**Title:** PROFIT (F)OR THE PUBLIC GOOD? Sensationalism, homosexuality and the postwar popular press

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**Abstract:** From the *Sunday Pictorial*’s 1952 ‘Evil Men’ series, the first post-war exposé on homosexuality to appear in the British popular press, to the 1964 achievement by its stable mate the *Daily Mirror* of record circulation figures, both papers commodified and sensationalized homosexuality for consumption by mass newspaper audiences. Sensationalism was combined with homosexuality as a deliberate strategy to succeed in Britain’s highly competitive postwar circulation wars and also to promote particular personal and political agendas of key directors. But historians have tended to focus on the vitriol of sensationalism, emphasizing its homophobic content, without fully interrogating the tactic itself. This paper looks to the origins of sensationalism as a strategy at Mirror Group newspapers, asserting that sensational treatments of homosexuality concretely illuminate the multiple interactions between subjective beliefs and the seemingly objective profit motive. At the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, homosexuals held a negative moral, political and social value, but critically, they also held a high commercial value.

**Keywords:** Sensationalism, Homosexuality, Tabloids, Newspapers, 1950s, Great Britain

The *Sunday Pictorial*’s 1952 ‘Evil Men’ series of articles, which vilified homosexual men and became a feature of queer folklore, have been highlighted, or at least cited, by virtually every historian of twentieth-century British homosexuality since Jeffrey Weeks’s path breaking 1977 study *Coming Out*.[[1]](#endnote-1) Academic historians, popular writers, mid-century critics, tabloid competitors and even *Pictorial* executives themselves have all agreed that the series, which reintroduced the homosexual exposé to the postwar British popular press, was sensational. And yet, across nearly four decades of historical engagement with these articles, and scholars’ agreement that sensationalism was a defining element of much postwar tabloid coverage of homosexuality, the category of sensationalism itself still remains peculiarly underexamined. In describing this body of scholarship, historian Chris Waters has identified sensationalism as the ‘absent center’ of historical research into the twentieth-century press’s treatment of homosexuality.[[2]](#endnote-2)

For many historians of homosexuality, both academic and popular, it would seem that such articles’ sensationalism is self-evident, proven by their transparent bias and extreme offensiveness. Jeffrey Weeks uses the term ‘shockability’, but the sentiment remains the same: coverage reinforced negative stereotypes to tabloid consumers and ‘*objectified* homosexuals, turning them into less than human beings’.[[3]](#endnote-3) More recently, popular writer Stephen Jeffery-Poulter has denounced the ‘total absence of objectivity and the tone of outraged morality’ in the series, concluding that it ‘smack[ed] more of sensationalism than sincerity’.[[4]](#endnote-4) Historian Patrick Higgins too describes the series as ‘sensationalistic’, placing blame for its content and tone squarely on editor Hugh Cudlipp’s desire to increase circulation and promote his own beliefs by ‘vilifying and demonising homosexuality’.[[5]](#endnote-5) And journalist Roy Greenslade, himself a former *Mirror* editor, likewise attributes to Cudlipp the series’ most offensive claim, the linking of homosexuality with paedophilia.[[6]](#endnote-6) The key point of this work has often been to identify tabloid journalists, editors and proprietors as the true ‘Evil Men’, driven by homophobia or greed or both to use sensationalism to vilify queer men and contribute to the widespread prejudice they experienced in pre-decriminalization Britain.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Scholars’ interest in ‘Evil Men’ does go beyond vilification, however, and other historians have offered further analysis of the series’ impact and significance. For his own part, Chris Waters identifies the articles’ encouragement of ‘both the fears and voyeuristic fascination’ of readers in the creation of a ‘tabloid discourse on homosexuality’.[[8]](#endnote-8) Adrian Bingham notes their employment of ‘science and psychology’ to demonize homosexuals.[[9]](#endnote-9) Comparing the articles to interwar examples, Matt Houlbrook emphasizes the series’ new ‘narrative of corruption rather than effeminacy’.[[10]](#endnote-10) And Justin Bengry writes about their role in creating homosexuality as a public threat so potent that it required state attention.[[11]](#endnote-11) Suffice it to say that the ‘Evil Men’ articles are very familiar to historians. And yet, with all this focus on their impact and significance, we have only incompletely interrogated their production.

While ‘Evil Men’ was a shock to Britons generally and an affront to British homosexuals particularly, the *Sunday Pictorial* and its counterpart the *Daily Mirror* were never so iconoclastic as their producers claimed.[[12]](#endnote-12) Competing tabloids like the *News of the World* and the *People*, among others, also offered Britons a regular quota of ‘titillating, horrifying detail about spectacular accidents, terrible deaths, [and] kinky sex…’ including reports of trials for homosexual offences.[[13]](#endnote-13) But even before the explosion of coverage in the 1950s,[[14]](#endnote-14) popular publications had long commodified and sensationalized (homo)sexual acts for mass consumption.[[15]](#endnote-15) From at least the early nineteenth century, Harry Cocks has shown, pamphlets ‘detailing the crimes of “sodomites” were estimated to sell as many as 20,000 throughout Britain and its Empire’.[[16]](#endnote-16) By the 1830s, Cocks writes elsewhere, ‘scandalous papers’ like the *Satirist* and *Crim. Con. Gazette* employed sensationalism to similar effect, recognizing that scandal and sex combined in useful ways to improve sales.[[17]](#endnote-17) Even if it was not strategically sensationalized, Charles Upchurch has shown that significant press coverage of homosexuality continued throughout the remainder of Britain’s early and mid-nineteenth-century ‘age of reform’.[[18]](#endnote-18) And in a series of trials in the last quarter of the nineteenth century including the Boulton and Park public cross-dressing case (1870-71), the Cleveland Street male brothel scandal (1889), the trials of Oscar Wilde (1895) and others, the press continued to capitalize on homosexuality to attract readers.[[19]](#endnote-19) Much like mid-twentieth-century tabloids, many of these earlier publications purported to publish in the interests of the public good, mindful of circulation figures while veiling their coverage in righteous demands for social change.[[20]](#endnote-20)

That being said, the significance of press strategies and messages take on more urgent significance as market penetration expanded and competition intensified, particularly as tabloids hit peak circulation figures in the 1950s. Already by 1939, some two thirds of British households read a daily newspaper, and at mid-century more than 85 per cent of the population did so.[[21]](#endnote-21) Communicated within an already established policy of sensationalism, homosexuality was further employed as a tool to increase circulations at this critical moment. From the *Sunday Pictorial*’s 1952 ‘Evil Men’ series, the first post-war exposé on homosexuality to appear in the popular press, to the 1964 achievement by the *Daily Mirror* of record circulation figures, directors Cecil King and Hugh Cudlipp’s own social and political values fundamentally affected the papers’ treatment of homosexuality. King and Cudlipp, however, also justified sensational coverage of homosexuality by expressing concern over the corruption of Britain’s youth and threats to national security. Yet these moral and political explanations could not entirely disguise the pecuniary benefits of sensational homosexual exposés.This use of sensationalism, then, concretely illuminates the multiple interactions between subjective beliefs and the seemingly objective profit motive that drive the market. At the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, homosexuals held a negative moral, political and social value, but critically, they also held a high commercial value. Sensationalism was the tool that allowed directors to combine these agendas. It was employed, dissected, criticized and defended, but for the Mirror Group it nonetheless transformed values into economic rewards.

Our familiarity with the *Sunday Pictorial*’s ‘Evil Men’ articles has, nonetheless, begotten complacency, a seeming certainty that we either already know all there is to learn from them, or have dedicated too much attention to men like Cudlipp and the publications they directed. I argue, however, that these articles and others like them can yet be mined for insights into how sensationalism operated, in what ways it was contested, and what benefit editors expected to gain from its mingling with homosex. It is precisely in the remarkable volume of press articles, self-congratulatory memoirs, official concern, and competitors’ denouncements of Mirror Group activities that unique insights into producers’ understandings of what constituted sensationalism and how it could most effectively be deployed can be uncovered.[[22]](#endnote-22) By returning to these deceptively familiar texts, and asking how it served producers’ multiple goals, I seek to locate sensationalism’s ‘absent’ core.

**The Mirror Group of Newspapers**

In 1931, Harold Harmsworth, Lord Rothermere sold his controlling interest in the *Daily Mirror* and its counterpart the *Sunday Pictorial*, dispersing ownership of the two papers across thousands of small shareholders.[[23]](#endnote-23) Unique among national newspapers, the sale meant that no one external shareholder or group of shareholders controlled either paper, but rather each company was left with a controlling interest in the other. From this moment, as the 1949 Royal Commission on the Press later noted with some concern, the ‘directors of the two companies [could] exercise absolute control’.[[24]](#endnote-24) And they did. Thereafter, three key directors—(Harry) Guy Bartholomew, Cecil Harmsworth King, and Hugh Cudlipp—shaped the papers’ politics and priorities through much of the twentieth century, transforming them in the 1930s into ‘thrusting’ tabloid newspapers that increasingly relied upon sensation and sex to build circulation and revenues.[[25]](#endnote-25) Homosexuality was not yet part of this initial 1930s revolution, but in the 1950s King and Cudlipp initiated a second transformation combining their own values and priorities with the economic incentive of tabloid sensationalism. Homosexuality at the *Mirror* and *Pictorial* now became a moral danger, a public safety concern, a national security threat, and a commercial opportunity.

Guy Bartholomew, a *Mirror* director since before the First World War and editorial director of the paper from 1933, was instrumental in what *Sunday Pictorial* editor and fellow director Hugh Cudlipp termed the ‘Tabloid Revolution’ that transformed Britain’s popular newspaper.[[26]](#endnote-26) Bartholomew’s contribution was so influential, in fact, that Cudlipp alternatively called it the ‘Bartholomew Revolution’.[[27]](#endnote-27) He and Rothermere’s nephew, Cecil King, invigorated the *Daily Mirror*’s image and circulation by appealing to an untapped working-class mass readership with sensational headlines, content, and pictures. Strategically, but matching King’s own political values, they also abandoned the historically right-wing paper’s politics in favour of left-wing populism and support for Labour.[[28]](#endnote-28) Motivated by Bartholomew’s success at the *Mirror*, Cecil King and Hugh Cudlipp likewise transformed the *Pictorial* into a sensational popular tabloid. From 1937, when by-then editorial director King appointed Cudlipp editor, they too relied upon the use of striking visual strategies, left-wing politics, and a crusader’s zeal to reinvigorate the failing paper.[[29]](#endnote-29) Circulation at the *Pictorial* soon outstripped even that of the already revitalized *Mirror*, remaining 200,000 in front for some years.[[30]](#endnote-30)

When 24-year-old Welshman Hugh Cudlipp took over the reigns of the *Sunday Pictorial* in 1937 he was the youngest editor on Fleet Street. Notwithstanding his years of wartime service, Cudlipp was editor of the *Sunday Pictorial* from 1937 until Bartholomew dismissed him in 1949, and then again in 1952.[[31]](#endnote-31) Cudlipp later recalled his astonishment at the quality of articles in the issue immediately prior to his taking the editorship. Alongside decidedly unfunny puns and features on tomatoes he found nothing more exciting than commentary from W. H. Elliott, the Radio Parson.[[32]](#endnote-32) The *Sunday Pictorial* was, he concluded, ‘a conspiracy to make the English Sabbath duller’. It required a quick, even dangerous, transformation into a ‘volatile Sunday tabloid’ to achieve any success. For Cudlipp, the transformation of the *Pictorial* into a sensational tabloid was to be a ‘surgery without anaesthetics’.[[33]](#endnote-33) By 1940, when he went to war, the calculated strategy of tabloid sensationalism was already paying off. Circulation had increased some 300,000 copies, or 27 per cent.[[34]](#endnote-34) By 1949 circulation was approaching five million.[[35]](#endnote-35)

A key feature of the transformation at the *Mirror* and *Pictorial* was sex. With each advance in public dialogue, the papers seized the opportunity to expand and sensationalize the subject further. This both built upon but also contributed to the increasing role of sex in wartime and postwar reconstruction discourse.[[36]](#endnote-36) Wartime concern over venereal disease, for instance, brought sex into greater public awareness, particularly after the arrival of US troops to Britain in 1942. This opportunity was not lost on Bartholomew who was proud, ‘more than anything else’, of the *Mirror*’s early campaign to bring attention to venereal disease even before the government’s own efforts.[[37]](#endnote-37) In 1946 and 1947, the *Sunday Pictorial* then, in Cudlipp’s words, ‘took the first timorous journalistic steps in sex education’ with articles on ‘The Miracle of Children’ and ‘How a Baby is Born’.[[38]](#endnote-38) Following Alfred Kinsey’s 1948 *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, the *Sunday Pictorial* responded in the summer of 1949 with its own five-week series titled ‘The Private Life of John Bull’. Reporting on findings from Mass Observation’s so-called ‘Little Kinsey’ survey of British attitudes toward sex, the series was, according to press historian Adrian Bingham, ‘probably the most detailed and explicit discussion yet published in a British popular newspaper’. It confirmed that some of the same revelations in the Kinsey report regarding abortion, prostitution, and homosexuality were true in Britain as well.[[39]](#endnote-39) Prostitution, finally, was another area where, as Julia Laite describes, sensational reporting on sex also appeared in *Sunday Pictorial* exposés at mid-century.[[40]](#endnote-40) The tabloids felt impelled to call the government to action to address immoral and illegal activity, criminal networks, and international crime syndicates. By the 1950s, the introduction of sensational reports and exposés dedicated to homosexuality would fit readily into both papers’ intensifying interest in sex and their sense of moral and political crusade.

**Defining Sensationalism**

Sensationalism at the *Mirror* and *Pictorial* promoted myriad subjects, but was ostensibly guided by what Hugh Cudlipp described as ‘its earnest crusading and sense of social purpose’.[[41]](#endnote-41) This was achieved by presentation and layout strategies designed to attract readers’ attention. It also included fervent opinions and demands for change as directors and editors sought to awaken and educate Britons to what they believed were the most important political and social crises of the day. Silvester Bolam, editor of the *Mirror* from 1948 to 1953, was most vocal of all in defining and defending its creed. Highlighting his position on the cover of the Saturday edition of 30 July 1949, Bolam was unambiguous. He introduced his editorial, titled ‘Alive and Kicking’, uncompromisingly with the statement, ‘The *Daily Mirror* is a sensationalist newspaper. We make no apology for that’.[[42]](#endnote-42) Responding to charges of sensationalism against the *Mirror* and calls that week in Parliament for a press council, Bolam defined sensationalism at length. The sensational presentation of ‘news and views’ was critical, asserted Bolam, as a ‘necessary and valuable public service in these days of mass readership and democratic responsibility’. The *Mirror*, he suggested, was not just motivated by profit, but was as an organ to promote the public good, inspiring Britons, and even spurring them to action. ‘Sensationalism does not mean distorting the truth’, Bolam continued. ‘It means the vivid and dramatic presentation of events so as to give them a forceful impact on the mind of the reader. It means big headlines, vigorous writing, simplification into familiar everyday language, and the wide use of illustration by cartoon and photograph’. Sensationalism for Bolam, then, was a toolbox of strategies to promote empowerment, not a device for increasing profits.

The 1949 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Press*, which had inspired Bolam’s editorial, criticized the use of sensationalism by papers as a strategy to increase circulation.[[43]](#endnote-43) The popular newspaper, the Report held, in an effort to ‘attract readers whose tastes are believed to be reflected’ by sensational and trivial content, ‘too easily loses the distinction between what will entertain and what is intrinsically important’.[[44]](#endnote-44) The Commission described sensationalism as both ‘an extreme manifestation of the particular values reflected in the popular newspapers’ and ‘a desire to provide the excitement which the reader is believed, and has been taught, to expect’. The *Daily Mirror*, accused the Report, was among the worst offenders. It focused on ‘news of sex interest’ more than its competitors amounting to some 7 per cent of editorial space in 1947.[[45]](#endnote-45) Layout also contributed to sensationalism, the Report contended, in particular an exaggerated concern for ‘eye-appeal’ that used bold and large headlines to elevate the importance of a story or aspect of a story beyond reasonable proportion. At their height in the late 1930s, headlines took up more than one third of the news space on the main pages of several popular papers. Once again, the Commission identified the *Daily Mirror* as the most egregious offender: in 1937 its proportion was greatest among popular papers at 40 per cent.[[46]](#endnote-46) Despite identifying the ‘debasement of the professional standards of the journalists’ who dealt in sensation, the Commission saw a ‘greater evil’ in the ‘degradation of public taste which results from the gratification of morbid curiosity’.[[47]](#endnote-47) The Report distributed blame widely, but placed ultimate responsibility both for content and public taste on the newspapers themselves.

Responding to the 1949 Royal Commission in Parliament, MPs maintained that the press played a vitally important role in educating the public, but expanding beyond the Report itself, concluded that sensationalism too readily served the profit-driven interests of newspaper directors rather than the public good.[[48]](#endnote-48) In addition to blaming editors and proprietors, Conservative MP Oliver Stanley (Bristol West) also blamed public appetites for sensational content. He further charged that the state bore some responsibility for failing to ‘build up an educational system to raise the public taste above the stuff which is now being provided’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Stanley recognized the complex interplay of popular taste, demand, supply, and profit motive in the expansion of sensationalism in the press. Sensitive to the interests of business, however, he also recognized that editors and proprietors with ‘tremendous responsibility’ over organizations with ‘tremendous capital investment’ and hundreds of employees could not be asked to jeopardize their charge by going too far outside public taste.[[50]](#endnote-50) In the end Stanley supported the creation of a council to raise press standards by eliminating ‘the deliberate distortion of the news and…unhealthy pandering to crude sensationalism’.

Cecil King would no doubt have disputed Stanley’s characterization of tabloid methods as ‘pandering to crude sensationalism’. Sensationalism for King was instead an important tool for accessing the working-class market, whom he described as ‘in general the least educated part of the population’. In order to do so, King knew that the politics and message had to match.[[51]](#endnote-51) His criterion for anything to be printed was whether ‘it was of interest to, or intelligible by, a bus driver’s wife in Sheffield’.[[52]](#endnote-52) King’s tabloid guidelines do not significantly differ from Silvester Bolam’s insistence that a key feature of sensationalism is the ‘simplification into familiar everyday language’. Still, as King related, the transformation of the *Mirror* was not just about an accessible message defined by left-wing politics. A popular paper is necessarily also in ‘the entertainment business’, and the *Mirror*’s success was in part its open and sensational ‘attitude to sex’.[[53]](#endnote-53) In the first years of the tabloid revolution, this strategy initially met with hostility from some advertisers who cancelled accounts. Bartholomew and King were confident, however, that with the ongoing support of major accounts like J. Walter Thompson and Unilever, increased sales would bring them into the ‘big time’.[[54]](#endnote-54) Their confidence in sensationalism was not misplaced.

Finally, Hugh Cudlipp offered his own understanding of tabloid sensationalism, which is perhaps most enlightening for understanding the second tabloid revolution and its approach to homosexuality. Cudlipp based his position on Bolam’s own definition, which he quoted at length in his memoirs to describe the value he placed on sensation as a critical tool for the popular press.[[55]](#endnote-55) Going further, he actively described the *Sunday Pictorial*, under his direction,as a ‘sensational’ tabloid with a ‘radical zeal’. It undertook ‘japes and stunts of a most startling order’.[[56]](#endnote-56) Going beyond King’s emphasis on political alignment, accessible entertainment, and human interest, Cudlipp asserted that a popular newspaper ‘must be alarmingly provocative in every issue and abundantly confident of its own prowess and importance’. But he was clear, the bottom line mattered. It was important not to kill off old readers by shock quicker than attracting new ones with new sensational methods.[[57]](#endnote-57) Cudlipp’s understanding of sensationalism thus illuminates the *Pictorial*’s and later the *Mirror*’s treatment of homosexuality. It was ‘alarmingly provocative’ in warning readers of the dangers to the state and their children from homosexuality. And it was ‘abundantly confident’ that it was the sole voice acting in the public good, educating Britons to the threat around them. Describing the powerful and emotive use of sensationalism at the *Pictorial*, he lauded,‘It was printed in black and white, never grey’.[[58]](#endnote-58)

**Sensationalism and Homosexuality**

Following Bartholomew’s 1951 forced resignation and replacement as chairman by Cecil King, as well as Hugh Cudlipp’s subsequent return to the *Pictorial* and promotion to editorial director of both papers within the year, a second revolution took place.[[59]](#endnote-59) Together King and Cudlipp now sought to achieve an ‘even greater social significance and political influence’,[[60]](#endnote-60) including the expansion of sex coverage to include more explicit reports and exposés on homosexuality. Within weeks of Cudlipp’s return to the *Pictorial* in mid-April 1952, he oversaw a transformation in popular press coverage of homosexuality with the *Sunday Pictorial*’s sensational three-part series ‘Evil Men’. [[61]](#endnote-61)

Among the key features of sensationalism that *Mirror* editor Silvester Bolam had described in his 1949 editorial were ‘big headlines’ and ‘vigorous writing’, something the Royal Commission had criticized. Typeface was important, particularly what Cudlipp called the thick, black, inch-deep ‘sledge-hammer’ headlines that promised readers ‘sex and crime’.[[62]](#endnote-62) Across three Sundays beginning on 25 May 1952, the bold, oversized, and dramatic headline of ‘Evil Men’ immediately conveyed the series’ sensational treatment of the new subject while also signaling imminent danger and threat. But with no obvious sub-headline to explain who exactly the ‘Evil Men’ were, readers were left to navigate provocative bullet points describing the *Pictorial*’s ‘investigation’, a strategy to further engross readers in the exposé before learning its subject was homosexuality. Even then, little beyond the suggestive term ‘male degenerates’ identified the exact subject of the article before reading further.

The subject of homosexuality soon became clear, however, as the series’ author Douglas Warth condemned the ‘unnatural sex vice’ that was gaining a ‘dangerous grip’ on Britain. Evoking buggery, the classic trope of ancient Greece, Warth claimed pointedly that homosexuality had destroyed civilization itself. But, strategically, he also familiarized the problem by relying on shared memory of the Second World War, asserting that homosexuality was responsible for ‘producing the horrors of Hitlerite corruption’ less than a decade earlier. Silence was the enemy, Warth cautioned readers, because it allowed the vice to spread. Language of spreading infestation, disease, and corruption appeared again and again, evoking the sense that the scourge of homosexuality could not be contained without direct action, and more menacingly, everyone was threatened by its growth. As evidence, Warth cited police figures showing that before the war ‘there were over a million known homosexuals in Britain’, but this figure had only grown since then.

The greatest obstacle to containment was the homosexual’s invisibility and also his ubiquity, according to Warth. Again, building first on already familiar examples, he identified ‘ “pansies” – mincing, effeminate young men who call themselves “queers”’, but noted that they were dismissed by most as ‘freaks and rarities’, the fodder for ‘variety hall jokes’. Complacency and ignorance were dangerous, however, because few homosexuals ‘look obviously effeminate’ and appeared even in the ‘most virile professions’ including ‘generals, admirals, fighter-pilots, engine-drivers and boxers’. The lesson here was that readers could not trust themselves to correctly identify and avoid homosexuals; they had already penetrated every facet of public life and authority. Youth, most of all were susceptible either ‘through ignorance, curiosity, drink, blackmail or flattery’, suggesting that homosexuality was both a physical and social infection that could readily ‘corrupt’ even ‘normal people’. Parents, therefore, held a critical role in protecting their children, but too often ‘parents themselves are responsible for their children growing up to be perverted’. Dismissing both decriminalization and traditional prisons, Warth concluded that the only solution was a ‘research clinic for perverts’ dedicated to treatment in indefinite confinement ‘until they threaten society no more’.[[63]](#endnote-63)

Warth had employed numerous sensational strategies to attract and engage readers: enlarged headlines, easily understandable but volatile language, and removal of the issue from distant abstraction by making it a potent threat to readers. While the article had used some familiar references readers would readily understand, it relied primarily on exploiting their fear of unknown and hidden vices. Vague trial reports, they were told, left the subject unknowable to most of the community while many crimes, in fact, remained unproven. Homosexuals were invisible, readers were repeatedly warned; they even spoke a special language. The article described all in the vivid and active language of discovery and danger in which his investigation uncovered hidden truths for the public good. Richard Hornsey has similarly identified in the articles a ‘contrived dialetic of conspiratorial concealment and heroic exposure’ that could contribute to their sensationalism.[[64]](#endnote-64) Warth even relayed overheard conversations in seedy bars and cafes in which known homosexuals condemned his investigations, further emphasizing the series’ importance and the lengths to which Warth and the *Pictorial* would go in the interests of public safety.

Not since the 1920s ‘Painted Boy Menace’ articles in *John Bull* had a popular publication devoted so much ink to homosexuality, and certainly not on the scale or circulation that the *Pictorial* could achieve.[[65]](#endnote-65) But as Matt Houlbrook explains, the postwar ‘Evil Men’ differed fundamentally from the interwar ‘painted boys’. After the First World War the painted boys had disrupted ‘natural’ gender norms and differences through the use of makeup and their effeminate appearances and behaviour.[[66]](#endnote-66) After the Second World War, the *Pictorial*’s evil men were ‘predatory’ and ‘masculine’ queers who threatened both the state and the post-war family.[[67]](#endnote-67) Their danger lay precisely in their invisibility, their seemingly conventional masculinity, and the threat they posed the state and youth. These characteristics remained a feature of sensational coverage of homosexuality thereafter.

Further utilizing the articles’ own sensationalist devices of revelation, contagion and disease, Hugh Cudlipp lauded the series as the first attempt to strip away the ‘careful euphemistic language in which it had always been concealed’. Commenting on his motivation for printing ‘Evil Men’ a decade later, and still relying on some of the same sensational and vitriolic language used by Warth, Cudlipp’s personal positions on homosexuality deviated little from the positions of the original series. He held confidently that ‘Doctors, social workers and the wretched homosexuals themselves recognized this as a sincere attempt to get to the root of a spreading fungus, but the taboo was still strong’. Given that ‘Parliament, press and public alike evaded any serious discussion of the homosexual problem’, Cudlipp saw the sensational tabloid as key to overcoming and remedying ‘the last of the taboos’.[[68]](#endnote-68)

While the series polarized *Pictorial* executives and even alienated some readers, it nonetheless repositioned sensational coverage of sex and homosexuality at a key competitive moment.[[69]](#endnote-69) By 1952 the *Sunday Pictorial* was, according to Cudlipp’s own memoirs, in a neck-to-neck race with the *People* for second place in the Sunday newspaper circulation stakes after *News of the World*.[[70]](#endnote-70) Indeed, the *Pictorial*’s circulation was beginning an upward growth toward six million. Meanwhile, goals were in place for the *Mirror* to achieve a record daily circulation of five million. Sensational coverage of homosexuality figured in both newspapers’ ongoing strategy. Further, following the innovation of ‘Evil Men’, all their major competitors expanded coverage of homosexuality as the subject became increasingly profitable in the years before decriminalization in 1967.[[71]](#endnote-71)

Neither the exploitation of sexual sensationalism in the popular press nor its producers’ motivations for doing so went uncontested by competitors. In August 1953, the *Sunday Express*’s John Gordon led the charge, bemoaning the growth of ‘brothel journalism’.[[72]](#endnote-72) Gordon condemned competitors for their deployment of sensational techniques: ‘skillful handling of type, headlines, and layout’ to emphasize salacity. His own article’s headline, ‘Our Sex-Sodden Newspapers’, was, however, similarly highlighted in large, capitalized, and italicized text, as much a ‘sledge-hammer’ headline as anything Hugh Cudlipp ever produced. His article further railed against competitors who exploited the ‘powerful sales stimulant’ of sex, which the *Express* – Gordon claimed – avoided. He did not explicitly reference homosexuality in his diatribe against the ‘wallowing’ and ‘unrestrained glee’ that competitors found in their ‘cesspool of sex’, but the *Mirror* was only too happy to bring homosexuality into the debate in its front-page rejoinder against him. The *Mirror* dismissed accusations of sensational exploitation of sex as ‘nonsense’, and then indicted Gordon for his own hypocrisy. It charged that after denouncing competing papers, he went on just three months later ‘with the candour he condemned in others’ to rouse the nation against homosexuality.[[73]](#endnote-73)

The *Daily Mirror* further disputed the financial incentive behind sensational homosexual features as ‘rubbish’. The *Pictorial*’s ‘Evil Men’ series, it claimed, had actually threatened circulation figures. But this position is hardly surprisingly considering the *Mirror*’s and *Pictorial*’s recent coverage of actor John Gielgud’s arrest for importuning, the lead-up to the first Lord Montagu trial for homosexual offences, and other articles that kept homosex in the public eye.[[74]](#endnote-74) Just five days earlier, in fact, the *Mirror* defended its coverage of homosexuality for ‘serious people’ who were ‘now waking up to demand action’ on the homosexual problem.[[75]](#endnote-75) Proclaiming, as King and Cudlipp had always politically and strategically done, to act in the public good, the *Mirror* asked if authorities would now at last take action.

Denials of self-interest aside, the *Mirror*’s brand of sensation was working and by 1953 daily circulation was already more than 4,500,000. With a readership of 11,000,000, concluded Cudlipp, ‘An immense power for good lies within its grasp’.[[76]](#endnote-76) But what that good might encompass remained defined by directors’ priorities and their use of sensational strategies. Even in its call for action, however, the *Mirror* was not yet ready to advocate progressive reform and was following rather than leading. By now even the respectable broadsheets were calling for deeper consideration of the ‘problem’ of homosexuality.On 1 November 1953, the *Sunday Times* had become the first respected national newspaper to broach the subject in a meaningful way, concluding, ‘the law that makes intercourse between males as such an indictable offence is neither enforceable nor consonant with current ethical standards’.[[77]](#endnote-77)

Interest in homosexuality among the press, the public and Parliament was by now reaching a fever pitch. In the spring of 1954, the *Mirror* avidly reported on the infamous Lord Montagu scandal, announcing his conviction along with his cousin, Michael Pitt-Rivers, and *Daily Mail* diplomatic correspondent Peter Wildeblood, in enormous front-page headlines.[[78]](#endnote-78) In the wake of the case, on all sides action was further demanded of Churchill’s Conservative government. Some advocated immediate legal reform; others sought stricter enforcement of legal prohibitions on homosexuality. Responding to what it saw as egregiously unfair sentencing, the *Sunday Times* entered the fray once more using the opportunity to call publicly for an inquiry into legal reform.[[79]](#endnote-79) Scholars have generally, and often whiggishly, attributed the calling of the Wolfenden Committee to increased pressure put on the government following the scandal of the Montagu trial.[[80]](#endnote-80) They identify concern with the disparate application of the law and its attacks on prominent men as the leading incentives for government action. But, in fact, the origins of these demands, and indeed initial Cabinet discussions, cohere around concerns with widespread press exploitation and sensationalisation of homosexual scandal.[[81]](#endnote-81) Nonetheless, by August, Home Secretary Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe appointed the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution to undertake a comprehensive review of ‘the law and practice relating to homosexual offences and the treatment of persons convicted of such offences by the courts’ as well as a similar examination of prostitution.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, Cold War tensions offered another location for the use of sensationalism that linked unpatriotic citizens, double agents, and homosexuality.[[82]](#endnote-82) In 1955, with the exposure of defectors and Soviet spies Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, the *Pictorial* finally had the example of national danger and sexual offence that it had foretold in the ‘Evil Men’ series. Proclaiming on 25 September in full capitals, ‘The Squalid Truth’, the article announced to readers that ‘The wretched, squalid truth about Burgess and Maclean is that they were sex perverts’.[[83]](#endnote-83) The piece took front-page prominence, a significant location according to Cudlipp. Not only a site for important news, Cudlipp viewed this critical location as a site for ‘pamphleteering as well’, and as such it played a key role in his papers’ sensational methods. ‘Strong words and compelling type’ on front pages would ‘hammer home’ the message to millions of regular readers, but would be readily understandable even to the ‘millions who would catch a glimpse of the headlines on the shop counters, the railway bookstalls, the street corners, the trains and buses’.[[84]](#endnote-84)

It is perhaps in ‘The Squalid Truth’ that the clearest intersection of personal and Cold War politics in relation to homosexuality can first be seen in the *Sunday Pictorial*. Though progressive on class and social welfare issues, according to Cudlipp’s friend and biographer Ruth Edwards, both he and King ‘were revolted and alarmed by homosexuality’.[[85]](#endnote-85) King, however, was most threatened by the infiltration of homosexuals into positions of government power and authority. According to Cudlipp, King saw homosexuals everywhere. ‘The number of people he mentioned to me over the years as homosexuals’, Cudlipp recalled, ‘led me to ponder whether *homo sapiens* could be relied upon any longer to propagate the species’.[[86]](#endnote-86) Cudlipp remembered King being obsessed about the extent to which homosexuals had penetrated the Foreign Office.[[87]](#endnote-87) And both were focused on undermining Tory authority and power.

‘The Squalid Truth’ highlighted each of these concerns, warning Britons of deceitful civil servants who were subject to blackmail and turning on account of their homosexuality. The US State Department, readers were alerted, had undertaken its own purge of suspect staff. Among them were 325 homosexuals. Similar men at home were, the article stated unambiguously, a ‘Danger to Britain’. Perhaps worse than the danger posed by such men becoming traitors, however, was the secrecy already pervading the Foreign Office promoted by ‘a chain or clique of perverted men’. Once more claiming the higher purpose of speaking for public good, the *Pictorial* demanded an end to this kind of ‘sordid secret’ and that ‘it is urgently necessary that this hoodwinking of the public should cease’. Surprisingly, criticism of the government for its lack of transparency and of departments for shielding homosexuals soon transformed as the *Mirror* criticized the government for its inaction to *decriminalize* homosexuality.

Despite continuities in sensational accounts of homosexuality, which in fact mirrored Hugh Cudlipp’s own personal positions across three volumes of memoirs from 1953 to 1976, the *Mirror* and *Pictorial*’s politics on homosexuality were not, in fact, always entirely static. Despite its vitriol, in September 1957, following the release of the Wolfenden Report,[[88]](#endnote-88) the *Mirror* had come out in support of the Report’s call to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adult men in private.[[89]](#endnote-89) That is not to say, Adrian Bingham reminds us, that the *Mirror* had significantly shifted its position on homosexuality itself.[[90]](#endnote-90) It was still an ‘odious offence’. But, taking a more classically liberal rather than a progressive stand on the issue, the *Mirror* concluded, ‘it should not be the function of the law to punish a personal moral sin’.[[91]](#endnote-91) Calls for decriminalization then became another opportunity to criticize Conservative government inaction. ‘Get a Move on, Mr. Butler’, exclaimed the *Daily Mirror* the following year as it demanded ‘immediate action’ from Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s Home Secretary R. A. Butler on the Wolfenden recommendations.[[92]](#endnote-92) Despite apparently evolving politics, the combination of sensationalism with homosexuality remained constant. Enormous ‘sledge-hammer’ headlines, provocative text, and the personalizing of the issue continued. Even if the *Mirror* eventually advocated the Wolfenden recommendations, it nonetheless did so within the successful framework of sensational journalism. Tellingly, however, the *Mirror*’s strongest statements in favour of homosexual law reform appeared less visibly on the inside pages, and not, sensationally, on the critical front page.

By the end of the decade, understandings of sensation and the value placed upon them by directors and columnists were cast into high relief when flamboyant American entertainer and personality Wladziu Valentino Liberace brought forward a libel suit against columnist William Connor and the *Daily Mirror*. Describing Liberace’s 1956 arrival at Waterloo under his pen-name Cassandra, Connor asserted of Liberace: ‘He is the summit of sex – the pinnacle of Masculine, Feminine and Neuter. Everything that He, She and It can ever want’. The column further described Liberace as a ‘deadly, winking, sniggering, snuggling, chromium plated, scent-impregnated, luminous, quivering, giggling, fruit-flavoured, mincing, ice-covered heap of mother-love’.[[93]](#endnote-93) Testimony at the 1959 libel trial—delayed on account of Liberace’s touring commitments—unsurprisingly emphasized adjectives like fruit-flavoured. But these were complicated by trans-Atlantic differences in language and interpretation. The ‘summit of sex’ comment, however, may have been the most sensational, suggesting desire across genders, and remained a critical piece of evidence but also the most disputed.

In addition to the article’s content, the very nature of the *Daily Mirror* as a sensationalist tabloid was used as evidence against Connor. He disputed that the tabloidrelied upon sensationalism, even arguing against Cudlipp’s own unambiguous characterization of it in his 1953 book *Publish and be Damned!*[[94]](#endnote-94)Connor realized that this was an important definition, ‘sensationalism’ meaning, in his testimony, corrupted by commercialism and by extension driven by motivations for profit rather than the public good.[[95]](#endnote-95) But this was exactly the prosecution’s point: the *Mirror* was motivated by profit. It was, Liberace’s counsel asserted against Connor’s vehement protestations, ‘the ordinary normal policy of the *Daily Mirror* of writing a sensational article in order to boost its sales’.[[96]](#endnote-96) And Connor’s use of sensational language to exploit Liberace’s suggested homosexuality was only one more example of this policy.

When he finally took the stand, Cudlipp could do little but confirm what appeared in his own book, already placed prominently on a courtroom bench before him. ‘Oh that my enemy would publish a book’, Liberace’s counsel chuckled menacingly.[[97]](#endnote-97) Like *Mirror* editor Sylvester Bolam, who had likewise defended the paper’s strategies, Cudlipp too remained clear on the publication’s priorities and success. ‘Sure it is sensational, and is proud of being sensational’, he had written in 1953.[[98]](#endnote-98) Directly contradicting William Connor’s testimony, Cudlipp admitted transforming the *Mirror* into a ‘sensational newspaper’ that derived its enormous success from precisely those policies and tactics. In the time that Cudlipp had been associated with the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Pictorial*, this policy succeeded in raising circulation figures and thus increasing capital by some £4,000,000.[[99]](#endnote-99)

The verdict hinged not only on whether Connor’s description suggested Liberace was homosexual and whether that might be true, but also the intent and motives at the *Mirror*. For his part, Liberace was unambiguous. When asked if he had ‘ever indulged in homosexual practices’ he replied: ‘No, never in my life’.[[100]](#endnote-100) Most damning of all perhaps was testimony from Dail Betty Ambler, a reporter for competing Sunday tabloid the *People*, sent coincidentally to interview Connor only days after the writ for libel had been issued. She testified that in conversation with Connor at his home he had admitted the Liberace article was libelous and its sensationalism financially motivated. ‘Of course it’s a libel, and he will take a lot of money out of us’, Connor foretold, ‘They think it will be worth it for a week’s publicity’.[[101]](#endnote-101) ‘They’ could have been none other than Hugh Cudlipp and Cecil King, key directors who guided the paper’s sensational policies and content.

After deliberating for three hours and twenty-five minutes the jury determined that Cassandra’s column would cost the *Mirror* the enormous sum of £8,000 damages, then the largest judgment for libel ever handed down by an English court.[[102]](#endnote-102) The case cost the *Mirror* another £27,000 in legal costs ‘not counting’, Cudlipp added drolly, ‘consumption of gin and tonic during the preparation of the defence’.[[103]](#endnote-103)

Reflecting on the case just three years later, Hugh Cudlipp was candid about the financial benefit the article and the case had brought. Asserting that the *Mirror* did not need publicity, he nonetheless acknowledged that even the record judgment against the paper could not have brought so much attention from the world’s press, repeating the conclusion put forward by the *Guardian*: ‘The case is unlikely to do any harm to newspaper circulations’.[[104]](#endnote-104) Cudlipp’s full disclosure, however, only emerged in a 1992 *British Journalism Review* article reflecting on the case as the sole survivor among those involved. The day before publication of Connor’s infamous column, the *Mirror*’s legal team warned Cudlipp that the column left the tabloid open to litigation. ‘Cassandra’s piece manifestly held Liberace up to ridicule and contempt’, Cudlipp concluded, ‘but not…to hatred’. He decided that the column would be printed unexpurgated, and ‘if we lost, well, hell, it would be money well spent’.[[105]](#endnote-105) Despite the loss of the Liberace libel case, the powerful financial incentive offered by sensational vitriol and the scandal of homosexuality nonetheless continued unabated. Expanding sensationalism at the *Pictorial*, including politicized attacks on homosexuality in schools and government alike, was paying off. By the autumn of 1959 the *Pictorial* was the first paper to achieve a weekly net sale of 525,000 and became the second biggest Sunday paper.[[106]](#endnote-106)

Legislative action and popular culture alike brought homosexuality further into the public eye in the first years of the 1960s. MP Kenneth Robinson sought unsuccessfully in 1960 to move forward on the Wolfenden Report’s recommendations in Parliament with a private member’s motion. At the same time as these debates were held in the House of Commons, two sympathetic films about Oscar Wilde’s trials were premiered in London.[[107]](#endnote-107) The following year *Victim*, one of 1961’s most prominent films, starred heartthrob actor Dirk Bogarde and further drew attention to illogical laws, the criminal status of homosexuals, and the incentive to blackmail them.[[108]](#endnote-108) In 1962, Labour MP Leo Abse proposed a Sexual Offences Bill. It included secondary recommendations from the Wolfenden Report seeking to secure men complaining of homosexual blackmail from prosecution, prohibit charges for homosexual offences more than twelve months old, and ensure that cases against ‘consenting adults in private’ should be brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions himself.[[109]](#endnote-109) It was defeated before securing a second reading.

When the spy case of Admiralty clerk John Vassall broke in 1962, the papers continued to play on the fear of the invisible homosexual who threatened the state. Having been blackmailed by the KGB into becoming a Soviet agent in 1955, Vassall became the face of the traitorous homosexual. Recognizing the value of sensation and homosexuality to promote directors’ moral, political, and commercial agendas, the *Sunday Pictorial* offered Vassall £5,000 for his story.[[110]](#endnote-110) Following Vassall’s arrest, the *Sunday Mirror* (as the *Sunday Pictorial* was by then rebranded) offered a primer on ‘How to Spot a Possible Homo’.[[111]](#endnote-111)

Condemning the Admiralty, the Foreign Office and MI5 for not recognizing Vassall’s homosexuality – ‘Vassall, the spy, was a homo. He lived like one, he acted like one’. – author Lionel Crane concluded that if professional men cannot identify a homosexual, ‘I think it is high time we had a short course on how to pick a pervert’. ‘Homos’, the article explained in tones that echoed both older interwar queer stereotypes and also contemporary post-war concerns, fell into two groups: the obvious and the concealed. Less dangerous where the ‘obvious’ men who dyed their hair, used cosmetics, and ‘walk with a gay little wiggle’. Echoing the sensationalist strategies in place since ‘Evil Men’, the remainder of the article focused on the varying characteristics of the many ‘concealed’ homosexuals who could include fashionable men, married men and fathers. But these most invisible men were also the most dangerous. ‘THEY are everywhere, and they can be anybody’. Helpfully identifying categories of suspicion to the publication’s consumers – the bachelor with a strong attachment to his mother; the man too interested in helping youths; the man ‘adored by older women’ – Crane added: ‘They would be on *my* “suspect list.” I wouldn’t tell them *my* secrets’. So incensed was the Homosexual Law Reform Society that secretary Antony Grey wrote personally to Cecil King to complain. He asked whether this ‘reactionary and ill-informed’ piece represented a departure from the paper’s other more progressive positions. Unsurprisingly, given the article’s reflection of his enthusiastic commitment to rooting out the threat of homosexuals from positions of authority and its employment the successful strategy of sensationalizing homosexuality, King never replied.[[112]](#endnote-112)

**Conclusion**

Across these many sensational treatments of homosexuality in the tabloids, we must remember to see them in their primary form: capitalist enterprises that consciously develop techniques and strategies, and then employ them to promote their own political, moral and financial interests. Directors and editors, however, unswervingly denied interest in expanding circulation figures that the use of sensationalism brought. Hugh Cudlipp, for example, invariably couched sensationalism in a language of public morality, social values and political change. Describing the *Mirror* as having ‘been denounced as “sensational” (of course it is), “churlish” (nonsense), “brash” (why not?), “self-important” (sure!), “impertinent” (yes!), “inexcusably vulgar” (vulgarity does not seek an excuse)’, he concluded that ‘the importance of the paper is not its audacity but its social significance’.[[113]](#endnote-113) Still, whatever the social and political motivations behind sensational articles, they also contributed to ever increasing circulation figures that ultimately created record readerships for both publications. On 9 June 1964, the *Mirror* achieved its long sought goal of an average daily sale of 5,000,000, which corresponded to a readership of 14,000,000 for each issue, making it in Hugh Cudlipp’s own words, ‘the greatest commercial success of any newspaper in the Western world’.[[114]](#endnote-114)

Too often we understand the motivations that guide tabloid content, to paraphrase Hugh Cudlipp, in black and white, but never grey. We see them either as organs of discourse that reproduce the values of their producers or we see them as machines of capitalism driven only by an amoral profit motive. An analysis of the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* at the critical moment of their deliberate and calculated transformation into sensational tabloids demonstrates how their content cannot be disentangled from the values of key directors. But nor did these directors ever lose sight of circulation figures and the returns they promised. It is precisely within the context of commercial competition and capital growth that the strategic sensationalism of value-laden treatments of sex in general and homosexuality in particular allowed these publications to flourish. These popular newspapers’ employment of sensationalism from the 1930s tabloid revolution, and particularly from their 1950s inclusion of homosexuality, demonstrate how capitalism is not in fact amoral and cannot be disassociated from either political or personal values.

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1. NOTES

   References to *Daily Mirror* articles are from the *Daily Mirror* Digital Archive at http://www.ukpressonline.co.uk. References to unpaginated newspaper articles are from the collections of the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

   Douglas Warth, ‘Evil Men’, *Sunday Pictorial*, 25 May 1952, 6 and 15. Other articles appeared: 1 June 1952, 12; 8 June 1952, 12. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, 162-163. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I am indebted to Chris Waters for his astute feedback on the need for engagement with the category of sensationalism both among the papers that made up the panel, and now this journal, but also on the field more broadly. Chris Waters, Comments for the panel “Sexual Sensations: The Popular Press in Twentieth-Century Britain,” North American Conference on British Studies, Montreal, 9 November 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 162 (italics original). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*, 11-12 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 283-293. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Greenslade, *Press Gang*, 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The Sexual Offences Act (1967) only decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting men in England and Wales over the age of 21 committed in private. It did not apply to Scotland, Northern Ireland, the merchant navy or the armed forces. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Waters, ‘Disorders of the Mind’, 139-40. This ‘tabloid discourse’ competed in the 1950s with scientific discourse ‘for both popular and state acceptance’. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Bingham, *Family Newspapers?* 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 238; see also Houlbrook and Waters, ‘The Heart in Exile’. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Bengry, ‘Queer Profits’. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. There is similarly a long history of the transformation of British popular papers into sensational tabloids. Conboy, *Tabloid Britain*, 1-13. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. This description is from an unnamed woman born in Pembrokeshire, Wales in 1954. Box 6 5/535A, National Lesbian and Gay Survey, University of Sussex Library. See for example ‘They Infested a City’, *News of the World*, 1 August 1954; Michael Knight, ‘Polluted’, *The People*, 16 August 1964; Noyes Thomas, ‘Into the Twilight World’, *News of the World*, 27 July 1964. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 162-3; Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 275 and 281. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Of course employment of sensationalism was not limited to treatments of queer sexuality or homosex. Adrian Bingham identifies a ‘tradition of prurient journalism’ reaching back to the earliest news sheets of the sixteenth century. Bingham, *Family Newspapers?* 1. Most famously W. T. Stead, a key figure of the ‘New Journalism’, used sensationalized accounts of child prostitution and the ‘white slave trade’ to appeal to an emerging mass market in the late nineteenth century. Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, 55-8 and Laite, this volume. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Cocks, ‘Secrets, Crimes and Diseases’, 115. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 123 and 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Upchurch, *Before Wilde*. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See among many others: Bingham, *Family Newspapers?* 173-4; Hyde, *The Other Love*, 96-98, 123-33,149;Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*, 171; Upchurch, ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable’, 127–57;Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*;David, *On Queer Street*, ch. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. On the competing interests of social reform and commercial concern in the ‘New Journalism’ see Hampton, ‘Representing the Public Sphere’, 15-29. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Bingham, ‘An Organ of Uplift?’, 651; Bingham, *Family Newspapers*? 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. For example the multiple volumes by Hugh Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, *Publish and Be Damned!*, and *Walking on the Water.* [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. *Royal Commission on the Press, 1947-1949*, 60. See also Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!* 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *Report of the Royal Commission on the Press*, 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 49. On the transformation of the *Mirror* to a populist, sensationalist tabloid see Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture*, 126-33. And for a more recent survey of tabloids’ exploitation of sex, particularly in relation to issues surrounding women, see Conboy, *Tabloid Britain*, 123-51. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned*, 48-54. Cudlipp went on to become editorial director of both papers in 1952 and in 1963 chairman of Daily Mirror Newspapers. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned*, 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Beers, *Your Britain*, *passim*. On Guy Bartholomew and Cecil King’s motivations and transformation of the *Mirror* see King, *Strictly Personal*, 100-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. On King’s hiring of Cudlipp and subsequent transformation of the *Sunday Pictorial* roughly along the lines of the *Mirror* see King, *Strictly Personal*, 108-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. King, *Strictly Personal*, 109. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 182-5 and 194. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 87-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 90. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Swanson, *Drunk with the Glitter*. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. “Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the Press: Twenty-Second Day, 19 February 1948,” Cmd. 7398 (London: HMSO, 1948), 12. See for example “False Modesty won’t stop this Disease,” *Daily Mirror*, 19 February 1943, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. *Sunday Pictorial*, 3-31 July 1949 cited in Bingham, ‘The “K-Bomb”’, 156-79. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, 178-80. See *Sunday Pictorial*, 13 February 1949. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Silvester Bolam, “Alive and Kicking,” *Daily Mirror*, 30 July 1949, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. The 1949 Royal Commission on the Press had been struck to consider the press’s financial and managerial organization and whether concentration of ownership could adversely affect its quality and freedom. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. *Royal Commission on the Press*, 131-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. *Royal Commission on the Press*, 264. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. *Royal Commission on the Press*, 133. The *Daily Express* was only marginally further behind at 38 per cent. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *Royal Commission on the Press*, 132. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. *Hansard Parliamentary* Debates, 5th ser., vol. 467 (1949), cols. 2683-794. House of Commons debate on the Report of the Royal Commission on the Press, 28 July 1949. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., col. 2713. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Stanley questioned whether public taste had changed since the beginning of the war and if the press was ‘actually encouraging feelings which might otherwise have subsided’. Ibid., cols. 2714-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. King, *Strictly Personal*, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. King, *Strictly Personal*, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. King, *Strictly Personal*, 105-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. King, *Strictly Personal*, 102. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 115-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Cudlipp called this the ‘Second *Mirror* Revolution’, though it impacted the policy and content of the *Sunday Pictorial* to a similar extent. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 108. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 109. Cudlipp was describing their goals for the *Mirror*, but the same could easily be said of the *Pictorial*. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Edwards, *Newspapermen*, 224. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Cudlipp attributes this innovation to early days of the tabloid revolution at the *Mirror*. Such headlines were sometimes twice as large as the article itself and were a ‘signal that all could see of the excitements to come’. Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned*, 64. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Warth, ‘Evil Men’, 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. *Hornsey, The Spiv and the Architect, 82.* [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. ‘Evil Men’ was not the paper’s first postwar discussion of homosexuality, but it was the first postwar exposé. Throughout the first half of the 1950s, both the *Mirror* and the *Pictorial* doggedly pursued the case of the London Choir School’s ‘Father Ingram’ as well as other masters and staff who assaulted boys. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 317-25. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 224-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 238-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 317. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Protests came from *Sunday Pictorial* shareholders and circulation managers alike. Even the Financial Director, James Cooke, cancelled his subscription. Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 180-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. From unpaginated graph of Sunday newspaper circulations 1947-61. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. For more on competing papers’ treatment of homosexuality see especially Bingham, *Family Newspapers?* chpt. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Though he focused on the press ‘orgy’ following the release of Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), Gordon was well known for his thoughts on homosexuality. John Gordon, ‘Our Sex-Sodden Newspapers’, *Sunday Express*, 23 August 1953. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. ‘Sex, Crime and The Press’, *Daily Mirror*, 11 November 1953, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. With a flurry of high-profile queer trials including that of Labour MP William Field, author Rupert Croft-Cooke, recently knighted Shakespearean actor Sir John Gielgud, 1953 saw a growth in column inches as the lucrative potential of the subject became clearer. On homosexual trials that appeared primarily in 1953 and 1954 see Higgins*, Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 179-230 also 268-70. For descriptions of this and the Montagu case, see Hyde, *The Other Love*,216-26*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. ‘Now Will They Act?’ *Daily Mirror*, 6 November 1953, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned*, 285. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. ‘A Social Problem’, *The Sunday Times*, 1 November 1953. The paper was conscious of its historical position, highlighting for ‘surprised’ readers: ‘This is possibly the first time that a national newspaper of standing has devoted its whole leading article this subject’. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Peter Woods, ‘Guilty: Montagu—12 Months’, *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1954, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. ‘Law and Hypocrisy’, *The Sunday Times*, 28 March 1954. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. See especially: Weeks, *Coming Out*, 156-167; Grey, *Quest for Justice*, 19-33. Waters, ‘Disorders of the Mind’, 134-136 uses the term whiggish. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Bengry, ‘Queer Profits’, 174-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. See especially Weeks, *Coming Out*, 159-60. Besides Weeks, Peter Wildeblood himself propounded the theory of a witch-hunt to explain his own arrest and incarceration. It was further taken up by MP and independent scholar H. Montgomery Hyde. See Wildeblood, *Against the Law*; Hyde, *The Other Love*, 212-16. More recently scholars of British homosexuality have largely dismissed the theory of US Cold War pressure precipitating any kind of top-down witch-hunt for homosexuals in the UK. See Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 247-66; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 242-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. ‘The Squalid Truth’, *Sunday Pictorial*, 25 September 1955, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Edwards, *Newspapermen*, 247 [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, p. 299. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Interview with Cudlipp, 16 November 1992 cited in Edwards, *Newspapermen*, 249. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. ‘Vice: Official’, *Daily Mirror*, 5 September 1957, 1. Accused of focusing on prostitution in its September 5 cover story, the *Mirror* made support of homosexual law reform unambiguous a week later. ‘Playing Safe?’ *Daily Mirror*, 12 September 1957, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 189. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. ‘Why are They Scared?’ *Daily Mirror*, 26 November 1958, 2. quoted in Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 189. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. ‘Get a Move on, Mr. Butler’, *Daily Mirror*, 9 June 1958, 2. This failure to gain headway on the report’s recommendations, along with an apparent resurgence of prosecutions against consenting homosexuals in the spring of 1958, notes Antony Grey, ‘directly precipitated the formation of the Homosexual Law Reform Society’, which worked to see the Wolfenden recommendations enacted into law. Grey, *Speaking Out*, 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Cassandra, ‘Yearn-Strength Five’, *Daily Mirror*, 26 September 1956, 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. William Connor cross-examined by Gilbert Beyfus, Q.C., Liberace v. *Daily Mirror* and W. Connor, 1956 L. 1901, Vol. II, 10 June 1959, 40-3. University of Cardiff, Hugh Cudlipp Papers, HC 7/2. All subsequent references to Liberace transcripts are held in the same location. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid., 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., 11 June 1959, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. See Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 336-41 for his account of the Liberace trial. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned*, 249. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Hugh Cudlipp cross-examined by Gilbert Beyfus, Q. C., Liberace v. *Daily Mirror* and W. Connor, 1956 L. 1901, Vol. III, 15 June 1959, 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Liberace examined by Gilbert Beyfus, Q.C., Liberace v. *Daily Mirror* and W. Connor, 1956 L. 1901, Vol. I, 8 June 1959, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. Dail Betty Ambler examined by Gilbert Beyfus, Q. C., Liberace v. *Daily Mirror* and W. Connor, 1956 L. 1901, Vol. I, 9 June 1959, p. 56 [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Pyron, *Liberace*, 233. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 336. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 337. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Cudlipp, ‘Laughter in Court’, 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 293-4. The *Pictorial* had narrowly missed becoming the first to achieve 500,000 when the *People*’s scoop of Errol Flynn’s explicit memoir pushed it ahead by ‘publish[ing] far more purple passages than the *Pictorial* would have dared’. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. A. Hallidie Smith quoted in Grey, *Quest for Justice*, 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. ‘Films’ [Review of *Victim*], *Man and Society*, 1, no. 2, (Autumn 1961): 18-19. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. In July 1965 it was announced that these points were informally brought about not by legislation but at the request of the Director of Public Prosecutions himself. Grey, *Quest for Justice*, 85-86. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Vassall, *Vassall*, 145. According to Vassall, the *News of the World* had offered £10,000 for an ‘exclusive and extensive story’. Vassall took the *Pictorial*’s offer because it was ‘to the point and would pay for my costs’. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Lionel Crane, “How to Spot a Possible Homo,” *Sunday Mirror*, 28 April 1963, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Grey, *Quest for Justice*, 82. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 126. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water*, 245. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)