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To cite this article: Kevin Gotkin Doctoral Student (2016) Openings: On the Journal of Homosexuality, Volume 1, Issue 1, Journal of Homosexuality, 63:3, 446-451, DOI: [10.1080/00918369.2016.1124709](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1124709)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1124709>



Accepted author version posted online: 07 Dec 2015.
Published online: 07 Dec 2016.



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MAPPING THE *JOURNAL OF HOMOSEXUALITY*

Openings: On the *Journal of Homosexuality*, Volume 1, Issue 1

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ABSTRACT

This article serves as one of the supplementary pieces of this special issue on “Mapping Queer Bioethics,” in which we take a solipsistic turn to “map” the *Journal of Homosexuality* itself. Here, the author examines Volume 1, Issue 1 of the *Journal of Homosexuality* and asks whether the journal’s first contributors might reveal a historically problematic relationship whereby the categories of front-line LGBT health advocates in the 1970s might be incommensurate with the post-AIDS, queer politics that would follow in decades to come.

KEYWORDS

Bioethics; history of medicine; homosexuality; human sexuality; intersex; john money; LGBT health; media studies; psychiatry; transgender

Why then a new journal?

—Charles Silverstein (1974) “Editorial,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1(1), p. 5

In the first few sentences of the first issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality*, founding editor Charles Silverstein justifies adding another to “the great abundance of scientific journals that line [our library] shelves” (Silverstein, 1974, p. 5). Not one, he claims, specializes in “alternative sexual life-styles” (Silverstein, 1974, p. 5). And of the research on sexual behavior at the time, there was no outlet for scholars to challenge the medical model of homosexuality (the pathological condition of same-sex attraction, something to be fixed) without expecting a thin envelope after peer review. Silverstein devotes about one half of his three-page introduction of the journal to “a statement of values” that defends a progressive publishing agenda. Silverstein seemed to be heading off the objection forming in the mouths of his critics: How could a journal be devoted to “empirical research, and its clinical implications” while also challenging tried-and-true scientific models of human sexuality? Silverstein suggested that what seems to violate a scientific sensibility of the time—“If the Editorial Board were polled, we would find most viewing homosexuality as a valid life-style” (Silverstein, 1974, p. 5)—in fact makes for a better science. “It is an inclusionary bias,” he says, “not an exclusionary one” (Silverstein, 1974, p. 6).

The first issue of this journal is a fascinating trip to a different moment in academia, one that seems familiar and strange at once. The transformations of “homosexuality” that have unfolded over the past 40 years are, of course, too immense to behold in a simple then-and-now exercise. But revisiting volume 1, issue 1 of the *Journal of Homosexuality* bears witness to an opening: onto what the journal set out for itself, what it became, what it is now. And not just the journal, but a whole landscape of scholarship and clinical practice that circumscribed it. In the following tour through the introductory lines from some of the articles in the first issue of this journal, we get a sense of some openings. We look backward at what faced forward, glimpsing the dynamism that beginnings harbor.

Considerable publicity has been given to the removal of homosexuality as a pathological diagnosis from the classification scheme of the American Psychiatric Association, but little attention has been given to how it came to be classed as an illness in the first place. (Bullough, 1974, p. 99)

We know that openings are often culminations in addition. This is true of this journal when we consider that just 1 year before the *Journal of Homosexuality* published its first issue, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder by removing it from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. This was a major frame within which this journal positioned itself, in large part because psychiatry was one of the central fields at which the journal was aimed. Of the 34 founding members of the editorial board, 15 were psychiatrists or psychologists. What was inaugurated in the first issue of this journal, then, is homosexuality in its *DSM* afterlife.

In his article on the medical model of homosexuality, Vern Bullough traced the medicalization of homosexuality in the West, concluding with a constructionist argument that is familiar to those who have taken up Michel Foucault's history of sexuality. What Bullough stressed, perhaps in tension with a Foucauldian epistemology that recasts “history” and “sexuality” as ubiquitous and multivalent relations of power, is that it was science that tipped the scales. “Not until massive amounts of research had proved otherwise,” Bullough wrote, “did the medical community reluctantly change its scheme of classification” (1974, p. 109). Although Bullough's is not a historiographic reflection, he nonetheless implicitly articulated a theory of history that seems to undergird much of the research published in the first issue. Picking up where editor Silverstein left off, Bullough suggested that knowledge production through empirical data collection and analysis (“massive amounts of research”) has the potential to change the course of history (depathologizing homosexuality). By arguing for the blunt force of scholarship, so powerful it is politically neutral, Bullough recast his fellow authors as contributing directly to an emancipated homosexuality. The APA

significantly marks the historical antecedents to the journal's emergence, reminding us that openings are also continuations.

Insofar as the etiology of [gender identity and its disorders] is still speculative and not definitively established, one needs an orderly system of phenomenological description. (Money, 1974, p. 65)

For many in sexuality research, John Money's name looms large. He is viewed by some as a pioneer, having argued for the learned nature of gender and fiercely battling genetic deterministic thinking. But others know him as a villain, embroiled in a controversial gender reassignment surgery he recommended for a young child who grew up to resent the procedure, resulting, the family claims, in his suicide later in life. Though Money developed many useful concepts (the notion of a "bodymind" that incorporates both nature and nurture into a theory of human development, for example), research on intersexuality today largely rejects Money's confidence in the effectiveness of reassignment without careful consideration of other biological and psychological factors.

In his article in vol. 1, no. 1 of the journal, Money called for a "phenomenological" account of gender identity disorders that is inflected by this hero-villain chiasmus. While Money called for clinicians to think of gender identity in a holistic, subject-centered way, "phenomenology" was Money's way of operationalizing "etiology." That is, his main concern was to find a process that could deal with people who present gender identity disorders in a clinical way, but he proposed looking closely at an individual's life pattern to arrive at this abstraction.

Money was not the only person with this hero-to-villain story. Robert Spitzer, a founding member of the *Journal's* editorial board and considered by some to be the architect of mental disorder classification, rued the work he did to pathologize homosexuality. In 2012, a reporter for the *New York Times* told the story of Spitzer sitting at his computer typing up an apology to be printed in the same journal where he argued for the use of reparative therapy to cure homosexuality. "I believe I owe the gay community an apology," the letter concluded (Carey, 2012). Only in retrospect is Spitzer's name in the roster of the journal's founding members a troubling feature; what we know as boundary-pushing research has a curiously quicksilver quality.

Or consider recommendations made in another article published in *JH* vol. 1, no. 1 about how the gay liberation movement could seize on homophobic attitudes in mainstream society that correlated strongly with sexist views of gender. The authors wrote that because uninitiated publics may not associate the adjective "gay" with "potent," "increased visibility of 'masculine' male homosexuals may do much to further the success of [the gay liberation] movement" (MacDonald & Games, 1974, p. 26). Today we might call this

misogynistic or effeminophobic, propagating the idea that masculinity should be the prized currency within the gay community while justifying the subordinated status of women and effeminate men. These examples illustrate the wily historical routes that originary sexuality research has taken. Some of the researchers who helped build the house we inhabit today also left some parts in disrepair.

In the face of hard data to the contrary, psychiatrists have continued in their assumed moral obligation to change homosexuals into heterosexuals based primarily on the assumption that homosexuality is a pathological condition that must be cured. (Serber & Keith, 1974, p. 87)

Continuing with a thread that runs through a number of articles in the issue, Serber and Keith took aim at the seemingly natural inclination that psychiatrists should help their clients become heterosexuals. We could pause to meditate on the homology between this as an epistemological maneuver and a phenomenological condition on an individual level. To borrow an analogy from a theory of evolutionary biology, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: growing from embryo to adult, an individual goes through the same stages as her or his ancestors went through as a species. As individuals, liberationists fighting for the declassification of homosexuality from the *DSM* rejected the pathologization of their own lives as they were rejecting pathologization for the gay community writ large. Demedicalizing the category dovetailed with demedicalizing the lived experience of being a homosexual.

Notions of “the cure” in sexuality—and also disability—studies are steeped in fantasies of origin. Those who insist on knowing how homosexuality emerged often imply that if we could go back to some evolutionary fork in the road, we could have prevented something. But we could see these theories, or even Lady Gaga’s celebrated Born This Way Foundation that similarly seeks homosexuality’s source, as wrapped up in the search for a conclusive theory of origins that ultimately occludes true social progress for nonnormative sexuality. Legal scholar Kenji Yoshino (2006) has argued that this kind of thinking ultimately rests on the presumption that we ought to do something about homosexuality when banishing the fascination altogether is actually much more productive for social change that focuses our attention to the present and the future. Thus openings are not always a reckoning with futurity; they are also causal beginnings that get marked and returned to when normative logics are threatened by transgressive sexualities.

Openings can be imagined as horizons, but whether the sun is setting or rising can be hard to discern. As easy as it seems to look back on the first issue of this journal with doe-eyed enthusiasm for the beginnings it held, it is

important to consider the uncomfortable vicissitudes of scholarly publishing. It is not just the word *homosexuality* that has changed drastically since 1974, but also the word *journal*.

For the first year of publication, the subscription fee for a university for *Journal of Homosexuality* was \$25 (\$120.71 if we account for inflation¹). That was when the journal was published by Haworth Press, a New York firm that went on to publish about 200 journals in addition to academic and trade book catalogs. In 2007, Haworth was acquired by the Taylor and Francis Group, owned by Informa plc, which also owns Routledge. Now, the journal's fee for an institutional print and online subscription is \$2,688.²

As communication scholar Ted Striphas has written in his influential article "Acknowledged Goods: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Academic Journal Publishing," Taylor & Francis/Informa plc's 2007 revenue topped £1.1 billion GBP. He notes:

One of Informa's subsidiaries, Adam Smith Conferences, which is indeed named for the patron saint of economic liberalism, specializes in organizing events designed to open the former Soviet republics to private investment. Other divisions of the company provide information, consulting, training, and strategic planning services to major international agricultural, banking, insurance, investment, pharmaceutical, and telecommunications corporations, in addition to government agencies. (Striphas, 2010, p. 5)

This journal's history can therefore be understood as one of many academic units that have become subsumed into the neoliberal university structure. But to avoid concluding with a dim and walleyed look back at the origin of this journal, we could think of these developments perhaps not as absolute declensions but as opportunities to witness the eddies of our industry. We often fall prey to tacit assumptions about our research about sexuality: that our work is not market-determined, that we are producing knowledge that will help others, that we can properly understand the developments of our own terrain. And while this is all true to some extent, even a brief glimpse back at the beginnings of the journey teach us that we are implicated in unfoldings far larger than what we perceive.

We should think of the first issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* as an opening in as many ways that the term might be used. An opening onto an untilled pasture, an opening to a wider room, an opening into the unknown.

Note

1. According to the CPI Calculator from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

2. The 1974 subscription fee of \$25 was before the journal doubled and eventually tripled its publication frequency. The current price now includes digital subscriptions obviously not available in 1974. And the \$2,688 fee does not take into account that educational institutions often receive package deals for many subscriptions from Taylor & Francis. Still, the fee hike is substantial.

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