

Chapter 7

'SOMEONE WHO IS SICK AND IN NEED OF HELP': MEDICAL ATTITUDES TO HOMOSEXUALITY IN AUSTRALIA, 1960-1979

EMILY WILSON

This chapter explores the relationship between homophobia and the medical and allied health professions in Australia between 1960 and 1979. This is an important period, as it was a time when there was widespread acceptance that homosexuality could best be understood within a medical framework as a neurotic disorder. This acceptance allowed the conceptualisation of homosexuality as a treatable and potentially curable disease. By 1960, medical treatment was widely established as a necessary, although certainly not the sole, method of dealing with the 'problem' of homosexuality. This changed in the 1970s for a number of reasons, including the rise of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, which conducted many campaigns against the treatment of homosexuality as a disease. Despite this, some medical professionals continued to carry out invasive procedures on homosexual patients in an attempt to 'cure' them. This chapter examines attitudes among medical professionals, particularly mental health professionals, towards homosexuality during these crucial decades. It considers attitudes towards homosexuality in the context of wider developments in medicine and psychiatry, and examines the extent to which the attitudes of medical and allied health professionals at this time can be characterised as 'homophobic'.¹

A number of historians have explored the experiences of gay and lesbian people with the medical profession, and particularly with treatments aimed at 'curing' homosexuality, in Australia.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.

belief was never universally accepted, with a significant number of medical professionals at any given time believing that treatment was either inefficient or unnecessary, or both.

By the early 1970s, prior consensus on the nature of homosexuality was under serious attack. Belief that homosexuality was a mental illness had been thoroughly undermined by the mid to late 1970s. This makes it all the more disturbing that not only did some medical professionals cling to the belief that homosexuality was a disease which could and should be treated, but continued to carry out extreme and invasive procedures such as psychosurgery, an operation which was in itself extremely controversial and subject to a great deal of criticism. While homophobia is certainly not the only factor, it must be assumed that it played at least some role in the decision of a minority of psychiatrists to employ a controversial and invasive procedure in the service of 'treating' a condition which was no longer widely believed to be pathological or indeed a 'condition' in the medical sense at all.

There were many motivations behind the treatment of homosexual patients: attempts to establish and reinforce a position of expertise for the medical and particularly psychiatric professions; a desire for professional knowledge and innovation; and in some cases a genuine, if misguided, attempt to help individuals. However, the invasive and punitive treatments inflicted on homosexual patients in the name of a cure can be considered homophobic, regardless of the prevailing attitudes of the time in which they occurred.

Notes

- 1 This chapter deals principally with male homosexuality, as this was the main focus of medical professionals at this time. The reasons for this almost exclusive concentration on male homosexuality have been discussed in various sources. For example, Robert Reynolds, quoting the work of the American political scientist Shane Phelan, argues that lesbians tended to 'slip through most clinical discussions of homosexuality', and that male homosexuals were considered more threatening to society because they were not participating in the reproductive economy (Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), p 14). There is certainly more work to be done on medical attitudes towards female homosexuality, but it is outside the scope of this chapter.

- 2 Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Gary Wotherspoon, *'City of the Plain': History of a Gay Sub-culture* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1991).
- 3 Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: a History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000); 'The Darkest Decade: Homophobia in 1950s Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 28, No 109 (1997), pp 120-132.
- 4 See, for example, Simon LeVay, *Queer Science: the Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1996); Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Laurie Guy, "'Straightening the Queers": Medical Perspectives on Homosexuality in Mid-twentieth Century New Zealand', *Health and History*, Vol 2, No 1, 2000, pp 101-120. All these works provide important evidence of the rise to pre-eminence of a medical model of homosexuality in the United States and New Zealand.
- 5 Jeremy Fisher, 'Interface: Medicine and Homosexuality in Australia', *Gay Information*, Summer (1982/1983), pp 44-48.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 44.
- 7 Guy, "'Straightening the Queers'", p 112.
- 8 *Ibid*.
- 9 WS Rowe, 'The Treatment of Homosexuality and Associated Perversions by Psychotherapy and Aversion Therapy', *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol 2 (1967), p 637.
- 10 Milton Lewis, *Managing Madness: Psychiatry and Society in Australia 1788-1980* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988), p 43.
- 11 *Ibid*, p 55.
- 12 Andrew T Scull, 'Psychiatry and Social Control in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *History of Psychiatry*, Vol 2 (1991), pp 159, 162-164.
- 13 Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1995), p 247.
- 14 LeVay discusses this in *Queer Science*, pp 75-78. See also Guy, "'Straightening the Queers'", pp 107-108.
- 15 LeVay, *Queer Science*, p 76.
- 16 *Ibid*, p 77.
- 17 Willett, 'The Darkest Decade', p 121.
- 18 Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p 113.
- 19 Willett, 'The Darkest Decade', p 121.
- 20 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 14.
- 21 Simon LeVay, *Queer Science*, p 76.

168 HOMOPHOBIA: AN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

- 22 John Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', *Australian Humanist*, Vol 6 (July 1968), p 20.
- 23 Arnold Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality: a Social Work Appraisal', *Australian Social Work*, Vol 28, No 3 (1975), p 23.
- 24 AA Bartholomew, 'Sex Offenders, Sex Deviants and Society', *Australian Humanist*, Vol 2 (June 1967), p 6.
- 25 David Maddison, 'Sexual Offenders in Australian Society', *Bulletin*, 5 May 1962, p 26.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid, p 27.
- 28 Miller, *Out of the Past*, pp 247-248.
- 29 Ibid, p 248.
- 30 Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', p 23.
- 31 Guy, "'Straightening the Queers'", p 112.
- 32 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 14.
- 33 'Male Homosexuality', *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol 2 (1967), p 652.
- 34 Lesley Rogers, 'Hormones and homosexuality', p 3, Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA) material.
- 35 Lesley Rogers, 'Hormonal Poofter Bashing', p 33, ALGA, file number 837.
- 36 Ibid, pp 33-34. An editorial in the gay magazine *Stallion* also described the use of Benperidol as leading to 'chemical castration' ('Stop This Butchery!', *Stallion*, No 13, p 4, ALGA).
- 37 Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality', p 24.
- 38 Ibid, p 23.
- 39 Guy, "'Straightening the Queers'", p 117.
- 40 Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', pp 21-23.
- 41 Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', *Interchange*, 1, 4, 1968, pp 223-231.
- 42 Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', *Australian Humanist*, p 21.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid, p 25. Court's attitudes were influenced as much by his religious beliefs as by his clinical observations (pp 25-26). He was a conservative Anglican and later a founding member of the Festival of Light.
- 45 Guy, "'Straightening the Queers'", p 117.
- 46 Court 'Sexual Deviation in Society', p 23.
- 47 Rowe, 'The Treatment of Homosexuality', pp 637-638.
- 48 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 16.
- 49 Bartholomew, 'Sex Offenders, Sex Deviants and Society', p 7.
- 50 Sue Wills, 'Intellectual Poofter Bashers', *Camp Ink*, Vol 2, No 11 (1972), p 10.

- 51 Ibid, p 7. Fisher described him as the 'bete noire of antimicrobial homosexuals' ('Interface', p 45).
- 52 Wills, 'Intellectual Poofster Bashers', p 6.
- 53 RG Farmer, 'Behaviour Therapy and Psychosexual Disorders', *Brain-wave*, Vol 2, No 1 (1972), p 8.
- 54 Ibid, p 9.
- 55 Quoted in Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality', p 25.
- 56 Rogers, 'Hormonal Poofster Bashing', p 34.
- 57 Bartholomew, 'Sex Offenders, Sex Deviants and Society', p 5.
- 58 Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', *Australian Humanist*, p 21.
- 59 Ibid, p 23.
- 60 Rogers, 'Hormones and homosexuality', p 3.
- 61 Rogers, 'Hormonal Poofster Bashing', p 34.
- 62 'Male Homosexuality', p 652; Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 15.
- 63 'Male Homosexuality', p 652.
- 64 Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender and Power in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp 185-187.
- 65 Maddison, 'Sexual Offenders in Australian Society', p 26.
- 66 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 19.
- 67 Court, 'Sexual Deviation in Society', p 23.
- 68 Greg Weir Collection, Gay Issues 1891-1994, University of Queensland Fryer Library 249, 161-1, 1973.06.18.
- 69 Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality', p 26.
- 70 Rogers, 'Hormonal Poofster Bashing', p 34.
- 71 Ibid; Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality', p 25.
- 72 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 17.
- 73 LeVay, *Queer Science*, p 94.
- 74 Many psychiatrists were active in the mental hygiene movement and used it to promote early treatment for mental illnesses. See Lewis, *Managing Madness*, p 48; Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), pp 632-33.
- 75 Stephen Garton, *Medicine and Madness: a Social History of Insanity in New South Wales, 1880-1940* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1988), pp 57-59; Ross Jones, 'The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots: Eugenic Legislation in Victoria, 1918-1939', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 30, No 113 (1999), p 331; Diana Wyndham, *Striving for National Fitness: Eugenics in Australia, 1910s to 1930s*, PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 1996, p 313.
- 76 Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, pp 168-169.
- 77 Ibid, p 182.

170 HOMOPHOBIA: AN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

- 78 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, p 35.
- 79 Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p 181-182.
- 80 William Rens, "You're Damned Right We're Untreatable", *William and John*, Vol 1, No 4 (1971), p 12.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 'Stop This Butchery!', p 4.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Rogers, 'Hormonal Poofster Bashing', pp 33-34.
- 85 Ibid. These 'refined' techniques primarily consisted of smaller lesions in the cingulate area of the brain or the hypothalamus.
- 86 J Sydney Smith and LG Kiloh, 'Psychosurgery and Society', *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol 1 (1975), p 118.
- 87 Bailey 'pioneered' a controversial treatment known as 'deep sleep therapy' which was the cause of a great deal of distress to his patients, and was the subject of a NSW Royal Commission in 1990. For further discussion of Bailey and his role at Chelmsford see Brian Bromberger and Janet Fife-Yeomans, *Deep Sleep: Harry Bailey and the Scandal of Chelmsford* (Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Emily Wilson, *Psychiatric Abuse in Australia, 1963-1991*, BA Hons Thesis, University of Queensland, 1998.
- 88 Greg Weir Collection, 135-1, 1973.01.01.
- 89 Given Bailey's penchant for exaggeration and outright fabrication it is difficult to know if these figures have any basis in fact or if he was simply bragging.
- 90 Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality', p 25.
- 91 Rogers, 'Hormonal Poofster Bashing', p 34.
- 92 Greg Weir Collection, 145-1, 1973.04.03.
- 93 DG Jones, 'Psychosurgery: the Handmaiden of the Technological Society', *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol 1 (1975), p 108.
- 94 Jones, 'Psychosurgery', p 110.
- 95 Quoted in above; this article is primarily a review of Valenstein's 1973 book, which Jones unreservedly praises.
- 96 Ibid, p 111.
- 97 Sydney Smith and Kiloh, 'Psychosurgery and Society', p 117.
- 98 Greg Weir Collection, 101-1 1972.07.15.
- 99 Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Clinical Memorandum: Homosexuality*, Vol 6, No 4 (1973), p 3.
- 100 Sent to 100 psychiatrists and 93 trainee psychiatrists in New South Wales, of which 81 psychiatrists and 62 trainee psychiatrists responded.
- 101 The remaining two said none of the statements closely resembled their views.

- 102 This document predates (by about a month) the decision of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.
- 103 ANZCP, *Clinical Memorandum: Homosexuality*, p 2. One of the factors driving this view was the increasing number of researchers pointing out the problem with previous studies which had focused almost entirely on homosexual people who had sought out treatment, thus providing a biased sample with limited application to the general population. As more studies were done with proper control groups, the view that neurotic symptoms were not particularly pronounced in homosexuals became more widely accepted.
- 104 As this suggests, this was an alternative to the primary recommended treatment, which was to use therapy to help homosexual patients adapt to overcome societal pressures or prejudices.
- 105 G Hope-Scott, 'Homosexuality', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol 8 (1974), p 208.
- 106 GI Tewfik, 'Homosexuality', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol 8 (1974), p 207.
- 107 Ibid, p 208.
- 108 Miller, *Out of the Past*, p 256.
- 109 'An Instant Cure', *Time*, 1 April 1974, p 41.
- 110 LeVay, *Queer Science*, pp 92-93. It seems this negative reaction was enough for McConaghy to reconsider his opinion; in 1976 he published an article that was highly critical of the use of aversion therapy to 'cure' homosexuality.
- 111 Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p 182.
- 112 Veraa, 'Sexual Deviance and Homosexuality', pp 24-25.
- 113 Ibid, p 25.
- 114 Greg Weir Collection, 161-1, 1973.06.18.
- 115 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, pp 15-16.
- 116 Ibid, p 19.
- 117 Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p 18.