“Why is My Child Gay?”: PFLAG and the Origins of the Born This Way Gay Political Identity

Joseph Wuest, Ph.D. Candidate — University of Pennsylvania
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In this paper, I focus on how the budding movement’s project of making alliances with scientific and medical actors and institutions in the late 1970s and 1980s established the foundations of the “born this way” gay political identity that would come to define the movement’s articulation of gay identity. I argue that the use of scientific expertise in the movement’s political discourse facilitated the creation of the relatively conservative neoliberal version of gay politics that has defined the contemporary LGBTQ movement. Looking to the origins and development of the family-based gay rights organization PFLAG as a case study, I demonstrate how these scientific alliances led the movement to adopt a narrow biodeterministic conception of what it means to be “gay,” therein limiting the bounds of queer politics and abandoning the more radical early 1970s gay liberation movement’s project of exposing heterosexuality and homosexuality as false and constraining social categories, which served to rationalize an unjust political and social order. This new construction of homosexuality and the commitment to a politics of the family entailed a self-conscious eschewing of the very notion of sexuality in favor of a de-sexualized gay subject whose orientation was best defined in biological or genetic terms rather than by one’s desires or sexual behavior. To make this case, I employ archival materials including PFLAG pamphlets, issue-based campaign training materials, and conference presentations to illustrate how this major national gay rights organization constructed the origins of the “born this way” gay political identity—premised on ideas like the sexual innocence of children and the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm—that would come to
figure prominently in battles over policy and legal cases at the center of modern gay organizing such as same-sex marriage and military inclusion.¹

At its core, this paper is a case study in what Science and Technology Studies scholar Sheila Jasanoff terms *co-production*, a phenomenon in which scientific and political actors work in tandem to create a new logic of the social.² By tracing the political development of one of the major liberal gay rights organizations alongside developments within various scientific approaches to the science of sexuality, I illustrate the intertwined nature of their ideological conceptions of gay identity. As gay rights activists made significant gains against an older psychoanalytic paradigm that emphasized parental influences on a child’s sexuality, new possibilities for biological understandings of homosexuality proliferated and were encouraged by PFLAG’s desire for experts to aid them in articulating sexuality as an inherent orientation, one that was natural, fixed, non-threatening to the social order, and—for the most part—de-sexualized.

In taking account of factors such as the political orientation and incentives of PFLAG as well as disciplinary developments in the sciences that are all constitutive components of this process of co-production, I pay special attention to the impact of the broader neoliberal political ideological context that matured along with these developments from the late 1970s onward. Other scholars such as the historian Lisa Duggan have described this period as one that laid the foundations for the 1990s “homonormative” turn in gay politics, which she defined as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and

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sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized
depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”³ Lauren Berlant too has
identified particularly conservative elements of neoliberalism where the idea of a “familial
politics” became central to public discourse and the Reagan ideal of the family and its place in
the private sphere as the most important realm of citizenry.⁴ These earlier writings on
homonormativity and the neoliberal family inform the way in which I discern the ways in which
both PFLAG and its allies in the sciences came to understand gay and lesbian identity in the
context of considerations of the family, the welfare state, and the overall purpose and origins of
homosexuality and heterosexuality.

As for how the structure of what follows, I begin with outlining PFLAG as a liberal gay
rights institution with attention to how its ideology differed so drastically from previous
instantiations of gay politics in the U.S. I then discuss how the 1973 success at the American
Psychiatric Association to de-medicalize homosexuality created an opportunity for biological
considerations to be taken more seriously. I note here too how PFLAG’s early post-1973 claims
concerning gay and lesbian identity were already rooted in strong statements about innateness
and biologically-fixed notions in a time when most of their scientific allies were offering much
more nuanced considerations regarding biology. The next section, however, demonstrates the
ways in which scientific developments came to produce evermore biodeterministic accounts of
gay identity, which represented sharp turns from older more sociologically-informed approaches
taken by scientists with gay sympathies such as those working at the Kinsey Institute. In the last

section, I look at PFLAG documents and conference proceedings from the 1980s that showcase the ways in which scientific discourse and authority were deployed to further solidify claims about the immutable nature and biological origins of homosexuality. I conclude with a note on how these developments set up the liberal gay rights movement both to help engender as well as popularize and politicize the gay gene and gay brain studies of the 1990s that came to figure so prominently in legal and constitutional strategies as well as in popular discourse.

[Note: Previous chapters of the dissertation explore in depth the kinds of alliances with scientific and medical experts that were made in the previous decades whereas this chapter focuses more on showing how scientific institutional and discursive resources were deployed by PFLAG and others to ground their ideological approach to themes of identity, the family, and the purpose of a gay politics.]

**PFLAG and the Neoliberal Turn in Gay Rights Activism**

Founded in New York in 1973 by the parents of gay liberation activist Morty Manford, Parents of Gays (POG) was established initially as an educational and advocacy resource for parents who wished to better understand, accept, and support their gay and lesbian children. Jeanne Manford and her husband had always accepted their activist son Morty’s sexuality and his work in the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) but after his beating at a protest in 1972 they took action in organizing themselves and other parents, noting an urgent need for straight society to assist their gay loved ones’ personal and political struggles. POG came into being during a time in which the radical left-wing gay liberation movement was in its dying days; as organizations like the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and their allies in the broader New Left groups characterized by nominally anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist principles and decentralized horizontalist approaches to governance crumbled under the weight of a conservative turn in the mid-to-late 1970s, a new more moderate strain of liberal gay politics began to form.
Organizations like the National Gay Task Force and Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF) were representative of this turn toward an interest group-centered politics that sought to cultivate relationships with political elites within the Democratic Party and other mainstream political channels to fight for the civil rights of gay and lesbians across the country.

Parents of Gays exemplified this trend as it was founded upon not only support for gays and lesbians but also a commitment to the family as a fundamental social and political unit and the idea that through collective effort, gay activists and their loved ones could carve out a space of belonging in the existing society. Historian Heather Murray described POG as comprised of “activists [who] affirmed not only that they were simply loving parents but also that they were, in fact, socially conservative: their heterosexuality, marriages, and families were intact, and they were not particularly left-leaning or sympathetic to radicalism.” This parents-and-citizens-for-gays” orientation led to rapid growth as POG expanded to twenty chapters across the country by 1980. The organization published advice and resource pamphlets, participated in campaigns against discriminatory policies and for civil rights legislation, and increasingly brought together a group of people who largely never imagined themselves as being involved in a gay and lesbian political movement. By 1982, founder of the Los Angeles chapter Adele Starr took the organization national—renaming the group Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)—by attaining an official non-profit status and placing it among a growing number of liberal gay rights organizations across the country.

In examining PFLAG’s early activism and its relationship with scientific experts and discourses regarding the nature of sexuality, it is important to highlight the ways in which the

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6 Ibid., 108-9.
new gay rights politics constituted a sharp break with previous forms of gay politics. PFLAG differed in considerable ways from the early homophile activism of the 1950s and 1960s as well as the gay liberationists who built a radical gay alternative to the more conservative homophiles following the riot at Stonewall in 1969. To be certain, PFLAG and other incipient liberal gay groups were not entirely divorced from the history—and for some, their own experiences in that history—of these previous iterations of gay political struggle. For instance, the gay liberation insistence that gays “come out” as a political act influenced PFLAG’s call for families to do the same. In a call for parents to follow their children out of the closet, an early POG newsletter read: “IF THERE ARE MORE THAN 100,000 GAYS AND LESBIANS IN NEW YORK CITY – THERE SHOULD ALSO BE MORE THAN 200,000 PARENTS WHO HAVE “COME OUT.””

PFLAG also carried on the work of homophile activists in fighting for military inclusion, against employment discrimination and those who sought to pathologize homosexuality, and various protective policies that were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. Despite these continuities, however, PFLAG different significantly from the homophiles and the liberationists due to both its founding ideological commitments as well as its historical situation in a post-New Left, increasingly conservative political era.

While the homophiles are often portrayed as an early conservative strain of the gay movement especially after its “respectability”-oriented wing seized control of the movement’s flagship organization, the Mattachine Society, from its communist founders in 1953, it is striking...

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how much more these early activists emphasized sexuality and sexual behavior than PFLAG did.\textsuperscript{10} The homophile movement worked primarily on issues like police brutality in the nascent gay bar scene as well as entrapment policies that targeted gay men having sex or arranging to have sex in public and semi-public spaces. Their attention was so focused on protecting men against charges of “lewd conduct” and other sex crimes, lesbian feminists among their ranks came to criticize the male-dominated movement in part for its disproportionate attention to issues regarding male sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{11} In contrast, PFLAG’s focus on gay children and the relationship between those children and their families led the issue of actual sexual acts to be sidelined. By attending to questions that parents had about the nature of sexuality, PFLAG spent its educational resources promoting the idea that a person’s sexuality was formed at an early stage of child development years before puberty and, therefore, highlighted sexuality as an endemic part of a person’s constitution rather than as a way of speaking about sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{12}

In many ways, PFLAG was still closer ideologically to the homophiles—especially with their focus on civil rights and liberties—than it was with the gay liberationists who directly preceded them. In the immediate post-Stonewall era in 1969, liberationists had staked their politics in themes such as the proper theoretical way to conceive of sexuality and identity, critiques of patriarchy and the family, and child sexuality in ways that were in direct opposition to a civil rights tradition they saw as being committed to inclusion into an already-existing political and social order. Liberationists did not conceive of gay and lesbian identities as equal alternatives to straight identity that simply required a liberal attitude of tolerance to accommodate them; rather, they wrote manifestos and developed political analyses that centered


\textsuperscript{11} Armstrong, \textit{Forging Gay Identities}, 114.

\textsuperscript{12} Murray, \textit{Not in This Family}, 118.
on the artificiality of the homosexual-heterosexual binary, which they deemed a tool of sexual repression that perpetuated the patriarchal family model.\textsuperscript{13} This led gay liberation’s intellectuals such as Dennis Altman to hypothesize an impending “end of the homosexual” in which gay liberation would successfully expose the false and constraining categories of homosexual and heterosexual and give way to a “polymorphous perverse society” where this binary would cease to be policed.\textsuperscript{14} Others like Martha Shelley posited that the homosexual was a political and social category that represented the negation of all the behaviors and desires that were necessarily considered unacceptable and deviant in a heterosexual society.\textsuperscript{15} The Radicalesbians and other liberation groups advanced the claim that in a non-patriarchal society, the fictitious binary would no longer serve an legitimating purpose and a more sexually free society might flourish in its stead.\textsuperscript{16} True liberation and equality for liberationists thus entailed demystifying—and ultimately ridding of—the categories of the homosexual, the heterosexual, and the nuclear family.

So, whereas gay liberationists cast the heterosexual nuclear family as a historically-contingent social unit that largely existed to perpetuate a patriarchal capitalist political order, PFLAG centered its advocacy on the opposite idea that gay, lesbian, and straight identities existed as natural categories. Additionally, they placed their faith in the liberating role that the family—especially parents—could play in making a more tolerant liberal political world. In a correspondence between the Task Force and POG in 1978, activists decided that in their canvassing against a discriminatory bill in California they needed to reassure families that the new gay rights was not interested in undermining the family. The Task Force implored POG

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 88-92, 237.
canvassers to “[b]e proud that you are good and loving parents. Assure people that homosexuality is not a threat to the family unit.” Several years later, a coalition consisting of PFLAG, the ACLU, and the National Organization for Women (NOW) shifted the focus of sex abuse and sexual predators from gay men to male members of heterosexual families, noting that research indicated the latter were responsible for the majority of child abuse that resulted in destabilized families. Holding straight men accountable, they argued, was much more important for protecting the family than were policies that targeted innocent and harmless gays and lesbians who merely wished to exist in their own family households.

As a key component of its family-oriented politics, PFLAG portrayed the gay or lesbian child as a de-sexualized figure whose sexuality was best explained in terms of something deeply-rooted, a condition present from early childhood, rather than in reference to sexual acts and penchants. As Murray has noted, PFLAG promoted the idea of sexual innocence in children to avoid undermining the centrality of the family and its related heterosexual norms that allowed straight, often relatively conservative parents to speak on behalf of a minority sexual identity. PFLAG and related organizations too had to defend themselves against conservatives who had developed a rhetoric of protecting innocent children from gay teachers and other adults whose predatory tendencies could corrupt and infect children with homosexuality. The language of the California Briggs Initiative exemplifies this strategy in its declaration that “[o]ne of the most

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18 Scott de Orio, “The Creation of the Modern Sex Offender,” in The War on Sex, eds. David M. Halperin and Trevor Hoppe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 247-67. de Orio makes the claim that this constituted a significant shift in gays and lesbians going on the offensive regarding the heteronormative family. This framing, however, overstates the critique of the family present here as PFLAG was committed ideologically to the family as a fundamental unit of society.
19 Murray, Not in This Family, 127.
fundamental interests of the State is the establishment and preservation of the family unit.” In a letter to journalist Dan Rather regarding his reporting on young gay men and prostitution, Jean Smith drew a distinction between gay and lesbian children and teenage prostitutes, arguing that the latter were an unrepresentative group who engaged in the practice “for fast, easy money.” Smith must have felt the pressure to combat those like Save Our Children who suggested that all homosexual children were budding sexual deviants, it is notable that she downplayed the idea that young gays and lesbians might turn to prostitution after being evicted from discriminatory family homes in order to maintain a strict separation between innocuous children who happened to be gay and those she termed “the few who discredit all homosexuals” by being improperly sexual.

Though the move to de-sexualize children as part of a gay rights group’s political advocacy might not strike contemporary readers as strange, some gay liberationists had challenged the trope of the innocent child only years before PFLAG made it a constitutive part of its politics. In Carl Wittman’s “A Gay Manifesto,” which was adopted by many Gay Liberation Front chapters across the country, he contended that “kids can take care of themselves, and are sexual beings way earlier than we’d like to admit. Those of us who began cruising in early adolescence know this, and we were doing the cruising, not being debauched by dirty old men.” Gay liberation youth organizations also opposed the regulation of their sexual activity and often rallied against prohibitions of sex with minors and other age-based sexual regulations.

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22 Ibid.
For instance, at the 1970 National Student Gay Liberation Conference in San Francisco, delegates from a San Diego-based group stirred controversy in calling for the abolition of laws that regulated adult sexual behavior but not youth-targeted ones. Many other activists at the conference drowned out the San Diego liberationists with rancorous crying out as they believed that non-adults ought to be afforded sexual autonomy as well.24 Even after the heyday of gay liberation’s influence, some continued to advocate for youth sexual rights. In 1979 at a national gay rights conference in Washington, D.C., the Gay Youth Caucus petitioned to revise age of consent laws across the country as a means of both affording rights to young gays and lesbians and pushing the punitive state’s reach further from the gay community writ large.25

At the most extreme end of this debate was the infamous pro-pederasty gay liberation group called the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA). The organization’s co-founder David Thorstad declared that the spirit of the “Stonewall generation” was one of “please-affirming impulses” and that its message was that “[s]ex is fun, homosexuality is fun, boy-love is fun, gay liberation is a movement for everyone’s sexual liberation.”26 While NAMBLA became the subject of police scrutiny and marginalization within gay rights politics almost as soon as it was formed, its founders were active in organizations like the Gay Activist Alliance and they held forums through those groups to discuss the nuances of youth sexuality and the law’s role in policing it.27 As gay activism became more disconnected from pederasts and their calls for age of consent legal reforms, Thorstad criticized those like PFLAG leaders for going into a defensive mode in response to those like Anita Bryant and John Briggs; he noted

26 Ibid., 251-2.
that “[i]t didn’t occur to gay spokespeople to draw a distinction between being raped and molested and enjoying sex.”\textsuperscript{28} Thorstad lamented that by the late 1970s and the rise of the new gay rights movement, activists ceased “fighting to liberate youth [and instead] it became fashionable to argue that youth needed protection, especially from sex with men.”\textsuperscript{29}

The demise of gay liberation’s more radical approach to identity politics not only altered the way in which gay rights activists articulated the nature of their identity, but it also led to new gays rights politics where parents and families articulated neoliberal concerns about preventing their gay and lesbian children from being “left behind” in a society defined by competition and a troubled social welfare state. Rather than taking a critical disposition toward the reigning social and political economic order, the new gay rights essentially accepted society as it was except for the fact of anti-gay discrimination. Considering PFLAG’s middle-class style of politics rooted in its material existence as an interest group that survived on donations, fundraisers, and corporate sponsors, this ideological disposition ought not be surprising.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, the gay rights movement lurched rightward with the rest of American politics during this period as the roots of neoliberalism spread and a new political reality characterized by increasing attacks on social welfare, labor, and the very idea of “the public” settled onto the political landscape. The advent of a homonormative gay politics can be detected in PFLAG’s project of demonstrating how simple it would be to integrate gay and lesbian youth into the existing social categories and logics of the existing social and political context.

\textsuperscript{28} Thorstad, “Man/Boy Love,” 253-4.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 254.
\textsuperscript{30} I mention this here to avoid a common mistake of positing that because one can trace socialist and communist influences in previous iterations of gay political movements that a gay politics \textit{ought to naturally be rooted in} a Marxist politics. In chapter 3 of the dissertation, I offer my own interpretations of the history and demise of the radical gay liberation movement, and here I take a more materialist view that considers the material base and actual constituency of a social movement to be more indicative of what we can expect out of their politics than any ideological ancestry might suggest.
This attitude is evident in documents such as an early 1975 POG newsletter that proclaimed “the time is ripe to join together to appeal to the public conscience in order to achieve equal opportunities for our daughters and sons.”\textsuperscript{31} Whereas gay liberation radicals had theorized a break from this rhetoric of “opportunity” and anti-discrimination policies disconnected from a broader left-wing agenda, POG was content with appealing to the public on the principle of liberal fairness with the demand that their sons and daughters be accepted in society as equal participants. In a stark example of this ideological temperament, Jean Smith stated in a 1977 letter to \textit{Newsweek} that “[d]epriving homosexuals of their civil rights is not only unconstitutional and inhumane but it means we will be adding twenty million homosexuals to our overburdened welfare rolls if we do not permit them to be productive individuals.”\textsuperscript{32} At this early moment, Smith exemplified the soon-to-be dominant neoliberal political belief that the U.S. social welfare system was nearing implosion and that “realist” solutions to the problems of the national debt and the “underserving poor” alike would need to be soon tackled.\textsuperscript{33} PFLAG’s appeals to science and its rooting of sexuality in nature offered help in this integration into the burgeoning neoliberal hegemony by reconstituting gay political identity in a relatively desexualized idea of gay and lesbian youth and the family as a fundamental and organic unit in modern human society. Gays and lesbians in this view were just like straights—their sexualities were not only benign and apolitical but also secondary to their roles as individuals willing to offer their labor as productive members of society, perfectly content with the world as it was.

\textsuperscript{32} Jean Smith letter to \textit{Newsweek},” (June 1, 1977) Collection 1857, Box 1, Folder 3, Jeanne Manford Papers 1972-1995, New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts, New York, NY.
\textsuperscript{33} Adolph Reed, Jr., “The ‘Underclass’ as Myth and Symbol: The Poverty of Discourse about Poverty,” in \textit{Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 179-96; Reed notes here how conservative discourse on the underclass and poverty was quickly adopted by liberals.
Rejecting Theories of Parental Influence and Re-naturalizing Gay Identity

Buttressed by the 1973 victory at the American Psychiatric Association (APA) where homosexuality was removed from its classification as a mental illness through the work of an alliance of gay activists and reformist psychiatric professionals, PFLAG could make the claim that previous neo-Freudian assumptions about parental causes of homosexuality were based in outdated science and the bigoted social biases of their adherents. Prior to the reforms, conservative psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts dominated their disciplines’ approach to homosexuality, which rested on premises that long-term exposure to effeminate fathers and overbearing mothers were at the root of child’s homosexuality and that gays and lesbians could be “cured” of their deviant desires through therapy. Since the 1950s in the early days of the homophile movement, gay rights activists had been cultivating relationships with Alfred Kinsey and affiliated researchers at the Kinsey Institute who first challenged the pathological account of homosexuality in the late 1940s and 1950s with their infamous studies on the hidden diversity of sexual practices and predilections of American adults. Psychologists like Evelyn Hooker recruited homophile activists from their early organizations to serve as research subjects, which led to some of the first modern scientific accounts against the assumption that homosexuals suffered from curable mental illnesses. These relationships—which continued to grow throughout the 1960s and 1970s—helped to build the foundation of the

liberal gay rights movement’s ability to draw from the sciences in their legal and political advocacy and their educational work, especially as a number of their allies became leaders in their respective disciplines.

Thus, PFLAG activists and other liberal gay rights proponents came to interpret any reference to parental causes of a child’s sexuality to be intrinsically linked to conceptions of homosexuality as a sign of a corrupted mental state; relying on a mix of older studies that the homophiles had contributed to as well as newer ones in that tradition, PFLAG members often pointed out that the parental upbringing thesis was based on studies of persons who were forced into the office of mental health practitioners against their will and that it was likely that if there was any mental illness in a homosexual patient that it was the product of society’s ill treatment of them rather than sign of anything neurologically defective in the person. As the following examples demonstrate, this suspicion of any explanation of homosexuality that rested on factors within the family home led both PFLAG and their allies in science and medicine to begin entertaining ideas about homosexuality as something innate, deeply-held, and perhaps biologically natural.

The educational literature and political pamphlets produced by PFLAG during its initial political struggles against an ascendant New Right illustrate how scientific resources and language were deployed both to defend themselves and their children against discrimination as well as to ground their ideological commitments to the naturalness of homosexuality and the political role of the family in liberal gay politics. In 1977, the liberal gay rights movement was met with the beginnings of a conservative backlash when former Miss Oklahoma pageant winner Anita Bryant launched the “Save Our Children” campaign, which brought together those in the new Religious Right to contest local ordinances protecting the housing and employment rights of
gays and lesbians. In reaction to this growing national threat to the limited number of local and state protections the movement had already won, PFLAG produced advocacy pamphlets and gave statements to the press that rested on the idea that homosexuality was “not a choice” but instead a benign and natural inclination. When Bryant teamed up with California State Senator John Briggs that same year to push an initiative that would have outlawed gays, lesbians, and their straight allies to teach or work in the California public school system, PFLAG distributed 150,000 copies of its “About Our Children” booklet to reassure California voters that, contrary to Briggs’s argument, homosexuality was not a contagion and in no way did gay children or gay adults present an assault on the family unit.

In a series of letters to newspapers and magazine editors and reporters, members of the PFLAG executive committee demanded that the media to cease portraying gays and lesbians as victims of their upbringings and instead to promote their own scientific understandings of homosexuality. In a letter to CBS News, executive committee member Lawrence Starr relied on scientific expertise to declare that “[t]he consensus of professional opinion of psychologists is that sexual preference is determined in very early childhood, that environment has little influence in determining sexual preference and that probably ten percent of all persons are homosexual.”

Thus, the family could not be held responsible for children’s sexuality, which was, rather than a mental illness, simply a natural part of sexuality in a human population where a certain fixed proportion of people are inherently homosexual.

In some instances, PFLAG leaders would use language that was even more forceful and assured about the innate quality of a person’s sexuality than the actual claims of scientists who

38 Murray, Not in This Family, 118-9.
39 PFLAG, “Our Story.”
tended to emphasize that biology could be one of many factors. Writing on behalf of the Los Angeles PFLAG chapter to Henry Gammill of the *National Observer* in 1977, Adele Starr criticized the paper for running an article titled “What if your child is gay?” which rested on the myth that parents were most responsible for causing homosexuality in their children.41 Starr complained that the paper did not reach out to any sympathetic experts such as their allies psychologists Evelyn Hooker and Judd Marmor but instead chose to interview Irving Bieber who clung to a pathological understanding of homosexuality even after the APA voted in 1973 against that model. If only journalists would contact these experts, Starr argued, they would see that “[a]nother truth, realization that is emerging is that it is natural for a gay person to be attracted to the same sex, just as it is natural for a non-gay person to be attracted to the opposite sex. It is not contagious. It is probably innate.”42 The last line on sexuality-as-innate extended the theory that homosexuality was not contagious nor caused by parental factors; rather, Starr posited that it was likely that this new trend in the science of sexuality would reveal that a new “truth” about the biologically-ingrained nature of homosexuality would soon be known.

In addition to appealing to journalists and editors, PFLAG leaders targeted the authors of popular advice columns to spread their message. In 1977 Florida chapter leader Jean Smith wrote to Ann Landers of the “Ask Ann” advice column to assist Landers in better addressing the concerns of parents and family friends of gay children. Smith offered scientific resources to Landers noting that “I have articles stating that some psychiatrists suspect three factors: 1) genetic inclination, 2) personality makeup, 3) social stresses, and that some geneticists suspect

42 Ibid.
biochemical or hormonal conditions already present at birth.”  

Several years later in 1981, Adele Starr repeated this move in writing to the author of the nationally-syndicated “Dear Abby” column and offering her resources to assist with families who found themselves struggling to understand homosexuality.  

Abby not only enthusiastically referred her readers to PFLAG in her next column on the topic, but she also referenced the scientific knowledge that Starr had provided in advice to a mother who was struggling with her young lesbian daughter and the origins of her sexuality. Abby responded by dispelling myths about parental influences on children’s sexuality and reassured the mother that “sexual preference is not a matter of choice; it is determined at a very early age.”  

Shortly after the column was published, 7,500 letters from other parents flooded Starr’s address, which PFLAG responded to individually in their quest to remake gay politics and the family in their own image. 

[NOTE: In another chapter, I analyze how many of the scientists discussed here ended up serving as expert witnesses in court cases that began to argue that homosexuals were a protected class under the equal protection clause due to the immutability of their identities. Here I focus on the developments and changes in the science itself as well as the interaction between scientists and political actors in venues such as national political conferences and advocacy literature].  

Learning from One Another: Gay Identity and the New Biodeterminism Grow Together  

PFLAG and the gay rights movement could rely on scientific allies in part due to massive shifts in the science of sexuality and the natural sciences more broadly that moved genetic and

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44 PFLAG, “Our Story.”  
45 Murray, Not in This Family, 119.
biological explanations for a slew of behaviors and identities to the fore. Studies of sexuality—especially those conducted by researchers involved with the Kinsey Institute and others who had worked with gay rights activists or were sympathetic to their cause—moved further away from parental and environmental explanations for homosexuality and increasingly conducted their inquiries into the nature of sexuality with attention to hormonal, genetic, neuroanatomical factors. PFLAG then entrenched these allies through maneuvers such as serving in advisory roles for their studies, reserving time for researchers to speak at their annual national conferences, and making scientific insights and authority part of their educational literature and political advocacy. In this sense, the interactions between PFLAG and these researchers represent most clearly how these scientific and political forces worked to co-produce a new way of understanding sexuality. In this section, I outline the changes that were occurring in different fields of sexuality research with attention to how these changes cannot be understood without reference to the gay rights movement’s relationships with scientific actors. The shift from environmental understandings of sexuality melded well with PFLAG’s desire to articulate gay identity as something deeply-rooted and beyond the influence of any social factors.

In the post-1973 climate, researchers began turning to biological explanations for sexual identities due mainly to two factors. The first was the discrediting of many older theories that emphasized environmental factors and parental influence as these were increasingly associated with a mix of the conservative old guard and evangelical Christians who focused on reparative therapies to convert homosexuals. Just as the previous section noted how gay rights activists

recoiled from theories projecting some kind of parental influence, the scientists that helped to move the APA away from the pathological model in the 1970s also shared a suspicion of theories that leaned too heavily on parental factors. Secondly, the turn to biology was also in many ways not necessarily a brand-new research trajectory as much as it was the reassertion of a previously more dominant one. As historians of sexuality have shown, biologically-laden assumptions about homosexuality were commonplace throughout the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in a range of scientific and medical circles—especially those encompassing researchers and policymakers enamored with eugenics. These theories featured a blend of the biological and environmental premises and often came in the form of Lamarckian-esque fears about how the degenerated physiological and mental constitutions of persons (often lower class and racialized) might “infect” others (often middle-to-upper class and white); thus in some respects, the narrow focus on the environmental causes was a particular—albeit authoritative—strain of psychotherapy that dominated briefly in the mid-twentieth century.\textsuperscript{48} Technological developments in the realms of genetic and hormone testing too enabled researchers to retest old hypothesis they have been previously criticized for pursuing with sloppy and inconclusive methodologies as well as formulate new ones regarding identities and behaviors during this moment.\textsuperscript{49} This movement toward biological, genetic, and hormonal approaches to the study of human behavior and identities manifested both in changes in the research agendas of Kinsey-allied scientists as well as the production of a new cohort of scientists who were predisposed to search for the origins of human sexuality in genomic, neurological, and endocrinological aspects of a person.

\textsuperscript{48} Terry, An American Obsession, 92-3.
In taking account of these factors, it is important also to consider how the broader political context of the moment and the ways in which dominant modes of thinking about the social influenced the scientists—as well as the political actors—of the time. Biologist Richard Lewontin has most famously argued that this shift toward biological explanations for human identities and behaviors cannot be separated from the “modern competitive individualist entrepreneurial” (i.e. neoliberal) world from which contemporary biodeterminism emerged.\(^5^0\) Lewontin noted that what he termed the “ideology of biological determinism” rested on three premises that could not be divorced from the political moment. These three ideas were that: “[human beings] differ in fundamental abilities because of innate differences, that those innate differences are biologically inherited, and that human nature guarantees the formation of a hierarchical society.”\(^5^1\) Though he was primarily focused with the ways in which the unequal distribution of resources and life chances were being legitimated by this scientific paradigm, Lewontin did discuss biodeterministic studies of homosexuality, indicating that these neoliberal-imbued scientific research agendas were primed to mistake contingent social and political phenomena for something written into the human genome.\(^5^2\) This meant that assumptions about the evolutionary basis for all nodal points on the spectrum of sexuality (such as theories about how in the Pleistocene era\(^5^3\), homosexual male family members helped pass down the overall family unit’s genetic material) came to overshadow more sociologically-informed theories that emphasized the malleability of sexual preference and the social conditioning that produced compulsory heterosexuality for most Americans. As liberal gay rights groups like PFLAG were

\(^{50}\) Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology*. 15.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{53}\) Sociobiology and evolutionary psychology both posit that human behaviors and norms generally emerge from this period of human evolution.
fundamentally committed to the idea that social unit of the family was both rooted in nature and a moral good, its ideology was a near perfect match for these new studies.

In the rest of this section, I discuss changes in the research agendas of Kinsey Institute-affiliated researchers, new studies in hormonal research, and the creation of new fields of inquiry such as sociobiology and behavioral genetics, all of which contributed to the shifting of the scientific study of sexuality and identity in a biological direction. In 1981, researchers at the Kinsey Institute published the long-awaited third installment in their series on human sexuality, which marked the first time one of the Institute’s major studies gave serious attention to the biological conception of homosexuality. The research for the book, *Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women*, was conducted by psychotherapist Alan P. Bell and sociologists Martin S. Weinberg and Sue Kiefer Hamersmith who peered through data collected from face-to-face interviews with persons across the spectrum of sexuality in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Unlike the previous Kinsey studies which were more descriptive in nature, these researchers set out to test hypotheses including Bieber’s family background model. In a press release for the book, the authors touted that “parents have little influence on whether their children develop a homosexual orientation.” They explained to parents that “[y]ou may supply your sons with footballs and your daughters with dolls, but no one can guarantee that they will enjoy them.” Though this framing demonstrates that most researchers in the 1980s had not yet separated questions of gender identity and gender normativity from sexuality, the fact that the

most prominent center for the study of sexuality in the country produced a study exonerating parents from their roles in their child’s sexuality signaled that the post-1973 scientific climate would be defined by the sidelining of social considerations and the rise of biological ones. Accordingly, in their theorizing about this phenomenon, Bell, Weinberg, and Hamersmith reached for genetic and hormonal explanations stating that “homosexuality may arise from a biological precursor (such as left-handedness and allergies, for example) that parents cannot control.”

As some psychotherapists were becoming more receptive to biological assumptions, endocrinological work on hormones and human sexuality became more prevalent in broader scientific discussions about homosexuality. The idea that endocrine glands regulated a person’s personality and sex presentation and preferences had existed since the late 1920s and 1930s, but longstanding feuds between psychoanalysts and endocrinologists kept the two fields distant from one another for decades as the former focused on mental state as the root of a condition like homosexuality whereas the latter searched for a somatic origin. The political-scientific shifts at the APA, however, gave attention to those like Gunter Dörner who published an influential 1976 book *Hormones and Brain Differentiation*, which posited that—inspired by his results from previous experiments on castrated mice—homosexual men had lower levels of testosterone and higher levels of estrogen than heterosexual men. Dörner’s study demonstrated that endocrinology too did not distinguish gender nonconformity, transsexuality, and homosexuality from one another, but rather hypothesized their etiologies as being intrinsically tied to the nature of sex hormones that regulated masculine and feminine an individual’s physical characteristics as

57 Ibid.
well as one’s psychological qualities. This hormone-based work and others like it were quickly integrated into the writings of other sexologists as Bell, Weinberg, and Hamersmith cited the Dörner study to show that there might be a hormonal basis for homosexuality.  

Several years into these new investigations into the endocrine system, a research team led by psychoendocrinologist Brian Gladue and psychiatrists Richard Green and Ronald Hellman sought to put Dörner’s sex hormone hypothesis to a more rigorous test. The test involved administrating Premarin, a strong dose of estrogen used to treat menopause and uterine bleeding, to self-identified homosexual and heterosexual men; it was hypothesized that because women’s luteinizing hormone (LM) levels initially drop and then rise to double their original baseline, that homosexual men’s baseline levels would rise as well. Once again, endocrinology’s focus on sex hormones led to an assumption that homosexual men were essentially a hybrid species between gender normative, heterosexual men and women. The results showed that although none of the 17 heterosexual men experienced a rise in their LM baseline, 9 out of 14 of the homosexual men experienced a rise of about 35%, leading the researchers to conclude that there was significant evidence for the idea that hormonal factors had a causal impact on a sexuality. Gladue, Green, and Hellman did attempt to nuance their results by reminding their peers that “these findings are based on a particular subset of homosexual men and may not apply to all male homosexuals.” However, their hedging here came primarily from a concern about different varieties of homosexual men as they had been certain to capture “lifelong homosexuals” in their sample. Citing the Kinsey scale, which places human beings on a spectrum ranging from

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62 Ibid.  
63 Ibid.  
64 Ibid.
exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality, they allowed for the idea that less-than-exclusive homosexual men might respond differently to their treatment effects, and thus, “[w]hether a differential neuromodulatory response is present in men of less exclusive homosexual orientation is an open question.” So for Gladue, Green, and Hellman, even if not all homosexual men’s sexual orientations could be described by this particular hormonal differentiation, it was possible that another biological mechanism might.

The rise of new genetics-based disciplinary approaches to the study of human behavior and identities coupled with interdisciplinary scientific developments such as the founding of modern day behavioral genetics also contributed to the biodeterministic trend. During the late 1970s, the field of sociobiology, a progenitor of modern day evolutionary psychology, was founded by an entomologist named E. O. Wilson who sought to explain human behaviors and identities with reference to evolutionary theory. As biologist Richard Lewontin described the field of inquiry, sociobiology begins with traits we see in contemporary life and posits that those characteristics are relatively universal, can be traced down to the level of genetic code, and are the natural result of the process of human evolution. This theoretical framework presumes that a trait possesses an adaptive quality that can be theorized with reference to early hunter-gatherer society, which discounts any sociological account for the existence of an identity or behavior by rooting it in a story about human evolution.

In addition to exploring the evolutionary nature of human behaviors such as altruism and racial divisions, Wilson applied his theory to homosexuality. Though he spoke of a “potential for bisexuality in the brain,” his theoretical concerns were the twin phenomena of “full homosexuality” and “full heterosexuality,” particularly with regard to the former’s evolutionary

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65 Ibid.
66 Lewontin, Biology as Ideology, 88-90.
In 1978, Wilson stated this hypothesis more starkly than many of his contemporaries by writing that “[t]he predisposition to be a homophile could have a genetic basis, and the genes might have spread in the early hunter-gatherer societies because of the advantage they conveyed to those who carried them.”

He explained that while early homosexual men would not have passed on their genetic material through reproduction themselves, they might have “taken the roles of seers, shamans, artists, and keepers of tribal knowledge” that enabled their immediate relatives to survive and reproduce at higher rates and, thus, pass on these “gay genes.”

Sociobiologists were soon accompanied by another set of biological determinists in the formation of the field of behavioral genetics, a loose assemblage of geneticists, biologists, psychologists. As historian of science Aaron Panofsky explained, this field was constructed by a new guard of geneticists who sought to re-establish ties with psychologists, psychiatrists, and other social scientists from which an older guard in genetics had separated themselves. Behavioral geneticists were particularly influential in their defense of twin and sibling studies, which they spread throughout the social sciences in part by attacking those who harbored suspicions of the methodology as “anti-genetic,” unscientific reactionaries. Though even those like E. O. Wilson had only cautiously endorsed the twin study methodology particularly—in his 1978 book, Wilson critiqued a twin study on homosexuality for “suffer[ing] from the usual defects that render twin analyses less than conclusive”—behavioral geneticists in the 1980s

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 145; Wilson linked homosexuality to a broader consideration of the evolutionary character of altruism in human societies. He wrote that “[t]here is, I wish to suggest, a strong possibility that homosexuality is normal in a biological sense, that it is a distinctive beneficent behavior that evolved as an important element of early human social organization. Homosexuals may be the genetic carriers of some of mankind’s rare altruistic impulses” (p.143).
71 Panofsky, Misbehaving Science, 139-41.
72 Ibid., 141.
marched forward with their bold claims regarding the genetic origins of a slew of identities and behaviors.  

E. O. Wilson’s own student James Weinrich, for example, came to publish a number of genetics-based studies on sexuality including an influential study of homosexual and heterosexual brothers on heritability and homosexuality with his co-author Richard Pillard, the first openly gay psychiatrist in the U.S. In that study, Pillard and Weinrich recruited a sample of fifty-one primarily homosexual men and fifty heterosexual men and demonstrated that the homosexual subjects were four times as likely to have a gay sibling compared to the heterosexual ones whose likelihood of having a gay sibling mapped onto assumptions about how gay siblings were distributed in the general population. The last third of the fairly short paper was devoted to counterfactuals that might explain the increased incidence of homosexuality in the gay subjects, which ranged from assumptions about an increased tendency for gay men to know if their siblings were gay as well as issues in the recruitment methodology; however, Pillard and Weinrich concluded that they had accounted adequately for these scenarios and were convinced that their results showed that there was likely “a significant familial component to male homosexuality” and that it was possible that it was discoverable in a person’s genetic code.

Co-production in Motion: Evidence from Conferences and Advocacy Literature

As biological conceptions were coming to the fore in the science of sexuality, PFLAG was simultaneously deepening its relationship with these researchers by inviting them to their annual national conferences and by consulting them to create advocacy literature to teach

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75 Ibid., 808.
76 Ibid.
parents, friends, skeptics, and gays and lesbians themselves about the likely origins of homosexuality. Though PFLAG had a longer history of inviting those like Evelyn Hooker to their meetings to dispel myths about the pathological model of homosexuality, the mid-to-late 1980s saw a noticeable shift in the types of researchers being brought to address the national membership. No longer were these scientists simply attacking neo-Freudian ideas about bad parenting and other sociological conditions that were presumed to corrupt a child’s sexuality; instead, the scientists invited to conferences were increasingly engaged in the biological sciences and advanced new biodeterministic theories of the origins of sexuality as an alternative. Whereas activists in the liberationist and immediate post-liberationist moment were more likely to downplay the importance of searching for such origins (the rejoinder to the question of origin was often: “what are the origins of heterosexuality then?”), PFLAG’s ideological commitments made it a suitable political vessel for both the question of ontology and the new theories that sought to answer it.77

During PFLAG’s first national conferences in the 1980s, the researchers that were invited constituted a mix between those who had made careers on refuting the pathological model as well as those who were working on elements of the biological thesis. As for the former, Evelyn Hooker gave one of the early presentations titled “Facts and Misconceptions about Homosexuality,” which offered reassurance to PFLAG members that gays and lesbians were not a deviant class of mentally ill persons.78 A later presentation in 1989 titled “Future Directions for Sexuality: Beyond the Biology” featured public health and nursing scholar Sylvia S. Hacker who

77 Note: Although I had access to a vast number of PFLAG’s records housed in Cornell University’s Human Sexuality Collection, I have yet to actually hear the content of these conference proceedings. They currently exist only in cassette tape form and Cornell’s policy requires that they be digitized before being made accessible to researchers. It is my hope that I will flesh out this section a bit more once I am able to listen to these recordings.
was known also for confronting myths about homosexuality but also for promoting a vision of sexuality as a spectrum rather than a binary. But as evidenced in the Gladue, Green, and Hellman paper on the hormonal thesis, this perspective would not necessarily provide a bulwark against the development of a biological conception of gay identity. The biological account was proving capable of generating enough nuances and hedging to incorporate degrees on the Kinsey scale into its etiological assumptions (i.e. a variety of biological factors may be at play, each coding for a different degree on the spectrum of sexuality); as long as that was conceivable, the scientific foundation for a political and cultural disposition toward a “born this way” gay identity was possible.

Other conference presenters during this same period, however, gave talks that more closely resembled the fully-matured biodeterministic studies and political discourse that would come to dominate throughout the 1990s. Sociologist and coauthor of *Sexual Preference* Martin Weinberg, for example, gave a presentation in 1986 titled “Development of Sexual Orientation” modeled on his work that took seriously considerations that a combination of factors including biology contributed to a person’s sexuality. Though Weinberg was not an uncompromising proponent of the biological thesis, his work with Bell and Hamersmith had come to be cited frequently by those considering biological explanations. C. A. Tripp, an older Kinsey-affiliated scholar who had been in correspondence with members of the homophile organization the Mattachine Society in the 1950s and 1960s, saw *Sexual Preference* as tossing aside nearly all psychological and social learning studies along with the pathological model (environmental

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influences were largely determinative in both of these) and leaving only biological ones to explain human sexuality. While Weinberg would protest being cast as a biodeterminist, it is telling that here that an older gay rights scientific ally recognized the shift that Weinberg and others represented.

In 1987, one of the most bioessentialist of these conference presentations was delivered by the newly-appointed director of the Kinsey Institute, biologist June Reinisch. Her talk, titled “Biological Factors in Psychosexual Development,” echoed the new director’s project in moving the Institute in a more biomedical direction, a commitment that was reflected in her decision to change the Institute’s name to the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction. Reinisch’s work during the period was characterized by the assertion that gender differences in personality were rooted in genetic, prenatal, and postnatal factors; this research entailed investigations into the impact of in utero hormonal differences that Reinisch and her colleagues believed were at the root of masculine and feminine behaviors in males and females respectively that could demonstrated in infant children. Unsurprisingly, as gender differences—gender nonconformity in particular—were so heavily linked to homosexuality at this time (both in science and in culture), Reinisch also expressed the belief that prenatal factors such as

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hormone imbalances in the womb could alter a child’s male hormone production in such a way that would predispose him to a homosexual orientation.\textsuperscript{84}

By 1988, PFLAG had assembled eleven of these scientific allies and gathered their expert opinions into one document to disseminate among their members and supporters.\textsuperscript{85} This pamphlet titled “Why is My Child Gay?” had the stated purpose of being a resource for readers “to learn how experts in the field (scientists, researchers) answer the questions most commonly asked by parents and friends of gays and by homosexuals themselves.”\textsuperscript{86} The experts consulted included a number of familiar names including: Alan Bell, Richard Green, Judd Marmor, Richard Pillard, June Reinisch, Martin Weinberg, James Weinrich, and Evelyn Hooker, all of whom with the exception of Hooker had entertained the biological thesis to some degree. Out of the remaining three researchers, only one, an anthropologist named Gilbert Herdt who studied gender identity development in Papua New Guinea through the lens of culture and semiotics, questioned the heavily-biological approach to sex/gender and sexuality.\textsuperscript{87} Among the other two were the famous transsexuality and intersex sexologist John Money, who too considered hormonal determinants in sex, gender identity, and sexuality, and Lee Ellis, a sociologist who researched the neurohormonal causes of aggression, a decidedly biodeterministic enterprise.

Anticipating the query of why scientific experts ought to be the ones answering these questions, the next section asked rhetorically “[w]hy ponder the questions” and “[w]hy analyze facts we cannot change?”\textsuperscript{88} PFLAG explained that for some “because of a natural curiosity, or as a means of coping with the fact that their child is gay in a heterosexual society—seek to explore

\begin{footnotes}
\item[84] Breu, “As Did Kinsey.”
\item[86] Ibid., 1.
\item[88] PFLAG, “Why is My Child Gay?,” 1.
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the origins, prevalence, and history of male homosexuality or lesbianism before they can accept
their child’s homosexuality or bisexuality as a reality.”89 This answer reveals how the liberal gay
rights movement was becoming more amenable to the idea that gay and lesbian identity was an
aberration from a heterosexual world that was divided into the gay-straight binary not because of
any historical, sociological, or political economic developments, but rather because that was the
natural order of things. And accompanying this move was an insistence that the term “sexual
preference” be replaced with “sexual orientation” as “[a]fter 1982…scientists [have] found
evidence that homosexuality and heterosexuality may not be a matter of free choice,” and thus,
the rhetoric of the movement ought to reflect this new understanding how sexuality existed as a
function of hormonal and genetic factors that were smaller parts of a grander—and “natural”—
evolutionary ordering of sexuality in human societies writ large.90

The most striking part of the pamphlet was the cover, which was composed of simply the
title of the pamphlet along with a series of the conclusions offered by a consensus of the experts
surveyed. The results began with a hedged statement that granted that while “[t]he exact causes
of heterosexuality and homosexuality are unknown…[but] likely to be the result of an interaction
of several different factors, including genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors.”91 Following
this claim was another that stated “[p]sychological and social influences alone cannot cause
homosexuality,” which reveals both the move away from the pathological model that rested
heavily on these methods but also the move toward a more biological thesis.92 The latter element
becomes more obvious when paired with the third conclusion that stated “[a] biological (genetic,
hormonal, neurological, other) predisposition toward a homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., cover page.
92 Ibid.
orientation is present at birth in all boys and girls."93 This represents one of the clearest and forceful articulations of the biological thesis of the time. And while the fourth conclusion offered a caveat that “[n]one of the contributing factors alone can cause homosexuality,” the pamphlet as a whole considered biological assumptions above all others.

A look to the individual statements given by these researchers in later pages confirms this assessment of the piece’s overall biological character. The first question posed to the researchers asked “[w]hat is the basis of sexual orientation/which factor or factors drives most?”94 Whereas Hooker and Marmor offered their usual statements on biology being possibly one of many determining factors, most of the others replied with some restatement or explanation of the biological thesis. Weinberg’s response reiterated the premise that even if bisexuality and other degrees of sexuality did not fit neatly with biological studies focused on gays and lesbians at the far end of the Kinsey scale, that it was possible that other biological factors might explain those who did not fit the hetero-homo binary.95 Bell, Ellis, and Money all gave answers that hinged on the link between gender nonconformity and homosexuality. Ellis’s comment in particular stands out as he asserted that “the most significant factors responsible for variation in sexual orientation appear to occur before birth.”96 He continued on by discussing the brain’s hypothalamus, citing that this “primary control center…not only appears to largely control sexual orientation, but has been shown to be organized differently for males and females (albeit to varying degrees, depending on the amount and timing of exposure to testosterone and other sex hormones).”97

This pamphlet helped introduce PFLAG members and others to these kinds of biological

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 6; The other two questions posed to the researchers had more to do with reparative therapy than etiology specifically.
95 Ibid., 9. Weinberg’s full response to the question was simply: “My guess: Biological factors for homosexuality and heterosexuality; conditioning for various degrees of bisexuality.”
96 Ibid., 6.
97 Ibid.
assumptions about gay identity and would be instrumental in crafting the movement’s approach to identity in the following decades.\textsuperscript{98}

**Conclusion: The Shape of Gay Political Identity to Come**

The preceding analysis has been an attempt at tracking the ways in which the liberal gay rights movement and scientific and medical experts studying the nature and origins of homosexuality grew together, influencing one another along the way. Both groups were impacted not only by the writings and actions of one another, but they also matured together during the early days of neoliberalism and were thus theorizing identity and science during a period of right-wing political ascendance to power with an accompanying ideology that rationalized inequalities and existing social relations by reading their inevitability into human nature. The underlying premise to my argument is that the scientific and the political here cannot be understood as discrete assemblages of actors and ideas; rather, they constituted one another in ways that can be teased out through the study of their institutional and ideological developmental trajectories, which were intrinsically intertwined.

By the early 1990s, this co-production process had begun to reach its mature state as the infamous gay genes and gay brain studies of the era would come to be published and subsequently popularized and politicized by gay rights organizations seeking to link these seemingly definitive accounts regarding the immutability of gay and lesbian identity to their political and legal campaigns. In the later chapters of the dissertation, I show this by illustrating those developments with examples such as the makeup of the advisory board that saw over geneticist Dean Hamer’s 1993 study, which included the director of PFLAG along with other

representatives from organizations like the Human Rights Campaign.\textsuperscript{99} For now though, I hope to have laid the ideological foundation for the study of these later developments that resulted in the “born this way” idea of gay political identity that remains so culturally and politically resonant today.\textsuperscript{100}


\textsuperscript{100} Though there are at least a few chapters’ worth of legal cases and political campaigns to analyze on this front, I want to note that as recently as 2015 we can see the impact of this ideological approach to identity as Justice Anthony Kennedy’s majority opinion in the landmark same-sex marriage case \textit{Obergefell v. Hodges} (2015) speaks of immutability twice despite the fact that many legal scholars have downplayed the significance of immutability in achieving higher standards of judicial protection under the equal protection clause since the Court’s 1996 decision in \textit{Romer v. Evans}. 