

Chapter 10

OLDER GAY MEN'S RECOLLECTIONS OF ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL PREJUDICE IN AUSTRALIA

PETER ROBINSON

Introduction

Many scholars have speculated on the reasons for anti-homosexual prejudice, or homophobia, and this chapter considers how a group of 22 'camp' men understood their experience of it in Australia during the post-war decades.¹ According to Australian sociologist RW Connell, homophobia exists because it is a feature of 'hegemonic masculinity' – the term he coined and uses to describe the exemplary form of masculinity, which, he says, 'may be quiet and explicit, but may also be vehement and violent, as in the case of homophobic violence'.² Like Connell, North American feminist Lynn Segal argues that masculinity must be defined in opposition to homosexuality and femininity because of heterosexual men's fear that closeness between them might be misconstrued as homosexual interest.³

Danish theorist Henning Bech takes this argument further and argues that homophobia arises out of the sexual tension that develops between men during the course of homosocial encounters such as occur on sporting fields and where there is 'physical or intense emotional contact between men, and where masculinity is stressed'. In these situations, argues Bech, the attraction/repulsion between men is often expressed in violence.

This applies to ... the police and the military, where men are literally rubbing up against each other, all the while their interaction with physical strength and virility boosters (canons, pistols, batons) turns them on ... [As] directly sexual acting out is often socially impossible

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ensorship that speaks volumes for the effectiveness of the repressive mobilisation'.³⁰

I would argue that the decisions of the majority of men in this sample to lead a double life or not to come out suggest that a combination of heterosexist public narratives and targeted police activity effectively repressed camp lives in the 1950s and 1960s. The men in this sample who married or kept their camp relationships secret made a strategic decision to adapt to the prevailing conditions, which then were not conducive to an open camp existence. By their own admission, the two men who never came out were deeply affected by the anti-homosexual prejudice they witnessed or experienced as young men, but for unexplained reasons they chose not to come out later when the social climate improved.

But there was also evidence from this sample of men who were willing or able to withstand or ignore the anti-homosexual prejudice that prevailed in the 1940s and 1950s in Australia. They comprised the five interviewees who declared that they never had to come out because it was obvious, because, in the words of one of them, they were 'the lucky ones'.

Notes

- 1 'Camp' is one of the terms same-sex-attracted men used for themselves at the time. See Gary Simes 'The language of homosexuality in Australia' in Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay Perspectives: essays in Australian gay culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1992), pp 31–57.
- 2 RW Connell, *The Men and the Boy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p 11.
- 3 Lynne Segal, *Slow motion: changing masculinities, changing men* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p 139.
- 4 Henning Bech, *When Men Meet: homosexuality and modernity*, trans Teresa Mequit and Tim Davies (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p 78.
- 5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p 119.
- 6 'The playing of a sexual part by the ... anus is by no means limited to intercourse between men: preference for it is in no way characteristic of inverted feeling. On the contrary, it seems that ... with a male [it] owes its origin to an analogy with a similar act performed with a woman; while mutual masturbation is the sexual aim most often found in intercourse between inverts'. Sigmund Freud [1953, 1905], *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: three essays on the theory of sexuality and other works*, trans under general

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editorship of James Strachey, compiled and edited by Angela Richards, London: Penguin Books, 1991), p 64-65.

- 7 Martha C Nussbaum, *Hiding from humanity: disgust, shame, and the law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p 296.
- 8 The men were asked 29 questions that covered five general aspects of their lives, viz, work, sexual identity, relationship status and history, experience of ageism, and social life. Two questions evoked stories of anti-homosexual prejudice in their youth, the responses to which form the basis of this chapter, and they were: 'Would you briefly tell me the story of your coming out?' and 'What has been your experience of acceptance as a homosexual/gay man?'
- 9 See for example, RW Connell, MH Davis and GW Dowsett, 'A bastard of a life: homosexual desire and practice among men in working-class milieu' in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol 29, No 1 (March 1993), pp 112-35; Michael Pollak, 'Male homosexuality – or happiness in the ghetto' in Philippe Ariès and André Béjin (eds), *Western Sexuality: practice and precept in past and present times*, trans Anthony Forster (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp 40-61; and Martin S Weinberg and Colin J Williams, *Male Homosexuals: their problems and adaptations* (New York: Penguin Books Inc, 1975), *passim*.
- 10 A meaning that is a legacy from the gay liberation movement of the 1970s.
- 11 George Chauncey found similar understandings in North American camp subcultures: George Chauncey, *Gay New York: gender, urban culture, and the making of the gay male world, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) footnote, p 8.
- 12 John Murphy, *Imagining the fifties: private sentiment and political culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2000), p 56.
- 13 Angus McLaren, *Twentieth Century Sexuality: a history* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), ch 8.
- 14 Garry Wotherspoon (ed), *Being Different: nine gay men remember* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1986), p 115.
- 15 George Johnston, *Clean Straw for Nothing* (London: Collins, 1949), pp 87-88.
- 16 McLaren, *Twentieth Century Sexuality*, p 162.
- 17 Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America, the Americanization of the Homosexual*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), p 2.
- 18 See Garry Wotherspoon, 'City of the Plain': history of a gay sub-culture (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1991), pp 153-154.
- 19 Nancy Achilles, 'The development of the homosexual bar as an institution' in Peter M Nardi and Beth E Schneider (eds), *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: a reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp 175-188; Clive Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows: the development of gay and*

lesbian culture in Queensland (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001), pp 144-145.

- 20 Chauncey, *Gay New York*, p 7.
- 21 Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: meanings, myths & modern sexualities*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p 193.
- 22 Maurice, aged 65.
- 23 See Clive Moore and Bryan Jamison 'Making the modern Australian homosexual male: Queensland's criminal justice system and homosexual offences, 1860-1954' in *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies*, Vol 11, No 1 (2007), pp 27-54.
- 24 Michael Pollak refers to a large German study from the mid-1970s that shows evidence of a greater willingness among working-class men to begin their homosexual sexual career earlier than middle-class men, and for it to last longer; see Pollak 'Male homosexuality - happiness in the ghetto', pp 48-49. In the North American context, according to George Chauncey, Alfred Kinsey found greater willingness among labourers to begin their sexual career early and to experiment sexually, and an increased hesitancy among white-collar workers and other professionals to begin or to experiment: Chauncey *Gay New York*, pp 118-119.
- 25 John Rechy, *The Sexual Outlaw: a documentary* (New York: Grove Press Inc, 1977), p 98.
- 26 John D'Emilio & Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: a history of sexuality in America*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p 294.
- 27 The *Sydney Morning Herald* published the names and occupations of 50 of the 53 marchers the police arrested when they appeared at the Central Court of Petty Sessions in Sydney on Tuesday 27 June 1978. See Peter Blazey in Graham Aitken (ed), *The Penguin Book of Gay Australian Writing* (Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 2002), pp 260-261.
- 28 Kenneth Plummer, *Sexual Stigma: an interactionist account* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p 114.
- 29 Graham Willett, 'The Darkest Decade: Homophobia in 1950s Australia' in John Murphy and Judith Smart (eds), *The Forgotten Fifties: aspects of Australian society and culture in the 1950s*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997) and *Australian Historical Studies*, No 109, p 128. The head of the NSW police force said that homosexuality was the greatest danger Australia faced in the 1950s, see Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, London: Routledge, 2003), p 238.
- 30 Willett 'The Darkest Decade', pp 124-129.