing' was in many ways a landmark victory for gay politicians. Indeed, 'private' homosexuality had long been enshrined in British law, and many gay politicians - while privately tolerated - were urged to stay 'closeted.' As Rayside (1998: 91) notes:

> The notion of homosexuality as a 'private' matter is widespread in all countries in the West, but nowhere more institutionalized than in Britain, and nowhere within Britain more deeply entrenched than in the House of Commons. The formula arrived at in the 1960s and culminating in the partial decriminalization of 1967, tolerating sexual deviation when kept within the strict boundaries of public view, remained dominant in parliamentary culture until the early 1990s, and retains powerful currency still.

Smith's 'self-outing' thus bucked the trend. Of course, his political acceptability made things much easier for him. After all, not only were his political beliefs unproblematic, he was also a man in a male-dominated institution, as well as being the consummate politician. Perhaps this is another reason why Colquhoun did not receive support from some sections of the Commons. Aside from the fact she was a woman, and therefore already stood out from the pack, she was a colourful politician as well; Smith, in many ways the archetypal career politician, looked and acted the part in a way that Colquhoun never could. Smith was advantaged in another way as well; unlike the Australia-born Tatchell, who left school at sixteen due to his family's financial problems, Smith had a rather privileged educational background, attending Cambridge and then Harvard universities from where he gained a PhD. Smith thus had the same background and experiences as many of his parliamentary colleagues, and was consequently part of the parliamentary 'club.'

The 'Outing' Issue

Smith (*The Times*, WHY 'OUTING' IS WRONG, 22 March, 1995) wrote in 1995:

> I cannot accept that 'outing' in any shape or form is right either tactically or morally... It is of course important for people in the public eye to be honest about themselves and their sexuality. Not only is openness better than covert behaviour or pretence; but standing up and saying something about yourself can greatly help and encourage others... But this chance to bring confidence to others by being open only comes if the decision has been made voluntarily. If the statement is dragged out by others, it seems there is some cause for shame.

Here, succinctly expressed, is the crux of the 'outing' issue. If Smith had been forced to 'come out,' the press would have been able to present his homosexuality as scandalous and shocking, and thus something that the public needed to be aware of; Smith would have been a 'bad,' 'closeted' gay MP, rather than a 'good,' 'out' one, binary themes noted in Frame 3 of Figure 1.10. By 'coming out' voluntarily, Smith avoided this (and the vast majority of his press coverage, apart from the 2005 HIV/AIDS stories, was therefore simple reportage rather than manufacturing). Of course, as Smith wrote in *The Times* - and stated when interviewed for this research - the benefits of being publicly 'open' from the beginning of a political career do not justify 'outing' in any way, morally or tactically:

> The decision should be entirely theirs [gay MPs]. I don't agree with outing people forcefully, because I think that so much more is gained for the standing of lesbians and gay men by people voluntarily making the decision to say something - public figures voluntarily deciding to say something about themselves - rather than being forced out. I would certainly say to any parliamentary colleague who was gay, who hadn't said anything about themselves publicly, that it's worth deciding to do so; the roof won't fall in, people will respect your candour and your honesty, you will feel an awful lot less concerned once you've done it, but it is none the less entirely your decision whether you do it or not. (Private interview, 2 February, 2006).

Ironically, in the long-term the press does not seem to benefit from the 'outing' of, or focus on, gay politicians. For, of all the politicians mentioned so far, the only one to voluntarily give in-depth interviews about his or her personal life, and to allow his or her partner to do the same, is Smith. Indeed, in 1997, Smith's partner, Dorian Jabri, gave an interview in which he talked about various aspects of their private lives,

including: how he and Smith met; their commitment to each other; how he 'came out'; and the prejudice they have faced (*The Times*, WE BOTH THINK IT IS FOREVER, 19 September, 1997). It is unlikely that Smith and Jabri would have been quite so forthcoming if the press had mercilessly hounded Smith about his sexuality.

3.2.4   'The Spanking MP': Harvey Proctor, Prostitutes and Sexual Scandal

Proctor's Story

Proctor's experiences and press representation were enough to dissuade any gay politician from standing up to be counted. Indeed, his press coverage was very brutal, and was one of the fiercest and sustained press attacks ever seen against a gay politician. While manufactured, Proctor's early press coverage (unlike some later articles) was covered by public interest criteria. Indeed, Proctor received such bad press coverage because, unlike Smith, he did not tick all of the right boxes. In fact, his press representation was almost the opposite of (the majority of) Smith's press representation; he had a negative mediated persona (as described in Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Whereas Smith was politically acceptable, Proctor was known for his controversial and Right-wing views; while Smith was sexually 'safe,' Proctor was accused of spanking underage male prostitutes; and, whilst Smith voluntarily 'came out,' Proctor was 'outed' in a storm of sexual scandal. Undoubtedly, the fact that Proctor's sex life was seen as 'exotic' and 'dangerous' was the major factor in his downfall. Indeed, his apparent sexual behaviour crossed the ostensible 'norms' of homosexual sexual behaviour, let alone heterosexual.

However, regardless of the fact that Proctor's partners were underage (the age of consent for gay men was still 21 and his partners were apparently 17 and 19) and he had

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therefore committed a crime, his press coverage was still vicious. Indeed, the tabloid press coverage of Proctor's sex life verged on the obsessive, and the broadsheets, while less fervent, insisted on referring to Proctor's partners as 'boys,' building on the paedophilic connotations of his tabloid press representation. The methods used by the press to expose Proctor were actually unethical, and can be seem as further proof that the press coverage of Proctor actually turned into a witch-hunt.

In the summer of 1986 *The People* newspaper claimed that Proctor had engaged in spanking sessions with a young male prostitute and regularly used a rent-boy network. Proctor denied the story, but Parris (1995) suggests his decision not to sue encouraged the press to search for new stories. Over the next six weeks *The People* went on to make further claims and actually tracked down one of Proctor's supposed rent-boys - allegedly called 'Max' - wired him for sound, and then sent him to talk to Proctor. The *Daily Mirror* then made the sensationalised claim that on a trip to Morocco, Proctor had had a young Moroccan man in his room who was forced to hide naked under his bed to avoid detection. The press used underhand methods to obtain both stories; apart from being wired for sound, 'Max' also assured Proctor that he was over the age of 21 when he was in fact 18 and thus underage, and the Moroccan story was extracted from a 'friend' of Proctor's, rather than being based on reliable evidence (Parris 1995). And, as Parris (1995) notes, Proctor has stated that the Moroccan 'youth' was in fact in his mid-twenties, something which certainly makes the story less salacious. After receiving *The People* 'dossier' in 1987, the Metropolitan Police raided Proctor's flat, and on 20 May of the same year, decided to prosecute him with four charges of gross indecency against two men aged 17 and 19. Proctor was arrested during the election campaign and due to the immense pressures he faced as a result, decided not to stand again (Parris 1995). Proctor pleaded guilty in court and was fined £1,450 with £250 costs.

Proctor's press coverage was inexorable. As Proctor himself has noted:

> The scandal went on for eighteen months; it was unrelenting. I think I was on page one, two or three of *The Sunday People* for six consecutive weeks running. Apart from Princess Diana, I don't think that anybody at that time was public enemy number one, or generating that amount of adverse or bad publicity. Because it was not just the Sunday papers, it then goes on to the Monday nationals, it goes on to your local paper in the evening, the weekly papers. (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

As with Tatchell, tabloid newspapers were responsible for the most salacious press coverage. Indeed, when breaking the original story, *The People* claimed that Proctor liked to dress up as a headmaster and then spank his 'students.' A male prostitute told the paper:

> I would have to pretend to be a pupil who had done something wrong. He said I must call him Sir at all times and must not answer back. He took me into the bedroom and told me to put on a pair of white shorts. (1986 cited Parris 1995: 251).

The following Sunday *The People* claimed that Proctor used a rent-boy 'network' and hired young men for sex at £35 a time. According to the newspaper, Proctor would spank these men 'while he watched by-election results on television' (1986 cited Parris 1995: 251). Other newspapers followed up the stories and echoed *The People's* salacious tone. For instance, *The Sun* published news of Proctor's dalliance with the Moroccan 'youth' under the headline 'NAKED ARAB BOY AND TORY MP' (1987 cited Sanderson 1995: 106), emphasising the apparent youthfulness of Proctor's partner, his Arabian 'exoticness,' and that yet another Tory MP had done something 'kinky.' As Baston (2000) notes, Proctor's case demonstrates the antagonism between the press and gay Conservative MPs in the 1980s.

Loaded Terms

Tabloid newspapers labelled Proctor the 'Spanking MP,' and as the above headline illustrates, articles frequently made reference to 'youths' and 'boys.' As with the majority of Tatchell's broadsheet press coverage, the broadsheets chose to cover Proctor's traumas in a less forthright and lurid manner, and instead reported Proctor's case as a straightforward news item (following up the tabloids' stories, rather than breaking new ones). However, broadsheet newspapers from both sides of the political spectrum often used similar language. Proctor notes:

> I think they [broadsheets and tabloids] are both as bad as each other. The broadsheet papers report the tabloid press and then say 'tut tut.' But they are still getting across to their readers whatever scandal is in the tabloid press. So the press is as bad as each other; I wouldn't differentiate. (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

Indeed, *The Guardian* (PROCTOR FACES CHARGES, 8 April, 1987) noted that 'Mr Proctor... was arrested in March after allegations that he had hired boys for sex.' *The Times* (PROCTOR QUITS AS TORY CANDIDATE, 17 May, 1987) observed that:

> He [Proctor] is charged with three offences of gross indecency with a boy aged 16 to 17... and one offence involving a youth aged 19.

The words 'boy' and 'youth' are loaded terms; they link Proctor - and homosexuality in general - to paedophilia. Indeed, Sanderson notes that this link is often used to suggest that:

> given the opportunity, all homosexuals are child-molesters; that homosexuals make inappropriate role models for 'impressionable' young minds; and that homosexuals are 'proselytizing' and 'recruiting' in order to replenish their ranks. (Sanderson 1995: 214).

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Defined by Sexuality

MPs who are involved in scandals (whether or not they are sexual ones), are often forever associated with their scandal, and this is certainly the case with Proctor. As Proctor has stated:

> Well the press will go back to their files, and if the files are wrong, or the terms in their files [are wrong], they [the terms] will keep coming out. (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

Indeed, Proctor's public self is defined by his private sexuality; few articles about him do not refer to his supposed sexual tastes, the charges made against him, and/or his personal life in general (*i.e.* his relationships). Tatchell is also defined by his sexuality (although, to some extent, he has chosen to be defined this way - since the Bermondsey by-election - what with his rather militant and controversial gay rights campaigns), but Smith is not - at least to the same extent anyway; while Smith is known as the first 'out' gay MP, he is taken seriously as a politician and commentator. This is partly because Smith chose to distance himself from gay rights issues, but also because he is not 'scandalous' and controversial in the way that Tatchell and Proctor are. Ironically, Smith's public declaration also helped to prevent the personal becoming public. Indeed, Proctor's decision to stay 'closeted,' as justifiable as that may be, flamed the tabloid fires; being gay in itself could be presented as scandalous (because of its 'hidden' status), let alone the spanking issue.

The tabloid press continued to label Proctor the 'Spanking MP' long after he stood down from Parliament. For instance, when Proctor left politics he opened a shirt shop which various Conservative MPs invested in but failed to declare in the *Register of Members' Interests*. *The People* greeted this news with the headline:

MR BOTTOM SPANKER AND 10 TOP TORIES SLEAZEGATE; TORY MPS FAIL TO DECLARE SHARES IN HARVEY PROCTOR SHIRT SHOP. *(The People,* 30 October, 1994)

The paper went on to state:

HANKY-PANKY AS TOP TORIES KEEP QUIET OVER SHARES IN PERVERT PROCTOR'S BUSINESS... THE PEOPLE LIFTS THE SHIRT ON THE NEW SHOCK TORY SCANDAL. *(The People,* 30 October, 1994).

In the latter article Proctor is referred to as a 'bottom spanking pervert' with a liking for 'kinky sex.' The article is full of loaded words - 'pervert,' 'spanker' and 'kinky'- all used to emphasise just how sordid Proctor is. The expression 'lifts the shirt' is outwardly homophobic. As late as 2004 the *Daily Mail* (4 March 2004) reported on Proctor's whereabouts under the headline 'QUEEN OF THE CASTLE: NEW LIFE OF SHAMED MP,' noting that Proctor 'resigned following a scandal that involved rent boys and spanking.' While some gay men may use the word 'queen' as a form of positive identification (Baker 2002), here it is used disparagingly. Broadsheet newspapers (from the Left and Right) also referred to Proctor using these terms long after the initial scandal was over, when Proctor was, after all, a private citizen.

Indeed, when Proctor gave evidence in a libel trial involving his parliamentary successor, Teresa Gorman (MP for Billericay 1987-2001), *The Independent* referred to him as 'Mrs Gorman's spanking predecessor' (PALACE OF PLEASURE AND PROFIT; DINNER OR PARTYING AT PARLIAMENT HAS BECOME HUGELY POPULAR, BUT THE GORMAN LIBEL CASE FOCUSED CONCERN ON WHETHER THE PRIVILEGE IS BEING ABUSED, 4 August, 1991). By referring to Proctor using words such as 'spanking' and 'kinky,' the press categorises Proctor as a 'dangerous' homosexual whose apparent sexual habits meet neither a heterosexual or

homosexual 'norm'; the binary themes used to describe him give him a negative mediated persona (rather than positive, a division highlighted in Frame 3, Figure 1.10). The identification of Proctor as a 'deviant' homosexual reassures the heterosexual reader that he/she is 'normal' (a classification identified by McIntosh 1996). This tactic did not need to be used with Smith; as an 'out' and 'good' homosexual with no apparent sexual 'kinks' (*i.e.* he was 'safe' rather than 'dangerous'), Smith was not a threat to the heterosexual reader.

Invasions of Privacy

In striving to punish Proctor's 'deviant' behaviour, some journalists behaved unethically. In fact, Proctor has claimed that the press hounded both himself and his mother, by not only camping outside their house, but also by storming in uninvited. He has stated that he was harassed in other ways as well:

> [by] the tapping of my telephone, stealing documents and photographs from my home, stealing documents from my office at the House of Commons, following me around London, following me around Europe, following me around America. They would ring my doorbell once I got in from a late night at the House of Commons, say one o'clock in the morning, and say Mr Proctor 'who are you sleeping with tonight?' And they would ring my doorbell at 6.30 [am] and say 'who have you slept with tonight?' So harassment of a high order.... Paying people for stories, trawling round bars in London showing my photograph to people saying 'have you been with this man,' wiring people for sound to come into your apartment, to bug you for sound. (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

The invasions of privacy, along with the secret taping of Proctor's conversation with 'Max' (who was, incidentally, paid by *The People* for his efforts), raise many questions about the lengths that journalists should be allowed to go to obtain a good story, whether or not it is in the public interest. Indeed, it should always be borne in mind that the consequences of 'outing' or writing about a gay politician's sexuality can be major; a story long-forgotten by journalists can impact greatly on the lives of the subject of the

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story. Indeed, in 1993 two men were jailed for causing actual bodily harm against Proctor (they broke his finger) after entering his shop and verbally abusing him about his homosexuality. The attack on Proctor (and two of his friends) appears to have been an indirect result of the publicity he received in the late 1980s. Indeed, in summing up, the judge said:

> I am satisfied that both of you went to the shop of Mr Proctor, a man of whom you knew there had been scandal in the past, to cause trouble. (*Daily Mail*, 'GAY BASHERS' JAILED FOR ATTACK IN HARVEY PROCTOR SHOP, 7 May, 1993).

Scandal

The reasons for Proctor's intense press coverage correlate with the case studies explored so far in this chapter. As stated above, one of the major factors in Proctor's negative portrayal was the fact that he had not publicly 'come out' as gay, meaning that the newspapers had a potentially explosive and very scandalous story on their hands. This, coupled with his 'dangerous' sexuality (Frame 3, Figure 1.10), weakened Proctor's position. Importantly, as noted in relation to Roberts, Proctor's press coverage was not just about sexuality; it was also about scandal. Indeed, in journalistic terms, scandal (whether straight or gay) equals a good story and thus - hopefully - good sales. The 1986/1987 stories were in fact preceded by an earlier brush with 'scandal' in 1981, when after an argument Proctor's partner Terry Woods spoke to journalists prompting a *News of the World* story about their relationship. Woods also claimed in a court case that he lived with Proctor, prompting Proctor to publicly reject his comments and distance himself from Woods (*The Times*, THE 'LONER' WHO HIT THE HEADLINES, 2 November, 1986). A public interest defence, *i.e.* exposing the hypocrisy of a public figure, could therefore be used to justify Proctor's intense 1987 press coverage. In many respects, a subsequent focus on Proctor's sexuality was almost

inevitable, and there is certainly a sense of 'unfinished business' in his press coverage.[56]

As with Tatchell, and unlike Smith, Proctor was also damned by the fact that he had

already courted controversy with his political views, something noted by Baston (2000).

The fact that Proctor's sexual partners turned out to be underage certainly made his

press coverage worse, and gave newspapers another public interest justification for the

stories. If an MP found himself in Proctor's situation now, it would not be as serious

legally, due to the lowering of the age of gay consent in 1994 and then 2000. As it

happens, Proctor believed his partners *were* of legal age (after all, 'Max' assured him he

was so). Proctor has stated:

> The argument that the press might have put forward, and some of them did put forward, was that I was committing criminal acts, *i.e.* that I was actually meeting people for a sexual purpose for people who were under 21. I have to say that I didn't know that. On the tape that *The Sunday People* acquired from a boy who came in to see me, he says on it, on their own tape, that he was over 21.... So it was a question of the age of consent, and right the way through to me seeing my solicitor I believed I had a defence that ok, these people were under 21, but I genuinely believed they were over 21. In a heterosexual case, that was the defence. The age of consent then was 16 as it is now, if a chap went with a girl and she was 15, but he thought she was over 16, than that was his defence. There was a lacuna in the law [for homosexual sex]... (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

Baston (2000) defends Proctor and states that the public interest defence is not

convincing because he had tried to ensure that his partners were of legal age and he met

them in his private home, rather than a public location. All of this is undoubtedly true,

but the fact remains that Proctor was on the wrong side of the law. This, plus the

intolerant climate of the 1980s, meant that he did not stand a chance.

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[56] However, Proctor does not believe there was a link between the two articles: 'There had been an earlier story. I don't think it was that, I think they were two different issues.' (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

The Parliamentary 'Club'

Moving on to Proctor's political standing and Conservative Party attitudes towards sexuality, Baston (2000) notes that Proctor was not part of the parliamentary 'club,' and in many respects this is true, particularly in relation to his Conservative colleagues. Certainly, Proctor was not particularly well off, did not attend Oxbridge, and was not universally popular. However, Proctor still had a firm base of friends within the Conservative Party, and while this may not have helped him while he was struggling to keep his seat, it certainly helped him afterwards. Indeed, as noted above, 16 MPs (from the Left and Right of the Conservative Party) invested in his shirt shop. The support which Proctor received from Conservative politicians once he had left Parliament once again demonstrates that - outside of the political arena at least - many Conservative politicians are relaxed about homosexuality. However, at the time of Proctor's press coverage, the Conservative Party's (unofficial) rule was 'keep it private' (an active demonstration of the acceptability threshold in relation to public space, as discussed in Frame 2, Figure 1.10, and an acknowledgement of the fact that different 'groups' may have different notions of acceptability). Indeed, an offer made to the Conservative politician Matthew Parris (MP for West Derbyshire 1979-1986 and now a writer quoted in this sub-section) to become a Parliamentary Private Secretary was withdrawn once Parris had made it clear to the Whips that he was gay. As the Chief Whip said to Parris at the time:

> I don't believe in God... But I don't shout about it. I don't feel the need to add it to my election address at general elections... It's a secret, if you like. It's private. It's between me and my... well, I don't believe in Him. See? See my point? (Parris 2002 a: 260).

Indeed, Parris has stated that while he experienced very little unpleasantness about his sexuality within the Conservative Party *privately*, 'there was pressure not to make an open issue of it' (Private interview, 9 December, 2005) from the beginning of his career:

> Yes obviously in 1979 [I was pressured]. [By my] Peer group, the media, the Party, and the fact that I had not been open when interviewed for the job or running for Parliament... The greater danger would have been being deselected [rather than being rejected at the ballot box], though this was not the likelihood. (Private interview, 9 December, 2005).

Proctor has echoed this statement:

> Within the Conservative Party it was at that time, it would have been, certainly it would have been. It would have been impossible [to climb the career ladder and be 'out']... had I outed myself and said that I was gay openly then I think that would have had the effect at that time of being deselected. Whereas keeping quiet about it, not that I kept quiet about it for that reason, but just not saying anything about it, wasn't an issue. Why make it an issue? (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

Parris (1995) notes in relation to Proctor's standing in the Conservative Party that one of the reasons why he kept the respect of the Party hierarchy was because he could generally be relied upon by the Whips to vote correctly. However, even the most supportive political party would have found it difficult to allow Proctor to stay on as an MP in the face of such damaging allegations, especially when the Conservative Government (in spite of the private tolerance of Thatcher and many other politicians) had made it very clear that improving gay rights was not part of its social agenda (see Chapter 2 for more detail), and when a general election was fast approaching. The Conservative Party was surely mindful of public attitudes towards gay men and women as well; as stated above, in 1987, the year of Proctor's resignation, public hostility towards homosexuality reached its 1980s peak (Jowell *et. al.* 1991). It is thus unsurprising that Proctor's constituency party, while initially supportive, accepted

Proctor's resignation when he offered it. Parris and Proctor's experiences suggest that while it was possible for Labour MPs to be fully 'out' at this point in time, Conservative politicians could not let their homosexuality be seen *or* heard by the powers that be. Gay Conservative politicians were thus in a difficult position; their party expected them to 'keep it private,' but the press abhorred this approach.

Voting Record

In relation to his voting record and the impact this may have had on his political survival, Proctor notes:

> ...there was no hypocrisy on my part as a politician. It wasn't that I was homosexual in private and anti-gay in public. I voted for the reform of homosexual legislation, homosexual reform, every time it came before the House of Commons. (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

While it is true that Proctor was not known as an anti-gay MP, and he often voted for gay-rights, he was capable of voting in a way damaging to the gay cause. By voting for the Sexual Offences Act to be extended to Scotland and Northern Ireland, in 1980 and 1982 respectively, Proctor obviously showed his support for the extension of gay rights.[57] This is particularly true in the case of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill; as noted in Chapter 2, while the Government's position was officially one of neutrality, the Government disapproved of the proposal (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). However, Proctor's decision to vote against the Sex Equality Bill[58] could certainly be interpreted as a vote against gay rights. One could of course defend Proctor and state that as a Labour MP introduced the Bill, a vote for it would have been a vote against the Government and thus problematic for his career. However, in 1986 Proctor was one of 43 Conservative

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[57] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 989) 22 July 1980 (Criminal Justice Scotland Bill - Homosexual Offences); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 29) 25 October 1982 (Northern Ireland - Homosexual Offences).
[58] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 50) 9 December 1983 (Sex Equality Bill).

MPs who rebelled against the Government's attempt to make it the right of school governors to decide whether or not a parent could withdraw their child from sex education; the rebels (which included Hampson) wanted parents to have the unqualified right to withdraw their children.[59] The rebellion was defeated, but Proctor proved that he was willing to vote against the Government. Proctor's decision to not support the 1983 Bill cannot therefore be explained by the fact that he did not feel able to vote against his party. The 1986 rebellion, while not about homosexuality *per se*, was in part a response to the apparent 'promotion of homosexuality' in the classroom by Labour run Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Thus, Proctor's support for the rebellion not only demonstrates that he was willing to vote against the Government; it also demonstrates that Proctor was willing to go out on a limb for a measure that presented homosexuality as morally wrong and potentially damaging to young people. His press coverage, while unethical in part, could thus technically be justified on grounds of hypocrisy.

The Public/Private Divide

Proctor's negative press representation once again demonstrates that the tabloid press hounds those ('bad') politicians who do not 'engage' with their homosexuality (*i.e.* they are not open or relaxed about their sexuality even if they are not 'out'). Without a doubt, in *The People's* view it was unacceptable for Proctor to keep this part of his life private, especially when his sexual life was seen as morally unacceptable; according to this rationale, his press coverage, while harsh, was justified. The public/private divide relating to homosexuality, as defined by the tabloid press at least, is elucidated by Proctor's experience; while being 'closeted' is unacceptable, 'active' *sexual* homosexuality is also intolerable. Thus, public homosexuality is only acceptable if it is

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[59] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 102) 21 October 1986 (Education Bill [Lords] - Local Education Authorities Reserve Power).

unthreatening and almost sexless. Proctor's willingness to vote against the Sex Equality

Bill, and his support of the 1986 rebellion, indicate that the cause of gay rights was not

the most important thing on his political agenda. While Smith and Proctor approached

their homosexuality in very different ways, both, to varying degrees, disassociated

themselves from homosexuality. Proctor refused to talk about his sexuality at all

(believing that his private life was his own personal business), and Smith, while 'out,'

did not want to be seen as a single-issue politician; in fact, Proctor has gone as far as to

say:

> Well I was never a gay MP. I was an MP, nobody ever asked me whether I was gay or not, until the scandal started of course, so it wasn't an issue. Whether people thought that I was gay was neither here not there. (Private interview, 26 July, 2006).

As detailed above, this approach did not hold much sway with the press. Both Smith

and Proctor were aware that being a gay politician in the 1980s was fraught with

difficulty, something proved by their troublesome press coverage.

3.3   Conclusions: the Traditional Representation of Gay Politicians

"The amount of negative copy relating to homosexuality that the British press have originated is absolutely enormous and most of it could hardly be described as 'news' in the sense that it had any importance outside of the lives of those directly concerned." (Sanderson 1995: vi).

The case studies of Chapter 3 have demonstrated that before 1980, 'mainstream' press

coverage of gay politicians, if it existed at all, was limited to 'outings' and/or 'scandals,'

all of which ended badly for the politicians concerned. It was extremely difficult for gay

politicians to separate their private lives from their public positions. It did not matter

that, as suggested by Sanderson (1995), much of the copy related to immensely personal

matters; the private *was* the political. This theme was carried through to the 1980s, although it became possible for gay politicians to survive politically once their sexuality had become public. However, the identification of HIV/AIDS as a gay 'plague' meant that the press (and public) attitude towards homosexuality regressed, affecting the tolerant (or perhaps more appropriately, less hostile) portrayal of gay politicians and homosexuality in general, which was beginning to emerge in the early-1980s; the above described move towards tolerance and recognition (Frame 1) took a backwards step at this time, as demonstrated by Proctor's press coverage (although the individual details of his case also had an impact).

While by the 1980s it became possible for gay politicians (*e.g.* Smith) and 'outed' (whether gay or heterosexual) politicians (*e.g.* Roberts) to survive politically, gay politicians often found themselves at the mercy of a powerfully heteronormative, often discriminatory, sensationalist press. In some respects, press coverage did improve over the period. For example, as stated above, the majority of newspapers did not even mention Smith's 'self-outing.' However, the tabloid press coverage of politicians such as Tatchell and Proctor was very homophobic, indicating that there was a long way to go until gay politicians would be treated on an equal footing with heterosexual politicians. Indeed, Smith was the only MP to voluntarily 'come out' in this period. The fact that other gay politicians did not follow his lead is unsurprising when one takes into account the pejorative treatment of politicians such as Tatchell and Proctor. 'Coming out' was a transgression of the proper way of acting in public (particularly for the Conservative Party).

Chapter 3 has revealed that the press coverage of gay politicians pre-1990 must be understood in relation to the news values, agendas, and styles of tabloid and broadsheet

newspapers; while broadsheet newspapers did discuss the sexuality of politicians, and also used negative, homophobic terms while doing so, tabloid newspapers tended to be much more vicious in their treatment of gay politicians, using discriminatory language and an often scornful tone. The reporting versus manufacturing issue also needs to be taken into account; manufactured stories (*i.e.* 'outing' a politician), as opposed to reportage (*i.e.* a newspaper reporting the events of a court case), also tend to be very sensationalist. The individual circumstances of each politician must also be considered. In particular:

- The gender of the politician[60]
- The politics and/or popularity of the politician
- The sexual life of the politician
- The lifestyle of the politician.

In terms of mediated personas, a key concept of the research (Frame 3, Figure 1.10), the chapter has further demonstrated that gay politicians are represented in the press through the use of particular binary themes, and using these binaries, their personas are created by and mediated through newspapers. There are two main mediated personas for gay politicians, one of which is positive, the other negative, although particular gay politicians may be presented more positively or negatively than others (taking into account factors such as popularity and politics, as noted above). Indeed, the politicians mentioned in this chapter can be categorised according to the criteria in Figure 3.1:

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[60] As noted in sub-section 1.2.1, individuals have more than one identity. Thus, other factors/types of identity such as gender can impact upon a homosexual identity.

Name	Private/public* (sexual behaviour)	Out/In	Good/bad	Safe/dangerous	Positive/negative mediated persona
Field	Public	In	Bad	Dangerous	Negative
Harvey	Public	In	Bad	Dangerous	Negative
Driberg	Public	In	Good	Dangerous	Positive
Thorpe	Private	In	Bad	N/A	Negative
Colquhoun	Private	In	Bad	N/A	Negative
Roberts	Public	In	Good	Dangerous	Negative
Hampson	Private	In	Bad	N/A	Negative
Tatchell	Private	In	Bad	N/A	Negative
Smith	Private	Out	Good	Safe	Positive
Proctor	Private	In	Bad	Dangerous	Negative

Figure 3.2: The mediated personas of (allegedly) gay politicians** in Chapter 3.

* Blue = positive binary theme/persona
  Red = negative binary theme/persona
** The classifications apply to their original press coverage, rather than later stories.

While the press takes a dichotomous approach, it is essential to recognise that there is a relational aspect to the binaries (along with the overarching positive/negative mediated personas); for example, a gay politician may have a stronger negative mediated persona than another (as shown in Figure 3.2, above). They may also meet the binary themes in a strong or weak fashion (and gradients within). Indeed, as Chapters 3 and 4 reveal, the binary themes themselves have been stronger and weaker at different times (depending on the socio-political factors identified in Chapter 2). Thus, while a relational approach is not utilised in the purest sense (an approach discussed in Chapter 1), within the binary themes themselves there are degrees of strength and different possibilities, alongside different combinations of binaries making up negative and positive mediated personas.

To some extent my subjective opinion has affected the above classifications. Nevertheless, as Figure 3.2 reveals, gay politicians do not have to meet all of the criteria to be presented positively or negatively: generally, if they meet more positive binary themes than negative ones then they have a positive mediated persona, and vice versa. However, I have identified one exception: although Driberg was known for engaging in public sexual acts and meets more negative than positive binary themes, I have classified his persona as positive rather than negative because he was so open about his sexuality (he is quite unique in this). However, gay politicians are generally considered 'good' if they are open about their sexuality, but do not 'flaunt' it, and engage in private and safe sexual behaviour. Gay politicians are considered 'bad' if they are 'closeted' or not open about their sexuality, and engage in public or 'dangerous' sexual behaviour. Newspapers like to define or categorise gay politicians (in relation to all of the above binary themes), thus reaffirming the heterosexuality - and 'normality' - of the press and public. Politicians who do not 'engage' with their sexuality are more likely to be

hounded about it. Indeed, the 'need to know' is a key factor in the 'outing' of gay politicians. Chapter 4 expands on these themes.

Most of the above-described press coverage relates to male gay politicians. This is not surprising: there have always been many more male politicians than female politicians. It is therefore difficult to directly compare the representation of male and female gay politicians. However, what is clear is that male gay politicians have suffered because of the link to HIV/AIDS, the false association between male homosexuality and paedophilia, and anti-gay legislation - which have only ever applied to men - beginning with the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. These factors have led to the demonisation of gay men in general, thus affecting the representation of male gay politicians. It does appear that the press uses the stereotypes of effeminate male homosexuals and masculine lesbians, a common association (Alley and Dillon 2001; McCreary 1994; McIntosh 1996; Taylor 1983). Indeed, Colquhoun was masculinised and Tatchell effeminised.[61]

It must of course be borne in mind that heterosexual politicians also suffer at the hands of the press and, for example, are also demonised for 'unacceptable' sexual behaviour and the apparent threat to the family that this brings (a good example being the press coverage of the various heterosexual Conservative MPs exposed as having affairs in the early-mid 1990s in the wake of John Major's 'back to basics' speech, a period discussed in the next chapter). However, gay politicians can be seen as more of a threat due to the fact that their 'indiscretions' are completely outside of heterosexual procreation. Gay politicians are thus at a major disadvantage when caught up in a sexual scandal: not only can they be criticised for their sexual behaviour in general, they can also be

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[61] Twigg has noted that: 'I think there are stereotypes used against gay men that are different from the stereotypes used against lesbians...' (Private interview 18 July 2006).

implicitly condemned for the fact they are not heterosexual. This is also explored in Chapter 4. Interestingly, examination of Proctor's press coverage reveals that post-public life (as presented in the media at least) he has been defined (negatively) by his sexuality (and scandal). While 'scandalous' heterosexual MPs also often find themselves in this situation, their representation can be positive (*i.e.* affairs may define them as manly and virile), as discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATION OF GAY POLITICIANS IN THE UK PRESS

"I'm a politician first and a gay man second. I am not a single-issue MP. Being gay is part and parcel of what I am, who I am." Gordon Marsden, Labour MP for Blackpool South 1997- (*The Independent*, 'I'M GAY AND I'M HAPPY FOR MY CONSTITUENTS TO KNOW ABOUT IT'; IN THE RUN-UP TO A COMMONS DEBATE ON LOWERING THE HOMOSEXUAL AGE OF CONSENT, ANOTHER MP COMES OUT OF THE CLOSET, 11 June, 1998).

In the early to mid-1990s numerous Conservative MPs were 'outed.' While their press coverage was not as ferocious as that experienced by Proctor just a few years earlier, similar language was utilized, as was the association between homosexuality and paedophilia. These 'outings' were political. Indeed, the supposed moral crusade of the Conservative Party's 'back to basics' campaign gave the press additional justification (at least in the minds of journalists) for the 'outings': the politicians 'outed' at this time could be presented as living secret lives *and* as moral and political hypocrites. An exploration of the press coverage of gay MPs post-1997 demonstrates that the press focus (tabloid and broadsheet) on the personal lives of gay politicians continued after Labour's 1997 General Election win. While this period saw the election of openly gay politicians and many 'closeted' gay politicians voluntarily 'coming out' to the press, from 1998 onwards many gay MPs were 'outed' by the tabloid press. While on the surface the press representation of gay MPs had improved when compared to, for example, the time of the Bermondsey by-election, the portrayal of gay MPs and homosexuality as a whole often had murky undertones. Plus, as noted above, many contemporary 'out' gay politicians were keen to state that they were not single-issue politicians. The move towards recognition (Frame 1 of Figure 1.10) had not been reached because gay MPs were not accepted for who they were in their entirety: particular criteria had to be met.

This chapter analyses the press coverage of gay politicians 1990-2005 through the detailed study of newspaper articles. The chapter is split into two main sections, echoing the structure of Chapter 2: 1990-1997 (*i.e.* up to Labour's victory in 1997) and post-1997 (*i.e.* post-Labour's victory). As with the previous chapter, interviews have been carried out with MPs and related figures, thus contextualising the press coverage and allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers. Like Chapter 3, Chapter 4 puts into practice the overarching frame of representation presented in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.10) and the theory of Chapter 1, in relation to socio-political factors, as discussed in Chapter 2. The case studies reveal that the binary themes demonstrated so far continue post-1990; thus, even though the acceptability of homosexuality and gay politicians has changed over time, there is underlying consistency in the press representation of gay politicians in terms of thematic characterisation, in particular, the idea of 'positive' and 'negative' mediated personas and the binary themes which contribute to them. In fact, the post-1990 case studies show that in terms of the mediated personas of gay politicians' a fifth binary theme can be added to the list:

- Private/public
- Out/in
- Good/bad
- Safe/dangerous
- *and* clean/dirty.

As suggested above, the chapter also further demonstrates that the acceptability of homosexuality, as shown through the examination of the press representation of gay politicians, can be understood in terms of a (halting) progression of tolerance towards

partial recognition (Frame 1). Thus, the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press can be mapped using three interconnected frames:

1. The move towards recognition

2. Acceptability/time (in relation to heterosexual public space)

3. Mediated personas as 'constructed reality.'

4.1. 'Scurrilous' Politicians, Scandalous Stories: the Press Representation and Experiences of Gay Politicians Pre-1997

"There was an incident which was childish and stupid and naturally I regret it. Whether that is enough to be used to try to destroy a man's career and whole life is of course another matter...Whether I am or not [gay] is none of your business. I know you would like me to say yes, or perhaps you would like me to deny it... [the press has] again determined the outcome of an election rather than the common sense and decency of the voters." Alan Amos, Conservative MP for Hexham 1987-1992 (*Daily Mail*, SEX SCANDAL MP QUITS; TORY ADMITS A 'STUPID ENCOUNTER,' 10 March, 1992).

Towards the mid-1990s the press coverage of gay men and women began to improve and language became more moderate, especially in the broadsheet newspapers (Rayside 1998), echoing - and influencing - public opinion. The increased visibility of gay people undoubtedly contributed to improved press coverage (Sanderson 1995). Nevertheless, in the mid-1990s gay politicians such as Alan Amos were still being 'outed' by tabloid newspapers and the tone used by many newspapers (particularly the tabloids) was still considered unsatisfactory by many gay activists. It is perhaps unsurprising that Smith remained the only 'self-outed' gay MP at this time.

Politicians such as Amos and Jerry Hayes (Conservative MP for Harlow 1983-1997) were unfortunate to be 'outed' by the press during a time of supposed Conservative

'sleaze.' Indeed, both Amos and Hayes denied being gay at the time of their 'outings,' but this did not stop the press from printing salacious details about their private lives and alleged homosexual activity. The following sub-section explores the experiences and representation of gay politicians from 1990-1997, focusing on the 'outings' of various Conservative politicians.

4.1.1   The Major Years: Tories, 'Sleaze' and 'Back to Basics'

Alan Amos

The first MP to be 'outed' by the press in the 1990s was the aforementioned Amos in 1992. Amos was caught on Hampstead Heath (presented as a gay 'cruising' location) in a car with another man. The police decided that Amos was engaging in compromising behaviour and subsequently arrested and then cautioned him. As cautions are not normally publicised, it may be the case that his arrest was leaked to the press by the police or someone else close to the case; nevertheless, the press could claim to be reporting and reacting to 'outside' events. Amos's tabloid press coverage, while not as vindictive and relentless as Proctor's, was still very unsympathetic. For example, the *Daily Star* (1992 cited Parris 1995: 282-283) wrote:

> Amos is a teetotaller, opposes abortion, and brands smoking a 'dirty, dangerous, and anti-social habit.' Hopefully he is now questioning his judgement in wandering at dusk, at a place which has been turned into a no-go area for decent families by perverts practising what many people - even smokers - would call another dirty, dangerous and anti-social habit. His downfall must be sad for him. But he shouldn't try and tar us with his own muck.

As with Proctor's press coverage, homosexuals are presented as a threat to families and children. The word 'pervert' is used again, along with 'dirty,' 'dangerous' and 'muck,' to portray gay men as unclean. Of course, the fact that Amos was arrested for public

sexual behaviour made his press coverage worse; as with Proctor, he could be characterised as a 'dangerous' gay man indulging in public sexual behaviour (binaries of Frame 3, Figure 1.10) and as 'invading' public heterosexual space (Frame 2, Figure 1.10). But even so, the choice of words reveals much about the newspaper's attitude towards homosexuality. One must also bear in mind the fact that the *Daily Star* was competing with other tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* for readers, hence its colloquial and rather over-the-top didactic tone. As with Proctor and Tatchell before him, the broadsheet press did not join in the moralizing, but instead contented itself with reporting on Amos's tabloid coverage as well as on the general detail of Amos's arrest, in a rather straightforward and non-sensational manner. Many broadsheets did, however, note that Amos was a 'bachelor,' which is an often-used euphemism for a gay man; for example, *The Independent* referred to Amos as a 'teetotal bachelor' (ELECTION 1992: HOW SEX CAST A HEX ON HEXAM, 1 April, 1992). Several broadsheet newspapers used Amos's arrest as an opportunity to write articles on 'cruising.' Indeed, *The Independent* visited Hampstead Heath and under the headline 'OUT IN THE UNDERGROWTH' (15 March, 1992) noted:

> The scene confirmed that neither the arrest, cautioning and subsequent resignation of Alan Amos, the Conservative MP for Hexham, for committing an act of indecency on Hampstead Heath, nor the bad weather had kept visitors from North London's favourite open-air meeting place for gays.

While the article does not condemn gay men, and is instead a rather tolerant exploration of 'cruising' on Hampstead Heath, the article does seem to imply that 'cruising' is common behaviour for gay men, shown here by the characterisation of Hampstead Heath as 'North London's favourite open-air meeting place' for gay men.

The fact that Amos was known for campaigning on moral issues contributed to his downfall. As Parris (1995: 283) notes, 'we know readers hug themselves with joy when the apparently pious fall.' Amos has never said that he is gay, and at the time of his caution would only admit to engaging in 'stupid' and 'childish' behaviour (*The Guardian*, TORY MP QUITS AFTER ARREST, 10 March 1992). He stood down from Parliament once it became clear that his constituency party would not back him (Parris 1995). Perhaps if he had happily 'come out,' becoming more of a 'good' gay man, to use a binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10, his constituency party would have forgiven him for his lapse in behaviour; public opinion regarding homosexuality was not as unforgiving as in the mid to late-1980s, the time of Proctor's press coverage. As it was, Amos's explanation did not really explain much at all, dissatisfying not just his local party, but also the press. Amos's undoing was also linked to the fact that he was arrested on the eve of a general election; the timing of his press coverage meant that his party could easily get rid of him.

David Ashby

At their 1993 party conference, the Conservative Party launched a new policy initiative - 'back to basics' - centring on a return to 'traditional' Conservative values. Although Major's speech never actually made reference to sexual morality, the speech made reference to how people should behave therefore making the speech appear moralistic (Baston 2000). The speech gave newspapers an excuse to focus on the behaviour of Conservative politicians. Indeed, exposure could be justified on the grounds of hypocrisy. Baston (2000) goes on to note that 'back to basics' established 'sleaze' as a part of British politics, particularly the Conservative Party (at this time - in recent years the Labour Party has been characterised as 'sleazy' too). In fact, use of the word 'sleaze' skyrocketed in the early 1990s. As Dunleavy and Weir (1995) note, while use

of the term slowly increased from 1985-1993, it escalated from 1993 onwards. The 'back to basics' fiasco led to a rush of stories about the personal lives of 'sleazy' Conservative politicians, including those of various gay MPs or MPs thought to be gay. David Ashby (MP for Leicestershire North West 1983-1997) was caught up in a bizarre story about whether or not he had shared a bed with another man while on holiday. Although the story amused many journalists - and a great deal of the public - it upset Ashby greatly. The story appears unfair because, as Baston (2000) notes, Ashby had never made any homophobic comments in the political arena (although, in 1986, like Proctor, he rebelled against the Government's attempt to make it the right of school governors to decide whether or not a parent could withdraw their child from sex education - a vote which was in part a response to the apparent 'promotion of homosexuality').[62] In fact, in 1994 he actually voted for the age of gay consent to be lowered to 16.[63] However, the fact that Ashby's 1992 election address described him as 'Married with a family... he is man... who believes in traditional moral values' (1992 cited Parris 1995: 315) was good enough reason for the press to link him to Tory 'sleaze.' This was a common justification. Indeed, Doig and Wilson (1995: 21) note that if a party plays on the notion of morality:

> Then they must be prepared, individually and collectively, for the consequences if the apparently private conduct of its MPs is held up to judgement against the party's public stance.

Surprisingly, it was a broadsheet newspaper which first alleged that Ashby was gay. In fact, *The Sunday Times* claimed that Ashby had left his wife because of a 'friendship with another man' (1994 cited Parris 1995: 315), and followed this up with the allegation that Ashby had shared a bed with another man while on holiday in Goa. *The*

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[62] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 102) 21 October 1986 (Education Bill [Lords] - Local Education Authorities Reserve Power).
[63] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).

Sunday Times ended up retracting the Goa story, but refused to retract its assertion that Ashby was gay. Ashby went on to sue *The Sunday Times* for libel, which he lost (Parris 1995). The original story was pure manufacturing, although his decision to sue for libel meant that later stories were in response to 'outside' events.

Most of the broadsheets followed up the original story and the court case using, as standard, unobjectionable language, although one or two words or phrases slipped into the broadsheet coverage which could be considered rather stereotypical. Indeed, many of the broadsheets called a pub visited by Ashby a 'gay haunt,' thus characterising what appeared to be a rather average and unexciting pub as sleazy and even sexual; for example, when reporting on Ashby's libel case, *The Independent* said '... the Queens Head [a pub Ashby was seen at] is an unmistakable gay haunt' (ASHBY LOOKED 'TOTALLY AT EASE' IN GAY PUB, 15 December 1995). The tabloid newspapers covered *The Sunday Times* story on Ashby (although less fervently than with Proctor), making use of colloquial language and well-used stereotypes. Indeed, the *Daily Mail* (30 November, 1995) reported on the court case with the headline 'LIBEL CASE MP "WAS SPOTTED IN GAY BAR LOOKING AT YOUNG MEN"' and the *Daily Mirror* (30 November, 1995) stated 'I SAW MP EYEING YOUNG MEN IN GAY PUB.' While not as blatant as in the press coverage of Proctor, a link was still made between gay men and youth. Ashby is also categorised as a predatory homosexual, 'looking' and 'eyeing' up young men. He is very much a 'bad' and 'dangerous' gay man (Frame 3, Figure 1.10), even though he denied being gay. It should be noted that these headlines paraphrase what was said in court; one could thus state that the newspapers were not actually judging Ashby and were instead summing up the court case. However, one must always keep in mind news values; the newspapers chose to publish these headlines and thus highlight a particular aspect of the case. Both the

broadsheet and tabloid newspapers linked Ashby to 'sleaze.' Indeed, in a round up of the 'back to basics' scandals (including Ashby's) *The Independent* (8 February, 1994: 1) wrote 'TWO MONTHS OF SEX AND SLEAZE,' neatly summing up everything that Conservative MPs (heterosexual and gay) had come to stand for in the preceding months.

The fact that a broadsheet newspaper broke the original story about Ashby demonstrates that at the time of 'back to basics' there was a frenzied atmosphere surrounding Conservative politicians and 'sleaze.' *The Sunday Times's* story was not salacious, but the fact that it was printed at all is very significant: sexual scandal and 'sleaze' permeated the political establishment and the press that reported on it. While he survived *The Sunday Times's* story and the subsequent court case, Ashby's political career died shortly after. In fact, his constituency party deselected him following his support (during a 1996 Commons Committee on the Housing Bill) for a Labour amendment to the Housing Bill which would have allowed gay couples the right to inherit the tenancy if their partner died. Ashby's constituency association denied that his deselection was homophobic (something asserted by Ashby) and claimed that it had instead come about as a result of his vote against the government and the failed court case. The Chairman of his constituency stated:

> Homophobia did not have a bearing on it. It was his court case when he was branded a hypocrite and a liar, and then, finally, when he voted against the Government last week. (*Press Association*, ASHBY'S ONSLAUGHT ON CONSTITUENCY TORIES, 11 March 1996).

Whether or not Ashby is actually gay (and he denied it during the libel case), the support he gave gay rights in the House of Commons in the 1990s meant that his negative press coverage was hard to justify. Indeed, it would have been easy (and

politically sensible) for Ashby to have voted *against* Labour's amendment to the Housing Bill.

Michael Brown

Michael Brown (Conservative MP for Briggs and Cleethorpes 1979-1997) was also caught up in the 'back to basics' scandal. In 1994 the *News of the World* revealed that Brown had had a relationship with a 20-year-old man and had taken him on holiday to the Caribbean. While he kept his seat, Brown resigned his Government position immediately, having broken the law; while MPs had by now voted for the age of gay consent to be lowered to 18, the change had not yet taken effect. Brown suffered the typical tabloid headlines. The *News of the World* (1994 cited Sanderson 1995: 74) headlined its expose 'TORY WHIP IN GAY SEX TRIANGLE,' reducing the relationship to its basest form. *The People* (8 May, 1994) labelled the story 'TORY WHIP QUITS AFTER GAY TOYBOY ALLEGATIONS.' *The Sun* (1994 cited Sanderson 1995: 74-75) also used the word 'boy' when writing about Brown's partner:

> John Major has ruled that it is OK for his ministers to be gay. The premier says they will not be sacked unless they behave irresponsibly - such as cheating on their wives or having affairs with under-age boys.

As with Ashby and Proctor before him, a correlation between homosexuality and paedophilia and the corruption of youth was made by the tabloid press. *The Sun* attempted to characterise Brown as a 'dangerous' gay man, although the age of Brown's partner lessened the effect. In spite of *The Sun's* attempts, Brown's tabloid press coverage was less intense than it was for those politicians 'outed' in the 1980s, and he was able to carry on as an MP until he lost his seat in 1997. Brown's colleagues were largely sympathetic to his plight, seeing him as yet another victim of the press (Sanderson 1995). Unlike Proctor, he was popular with his colleagues and was not

known for extreme political views. The broadsheet press was kinder to Brown (indeed, he is now a well respected broadsheet journalist and political commentator). While the broadsheets covered the story, they did not resort to stereotypical or homophobic language. For many broadsheet newspapers the problem was not that Brown was gay, but that he had technically broken the law and was thus 'sleazy.' Indeed, *The Independent* (1994 cited Sanderson 1995: 75) believed that:

> Mr Brown's problem lies not in his sexuality but in having notionally broken the
> law... Unfortunately for MPs, the public expects those who act as legislators not
> to break the laws that Parliament passes... That applies equally to heterosexual
> MPs.

Indeed, while the story was manufactured, there was public interest justification. If Brown had been 'outed' as having an underage lover just a few years earlier he may have suffered the same fate as Proctor. As it was, attitudes towards homosexuality had improved to such an extent that it was again possible for politicians 'outed' and/or caught up in a gay 'scandal' to hang on to their seats (even if they were members of the Conservative Party), showing that the move from intolerance to tolerance (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) had certainly moved on from Proctor's time. Brown also officially 'came out' after his tabloid expose (becoming more of a 'good' gay man), and therefore managed to gain the respect of tabloid journalists who would have no doubt condemned him if he had refused to 'come out' like Ashby. The fact that Brown was known for his pro-gay views also helped him to avoid total political annihilation; he not only voted for the age of consent to be lowered to 16,[64] he also voted against the Conservative whip on Clause 28.[65]

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[64] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).
[65] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 129) 9 March 1988 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material).

Jerry Hayes

The final MP to be 'outed' in this period was Jerry Hayes. In early 1997 the *News of the World* claimed that Hayes had had an affair with a man called Paul Stone six years earlier, when Stone was 18 and thus underage. The headline stated:

TORY MP 2-TIMED WIFE WITH UNDERAGE GAY LOVER: INTIMATE LETTERS REVEAL HIS LONGING FOR TEENAGER. (5 January, 1997).

As with Proctor *et. al*, a link to paedophilia was made. Indeed, the use of 'teenager' and 'underage' suggest that Hayes had sex with someone very young when, as stated above, Stone was actually 18. In fact, the phrase 'his longing for teenager' suggests that Hayes was infatuated with Stone partly because he was 'young.' Other tabloid newspapers used similar language. The *Daily Mirror* headlined an interview with Stone's mother 'HE BROKE MY BOY'S HEART' (7 January, 1997) and the *Sunday Mirror* (5 January, 1997) stated:

TORY MP'S PASSION FOR BOY, 18: TORY MP ADMITS LOVE FOR 18-YEAR-OLD BOY.

As the above headlines illustrate, the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, while not as Right-wing as *The Sun* and *News of the World*, still understood that the majority of their readers would interpret Hayes's alleged behaviour as unacceptable. Of course, it should also be noted that the *Mirror* newspapers are historically pro-Labour, and this was especially so in 1997 when a Labour victory appeared a certainty; Conservative sex scandals were thus revelled in, not just for their scandalous (and newsworthy) nature, but also for the political point that could be made. Indeed, some Conservative MPs claimed that Hayes's exposure was orchestrated by Labour Party figures, something denied by the Labour Party, who stated:

> Throughout the 'back-to-basics' debacle, the Labour Party never once sought to make any political capital out of the many scandals. We have no intention of starting now. (*The Times,* CLIFFORD ANNOUNCES ANTI-TORY VENDETTA, 7 January, 1997).

Stone's revelations appeared in the press not because his alleged relationship with Hayes had suddenly been uncovered, but because he decided to sell his story as a 'kiss and tell,' a mode of revelation traditionally used when female 'lovers' expose famous partners (this story can be classed as reportage, rather than manufacturing, because the newspaper reacted to an outside source - although there is an element of manufacturing in kiss and tell stories because the newspaper concerned could ignore the seller, hence the blurring of the reporting/manufacturing boundary noted in Chapter 1). Indeed, the tabloids treated the story in the same manner as a heterosexual 'kiss and tell' story, *i.e.* further revelations about Stone himself were published (for example, the tabloids printed pictures of him dressed as a woman), as well as subsequent interviews with connected figures. The story was actually very personal, with members of both Stone's and Hayes's families - including Hayes's wife and Stone's parents - giving interviews or comments to the tabloid press. The tabloids characterised Hayes's alleged homosexuality as a threat to his wife. In fact, the *Daily Mirror* (6 January, 1997) stated:

> JERRY PREACHED SAFE SEX BUT DIDN'T PRACTICE IT WHEN HE WAS CHEATING ON HIS WIFE WITH ME; TORY MP'S GAY LOVER REVEALS NEW SHAME; ALLEGED GAY LOVER OF JERRY HAYES SAYS THEY DID NOT PRACTICE SAFE SEX.

The article goes on to mention HIV/AIDS, thus characterising Hayes as a 'dangerous' and 'unhealthy' gay man. Hayes is not only a threat to his wife; he is also a threat to 'healthy' heterosexuality. Clean/dirty is another binary theme applicable to Frame 3, Figure 1.10.

Although the broadsheet newspapers (on the Left and Right of the political spectrum) did not treat Stone's professions in such a lurid and censorious style as the tabloids, and also resisted the use of stereotypical language, the alleged 'affair' was covered in lots of detail (following the tabloids' lead rather than making new revelations); for example, *The Times* stated 'SPECTRE OF YOUNG 'ASSISTANT' RETURNS TO HAUNT HAYES' (6 January, 1997). The broadsheet press also reported on the political consequences of the story and how Hayes would fare in the forthcoming general election. Interestingly, *The Guardian* (18 January, 1997) interviewed Stone under the headline 'OH PAUL, HOW COULD YOU' (his mother's apparent reaction to the story). By interviewing Stone, *The Guardian* moved from factual reporting of the case to the promotion of gossip as valid news. Indeed, there was not much point to the article at all; there were no new revelations (apart from the fascinating fact that Stone plucked his eyebrows, itself a suggestion of effeminacy), just musings on the motivations of Stone. If anything, the article is a good example of the growing 'tabloidization' (Franklin 1997) of the broadsheet press.

Stone's revelations received lots of press coverage, partly because of the mass of Conservative 'sleaze' a few years before, but also because a general election was imminent and politics was high on the media's agenda. Hayes was also damned by the fact that Stone's revelations were so 'scandalous.' Indeed, Hayes could be presented as a political and moral hypocrite, a 'closeted' gay man, and as sexually 'dangerous' (binaries of Frame 3, Figure 1.10), a newsworthy combination indeed. Hayes denied that he had sex with Stone - and also that he was gay at all - although he did go on to admit that his feelings for Stone were confused and becoming 'unhealthy' (The Times, TORY MP IN 'GAY AFFAIR' SCANDAL, 5 January, 1997). Still, the letters written by Hayes to Stone, which the *News of the World* based much of its original story on,

were rather passionate and could certainly lead one into thinking that the relationship was sexual. However, even if Hayes is gay, his press coverage was somewhat unfair. Indeed, in many respects, Hayes was not hypocritical; he was a known pro-gay MP, voted for the age of consent to be lowered to 16,[66] and was vice-chairman of the House of Commons AIDS Committee. Of course, one could equally state that the latter fact justified his coverage; as a safe-sex campaigner, it was hypocritical of him to have (alleged) unprotected sex. Likewise, it should not be forgotten that if Hayes and Stone were in a sexual relationship, that relationship was illegal. Nevertheless, in spite of the scandalous nature of Stone's revelations, Hayes kept the support of his constituency party. Even though he lost his seat in the Labour landslide of 1997, it does not appear that the allegations played a major part. Hayes was lucky in that, like Brown before him, he was popular with his colleagues and was not known for 'outrageous' political views. The fact that he had a wife who backed him to the hilt (expressing incredulity that he was gay) also contributed to the support received by Hayes (*The People*, OUR LOVE WILL BEAT GAY LIES; INTERVIEW WITH ALISON HAYES, 12 January, 1997).

On the whole, the above-mentioned Conservative MPs were not excommunicated in the brutal manner of Proctor. Indeed, while Brown lost his government post, he stayed an MP; Hayes lost his seat due to the imminent Labour landslide rather than his scandalous press coverage (note that Brown also lost his seat in the landslide); and, Ashby was deselected because of his post-scandal behaviour rather than the press's accusations (at least according to his local party). The only MP who seems to have been forced to resign directly as a result of his scandal is Amos. However, it appears that it was not his sexuality as such that was the major problem; as noted above, Amos's explanation for

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[66] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).

his arrest dissatisfied his local party. It appears that while in the early to mid-1990s it was not necessarily the case that a gay Conservative MP would lose the confidence of their party, 'coming out' was still fraught with problems. Indeed, even if a constituency party was supportive, the tabloid press was still likely to categorise the gay MP concerned in a stereotypical manner, utilising negative binary themes and personas (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). As a general rule, in the early to mid-1990s tabloid newspapers covered the private lives of 'outed' gay politicians using sensationalist and stereotypical language. However, while this was the case, the press coverage of 'outed' MPs was not as vicious as in the 1980s (*i.e.* Tatchell and Proctor's press coverage), and the moral relevance of sexual stories (*i.e.* judging someone's worth on their actual sex life or sexuality) decreased in the 1990s; what was much more important was whether or not a politician was 'truthful.'

The notion that a politician could be unfit for public office just because they were gay - as suggested in Tatchell's press coverage (*i.e.* he was only interested in gay issues) - lost resonance, indicating that recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) was closer. Instead, politicians such as Brown were presented as unfit for public office because they were 'sleazy' and 'untrustworthy.' While the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror* newspapers are not as Right-wing as *The Sun, News of the World* and even the more 'upmarket' *Daily Mail*, and were not as fervent in their coverage, they too covered the private lives of 'outed' gay politicians, often using detrimental language and implying a link between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality. In the mid-1990s one can see an interesting phenomenon; broadsheet newspapers not only commented on the tabloid press coverage of 'outings' or sexual scandals (as they had always done), they began to actively engage with 'outings' and scandals as well (*i.e. The Guardian* interview with Stone), or even do the 'outing' themselves (*i.e. The Sunday Times's* article on Ashby).

4.2 Public Life, Public Pressures: the Press Representation and Experiences of Gay Politicians 1997-2005

"The fact that I'm gay is a personal thing to me... I think Chris Smith is a role model for this. I don't think he was ever seen as a single-issue politician." Stephen Twigg, (*The Independent*, WIN SOME, LOSE SOME; NIGHT-CLUBBING, EASTENDERS... THE NEW MP FOR ENFIELD SOUTHGATE HAS GIVEN UP A LOT, HE TELLS JANIE LAWRENCE. BUT NOT AS MUCH AS MICHAEL PORTILLO, 24 July, 1997).

While in the late-1990s some newspapers (mainly tabloid) continued to use negative words and phrases when writing about gay men and women and, as noted above, the sexuality of gay politicians and public figures was still the focus of much press attention, the general tone of the press towards gay rights was much improved when compared to the 1980s and even the early 1990s, echoing the continuing relaxation of public attitudes (see Bromley *et. al.*, 2002 and Chapter 1). The positive reaction of the press to the election of openly gay politicians in 1997 suggested that gay politicians would no longer have to hide their sexuality in order to get ahead in politics (in fact, it could be a plus point), something emphasized by the promotion of gay men and woman to ministerial posts, suggesting the move from tolerance towards recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) was becoming more evident.

However, since then various gay politicians have been 'outed' by tabloid newspapers, with stereotypes and discriminatory language utilized, and the public interest criteria of the PCC disregarded. While many political commentators felt that tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* went too far in their press coverage - indeed, the ex-editor of *The Sun*, David Yelland, later admitted this in an interview with *The Guardian* (WAPPING TALES, 14 June, 2004) - other tabloid newspapers, and broadsheet newspapers too, also covered the 'outings.' In fact, broadsheet newspapers, while much more respectful

of the private lives of gay politicians than the majority of tabloid newspapers, continued their engagement with the private lives of gay politicians, even though 'out' politicians such as Stephen Twigg (as quoted above) stated that their sexuality was a private matter. Storr (2001) believes that the tabloid press's attitude to the 1998 outings reveals a deep-set confusion about sexual values in the late 1990s and beyond. On the one hand, gay politicians engaging in 'acceptable behaviour' (*i.e.* gay MPs open about their sexuality and/or part of a couple) were treated respectfully by the press, but MPs who were deemed to be hypocritical (those who were married and/or thought to be lying about their sexuality) were treated in the same disrespectful manner as earlier gay politicians such as Proctor. Indeed, Storr (2001: 124) notes:

> there is little indication that British sexual attitudes are undergoing any significant change except in specific and limited contexts. For those who fall outside the bounds of married and/or heterosexual acceptability, the best that one can hope for is that one's sex acts will 'die,' and will enter the 'zone of privacy' by becoming decorporealized. In other words, the condition of tolerance is the desexualization of one's sexual identity. Thus to the extent that Peter Mandelson and Nick Brown... won public tolerance, they did so in spite of their sexuality, not because of it.

Storr's work certainly fits with the notion of good/bad and safe/dangerous homosexuality, as meditated on in this thesis. While this research will question the validity of Storr's (2001) claim that Mandelson's coverage was 'gentle' and 'ambivalent' and that his sexuality was entering the 'zone of privacy' mentioned above, it is certainly true that Mandelson's coverage unlike, for example, Ron Davies's (Labour MP for Caerphilly 1983-2001), did not suggest that his homosexuality was incompatible with public office, signifying the acceptable/unacceptable behaviour divide.

The following sub-sections explore the experiences and press representation of gay politicians from 1997 to 2005. They demonstrate that even though the private lives of gay politicians were invaded over and over again in this period (even the private lives of politicians who voluntarily 'came out' as gay), nearly all survived politically. As with Proctor and Amos, the politician who was forced to resign from a political position (Davies) was involved in (suspected) illegal behaviour; thus, while issues such as the sexual behaviour, lifestyle (whether 'in' or 'out'), openness, and general popularity of the politician concerned did have an impact on the tone of press coverage, they did not (when isolated from illegal behaviour) affect whether or not they survived politically.

4.2.1 New Century, New Attitude?: Openly Gay Politicians, 'Self-Outings' and the Desexualization of Sexual Identity

Stephen Twigg

During the 1997 General Election campaign, Stephen Twigg ran as an openly gay candidate for the London seat of Enfield Southgate, beating the incumbent MP, Michael Portillo (MP for Enfield Southgate 1984-1997 and Kensington and Chelsea 1999-2005), in one of the most infamous wins of the election. Twigg's homosexuality was a non-issue to his own party and also to the Conservative Party as a whole (on a public, party level), perhaps because of rumours surrounding Portillo's own sexuality (explored below). As Twigg has stated:

> in 1997 I was standing against Portillo, and there were all these rumours about him as well, so it was probably neutralised from a partisan point of view. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

However, Twigg believes that in the 2001 General Election *individual* Conservative members did make an issue of his sexuality:

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> I remember in the 2001 election seeing someone I'd been to school with, and he said the Tories had knocked on my door and sought to use my sexuality, so I think there was a little bit of that in 2001. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Also, in the 2005 election:

> Everyone joked at how the Tory candidate, his wife and kids were literally, not just on every photo but in every speech! It was family man, family man, and actually, having said they didn't do anything last year [2005] but I do recall right at the start of the campaign we overheard their people were giving out leaflets at the tube saying vote for David Burrowes the family candidate. So they did do a bit, one person... (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Twigg received good national press coverage (both tabloid and broadsheet) during and immediately after the election; the national press did not resort to homophobia (implicit or explicit) and he did not suffer as the still 'closeted' Tatchell did in the Bermondsey by-election of 1983. This is not to say that the press did not refer to Twigg's sexuality at all. Indeed, his sexuality was the focus of much positive press attention, particularly broadsheet, with many post-election articles and interviews focusing on the fact that he was one of only two gay MPs to be fully open about their homosexuality since Smith 'came out' in 1984 (in fact, unlike Smith, Twigg 'came out' before he was elected). For example, *The Independent* article: 'WIN SOME, LOSE SOME; NIGHT-CLUBBING, EASTENDERS... THE NEW MP FOR ENFIELD SOUTHGATE HAS GIVEN UP A LOT, HE TELLS JANIE LAWRENCE. BUT NOT AS MUCH AS MICHAEL PORTILLO' (24 July, 1997).

Twigg's local newspaper also highlighted his sexuality - perhaps unnecessarily and rather sensationally, but not in a vindictive manner. As Twigg notes:

> I remember when in the run up to the 1997 election, one of the local papers in Enfield ran a big story saying 'I'm gay' admits Labour candidate, which made

all my friends laugh because I'd been openly gay for well over a decade by that stage. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Twigg notes that, as a whole, his press coverage and his experiences were very positive:

> My experience was overwhelmingly positive. I was in a position where even if I wanted to I could never have gone back in because I was out, really from university and student politics days... (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Twigg received positive press attention for a variety of reasons. Firstly, he had beaten the somewhat unpopular Portillo; indeed, while it is of course a Labour supporting newspaper, the following headline from the *Daily Mirror* can be seen as somewhat representative of the mood of many members of the public, and newspapers, at the time: 'WHAT'S THE STORY? MOURNING TORY! WHENEVER YOU NEED CHEERING UP, TAKE A LOOK AT THIS; CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP GENERAL ELECTION CELEBRATION POSTER OF VANQUISHED TORIES' (3 May, 1997). Twigg's openness about his sexuality from the start (which made him a 'good' gay MP to use a binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10) was also a big factor in the press's acceptance of his homosexuality; like Smith before him, he could not be accused of hypocrisy, and because he had pre-empted the press by revealing he was gay, he could not be 'outed.' As Twigg notes 'I would say probably the best way to protect your privacy is to be open about your sexuality' (Private interview, 18 July, 2006). The lack of scandal surrounding his sexuality and the 'safeness' of his sexuality also contributed to the lack of negative press coverage. The fact that Twigg was a member of a new government and a political party with a fresh approach to sexuality was another reason for his acceptance. As a member of an unsullied, sleaze-free government (at the time), the press was undoubtedly easier on him than if he had 'come out' as a member of the purportedly sleazy 1992-1997 Conservative Government. Twigg acknowledged that his membership of a more liberal political party made it 'easier' to be gay:

> Although I am by no means claiming that there is no prejudice on our side, on the Tory side there is more prejudice at the grass roots. So some Conservatives might feel it could be politically damaging. (The Independent, WIN SOME, LOSE SOME; NIGHT-CLUBBING, EASTENDERS... THE NEW MP FOR ENFIELD SOUTHGATE HAS GIVEN UP A LOT, HE TELLS JANIE LAWRENCE. BUT NOT AS MUCH AS MICHAEL PORTILLO, 24 July, 1997).

Twigg was always very blasé about his status as an openly gay MP and was keen to show that he was not a single-issue politician, as noted in sub-section 4.2. As with Smith, Twigg's ministerial responsibilities naturally curtailed his ability to speak on gay rights and, indeed, he did not vote in every key vote.[67] However, Twigg made it clear that he did not want to become a 'crusading' gay politician. Indeed, he noted in an interview with *The Independent* newspaper that being gay was 'a personal thing' (WIN SOME, LOSE SOME; NIGHT-CLUBBING, EASTENDERS... THE NEW MP FOR ENFIELD SOUTHGATE HAS GIVEN UP A LOT, HE TELLS JANIE LAWRENCE. BUT NOT AS MUCH AS MICHAEL PORTILLO, 24 July, 1997). Looking back on his early years as an MP, Twigg believes that he may have worried about being a single-issue MP unnecessarily:

> the single-issue MP thing is something in the beginning I was very conscious of. And I think with the benefit of hindsight I was over conscious about it. But I didn't want in 1997 to be labelled as a single-issue MP, I wanted to be seen as someone who was politically engaged across the spectrum... Was there a pressure on me or was it just me? In some ways it probably was just me, probably thinking there were constraints on what I should and shouldn't just do that perhaps weren't there... I think constituents, if I only ever popped up on the telly to talk about lesbian and gay rights, constituents would have a proper criticism, because actually it's part of the job that you should be talking about education and health and all the other issues as well. So in a sense my wanting to strike a balance was actually a sensible thing to do, not just for my own political self-preservation, but also doing the job right. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

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[67] For example: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 373) 24 October 2001 (Relationships - Civil Registration); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 373) 29 October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill - Consideration and Third Reading); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 386) 20 May 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - General Interpretation etc).

The 'Outing' Issue

Moving on to the concept of 'outing,' Twigg is opposed to this even when the person concerned is making hypocritical statements:

> The argument that is given that is quite persuasive is what if it's someone who is voting in a homophobic way, and there is some force in that, and I would certainly shed less of a tear if a closeted MP who is voting the wrong way is outed than if it's someone who's voting the right way and for whatever reason has not come out. But in the end I think the issue of someone voting the wrong way is that they are voting the wrong way, and should you really make a bigger issue of someone who is gay themselves than someone who is straight. One is almost saying that the straight MP who is voting the wrong way is less of an issue, and I think that would be quite wrong. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

While Twigg is obviously keen to support all gay MPs, whether they are 'out' or not, part of his statement is problematic; while it is true that gay MPs should not be expected to be of a higher moral standard than any other MP, by making hypocritical statements or voting against gay rights, they are actually holding themselves up to charges of hypocrisy, greater scrutiny and the increased possibility of being 'outed.'

Ben Bradshaw

Ben Bradshaw (Labour MP for Exeter 1997-) was the second gay MP to be open about his homosexuality during the 1997 General Election campaign and - like Twigg - he won his seat standing as a Labour candidate. The tabloid and broadsheet press were also kind to Bradshaw, even though he was much more ripe for the picking; Bradshaw used to work as a journalist for the BBC, and it emerged a few months before the election that he had been financially maintained by the corporation from September 2004 until the election, during which time he had been campaigning for his parliamentary seat. *The Independent* pondered why the press was easy on Bradshaw and concluded that society's increased liberalness impacted upon press strategy:

The reticence of the tabloids towards Bradshaw may reflect a growing recognition that attacking minorities can be bad for business, that their readerships are more complex than in the past. This more sophisticated approach was signalled by the Daily Mail, for example, when it surprised everyone and championed the family of Stephen Lawrence, the murdered black teenager, against the alleged five white attackers. (*The Independent,* THE POLITICS OF THE BBC; BUSY ELECTIONEERING, ON FULL PAY. STANDING FOR LABOUR AND OPENLY GAY. PREPARE FOR THE USUAL FLAK, AND MORE BESIDES, 3 March, 1997).

Bradshaw believes that the press left him alone during the campaign because he was open about his sexuality (out/in being another binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10):

The tabloids seem more interested in hypocrites. They have not targeted Chris Smith and seem to have little interest in me. (*The Independent,* THE POLITICS OF THE BBC; BUSY ELECTIONEERING, ON FULL PAY. STANDING FOR LABOUR AND OPENLY GAY. PREPARE FOR THE USUAL FLAK, AND MORE BESIDES, 3 March, 1997).

If one applies Storr's (2001) analysis, due to the fact that Bradshaw was openly and non-scandalously gay, his sexuality entered the 'zone of privacy' and was therefore of little interest to the press. Indeed, if Bradshaw's sexuality is understood in relation to Thompson's theories, it does not transgress 'prevailing norms,' a defining feature of sexual political scandals (Thompson 2000: 120). If Bradshaw had 'come out' or been 'outed' in the mid to late-1980s, his sexuality may have been portrayed as breaking 'norms' or 'codes,' but growing liberalism, and the lack of 'dangerousness' surrounding Bradshaw's sexuality, meant that his sexuality was (as Storr would pronounce) 'decorporealized.' Bradshaw's sexuality was of interest, however, to his Conservative opponent, Dr. Adrian Rogers, who called Bradshaw 'Bent Ben' and described homosexuality as 'sterile, disease-ridden and God-forsaken' (*The Guardian,* THE ELECTION: SPOTLIGHT/EXETER: LOVE AND HATE IN A HOLY WAR, 2 April, 1997). In fact, Rogers went on to describe Bradshaw as 'a media man, a homosexual... he is everything about society that is wrong' (*The Guardian,* THE ELECTION:

SPOTLIGHT/EXETER: LOVE AND HATE IN A HOLY WAR, 2 April, 1997). While it would be unfair to suggest that Rogers was a true representative of the Conservative Party at this time (in fact, he became something of a Right-wing caricature and was forced out of the Party for urging people to vote for the UK Independence Party), his candidature does demonstrate the ideological gulf between the Labour and Conservative parties at the time of the 1997 General Election.

Twigg and Bradshaw were treated fairly by the press during the 1997 election campaign because they were not considered a political threat. As loyal Right-wing Blairites (and, later on, on-message and rather uncontroversial ministers), the (predominantly) Right-wing tabloid press did not feel the need to mount a campaign against the Left, as they did with Tatchell. Although Twigg and Bradshaw did not have to endure homophobic coverage during the General Election, they were not completely immune from negative publicity surrounding their homosexuality afterwards. Indeed, when Bradshaw sought concessions for his partner normally reserved for the spouses of heterosexual MPs, tabloid newspapers greeted the news with the headlines 'MP'S GAY LOVER TO GET FREE RAIL TRAVEL' (*Daily Mail,* 23 June, 1997) and 'COMMONS KEY FOR GAY MP PAL' (*Daily Record,* 23 June, 1997). While the articles are not homophobic as such, the language used is telling. Indeed, Bradshaw's partner is referred to as his 'lover' in many of the articles, as opposed to 'spouse,' a term often used to describe heterosexual married partners. While this may not seem important, and indeed, heterosexual *unmarried* partners are also described using the word 'lover,' this term does explicitly link Bradshaw's relationship to sex, and suggests that the relationship is more frivolous and inconsequential than a 'serious,' heterosexual marriage. The headlines also suggest that Bradshaw and his partner somehow received undeserved special treatment, and imply that Bradshaw 'overstepped the mark'; in relation to

heterosexual public space (Frame 2, Figure 1.10), he crossed the line from acceptable to unacceptable behaviour in relation to his position as a gay man and the way he should act/the expectations he should have. Broadsheet newspapers also reported on the concessions issue; interestingly, *The Independent*, a liberal newspaper, also used the word 'lover' (COMMONS 'SPOUSE' PASS FOR GAY MP'S LOVER, 22 June, 1997).

Bradshaw and Twigg, and other MPs who 'came out' after 1997, were also used by tabloid newspapers - mainly through columnists who have more freedom to be controversial and opinionated - to demonstrate all that was wrong with gay equality and so called 'political correctness' as a whole. For example, Simon Heffer asked 'DOES MARRIAGE MEAN ANYTHING IN TODAY'S SOCIETY?' (*Daily Mail*, 20 January, 1998 a), and also claimed that society and politics had been 'HOODWINKED BY GAY PROPAGANDA' (*Daily Mail*, 13 June, 1998 b). This suggests that late twentieth-century tabloid newspapers may not have been as pro-gay as they first appeared: through columnists, true opinions on homosexuality could be expressed. Even so, aside from the above-described moments of controversy, the tabloid press did not focus upon the private lives of Twigg and Bradshaw - they were just too 'normal.'

Angela Eagle

Following the example set by Twigg and Bradshaw, three sitting Labour politicians decided to 'come out' as gay: Angela Eagle (Labour MP for Wallasey 1992-); David Borrow (MP for Ribble South 1997-); and Gordon Marsden. Eagle became the first lesbian MP to voluntarily 'come out' as gay, and also received good press; while she 'came out' five years *after* her initial election, her status as the first 'openly' lesbian MP, the fact that she was not hypocritical in her lifestyle or politics, and the fact that she

was non-scandalous and 'safe,' to use a binary theme of Figure 1.10 (Frame 3), meant that all of the press (tabloid and broadsheet, Left and Right) admired her, rather than condemned her. Indeed, the *Daily Mirror* (11 September, 1997) headed an article about her 'self-outing':

> I'M A LESBIAN SAYS LABOUR MINISTER; COURAGE OF MP ANGELA AS SHE COMES OUT; ANGELA EAGLE MP ADMITS TO BEING A LESBIAN.

And the *Daily Mail* (11 September, 1997) noted in a very respectful and straightforward article:

> POLITICIAN GOES PUBLIC WITH BACKING FROM PARTY: THE TIME IS RIGHT TO BE HONEST SAYS LABOUR'S LESBIAN MP.

In 2008, when Eagle had a civil partnership with her partner, she also received little media comment, and the comments she did receive were positive ones; the *Mail on Sunday* noted, for example, 'TREASURY MINISTER ANGELA TIES THE KNOT WITH GAY PARTNER' (28 September, 2008). Summerskill believes that Eagle's positive press coverage does not necessarily mean that lesbian politicians are of less interest to the press than gay male politicians:

> I'm not sure there is less interest [in lesbian MPs], I think potentially there is much more interest… but the issue [with] Angela Eagle is that she's in a long-term monogamous relationship, she keeps herself to herself, she doesn't satisfy the prurient heterosexual male interest in what lesbians might get up to in bed and therefore she's not as much interest. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Summerskill goes on to note that it might be different if a lesbian from a more 'glamorous background' was elected to the Commons, although because there are so few lesbian politicians it is difficult to be scientific about it (Private interview, 20 June,

2006). Indeed, Twigg also noted that there is a visibility issue for lesbians (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Eagle also made it clear that she did not want to become a spokesperson for gay rights:

> That's [her homosexuality] just one aspect of what I'm about. I've always supported gay rights to the extent that I believe gay people should have the same civil rights, equal rights, partnership rights and the right to be free from irrational discrimination as everyone else. I've always voted that way whenever such issues arose. Then again, my sister [who is also an MP] feels the same way and she isn't gay. (*The Independent*, 'I NEED TO GET THINGS SORTED'; ENVIRONMENT MINISTER ANGELA EAGLE TALKS TO SUZANNE MOORE ABOUT HER DECISION TO COME OUT AS A LESBIAN, ABOUT CHANGING ATTITUDES, AND THE BATTLE TO DO HER JOB AND STILL HAVE A PERSONAL LIFE, 11 September, 1997).

Storr's notion that 'the condition of tolerance is the desexualization of one's sexual identity' (Storr 2001: 124) can be said to apply to Eagle and other gay politicians; to be accepted, they have to limit their identification with gay issues, even if all this involves is a statement to the press. While Eagle did not suffer the same fate as Colquhoun, and Blair as well as her constituency party and her fellow MPs supported her decision to 'come out as gay,' her lesbianism did mark her out as different from the supposed 'norm.' By stating her interest in other issues, Eagle (and other gay MPs who make similar statements) sought to assimilate herself into the political 'mainstream.'

David Borrow and Gordon Marsden

Borrow and Marsden 'came out' as gay following Eagle's declaration. Like Twigg before him, Marsden made it clear that he was not a single-issue MP:

> I'm a politician first and a gay man second. I am not a single-issue MP. Being gay is part and parcel of what I am, who I am. (*The Independent*, 'I'M GAY AND I'M HAPPY FOR MY CONSTITUENTS TO KNOW ABOUT IT'; IN THE RUN-UP TO A COMMONS DEBATE ON LOWERING THE

HOMOSEXUAL AGE OF CONSENT, ANOTHER MP COMES OUT OF THE CLOSET, 11 June, 1998).

Most broadsheet and tabloid newspapers declined to make a big deal out of Borrow and Marsden's 'self outings,' and did not target them for their homosexuality. As with Twigg and Bradshaw, they were non-scandalous, honest, 'safe' and 'good' gay politicians (Frame 3, Figure 1.10), something reflected by the majority of the tabloid and broadsheet press. However, while the majority of newspapers linked the declarations to a forthcoming vote on the lowering of the age of gay consent (*The Guardian* (11 June, 1998) stated 'VOTE PROMPTS SECOND MP IN A WEEK TO DECLARE HE IS GAY'), the Right-wing *Daily Mail* tabloid newspaper treated their assertions as part of some kind of covert operation aimed at affecting the result of the vote. In an article, which at first glance appears rather positive ('I'M GAY TOO SAYS A SIXTH LABOUR MP'), the *Daily Mail* noted:

> The 'self outings' are part of a discreet campaign by homosexual MPs in the run up to the Commons vote of the lowering of the age of homosexual consent to 16. Two or three more gay MPs are expected to reveal their sexual orientation before the vote in a fortnight. (*Daily Mail*, 11 June, 1998).

The paper also called Borrow and Marsden 'avowedly homosexual' (*Daily Mail*, I'M GAY TOO SAYS A SIXTH LABOUR MP, 11 June, 1998), suggesting that they were combative activists, emphasising once again that public homosexuality (Frame 2 of Figure 1.10) was unacceptable in relation to active campaigning (even though the MPs may not have actually been doing this), as well as expressions of sexuality. Of course, it must be borne in mind that the *Daily Mail* is a supporter of Right-wing conservatism, and is thus unimpressed with moves to improve gay rights and homosexuality as a whole.

Heffer, writing in the *Daily Mail*, linked the MPs' 'self outings' to schoolboy sex, via

the age of consent vote, thus attempting to characterise Borrow and Marsden as sexually

'dangerous' (Frame 3, Figure 1.10):

> Two Labour MPs, David Borrow and Gordon Marsden, have announced this
> week that they are homosexual. They felt the need to do so, apparently, before
> the Commons votes on legalising homosexual relations with boys who (thanks
> also to this Government) are by law too young to buy cigarettes... I do,
> however, worry that the growing acceptability of homosexuality among our
> legislators will blind them to its unsuitability in certain sections of society - such
> as immature schoolboys and the armed forces. We are being softened up for
> reforms in both these areas, with the progressive, metropolitan customs of a
> small but influential group being pressed upon us.' (*Daily Mail*,
> HOODWINKED BY GAY PROPAGANDA, 13 June, 1998 b).

Heffer goes on to state that there is the 'greater likelihood of boys of 13, 14 or 15 being

absorbed into the homosexual world' (*Daily Mail*, HOODWINKED BY GAY

PROPAGANDA, 13 June, 1998 b). As Sanderson (1995: 214) asserts, and this chapter

has noted, the relationship between gay men and children is 'the ace up' the tabloid

'sleeve'; the connection is used to suggest that gay men wish to systematically 'convert'

young men and boys into homosexuality. While the connexion between homosexuality

and paedophilia is not as explicit here as in articles written in the 1980s, Heffer's use of

the words 'boy,' 'schoolboy,' 'immature' and 'young,' show that this method is still

employed to great effect.

Heffer categorises Borrow and Marsden as 'other' and presents gay men as a

threatening group undermining 'normal,' heterosexual society. While at one point in the

above article Heffer congratulates Borrow and Marsden for 'coming out,' he makes it

very clear that the increased visibility of gay men and woman - and homosexuality as a

whole - is very dangerous. Of course, Heffer is not representative of the tabloid press as

a whole, or even the *Daily Mail*, which he no longer works for (although his presence as

a columnist at the time suggested the general ethos of the paper), and his comments are about more than homosexuality: he opposes, generally, the Labour Government's policies and what he sees as the interests of minority groups taking precedence over the concerns of 'ordinary' people. However, he does represent a small, but vocal, group of journalists (present in both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers) determined to represent homosexuality as an encroaching, disturbing menace (*i.e.* towards heterosexual public space - Frame 2, Figure 1.10) and gay MPs as symptomatic of all that is wrong with 'liberal' Labour policies and moves towards gay equality.

The sub-section has shown that gay politicians post-Labour's 1997 election victory, whether they came out before or after their election to Parliament, were not judged by the vast majority of the press on their sexuality. This indicates that the press as a whole was much more comfortable with homosexuality and gay public figures. Indeed, the vast majority of articles on the MPs covered in this sub-section were simple reportage rather than manufacturing, although one could question whether the mentioning of their homosexuality was always necessary (and some articles seemed to cross the line because of this) and in the public interest. The fact that the politicians were sexually non-threatening, open about their private lives and politically acceptable also contributed to their positive press coverage (they could be described using positive binary themes and as having positive mediated personas – Frame 3, Figure 1.10), as did the fact that they were all keen to stress that they were not single-issue politicians. However, some Right-wing tabloid newspaper columnists used gay New Labour politicians to demonstrate all that was wrong with gay equality and so called 'political correctness,' indicating that some sections of the tabloid press still believed that homosexuality could be used as a political weapon (in relation to recognition – Frame 1 of Figure 2 – this particularity was not necessarily looked on favourably). This was

further indicated in late-1998 when Ron Davies, Peter Mandelson and Nick Brown (MP for Newcastle Upon Tyne East and Wallsend 1983-) were 'outed' as gay, by the press in Brown and Davies's cases, and on television, in Mandelson's case. While Davies's exposure could be said to meet the PCC's public interest criteria (*i.e.* detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety) (PCC 2007), this was less obvious in the case of Brown and especially so in the case of Mandelson.

4.2.2   The 'Moment of Madness': Ron Davies, Clapham Common, and New Labour Sexual Scandal

Tabloid and Broadsheet Approaches

After so many MPs had happily 'come out' to the press in the late 1990s, the dramatic 'outing' of Davies in late 1998, and the unusual circumstances surrounding it, impacted greatly. Just after 9pm one October night, Davies, who was walking alone on Clapham Common, was invited by a man he had never met to a nearby flat for a meal, which he accepted. Two other people joined them and they all got into Davies's car. After being directed to drive to a nearby estate, a knife was pulled on Davies and he was ordered to hand over his wallet, his phone, his watch and his House of Commons pass. Davies was then forced out of the car, at which point he called the police and gave a full statement. The media immediately suspected Davies of 'cruising' for sex, something he emphatically denied. The tabloids got straight to the point and openly suggested that he was seeking gay sex; the *Daily Mirror* (28 October, 1998) stated 'SHAME OF GAY SEX CABINET MINISTER; RON DAVIES RESIGNS AS WELSH SECRETARY.' The broadsheet newspapers used a less dramatic tone, being careful not to state explicitly that Davies was soliciting sex; *The Guardian* (28 October, 1998) wrote 'MYSTERY MEETING THAT ENDED A CAREER.' As time went on, the

broadsheets explored Davies's situation in more detail, but generally used respectful language, commenting on, for example, the opinions and language of tabloid newspapers (*i.e. The Sunday Times*, THEY'LL GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT, THEY WILL, 1 November, 1998). The tabloid newspapers linked Davies's apparent sexual exploits to sleaze, and were thus satisfied that Davies resigned so quickly. *The Daily Mirror* (THE CABINET MUST BE FREE FROM SLEAZE, 28 October, 1998) suggested that his actions were in danger of tarnishing the Government:

> The best thing that can be said of Ron Davies is that he went quickly. At least that shows that he had no wish to damage or drag down the government with him... Tony Blair wants a clean, sleaze-free administration. The speed of Ron Davies' exit shows the Prime Minister will not tolerate anyone breaking his high standards.

Negative words used to describe Davies include 'shamed,' 'disgraced,' 'foolish' and 'bizarre.' They suggested that Davies was a guilty, flawed individual who had engaged in some kind of disreputable behaviour (even though none of the newspapers actually had any proof of what Davies was doing in the park). Clapham Common itself was frequently labelled a 'gay sex haunt,' 'murky,' and 'notorious,' thus directly linking Davies with unseemly, dangerous behaviour. Davies was quickly categorised as 'other' by the press; like Proctor before him, his apparent liking for sex not considered to be the (heterosexual or homosexual) norm defined him as a 'dangerous' gay man (Frame 3, Figure 1.10), in opposition to heterosexuality. As Storr (2001: 119) notes:

> Davies' alleged transgressions were aggressively corporealized. Tabloid allegations were not just of homosexuality in the abstract, but of specific acts which were clearly located outside the zone of privacy both by their homosexuality... and by their non-domestic setting...

Acceptability and Heterosexual Public Space

Indeed, his alleged public sexual acts and sexuality as a whole were unacceptable in heterosexual society (Frame 2, Figure 1.10). As with Field, Harvey *et. al.*, his lack of openness about his sexuality, coupled with the unexplained circumstances surrounding the incident, meant that Davies could not be slotted into a neat, safe sexual category; as Brown (*The Independent*, THE GOOD GAYS AND THE BAD GAYS, 9 November, 1998) writes, he is a 'bad gay,' fulfilling that binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10. Davies's sexuality crossed the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Rubin (1992) notes that according to hierarchies of sexual values, 'normal' sexuality should be heterosexual and reproductive, and any sexual acts which violate this can therefore be regarded as 'abnormal.' While, as Rubin (1992) remarks, some forms of homosexuality are in the process of crossing the acceptable/unacceptable line, this relates to coupled and monogamous homosexuality; Davies was therefore considered abnormal or 'dangerous' by much of the tabloid press. The perceived unusualness of Davies's sexual behaviour was condemned by the tabloids (even the Labour supporting *Daily Mirror*, as noted above); while tabloid newspapers would by now accept 'good' gay politicians (although, as explored above, the tabloid press was not particularly in favour of supposed 'campaigning' gay politicians), any 'extreme' behaviour which revealed the politician concerned to have an 'active' rather than 'neutered' sexual life was too much for them to take.

The tabloid newspapers also revelled in Davies's predicament because it was the first major homosexual scandal of Blair's time in power. Plus, Davies's private life was just seen as *so* scandalous. Indeed, his press coverage can be read in relation to Thompson's (2000: 120) definition of sexual scandal, in which it was not the illegality of his actions which were important, but rather that the 'norms' which were transgressed had a degree

of 'moral bindingness.' Interestingly, Thompson states that the activities concerned do not have to be considered 'transgressions' by everyone, but instead need to have 'a sufficient degree of moral bindingness' in order that public expressions of disapproval are made (Thompson 2000: 120). Davies's transgressions certainly met these criteria.

'Dangerous' Sexuality

Newspapers even linked Davies with a so-called gay sex disease. Following on from the original *Mail on Sunday* story, *The People* (1 November, 1998) exclaimed: 'SHAMED MP HAS GAY SEX DISEASE; RON DAVIES PICKED UP HEPATITIS B SAYS EX-WIFE.' The article went on to state that:

> Shamed MP Ron Davies caught the deadly gay sex disease hepatitis B, his ex-wife sensationally claimed last night... It is primarily caught by gay men through sex and intravenous drug users... She [Davies's wife] sent him for medical help when he turned up at her home looking gaunt... Last night Dr James Le Fanu said: 'biologically, the hepatitis B virus closely resembles the HIV virus... (*The People*, SHAMED MP HAS GAY SEX DISEASE; RON DAVIES PICKED UP HEPATITIS B SAYS EX-WIFE, 1 November, 1998).

By linking Davies to 'gay sex disease' and even HIV, *The People* is further categorising him as a 'dangerous' gay man, and an unhealthy one at that (also binary themes of Frame 3, Figure 1.10). By categorising gay men alongside drug users, the article slots Davies into one of the 'categories of blame' identified by Sanderson (1995) in relation to HIV/AIDS (homosexuals, drug abusers, prostitutes); as a gay man, it is Davies's fault he allegedly has this disease. Storr (2001: 118) notes that the link with HIV/AIDS in the above article is a clever use of precedent:

> the casual reader of the headline will certainly have assumed [the gay disease] to be HIV. Thus the tabloids in particular condemned Davies in terms more familiar from previous 'gay scandals.'

There is no public interest reason for this article to be published, and, indeed, the article could be considered unethical. Certainly, Clause 3 (i) of the PCC Code of Practice states that:

> Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications. Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual's private life without consent. (PCC 2007).

Defined by Sexuality

The *Mail on Sunday* and *People* articles (above) further intruded into Davies's private life and went into lots of detail about his first marriage, revealing how many times he and his first wife had sex, the fact that he allegedly liked to visit Turkish baths, and that he supposedly has a low sperm count. Through the articles, Davies's public life becomes defined by his private self. He has never been allowed to forget the incident and his political career did not recover. The intrusion into Davies's private life (particularly the above revelation) is even more problematic when one looks at his voting record on gay issues. Indeed, Davies could not be accused of hypocrisy in the way he voted; his pre-1997 voting record was strong[68] and while his post-1997 record is less impressive[69] (*i.e.* post-scandal), he did vote in the key 1998 division on the age of gay consent.[70] Thus, the articles are not only against the public interest, they are blatant manufacturing (unlike his original exposé, which can be regarded as reportage and in the public interest). Davies's subsequent behaviour did not help his cause; the media

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[68] For example, Davies voted in the following key debates: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 50) 9 December 1983 (Sex Equality Bill); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 124) 15 December 1987 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material) (divisions 116-118); Hansard House of Commons debates (vol 129) 9 March 1988 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).

[69] For example, he was absent for the following key debates: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 325) 10 February 1999 (Sexual Offences Amendment Bill); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 253) 5 July 2000 (Local Government Bill [Lords] - Prohibition of Promotion of Homosexuality: Bullying).

[70] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 314) 22 June 1998 (Crime and Disorder Bill [Lords] - Reduction in Age at which certain Sexual Acts are Lawful).

accused him of 'cruising' for sex on two further occasions (1999 and 2003), one accompanied by apparent photographic proof (NEWS OF THE WORLD, 13 June, 1999). The second incident prompted Davies to 'come out' as bisexual, something many commentators saw as proof that he had been 'cruising' for gay sex on Clapham Common. Guidry (1999) notes that the assumption that sexual orientation is either hetero or homosexual (dichotomous) contributes to the marginalisation of bisexual people. Thus, Davies's bisexuality can be seen as more of a threat to the 'norm' than homosexuality; homosexuality, while seen as 'abnormal,' is at least a fully recognised 'other.'

The 1998 scandal forced Davies to resign as Welsh Secretary and forgo the opportunity to be the first First Secretary of the new Welsh Assembly. He stood down from Parliament in 2001 and became Welsh Assembly member for Caerphilly, a post he resigned when the third incident became front-page news. The Labour Party was relatively supportive of Davies after the 1998 scandal (Davies became the Welsh Assembly economic development chief). However, the continuing embarrassment Davies brought Labour meant that the Party could no longer support him. Davies's case shows that while the press would accept gay MPs and ministers, any 'extreme' behaviour - behaviour perceived as a threat to the 'norm' - was too much for the press to take. Mandelson's 'outing' just a few weeks later showed that the Labour Party did not object to Davies's homosexuality in itself; it was the circumstances of his 'outing' that were the problem, alongside his 'tactics' to manage the event.

Mandelson's Television Outing

In the midst of Davies's scurrilous 'outing,' Mandelson's homosexuality became the focus of intense media speculation, receiving more press coverage than the other politicians in this chapter. Mandelson's press coverage is important because it is representative of a period during which gay politicians were at the forefront of journalistic attention; Mandelson's press coverage reached fever pitch, and was probably the most intense since Proctor's ten years earlier. At a time when homosexuality had supposedly become less contentious (signalling tolerance, if not the move towards recognition – Frame 1, Figure 1.10), Mandelson's press coverage was astonishingly profuse. At the time of the 'outing' Mandelson was a very influential figure in British politics; he was a confidant to Blair, one of the masterminds of the 1997 General Election and the New Labour project as a whole, Trade and Industry Secretary, and a controversial political figure whom much of the press loved to hate (partly due to the fact that he was a proponent of 'spin' and had therefore spent many years dealing with the media, in many cases preventing stories coming out about the personal lives of other politicians). His sexuality was also an open secret in the political and media worlds (Macintyre 2000), thus putting him in a vulnerable position.

Mandelson was 'outed' on the BBC2 current affairs programme *Newsnight*. While discussing Davies's sexuality on the programme, Matthew Parris, by now a political journalist, stated in an interview 'there are at least two gay members of the Cabinet.' His interviewer, Jeremy Paxman, asked 'Are there two gay members of the Cabinet?' to which Parris replied 'Well, Chris Smith is openly gay and I think Peter Mandelson is certainly gay.' The following day Mandelson was confronted by journalists and

photographers on his doorstep, all eager to enliven his press coverage. Most tabloid newspapers covered the story, although the coverage was not, in the first instance, that sensational. Indeed, *The Sun*, a newspaper which had in the past printed extremely homophobic articles about gay politicians, other public figures, and gay men and women as a whole (see above and Sanderson 1995), stated:

> The Sun has a few thoughts about these incredible events, Firstly, Mandelson's outing - coupled with the Ron Davies affair - will prove to be a major turning point in British politics. Secondly, there is a massive difference between Davies's shenanigans on Clapham Common and Mandelson's homosexuality. The Sun knows that Mandelson has struggled with this issue for many years. He knew biographers were about to spill the beans anyway. So last night's furore was a controversy waiting to happen. The fact is: Mandelson is gay. He also has a brilliant mind. He is also a talented politician. And it is also true that times have changed. The British people will not turn on Mandelson because he is gay. And they will sympathise with him for the way in which he was 'exposed.' We say to Mandelson: tell the truth. You will win respect for your honesty. (*The Sun*, ABOUT PETER; THE SUN SAYS, 28 October, 1998).

Of course, this volte-face by *The Sun* may have been an attempt to appeal to Blair via Mandelson. Some newspapers actually turned on Parris for 'outing' Mandelson (he was in fact sacked as a *Sun* columnist). Indeed, the *Daily Mirror* (29 October, 1998) stated 'FURY AT TORY'S OUTING OF MANDELSON,' managing to display its pro-gay credentials and political allegiance at the same time. *The Times* decided not to publish anything at all on Mandelson's initial 'outing.' The paper's then editor, Peter Stothard, justified his decision by saying:

> It wasn't a story... Mandelson has had more outings that Saga Holidays. Even though it came from our own wise and distinguished columnist, we didn't consider it to be a sufficiently new story to warrant space. (*The Guardian*, ETHICS MAN; WHEN MATTHEW PARRIS 'OUTED' PETER MANDELSON ON NEWSNIGHT, IT CREATED CONFUSION IN NEWSROOMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. HOW SHOULD THE MEDIA DEAL WITH SUCH A DELICATE ISSUE, 2 November, 1998).

The newspapers which did comment on the *Newsnight* incident treated the news that Mandelson was gay as if it had never before been the subject of press speculation, even though Mandelson had been 'outed' on numerous occasions, from as early as 1987 (explored later in the sub-section); the *Daily Mirror* stated 'MANDELSON IS GAY, SAYS FORMER MP' (28 October, 1998). The story was such big news in 1998 because Mandelson had become one of the most powerful men in the country (Macintyre 2000).

The Need to Know

The initial positive reaction to Mandelson's 'outing' faded just a few days after the *Newsnight* incident; as Macintyre (2000) notes, the BBC, sensitive to the possibility that Mandelson was offended, and the thin line between the public interest and private intrusion, issued a memo stating that Mandelson's sexuality should not be referred to on any programme (thus highlighting the different approaches of the press and television towards the publicising of private lives). While a great deal of the newspapers' anger was directed at the BBC, Mandelson lost much of the sympathy he had until this point received. As Macintyre (2000) notes, Mandelson's friendship with the then Director General of the BBC, John Birt, made it seem as if he was getting special treatment. *The Observer* (1 November, 1998) claimed there was 'OUTRAGE AT BBC BAN ON CABINET SEX GOSSIP,' and *The Mail on Sunday* (1 November, 1998) stated 'ANGER AT BBC GAG ON MINISTER'S SEX LIFE.' The BBC defended the memo, noting that it is only policy to comment on a politician's sexuality if it is relevant to public policy.

Mandelson further enraged the press by refusing to say that he is gay. Even though he lives/lived with and has been photographed with a male partner, in the last few years

has answered questions linked to his sexuality (for example, in 2003 he said 'My public life is my public life, my private life is my private life. I'm very happy in both' (*Daily Mirror*, EX-MINISTER TELLS OF HIS SHOCK AT AXE: BEEB GAY CLAIMS DIDN'T WORRY ME, 30 April, 2003), in response to a question about his *Newsnight* 'outing'), and cooperated with Macintyre's (2000) friendly biography which mentioned his homosexuality, he has never actually said 'I am gay.' It can be argued that there is no need for Mandelson to state whether or not he is gay, or for the press to write about his sexuality, due to the fact that no public interest criteria apply/have so far applied. However, Mandelson's reticence on this subject has certainly affected the press coverage his sexuality has received. Unlike Smith, Bradshaw, Twigg *et. al*, Mandelson has not given the press what it wants; his refusal to publicly 'come out' means that the press cannot define or label him, and therefore homosexuality/heterosexuality, as sharply as it would like to; he is thus a 'bad' gay man, to use a binary theme from Frame 3, Figure 1.10 (although not as bad as Proctor, for example, showing the graduated nature of the binaries). While the modern press representation of gay men and women is certainly less vicious than compared to the mid-1980s, and the representation of deviancy is therefore more implicit than explicit, there is certainly a case of 'them' ('abnormal' homosexuals) and 'us' ('normal' heterosexuals, *i.e.* the newspaper and its readers) in the coverage of some (tabloid) newspapers. Thus, recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) has not been achieved. For example, while stating that 'The old-fashioned era of gay bashing is over,' *The Sun* (ABOUT PETER; THE SUN SAYS, 28 October, 1998) noted that:

> As Richard Littlejohn [then a *Sun* columnist] - never a man to sport a limp wrist - says... being gay should not be a cause for shame.

The Sun thus stereotypes gay men as effeminate in order to define what Littlejohn, a heterosexual, is not. Although professing to accept Mandelson's sexuality, *The Sun* got into trouble over another Littlejohn column. Littlejohn (*The Sun*, MANDY, MANDY, MANDY, OUT! OUT! OUT!, 30 October, 1998) stated:

> The truth is that there is a virtual freemasonry of homosexuals operating at the highest levels in politics... This, like Peter Mandelson's sexual preferences, is well known to those who work and mix in these circles. It is not common knowledge to everyone else. Which is why I believe Matthew Parris was right to out Mandy on Newsnight. This Government is committed to furthering the homosexual agenda. It has given top priority to reducing the age at which schoolboys can be buggered legally to 16, in the face of public opinion. If MPs and Cabinet ministers have a vested interest in furthering this agenda, we should be told.

By this reasoning, every male MP would have an avid interest in the female age of consent. Indeed, would Littlejohn demand a public register of heterosexual MPs if a debate ever took place on this topic? However, he clearly uses the public interest defence for Mandelson's 'outing,' as did many journalists at the time.

Defined by Sexuality

Mandelson's initial 1998 press coverage can be classed as reportage, rather than manufacturing, because newspapers were reacting to outside events (*i.e.* his 'outing' on television). However, much of his later press coverage was either pure manufacturing, or his sexuality was brought up when it was not relevant. Indeed, moving on to his press representation since his 1998 'outing,' it is clear that Mandelson has often been defined by his sexuality, particularly in tabloid newspapers. For example, Mandelson is often referred to using exaggerated, ostentatious terms such as 'exotic.' Indeed, the *Daily Mirror* (23 December, 1998) headlined Mandelson's 1998 resignation 'RISE AND STALL OF MR EXOTIC' and the *Daily Mail* (MANDELSON HOME LOAN

BOMBSHELL; THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS AND A HOUSE DEAL THAT DIDN'T ADD UP, 22 December, 1998) described him thus:

> Peter Mandelson is one of the most brilliant, exotic and mysterious figures the Labour movement has produced. A flamboyant former television producer... His glittering success triggered a mixture of admiration and envy among New Labour MPs through his closeness to Tony Blair, his condescending attitude to colleagues and his liking for the highlife.

The adjectives serve to categorise Mandelson as an unusual, 'showy' gay man, thus promoting a gay stereotype. While Mandelson did once describe himself as 'exotic' (*Daily Express*, WEALTHY FRIENDS OF AN 'EXOTIC CREATURE,' 24 January, 2001), seemingly legitimising the use of the word, it is doubtful that he was referring to his sexuality at the time; there is no doubt that when the *Daily Mail* uses 'exotic,' combined with 'flamboyant,' that reference is being made to the fact that Mandelson is gay. On occasion, Mandelson is referred to using stronger, even homophobic, terms. Indeed, while he may not have been purposely making a derogatory comment, *The Spectator's* Rod Liddle used the word 'mincing' to describe Mandelson:

> What we have to remember, as we are fed all the spin - most recently from the revolting Peter Mandelson, that mincing embodiment of sanctimony and obfuscation - are the following indisputable facts... (A DESPICABLE AND COWARDLY DIVERSION, 26 July, 2003).

The suggestions of effeminacy - an assumption often made by heterosexuals about homosexuals (McIntosh 1996) - were at their strongest when Mandelson held his seat at the 2001 General Election. Mandelson's loud, enthusiastic election speech caused Peter McKay from the *Daily Mail* to state:

> Peter Mandelson's extraordinary 'I'm no quitter!' victory speech after he recaptured Hartlepool was the political equivalent of Gloria Gaynor's disco anthem I Will Survive. His enemies and those who prefer a quiet life want Mr

Mandelson to disappear and open a ballroom dancing academy with Reinaldo [his partner], perhaps, or lead a Home Rule for Hartlepool movement. But having got a taste of him in Gloria Gaynor mode, wouldn't you prefer him to kick up merry hell about getting back into government? (MANDY, THE GLORIA GAYNOR OF HARTLEPOOL, 11 June, 2001).

The term 'Mandy' is a label and a stereotype, used to suggest effeminacy. Quite why Mandelson would open a ballroom dancing academy is unclear, as is the association with Gloria Gaynor; the only firm link between Mandelson and the *Mail's* imagery is the fact that ballroom dancing and Gloria Gaynor are stereotypes frequently associated with gay men. Littlejohn has often used more obviously homophobic words/phrases when writing about Mandelson, and his articles (particularly when he wrote for *The Sun*) were often accompanied by sketches showing Mandelson dressed in outdated stereotypical gay clothing such as leather chaps, or side-by-side with his Brazilian partner Reinaldo Avila da Silva (for example, one column in *The Sun* (LATER TONIGHT ON THE BAY BEE C, 19 May, 2000) showed a drawing of Mandelson dressed as Carman Miranda, with Reinaldo showering him with money).[71] While Littlejohn's *Sun* coverage should not be taken as typical of the tabloid press, the fact that Littlejohn was able to describe Mandelson as 'Iago played by Kenneth Williams... a mixture of mincing, obsequiousness and fake menace' (*The Sun*, HOW CAN THIS SLEAZY CREEP REPRESENT US?, 27 July, 2004) and write with regard to Mandelson's purchase of a dog that 'it has confirmed what we always suspected. Mandy's best friend is a little woofter' (*The Sun*, WHEN IT COMES TO REARING CHILDREN, GAYS AREN'T EQUAL, 17 December, 1999) shows that Mandelson's public life has continually been defined by his private sexuality (something which has continued up to and including 2008, with Mandelson's elevation to the House of Lords

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[71] Reinaldo Avila da Silva is described as Mandelson's partner in this thesis, although the researcher is unaware of the current status of their relationship (as of 2008, various newspapers state that they are still in a relationship).

and reinstatement to the Cabinet as Business Secretary). This is not unique to Mandelson; Twigg also notes that his sexuality was often referred to unnecessarily:

> One thing I did find was a bit of a tendency to say gay Labour MP in the context of something when my sexuality was completely irrelevant... If there was something controversial, but it has absolutely nothing to do with my sexuality, somehow that connection would then be erroneously made. There was a wonderful story, a broadsheet story, a friend who was on a broadsheet on the right of the spectrum, it was 1997 and something that I had said, and they actually wrote, he wrote the piece and he said gay MP, and it was about age of consent so it's fair enough, and they changed out gay MP to self-confessed homosexual! And he to his credit insisted they change it back! (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

Of course, in many ways Littlejohn is an anachronism. However, as noted previously, news values must always be considered. Indeed, his one-time inclusion as a columnist in *The Sun* reveals something about the news values of the tabloid and the opinions the paper expected its readers to have. Perhaps it is the case that Littlejohn expressed what *The Sun* would have liked to express in its main news pages, but could not. Littlejohn's move to the *Daily Mail* from *The Sun* shows the difference between the expectations of the *Sun* and *Mail* readerships; his columns are generally less vitriolic about Mandelson and homosexuality as a whole because he is writing for a more 'upmarket' tabloid audience (the demographics are different). It is also possible that he has realised that gay people are more accepted in society, making his writing appear over the top and outdated.[72]

Incredibly, Mandelson was called a 'poofter' in one tabloid newspaper as recently as 2001. The paper stated:

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[72] Littlejohn does on occasion, however, revert back to his *Sun* style of writing when writing in the *Mail*; indeed, in early 2007 he penned a fake telephone call between Mandelson and Avila using plenty of innuendo (*Daily Mail*, WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO - RORY BREMNER, 27 February, 2007).

Do you seriously give a monkey's about who Peter Mandelson sleeps with every night? Thought not. Yet somehow petulant Pete has reportedly convinced himself that his ousting is all a vicious plot by journalists because he's gay. Yeah, right. Like it's nothing to do with him being a lying, cheating scuzzball who only cares about himself and his ambition. Actually, thinking about it, the raving poofter might have a point. Because if it was just to do with him being a lying, cheating scuzzball etc etc then we wouldn't have any politicians left at all, would we? (*Daily Star,* OUT AND OUT LIAR, 25 January, 2001).

Not only does the newspaper define Mandelson by his sexuality in a very crude way (while berating Mandelson for apparently doing the same thing himself!), the use of this term would be regarded by many people as offensive. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the *Daily Star* is more 'downmarket' than the *Sun* and *Mirror* newspapers, but even so the use of this term is surprising (even if the writer is trying to be 'ironic'); indeed, if a newspaper used a derogatory term about a black person, for example, condemnation from other newspapers and politicians would be fierce (with the 'irony' excuse not tolerated).

Mandelson's Partner

The press representation of Mandelson's partner highlights the fact that Mandelson is often defined by his sexuality, as well as the blatant manufacturing that the press have engaged in. After Mandelson's 1998 'outing,' the *Sunday Express* became the first newspaper to write about Avila under the headline 'BRAZILIAN STUDENT WHO IS MANDELSON'S CLOSE FRIEND' (1 November, 1998). Not only was the article manufactured, it was not in the public interest. When Mandelson heard that the paper was planning to run a story on his partner, he tried to have the article removed (he telephoned the editor-in-chief of the paper, as well as the head of the PCC) and after tense negotiations the article was moved from the front-page to page seven (Macintyre 2000). The editor of the *Sunday Express* was eventually fired. While the newspaper denied that the editor was sacked because of the article, an internal investigation

revealed that the story had not been investigated legitimately. Indeed, photographs were taken of Avila against his will and an airbrush was used to erase the hand that Avila had raised to block the camera lens (Macintyre 2000).

Between Avila's initial publicity in late 1998 and Mandelson's second resignation in January 2001 (he first resigned from the Cabinet in December 1998 before being reinstated in October 1999), Avila managed to escape excessive, intrusive press attention; he was the subject of a few relatively positive articles and occasionally photographed (for example, the *Sunday Mirror* (30 April, 2000) photographed them in Venice and published an article headed 'JUST ONE PORTFOLIO; MANDY AND REINALDO SOAK UP BEAUTIFUL SIGHTS OF VENICE'). The coverage was not all good (for example, Littlejohn begun to question Avila's immigration status), although negative publicity was minimal. However, Mandelson's 2001 resignation seemed to open a floodgate; his fall from grace and the diminishment of his power meant that journalists felt free to write about his personal life with relish. In the majority of articles written about Mandelson at the time of his second resignation, Avila was mentioned and often pictured. This was not confined to the tabloids: broadsheet newspapers also referred to Avila, although they generally took a less intrusive tone. Many tabloid newspapers followed Littlejohn's lead and queried Avila's immigration status; the *Daily Star* (25 January, 2001) asked 'HAS YER BOYFRIEND GOT A PASSPORT MANDY?' and went on to state:

> As Peter Mandelson resigned AGAIN in disgrace, last night mystery surrounded the citizenship status of his gay Brazilian lover... key questions remain: Does Reinaldo, 28, have a British passport? If so, how did he qualify for it? And - crucially - did Peter Mandelson pull any strings on his behalf?

Although there has never been any proof that Avila is in Britain unfairly, the press claimed that their queries were legitimate because it was in theory possible that Avila (a Brazilian national until he received British citizenship in 2005) had only been allowed to stay in this country because of Mandelson's influence. However, other articles about Avila, both at the time of Mandelson's second resignation and after, cannot be considered to meet any public interest criteria at all; articles have been published about Avila's family, friends and past partners, details of where he studied, and allegations that he and Mandelson were on the verge of ending their relationship. The articles relate Mandelson and Avila's private relationship to Mandelson's public life. For example, Mandelson's appointment as a European Commissioner in 2004 prompted speculation on the effect that this would have on his relationship and whether he and Avila would have to take part in a civil partnership in order for Mandelson to receive a spouse allowance (*Sunday Telegraph*, MARRIAGE MAY PAY FOR MANDELSON, 1 August, 2004). His partner was also the focus of press attention in 2008, after Mandelson was made a Lord (Daily Mail, LIFE IS SWEET FOR 'MR AND MRS MANDELSON,' 4 October, 2008). While the partners of heterosexual MPs are of course the focus of much press attention, the focus on Avila post-Mandelson's 2001 resignation has been mostly negative (used to demonstrate a political point or to speculate on the state of Mandelson's private life) rather than constructive (*i.e.* using Avila to positively promote Mandelson's political career).

Avila's original Brazilian nationality further strengthened the characterisation of Mandelson as an exotic gay man. Indeed, twinned with this, journalists love to mention Mandelson's supposed love of designer clothes and furniture, his famous friends and his smart appearance (for example, *The Scotsman* (25 January, 2001) stated 'SMART-SUITED MACHIAVALLI WHO TRIED TO IMPRES ONE MILLIONAIRE TOO

MANY'). While Mandelson is not categorised as a 'dangerous' homosexual in the way that Proctor was in 1987, his younger partner (Avila is nineteen years younger than Mandelson) pushes him closer to that category than politicians without a (publicised) partner altogether, or with less 'glamorous' partners. Storr believes that coverage of Mandelson's sexuality in 1998 was 'gentle' and 'ambivalent' (2001: 118) and that his sexuality had entered the 'zone of privacy' noted above, but the fact that his sexuality made the front - or prominent pages - of every newspaper, and that Avila became the focus of intense press speculation, particularly after Mandelson's 2001 resignation, suggests that this is not the case at all. While Davies was explicitly presented as 'dangerous' due to the supposed 'abnormal' nature of his lifestyle, Mandelson's 'exoticness,' coupled with his refusal to officially 'come out' to the press, means that the press coverage of his sexuality has been mostly unfriendly (especially once the BBC published its infamous memo and it became clear that Mandelson would not say that he is gay). Davies and Mandelson's cases neatly show the acceptable/unacceptable divide; Mandelson's sexuality, while considered 'exotic,' was not seen as a bar to ministerial office, unlike Davies's illegal, and as far as the newspapers are concerned, immoral behaviour.

The manner in which Mandelson and Avila have sometimes been portrayed by sections of the tabloid press can be shown through an examination of a front-page article from *The Sun* (MANDY GAY LOVER SHOCK, 26 January, 2001). The article was written when Mandelson resigned his Government post in January 2001 over the Hinduja passport affair, when he was accused of helping the Hinduja brothers (Indian businessmen) to get British passports in return for sponsorship of the Millennium Dome.[73] The article continued inside the newspaper, with more pictures of Mandelson's

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[73] An official Government enquiry later found Mandelson not guilty, although much of the media implied that the enquiry was a 'whitewash.'

partner and more personal detail, such as where he and Mandelson met and the name and details of Avila's previous partner, Howell James. *The Sun* justifies this detail because James was in charge of the Hinduja's PR at the time of Mandelson's resignation. Indeed, in the form of an accompanying commentary the paper stated:

> Now we learn that Mandelson's Brazilian boyfriend had a two-year fling with the man who has just taken over the Hinduja PR operations... That probe must now be extended to include Howell James' links with ministers, if any.' (The Sun, FIND TRUTH BEFORE POLL, 26 January, 2001).

The public interest is thus presented as a reason for the article's publication; *The Sun* seemed to think that Avila had somehow compromised the political process (although it is never openly stated how) by being in a relationship with James before his relationship with Mandelson. While the article does not go as far as to explicitly state that Mandelson and Avila are outside the realm of civilized society, it is clear that *The Sun* tries to portray Mandelson and Avila's relationship as morally questionable and politically and sexually scandalous. The article tries to make their relationship appear more controversial than it actually is (there has never been any proof of wrongdoing on Avila's behalf) in order to punish Mandelson for his alleged political wrongdoings. The words 'toyboy,' 'fling,' 'affair' and 'gay lover' are used to sexualise Mandelson and Avila's relationship and to portray gay relationships as inconsequential. In terms of news values the article satisfies all of Galtung and Ruge's (1973) rules, mentioned above:

- The meaning of the event was quickly arrived at (1)

- The event was at the right threshold - *i.e.* it was worth reporting (2)

- The event was relatively simple to understand (3)

- The event was UK based (4)

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- Most of the media desired the chance to humiliate Mandelson (5)

- The event was unexpected (6)

- There was the chance to cover the story for a long time (7)

- The story was different to many other stories being covered at the time (8)

- Mandelson is from an elite nation (9)

- Mandelson is an elite person (10)

- The event was highly personalised (11)

- The event was a negative story (12).

Note that the article also fulfils Hartley's (1995) 'map' concept; in it society can be seen as:

- Fragmented (Mandelson is part of the political sphere)

- Hierarchical (Mandelson is an 'important' person)

- Consisting of individuals in charge of their own destiny (Mandelson is responsible for his own problems)

- Consensual (society is united - against the scandalous Mandelson!).

It is important to note that Mandelson would probably have received the same kind of press coverage if he had had a female partner who had had a relationship with the person responsible for the Hindujas' public relations operation. In this respect, there is almost sexual scandal 'equality.' I say almost, because I would contend that gay sexual scandal stories are inherently more 'scandalous' than heterosexual sexual scandal stories, for the simple fact that homosexuality is often portrayed by the (tabloid) press and thought of by the public (even in the twenty-first century) as unusual and even aberrant. Thus, the above article is not only newsworthy because of the suggestion of

political scandal; it is newsworthy because Mandelson's partner is male. The fact that Mandelson and Avila's privacy was invaded is not important, at least to *The Sun*: the story was newsworthy and was therefore published.

Pre-1998 Outings

As mentioned above, Mandelson had been 'outed' many times before 1998, although the press treated the 1998 'news' that he was gay as something previously unknown. This undoubtedly contributed to the fuss surrounding his 1998 'outing.' After all, if Mandelson had 'come out' as gay after his first 'outing' in 1987, then his homosexuality would have been old news. Of course, as stated above, there is no reason why Mandelson needed to 'come out' after any of his public 'outings,' or at all, especially as he has always been completely open in his private life and with his colleagues, and has never acted or voted hypocritically (see below for detail on his voting record). Plus, the press could still have made a fuss about his younger partner or particular aspects of his private life even if he had 'come out.' His previous 'outings' demonstrate the changing coverage of gay politicians. In 1987 the *News of the World* carried a front-page story about Mandelson's relationship (which ended in the late 1980s) with Peter Ashby and Ashby's child, who they were both helping to raise. At the time Mandelson was the Labour Party's Director of Communications. In relation to this, the front-page stated 'KINNOCK'S NO 1 MAN IN GAY SENSATION,' followed by 'MY LOVE FOR GAY LABOUR BOSS' on pages two and three (16 May, 1987). The language used was designed to damage Mandelson's reputation and career; Kay Carbery, the mother of Ashby's child, was questioned on their relationship and stated (presumably in response to a question asked by the paper):

I'm not worried about Joe catching AIDS off them. After all, they have a long, stable relationship and are unlikely to catch the disease. (*News of the World* 1987 cited Routledge 1999: 99).

The link to AIDS was designed to characterise Mandelson as 'other' and suggested that Mandelson and homosexuality as a whole were dangers to heterosexual family life and children in particular; he was 'dirty' (a binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10). The paper went on to state in a leader column:

Pity Kinnock, too, over our exclusive revelation today about the life-style of his right-hand man. Publicly, Kinnock tries to distance himself from the loonies and the gays. Can he not see that proximity to the likes of Peter Mandelson is bound to bring embarrassment? (*News of the World* 1987 cited Routledge 1999: 100).

Mandelson was thus characterised as a threat to all that was 'normal,' and grouped in the same category as the 'loony Left,' echoing the coverage received by Tatchell in 1983. As a backroom assistant, there was absolutely no public interest reason for Mandelson's sexuality or his relationship to be written about; because he was not yet an MP, the press could not even claim to be informing constituents about the person representing them, a weak justification at the best of times. Mandelson's next 'outing' came in 1995 when Mandelson, Ashby and Ashby's son were mentioned in a political autobiography. In response to the autobiography, *The Sun* wrote 'TOP BLAIR WHIP IS "OUTED" BY GOULD,' with a sub-headline noting that Mandelson 'IS GAY' (*The Sun* 1995 cited Routledge 1999: 107). The paper actually condemned the mentioning of Mandelson's personal life in the autobiography, thus managing to highlight Mandelson's homosexuality while pretending to condemn the practice of 'outing.' Rather hypocritical, considering Mandelson was first 'outed' by *The Sun's* sister paper the *News of the World*. Other journalists from 1995 to 1998 mentioned Mandelson's homosexuality, although the stories were few and far between; in May 1998 the *London Evening Standard* stated 'he is gay' in an article about Mandelson (WHY WE

SHOULD LEARN TO LOVE PETER, 6 May, 1998). It was as if the previous 'outings' had never happened; Mandelson's lack of candour meant that the press could represent his homosexuality as 'scandalous' news. After all, it was extremely unlikely that readers would remember that Mandelson is gay, or even who he was.

Popularity

Of course, it must be borne in mind that Mandelson's sexuality is of interest to the press for reasons other than his fame, his power, the fact that he has not officially 'come out' and the issue's newsworthiness. Indeed, for much of his career Mandelson has been unpopular with his colleagues and many journalists, much of the unpopularity stemming from his dealings with the press when he was Labour's Director of Communications (see Macintyre 2000). Thus, unlike Twigg, Bradshaw *et. al.*, the press has always been inclined to write negative stories about him. It may be the case that the negativity surrounding Mandelson's sexuality is thus influenced by his unpopularity (*i.e.* it can be used to score points against him) rather than his actual sexuality being the focus of the papers' detestation. As Summerskill notes:

> I do think if you have a frosty relationship with the media then they are more likely to make fun of that. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

And Twigg states:

> There will always be a sense that how a politician is regarded, either by the public, by their own colleagues within their party or the rest of Parliament, will in any circumstance have an impact if something goes wrong. If someone's a popular politician, there are things people will kind of say, oh well so what, whereas for another politician who's less popular, then that's going to be far less the case. (Private interview, 18 July, 2006).

It is certainly not the case that Mandelson's voting record gives just cause for negative press surrounding his sexuality: his voting record on gay rights is strong.[74] Mandelson is in a strange position; he does not hide his sexuality, yet because he has not said those three words - 'I am gay' - the press treats him as not being fully 'out.' Mandelson himself seems happy with this situation; he has had numerous opportunities to say that he is gay and has so far refused and, as noted earlier in the sub-section, has tried to stop numerous stories about his sexuality becoming public. Mandelson's negative press coverage demonstrates that politicians who are 'out' are much better able to manage (or 'spin') their press coverage than ones who are 'in' (even if they are 'in' only in the minds of the media). Indeed, politicians themselves are aware of the binary themes in play, even if they have not identified them in such an explicit way as this thesis.

Active Sexuality

The public seemed relatively blasé about Mandelson's sexuality. Indeed, opinion polls carried out in 1998 suggested that the public did not care about gay MPs; as Storr (2001) notes, a self-selecting telephone poll in the *Daily Mirror* found that approximately two-thirds of its readers did not want to know about the sexuality of their MPs (*Daily Mirror*, A VOTE FOR TOLERANCE; YOU DECIDE 3-2 AGAINST KNOWING MPS' SEXUALITY IN RECORD MIRROR POLL, 11 November, 1998). However, the opinion polls also revealed that there was more opposition to the lowering of the age of consent for gay men, suggesting that the public is less tolerant of gay sex acts ('active' homosexuality) than homosexuality in itself (Storr 2001). Indeed, a *Guardian* opinion poll (run by ICM) found that only 26% of people were for the

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[74] For example, he voted in the following key debates: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Age at which Homosexual Acts are Lawful); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 325) 10 February 1999 (Sexual Offences Amendment Bill); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 314) 22 June 1998 (Crime and Disorder Bill [Lords] - Reduction in Age at which certain Sexual Acts are Lawful).

lowering of the age of consent, as opposed to 69% against (10 November, 2008). This may be why Davies was so roundly condemned: his sexuality was active and overt. Storr (2001: 122) believes that this backs up Mandelson's decision to not 'come out' as gay:

> In insisting that they 'did not want to know' about the sexuality of MPs, respondents to the opinion polls effectively endorsed the strategy adopted by Mandelson and perhaps even Davies, both of whom steadfastly refused throughout the allegations in October and November 1998 to come out as gay or bisexual.

It certainly suggests that to succeed politically gay MPs need to push their 'active' sexuality to one side. Thus, MPs should not hide or lie about their sexuality, but they should not be seen as being sexually active either (*i.e.* they should not cross the acceptability threshold of Frame 2, Figure 1.10). Ultimately, Mandelson's refusal to 'come out' did not affect his actual political career; his ministerial career floundered due to alleged personal financial impropriety and suggestions that he speeded up a passport application, rather than any kind of sexual scandal. It has however left the press unsatisfied. By refusing to say 'I am gay,' stories about his sexuality continue, as does his negative mediated persona.

4.2.4   The Arrival of the 'Gay Mafia': 'Outings' and the Murdoch Tabloid Press

A Forced Confession

The intense focus on gay politicians in late-1998 continued when Nick Brown was 'outed' just a few days after Mandelson. An ex-partner of Brown's, who was in his mid-twenties, tried to sell a story to the *News of the World* in which he alleged that Brown paid him for sex on numerous occasions. Brown pre-empted the 'kiss and tell' story and instead 'came out' to the newspaper, revealing that while the relationship did take place,

he never paid the man for sex. The front-page of the *News of the World* declared

'MINISTER CONFESSES GAY FLING TO BLAIR; EXCLUSIVE,' and went on to

state:

> Nick Brown's 2-year affair. Prime Minister is standing by him. It follows lover's kiss'n'tell threat. (*News of the World*, MINISTER CONFESSES GAY FLING TO BLAIR; EXCLUSIVE, 8 November, 1998).

The newspaper aimed to present Brown's 'confession' and his sexuality as

'scandalous.' The words 'fling,' 'affair' and 'kiss'n'tell' suggest that the relationship

was frivolous, although a two-year relationship seems anything but inconsequential.

The word 'confesses' suggests that Brown was living a surreptitious life, a theme

expanded on by the newspaper:

> Mr Brown, who is agriculture minister and was formerly Chief Whip, decided to make his admission to put an end to the rumour mill about his private life at Westminster. Commons insiders say he has been tormented all week over his secret life. The man has made a series of lurid and fanciful allegations which Mr Brown totally denies and which the News of the World has not been able to substantiate in any way. (*News of the World*, I AM DEEPLY EMBARRASSED ABOUT THIS; EXCLUSIVE, 8 November, 1998).

The above passage begs the question, if the allegations were so 'fanciful,' why did the

newspaper force Brown to 'come out'? Although the original article can be classed as

reporting rather than manufacturing because the paper was reacting to a 'kiss and tell,'

there were certainly no valid public interest criteria applicable; the article would only be

justified under the PCC's Code of practice if it was 'detecting or exposing crime or

serious impropriety' (PCC 2007), and if the allegations were 'fanciful,' than this was

not the case. The use of the words 'secret life' help to categorise Brown as duplicitous

and homosexuality as something to be ashamed of. It does not seem to occur to the

News of the World that, like Mandelson, Brown was 'out' to many people in his private life.

Tabloid and Broadsheet Approaches

Other newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet, were supportive of Brown, although as Storr (2001) notes, there was some interest in the allegations of sex for sale. Although they did not withhold the details of the story, broadsheet newspapers reported Brown's embarrassment in a straightforward and non-sensational manner (for example, *The Times* (10 November, 1998) said 'BROWN TAKES NO ACTION OVER 'OUTING''). Tabloid newspapers covered the *News of the World's* story in all its detail, although the vast majority refrained from using homophobic terms. However, as one might expect, the *Daily Mail*, a Conservative supporting newspaper, took the opportunity to criticise the Labour Government and homosexuality as a whole, suggesting that the 'emergence' of another gay MP somehow impinged upon family values:

> Like white rabbits from a conjurer's hat, gay Ministers continue to materialize from this New Labour Government before the bemused gaze of the public. Metropolitan commentators may smile indulgently, but many of the great mass of voters, who put their trust in New Labour with its reassuring espousal of family values, may take a less relaxing view. (*Daily Mail,* DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION, 9 November, 1998).

The *Daily Mirror*, in its support of Brown, highlighted the fact that homosexuals who are 'militant,' who engage in 'dangerous sex,' or who are 'bad' rather than 'good' (binaries of Frame 3, Figure 1.10) are not acceptable public figures:

> *The Mirror* has no sympathy at all with militant gays who want to 'out' those who would rather keep their situation to themselves... His [Brown's] situation is very different from that of Ron Davies... He [Davies] had to get out because he was trawling the park for sex, apparently lied to the police and still refuses to be honest about what he was up to. (*Daily Mirror,* VOICE OF THE MIRROR: JUDGE HIM ON MERIT, NOT ON HIS SEXUALITY, 9 November, 1998).

Unlike Davies, Brown had 'come out' straight away when questioned about his sexuality, and allegations of illegality, while of interest, were unfounded. Furthermore, in contrast to Mandelson (who was very unpopular in much of the press), the press had no particular axe to grind against Brown. Brown's response to the article - total honesty and obvious embarrassment - also counted in his favour; he was very upset by the *News of the World's* story and other politicians and journalists responded to that.

Although the majority of the tabloid press was respectful of Brown, one newspaper misread the public, political and journalistic mood. *The Sun*, sister paper of the *News of the World*, claimed on its front-page 'Are we being run by a gay Mafia?' (*The Sun*, TELL US THE TRUTH TONY, 9 November, 1998). The newspaper went on to state:

> his [Blair's] Government is going to get itself into MASSIVE trouble if it doesn't tell us the whole truth. Is Britain being run by a gay Mafia of politicians, lawyers, Palace courtiers and TV bigwigs? The revelation that a FOURTH member of the Blair Cabinet, Nick Brown, is gay has set alarms ringing. Not because people despise gays, or fear them, or wish to pillory them, but the public has a right to know how many homosexuals occupy positions of high power. Their sexuality is not the problem. The worry is their membership of a closed world of men with a mutual self-interest.

The Sun also asked gay MPs, 'SO YOU WANT TO COME OUT? COME ON' and enquired:

> Are you a gay MP who'd like to come out? The Sun has set up a hotline on 0171 782 4105 for ministers and MPs who are secretly homosexual. Don't worry about the cost, we'll ring you back. (The Sun, SO YOU WANT TO COME OUT? COME ON, 9 November, 1998).

The idea of hidden self-interest was also used against Mandelson in relation to his political position and the favours he could possibly do his partner, and was roundly condemned by other newspapers, as was the idea that gay MPs were a figure of

legitimate fun, epitomised by the above quote. Indeed, *The Independent* (13 November, 1998) stated:

> YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT UP; THE SUN SAYS: 'HANDS OFF OUR GAYS.' THEN IT SAYS: 'IS THERE A GAY MAFIA?' IS DAVID YELLAND THE MOST VOLATILE TABLOID EDITOR IN BRITAIN? WE THINK YOU SHOULD BE TOLD.

The Guardian exclaimed:

> SQUIRMING SUN SETS RECORD STRAIGHT IN FURORE OVER GAYS; WILL WOODWARD ON A FAMOUSLY FEARLESS TABLOID IN FULL RETREAT FROM HOMOPHOBIA AS POLLS SHOW IT OUT OF STEP WITH POPULAR MOOD. (14 November, 1998).

The Sun was actually forced to apologise for the articles and made it known that gay men and women would never again be 'outed' unless there was overwhelming public interest in the story. However, as shown in relation to Clive Betts's (Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe 1992-) press coverage, explored below, *The Sun* did not keep its promise. The then editor of *The Sun*, David Yelland, went on to state:

> I had been at a think tank in Dublin; came back on Sunday about 4pm and we didn't have a splash. I was talked into running this leader. I'm not blaming anybody, because the decision was my responsibility. But I learned fairly quickly that the buck really did stop with the editor and you have to be strong enough to resist people around you. (*The Guardian*, WAPPING TALES, 14 June, 2004).

The notion of using private lives as a 'splash' emphasises that the newspaper approached 'outings' in an impersonal and business-like manner; the private lives of gay (and heterosexual) politicians could be invaded if a 'good story' was in the offing.

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Brown was backed by Blair and other political parties did not make capital out of his misfortune either. The political establishment's acceptance of Brown mirrored the public's growing acceptance of homosexuality. Indeed, as noted above, the self-selecting telephone poll carried out by the *Daily Mirror* after Brown's 'outing' indicated that the majority of its readers (three to two) did not want to know whether their MP was gay, and the opinion poll (also mentioned above) commissioned by *The Guardian* and run by ICM (before Brown's 'outing') found 52% of interviewees thought that being openly gay was compatible with being in the Cabinet, compared to 33% who considered it incompatible (10 November, 2008). Storr notes that Brown received public support despite the fact that he had no known partner, suggesting:

> not only are monogamous gay couples entering the 'dead' zone of privacy, but other forms of 'bad' sexuality may also be 'dying' - in declaring that they 'do not want to know' about their MPs' sexuality, for example *Mirror* readers could be seen as resituating all of their MPs, heterosexual or otherwise, in the abstract realm of the 'dead' sexuality rather than the corporealized realm of the 'live.' (Storr 2001: 121).

While this may be the case for the public, it does not appear to always be the case for the press; Mandelson, a gay politician with a long-term partner, has had his privacy invaded more than any other gay politician in recent times. As stated above, for a gay politician's sexuality to be of no interest to the press, conditions have to be met: Mandelson did not meet them.

Binary Themes

The case studies so far suggest that Brown's political (and public) acceptance would have been less forthcoming if he had lied about his sexuality or about the way he lived his life, and/or been hypocritical. Indeed, while Brown was not known as a gay rights

campaigner, he had a strong voting record on gay rights, even when he was a minister.[75]

In relation to the binary themes of Frame 3, Figure 1.10, Brown's swift acknowledgement of his homosexuality pushed his press representation towards the 'good,' unlike Davies, whose refusal to 'come out' made him 'bad.' Brown was in danger of being categorised as a 'dangerous' gay man, due to the rent boy allegations, but he managed to escape this as a result of his swift admission, the lack of proof and the support he had from large sections of the press (particularly as a result of *The Sun's* mistake). The safe/dangerous and good/bad divides were further highlighted when other gay politicians were 'outed' in the late-1990s and early 2000s. While homosexuality as a whole became more acceptable, active homosexuality continued to be presented as unacceptable and a threat to 'normal' family values - an 'invasion' of heterosexual public space/life (Frame 2, Figure 1.10), and a sign that whole recognition had not been achieved, even if gay MPs were by now generally accepted.

4.2.5 *Making it Public: Alan Duncan, the Conservative Party and Leadership Ambitions*

A New Conservative Attitude?

In mid-2002, after deciding that he should no longer have to hide his homosexuality, Alan Duncan (MP for Rutland and Melton 1992-) became the first serving Conservative MP to voluntarily 'come out' as gay. The reaction of the press - tabloid and broadsheet newspapers from both sides of the political divide - was very positive; virtually every newspaper reported the story in a straightforward and non-judgemental

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[75] For example, he voted in the following key debates: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Age at which Homosexual Acts are Lawful); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 325) 10 February 1999 (Sexual Offences Amendment Bill); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 314) 22 June 1998 (Crime and Disorder Bill [Lords] - Reduction in Age at which certain Sexual Acts are Lawful).

manner (the main news pages at least, as opposed to the more independent columnists), the broadsheets in particular. Indeed, the broadsheets used Duncan's 'outing' to discuss wider issues such as the Conservative Party and homosexuality, *e.g.* how Party members would react to Duncan's announcement (for example, *The Times* (29 July, 2002) noted 'SENIOR TORY'S GAY REVELATION TO TEST PARTY'). This could be seen as evidence that recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) was edging closer. Indeed, many broadsheet newspapers saw Duncan's proclamation as proof of a newfound *public* tolerance in the Conservative Party (*i.e.* 'keeping it private' was no longer necessary). Certainly, the Conservative Party hierarchy praised Duncan for 'coming out,' both publicly and privately; Iain Duncan Smith, (MP for Chingford 1992-1997 and Chingford and Woodford 1997- and Conservative leader 2001-2003), praised Duncan's honesty and offered his 'personal support' (*London Evening Standard*, COMING OUT EARNS ALAN DUNCAN SUPPORT OF LEADER AND JOB HINT, 29 July, 2002). Of course, some Party members were unhappy about Duncan's announcement, but they were not excessively vocal; those members that were outspoken tended to take issue with Duncan speaking publicly about his homosexuality, rather than his homosexuality *per se* (suggesting that for the more the traditional Conservative members, 'keeping it private' was still important). As Norman Tebbit (MP for Epping 1970-1974 and Chingford 1974-1992) wrote:

> The great mass of us have no desire to emulate Mr Duncan's activities under his duvet; we do not think it our business exactly what he does do there; we do not wish to join in; we just wish profoundly that he would not bore us with his sexual problems. We would prefer him to get on with finding answers to our problems of healthcare, crime, pensions, excessive taxation, uncontrolled mass immigration, traffic congestion, lousy schools, environmental pollution and more. (*The Spectator*, WHO CARES WHAT ALAN DUNCAN DOES UNDER HIS DUVET? WHAT THE TORIES NEED IS POLITICAL CLOUT, 3 August, 2002).

Parris, writing in *The Times*, stated that Duncan's political and press acceptance proved that this response was losing resonance:

> that he [Duncan] was able as a frontbencher even to contemplate such honesty speaks volumes about the [Party's] change. For Tories, the changed approach has not been to homosexuality, but to openness. Homosexuality has never been a problem for top Tories - any more than adultery... But there was a code among us, and it was understood: 'Not in front of the constituents.' So you didn't campaign for reform of the law, you didn't advocate social change in public and you didn't talk about yourself. (*The Times*, NOT IN FRONT OF THE VOTERS, 30 July, 2002 b).

It should be noted that there were one or two examples of tabloid press insensitivity in the reporting of Duncan's declaration. Indeed, the *Daily Star* used Duncan's 'self-outing' to urge all gay politicians to 'come out,' and for politicians in general to be more honest about their private lives. The paper stated in a leader article headed 'A GAY TORY SHOWS WAY':

> Should we care that a politician is gay?... But politicians are always sticking their noses into OUR private lives. They constantly bang on about whether we should get married, how old we must be to have sex, and who we can have that sex with. So it's only fair to know where they're coming from when they get all high and mighty. MPs have to state financial interests - why not personal interest too? Make them state if they're gay, having an affair, on their third wife, trapped in a loveless relationship or into a bit of bondage. (30 July, 2002).

According to the *Daily Star*, politicians should not only be judged on their politics, they should also be judged on the way they live their lives in order to expose hypocrisy and the possibility of hidden interest. As discussed previously, Seaton (2003) notes that one of the media's defences is that democracy depends on the scrutiny of public power and how it can be used to further private ends. While this may be the case in theory, in practice the press often goes further than it should (in relation to PCC criteria), as this chapter has shown. Interestingly, the above quote from the *Daily Star* equates homosexuality with other apparent 'immoral' activities such as extramarital sex, thus

suggesting that homosexuality as a whole is morally wrong. However, while troubling, this type of comment was not common and should not be seen as representative of the (tabloid) press as a whole.

Indeed, in 2008 Duncan announced that he was having a civil partnership ceremony with his male partner. The press reaction - tabloid and broadsheet - to his announcement, and the ceremony itself, was very upbeat; the events were either not covered at all, or if they were, the coverage was very positive, without the use of negative binary themes or stereotyping (indeed, Duncan's civil partnership emphasised his positive mediated persona). As *The Sun* put it, 'TRUE BLUE LOVE TORY' (26 July, 2008). In fact, Duncan was interviewed in *The Sunday Times* (MY BIG FAT GAY TORY WEDDING, 9 March, 2008) and *The Daily Telegraph* ('I'M AN MP WHO HAPPENS TO BE GAY' ALAN DUNCAN IS THE FIRST LEADING TORY TO ENTER INTO A CIVIL PARTNERSHIP. HE TELLS NEIL TWEEDIE HOW IT CAME ABOUT, 5 March, 2008) about the forthcoming ceremony. Both interviews took the opportunity to discuss wider issues such as the Conservative Party and gay rights, but otherwise were very straightforward.

Kissing and Telling

The biggest disappointment for Duncan in relation to his press coverage was a 'kiss and tell' story in *The Mail on Sunday* a few days after the original story broke. In an article headed 'MY SECRET GAY KISSES AND CUDDLES WITH ALAN DUNCAN IN COMMONS' (4 August, 2002), an ex-partner of Duncan's expanded on their relationship and declared:

> I suppose I was surprised when he cuddled me in the kitchen and, after going upstairs to show me the rest of the house, we ended up in bed. I'm quite a shy

and considered person and I don't usually take things so fast. But Alan is not backward in coming forward and I didn't reject his advances. (*The Mail on Sunday*, MY SECRET GAY KISSES AND CUDDLES WITH ALAN DUNCAN IN COMMONS, 4 August, 2002).

This article was not in the public interest at all, although it can be classified as reportage rather than manufacturing (like most of the articles on Duncan's sexuality), because the paper was reacting to someone's decision to sell their story. The article categorised Duncan as a seductive, sexually active gay man who would not commit to a younger partner portrayed as 'betrayed,' 'bitter' and 'seduced.' Duncan's categorisation as a 'predatory' gay man further emphasised the idea that gay relationships are entirely about sex, and the notion that all gay men want to seduce younger men (a notion expanded upon by Sanderson 1995). As with Mandelson, the presence of 'a young gay lover half his [Duncan's] age' (The Mail on Sunday, MY SECRET GAY KISSES AND CUDDLES WITH ALAN DUNCAN IN COMMONS, 4 August, 2002) added to the article's sensationalism. However, unlike Mandelson whose representation leans towards the 'bad' (due to his refusal to 'officially' 'come out' as a gay man and be open to the press), Duncan can be considered a 'good' gay MP; he may have once been 'in' (to the press), but his later openness actually negates this (binary themes of Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Duncan's status as the first openly gay Conservative Member of Parliament, and the lack of real sexual scandal surrounding his 'outing' (after all, the 'kiss and tell' did not reveal anything particularly shocking, just the details of a rather ordinary relationship), also makes Duncan a 'good' gay MP.

There was a distinct lack of gossip about Duncan's sexuality before his 'outing,' meaning that the press did not approach his private life in a hysterical, fervent manner. The fact that Duncan 'came out' voluntarily was also a factor in his relatively positive

press coverage. As Summerskill has stated, and as this thesis has expanded on, 'self-outing' generally leads to a better press coverage:

> I think nowadays that's probably true, so someone like Alan Duncan who just said he was gay and said that's that, certainly received more positive and sympathetic coverage than Michael Brown, who a decade or so ago was outed by virtue of going on holiday with a young man. [However] Some of that may just be the passage of time. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Duncan's predominantly positive press coverage (most newspapers did not follow up the 'kiss and tell' story) was also a consequence of his political acceptability; Duncan was not particularly controversial (although he was involved in a minor financial scandal in 1994) or hypocritical, and was in fact one of the few Conservative MPs to vote to lower the age of consent for gay men to sixteen in 1994,[76] and a regular speaker in House of Commons debates on gay issues. Duncan did, however, give in to the Party whip in relation to the Adoption and Children Bill. In 2001 and 2002 Duncan voted with his party and thus technically against gay rights (the Conservatives were attempting to prevent unmarried couples, heterosexual and gay, from adopting children).[77] Of course, Duncan could claim that the vote was less about letting gay couples adopt, than about letting *unmarried* couples adopt (something claimed by the Conservative Party leadership). However, Duncan's true feelings are perhaps revealed by the fact he was absent for another vote on the Adoption and Children Bill in 2002,[78] thus managing to avoid voting once more in an anti-gay rights way.

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[76] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).
[77] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 373) 29 October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill - Consideration and Third Reading); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 386) 20 May 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - General Interpretation etc).
[78] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 392) 4 November 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - Suitability of Adopters).

Duncan's Political Ambitions

Moving on to the consequences of Duncan's 'self-outing,' although it was predominantly well received, it appears to have had an impact on his political ambitions. Indeed, in 2005 Duncan considered standing for the leadership of the Conservative Party - a result of Michael Howard's (Conservative MP for Folkestone and Hythe 1983- and Conservative leader 2003-2005) decision to stand down as Party leader - but quickly pulled out of the race once he realised he did not have the political or media support that he needed. While Duncan was never a serious candidate when compared to a politician like Cameron, his homosexuality appears to have affected his support. Indeed, in an article in which he announced his decision to withdraw from the leadership race, Duncan hinted that this was so:

> Our achilles *[sic]* heel, though, has been our social attitude. Censorious judgmentalism from the moralising wing, which treats half our own countrymen as enemies, must be rooted out. We should take JS Mill as our lodestar, and allow people to live as they choose until they actually harm someone. If the Tory Taliban can't get that, they'll condemn us all to oblivion. Thank heavens for the new intake of MPs who do. (*The Guardian*, THE TORY TABLIBAN MUST BE ROOTED OUT: THE CONSERVATIVES NEED A LEADER WHO CAN MODERNISE THE PARTY AND TACKLE ITS MORALISING WING: IT WON'T BE ME, 18 July, 2005).

While his comment should not be seen as representative of the tabloid media, Paul Routledge in the *Daily Mirror* responded to Duncan's decision by saying that he had 'flounced out' (*Daily Mirror*, VOTE IS SUCH BAD NOSE FOR DAVIS, 22 July, 2005) of the leadership race, thus undermining Duncan's political status, effeminising him, and resorting to a gay stereotype. Parris's claim that 'there has been a change in the stratosphere among Conservatives' (*The Times*, NOT IN FRONT OF THE VOTERS, 30 July, 2002) seems overly optimistic; while Duncan was able to 'come out,' a gay Conservative Party leader (and possibly Labour leader as well) seems unlikely for the foreseeable future; whole recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10) has not been achieved.

Indeed, Michael Portillo's 1999 admission of 'homosexual experiences as a young person' not only affected his standing in the Conservative Party, it also damaged his leadership ambitions (particularly when combined with his contentious pre-1997 politics and his controversial shift to the Left post-1997; all of these things combined served to portray Portillo as an opportunist, someone who would change his politics and outlook simply to achieve power). Rumours that Portillo was gay or bisexual had been circulating for years (as noted above in relation to Twigg), but had never been proved, making Portillo's disclosure a big news story even though he was in a seemingly happy, long-term marriage, and did not actually admit that he was gay. The press reaction to his 'outing' was initially positive, following on from the good reaction to the 'self-outings' of Twigg *et. al.*, although many of the tabloid newspapers related Portillo's 'experiences' directly to gay sex (even though he never actually admitted to having sex with anyone). For example, the *Daily Mirror* headlined an article 'PORTILLO: I HAD GAY SEX' (9 September, 1999).

The acceptance and support of some newspapers seemed to be dependent on the fact that Portillo's homosexual experiences were apparently rooted in the past. However, the news that Portillo's gay experiences may have continued once he left university - an ex-partner claimed their relationship lasted for eight years, after meeting at university (*Mail on Sunday*, PORTILLO'S FORMER HOMOSEXUAL LOVER TELLS OF THEIR EIGHT-YEAR AFFAIR, 12 September, 1999) - damaged his acceptance. The revelation that two ex-partners had AIDS (both men actually died soon after they made their revelations) also damaged him; the Dail*y Mirror* (PORTILLO'S GAY EX HAS AIDS, 31 October, 1999) noted 'Mr Portillo will be very embarrassed by the revelation.' Through the link with HIV/AIDS, some tabloid newspapers classified Portillo as a 'dangerous' allegedly gay MP (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Much of the press

seemed unwilling to accept that Portillo's marriage was a happy one, and that his wife was aware of and accepting of his past gay relationships (the *News of the World* (12 September, 1999) reported 'HE CHEATED WITH MAN'), indicating the narrow view of the family present in some sections of the press.

Portillo's gay past was used against him when he stood for the Conservative Party leadership in 2001; his disclosure, plus the fact that he and his wife do not (actually, cannot) have any children, was used to suggest that he was not quite right for the post. In fact, Portillo's 'childless' status was used as a coded reference to his past homosexual experiences. In an article headed 'WHAT FAMILY LIFE HAS TAUGHT THE MAN WHO WANTS TO BE THE TORIES' TONY BLAIR,' Iain Duncan Smith, Portillo's competitor and the eventual winner of the leadership contest, explained how family life has shaped his views. The author of the article noted:

> He [Duncan Smith] was born in Scotland, went to a private school, is sporty, had no interest in politics in his youth, has two sons and two daughters, a stable marriage, family connections with the stage and a lifelong passion for Italy. It could almost be a description of the qualities that helped to propel Tony Blair into Downing Street. And it is also a description of the man who hopes to defeat him as the next election. (*Daily Mail*, WHAT FAMILY LIFE HAS TAUGHT THE MAN WHO WANTS TO BE THE TORIES' TONY BLAIR, 15 July, 2001).

The references to family life and children in this article are used to suggest that the heterosexual Duncan Smith has the qualities needed to be a successful political leader. Indeed, the comparison with Blair, a seemingly happily married father of four, further strengthened the notion that fatherhood equals superior leadership. As with Blair, Duncan Smith's 'family man' image is not the reason he succeeded; however, it can be seen as giving him an extra edge, helping to make him a more attractive candidate in the eyes of a newspaper like the *Daily Mail*. Parris has noted that while he does not believe

that a focus on the family negatively affects the political process, in relation to this 'We like to see our leaders as fully-rounded human beings' (Private interview, 9 December, 2005). It could be argued that this *does* negatively affect the political process: can a gay MP (or indeed a heterosexual MP) without children fully compete on the 'family-friendly' playing field? Of course, it may be that politicians give too much stock to the importance of presenting a 'family friendly' image; Summerskill states, 'There is a focus on the family and in some ways you can't blame them for doing that,' but:

> I'm genuinely not convinced that the vast majority of people at home really buy into I'll vote for him because he's a family man. I think they do buy into I'll vote for someone because he's a nice bloke, or I wouldn't mind sitting next to her in a pub... (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Of course, it must also be borne in mind that Portillo's lack of success (by only one vote) was also related to the fact that he was a fairly unpopular politician. Indeed, not only did his party think that he had latterly become too liberal, many gay rights campaigners, thought that his previous Right-wing views and anti-gay votes and speeches (*e.g.* when Defence Secretary he supported the policy that gay people should be banned from serving in the Armed Forces) made him a hypocrite. As the *Daily Record* (PORTILLO ON WAY BACK WITH EURO WARNING, 3 November, 1999) notes, when he stood for re-election in 1999, protesters, including Tatchell, demonstrated outside the election count, citing his hypocrisy as the reason. Indeed, the majority of his pre-1997 votes on gay rights (when the Conservative Party was in power) were against liberalisation.[79] Even post-1997, when Portillo had apparently become more liberal, he was absent for a surprisingly high number of votes on gay

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[79] For example: Hansard House of Commons debates (vol 129) 9 March 1988 (Local Government Bill - Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality by Teaching or by Publishing Material); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to).

rights.[80] Of course, like Duncan, he may have been absent in order to avoid having to choose between voting either with his party or for gay rights when, for example, the Party instructed its MPs to vote against liberalisation.

However, Portillo was prepared to vote against gay rights post-1997 (*e.g.* 2000's Local Government Bill [Lords] - Prohibition on Promotion of Homosexuality: Bullying, when he voted with his party).[81] And, he was also willing to vote against his party if needed (*e.g.* 2002's Adoption and Children Bill - Suitability of Adopters, when he voted against the Party whip and even spoke out against the wisdom of it in the preceding House of Commons debate).[82] Portillo's somewhat confused voting pattern (and to some extent Duncan's) is symptomatic of the Conservative Party's confused position on gay rights, particularly in the past. The Labour Party does not suffer this confusion; a pro-gay position is currently expected of the Party (by the vast majority of MPs and Party members), and gay MPs are supported, even when they embarrass their party.

4.2.6   The Threat of Overt Sexuality: Clive Betts, Chris Bryant and Risks to Security

Clive Betts

The last gay MP to be 'outed' by the press in this period was Clive Betts in early 2003. Betts was forced to 'come out' by *The Sun* after the newspaper became aware of his relationship with an alleged part-time rent-boy from Brazil who he also employed in his

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[80] For example: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 373) 29 October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill - Consideration and Third Reading); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 386) 20 May 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - General Interpretation etc); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 401) 10 March 2003 (Local Government Bill - Repeal of Section 2A of Local Government Act 1986) (divisions 108 and 109).
[81] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 253) 5 July 2000 (Local Government Bill [Lords] - Prohibition of Promotion of Homosexuality: Bullying).
[82] Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 392) 4 November 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - Suitability of Adopters).

Commons office. In a front-page article headed 'GAY MP AND THE RENT BOY;
SECURITY SCANDAL' (26 February, 2003) the newspaper claimed:

> A top Labour MP has hired a Brazilian rent boy to work in the House of
> Commons. Smitten Clive Betts, 53, employed lover Jose Gasparo, 20, as a
> research assistant. But the move has sparked major security fears because Betts
> met the man just two months ago when he worked in a seedy escort agency in
> London... Betts now wants Gasparo to get a Commons pass - but security chiefs
> fear the rent boy could pass on sensitive information to other clients. (*The Sun*,
> GAY MP AND THE RENT BOY; SECURITY SCANDAL, 26 February,
> 2003).

Betts's press coverage is very important because it is often suggested that homosexuals
are a particular risk to security. Indeed, Herek (1990) notes (in relation to US
Government security clearances) that there are three frequently raised objections to
granting gay people security clearance:

- Gay people are more likely than heterosexual people to have psychological
  problems

- Gay people are more susceptible to being blackmailed

- Gay people are less likely to be trustworthy and rule abiding.

Thus, as a gay man, Gasparo was deemed particularly risky, especially given the fact
that he purportedly worked in the sex industry.

When writing about the 'massage parlour' Gasparo allegedly worked at, *The Sun* used
the words 'seedy,' 'sordid,' 'reeking' and 'sweat' (*The Sun*, SEX FOR SALE AT
SORDID PARLOUR, 26 February, 2003). While similar words are used in relation to
heterosexual sexual scandals (particularly those involving prostitutes), their use here -
alongside 'rent boys,' 'gay escort and 'half-naked men' - highlight the 'dirtiness' of
Betts's homosexuality (clean/dirty being a binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Other

male sex workers are referred to as 'boys,' thus suggesting a subtle link between homosexuality and paedophilia (a link noted by Sanderson 1995). *The Sun's* press coverage was in typical tabloid style, illustrating that the newspaper now reported heterosexual and homosexual sexual scandals in a very similar manner. Indeed, as one example, the above article even declared that the reporter visiting the parlour 'made his excuses and left' (*The Sun*, SEX FOR SALE AT SORDID PARLOUR, 26 February, 2003) when offered sexual services, a well-used heterosexual 'kiss and tell' phrase (as just one of many examples, a reporter for *The Sunday People* 'made his excuses and left' when investigating a council worker who also worked as a prostitute (HARLOT OF NOISE, 13 January, 2008)). To use another binary theme of Frame 3, Figure 1.10, *The Sun* categorised Betts as a 'dangerous' gay MP; the link to prostitution and massage parlours ensured that his sexuality could not be considered 'acceptable' (in heterosexual public space – Frame 2, Figure 1.10 – or indeed in any space).

Tabloid and Broadsheet Approaches

Betts's public acknowledgment of his homosexuality may have meant that the press could now define him (and thus itself in opposition to him), but Betts's lack of previous candour, the allegations surrounding prostitution, and the fact that the admission was forced, counteracts this, making him far from a 'good' gay MP in *The Sun's* eyes (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Other tabloid newspapers of course covered the story, although with less zeal than *The Sun*. Many echoed the security-risk fears, and also used similar, evocative words, particularly the Right-wing *Daily Mail* (BETTS FACES CALLS TO RESIGN OVER CLAIMS THAT HE MISLED VOTERS; BRAZILIAN RENT BOY CLAIMS BETTS PAID HIM 70 POUNDS FOR SEX, 28 February, 2003). The *Daily Mirror*, while less sensationalist, was not sympathetic; Betts was listed in its 'TERRIBLE TEN' MPs, all of whom had brought 'ridicule on themselves' (17 June,

2003). Sections of the tabloid press not only condemned Betts because he was deemed a threat to security, but also because the story became more and more 'muddied' as time went on, causing Betts's honesty to be questioned (*Daily Mail*, THE MP AND THE RENTBOY – WHO'S LYING?, 28 February, 2003). Indeed, Gasparo later claimed that Betts had in fact paid him for sex, suggesting that Betts lied about first meeting him at a social event (*Daily Mail*, BETTS FACES CALLS TO RESIGN OVER CLAIMS THAT HE MISLED VOTERS; BRAZILIAN RENT BOY CLAIMS BETTS PAID HIM 70 POUNDS FOR SEX, 28 February, 2003). Betts was eventually found guilty of breaching the MPs' code of conduct by agreeing to copy a doctored document which Gasparo hoped would allow him to extend his stay in Britain, and for damaging public confidence in the integrity of Parliament by applying for a security pass for Gasparo.

Broadsheet newspapers also covered Betts's predicament, although as with previous sexual scandals and 'outings,' reported it in a straightforward manner. Betts's 'outing' and the justification given for the story were not universally popular; more 'liberal' broadsheet newspapers such as *The Guardian* suggested that 'security' was 'an old excuse for what otherwise appear to be intrusive stories' (SUN'S OUTING OF MP ADDS TO PUSH FOR PRESS CONTROLS, 27 February, 2003). Indeed, *The Sun's* earlier claim that gay men and women would never again be 'outed' unless there was overwhelming public interest in the story does not hold up when scrutinised; House of Commons pass holders are subject to strict scrutiny designed to weed out potential security risks, and it was claimed that Betts had abandoned the application for a pass for Gasparo before the story even broke. In response to *The Guardian's* claims, many tabloid newspapers claimed that it was not Betts's homosexuality that was the problem, but his 'sleaziness.' *The People* (VOICE OF THE PEOPLE: A SQUALID AFFAIR, 2 March, 2003) stated:

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> Talking of political correctness, the outpouring of it which followed the gay revelations about Labour MP Clive Betts was truly stomach-turning. Newspapers who criticised the MP for hiring a male prostitute as his Commons researcher were accused of homophobia and targeting Betts because he is gay. Yet if Mr Betts was heterosexual and the Brazilian rent boy had been a South American vice girl the affair would be equally scandalous. It is not the gender of a lover half Mr Betts's age which makes this sorry business so seedy, squalid and sordid. It's the fact that he was prepared to lavish taxpayers' money on a disgusting piece of low life who charges for sex.

This is not quite true. While Betts was condemned by much of the press for his foolishness rather than his sexuality, his homosexuality made the stakes much higher; for example, *The Sun* not only openly condemned his transgressions as 'sleazy,' but also - on a more implicit level - as a threat to the 'norm' (*i.e.* heterosexuality and family life). While not a gay rights campaigner, Betts consistently voted in a pro-gay manner.[83] Betts's lack of hypocrisy and pro-gay voting record further illustrates the problematic nature of Betts's press coverage; while many newspapers claimed that there was justification for his 'outing' (*i.e.* the copied document), much of the tabloid press coverage was unnecessarily prurient and can be considered manufacturing.

Chris Bryant

The last gay political 'scandal' of the period covered by the thesis involved Chris Bryant (Labour MP for Rhondda 2001-). When Bryant stood as an openly gay candidate at the 2001 General Election he seemed to have everything going for him: he was uncontroversial politically and sexually; his openness meant that the press could not 'out' him against his will; and, following on from the public's acceptance of Twigg, Bradshaw *et. al*, he knew that public and press knowledge of his sexuality would not hold him back politically. Bryant's selection as a candidate in the solidly working class

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[83] For example, he voted in the following key debates: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 238) 21 February 1994 (Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - Amendment of Law relating to); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 325) 10 February 1999 (Sexual Offences Amendment Bill); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 401) 10 March 2003 (Local Government Bill - Repeal of Section 2A of Local Government Act 1986) (divisions 108 and 109).

Rhondda Valley showed how far gay politicians had come over the preceding decades; local Party members were more upset that Bryant had once been a member of the Conservative Party than the fact he was gay. However, in late 2003 Bryant was embarrassed when a picture of himself wearing just a pair of Y-front underpants appeared on the gay dating site *Gaydar*. Along with the picture, it was revealed that Bryant had sent a series of sexually explicit messages to a man he met on the website who he then arranged to meet. The tabloid press revelled in Bryant's embarrassment. Alongside the photograph of Bryant in his underwear, headlines read 'PANTS MP IN VALLEY OF SHAME' (*Daily Star*, 1 December, 2003) and 'BLAIR ALLY IN GAY WEBSITE STORM' (*Daily Mail*, 1 December, 2003).

Words used to describe Bryant's emails include 'graphic,' 'obscene,' 'disgusting' and 'lewd,' highlighting the sexual nature of the messages, and the fact that the sex itself (whether or not it actually took place) should be thought of as 'dirty' (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). *The Mail on Sunday* (POSING IN HIS Y-FRONTS FOR A WEBSITE CALLED GAYDAR, THE MP WHO HELPED SCRAP BAN ON GAY SEX IN PUBLIC, 30 November, 2003) pointed out that many of the messages were 'unprintable in a family newspaper, even with asterisks,' placing Bryant in direct opposition to 'sanitary' heterosexual family life (his sexual behaviour had crossed the acceptability threshold – Frame 2, Figure 1.10). Bryant is categorised as a sexually active gay man and, to make matters worse, that sex (or the arrangements surrounding the sex) was 'unconventional' and 'dangerous.' Unlike Twigg, Bradshaw *et. al.*, who are somewhat desexualised (although not completely, because as gay men there is an assumption made about their sexual lives which underpins representation, as noted in Chapters 1 and 5, namely that penetration is the default sexual act between gay men), and like Proctor, whose 'unusual' sex life appeared on the front-page of every newspaper, Bryant's overt

sexuality - which does not appear to meet the (heterosexual or homosexual) 'norm' - makes him 'dangerous' (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Bryant's public self became defined by his private sexuality and certainly did not enter the 'zone of privacy' defined by Storr (2001). While homosexuality has become more publicly visible in recent years, Bryant's homosexuality was the unacceptable face of it. Indeed, as Richardson (2004) notes, many of the equal rights gained by gay people in recent years relate to sexual coupledom, thus leading to a desexualising of gay people; gay people must therefore conform to an idea of sexual citizenship that pushes the idea of sexuality being private within a normative public (*i.e.* gay sexual relationships should be modelled in relation to heteronormative ones). Bryant did not meet these criteria.

Some tabloid newspapers linked the furore with the Government's sexual offences legislation, suggesting that Bryant had some kind of hidden agenda:

> They [the revelations] raised questions about his role in forcing through controversial Government legislation which scrapped a ban on gay men using parks and public lavatories to 'cruise' for sex. (*Daily Mail*, BLAIR ALLY IN GAY WEBSITE STORM, 1 December, 2003).

The *Daily Mail* also questioned whether Bryant could be left open to blackmail:

> But he gave the man his full address and mobile phone number, possibly leaving himself open to the threat of blackmail. (*Daily Mail*, BLAIR ALLY IN GAY WEBSITE STORM, 1 December, 2003).

As Weeks (1981 a) notes, the link between homosexuals and blackmail dates back as far as the Cold War and McCarthyism. While it is true that the man in receipt of his emails could have blackmailed Bryant, it had nothing to do with the situation in itself; a politician (whether heterosexual of homosexual) could just as easily be threatened by a partner met in a more conventional manner. However, the notion of possible blackmail,

combined with the suggestion of a hidden agenda, gave the paper a public interest justification for publishing the story, even though the stories were completely manufactured.

Broadsheet Approaches

As with many of the above-mentioned post-1997 gay politicians, the broadsheet press was predominantly respectful of Bryant, with some sympathetic (*The Guardian*, ACTIVISTS TO DECIDE ON GAY WEBSITE MP, 4 December, 2003). Like the tabloid newspapers mentioned above, many broadsheet newspapers commented on the fact that Bryant was wearing Y-fronts (often using columnists to discuss the issue). However, unlike the tabloids, broadsheet newspapers took a light-hearted tone when discussing or mentioning Bryant's Y-fronts. Indeed, *The Sunday Times* (7 December, 2003) stated 'BLAIR'S ATTACK POODLE SAYS PANTS TO THE LOT OF YOU,' highlighting and making fun of Bryant's attire simultaneously. Many broadsheet newspapers used Bryant's predicament to discuss wider issues, such as his political future, Welsh politics and gay online-dating. For example, *The Independent on Sunday* (7 December, 2003) wrote an in-depth article about the *Gaydar* website captioned 'FOCUS: WHY THE REST OF THE WORLD IS WATCHING.' Of course, it could be argued (in general, rather than specifically related to Bryant) that the broadsheet press uses 'nonchalance' as a cover for discussing the private lives of gay MPs. Indeed, Parris noted when interviewed for this thesis: 'Broadsheets are sneakier [than tabloids] but attitudes [are] often similar' (Private interview, 9 December, 2005). An interviewee also noted about broadsheets:

> There are one or two of the sketch writer type parliamentary columnists who... I often felt some of the references, I think Ben Bradshaw gets quite a lot of it, I got a bit of it as well, I don't want to be over sensitive, but there is something there... I think they [broadsheets] can [use pejorative themes], and when I talk

about sketch writers they tend to be on the broadsheets, so it's not as straight forward as tabloids versus broadsheets.' (Private interview).[84]

Summerskill notes that while the press coverage of gay MPs has improved over time:

> there is still a huge amount of derogatory and slightly sneering reference to [gay] MPs, and interestingly that's not limited to what you might call the conservative media. I mean Simon Hoggart in *The Guardian* is just as unpleasant in a sneery sort of way, and would claim he wasn't being homophobic. Simon Hoggart can be just as unpleasant as Simon Heffer about gay people. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

Of course, Hoggart is a columnist rather than a news writer. However, the broadsheet press's general indifference, if one understands it as that, was perhaps more in keeping with the public mood than the tabloids'. While, of course, many members of the public quoted by the tabloids found Bryant's behaviour unacceptable (otherwise, why would the comments be considered newsworthy?), Bryant's Y-fronts (presented as an unfashionable choice) seemed to be of most interest to those people quoted (*Daily Mail*, HOW GAY IS MY VALLEY, 4 December, 2003), hence the papers labelling Bryant the 'pants MP.'

The Labour Party echoed the public's lack of concern about Bryant's behaviour. In fact, the Labour hierarchy declined to condemn Bryant publicly, stating that the matter was a private one (see *Daily Mail*, POSING IN HIS Y-FRONTS FOR A WEBSITE CALLED GAYDAR, THE MP WHO HELPED SCRAP BAN ON GAY SEX IN PUBLIC, 30 November, 2003). Bryant was supported by his party because he was 'on-message' politically, free from hypocrisy, 'out' as gay and thus a 'good' gay man (*partially* at least, because his sex life had been 'acted out' in public pushing it towards the 'bad' gay categorization), and - before the *Gaydar* incident - non-threatening sexually (*i.e.* 'safe'

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[84] The interviewee asked for anonymity for this answer.

rather than 'dangerous') (see Frame 3, Figure 1.10). An interviewee notes about

Bryant's predicament:

> It's interesting how Chris Bryant's business with the Gaydar profile, in the end didn't run that badly for him, and I think the fact he was an out gay MP, he was out when he stood in the first place, certainly helped him. (Private interview).[85]

While Bryant lost credibility after the *Gaydar* episode, and sections of the tabloid press

presented him as 'dangerous,' he stayed an MP (something which would have been

much more unlikely in the late 1980s/early 1990s, showing that the press/public *were*

more tolerant, even if whole recognition had not been met – Frame 1, Figure 1.10) and

continued to support gay issues without much media comment. In fact, Bryant - both

before and after his controversy - continuously voted for gay rights in the House of

Commons (following the Labour whip of course).[86] Bryant's strong voting and

campaigning record emphasises the lack of public interest criteria in his media

exposure: Bryant was an 'out,' single, young gay man living his life free of hypocrisy

and illegality. Bryant's no-nonsense attitude towards the episode also helped him to

receive positive press coverage, something recognised by Summerskill:

> The infelicity of Chris Bryant was just being pictured in his underpants and the idea that he was looking for a boyfriend on the Internet is kind of hardly shocking, given that the Internet is no longer regarded as even in the slightest bit racy... it became more difficult for the press to inflame, because he didn't deny it, he said yes it's me. Once they said he was looking for someone who was into football and swimming, there wasn't much more to say about it. And he very sensibly took advice not to go into hiding, he turned up at Westminster the next day and the next day, and was seen in the chamber and the tea room and so on, and I think the advice he was given was very sound and the fact that he took it was very sensible. (Private interview, 20 June, 2006).

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[85] The interviewee asked for anonymity for this answer.

[86] For example, he voted in the following key debates: Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 373) 29 October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill - Consideration and Third Reading); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 386) 20 May 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill - General Interpretation etc); Hansard House of Commons Debates (vol 401) 10 March 2003 (Local Government Bill - Repeal of Section 2A of Local Government Act 1986) (divisions 108 and 109).

4.3   Conclusions: the Contemporary Representation of Gay Politicians

"The questions [is] ...: why are some elements of the press so intransigent in their homophobia? Perhaps the simplest answer is an awareness of the widespread homophobia in Britain, and the wish to appeal to it. Another is that the tabloids like to pander to Britain's rather juvenile and immature sexual attitudes which are composed of part prurience, part prudery, part shock and part titillation. Anything of an 'unusual' sexual nature seems likely to provoke tabloid readers into a mixture of vicarious pleasure and tutting disapproval." (Sanderson 1995: 34).

The representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers (broadsheet and tabloid) undoubtedly improved from 1990 to 2005, with gay MPs welcomed by sections of the press, suggesting a move from intolerance to tolerance to partial recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10); but even in the twenty-first century gay politicians often found themselves at the mercy of a powerfully heteronormative, often discriminatory, sensationalist tabloid press. This is why the move towards recognition is partial; they are generally accepted, but only bar 'bad' acts. As suggested by Sanderson (1995), 'unusualness' stands out (whether this relates to sexual acts or homosexuality as a whole). The move towards more liberal press coverage has been gradual, with setbacks (indicating the halting aspect of the process). Indeed, while representations of gay men and women in the 1990s were an improvement on those of the 1980s, gay politicians were still 'outed' by tabloid newspapers, with their private lives used to define public responsibilities.

From the mid to late-1990s onwards, many gay politicians decided to voluntarily 'come out,' which the majority of the press responded to positively, illustrating a more relaxed attitude toward homosexuality (press and public). However, while homosexuality in itself was no longer a scandal (in the way that it was up until the 1980s, certainly), the sexuality of politicians was still seen by the press as a newsworthy and somewhat controversial topic, suggesting that gay politicians were still discriminated against, even if it was on a more implicit level; through characterisation, the use of negative words

and binary themes (Frame 3), and references to the personal (a gay politician is often defined as such above anything else), their problematical status is made clear. Interestingly, many gay politicians, even from 1997 onwards, seek to point out that they are not single-issue politicians, thus recognising that being seen as a 'gay politician' can be a problem. Indeed, while Matthew Parris has stated that he does not think there was pressure on gay MPs to actively distance themselves from gay issues, he did note that 'nobody likes obsessives' and that there was pressure for gay MPs to a) promote themselves as family-friendly and b) to state that they are not single-issue MPs (Private interview, 9 December, 2005). In fact, many gay MPs seem to reject being set up as 'surrogate' representatives (rather than 'well-rounded' politicians). There is more detail on this in Chapter 5.

As with the case studies of Chapter 3, the politicians discussed in Chapter 4 can be mapped using binary themes (Frame 3):

Name	Private/public* (sexual behaviour)	Out/in	Good/bad	Safe/dangerous	Clean/dirty	Positive/negative mediated persona
Amos	Public	In	Bad	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative
Ashby	Private	In	Bad	N/A	N/A	Negative
Brown, M	Private	In	Bad	N/A	N/A	Negative
Hayes	Private	In	Bad	Dangerous	N/A	Negative
Twigg	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive
Bradshaw	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive
Eagle	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive
Borrow	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive
Marsden	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive
Davies	Public	In	Bad	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative
Mandelson	Private	In	Bad	N/A	N/A	Negative
Brown, N	Private	In	Bad	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative
Duncan	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive
Portillo	Private	Out	Bad	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative
Betts	Private	In	Bad	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative
Bryant	Public	Out	Good	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative

Figure 4.1: The mediated personas of (allegedly) gay politicians** in Chapter 4.

* Blue = positive binary theme/persona
  Red = negative binary theme/persona
** The classifications apply to their original press coverage, rather than later stories (although Mandelson is classified in relation to 1998).

The case studies have revealed that sexual behaviour which is not considered to be the (heterosexual or homosexual) norm intensifies the press coverage of gay politicians and often leads to vilification; their mediated personas (Frame 3, Figure 1.10) are more strongly negative (highlighting the fact that mediated personas are graduated within the positive/negative categories, as noted in Chapter 3, as are the binary themes themselves). The safe/dangerous binary theme suggests that gay politicians who are part of a couple and/or who are engaging in 'acceptable' sexual behaviour are considered worthy of press approval, unlike politicians such as Davies, who are considered a threat to the 'norm' (the family and heterosexuality). This in turn suggests that the press in general has a narrow view of families and partnerships. The lifestyle of a politician, *i.e.* whether they are voluntarily 'out' as gay, or (seemingly happily) acknowledge their homosexuality once 'outed,' is another important factor in the press coverage of gay politicians. If gay politicians are seen as being comfortable in their own skin then the press tends to be much more respectful towards them; a sensational story, as well as a public interest defence (*i.e.* exposing hypocrisy), is not possible. Politicians who are open and relaxed can be considered 'good' gay MPs; they can be safely pigeonholed and are therefore not a threat to heterosexual society. Further to this, 'good' gay MPs in publicly recognised relationships (*e.g.* Bradshaw) can be considered good citizens; through their 'normal' relationship, they assert their citizenship rights (Richardson 2004). They are also careful not to cross the acceptability threshold in relation to heterosexual public space (Frame 2, Figure 1.10).

Indeed, Currie has discussed the notion of a 'template' for MPs:

> The image of an MP has long been of male, white, middle-aged, educated, married with kids. Anyone who doesn't fit the template has some explaining to do... It's not just gay MPs. It's everyone. The template includes an image of family life... And every MP that fits the template or appears to fit the template

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strengthens it. If you put alongside that the image of gays as louche, hedonistic, walking on the wild side, risking danger, risking disease, you can see very quickly why nobody wants to claim as gay. (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

As this suggests, if they differ from the template, gay *and* heterosexual MPs have to make sure that their diversion is honest but discreet, also noted by Currie (Private interview, 14 August, 2006).

The fact that the press is more negative towards those gay politicians who refuse to engage with their sexuality and/or who are hypocritical ('bad' gays), but is easier with those who are open and/or confident ('good' gays) (Frame 3, Figure 1.10), reveals much about the way the press works. First of all, it reveals that the press (tabloid newspapers in particular) have a distinct view of what should be private and what should be public; total disclosure is the only acceptable option for gay politicians (if they want to receive a wholly positive press), ideally voluntarily, or, if they are 'outed,' soon after. This said, according to tabloids such as *The Sun*, there is such a thing as too much information. Indeed, sexual details must be kept private (unless, of course, a tabloid newspaper decides to publicise them in a 'kiss and tell'), as must any kind of apparent 'antagonistic' campaigning activity. Secondly, the high expectations that the press has for gay politicians (and, indeed, any politician or public figure) with regard to openness (and 'acceptable' behaviour too), actually contributes to sexual scandals; politicians are ordinary people with ordinary fears, foibles and private lives, who will make mistakes, and to expect otherwise is preposterous. Another reason for the press focus on 'bad' gay politicians is that the stories are generally more interesting. Indeed, the abovementioned sexual scandal stories are not just about sexuality; they all contain an element of scandal and often hypocrisy, all of which make the stories better 'value.'

Most of the above politicians were able to resume their political careers after their 'outings' and/or scandals (for example, Michael Brown is now a well-respected newspaper journalist). It seems the key to being left alone post-public life is to 'come clean' as soon as possible. Interestingly, in recent years gay politicians such as Bryant and Duncan have received the same sort of press coverage which politicians caught up in heterosexual sexual scandals have received. This suggests that while particular stereotypes are often still utilized in the 2000s, explicit homophobia (*e.g.* use of particular words) is less common; it is often the 'kiss and tell' aspect of a gay sexual scandal story which is utilized, rather than its homosexuality. Indeed, it should be noted that the case studies show that it has always been more common for the press to *react* to a story such as a 'kiss and tell' or another kind of incident such as a politician being arrested for 'cruising' (reporting) than to actually 'out' a politician just for the sake of it (manufacturing). Thus, there is almost sexual scandal 'equality.' 'Almost' because gay sexual scandal stories are inherently more 'scandalous' than heterosexual sexual scandal stories, for the simple fact that homosexuality is often portrayed by the (mostly tabloid) press, even in the twenty-first century, as 'other.'

Building on Figures 1.11, 2.1 and 3.1 of the previous chapters, Chapter 4 has further demonstrated that the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press can be mapped using the three interconnected frames identified in Figure 1.10 of Chapter 1:

1. The move towards recognition

2. Acceptability/time (in relation to heterosexual public space)

3. Mediated personas as 'constructed reality' (of which binary themes are part):
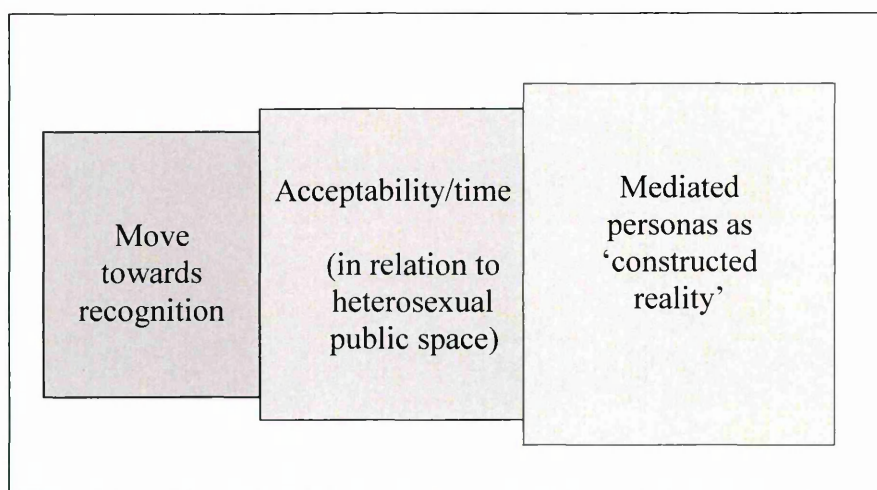
Figure 4.2: Framing the changing press representation of gay politicians: recognition, acceptability and mediated personas as 'constructed reality.'

Thus, gay politicians - or their mediated personas - are represented in newspapers using binary themes, the use of which is fairly consistent, although certain themes may be stronger at particular times (*e.g.* the notion of being 'closeted' or 'in' was particularly contentious in the late 1990s) and for particular politicians (Frame 3, Figure 1.10). Linked to this, the acceptability of homosexuality, as represented in the press, has changed over time; for example, homosexuality was beyond the pale in the 1950s, but generally acceptable in the 2000s (Frame 2, Figure 1.10). Heterosexual public space is key here; what is acceptable in private is different to what is acceptable in public. This has impacted upon the general (re)presentation of homosexuality, which has then affected gay politicians. The acceptability of homosexuality (something which has generally been a linear process, although there have been setbacks), as shown through the study of the press representation of gay politicians, can be understood in terms of a (halting) progression of tolerance towards recognition (Frame 1, Figure 1.10). However, this recognition is partial rather than whole. These ideas are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

The Changing Representation of Gay Politicians in the UK Press

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY THEMES

"The importance of recognition is now universally acknowledged in one form or another; on an intimate plane, we are all aware of how identity can be formed or malformed through the course of our contact with significant others. On the social plane, we have a continuing politics of equal recognition." (Taylor 1992: 36).

This chapter summarises the conclusions and key themes of the thesis, bringing them together to demonstrate the construction of an overarching interpretive frame applicable to gay politicians in the press. The previous chapters have shown that the changing representation of gay politicians can be explored using three interconnected frames:

1. *The move towards recognition*

   The move towards recognition (as defined by Taylor (1992), cited above) suggests that gay politicians have become increasingly tolerated as time has gone on (although this has been a halting process, quicker at some times than others, with some backward steps). Both the press and public have become more tolerant; as noted in Chapter 1, if newspapers are led by their readers, mirroring and shaping boundaries, rather than directly setting public opinion, then the move towards recognition has been driven by the public. However, as explored throughout the thesis (and in sub-section 2.3 and the case-studies of Chapter 4 in particular), recognition is a status which has not yet been reached by gay politicians; they are generally accepted (bar 'bad' acts), but not yet recognised as whole individuals. Chapter 1 noted that there may not be 'one' recognition for gay people because what it means to be gay may be different for individuals. However, wholeness has the potential to be achieved; gay politicians do not necessarily have to share all of the same characteristics as part of this process. In

relation to the themes of the thesis, recognition of particularity equals recognition of the fact that someone is a *gay individual.*

2. *Acceptability over time (in relation to heterosexual public space)*

Sexuality/sexual acts can be rated in terms of public acceptability (as in the acceptance of society) and heterosexual public space. What is acceptable in public and private has changed over the years. Generally, public homosexuality has become more acceptable over the last fifty years (although, again, this has been a halting process), although still has some way to go to reach full acceptability. Although homosexuality has grown in acceptance (legally and socially), the heterosexual public space part of the frame is very important; as discussed in Chapter 1, there is an acceptability threshold in terms of acts becoming public. Indeed, homosexuality is marked in society because public space as a whole is heterosexual. Thus, gay politicians are expected to act a certain way in public and not cross the acceptability threshold.

3. *Mediated personas as 'constructed reality'*

The third frame, mediated personas as constructed reality, is more visible than the first two. The binary themes identified in this thesis suggest that there are two main types of persona for gay politicians as presented by the press: negative and positive. The case-studies in Chapters 3 and 4 reveal the use of these personas, and demonstrate that although they are stronger at certain times than others (for example, negative themes, while still utilised, were stronger in the 1980s when HIV/AIDS was classified as a gay disease), they are still in play. It is, however, important to note that there are gradients within the mediated personas and binary themes; some politicians have a stronger or weaker

negative/positive mediated persona than others, or may meet a particular binary theme more conclusively. The thesis also notes that tabloid and broadsheet differences are an important factor in the representation of gay politicians and mediated personas; tabloid newspapers are more likely to write about the personal lives of gay politicians and cover sexual 'scandals,' and thus are more likely to portray gay politicians using negative themes and personas.

The bringing together of such theory to discuss the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press is important, both in its integration and its application to this subject; indeed, the move towards recognition is well discussed in relation to oppressed/minority groups in general (multicultural groups in particular), but its application to gay politicians is new. Its application is also significant because gay politicians/people in general, have certainly had their identities 'malformed' (Taylor 1992) over the years, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 4. The chapter will explore the interconnected frames in more detail, before moving on to identify key areas for future research based on the themes and conclusions of the thesis.

5.1   Framing the Changing Representation of Gay Politicians in UK Newspapers

"... the struggle for recognition is a conflict generated by disrespected or structurally excluded individuals, who want to be acknowledged as morally accountable, independent, self-respecting human beings by the community. Through a permanent contest in which the boundaries of society are constantly adjusted, individuals struggle to impose their identities upon the community in order to secure recognition." (Chari 2004: 112).

The thesis does something new in that it has shown that the changing representation of gay politicians in UK newspapers can be understood using the three interconnected

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frames identified above. Generally, the first two frames have a unidirectional (although halting) trajectory, but the third frame is constant in that the binary themes are always present (although may be stronger or weaker at certain times as a result of Frames 1 and 2); this is reflected in the press representation of gay politicians. The 'boundaries of society' discussed by Chari (2004: 112), above, are reflected by the frames.

The following sub-sections will explore the three interconnected frames in more detail, after a restatement of the overarching frame of representation, following on from the explanation in Chapter 1 and discussion throughout the thesis.

5.1.1 Framing Press Coverage: Recognition, Acceptability and Mediated Personas

The interconnected frames used to illustrate the changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press, (as demonstrated in Chapter 1 as Figure 1.10 and repeated in Figure 5.1, below), show that newspaper coverage is a representation of reality: gay politicians are *filtered through* press representation. I have identified three frames essential to this process:

- Frame 1: The move towards recognition

- Frame 2: Acceptability over time (in relation to heterosexual public space)

- Frame 3: Mediated personas as 'constructed reality.'

As noted in Chapter 1 (subsection 1.1.1) in greater detail, Frame 1 influences Frame 2 (with Frame 2 also influencing Frame 1), which shapes Frame 3. Frame 3 then shapes (the character/particularly of) and mirrors (particular moments of) Frames 1 and 2: the mirroring and shaping circular process mentioned in Chapter 1. The (predominantly)

unidirectional trajectory of Frames 1 and 2 is supplemented by Frame 3, which has the most impact on a day-to-day basis. Frame 3 is 'constant' in that the binary themes are always present; however, as noted above, the strength of the binary themes change over time, and thus relate to Frames 1 and 2:
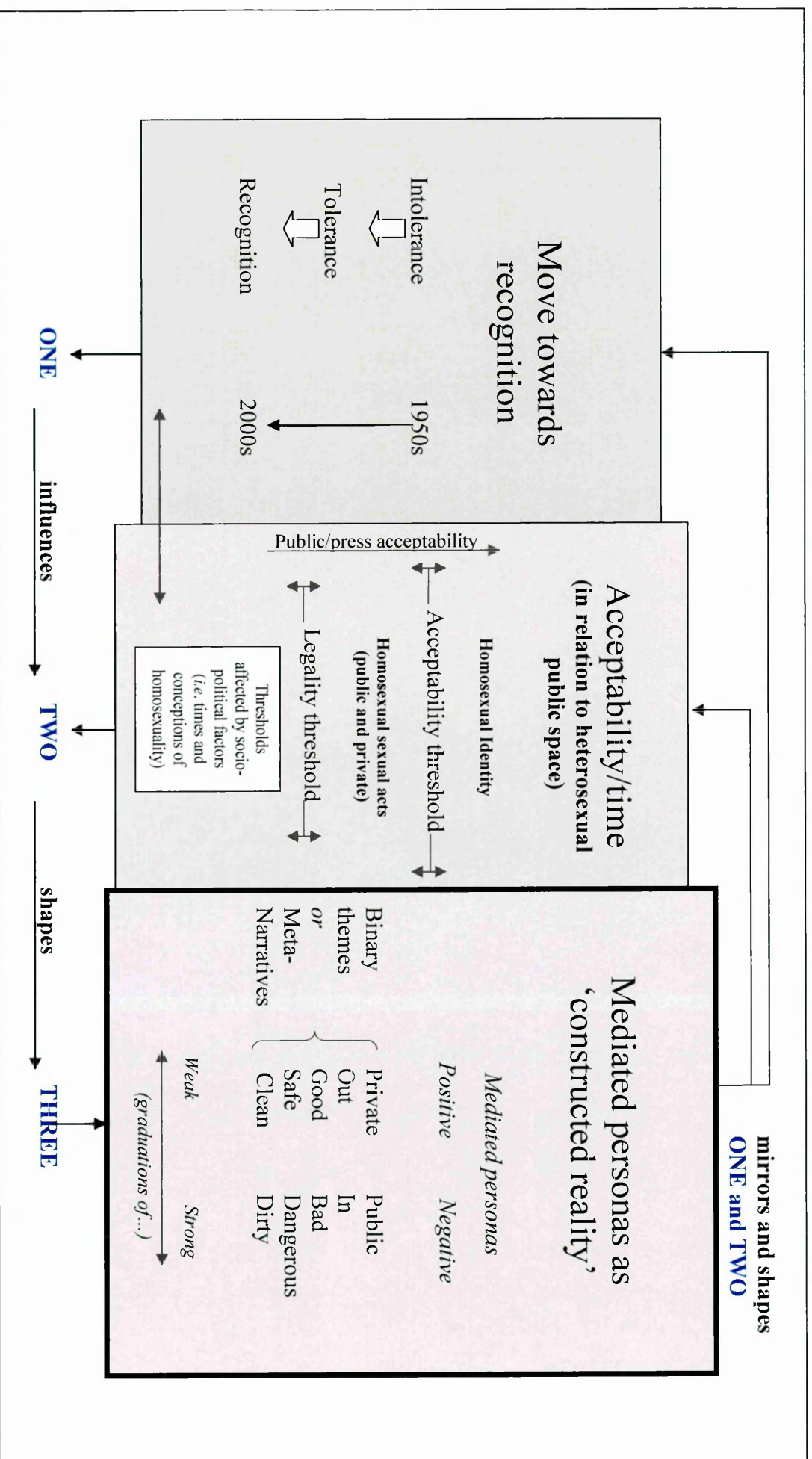
Figure 5.1: The changing representation of gay politicians in the UK press: a frame of representation.

Move towards recognition

Intolerance
Tolerance
Recognition

1950s → 2000s

ONE — influences → TWO — shapes → THREE

Acceptability/time
(in relation to heterosexual public space)

Public/press acceptability

Acceptability threshold — Homosexual Identity

Legality threshold

Homosexual sexual acts (public and private)

Thresholds affected by socio-political factors (i.e. times and conceptions of homosexuality)

Mediated personas as 'constructed reality'

Binary themes *or* Meta-Narratives

Mediated personas

Positive — *Negative*

Private	Public
Out	In
Good	Bad
Safe	Dangerous
Clean	Dirty

Weak — *Strong*
(gradations of...)

mirrors and shapes ONE and TWO

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The next three sub-sections explore the three frames in more detail.

5.1.2   Full Recognition? Wholeness, Respect and the Politics of Recognition

The first frame of Figure 5.1 is the move towards recognition. With the politics of recognition groups are not just tolerated; they are recognised as equal members of society *and* for their difference (Taylor 1992). Thus, gay men and women are respected *as gay individuals*. The thesis has expanded on the fact that whole recognition has not yet been reached for gay politicians. Indeed, we can see this in the way gay politicians are often defined as such above anything else – in a *negative* way, rather than as a positive affirmation. However, gay politicians have moved closer to recognition over the years, as demonstrated by the case studies of Chapters 3 and 4 (and the use of binary themes and personas, expanded on in sub-section 5.1.4).

The politics of recognition is not in itself a new idea, although in the 1990s it became a popular subject matter. Indeed, Chari (2004) states that as far back as the nineteenth-century Hegel theorised about issues surrounding recognition; he claimed that freedom is only possible for an individual through relationships of recognition with other people. As Chari (2004) also notes, modern theories of recognition, while they acknowledge Hegel's work, go beyond his ideas. However, it is certainly the case that Hegel's notion that freedom is only possible for an individual through relationships with others can be applied to homosexuality; it is only when others recognise the innate right of gay people/politicians to be recognised as whole individuals that gay people/politicians will become fully recognised members of society/politics. Whether gay politicians celebrate their difference, *a la* Young, is a different matter.

Challenging Recognition

Chapter 1 noted that Taylor's (1992) concept of recognition could be problematic, in relation to the idea of group shared characteristics. Indeed, one can debate whether or not full acceptability or recognition is even possible (and not just for gay politicians, but for any gay person or member of a minority group). Also, would such a world be a wholly positive one? In fact, one criticism of a fully recognised world, if we take it to the extreme, could be that individuals actually end up being limited by such an approach (*i.e.* all gay people have the same opinions and ideas, as do people within other minority groups, leading to rigid groups within societies). However, as I have stated above (in Chapter 1 in particular), gay politicians do not have to share all of the same characteristics to be recognised; recognition could mean that a gay politician is recognised as a gay *individual*, rather than as part of a homogenised group, thus allowing for group differences. It is also important to note that not all theorists believe that recognition theory reached its end point with the 'politics of recognition' theory. Indeed, Chari (2004) notes that recognition, as a standard-bearer, can actually contribute to the continuation of subordination, showing the problem with recognition; it can keep subjugated groups/individuals in their place. Thus, by relying on the recognition of others, individuals can in fact become oppressed. Consequently, it could be argued that gay people and other repressed people/groups need to act out their resistance as well as aiming for the recognition of others.

As valid and equal members of society and political life, it could be stated that gay politicians should not only look for (hope for?) the respect of heterosexual society, they should also fight for it through their actions. The campaign of the pressure group Outrage! in the 1990s is a rather extreme example of fighting for recognition through action. In the 1990s Outrage! 'outed'/attempted to 'out' gay politicians and public

figures because it was believed that by doing so, gay rights as a political cause would be strengthened; the 'outed' gay people were collateral damage. The methods employed by Outrage! were generally thought to be unfair to the gay public figures concerned, but the organisation's actions illustrate the significant impact gay public figures can have, whether or not they wish to engage with their sexuality publicly. The assertive identity politics espoused by Outrage! demonstrate that the media reacts to as well as creates gay identities; it may therefore benefit gay politicians to actively engage with their sexuality in order that outside influences (the press, pressure groups *etc.*) do not set the agenda.

Surrogate Representation

Another way of contributing to recognition and liberation is by representing gay people in Parliament. Indeed, representation can be interpreted in two ways: a) gay MPs are themselves represented by the press and the media as a whole and b) they also represent others in Parliament - and not just *electoral* constituents. Indeed, 'surrogate' representation, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (in the context of descriptive politics and the politics of presence) and Chapter 4, suggests that gay MPs may find themselves representing gay people from outside their constituencies (whether or not they want to), as discussed by Mansbridge (2003). Some gay politicians may be happy to regard themselves as a surrogate representative on gay issues and engage with the advancement of gay rights in a very vocal, active manner. However, politicians, gay or otherwise, may be reluctant to be seen as surrogate representatives, as some of the above-mentioned interviews with politicians have suggested: they do not want to be seen as single-issue politicians. This may suggest that it is not only the press/public that does not fully recognise gay politicians; there may also be resistance from gay politicians themselves, in response to the press/public.

Surrogate representation				
Voluntary Gay politician accepts/offers himself as representative for view/'constituents' (*i.e.* gay activists)		**Involuntary** Reluctant representation		
Gay politician accepts his representation but does not act on it (*i.e.* campaign)	Openly recognises his representation (*i.e.* campaigns)	'Constituents' believe gay politician should represent them/stands for a particular view	View of media that gay politician represents 'constituents'/stands for (often stereotypical) view	
Representative accepted/rejected by 'constituents' [87] Media portrays representative positively or negatively		'Constituents' assume gay politician represents them	'Constituents' vocalise belief	Unconscious characterisation or assumption	Media consciously declares that gay politician stands for view
		Accepted/rejected by representative Representative accepted/rejected by 'constituents' Media portrays representative positively or negatively		

Figure 5.2: Voluntary/involuntary surrogate representation.

Figure 5.2 demonstrates how a gay politician may accept or reject surrogate representation; the acting/not-acting distinction in the left-hand column of the table is similar to Pitkin's (1967) notion of active (interest-based) representation and passive (symbolic) representation. More than this, it shows the ways in which outside constituents (*i.e.* gay men and women) and the press may approach gay politicians. Figure 5.2 also highlights the fact that homosexuality is often mediated by others - the media, campaign groups, individuals (gay and heterosexual) - who may all (re)present

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[87] Saward (2006) notes that audiences/sections of audiences can accept or reject claim-making.

homosexuality in a way which suits them. Indeed the press, as an informal/culture of democracy (as opposed to a formal/institution of democracy such as the parliamentary system), has a lot of (democratic) power. For example, the media may assume that a gay politician stands for a particular (often stereotypical) view or characteristic. In this respect, surrogate representation is not just about the way that politicians represent others; it is also about the ways in which they are represented. Indeed, if we use Peter Mandelson as an example, a complaint made against him by some gay activists (Tatchell 1998), as well as parts of the mainstream press, is that because he refuses to talk about his private life and say 'I am gay,' he is a bad gay representative: he is not a willing surrogate representative for gay constituents *or* the press. He is thus characterised by the press as being a certain 'type' of gay man (one not open and relaxed about his sexuality), and becomes a surrogate representative for the media anyway. It is important to recognise that Mandelson's (conscious or unconscious) unwillingness to be a surrogate representative does not mean that he is ashamed of his sexuality or unconcerned about the gay cause. However, surrogate representation is a neat demonstration of the use of media characterisation and also the good/bad binary theme: willing surrogate representatives may be seen as 'good' gay politicians - in the eyes of the press and perhaps gay activists too - but someone such as Mandelson, is not.

5.1.3   The Acceptability Threshold: Public and Private Spaces and Changing Acceptability

The second frame identified in the thesis is acceptability/time in relation to public/private space. The acceptability (and press representation) of homosexuality, since its categorisation as an identity, has generally moved in one direction: from negative to positive (thus tying in with the move towards recognition). As noted in the thesis, although this progression is on the whole linear, it has been a halting process

with some backwards steps, such as the 1980s and the onset of HIV/AIDS and its early classification as a 'gay plague.' As Weeks (1981 a: 300) notes about this period, the classification of HIV/AIDS at this time caused a crisis and a 'swing of the pendulum' from liberalism towards conservativism. If we think of public space as being predominately heterosexual, the impact of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s can be felt even more keenly; gay men were dangerous sexual beings, poised to infect heterosexual society with their 'plague.' As the thesis has made clear, homosexuality/sexual acts can be rated in terms of public acceptability and heterosexual public space. Thus, Frame 2 is about the acceptability of types of *behaviour* (as opposed to Frame 1, recognition, which focuses on public *opinion*). Again, referring to HIV/AIDS and the 1980s, at this point in time homosexuality dropped down the acceptability scale: any type of gay sexual behaviour was seen as problematic.

Thresholds

What is acceptable has changed over the years. For example, a homosexual identity is now accepted by most of society (even the major Christian religious organisations find a homosexual *identity* acceptable) whereas at one time identifying as gay was illegal. Figure 1.1 (Chapter 1) demonstrates that there is an acceptability threshold in terms of acts becoming public. Indeed, Chapter 1 stated that while a homosexual identity is acceptable in heterosexual public space (in terms of law and society as a whole), homosexual sexual acts (both private and public) have not passed the acceptability threshold:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 20px;">

<u>Heterosexual public space</u>

Homosexuality (identity)

-------*Acceptability threshold (in terms of acts 'becoming' public)*------

Homosexual sexual acts (private)

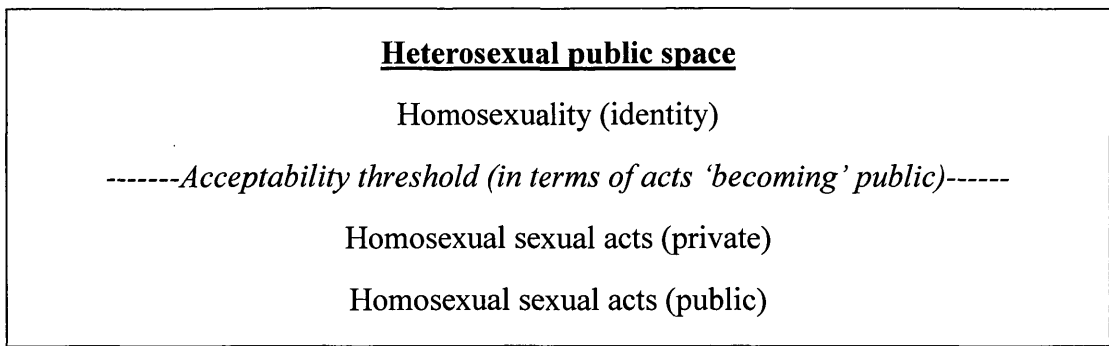Homosexual sexual acts (public)

</div>

Figure 5.3: The relationship between homosexuality and public space (c2000s).

While it could be argued that private homosexual sexual acts should be categorised as being above the acceptability threshold in Figures 1.2 and 5.3 (they are after all perfectly legal and have been for some time, hence the legality threshold also show in Figure 1.1), the amount of recent press attention given to issues such as the age of gay consent and Clause 28 suggests that they are not: these issue have been seen as being of public concern. One recent demonstration that homosexual sexual acts are below the acceptability threshold is the 2006 exposé of Simon Hughes MP's bisexuality, first mentioned in the Preface. Hughes was not openly bisexual, although it was assumed by much of the press and political world that he was gay or bisexual (see *The Daily Telegraph*, GAY COVER-UP MADE HUGHES EASY PREY, 27 January, 2006). The fact that he had called gay chat-lines (with their obvious sexual connotation) was deemed worthy of public exposure, even though these were private acts (whether or not they were sexual ones).[88] Indeed, they *became* public sexual acts. It is also of note that *The Sun* chose to 'out' Hughes with the headline 'A SECOND LIMP-DEM CONFESSES' (6 January 2006) showing that the old tabloid tendencies are still present in the twenty-first century, as Chapter 4 demonstrates. It could also be argued that public heterosexual sexual acts should be below the acceptability threshold instead of above (see Figure 1.1). However, unlike public homosexual sexual acts (stereotypically

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[88] As stated in the Preface, Hughes had previously denied being gay, meaning that exposure of his sexuality was covered under the PCC's guidelines (Clause 1.iii of the PCC's public interest criteria), although as noted above, the content of the articles can still be debated.

categorised as immoral and dirty by the press), heterosexual public sex is often presented by the press as a fantasy to be acted out. For example, a 2000 survey in *The Sun* found that:

> Sun readers do it in their cars... not to mention lay bys, cinemas, swimming pools, department stores, hospitals and even the Idea Home Exhibition. The strewth is out there! We asked you to tell us your sauciest secrets – and you have us The Sex Files. (YOUR SEX CONFESSIONS, 25 April, 2000).

Public homosexual sexual acts are not presented in this way by the 'mainstream' press. It is important to note that homosexual sexual acts are not alone in being below the acceptability threshold; 'alternative' sexual acts (such as sadomasochist ones) are also below this threshold, perhaps more so than homosexual ones (as the 2008 coverage of Max Mosley's sexual 'scandal' reveals[89]).

The acceptability threshold and its relation to public and private spaces impacts upon the representation of gay politicians in the UK press; as homosexuality has become more acceptable, so have gay politicians. However, public space still comes into play here; gay people - including gay politicians - are expected (and may wish) to limit displays of their sexuality (whether this involves actively campaigning about their sexuality or kissing, touching or even talking about their partner in public). Indeed, their sexuality is marked in heterosexual public space; for example, the above case-studies suggest that a gay politician who took their same-sex partner to an election count and posed with them on stage in front of the press may have a greater media impact than a heterosexual politician who posed with their opposite-sex partner (although the fame of the politician also needs to be considered: Mandelson would receive more press coverage than Bryant, for example). This seems, however, to be beginning to change,

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[89] Mosley, head of Formula One racing, was exposed as having taken part in sado-masochistic sex sessions by the *News of the World* (F1 BOSS IN NAZI STYLE ORGY, 30 March, 2008).

shown by the almost nonchalant approach of much of the press towards Duncan's civil partnership. Of particular interest in the above diagram is the distinction between a homosexual *identity* and homosexual *sexual acts*. As noted in Chapter 1, it is not necessarily the case that *being* gay in itself has always been problematic for gay people (in recent times in particular, as acceptability has improved); more accurately, it is the actual act of sodomy. It is for this reason that gay politicians whom the press have classed as 'dangerous' receive such negative press coverage; their *active* sexuality (in terms of sexual acts) is at the forefront of their press coverage, unlike 'safe' gay politicians, who are deemed less overtly sexual. Of course, it is not automatically the case that gay politicians who have been presented as 'dangerous' have engaged in penetrative sex; indeed, this stereotype is almost representative of male homosexual sex (in the media and the minds of many heterosexual people at least).

5.1.4 Mediated Personas as 'Constructed Reality': Positive and Negative Representations

The final frame highlighted by this thesis, mediated personas as 'constructed reality', is present in a more obvious sense than the move towards recognition and the acceptability framework; a perceptive reader can see this framework in use on a day-to-day basis, and as such it has the most immediate impact. The binary themes defined are also constant (in that they are always present in the period of press representation identified above – although their strength changes over time), whereas the first two frames have a (predominantly) unidirectional trajectory (*i.e.* the move towards recognition shows a move from intolerance to partial recognition, albeit allowing for backwards steps). The binary themes identified, as metanarratives/masterframes, suggest that there are two main types of persona for gay politicians: negative and positive. Of course, some

politicians are more strongly positive or negative than others, depending on how many of the relevant binary themes they meet, showing the graduated nature of the personas (as well as the binary themes which make up the personas). It is also not necessarily the case that the binary themes are of equal value to each other in the first place (*i.e.* being 'dangerous' could contribute more strongly to a negative persona than being 'bad'); factors such as year of publication need to be taken into account. Indeed, certain binary themes are more or less important at particular times, tying in with social/political/legal factors, as demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4. As stated above, the notion of being 'in' was very negative in the late 1990s with the 'outings' of Mandelson etc; however, in more recent years the fever pitch surrounding this binary has diminished (although it is possible it could return). Thus, while it is not the case that the binary themes are ranked in terms of a consistent importance (*i.e.* in/out is *always* the most important binary theme, across time), various boundaries are particularly important at different times.

Figure 5.4, showing how many positive binary themes (*i.e.* 1/3, 2/3 *etc.*) Tatchell, Twigg and Davies meet, demonstrate the graduated nature of mediated personas:

Name	Private/public (sexual behaviour)*	Out/in	Good/bad	Safe/dangerous	Clean/dirty	Positive/negative mediated persona
Tatchell	Private	In	Bad	N/A	N/A	Negative (1/3)
Twigg	Private	Out	Good	N/A	N/A	Positive (3/3)
Davies	Public	In	Bad	Dangerous	Dirty	Negative (0/5)

Figure 5.4: The mediated personas of Twigg, Tatchell and Davies**

* Blue = positive binary theme/persona
   Red = negative binary theme/persona
** The classifications apply to their original press coverage, rather than later stories.

It was noted in sub-section 5.1.3 that anal penetration is stereotypically seen as representative of gay sex, *i.e.* heterosexual people often assume that this sex act is always engaged in by gay men. Indeed, as stated in Chapter 2, anal sex was represented as the homosexual sexual norm in House of Lords debates on homosexuality (Baker 2004). In relation to this, there can be seen another binary theme associated with gay *male* politicians: passive (assumed no penetration) versus active (assumed penetration). Thus, while gay people may be accepted in a general sense (as an identity), penetrative gay sex is more contentious (something suggested in Figure 1.1). The active/passive binary theme involves assumptions on behalf of the writer/reader; not only that anal sex is the default sexual act of gay men, but also that anal penetration is negative (perhaps 'dirty,' to utilise the clean/dirty binary theme). After some debate this binary theme was not included in Frame 3 of Figure 1.10 or Figure 5.4 and similar figures due to the fact this binary theme is more of an abstract one; in a sense it underlines all of the above binary themes rather than being a completely separate binary theme in itself, in the way that it underscores heterosexual conceptions of gay (male) sex. This is suggested in Chapter 1, when it is noted that it is the homosexual sexual act (deemed to be penetration) that is of most concern to people, whether or not it takes place publicly or privately. For this reason there is also no separate binary of sexual versus desexualised; even gay men who are 'safe' are deemed sexual because of connotations about homosexuality and sex: homosexuality = anal sex. Thus, with the clean/dirty and safe/dangerous binary themes, the supposed wrongness of anal sex contributes to the negative binary; sex is dirty and/or dangerous partly because it (assumingly) involves anal penetration.

It is through negative binary themes that the media (as an informal/culture of democracy) contributes to gay politicians failing to reach whole recognition. Twigg

meets all of the positive representation criteria applicable to him, making his mediated persona extremely positive. Tatchell meets one out of the three positive representation criteria applicable to him; his reluctance to 'come out' as gay and instead stay 'in the closet' in the 1980s made his mediated persona more negative. This pales in comparison, however, to Davies; as he does not meet any of the positive representation criteria, his mediated persona is extremely negative. It should not be forgotten that the *time* of press representation has to be taken into account. Indeed, I mentioned above that there is almost sexual scandal 'equality' in some of the later press coverage of gay politicians; their press coverage is similar to that of heterosexual politicians caught up in sexual scandals (although the fact they are gay automatically makes their press coverage more 'scandalous'). Thus, negative binary themes are still utilised in the 2000s, leading to negative mediated personas, but not as strongly as in earlier times.

Tabloid and Broadsheet Differences

Tabloid/broadsheet differences come into play when discussing mediated personas. Indeed, the thesis has shown that tabloid newspapers are more likely to pay attention to the personal lives of gay politicians and use certain (negative/stereotypical) words. In the same sense, tabloid newspapers are more likely to (or more obviously) portray gay politicians using binary themes: they are safe *or* dangerous, clean *or* dirty. One can see this in the press representation of a gay politician such as Davies, who was portrayed in the tabloid newspapers as dirty and dangerous through, for example, the suggestion he had Hepatitis B, as published in *The People* (SHAMED MP HAS GAY SEX DISEASE; RON DAVIES PICKED UP HEPATITIS B SAYS EX-WIFE, 1 November, 1998). There is no middle ground for Davies and no chance for redemption. One reason why tabloid newspapers use binary themes, rather than a relational approach, is because through strong characterisation they can grab the attention of readers. Plus, broadsheets

generally focus on opinion, comment and analysis (looking at the 'bigger picture') more than scandal. It must also be noted that the press does not act in a vacuum; stories are published according to how well they will 'connect' with the public through their newsworthiness. Thus, a gay politician who is 'out' receives less attention than someone who has been 'outed' because it has less novelty. In fact, the negative binaries are more 'newsworthy' than the positive ones (scandal equals sales). As Chapter 1 notes, binary themes sell personas and thus stories and newspapers (who, after all, are competing against each other in the market).

5.2   Implications and Questions for Future Research

"All members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional standards. This Code... sets the benchmark for those ethical standards, protecting both the rights of the individual and the public's right to know. It is the cornerstone of the system of self-regulation to which the industry has made a binding commitment." (PCC 2007).

The above chapters have raised various questions which could lead on to future research. Subject areas which could be explored include:

- How the press is regulated (and the running of the PCC in particular)

- The ways in which gay politicians exist within the political and democratic system (*e.g.* the appropriateness of positive discrimination)

- Where/how else the binary themes are used.

The following sub-section identifies the most pertinent questions.

Press Regulation

The thesis has shown that the press has an impact; it can not only create a democratic deficit (explored in Chapter 1), but it also has a big effect on the individuals at the centre of the stories, as well as innocent partners and children, as noted by O'Malley and Soley (2000) (although the negative impact felt by individuals who are the subject of press coverage is sometimes an unavoidable component of the journalistic process, of course). As such, the way the press is regulated is a very important issue; this has been especially true in past decades, when negative mediated personas were at their strongest and homosexuality was not tolerated, particularly in heterosexual public space. Indeed, the frames identified in Figure 1.10 and then Figure 5.1 have been central to the negative representation of gay politicians in the press. Of course, articles can be published which *meet* the PCC's criteria, but which still engage negative binary themes/personas; the frame of representation has contributed to the reporting of the private lives of gay politicians because through it they have been seen as unacceptable or at least 'other.'

The thesis notes that the UK press is self-regulated via the PCC. The PCC's public interest criteria forbade intrusion into private lives unless particular criteria are met (PCC 2007). The articles studied suggest that the press often disregards the criteria when writing about gay politicians. This raises two important questions:

- Are the PCC's public interest criteria (and the Code more generally) fit for use, and if not what should replace them?

- Is the UK's current method of press self-regulation adequate in the face of the demonstrated press representation of gay politicians, and if not what should replace it?

The press coverage of the private lives of gay politicians as a whole (not just their 'outings') is particularly problematic:

- Should the sexuality of gay politicians be a subject for press comment, even if that comment is positive?
- Should ex-partners be allowed to sell their stories about their life with the politician concerned?
- Should the partners of gay politicians have their personal lives written about?

The latter two points obviously relate to heterosexual politicians as well as gay ones. In relation to the PCC's Code (if the articles are not legitimately covered by the PCC's public interest criteria), all three issues appear problematic.

There is of course the wider issue of the democratic impact of press regulation. Common arguments for and against self-regulation can be summarised thus:

Self-regulation = free press = free speech = *democracy*
Statutory regulation = constrained free press = constrained free speech = *lack of democracy*

Figure 5.5: Common arguments for and against press self-regulation.

In fact, one could go as far as to see press self-regulation as equaling liberty or freedom; if negative liberty is the absence of barriers and constraints (Berlin 2005), and this concept is used in a broad way, then self-regulation, as a mechanism which leans in favour of press freedom, brings freedom to the press and therefore the public. Thus, once again, self-regulation = democracy. However, it can be suggested that the press is not fulfilling its democratic role (at least wholly); self-regulation may contribute to a focus on the personal lives of gay politicians (and heterosexual politicians too of course) via the absence of barriers and constraints (*i.e.* the press is able to report on personal lives because the PCC's barriers are ineffective), thus adding to a democratic deficit for gay men and women. One could also suggest that press self-regulation has impacted on expression and communication (*e.g.* the press focus on the personal has impacted on the discussion of more 'serious' issues (discussed in Chapter 1) and even self-expression). As such, self-regulation of the press could be seen as a barrier to democracy and, conversely, statutory regulation - far from being a route to inequality - could potentially enhance the press's democratic role. The democratic consequences of statutory press regulation can be explored in more detail, paying particular attention to privacy.

Gay and Lesbian Privacy

At the heart of this debate is what is meant by the public interest. If one understands the public interest as being the common well-being, in relation to the press this would mean that articles are published in the name of the public good. Thus, a gay MP is 'outed' because it is in the interest of the public. However, if one applies the PCC's Code, unless the three public interest clauses are met (the press could attempt to use other justifications, but these are the named ones), gay MPs should not be 'outed.' The reporting events argument, while valid at times, should thus not take precedent over the PCC's Code as it stands. The thesis raises three more key questions:

- Does the public have the right to know about the sexuality of gay politicians or the way they live their lives more generally?

- If they do, where is the line drawn?

- At what point does the right to know come into effect?

If this argument is broadened out, some writers have claimed that gay and lesbian privacy is different to that of heterosexual privacy; indeed, it is important to note that heterosexual people cannot be 'outed' as such because heterosexuality, as the considered 'norm,' is generally assumed to be an individual's default sexuality. Thus, while press regulation, in a general sense, is not about sexuality - it is about privacy - this issue affects gay people in a unique way. It is not necessarily the case that in the 2000s gay politicians are less protected than heterosexual politicians or the wider public (although this was the case when homosexuality was illegal). The important point is that by writing about a gay politician's partner or private life, their sexuality is in turn referred to; if a politician considers their sexuality to be a private matter, they may thus be unintentionally 'outed' by the press. Mayo and Gunderson (1994) argued that to protect the right of gay people to a private sexual life, their sexual orientation must be protected as well. If one understands sexuality as being a private matter (as stated earlier, an individual's homosexuality, although something which can be discussed/viewed in/by the public, can be considered a private matter in that it is not something that the public ordinarily has any part in), then the public does not as a rule have the right to know about the sexuality of a gay politician. However, in terms of where the line is drawn and the right to know, a gay politician's privacy could be compromised if the PCC's public interest criteria are met. It has been argued in the past by some sections of the press (see Chapter 4's discussion on Mandelson) that politicians

should reveal whether or not they are gay because their homosexuality may influence the way that they vote; as it stands, the PCC's Code does not support this.

The argument against 'outing' only holds up if one believes it is a negative process. Indeed, the notion of sexual orientation as a private matter has actually been called into question. For example, it has been argued that 'outing' does not violate a person's privacy because it refers to orientation not sexual acts (Mohr, 1992). 'Outing' is a problematic process; while it is opposed by many gay people, it is also supported as a powerful political weapon. Indeed, whereas the gay rights campaigning organisation Stonewall engages with the political structure in debate, Outrage! has supported the 'outing' of gay political figures. 'Outing' is a challenging notion because it removes individual choice and places homosexuality in opposition to heterosexuality:

> ... [outing] so often loses sight of the vital aspect of *choice* which has always lain at the heart of progressive sexual politics. Moreover, it runs the risk of falling back into an extremely conservative notion of what it means to be 'gay' in the first place. Indeed, 'outing' usually tends to depict questions of sexual identity very much from within the normative values of dominant sexual epistemology. (Watney 2002: 21).

As Watney (2002) goes on to note, 'outing' is often justified as a means of providing gay role models, but how much of a role model is an unwillingly 'outed' politician?

Affirming Difference

Young (1990) asserts in relation to the politics of difference that public policy should undermine the oppression of groups by affirming group differences, rather than trying to eliminate them; equality may call for oppressed groups to be treated differently. Using this line of thinking one could justify women only parliamentary short-lists or calls for short-lists to be reserved for ethnic or other minority representation; to further the

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liberation of women and people of minority backgrounds, their difference has to be affirmed (as suggested by descriptive politics and the politics of presence). As a result of affirming group differences, social equality will be promoted and 'cultural imperialism' undermined (Young 1990: 191). This is an interesting idea. In relation to the thesis, it would suggest that gay politicians should *not* aim to become fully assimilated into the heterosexist culture of UK politics; they should celebrate their difference as a challenge to heterosexism, thus providing a point of representation for gay men and women. This is a view which many gay politicians may find challenging. Indeed, many of my interviewees and the politicians explored in the above case-studies did not want to be seen as 'gay politicians.' Issues to be considered include:

- The impact of 'positive discrimination' or similar measures on:
    o The political process (institutions, political parties *etc*)
    o The electorate (including gay constituents, surrogate or otherwise)
    o Gay politicians themselves.

Applying the Binaries Elsewhere

The binary themes identified above could be related to gay people more generally, gay celebrities in particular (as they are public figures), and to a certain extent heterosexual politicians/people as well. Indeed, in relation to heterosexuality, private/public, safe/dangerous and clean/dirty can be applied in their original context, and in/out and good/bad with a different emphasis. Indeed, heterosexual politicians are never 'in' because heterosexuality is the perceived default sexuality; however, they could be condemned for not being truthful about their sexual life. In the same manner, while a heterosexual politician is inherently 'good' when compared to a gay politician (once again because heterosexuality is deemed the default sexuality and heterosexual

politicians thus do not need to hide their sexuality), they could still be perceived as being 'bad' if they were not open and relaxed about their private lives.

In relation to the first three binaries mentioned in the above paragraph, heterosexual politicians can be represented as 'dangerous' and 'dirty' if they are caught, for example, having an extra-marital affair or hiring prostitutes. They can also be condemned for sexual behaviour that does not take place in private. However, as noted above, heterosexual politicians benefit from the fact that they are heterosexual rather than homosexual; thus, a heterosexual politician such as Steven Norris (Conservative MP for Oxford East 1983-1987 and Epping Forest 1988-1997), alleged to have had five mistresses at once, was portrayed by the press as 'shagger Norris,' a tongue-in-cheek reference to his so-called 'rampant' and 'impressive' heterosexuality (*The Observer*, THE OBSERVER PROFILE: THE ULTIMATE ESSEX MAN, 15 December, 1996). There is much less chance of a gay MP being portrayed in such a way, even in the twenty-first century. Future research could explore:

- The application of the binaries to the press representation of heterosexual politicians
- The application of the binaries to the press representation gay celebrities/gay people generally.

In particular, such a study could explore why the binaries are used, what they do and their impact.

5.3   Conclusions

"I have claimed that the style of popular culture typified by personalization and dramatization may offer a way into politics for people otherwise excluded or bored. I have also claimed that popular fictions of politics enable people to perform as citizens. That is, of course, all very respectable, but it should not make one blind to the sexist, racist and other antidemocratic tendencies that also exist in popular culture." (Van Zoonen, 2005: 150).

The thesis has demonstrated that the changing representation of gay politicians can be discussed in relation to three interconnected frames (Figure 5.1 and Figure 1.10 of Chapter 1). These frames work in conjunction with one another to create mediated personas, both positive and negative, and create conditions of possibility for the press representation of gay politicians. The use of frames in the discussion of media representation is not new in itself, but the bringing together of the above three frames in relation to gay politicians *is*. In fact, the press representation of gay politicians in the UK has never before been evaluated in such an extensive and detailed manner; while the press representation of homosexuality in general has been discussed (and within that, some gay politicians have been mentioned), it has never been examined in the way that some female politicians have, with in-depth study of words, themes and stereotypes etc. Considering that gay politicians have been at the forefront of the media's attention at various times over the last ten years, such a study seems timely. The relationship between the media and politicians has also focused on discussions surrounding the (negative) impact of political spin; I was keen that this thesis explored the impact of the media on politicians/political life.

As suggested by Van Zoonen (2005: 150) above, 'antidemocratic tendencies,' as homophobia could be termed, exist within popular culture. Thus, the press, as an institution of popular culture, can foster homophobia or at least help to maintain the

status quo in relation to attitudes towards gay men and women. It could also cause/contribute to a democratic deficit (for example, it could discourage gay politicians from talking about 'gay issues' thus leading to these issues/gay people not being adequately represented, as explored above). Indeed, this thesis has touched on two aspects of democracy: a) formal/institutions of democracy (Parliament and political processes) and b) informal/cultures of democracy (the press/media). It is through the second stratum that groups such as gay politicians are excluded; there is a subtle cultural politics of exclusion which is operated by the media. The third frame identified in this thesis is therefore very important; not only is it the most obvious frame in terms of reader perceptibility, it could also, potentially, be used as a tool for maintaining negative and stereotypical representations of gay people and politicians in the press, with negative consequences for democracy. While it is not the case that framing is negative in itself – frames exist, whatever their consequences – some frames can have negative effects. Of course, one could state that Frame 3 of the overarching frame of representation (Figure 1.10 and 5.1), binary themes/mediated personas, is a useful one; not only is it a helpful analytical tool, but as one half of the binary themes noted are positive ones ('good,' 'safe' etc), there is a case for stating that it has been of benefit to gay politicians, as well as a disadvantage at times. While a journalist may consciously use particular words to describe a gay person/politician - 'poof' in the 1980s or 'exotic' in more recent years - the frameworks which arch over this process are unconscious ones. Social mores - ways of acting and communicating in contemporary society - are almost supplanted by newspaper culture; however, newspaper culture in turn reflects social attitudes (as discussed below, Figure 5.6).

In Chapter 1 I noted that the media can be seen as reinforcing public opinion via the mirroring and shaping of boundaries, rather than directly setting public opinion. The

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move towards the whole recognition of gay politicians is thus led by the public, with the media acting as a tiller. Binary themes (Frame 3) are used by newspapers as an expression of public opinion, as shown in Figure 5.6:
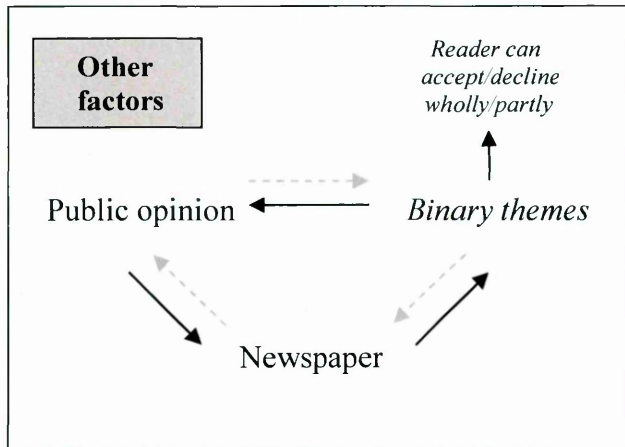

Figure 5.6: Media reinforcement and binary themes.[90]

Sometimes the press misjudges the mood of its readers and will face a backlash of public opinion, but generally the match is successful (taking into account tabloid/broadsheet differences and the political/moral opinions of newspapers/readers). As gay sexuality has become more accepted in terms of public space (see Frame 2), and whole recognition has moved closer (see Frame 1), binary themes have become less resonant, shown by the more moderate language employed by the press in recent years. However, as their presence in the representation of gay politicians in the UK press is linked to public opinion about homosexuality, such binary themes or metanarratives will continue to be present until public attitudes shift; as many of the themes (private/public, safe/dangerous/ clean/dirty) apply to heterosexuality as well as homosexuality, it appears that these themes will be present for the foreseeable future.

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[90] As indicated by the diagram (and as noted in Chapter 1), other factors, as well as newspapers, are a part of this process.

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APPENDIX I

Methodological Approach

In order to contextualise Chapters 2, 3 and 4, this Appendix describes the thesis's methodological approach in more detail.

Research Instruments

Newspaper Analysis

Once potential case studies (*i.e.* gay politicians) had been selected (after examining books, journal articles and newspaper articles), relevant articles were searched for. The starting point for this was a search of *Nexis UK*; the politician's name plus particular key words ('gay', 'homosexual,' 'sex,' 'scandal' being key examples) were searched for, thus bringing up potentially relevant articles. These articles were then read, with relevant articles kept, and irrelevant articles discarded (sometimes the key words used would bring up articles relating to unrelated people/subjects). Supplementing the articles found electronically, other key sources such as (auto)biographies, books on politics/history and hard copy newspapers were utilised, often leading back to particular newspaper articles which could then be sourced on *Nexis UK* as part of a circular process. Over time it became clear that there were consistent binary themes in play. These themes were used to meet Objectives 2 and 3.

Literature Review

The literature review (based on the methodology of Maples 2004) was a structured process and involved various research tasks. The tasks overlapped at various points in the project as literature surrounding the key issues was published and sourced continually.

First, a search was made of all relevant databases, libraries, journals and newspapers for literature/theory relating to the thesis. This involved travel to national academic libraries, although the majority of the literature was sourced online. Libraries were accessed using SCONUL Research Extra, a scheme allowing researchers admittance to all national academic libraries through their home university.

The content of the research was reviewed and common themes identified, allowing for further detailed searches to be made as appropriate. Key texts were then selected for inclusion in the literature review. The literature was then categorised according to its theme and relevance. A paper-based filing system was used; files were created relating to particular subjects and themes, within which the literature was filed according to its relevance. Gaps in literature/research were identified as part of the process, with further research taking place as a result.

The literature selected for inclusion was analysed with connections between themes identified. Further to the earlier categorisation, the material selected was then synthesised ready for insertion in the thesis. Finally, the research was presented in the thesis in the two main review chapters (Chapters 1 and 2), as well as in the other chapters as appropriate.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and the questions asked open ones; Bryman (2001) notes that open questions have the following advantages:

- Participants can answer the way they wish
- The participants are not persuaded by the researcher's choice of answers

- Answers which a closed question may not allow for can be sought

- Participants' understanding of issues can be monitored

- The researcher can gain new knowledge from the interviewee.

Open questions certainly require greater effort from participants, as they may be required to give longer answers than with closed ones. However, the professions of the interviewees suggested that they would be used to answering questions and would not be intimidated by this approach. All of the interviewees agreed to be quoted on the record, although one interviewee asked for two of their answers to be anonymised. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed. Common answers and themes were looked for and then explored in more detail, in line with the newspaper analysis and literature review.

Timetable

The thesis was completed in just over four years. Each year on the timetable below is divided into four sections (January–March, April–June, July-September, and October-December). I had face to face meetings with my supervisors every three to four months on average (not shown on the timetable). These meeting were supplemented by regular telephone and email contact as appropriate.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Thesis Organisation					
Completion of research proposal	▓	■			
Chapter structure in place	▓	■ ■ ■			
Editing thesis for submission	▓			■ ■	
Submission of thesis	▓				■
Research Tasks					
Literature review	▓	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	
Researching case studies	▓	■ ■	■ ■ ■		
Newspaper analysis	▓	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■	
Semi-structured interviews	▓	■	■ ■		
Methodology, Preface etc	▓			■ ■	
Conclusions	▓			■ ■ ■	

Figure i: Thesis timetable (thesis organisation and research tasks).

Budget

Much of the research was desk-based and therefore did not lead to any expenditure. However, the interviews (the majority of which were face-to-face and entailed two to three hours of travelling there and back) and travel to libraries was funded by my Open University yearly travel fund (£250 per year).

Ethics

Full consideration was given to the ethical implications of the research. As such, the rights of the interview participants were fully respected.

Selected participants were sent introductory letters asking for an interview. The letters were printed on Open University headed paper in order that the academic nature of the research was highlighted. My contact details, along with those of my supervisors, were made available to the potential interviewees in case they wanted more information. The letters highlighted the fact that the interview and research as a whole would not

speculate on anyone's private life. The letters made clear that while I wished to record the interview, if the interviewee so wished I was prepared to just make notes. The interviewees were informed that while the information generated from the interview would remain confidential, I was seeking to interview participants on the record and attribute quotes and opinions in the research; however, participants were informed that anonymous interviews were possible if requested. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time and the opportunity to raise questions over the course of the research. It was also made clear that only I would have access to contact details and unpublished data - which would not be given to any third party - and that all data, including interview notes and audio recordings, would be kept securely. Once the interviews were completed and interviewee comments to be included in the thesis selected, the interviewees were sent a copy of their transcribed notes. The interviewees were also offered the chance to receive a copy of the completed thesis.

Interviewer and interviewee safety was taken into account. The face-to-face interviews were carried out in safe locations. The meeting rooms were not locked and had either windows or doors with windows to ensure that others could look in. I ensured that there were other people in the buildings/vicinity at all times and that our occupation of rooms for interview was known by appropriate people (such as receptionists). I also gained an Enhanced CRB Disclosure as part of the research process.

Electronic copies of the interview transcriptions were kept on the researcher's PC with the files password protected (the passwords were changed regularly). Two more copies were kept on electronic media (CD and memory stick) and stored in a secure filing cabinet. VDUs used to display the interviewee transcriptions and personal details of the interviewee were not left unattended, and the screen was always cleared of personal data

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after use. Print outs and discs were stored in a secure filing cabinet when not in use and shredded/reformatted when no longer required. Personal data (*i.e.* contact details) will not be kept longer than necessary and will not be disclosed to others. The data will be kept for seven years from the completion of the project. The research was registered under the Data Protection Act with the Open University's Data Protection Officer.

Terminology

It is important to note that words used to describe same-sex attraction and/or sex have changed over the years. Indeed, this thesis explores the origins of the word 'homosexual' in the 1800s (see Chapter 2). When referring to gay individuals, I have predominantly used the word 'gay' rather than 'homosexual' throughout the thesis, because it is a word which has been claimed by gay men and women as a positive one, unlike 'homosexual' which has negative, medical origins.

However, when writing the thesis I found that it often seemed incongruous to use the word 'gay' when writing about the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Thus, when describing gay politicians, public figures and issues at this time, I often use the word 'homosexual.'

APPENDIX II

PCC public interest criteria:

There may be exceptions to the clauses marked * where they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

1. The public interest includes, but is not confined to:

    i)   Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety.
    ii) Protecting public health and safety.
    iii) Preventing the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.

2. There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.

3. Whenever the public interest is invoked, the PCC will require editors to demonstrate fully how the public interest was served.

4. The PCC will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain, or will become so.

5. In cases involving children under 16, editors must demonstrate an exceptional public interest to over-ride the normally paramount interest of the child. (PCC 2007).

PCC clauses:

1. Accuracy
2. Opportunity to reply
3. Privacy *
4. Harassment *
5. Intrusion into grief or shock (5.2*)
6. Children *
7. Children in sex cases *
8. Hospitals *
9. Reporting of crime *
10. Clandestine devices and subterfuge *
11. Victims of sexual assault
12. Discrimination
13. Financial journalism
14. Confidential sources
15. Witness payments in criminal trials (15.2 and 15.3*)
16. Payment to criminals (PCC 2007).*

Clauses with * next to them can be overridden in the name of the public interest.