

What About the Children! Masculinities, Sexualities and Hegemony

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By

Damien W. Riggs

**CAMBRIDGE
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For Liam

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Recently, a friend made a comment via her facebook status about Australian gay ex-rugby player and now actor Ian Roberts, whom she noted was named in the media as a witness in a court case about paedophilia. This representation of Roberts, she suggested, was homophobic. In response to her status, someone else noted that media reporting of the role of Roberts as a witness was not homophobic at all, but rather simply a standard procedure in a coronial inquiry that happened to involve a gay man (Roberts), the death of a young man, and the allegation that a paedophile ‘ring’ was involved in his murder. Intrigued, I googled the story and came to see that both my friend and her responder appeared to be right, and in ways that related directly to the contents of this book. Yes, it was indeed the case that media reporting of the trial in 2009 (and reporting of the murder and Robert’s relationship to the victim ever since it first came to the attention of the media in 2005) had, at least on a superficial level, simply involved a focus upon the murder of the young man and the allegations against one particular individual named as a paedophile. In this sense, media reporting of the trial (and Roberts’ involvement in it) was not homophobic. Nonetheless, I would argue that homophobia is very much in play when young people, paedophilia and gay men are all brought into metonymy with one another such as in much of the media reporting that has occurred on and off throughout the past five years in relation to the case. In this sense, my friend was very much right: whilst the media was not being explicitly homophobic, the logic by which some of the ‘facts’ of the trial were presented certainly evoked the tired old equation of paedophilia with homosexuality, and in so doing made possible a very homophobic reading of Roberts involvement in the trial (i.e., that it is the very fact of his gayness that ‘caused’ his involvement in the trial, though as I will argue below, in some instances media reporting of the ongoing trial leaves open the inference that the trial, in a circuitous way, ‘caused’ Robert’s gayness, or at least a specific iteration of it). Yet to flip my opening argument here on its head again, whilst the accusation of homophobia may well be a fair one for my friend to have made, such accusations about the bringing together of

homosexuality and paedophilia don't actually provide us with anything beyond the accusation—they don't open a space through which both homosexuality and paedophilia can be talked about (and any conjunctions between them). My argument in the remainder of this introduction, and to a lesser extent throughout the entire book, is that the conjunctions of these two topics must be rendered not only visible, but also a topic for public conversation, otherwise we run the risk of continuing to reinforce the very logic by which they are treated as analogous.

So to tell a little more of the case, as I understand it. The young man in question—Arron Light—was known to Roberts long before his murder. Roberts had first met Light when the latter was nine years old, when Roberts was undertaking charity work visiting children in hospitals as part of his role as a professional athlete. This was a role, Roberts admitted in an *Australian Story* interview conducted in 2005, that he undertook ‘not for the right reasons’: he did it to generate a positive image of himself as a sportsman and public figure. Despite this rather mercenary motivation at the time, Roberts developed a relationship of sorts with Light, whom he took on outings and saw occasionally after his discharge from hospital. The story told by Roberts and the media then fast forwards five years to when it became apparent to Roberts and his then female housemate that Light was potentially in serious trouble (no fixed address, involvement in drugs and street crime, non attendance at school), and they offered that he could stay with them. During the time that Light was subsequently living with Roberts the police made Roberts aware that Light had been under surveillance due to his presence at the homes of suspected paedophiles (though Roberts makes it clear in his *Australian Story* interview that the police, after a fashion, did not consider Robert’s residence to be one such house, rather that they had been following Light and hoped that Roberts would speak to Light and convince him to make a statement about the men under investigation for paedophilia). Roberts agreed to talk to Light, despite his own fears that the story would hit the media and that this would have negative implications for Roberts who had only recently at that stage come out publically. Yet as time passed after Light’s disclosure to both Roberts and the police, Roberts became so anxious about the possible negative implications that he decided to accept an offer to move interstate, thus leaving Light behind. In his absence, Light returned to his previous involvement with drugs and street crime, at which point he was arrested and subsequent to his release disappeared. For three years his whereabouts were unknown, until his body was found in a shallow grave, having been dead since not long after his release by the police.

Yet the story of the relationship between Robert’s life and that of Light

does not end there. In a case brought to trial in 2006, one individual—Frederick Rix—was accused by Roberts of sexually abusing him when he was 15. This is the same Rix who faced trial as a result of Light's statement about a paedophile ring: Light was to give evidence in the trial, but disappeared just before the trial and thus Rix was acquitted. Roberts has suggested that it was only subsequent to being made aware that it was Rix who was alleged to have abused Light that he made the decision to press charges against Rix himself for sexual abuse he experienced as a teenager (AAP, 2006). Rix and Roberts have more recently been brought together in the ongoing investigation of the death of Light, with Rix named again as a person of interest. In this context Roberts has testified as to his own memory of Light's disclosures relating to involvement with known paedophiles prior to his death. Finally, and in response to an argument between Rix and Roberts outside a hearing in late 2009, Rix sought an apprehended violence order against Roberts (AAP, 2009a).

Together, these developments in the trial demonstrate my earlier point; namely that the trial itself potentially, albeit in a circuitous way, produces Roberts' gayness. To explain: prior to the trial Roberts was already well known as an out gay man. Yet despite this, much of the language used to describe Roberts in the media over the years has suggested that he doesn't conform to the 'stereotype' of gay men, or that his involvement in a traditionally masculine sport has served to break down homophobia within rugby as a sport. In this sense, Roberts has often been depicted as an 'atypical gay'—he is very masculine in appearance, and it is presumed that this means he is by default not effeminate or any of the other tired stereotypes typically associated with gay men. As such, not only is he atypical (due to the assumption of his relatively normative masculine appearance), but he is acceptable: he stays pretty much in the place allocated for gay men in contemporary Australian society, namely a place where notions of liberal equality are emphasised. What media reporting of the trial served to do, by contrast, was to locate Roberts as a more normatively intelligible gay man (in the context of a still largely homophobic society): one involved in scandals and one whose identity as a gay man can be allegedly traced via recourse to the logic of causation, namely that he was sexually abused by another man as a young person. This type of representation produces Roberts as a gay man who is firmly located within a logic of depravity, and whose gayness is produced as if anew in the context of a trial about paedophilia where he is both a victim of the unwanted advances of a man, whilst also acting in ways that bring him into a relationship with a pathologised homosexuality that is connected to paedophilia (i.e. by befriending Light as a nine year old boy

and later taking him into his home). As the story of Light's murder came out, then, Roberts was retrospectively cast as always already imbricated in the trial of the present, where his past is produced through the lens of a trial that implicitly conflates homosexuality with paedophilia.

What we have here, then, is a very complex story through which homophobia plays out in media reports of the story through the proximity of homosexuality to paedophilia. This occurs in instances such as the *Australian Story* interview which emphasised the fact that Roberts was under surveillance himself prior to the police establishing that he was not in a sexual relationship with the then underage Light (and thus that Roberts' house was indeed not a 'paedophile house'). In and of itself this is not homophobic, yet the presentation of Roberts as automatically (as an out gay man) an object of suspicion who needed to be cleared of any impropriety indicates a homophobic logic informing the presentation of the story where any association between homosexuality and paedophilia automatically requires that gay men must be expected to prove that they are not by default guilty just by the very fact of being gay (as a Detective Inspector interviewed for the story suggests – "we were very alarmed" to find out that Light was living with Roberts, AAP, 2005). Yet it is important to also acknowledge that Roberts himself plays into this negative stereotype in his *Australian Story* interview, where he states that his move away from Sydney after Light made his statement to the police was driven by his fear that he would be labelled a paedophile by mere association. In so doing, Roberts reinforces a logic which associates paedophilia with a sexual orientation (i.e., homosexuality), rather than viewing it as either a psychological disorder or a criminal act.

This logic of associating paedophilia with a sexual orientation is reinforced in several news articles about the case, with one citing Roberts referring to Light as a 'definitely heterosexual' young man (Jacobsen, 2009), and another citing Roberts talking about his own allegations of sexual abuse by Rix, where he referred in a media report to the fact that his delay in reporting his own alleged abuse at the hands of Rix was due to his anxiety that he had somehow caused the abuse as a young man questioning his own sexuality who may have "given him [Rix] some sort of signal" (AAP, 2006). Here, again, the reference to both Light's and Robert's own sexual orientations makes the matter of child sexual abuse (or paedophilia as it is incorrectly labelled throughout most of the media reporting, incorrect as the term paedophilia is clinically reserved for adults who have sex with pre-pubescent children) a matter of sexual orientation. Roberts' reference to Light's sexual orientation, however, may also be understood as aimed at countering accusations made by a convicted sex

offender—Maxwell Raymond Barry—who stated in court in 2009 that Roberts and a male partner at the time were in a sexual relationship with Light prior to his death (Scheikowski, 2009). In making such an allegation, not only does Barry’s testimony allow for the implication that Roberts was indeed involved with Light (and thus potentially impartial in his testimony), but also further renders gay men (and gay sex) synonymous with paedophilia.

The final instance I would include here of media reports perpetuating the belief that there is a relationship between homosexuality and paedophilia appeared in a news story in late 2009 telling of the hardship that Rix claims to have faced as a result of the allegations of his sexual abuse of Light (AAP, 2009b). The article reports (in relation to the apparent statement by Rix during the ongoing trial that he was ‘against homosexuality’) that he was questioned by the judge as to his presence at a well known gay bar in Sydney in the early 1990s. In requiring a suspected paedophile to account for his attendance at a gay bar, the inference is that he was potentially there to meet other males. This is problematic as it infers that if he is indeed a paedophile, then he was at the (gay) bar *as a paedophile*, and that in so doing he was at the very least acting as though he were gay in order to be able to meet young men. As such, being gay, and being a paedophile acting gay in order to solicit young men, are made almost indistinguishable. And of course if in questioning Rix as to his attendance at the bar the intention of the judge was to somehow prove that Rix was indeed not against homosexuality, but rather was actually homosexual, then his subsequent involvement in a trial on paedophilia renders the link between homosexuality and paedophilia not implicit, but rather explicit.

Of course what is at stake in these representations of Roberts and gay men in general in these media reports is not simply their freedom as individuals to live a life free from false persecution when homosexuality is equated with paedophilia, but also their identity as men. Issues of (a typically normative) masculinity appear in media reporting of the trial as much as do issues of sexuality. So, for example, Rix was reported in late 2009 as saying that whilst as a father and grandfather he encouraged his family members into sports, he did so not so that they could be “contaminated by the likes of Roberts” (AAP, 2009b). This reference to contamination, I would suggest, indicates the widespread view in many sectors of Australia that homosexuality represents a taint upon a normative hegemonic masculinity—that sports, such as rugby, are queered (and not in good ways) by the involvement of openly gay sportsmen. Indeed Roberts himself recognises this in his *Australian Story* interview, where he speaks

not of struggling with his sexuality *per se*, but rather of struggling with what he perceived to be the ‘right’ public image to present prior to his coming out. And certainly after his coming out, as he suggests, his sexual identity was used sometimes by players on the field, and other times by the crowd, to ‘sledge’ him or otherwise abuse him as a sportsmen. Here again we can see that sexuality and masculinity are intimately related, and that only certain masculine identities are treated as acceptable or even intelligible to the broader public (it would be hard to imagine a rugby crowd calling out ‘boo you heterosexual’ to a heterosexual player who was underperforming).

The above discussion of issues relating to masculinity, sexuality, normativity and deviance bring me to the very crux of my focus in this book, namely the ways in which a range of masculinities function to prop up the western social order and its hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and ability that operate to both marginalise and privilege. More specifically, my interest in this book is to elaborate how masculinities (both normative and non-normative) are shaped in a relationship to discourses of childhood and children themselves. Which brings me to the important question of why I would begin this book with a consideration of the linking of paedophilia with homosexuality? Surely, it may be asked, this only further reaffirms the alleged association and provides yet more air space to it? Whilst on the one hand this accusation may be true, on the other hand I would suggest that the association is never going to go away without discussion, and furthermore that exploring what lies at the heart of the association may go a long way towards understanding how masculinities, sexualities and children operate together in a circular logic that is always primarily to the disservice of the latter. In other words, and following Stephen Angelides (2004), I am interested in how children’s agency, children’s desires, and children’s rights are made to disappear when our focus remains on a logic of child protection that is more about protecting a normative notion of the ‘good society’ from the fact that said society is in reality thoroughly imbricated in the production of categories such as ‘the paedophile’.

Without wanting to labour over the category ‘paedophile’ too much more in this introduction (as the remainder of the book is not about paedophilia *per se*), it is worthwhile exploring further just how the category itself is a useful trope for understanding the broader social contexts that shape the conjunctions of western notions of masculinities, sexualities and children. As Stephen Angelides (2005) has so cogently argued, the category of ‘the paedophile’ has a range of shifting historical meanings that leave it open as a repository for all that is considered abject

or at the very least unpalatable. Importantly, Angelides suggests that the category paedophile must be read alongside shifting historical understandings of both childhood and masculinity. In regards to the latter, Angelides suggests that the category paedophile in the present day functions as a catch-all category used to shore up the hegemonic status of a normative masculinity that is constructed as everything that is good or right about adult-child relations, the corollary being that paedophilia represents everything that is bad or wrong about adult-child relations. What disappears in this binary structure, however, is the fact that much of what passes as normative masculinity in contemporary western society is only a very few steps removed from that which is classed as paedophilia. In making this statement my purpose is not to reiterate radical feminist claims made in the 1980s to the effect that much like all men are potential rapists, all men are potential child abusers. Rather, my point is that the logic informing paedophilia (one constituted through unequal power relations and the simultaneous hypersexualisation and desexualisation of children) is not all that different to the logic informing male parent/child relations under heteropatriarchy. In the logic of the latter, children are typically constructed as objects to be gained, possessed, controlled and wielded in ways that Barbara Baird (2008) has referred to as 'child fundamentalism'. As Baird suggests, children are treated as tools to achieve political ends (consider the 'children overboard' scandal used to keep the Howard government in power or the image of Indigenous communities as abusing children that was used to warrant the so-called 'intervention' into such communities in the Northern Territory of Australia). Children are also used by the contemporary men's movement to secure rights (such as in the heteronormative claim that 'all children need a father' or in the claim for 50/50 custody post separation from heterosexual relationships, regardless of the distribution of carework prior to separation). And children are widely used in media and marketing to signify all that is 'good' or 'innocent' about the world. It really is not much of a step, then, to suggest that this type of understanding of children—widely promulgated throughout western societies as the normative way for men in particular to understand their relationship to children—could so easily become a fetishised object of desire for some men who may or may not already be susceptible to treating as blurry the line between adults' and children's sexualities and desires.

In part, then, at least one aspect of what I am suggesting here, is that at a societal level we can see how the reification of a normative masculinity described above and the treatment of children that it enshrines provides us with an aetiology of sorts of paedophilia. Of course the typical response to

this association of paedophilia with all men is a compulsion to deny this fact, and to further construct paedophilia as an abjected site within which all of the fears of normative masculinity are placed. Yet what we know of abjection is that the abject always remains to haunt those who would wish to escape it. Thus the paedophile within heteropatriarchy (i.e., both the blurry lines themselves between children and their desires and adults and their desires and the power-laden discourse of childhood) remains firmly inside the boundaries of normative masculinity, rather than neatly outside of it as a site that can be easily managed and controlled. Of course it is important to note that the normative masculinity to which I refer to here does not simply denote a heterosexual masculinity. Gay men as a collective are no more outside of this fear of paedophilia or the enforcement of normative accounts of adult-child relationships than are heterosexual men. Indeed, and as I will argue throughout this book, gay men are often overly invested in a power-laden account of children that keeps them firmly within the very boundaries they often wish to escape (i.e., the conflation of homosexuality with paedophilia). This, what appears to be almost willing, acceptance of normative accounts of adult-child relations is further exacerbated by the abjected history of some gay men's involvement in paedophile rights movements, such as the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA). NAMBLA originated in the late 1970s, and advocated for the lowering or even complete removal of age of consent laws, and the recognition of consensual relationships between adult men and younger males. Importantly, NAMBLA was at least initially led by men who identified as homosexual, and who advocated recognition of youth sexuality as an important aspect of gay rights struggles. With growing concern over the protection of 'childhood innocence', however, and increasing recognition of the widespread nature of child sexual abuse, NAMBLA was increasingly alienated and ultimately disowned by those attempting to secure gay rights. Whilst more recently significant numbers of men associated with NAMBLA have been arrested as paedophiles, it is important to consider what precisely the NAMBLA project attempted to render intelligible, and how the silencing of that contributes to what I suggested above to be the social production or indeed aetiology of paedophilia.

Certainly one thing that disappears when any mention of young people's sexuality or desire becomes equated with paedophilia or child abuse is the experiences of children themselves. Obviously as an adult I cannot speak for what children want. Furthermore, and in the context of the current western climate where speaking about children in any way other than as innocent is considered taboo, it is almost impossible to ask

children what they want. But it is nonetheless important, as Stephen Angelides (2004) suggests, to at least recognise that children do have agendas and interests and desires and that most often these are not simply the product of recruitment or coaching on the part of adults. Rather, they are the genuine interests of children who live in society where they are interpellated as speaking subjects with desires as much as any other person. Of course the rebuttal to this type of argument is circular in that it suggests that children are taught to want X or Y, and that children can be convinced that they are consenting to a range of relationships with adults when really they have no capacity to give consent. Yet the circularity of this logic falters when we apply it, for example, to western practices of child rearing or education or child care in general. We need only to recognise the vast cross-cultural differences in child rearing (and indeed cross-historical examples within western societies) to understand that current practices and policies are as much impositions upon children as are other forms of imposition that are considered pathological or deviant. My argument here is certainly not in support of NAMBLA or other such organisations, but is rather again to demonstrate how the logic of control or propriety over children that many would argue is enacted by paedophiles (either in the negative public, psychological or legal sense of the word, or in the sense of those who claim the legitimacy of adult-child relations such as those associated with NAMBLA) is in fact at root the logic that informs most adult-child relations in western societies.

It is also important to consider here the implications of the collapsing of all child sexual abuse into the category of 'paedophilia'. My point here of course is not to engage in an argument of, for example, the capacity of a fifteen year old versus the capacity of a five year old to consent to sex with an adult. Such an argument would miss the point I seek to make. Likewise (though important to consider), I am not interested in discussing whether or not all forms of sex between adults and young people are inherently damaging. Rather, the point I wish to consider further here is how the collapsing of multiple forms of context specific sexual engagements between some adults and some young people into one category fails to recognise that young people have sexualities that whilst not necessarily being differentiated towards particular bodies, nor being necessarily even direct at bodies other than their own, are nonetheless bodies. In other words, the oft-repeated (and vitally important) feminist statement that rape is not about sex holds the potential (both in reference to rape and in reference to child sex abuse) to overwrite the fact that abuses are perpetrated against bodies, and that it is through those bodies that children must live a life in which they will become adults (and thus potentially

consenting legal subjects) who bring with them the effects of being labelled as passive victims. As Stephen Angelides (2004) again has argued, this latter construction implicitly places responsibility back on children precisely at the moment when it attempts to absolve children of blame. If, for example, a child is instructed to challenge thoughts that they caused the abuse they experienced, then at the same time they are being taught to deny any agency or at the very least sense of presence they experience as subjects of their own bodies and desires. Again, the point is not to infer here some sort of misinformed *Lolita*-type logic (where the book is often taken to have suggested that the *Lolita* character was the agent of her own ‘seduction’). Rather, my point is that the bodies upon which child sexual abuse is committed are always already bodies in possession of their own sensualities and sexualities (as are all bodies). It is thus important to be clear that these are bodies which are shaped by their own logic of bodily sensuality and sexuality, one that exceeds the logic of sexualisation (or indeed desexualisation) that is placed upon them (i.e., that children’s bodies, whilst being shaped by dominant discourses of childhood and embodiment, are also shaped by each child’s own sense of themselves as a body in the world and the pleasures that a person’s body can bring to them). In this sense, then, it is important to read children’s and young people’s bodies as simultaneously marked as distinct from adult’s bodies (and the ways in which they are normatively assumed to be marked as young *heterosexual* bodies), whilst also carrying with them desires of their own that are potentially overwritten when our response to child sexual abuse solely evokes a logic of uniform effects of sex between adults and children or young people (as the use of the word ‘paedophilia’ in all instances would suggest).

An excellent example of when children’s or young people’s own capacity to act in the world is curtailed through the imposition of a totalising conceptualisation of abuse appears in the increasing presence of signs in playgrounds across western countries stating that adults can only enter in the company of children. Signs such as these are treated as a safety measure against the actions of supposed paedophiles, but in reality only serve to further perpetuate the adult-child distinction in ways that separates adults without children further from children, the result being yet another form of exoticisation of children. Prohibiting adults from entering playgrounds without children stops men and women who are childless from interacting with children, it stops community development by segregating parents and their children from other community members, and it reinforces the flawed logic which treats only strangers or single people (primarily men) as paedophiles. Interestingly, however, it is

important to note that children are accorded some power as a result of the signs—they are the ones whose presence accord adults access, and they are the ones whose recognition is required by the adults who are their parents. Nonetheless, this is still a model of power-over where one group of people (albeit the group who normally is constructed as powerless) is able at a very basic level to assert some determination over who and who will not be able to move in particular spaces. Of course it would undoubtedly be naïve to suggest that it is children doing this determining—it is not children putting the signs up and I doubt that many children would read the signs and veto their parents from attending or hide from their parents in the playground so that their parents are evicted. Once again, then, the signs are in reality not a marker of children's agency or determination but rather a deployment of child fundamentalism used to manage who will and who will not be allowed in particular spaces, and to implicitly suggest that all those not allowed in the playground space are somehow a potential threat to children.

What is perhaps one of the most troubling aspects of the normalisation of particular forms of adult control (though the construction of certain other forms of control as deviant or damaging to children) is that child protection agendas as they are currently configured in western societies largely carry with them an injunction to go beyond child protection and to encompass control of children. This of course is warranted, as Barbara Baird (2008) has suggested, through a discourse of child fundamentalism, in which the protection of children is seen to justify the control of children, and the control of children (i.e., by limiting the spaces they move in or the identities available to them) is seen to serve the purpose of protection. Of course the question this begs, then, is protection from what? The obvious answer is protection from abuse, protection from corruption, and protection from damage. Yet the increasing awareness over the past three decades of the fact that all of these things primarily occur to children in their own homes suggests that child protection can never be safely enacted by any one sector of the community if it is always already premised upon the logic of 'adult knows best'. We can never control every adults' motives or actions, and considering my above argument about the existence of the 'paedophile within' society in general, even if we could control every adult in some kind of Orwellian fantasy, that would only serve to further deify the category of 'child' and to further enshrine the unequal power relations that render child sexual abuse (or rape of women for that matter) intelligible.

What is needed, then, is a discourse of child protection that is willing to centre adult-child relations as operating through unequal distribution of

power between *all* adults and children, not just between those who are perceived to have abused their power as adults. Whilst there are certainly critical (primarily feminist) voices about child protection both within Australia and internationally, many of the voices asserting child protection agendas still very much emphasise a normative account of (certain) adults as the appropriate carers of children and arbiters of what counts as child protection. One particular group of people who in my opinion do not have an explicitly articulated position on child protection (but who need one) is lesbian and gay parents (and more broadly lesbian and gay rights activists in general). Obviously there are many reasons for the lack of an agenda within this group, including the fact that lesbians and gay men are still fighting the equation of homosexuality with paedophilia and its attendant implication that lesbians and gay men are not fit parents. But not developing a voice on child protection from a lesbian or gay perspective only serves to reinforce the supposition that lesbians and gay men cannot or should not talk about children, and ignores the fact that they could have a lot to contribute in setting an agenda for child protection (or indeed reconsidering the very notion of 'protection' itself). Part of the problem, of course, is that in many western countries (or individual states within them) lesbian and gay parents still do not have rights as parents, and thus there is considerable rhetorical force behind the claim that such parents need law reform in order to protect their families and most importantly their children. But yet again this logic of 'their children' only serves to enshrine the notion that children are the property of (individual) adults who require rights to protect their children. Obviously when it is still a reality that lesbians or gay men can be denied custody or access to children post-separation from heterosexual relationships, or when there is a new reality that lesbian or gay couples may separate after having children and that one (most often the birth) parent may deny the other parent custody or access, then there is a need for rights to determine how decisions will be made regarding children. Yet, at the same time, it would appear a relatively hollow victory for lesbians and gay men who are granted rights to family that centre the voices of parents at the expense of the voices of children.

Like pretty much everything I have raised in this introduction, this point about 'rights for whom' is highly contentious and not something that can be easily voiced (not for the least of which reasons is the fact that it is ammunition for the political right in their war against lesbian and gay parenting). Yet to see the notion of a child protection agenda on the part of lesbians and gay men as simply ammunition is to fail to recognise that when battles over children become about the assertion of one adult's rights over another's, that this is when children and their voices and desires

disappear, or at the very least become objects seen as having no will or interests of their own. As I will elaborate throughout this book (unfortunately at times by negative examples), a non-normative, non-infantilising, non-objectifying account of child protection can indeed be elaborated in ways that whilst certainly not free of adult-child power imbalances, can nonetheless be mindful of how the ways in which they play out are detrimental to all involved. In so doing, my point is not that we can naively treat children as able to give consent or to always know the best course of action (consider, for example, a situation in which children are recognised as the most appropriate arbiters of their health care, resulting in children being able to refuse medical treatment on the basis of the fact that 'it will hurt'). My argument throughout this introduction has certainly not been to suggest that in recognising children and young people as having desires or a sense of themselves as knowing subjects in the world, that this must mean that we simply hand control over to children. Rather, my point has been that first we must recognise that control is indeed exerted over children often in ways that reinforce the deification of children as sought after objects, and second that the recognition of this holds the potential to lead to a reconsideration of how adults interact with and care for children, and how notions of children's needs can be elaborated in ways that don't resort to children fundamentalism in the service of adults' needs. How can we move, in other words, away from a discourse of childhood that is in reality all about adults' needs, and towards ones in which children's needs are better recognised, even if the meeting of their needs must still be negotiated in a context where sometimes adults will know 'what is best' (even if we would want to remain suspicious of adults determining 'the best interests of the child').

So to return to Ian Roberts. Interestingly at the end of his *Australian Story* interview he mentions that he would love to have a child. Yet in stating this he clarifies that he would do this with a lesbian couple as co-parents and that he wouldn't have sole responsibility for the child so the child wouldn't have to 'wear that tag' (of being the child of a gay primary parent). Putting aside Roberts failure to recognise that plenty of gay men do indeed act as primary parents, it is important to note that in the context of the interview being to a significant degree about his relationship to Arron Light, Roberts appears to go to great lengths not to even notionally place himself alongside the figure of the child. And it is this expectation that appears to rest on Roberts' shoulders that occupies my focus in the remainder of this book: how are men of all sexualities and across a range of masculinities and gendered embodiment required somehow to be beyond reproach, and how does this result in a wide range of claims about

children that may in reality be seen only to reinforce the power imbalances in adult-child relationships that prop up and indeed create the opportunities for abuses of power to occur?

Looking at topics ranging from the experiences of known sperm donors to gay men who engage in transnational adoption, and from constructions of boyhood in books on raising boys to representations of gay parents in the media and in movies, I suggest that a broad range of men are implicated in the logic of protection and propriety that I have outlined in this introduction. As a counter to this, I explore two further groups of men, namely Australian foster fathers and the experience of one transman who is a parent, in order to consider some of the resistances that men make to the normative ordering of adult-child relations. In so doing, my intent is not to map out any one form of masculinity that is more susceptible to, or more free from, treating children as objects. Rather my point is to explore the impact of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinities upon all men, whether that be the heterosexual father who reports feeling great loss when his son or daughter comes out, or the gay man so invested in having children that he enters into court battles over 'best interests' in ways that only further enshrine a very normative account of adult-child relations. Relatedly, I am also interested in exploring at various junctures the ways in which women are positioned in this picture of adult-child relations in ways that often only serve to further centre men's needs over those of women. What does it mean, I would ask, for gay men to make use of commercial surrogacy in non-western countries? And what does it mean for some men to act as sperm donors with the hidden agenda of becoming a parent? In many ways, I suggest, the dominant models of adult-child relations made available to men in western societies stand to disbenefit not only children, but also women.

In response to the issues that I raise by mapping some of the current configurations of relationships between adults and children (and particularly men and children), I conclude the book by exploring one particular way in which we may reconceptualise such relationship in ways that whilst not being power-free, are nonetheless more reflexive about the operations of power. By drawing some links between practices of polyamory and family making, I suggest that the model of power and relationship evoked within many polyamory circles holds the potential to serve as a way to understand how children can be engaged with as partners in the building of families and adult-child relationships, rather than always already passive recipients of adult's decisions. Importantly, my use of polyamory as a model indicates that adult-child relationships can never be free of desire and investments. What we can potentially be free of,

however, is the pathologisation of adult-child desire (where adults, and especially men, can be seen to have a legitimate desire to care for children and engage with them in loving and respectful ways, and where children are recognised as knowing subjects whose desires and interests actively shape the relationships they have to adults, and indeed potentially change the ways in which adults see themselves, as any parent can attest). Reframing desire as part of the practice of relationships between adults and children, and allowing for, rather than closing down, opportunities for adults and children to build relationships, may go some way to beginning the work of dismantling the power-laden ways in which children are currently understood, and the ways in which this often leads to the deification (and indeed eroticisation) of children. In this sense, acting in the ‘best interests of the child’ is not about yet again seeking to determine what children need *per se*, nor is it about suggesting that children can simplistically be given control or free reign over their bodies and lives. Rather, thinking about what is ‘best’ requires refusing to perpetrate the binary of ‘best’ and ‘worst’, where the latter serves as a repository for all that is abjected from the former. Accepting that desire functions in and through adult-child relations (most often in non-pathological ways) is an important step towards recognising the plurality of ‘bests’ that exist, and the need to constantly challenge the evocation of children as only ever objects of adult desire and control.

CHAPTER TWO

SPERM DONORS

As trite as it might sound, sometimes it is just easiest to start at the beginning. When a man and a woman love each other, sometimes they get into bed and the man puts his penis in the woman's vagina and they make a baby. Or so the story of the birds and bees would have us believe. In reality, increasing numbers of babies are not made through heterosex, and in reality not all babies are made in the context of love. Yet this narrative of conception remains the dominant (and indeed often only) story made available to children under the guise of sex education. For young, potentially non-heterosexual people, this reification of heterosex as the only avenue to reproduction potentially serves to contribute to feelings of distress about same-sex attractions due to what may be perceived as the prohibition placed upon non-heterosexual people becoming parents. This point is captured neatly in a paper on the views of non-heterosexual young people in relation to sex education, entitled 'It was as useful as a chocolate kettle' (Hiller & Mitchell, 2008). As this quote from one participant would suggest, sex education as it is currently configured does nothing to meet the needs of non-heterosexual students, and indeed may only compound the challenges they face as I have suggested above.

So what other stories are there to tell about conception? And importantly, what do stories outside of the standard birds and the bees narrative do to offer truly alternate understandings of family formation and adult-child relationships? In this first analytic chapter of the book I explore one set of experiences that sit outside of the standard narrative of reproduction through heterosex, namely conception via donor sperm. Importantly, however, the experiences that I report here from interviews with Australian sperm donors in many ways reinforce the logic of adult-child relations that is often the product of normative accounts of family. More specifically, they draw upon very standard accounts of men's relationship to their genetic material and to the children conceived from it.

The men I spoke to whose experiences inform this chapter were a group of thirty gay and heterosexual men living across Australia who had acted either as known sperm donors through private arrangements with friends or acquaintances, or who had donated anonymously via clinics.

Whilst there was considerable variation amongst the men in relation to their views, there was nonetheless a commonality in their views about the fact that genetic material *should* have some sort of meaning attached to it (i.e., that it couldn't just be seen as 'potential' that whilst being produced by one man's body, didn't have to be connected to him in a proprietorial way). Just as interesting, was the fact that overall there was a negative perception of the recipients of donor sperm (the majority of whom were lesbian women). Whilst a small number of the men spoke in positive ways about their relationships to the woman they had donated sperm to, the majority spoke negatively of their views of lesbian recipients/mothers, something that has the potential for outcomes that seriously impact upon the lives of all involved, as I will elaborate later in the chapter.

To return to my opening points in this chapter, then, and to extend upon some of the issues I raised in the introduction to this book, whilst it is often the case that we assume that normativity adheres primarily to practices considered to be the norm (such as reproduction through heterosex), this is not always the case, as this chapter will show. Just as some heterosexual couples who reproduce through intercourse engage in parenting styles that resist the male breadwinner/female carer binary, so do some individuals who contribute to reproduction outside of heterosex buy into the same binary through attempts at adopting an identity that mirrors very traditional understandings of masculinity, parenting, and conception. The adoption of relatively traditional understandings of reproduction amongst sperm donors has significant implications for children born from their donations, as this chapter demonstrates. If men who donate sperm have an expectation of the children born, and one that may not match up with the child's own needs or desires, then once again children disappear within a logic that repeatedly positions men's (and including donors') needs above those of children. It is important to consider, then, how in a process that is explicitly and intentionally about the creation of a life, and thus the birth of children, that children yet again disappear through a logic of propriety that constructs children simply as objects produced by a sperm and an egg, rather than as individuals who very quickly develop the capacity to hold needs and desires that differ radically from those involved in their conception.

In the following three sections I explore some of the ways in which the men I interviewed spoke about their understanding of the meaning of sperm itself. Whilst, as I suggested above, there was considerable variation amongst men as to the meanings they attributed to sperm (and whilst as I have argued elsewhere, Riggs, 2008a; 2009a, there were notable differences between the ways gay men as a group and heterosexual men as a group

spoke), there was nonetheless a shared investment in constructing sperm as mattering on very specific terms that I would argue exceed the function of sperm itself, and encompass the symbolic meanings of sperm as a key site of a very normative masculinity. The very fact that all of the thirty men I spoke with made some sort of attribution about the meaning of sperm without provocation from me (i.e., that a question about the meaning of sperm was not a part of my interview schedule) would suggest to me that the 'value' of sperm above and beyond its role in conception was of significant import to these men (though it should be noted that three of the men did not make proprietorial claims about their sperm, though they nonetheless commented on its meaning).

Having explored the meanings the men attributed to sperm, I then proceed in the remainder of the chapter to explore the accounts that men gave of the recipients of their sperm. Again, this was another topic that did not arise from my interview schedule *per se*, but was a consistent topic that the men raised as something of importance to them. As I will suggest, there is now considerable legal precedent indicating the possibility of negative outcomes for all parties should donors hold views about recipients that (negatively) influence the ways in which they deal with recipients and children conceived of their donations.

Genetic material as a 'legacy'

The participants who I grouped into this first theme all appeared to draw upon a notion of 'genetic legacy' in talking about their motivations to act as sperm donors. Amongst these participants, genetic material was treated as serving a functional purpose for donors, enabling them to 'leave their mark' upon the world. The first example of this comes from an interview with Paul, a gay man who I asked about what motivated him to become a sperm donor.

Paul: umm an interesting thing is now that I am middle aged and don't plan to die soon, so the interesting question comes up to where or who am I going to leave all my worldly goods to. You know it seems a strange sort of thing, but when I was young I didn't think about those sorts of things. But it is important to me now or would be nice to know that um when I fall off the perch that I will leave something behind or part of me behind, you know

Damien: mm

Paul: So quite honestly my motives they are up front, you know I want to know I can share the experiences and financial gains that I have, the

knowledge and experience. It would be nice and give me a nice warm feeling to know that there is part of me left.

Damien: mm

Paul: Lots of stuff you read is about people having the feeling that the line is continued and you know there's a part of you left behind or continued on.

Paul indicates his investment in an understanding of genetic material as legacy in his statement that it would be “nice to know that when I fall off the perch I will leave something behind”. Importantly, however, Paul clearly states that he does not want to leave just *anything* behind, but rather that he wants to know “that there is part of me left”. Whilst Paul also mentions leaving ‘worldly goods’, ‘experience’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘financial gains’, his emphasis is upon the “warm feeling” of leaving a genetic legacy. In addition to making clear statements as to his own investment in notions of genetic legacy, Paul also makes a consensus warrant to bolster his claims, in the form of “lots of stuff you read is about people having the feeling that the line is continued”. This serves to endorse and justify his position as one that is not simply his alone, but rather is one that is widely held and therefore valid according to ‘lots’ of other people.

In the following extract Joe, a heterosexual man, employs a similar argument to that made by Paul, namely that acting as a sperm donor allows him to leave something behind in the world. Different to Paul, however, Joe was explicit in his desire to have a child:

Joe: Doing this means I will be creating a child and I think for me the thing out of it, is not so much the creation of a child which would be kind of exciting, of course, but I think for me by the time any child would be wanting to see me, I will be you know 65

Damien: mm

Joe: you know um I would be retired or about to retire I think at that sort of third age of life to have something like that come into it,

Damien: yep

Joe: I think it's partly about giving me something, a little package, a little present.

The first part of this extract presents a view of sperm donation where