

Chapter 8

'THE CONTINUING HOMOSEXUAL OFFENSIVE': SEX EDUCATION, GAY RIGHTS AND HOMOSEXUAL RECRUITMENT

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The 1970s and 1980s were something of a watershed in the politics of gender and sexuality. Feminist and gay and lesbian movements had considerable success in challenging widespread forms of social prejudice and discrimination. Homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder and laws criminalising homosexual behaviour were gradually overturned across much of the Western world. However, at the same time as private, consensual homosexuality was being socially validated, the recognition of homosexuality as a viable public good – a valid alternative lifestyle – aroused significant social anxiety and opposition. Sex education for minors, a growing concern of parents, communities, and governments during this time, became a decisive issue through which competing politics of sexuality were played out. This chapter examines the ways in which the figure of the 'innocent', heteronormative child was mobilised by a range of social groups in Australia during this time in order to serve as a bulwark against the liberalisation of sex education pedagogies and an advancing gay rights movement.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.

children. Not surprisingly, the scope for making arguments against homosexual rights and visibility was therefore very broad indeed. In this way homosexual law reform was as much, and sometimes more, a struggle over the figure of the proto-heterosexual child as the bedrock of the heteronormative nation. The recruitment of this figure of the child within a politics of reproductive futurity, by both Christian and secular groups, also revealed the homophobic fault-lines of Australian societies. By the 1980s a growing majority of Australians backed the legalisation of homosexuality between consenting adults in private. However, the positive affirmation of homosexuality as an equally valid public good, identity, or lifestyle was altogether different story, and one which Australian societies were not yet ready to embrace. That we live today with the historical residue of this homophobic imagining of homosexuality's detrimental relationship to childhood is evidenced in the ongoing contemporary debates over gay marriage and adoption.

Notes

- 1 *Royal Commission on Human Relationships: Interim Report* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976), p 1. This report will be hereafter cited in abbreviation as *Interim Report*.
- 2 *Interim Report*, p 6. That gay and lesbian movements and issues of homosexuality were pivotal to the report is evidenced by debates about whether homosexuality ought to be within the scope of the inquiry and the rubric of 'male and female relationships'. Christian groups objected to the inclusion of homosexuality within the terms of reference. This call for exclusion was rejected by the Commission, as they argued that in order to achieve a balanced account 'it is necessary to interpret 'male and female relationships' as including 'male relationships' and female relationships 'of a homosexual nature', (p 8).
- 3 *Interim Report*, p 1.
- 4 *Royal Commission on Human Relationships: Final Report Volume 1* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977), pp 46-95. This report will hereafter be cited as *Final Report Volume 1*.
- 5 *Interim Report*, p 6.
- 6 *Interim Report*, p 6. In their response to the objection about homosexuality's inclusion in the scope of the inquiry, the Commission also noted that 'it cannot sensibly be excluded from any consideration of the individual's growing sexual awareness, of the effect of family relationships on this awareness or of formal or informal education in personal development and sex' (p 8).

- 7 *Final Report Volume 1*, p 96.
- 8 *Ibid*, p 100.
- 9 *Ibid*, p 124. They did not go as far as recommending 'homosexual unions as legal marriages, or to allowing homosexual couples to adopt children except in cases of natural relationship'.
- 10 *Ibid*, p 124.
- 11 Anne Deveson, *Australians at Risk* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1978), p 321. Anne Deveson was one of the commissioners of the Royal Commission on Human Relationships, and this volume is an edited selection of material from the evidence of the inquiry.
- 12 Deveson, *Australians at Risk*, p 326.
- 13 *Final Report Volume 1*, p 124.
- 14 Deveson, *Australians at Risk*, p 318. At the beginning of the Royal Commission the committee saw its role on the issue of homosexuality to arbitrate on whether 'homosexuals were an aberrant group of people from whom society needed protection by way of laws and criminal sanctions, or whether they constituted a minority group which should be given the same rights, responsibilities and amenities as the heterosexual majority'. Their findings obviously supported the latter.
- 15 *Final Report Volume 1*, p 124.
- 16 'Gay Lib in the schools', editorial, *The Age*, 2 November 1973, p 9.
- 17 Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) ch 5.
- 18 Gary Jaynes, 'Young Gay and Proud – 20 Years On', p 2, unpublished manuscript held in the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives. Jaynes was a member of the Gay Teachers and Students Group.
- 19 Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students Group, *Young, Gay, and Proud* (Melbourne: Gay Teachers and Students Group, 1978). By 1981 almost all of the 10,000 copies were sold and the group was planning a second print run, although this never eventuated. See Jaynes.
- 20 Andrew Lansdown, 'Homosexuals on the Offensive', *Quadrant*, June 1980, pp 26-31.
- 21 Lansdown, pp 29, 28, 31.
- 22 John Lahey, 'A gay young time at school', *The Age*, 3 October 1978, p 2.
- 23 Quoted in Jaynes, 'Young Gay and Proud', p 4.
- 24 Jaynes, 'Young Gay and Proud', p 5.
- 25 *Alert*, No 8 (December 1981): p 1. *Alert* was the newsletter of the Concerned Parents' Association, a religious group that formed on the basis of its opposition to humanist sex education in schools.

- 26 'Homosexuals Plan Summer Offensive – A Warning to Christians', *New Life: Australia's Weekly Evangelical Newspaper*, 18 October 1979, p 2. This newspaper will hereafter be cited in abbreviation as *New Life*.
- 27 Jaynes, 'Young Gay and Proud', p 5.
- 28 *Alert*, No 1 (December 1980), p 1.
- 29 *Alert*, No 2 (April 1981), p 1.
- 30 The FOL were also very active in organising community meetings to raise awareness and support for anti-sex education campaigns. See 'Sex Education in Schools – FOL Arrange Meetings', *New Life*, 3 July 1980, p 1.
- 31 'Parents Organise Against Sex Education in Schools', *New Life*, 29 November 1979, p 3.
- 32 'Where We Stand', flyer inserted into *Alert*, No 2 (February 1981).
- 33 Quoted in 'Parents Pack Geelong Meeting on Sex Education Issue', *New Life*, 31 July 1980, p 6.
- 34 'Christians Challenged Over Sex Education Issues', *New Life*, 14 August 1980, p 3.
- 35 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p 11.
- 36 Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly (*Hansard*), 11 December 1980, p 5058. In 'The Concerned Parents' Association: Just Who Do They Think They Are?' *Gay Community News*, June 1982, p 18, it was reported that the CPA 'got a motion endorsed by the National Party Annual Conference, opposing "anything in the education, health and human relations programme which will undermine or break down the family unit"'. See also, 'Concerned Parents' Association Congratulates National Party', *New Life*, 7 May 1981, p 14.
- 37 Edelman's words are apposite here: A 'conservatism of the ego compels the subject, whether liberal or conservative politically, to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child'. *No Future*, p 14.
- 38 'New Policy on Sex Education', *New Life*, 25 October 1979, p 14. See also 'Parent Rep Slams Guidelines', *Gay Community News* (GCN), August 1981, p 10.
- 39 *Alert*, No 6 (August 1981), p 5. The public meeting was held on 29 July 1981 after the guidelines had been introduced.
- 40 This quote is taken from 'Parent Rep Slams Guidelines', *Gay Community News* (GCN), August 1981, p 10. Similar wording to this is cited in 'Concern over Content of Sex Education Courses', *New Life*, 26 June 1980, p 4.
- 41 'Sex Education Courses in Victorian Schools – Parents Concerned!', *New Life*, 17 July 1980, p 2.

- 42 Quoted in 'Parent Rep Slams Guidelines'.
- 43 'Parent Rep Slams Guidelines'. For a more extensive discussion of the guidelines, see 'The Guidelines that No One Wants', *Alert*, No 1 (December 1980): p 2. See also, 'Parents to set courses on sex', *The Age*, 20 December 1980, p 1. In this article the opposition spokesperson for education was quoted, in a reference to the CPA, as saying that the government is 'giving in to pressure from very conservative forces'. Something similar was said in a damning *Age* editorial on the government's backdown. See 'Government dodges sex', *The Age*, 22 December 1980, p 13.
- 44 'Liberal Government's Proposals to Change Victoria's Sex Laws', editorial, *New Life*, 11 September 1980, p 2.
- 45 Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p 99.
- 46 Here I am referring to the Royal Commission's recommendation of equality with regard to the age of consent, not their recommendation on what age this should be set at. The Commission actually recommended an age of consent of 15 years of age, with protection extended up to the age of 17 'where the other party is in a position of authority, such as a teacher'. *Final Report*, p 94.
- 47 Willett, *Living Out Loud*, p 155.
- 48 *Gay Community News*, February 1981, p 5.
- 49 Quoted in 'Parent Rep Slams Guidelines'.
- 50 *Crimes (Sexual Offences) Act 1980* (Vic). It is important to point out that the parliamentary debates attending the passage of the Bill were littered with denunciations of the Bill principally in regards to homosexuality. Homosexuality was the most contentious of the 'moral' issues by a long shot.
- 51 Quoted in 'The Continuing Homosexual Offensive', p 1.
- 52 'Councils' Support for Concerned Parents' Association', *New Life*, 6 August 1981, p 10.
- 53 'A Terrible Indictment', *Alert*, No 7 (October 1981), p 1.
- 54 Committee to Raise Educational Standards, 'The Continuing Homosexual Offensive: Next Target: Anti-Discrimination', November 1982, pamphlet held in the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives.
- 55 'The Rev F Nile Gains Upper House Seat', *New Life*, 24 September 1981, p 1.
- 56 An *Age* poll in 1978 revealed 57 per cent of people supported decriminalisation. See Willitt, *Living Out Loud*, p 132.
- 57 Quoted in NSW Parliamentary Debates (*Hansard*), 9 March 1982, p 2231.
- 58 Crimes (Homosexual Behaviour) Amendment Bill, Second Reading, NSW Parliamentary Debates (*Hansard*), 18 February 1982, p 2109.

- 59 Crimes (Homosexual Behaviour) Amendment Bill, p 2127.
- 60 'Homosexual Pressure Again', *New Life*, 19 November 1981, p 13.
- 61 The Queensland legislation set the age of consent for homosexual sex other than anal sex at 16, but made anal sex for men and women under the age of eighteen illegal. See Willett, *Living Out Loud*, p 224.
- 62 *Law Reform (Decriminalisation of Sodomy) Act*, Western Australia, 1989. The new law wasn't proclaimed until April 1990. On the UK's *Local Government Act*, s 28, see Joe Moran, 'Childhood Sexuality and Education: The Case of Section 28', *Sexualities*, Vol 4, No 1 (2001), pp 73-89.