

Let's Talk About Sex

Let's Talk About Sex:
Histories of Sexuality in Australia
from Federation to the Pill

By

Lisa Featherstone

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Let's Talk About Sex:
Histories of Sexuality in Australia from Federation to the Pill,
by Lisa Featherstone

This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2011 by Lisa Featherstone

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2736-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2736-2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
Let's Talk About Sex	
Chapter One.....	19
Morality and Motherhood: Concepts of Female Sexuality	
Chapter Two	43
Excess and Constraint: The Challenges of Male Sexuality	
Chapter Three	71
Sexuality and Race: Desire in Black and White	
Chapter Four	93
The Great War on Venereal Disease: Sexuality, Sores and Shaping the Race	
Chapter Five	119
Talking about (Hetero)Sex: Educating the Marie Stopes Generation	
Chapter Six	143
Racing Towards Whiteness: Birth Control, Sexuality and Race in the Interwar Years	
Chapter Seven.....	173
Pathology and Perversity, Pleasure and Pain	
Chapter Eight.....	205
The Multiple Moral Panics of World War II	
Chapter Nine.....	229
Heterosexuality, Homosexuality and the "Happy, Harmonious" 1950s	

Chapter Ten	261
Dancing and Romancing: Sex and the New Teen Body	
Conclusions	287
Sex in the Age of the Female Contraceptive Pill	
Abbreviations	293
Select Bibliography	295
Index	321

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5-1: Divorce Rates in Australia	135
Table 7-1: Cases of VD notified in various states, 1920 and 1927	189
Table 7-2: Rape and Attempted Rape Arrests and Convictions, NSW 1900-1939	191
Table 10-1: Sex Offenders in the Yasmar Child Guidance Clinic, June 1953 to September 1954	278

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to make a book.

My first vote of thanks must be to the State Library of New South Wales and the then Mitchell Librarian Elizabeth Ellis, for taking a chance on a project on sex. In 2005, the Library awarded me the CH Currey Memorial Fellowship, which allowed me to begin this book. The Library, and its librarians and archivists, have played a key role in the research and writing of this book. I was also supported by a Macquarie University Postdoctoral Fellowship, which allowed me the time and space to explore the archives and ideas. In 2009, I gained a tenured position at the University of Newcastle. I could not hope for a more supportive environment for research. Over the past two years, I have been generously funded through a New Staff Grant, an Early Career Grant, and then through the Humanities Research Institute (HRI), teaching and marking relief, and finally, a Mid-Career Fellowship. The Dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences, John Germov, and the Head of the HRI, Hugh Craig, have been strong supporters, and I thank them both for this.

Libraries and archives across Australia have generously offered assistance, including all of the State Libraries across the nation. A particular thank-you to the University of Melbourne Archives and the Wallace family, for permission to use the Wallace Papers.

On a more personal note, I must thank – sincerely thank – my fellow adventurers in the history of sexuality, Rebecca Jennings, Amanda Kaladelfos and Yorick Smaal. All three have offered expert opinion, read chunks of the manuscript, and shared tea and wine. Without their rich and generous friendship and scholarly advice, this task would have been far more onerous, and far less rewarding.

Similarly, Victoria Haskins was unstinting with her thoughts and advice throughout. A special thank you to those of you who read draft chapters: Michelle Arrow, Robyn Arrowsmith, James Bennett, Tanya Evans, Victoria Haskins, Alison Holland, Rebecca Jennings, Amanda Kaladelfos, Claire Lowrie, Yorick Smaal and Emma Warren. I know this book is better for your input, though the errors are all my own. Mary Spongberg and Bridget Griffen-Foley were friends and advisors, as always. Tonia Corner is the best friend a girl could have, and Sophie Avis

helped in more ways than she knows. Margaret Jones shared her memories and her written memoir, helping me to understand the period in multiple ways. Her generosity is important to this project. Others, including Barbara Baird, Desley Deacon, Jill Roe, Hsu-Ming Tao, Angela Woollacott and Frank Bongiorno, have provided support at timely moments. My colleagues at my new home the University of Newcastle have laughed at my research interests and encouraged me along: thank you Rebecca Beirne, James Bennett, Hilary Carey, Nancy Cushing, Philip Dwyer, Daniela Heil, Claire Lowrie, Roger Markwick, Jo May, Michael Ondaatje, Wayne Reynolds and Camilla Russell.

I am fortunate to have had a number of marvellous research assistants help me with this book: without their input, this book would no doubt be paler – and no doubt would still waiting completion. Amanda Kaladelfos went beyond the call of duty, providing a laugh, an astute eye and insightful conversations in the final years. Megan Edwards provided stellar help and wonderful company through the early years of the project. Lorna Barrow and Matthew Bailey made valuable contributions to the project as well.

My gorgeous University of Newcastle students have inspired my thinking. There is nothing like testing a chapter in the lecture theatre! And my excellent Honours students have broadened my reading and writing.

And a final thank you to my beautiful family, Craig and Lachlan Macdermid. Their love, joy and support made coming home from the archives all that much more special.

INTRODUCTION

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

“The sex question all over the world is in a muddle”
—Letter from “a Navvy” to *The Triad*, 1916¹

It was 1911, and in the small, still parochial city of Sydney, William James Chidley (1860-1916) walked the streets dressed in a toga, carrying a small, self-published sex guide with a prophetic name, *The Answer*. A self-educated man, Chidley had little formal training, but he read widely in public libraries, developing a particular taste for health and sexological literature. Sex, he believed, was the cause of the broader social and medical dilemmas of the age, and through his book and public lectures, Chidley wanted nothing less than to change the sexual culture of early twentieth Australia.

Living in a world fascinated with the pseudo-science of eugenics, Chidley had become obsessed by the degeneration of his own body. Rather than viewing ageing as a natural process, Chidley believed that his physical body deteriorated whenever he was sexually active and rejuvenated whenever he abstained. He developed this idea into a theory about the menace of sex. Chidley felt that the “shocks” of coition would lead to perversions of the muscles, glands and nerves, and the impact would quickly be inscribed on the face, the skin, the hands, the hair, the teeth and especially the brows. Prolonged exposure to sexual shocks would be increasingly dangerous, leading to serious diseases including consumption and asthma. In time, lesions would appear across the body, on the brain and in the bloodstream, and men and women would be driven to illness, criminality and even madness. At the same time as this physical degeneration, psychological deterioration would occur, with love, joy and pleasure replaced by lust, misery and pride. The end result was diabolical: depression, insanity, war and crime.²

For a man who talked a great deal about sex, and engaged in rather a lot of sex too, Chidley was perhaps a puritan at heart. Chidley openly and virulently condemned penetrative heterosexual intercourse, the “crowbar method” of sex as he termed it. While his theories were outlandish,

Chidley had tapped into cultural and social quandaries surrounding penetrative sex. He simply took this perspective one step further, to a condemnation of *all* heterosex in its contemporary form. He aimed to redefine the practice of heterosexual intercourse, so a man would not “force” himself into a woman, but would be drawn in via her “vacuum.” This, he claimed, would revolutionise not merely sex itself, but would purify and rejuvenate the entire being for both men and women.

Chidley’s is a well-known tale in Australian sexual histories, and as a sexual eccentric, is hardly representative of sexual norms or even of sexual subcultures.³ His story is, however, illustrative of the fierce questioning about sexual normativity that occurred in the early twentieth century. There was, in the early decades, a vast and impressive regulatory system surrounding sexuality, attempting to enforce a regime of sex based upon heterosexuality and reproduction, and (ideally) upon restraint and constraint. For much of the early century, sex was, discursively at least, as much about procreation as it was about pleasure. It was a “long Victorian period.”⁴ After the Great War, there was a continuing emphasis on heterosexuality, and procreation was still important, but so too was the maintenance of social order, through the model of the nuclear family. Indeed, it was the duty of a good citizen to “enjoy” a limited but active sex life, only within the safety and sanctity of married life. These were the normative conceptions of the age.

Yet such a system ensured not only surveillance, but resistance too. In the following fifty years, there would be no one else quite like Chidley, but many others would attempt to chart and change Australian sexuality. Individuals and communities attempted to write and rewrite sexual identities, sexual possibilities, many of which were a distinct challenge to concepts of normativity. Sometimes prominent, sometimes marginalised, sometimes gaining a measure of notoriety and even infamy, these voices began to think about sexuality in new and intriguing ways, moving beyond the procreative nexus into a whole new world of sexual options. If the mainstream did not necessarily embrace them, nevertheless they offered a vital challenge to the dominant views.

Let’s Talk About Sex traces these multiple and shifting attitudes towards sex and sexuality, both in the mainstream and in the alternative. Read broadly, it might be seen as history from purity and reproduction in the early-century, to the nascent beginnings of a culture of sexual identity, fluidity and pleasure in the mid-century. Yet this is not necessarily a history of progress. It is a story of flux and change – of moments of passion, and equal moments of repression. Clearly, sex was not always hetero, marital, reproductive and easily contained. Thus this is an attempt

to write an inclusive history of sexuality in Australia, surveying multiple and interwoven forms of sexuality, desire, pleasure, regulation and resistance.

The framework for such a study is clearly Foucauldian: the accumulation of bio-political power around bodies, and the resistance to these authorities.⁵ I, like many other historians of sexuality, have been rather seduced by Foucault, though he is not read uncritically here, especially with regards to his blindness to gender difference.⁶ Theoretically, this work assumes that sex (the act) and sexuality (the identity) were and are not merely biological, but rather formed by social and cultural interaction. Sex is thus malleable and changeable over time, mediated by the specific cultural conditions of the period and space.⁷ Within this project, sex and sexuality will be read as historical inventions, but inventions that nonetheless contain some flesh, some physicality.⁸ As such, this book speaks to a rich and often complex theorisation about the history of sexuality.⁹

Yet this work also “stands on the shoulders” of a large body of archival research on the history of sexuality, both internationally and in Australia. Since the 1970s, history has been understood as key to explaining sexual identity and community, and in Australia there has been a vibrant gay historical voice, including Garry Wotherspoon, Robert Aldrich, Graham Willett, Clive Moore, Robert Reynolds and Yorick Smaal.¹⁰ Lesbian histories, too have uncovered women’s same-sex desire, including work by Ruth Ford and Lucy Chessser, and more recently by Rebecca Jennings.¹¹ This work owes a debt of gratitude towards these historians, for uncovering the all too hidden histories, and for showing that, even with our limited sources, that these histories could be written. My work here aims to integrate these vital gay and lesbian pasts into a wider Australian sexual history, to explain the background, the inter-relations and the links, and to ponder the place of those deemed “deviant” in the broader historiographical tradition.

This study thus also draws on a range of other works that engage with sex in the historical, some which take sexuality as their primary focus, such as Judith Allen’s formidable work on sexual crimes, Amanda Kaladelfos’ recent thesis on masculinity and criminality, Rae Frances’ nuanced work on prostitution, and Jill Julius Matthew’s masterful considerations of femininity, sexuality and modernity.¹² Other works provide crucial background on the intersections between sexuality, race and gender, and these ideas have been integral to the ways I have historicized Australian sexualities.¹³ Biographies and broader histories with tangential themes have also been utilised to provide frameworks for understanding society, culture and politics in this period.¹⁴ For this is a

period of vast change in Australia: federation, war, depression, war, suburbanisation, domesticity, and the very (slow and small) start of liberalism.

My approach as a historian has been to draw on the widest range of primary and archival sources possible. Though this research would never claim to be exhaustive, I have endeavoured to cover multiple ways of thinking about sexuality through varied types of sources. In considering the way sexuality was publicly constructed, my sources have broadly correlated with the key interest groups writing about sex – social purity groups, medicine, the Church, both radical and conservative social commentators, the media, the law, and popular and elite culture. As Lesley Hall has shown, a range of “orthodox” discourses can operate sometimes offering differing, even inconsistent messages.¹⁵ Yet in Australia, perhaps surprisingly, the over-riding messages could be remarkably monolithic. While it is simplistic to suggest that those in authority had the simple and unequivocal means to silence and marginalise those without power, throughout the early century there was nonetheless a hegemonic discussion around sexuality that was too strong to entirely ignore.

Such a history, however, must be ever aware that an examination of the discursive constructions of sexuality is problematic. As Angus McLaren has noted, “There is an obvious gap between the literature – be it descriptive or prescriptive – and actual behaviour.”¹⁶ In many ways, I am interested more thoroughly in what is *said* about sexuality than what is done, for the former tells us far more about the way power and authority operate in a given society. Nonetheless, in an attempt to understand how sexuality was constructed and understood *outside* of these dominant discourses, wherever possible I have considered evidence from not-so-famous men and women. This might well be a misguided attempt to find out about what “real” or “ordinary” people thought about sex, and to explore how those who lived outside the realm of the “normal” understood their dispossession and deviance. This is a fraught exercise, of course, and we should not forget that these too are discursively constructed and endowed with a political and moral agenda – and in the end may be just as unreliable as more official documents. They are also fragmented: snippets and shadows, coming from letter writers, or diarists, or those who have left scratchings and drafts in archives, or occasionally those who allowed for more intrusive questioning from oral historians. These elusive fragments add a rich patina to our understandings of sex in the past, though it is far from comprehensive. Most people leave no records, no discursive trace of their sexuality. We can only find hints of their views, sometimes in

demography, or sometimes by reading legal, medical or media sources against the grain.¹⁷

It is a particular challenge to find sources that deal fully with non-normative sexuality, though this could change over different timeframes. Homosexuality is a case in point. Before the Great War, there was little public commentary on male same-sex desire, while in the 1950s homosexuality was quite widely commented on in the press and the law courts. Across both time periods, public discourse about homosexuality was condemnatory: in medicine, it was pathologised (to varying degrees), in the law it was criminalised, and in the public spaces of the media it was largely seen as an evil practice. Especially in later periods, it is a relatively simple exercise to find sources that construct homosexuality as deviant, or to condemn it as immoral. It was far more difficult to uncover the ways men experienced their homosexuality as a pleasure, or as an outlet, or as a relationship, or as an identity. Oral histories can undoubtedly explore this further, for the later periods at least, but there are certainly gaps in the historical record, particularly in times when sexual behaviours were criminalized, and men could suffer harsh legal penalties.

Sources on lesbian women, too, are deeply problematic, as a number of historians have shown.¹⁸ In Australia, studies by Ford, Chesser, Jennings, Sally Newman and Sylvia Martin have uncovered enticing histories of romantic friendships as well as lesbian love and desire. There are certainly examples in Australia of desiring relationships, and also of public condemnations of lesbians, but they are not omnipresent. Ford has suggested that authors had been reluctant to interrogate the heteronormativity of historical constructions of female desire, and thus lesbians were and are written out of the public record.¹⁹ Chesser, too, has noted that there is still an overall invisibility of Australian lesbians in the historical canon.²⁰ I would add to this the problem of finding new and intriguing source material in the early century: it is not that primary sources don't exist, but they are fewer and/or more elusive than we might expect. Sometimes it is a matter of joining together fragments, reading silences and absences, even sometimes reading anachronistically, when contemporary women did not have the vocabulary to describe their desire. Yet though I consistently searched for lesbian archives and evidence of female same-sex desires, women's experiences make up less of this book than I had hoped and anticipated, as lesbian and lesbian-like relationships were frequently all but invisible before Women's Liberation.

There are problems, too, in finding an historical record for criminalized sexual behaviours, such as paedophilia and bestiality: sources are generally fairly sparse, especially outside the courtroom.²¹ Even non-

criminalised sexual interests such as flagellation are under-represented in the primary sources.²² Despite my earnest searching, it was far easier to find multitudes of sources on reproductive sexuality, marital sex and normative sex and gender roles, than on alternatives. I suspect this survey will disappoint some specialists – and at times I was myself disappointed not to have found more, uncovered more, analysed more. But I have attempted to offer the most comprehensive survey that I could, using the available sources.

Intersections between race and sexuality are similarly complicated. Unfortunately, for much of the early century, there were few records left by indigenous Australians, and we are left to read sex through white eyes. By the interwar period, white commentaries on indigenous peoples proliferated, as Aboriginal men and women came increasingly under the spotlight of anthropologists. As it became clear that indigenous people in Australia were not going to simply “die out,” there was an increasing focus on documenting their lives. The records of anthropologists – reporting on “traditional” lifestyles in remote regions – are troubling when read as historical documents. They largely tell a story of sexual ignorance, deviance, excess and brutality. Daisy Bates, for example, recorded a tale of bartering, beatings and infanticide (she was of course an unreliable witness, suggesting also that Aboriginal women felt no pain in childbirth).²³ Others recorded sexual excesses, including (intimidatingly!) coitus five or six times a night.²⁴ Surely such tales tell us more about anthropologists than about indigenous sex rites, let alone local desires. Similarly, government reports and official documents surveying Aboriginal communities were steeped with racist assumptions, most notably the idea that mixed race sex needed to be controlled and legitimised. It is far more difficult to examine desire or want, in particular from an indigenous perspective. For this reason, as a white woman I have not attempted to establish how Aboriginal people experienced or understood sex, but rather have focused here on the ways white society attempted to control black sexuality and reproduction.

While there are evident limits to reading the past through narratives constructed largely by powerful voices, nonetheless intriguing debates over authority did emerge across this time frame. In particular, the debates over science and religion are especially important to our understandings of the ways cultural authorities formed and informed sexuality. Early in the century, there was a relative silence of the Churches in debates over sexuality, at least until World War II. In the United Kingdom, John Maynard has suggested that in the Victorian period it is all too easy to conflate the developments of sexual narratives with science and medicine,

overlooking the profound effect religion continued to have on issues of morality and sexuality.²⁵ Yet the various Churches in Australia do appear less vital, less vigorous in the early twentieth century debates around sex. With regards to sex, the tendency of the various Churches was to turn away – almost to abstain – from conversation. There is a relative silence on sex and religion in the early part of the century. In part this may have been because religion had few answers: in regards to sex, “even clergy and ministers were at a loss.”²⁶

Christianity – when it spoke – tended to stress the overall sanctity of sex, and its relationship to God. Therefore, any perceived misuse of sexuality (masturbation, promiscuity and so on) was read as an affront to God and His vision for the world. Christians in general promoted self-respect, nobility and abstinence: not only for the self, but for God. The body was seen as God’s vessel for life: to desecrate the body was to degrade Christ himself.²⁷ Thus the Churches had distinct policies on sexuality, with some differences between sects. But the Churches were surprisingly muted in their commentaries on sex in this period. It was not that the Churches were not important in Australian society, though some historians have suggested that Australians were less religious (or at least less church-going) than many similar Western nations. It seems more likely that the Churches’ own reluctance to engage with issues of sexuality before World War II rendered them less crucial to the debates. As Russel Ward recalled of his childhood in Queensland, his pastors never mentioned sex, other than in the vaguest terms of “exhortations to ‘purity’ or clean living.”²⁸ It was not that there was no Church involvement (and certainly social purity groups were often related to Christian groups), but that the official churches were less vocal in their discursive engagement with sex. As one contemporary noted, religious groups were “too timid” in attacking the problems of sex.²⁹ This was to change as the century progressed – particularly after WWII highlighted the sexual lives of young men and women – but the early-to-mid century saw, if not a silence, then at least a form of avoidance over issues that might be seen as distasteful.

In contrast, medicine increasingly constructed itself as something particularly empirical, as opposed to the superstition and sentimentality of religion.³⁰ The “science” of medicine appealed to the age of modernity, with its search for concrete, irredeemable solutions. By the 1930s, the authority of the medical profession in Australia had been firmly established.³¹ This strength was consolidated in 1933, with legislation to control the Medical Board ensuring the alignment of the state and the medical profession.³² It was part of a broad, modern movement to quantify and compartmentalise, to analyse systematically the world. Yet such

methods had not fully evolved – scientific studies were often small, and information on the aims, methods and results of any surveys were sketchy, if not non-existent. In Australia, in particular, the survey was under-developed. While in America in this period, there were a number of substantial sex surveys (well before Kinsey), in Australia there was no corresponding significant survey of any kind. Yet there remained a strident faith in the scientific model. As one Brisbane chemist suggested, “All problems can be solved by brains and science.”³³ Doctors were, perhaps, the new priests.³⁴

Other groups also intertwined with the ideas of the medical fraternity, including feminists. In the United Kingdom, Elaine Showalter described the New Woman of the turn of the century as an “anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule.”³⁵ Enticing as this view may be, the first-wave feminists in Australia were not quite this chaotic. Feminists certainly did disturb fundamental gender roles and rules in quite profound ways. Yet, their views on sexuality coincided with that of medicine, for both had a strong focus on sexual restraint, and the control of “the animal in man.” Feminists were of course not always uniform in their responses, as Susan Magarey has shown, but in general, feminists did construct men as rapacious and women as rather passionless.³⁶ Feminists exerted a powerful influence in Australia and sought to act as moral guardians of female virtue.

Feminist’s call for continence tied in neatly with the work of other social purity groups, including anti-venereal disease campaigners and early sex educators. In the early century, purity workers and feminists were vocal in calling for chastity, and in the following decades, they were key in developing sex education along these models of abstinence. As we will see throughout this book, groups such as the Father and Son Movement were instrumental in the propagation of limited forms of sexual knowledge. With the best of intentions, they nonetheless provided models of sexuality that focused on respectability, marriage and heterosexuality, rendering all others that fell outside of these boundaries deviant and dangerous.

Across a wide variety of spectrums, then, an ideal of sexuality was constructed, and there were strong social, cultural, medical and religious attempts to control sexuality. This took specific forms, mediated through gender, class, race and later ethnicity. Certainly gender was a great divide and the constructions of masculinity and femininity are of central concern to this project. The sexualities of men and women were constructed in divergent ways. While for most of the early century, both men and women

were *ideally* to be chaste and pure, few authorities truly expected men to be so. Responsibility for chastity – and hence the blame for disruptions such as premarital pregnancy – remained with women. The regulation of sexuality was then firmly gendered. So too men and women experienced their sexual bodies in fundamentally different ways, in part due to this discursive construction of sex, and in part due to the differing biological realities, which left women vulnerable to pregnancy, abortion, rape and the potential shame and stigma of being named promiscuous or slatternly. Issues of class, too, were ever-present. As Lynette Finch has shown, the surveillance of sexuality was central to the ways class was constructed in Australia.³⁷ Conversely, class and respectability were central to the ways that sexuality was shaped and narrated, especially as much sexual literature was written by the middle classes, aimed at or about the working classes.³⁸

Similarly, race was a definitive marker of sexual propriety and sexual deviance. On one level, this was a reaction to the perceived sexual degradations of Aboriginal Australia. On another, as emerging work on eugenics and whiteness is showing, sexuality, reproduction and birth control were integral to the ways white Australia defined itself against a polymorphous, non-white “Other.” Race in particular was crucial to the development of reproductive and sexual politics in the early century, with fears over whiteness and racial contamination central to demands for increased fertility amongst the married and even occasionally the single. Further, well into the twentieth century, interracial relations became critical to the development of the economy, politics and society in the cities and on the frontier. Thus race intersects with, forms and mediates sex and sexual politics. As Ann Stoler suggests in her analysis of sex and colonialism, a history of sexuality cannot adequately be discussed without reference to both race and whiteness more generally.³⁹

These complex interminglings of sexuality, race, gender and class were not Australian alone. Even when writing a “national” history, it is clear that Australia adopted many of the frameworks provided by British, Continental and, later, American thinkers. Postcolonial Australia was a transnational continent, situating itself as a Western outpost with economic, political, social, intellectual and educational models flowing directly from Europe. Thinking about sex was no different, and major sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and later Havelock Ellis were regularly referred to in local scientific and popular writings, and even Sigmund Freud rated an occasional if somewhat sceptical mention. Local feminists, eugenicists, sex educators and other progressives routinely placed themselves within international networks. In a practical setting,

court cases showed clear uses of international volumes such as *Taylor's Jurisprudence*, published first in London, and used across the British colonies.

There were, however, differences in timing and usage. For all of the similarities, we cannot assume that the British or American models will be a precise fit for local conditions. Australia was made up of a series of British colonies settled in the late eighteenth century on indigenous land. In 1901, the six British colonial states united to become a new nation, Australia. It was a peaceful federation encouraged by a common identity, heritage, ancestors, history, culture, language, as well as economic needs.⁴⁰ A significant part of the appeal of a united Australia was to consolidate it as an imperial outpost, to strengthen its resolve as an agent of the continuing white race, and to more readily enable the exclusion of non-whites. Australia's geographic place in the Asia-Pacific meant the new nation felt ever vulnerable to invasion, particularly from its northern (Asian) neighbours. It is not surprising to us that one of the first Acts passed by the new Commonwealth was the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, known colloquially as the "White Australia Policy." To the federating colonies, race mattered, and it continued to matter through much of the century. It is not, then, too much of a leap to suggest that the regulation of bodies, through sexuality and reproduction, was a great part of the process of national formation. At the core of the newly federated nation was population: population was power.⁴¹

Moreover, the particular forms of colonisation in Australia impacted dramatically on the development of society, culture and sexuality. Australia's vast seemingly "empty" spaces led men quickly from the towns and cities to the frontiers, some of which were not fully settled by white Australians until the twentieth century. Frontier regions hosted a peculiar gender and racial imbalance, with the white man carving out "new" territories. Historians have shown how the frontier aided the development of a particular form of masculinity: rough, rugged, homosocial. Thus the specific Antipodean situation – the perceived need to shore up White Australia from invasion, the certain types of masculinity which developed in a frontier nation – all ensured that Australian attitudes towards sexuality were both similar to and different from those of other western and/or postcolonial nations. Thus Australia needs to be studied for its specificities, and even within the Australian experience, for the shifts and changes that occurred even over short timeframes.

By the early twentieth century, it is clear that in Australia, as elsewhere, sex emerged as a central concept in modern thinking. As Foucault has so clearly drawn out, the Victorian period had seen many

paradoxes: on one hand, a repressive regime, but on the other, such repression was an incitement to discourse. In the condemnation of sex, everyone was in fact talking about it.⁴² In the new century, not everyone approved of the “discovery” of sex. As one social commentator suggested:

In these extraordinary days, you can't move without Sex being flung in your face. It sniggers at you from the pages of your newspapers; it shouts at you from street hoardings; it sidles and slides through the literature imported by the ton.⁴³

But for other intellectual elites, adrift in a modern, tentatively Freudian world, sex was seen as key to narrating life itself. Never before had there been such an avalanche of narratives about sex, and never before was sex seen as so omnipotent. In science, in the arts and in the media, sex had a new importance: it was more than the continuation of the species.⁴⁴ Instead, sex was seen as one key way, sometimes *the* key way, to understand modern life.

Sex was embedded into the psyche of the newly formed nation. In Kate Weston's 1913 novel *The Prelude*, sex was seen as fundamental to both life and nation. As the charming and intelligent male protagonist noted:

all progress is by way of sex. What is there in Art, Literature, Progress, Science, or even Religion into which it does not enter. Sex exercises a sort of moral propulsion that incites ourselves or others to action. It is a dynamo that drives the steering-wheel of life, mental, moral and physical. Remove its influence and what have you? A valley of dry bones, a machine with vital parts missing. Can you imagine a sexless nation?⁴⁵

In a period that idealised notions of progress, technology, science, classification and control, sex was an integral part of the newly federated nation: a central part of what it meant to be “modern.”

The links between modernity, pleasure and desire are considered throughout this book. In our contemporary world, ideas of pleasure are one foundational way that we understand sexuality. Yet as this study of Australian sexualities indicates, this was not always the case. Individual men and women may certainly have experienced pleasure, or desire, or both. But discursively, sex was often imagined and understood as being about things other than pleasure: about nation, citizenship, reproduction, duty, disease, contagion, immorality and sin. Understandings about sexuality and the sex act itself were and are historically contingent, based upon our social and cultural understandings of social order and bodily experience.

In effect, then, it is important to study this history of sexuality, to more fully understand the ways our past was constructed, imagined and understood – and perhaps, in brief moments, we can also recognise how sexuality was experienced, not as a monolithic or imposed institution, but how it was explored and enjoyed by individual bodies across different times and spaces. This book is therefore both chronological and thematic.

The first section covers the “birth” of the nation, from Federation and the new nation state in 1901 to the Great War. It begins in Chapter One with a consideration of female desire and the junctions between pleasure and purity. In a world where women (especially middle-class women) were expected to be chaste and pure, what did this mean for both sexual desire and reproduction? Male sexuality was just as problematic, as we will explore in Chapter Two. Men were – ideally – to be as chaste as women, yet their sexuality was more commonly defined by the idea of “hydraulic sexuality” and the belief that male sexual needs must be met, in any way possible. For men on the frontier, this could be indigenous women, and Chapter Three considers the crucial junctions between sex, race and desire. Chapter Four ends with the spectre of war and the rising anxieties over the venereal diseases, syphilis and gonorrhoea. In an age which constructed male sexuality as active and exertive, VD was difficult to treat and prevent, despite the rising social and medical costs to the community.

Section II considers the interwar years, both the glamorous “roaring twenties” and the more difficult years of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The years after the catastrophe of World War I saw an unflinching belief in science and modern knowledge, and as Chapter Five shows, a new urge to sex education. Sex ed was originally proposed as a way to end the spread of venereal disease, but it also aimed to promote new ways of living and loving in the twentieth century, including a reconceptualisation of monogamous marriage, which was now to be based on an active and happy sexual life. But not all Australians fitted into this paradigm of happy heterosexuality. Chapter Six continues the exploration of race and sexuality, beginning with an analysis of whiteness, eugenics and birth control, and ending with the situation for Aboriginal women, who could not and did not fit into the ideal of interwar familial bliss. Similarly, Chapter Seven examines the darker side of interwar sexuality. In a period which tightly defined and regulated the “norm,” those who fell outside were pathologised and rendered perverse. Here, we will consider the multiple ideas of “perversity,” including the ways that men and women experienced their own alternative desires.

The final section considers the period from World War II to the Pill, and the emergence of new forms of sexual ideas and identities. In Chapter Eight, we look to war, and the manifest changes in Australian society that this brought. Socially, and sexually, war was a turning point in our twentieth century history, for heterosexuals and for camp men and women. Chapter Nine considers adult sexuality in the 1950s, including both homosexuality and heterosexuality, and the ways sexuality was manipulated as a form of social, gender and political control. The final chapter moves to address the new teen bodies that emerge in the postwar years, and to think about the ways sexuality emerged as a crucial form of adolescent identity. The book concludes in 1961, when the female contraceptive Pill first became available on the market. Australian women were early adopters of the new technology, which helped reshape the sexual landscape into the sixties and seventies.

Many of the themes explored in this book overlap the various timeframes, and concerns about issues such as venereal disease and illegitimate childbirth permeate the entire sixty years. Yet, chronology and periodisation does allow us to draw out the most important ideas from each time frame, the key trends, the moral panics, the spaces of disruption and dislocation. As we will see, many things changed over these six decades, culminating in the contraceptive Pill, and the end to the definitive connection between heterosexual intercourse and pregnancy/procreation. Yet, so too other things stayed the same, as was illustrated by the continuing fight for those living outside the heterosexual “norm” to find companionship, love, and yes, sex. This book, then, foregrounds the greater changes of the late twentieth century, while allowing us a window into the way society and culture was thoroughly shaped and turned by sexual ideals and sexual adventures. It is not a definitive history, but rather by its inclusions and its omissions, hopes to inspire further discussion, further scholarship and future research into sexuality in twentieth century Australia.

Notes

¹ *The Triad*, June 1, 1916, 6.

² WJ Chidley, *The Answer* (Melbourne: The Australasian Author's Agency, 1911), 27-42, 47-8.

³ For more on Chidley, see Sally McInerney, “Chidley, William James (1860? - 1916)” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography Volume 7* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; 1979), 635-636; Mark Finnane, “The Popular Defence of Chidley,” *Labour History* 41 (1981): 57-73; GA Edwards and Wayne Hall, “The

Case of William Chidley: A Study in Psychiatry, Morality and Lunacy Law,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 14 (1980): 133-9; Sally McInerney, “Introduction,” in WJ Chidley, *The Confessions of William James Chidley* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977); B Horndage, *Chidley’s Answer to the Sex Problem* (Dubbo, NSW: Masterprint; 1971); Peter Coleman, *Obscenity, blasphemy, sedition: 100 years of censorship in Australia*, revised edition (Sydney: Angus & Robertson; 1974); Robert Darby, “William Acton’s Antipodean Disciples: A Colonial Perspective on His Theories of Male Sexual (Dys)function,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 13(2) (April 2004): 157-182.

⁴ See Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain 1860-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume. I: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1987); Michel Foucault, “Security, Territory and Population” in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Allen Lane, 1997), 69-71; Michel Foucault, “The birth of Biopolitics,” in *Ibid.*, 73-9.

⁶ Stephen Garton, “Keynote address,” Let’s Talk About Sex Conference, Macquarie University, 2008, with thanks to the author; Lisa Featherstone, ‘Foucault, Feminism and History’, in *Feminist Alliances*. Lynda Burns (ed) (New York: Rodolphi, 2006), 77-90.

⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*; See also, amongst others, Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981), 1-18; Robert A Padgug, “Sexual Matters: On Conceptualising Sexuality in History,” *Radical History Review* 20 (Spring Summer 1979): 3-23; RA Nye, “Introduction,” in *Sexuality*, ed. RA Nye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ On the materialities of bodies, see Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 7-9.

⁹ On the “history” of the history of sexuality, see Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality* (London: Equinox, 2003).

¹⁰ The various editions of *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives* remain an unparalleled source for thinking about gay, lesbian and queer histories in Australia.

¹¹ See Ruth Ford’s work including “‘The man-woman murderer’: sex fraud, sexual inversion and the unmentionable article in 1920s Australia,” *Gender and History*, 12(1) (April 2000): 158-196; “Speculating on scrapbooks, sex and desire: issues in lesbian history,” *Australian Historical Studies* 27(106) (April 1996): 11-26; “Lesbians and loose women: female sexuality and the women’s services during World War 2,” in *Gender and War*, eds Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81-104; “Lady friends and sexual deviationists: lesbians and the law in Australia, 1920s - 1950s,” in *Sex, Power and Justice: historical perspectives on the law in Australia, 1788-1990*, ed. Diane Kirkby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33-49; “Disciplined, punished and resisting bodies: lesbian women and the Australian armed services, 1950s-60s,” *Lilith: a Feminist History Journal* 9 (Autumn, 1996), 53-77; “They ‘were wed, and merrily rang the bells’: Gender-crossing and same-sex marriage in Australia, 1900-1940,” *Australian Gay and Lesbian Perspectives* 5 (Sydney:

Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, 2000), 41-66. See Lucy Chesser, including *Parting with my sex: Cross-dressing, inversion and sexuality in Australian cultural life* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008); "'When two loving hearts beat as one': Same-sex marriage, subjectivity and self-representation in the Australian case of Marion-Bill-Edwards, 1906-1916," *Women's History Review* 17(5) (2008): 719-740. See Rebecca Jennings, "A Room Full of Women: Lesbian Bars and Social Spaces in Postwar Sydney," *Women's History Review*, 2012, forthcoming; "It was a hot climate and it was a hot time: lesbian migration and transnational networks in the mid-twentieth century," *Australian Feminist Studies* 25(63) (2010): 31-45; "Lesbians in Sydney," *The Dictionary of Sydney*, 2(1) June 2009, http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/sydney_journal/index, downloaded September 2009.

¹² Judith Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes involving Australia Women since 1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990); Amanda Kaladelfos, "Crime and Outrage: Sexual Villains and Sexual Violence in New South Wales" (PhD Diss., University of Sydney, 2010), 48-84; Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in twentieth century Australia* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1984); Jill Julius Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace: Sydney's Romance with Modernity* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2005); Rae Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007).

¹³ In particular, I have drawn on Marilyn Lake's work on masculinity and feminism, including "On Being a White Man, Australia, c.1901" in *Australian Cultural History*, eds Hsu Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2003), 98-112; "Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man," *Journal of Australian Studies* 49 (1996): 12-20; "The Inviolable Woman : Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship, 1900-1940," *Gender and History* 8(2) (1996): 197-212. I have also utilised broader collections on gender, including *Gender relations in Australia: domination and negotiation*, eds Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992); Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath, Ann and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1994).

¹⁴ There are numerous examples, but see Michelle Arrow, *Friday On Our Minds: Popular Culture in Australia Since 1945* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009); John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: UNSW, 2000).

¹⁵ Lesley A Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁶ Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 6.

¹⁷ On reading the "Intimate Archive," see Maryanne Dever, Sally Newman and Ann Vickery, *The Intimate Archive: Journeys Through Private Papers* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2009); Elizabeth Stephens and Susan Stryker, *The Archival Imaginary*, special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* 25(64) (2010). On

reading absences and silences, see Judith Allen “Evidence and Silence: feminism and the limits of history” in *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, eds Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Grosz (Sydney Allen and Unwin, 1986), 184-88.

¹⁸ For some of the problems of reading the “lesbian” in the archive, see Sally Newman, “Silent Witness? Aileen Palmer and the Problem of Evidence in Lesbian History,” *Women’s History Review* 11(3) (2002): 505-530; Dever et al, *The Intimate Archive*, especially 81-176.

¹⁹ Ford, “Speculating on scrapbooks,” 122.

²⁰ Lucy Chesser, “‘What They Were Doing With Their Clothes Off I Don’t Know’: Homophobia, Lesbian History and Responses to ‘Lesbian-Like’ Relationships, 1860s-1890s,” in *Homophobia: An Australian History*, ed Shirleene Robinson (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2008), 39-44.

²¹ The best local survey on animal sex offences remains Anne Maree Collins, “Woman or Beast? Bestiality in Queensland, 1870-1949,” *Hecate* 17(1) (1991): 36-42. Work is continuing in the area of child sex offences, with forthcoming projects by both Steven Angelides and Yorick Smaal. See Angelides, “‘Hot for Teacher’: The Cultural Erotics and Anxieties of Adolescent Sexuality,” *Media International Australia* 135 (May 2010): 71-81 and “Sexual Offences Against ‘Children’ and the Question of Judicial Gender Bias,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 23(57) (2008): 359-373.

²² An exception is the writing of composer Percy Grainger. See also Lisa Featherstone, “‘Fitful Rambles of an Unruly Pencil’: George Southern’s challenge to sexual normativity in 1920s Australia,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19(3) (September 2010): 389-408.

²³ Daisy Bates, *My Natives and I*, incorporating *The Passing of the Aborigines* (Perth: Herpesin Press, 2004), 22-3, 66, 206.

²⁴ HK Fry, “Aboriginal Mentality,” *Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)*, March 23, 1935, 355.

²⁵ John Maynard, *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3-4, 36.

²⁶ Edward S Kiek, *The Christian Ethic of Sex* (Adelaide: self published, 1927), 1.

²⁷ Kiek, *The Christian Ethic*, 5.

²⁸ Russel Ward, *A Radical Life: The Autobiography of Russel Ward* (South Melbourne: The Macmillan Company, 1988), 38.

²⁹ Bishop of Willochra, “Birth Control,” *Mothers in Australia* vii (1) (September 1 1923), 11.

³⁰ See Herbert M Moran, *Viewless Winds: Being the Recollections and Digressions of an Australian Surgeon* (London: Peter Davies, 1939), 301-3.

³¹ JS Penabene, *The rise of the medical practitioner in Victoria* (Canberra: The ANU, 1980), 159.

³² Evan Willis, *Medical Dominance: The division of labour in Australian health care* (Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1989), 80.

³³ AJ Costello, *Know Thyself: An intimate discussion on Man’s Physical, Mental and Sexual Functions* (Brisbane: self published, 1935), 3.

³⁴ Moran, *Viewless Winds*, 315.

³⁵ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1990), 38.

³⁶ Judith Allen, "'Our deeply degraded sex' and 'the animal in man': Rose Scott, feminism and sexuality 1890-1925," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 3 (1998): 64-91; Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001).

³⁷ Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

³⁸ On respectability, see Janet McCalman, "Class and Respectability in a Working-Class Suburb: Richmond, Victoria, before the Great War," in *Memories and Dreams, Reflections of Twentieth Century Australia, Pastiche II*, eds Richard White and Penny Russell (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 21-39.

³⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); see also Ann Curthoys, "Sex and racism: Australia in the 1960s," in *Forging Identities: Bodies, gender and feminist history*, eds Jane Long et al (Nedlands: University of Western Australian Press, 1997), 11-28.

⁴⁰ Douglas Cole, "'The Crimson Thread of Kinship': Ethnic Ideas in Australia 1870-1914," *Historical Studies*, 14 (56) (April 1971): 514.

⁴¹ Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal* 5 (Spring 1978): 10; Foucault, "The Birth of Bio-Politics."

⁴² Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

⁴³ Hugo Knapp, "A Sermon on Sex," *The Triad*, October 10, 1917, 17.

⁴⁴ Dr Paul Ward Farmer, *Three Weeks in the Kew Lunatic Asylum* (Melbourne: John J Halligan, 1900), 60.

⁴⁵ Kate Helen Weston, *The Prelude* (London, Holden and Hardingham, 1913), 151. See also EA Povinelli, "Sex Acts and Sovereignty: Race and Sexuality in the Construction of the Australian Nation," in *The Gender Sexuality Reader*, eds RN Lancaster and M di Leonardo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 513-530.

CHAPTER ONE

MORALITY AND MOTHERHOOD: CONCEPTS OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

Hers was a deep intense nature, some said cold... but a few knew that the surface seeming was but the crust over the lava, between which lay rosy impetuous fires of everlasting love and tenderness.

—Mary Fullerton, “The Justification,” 1903¹

In 1904, the sex reformer Agnes Nesbit Benham produced a short but intriguing book, *Love's Way to Perfect Humanhood*. It was an idealistic, even romantic text, in which Benham was determined to prove that a happy, fulfilling and pure sexual life was an antidote to many of society's problems, including prostitution, illegitimacy and divorce. Benham (1850-1932) was born into a free-thinking Adelaide family where she was exposed to the radical ideals of feminism and Fabian socialism. As a young adult, she had read widely, from the poetry of Walt Whitman to Darwin's evolutionary theory. She was a progressive who believed that society could be shaped and improved. While she dabbled briefly in political thought, she came to believe that sex and gender relations were the key to social and cultural change.²

Benham was not alone in suggesting that sex was at the core of the human condition, but she was nonetheless surprisingly radical in her promotion of ideas about female pleasure. Unlike most sex writers, who stressed the need for a stereotypical Victorian purity, Benham suggested that sex was not only a “right and normal force,” but “the sweetest pleasure, the most transforming rapture,” for women as well as for men. She purported that women were indeed capable of “rapturous sensations,” “passionate love” and “the intense and joyous acme.” She hinted, too, at female orgasm: “the vibrations that affect our varied and ascending planes of being.”³ In a period that saw a woman's sexuality subsumed into her maternity, this exploration of female passion was a powerful challenge to the social and sexual order. Like other feminists of the period, Benham was rethinking the boundaries and definitions of sexuality and marriage,

but she was unconventional in her argument that female passion was possible, even desirable.

Such concerns became somewhat of a family tradition. Agnes' daughter, the medical doctor Rosamund Benham (1874-1932), was similarly determined to reform sexual mores and to identify the female body as a site of sexual desire. In 1905, she released her book *Sense About Sex*, which outlined a comprehensive theory of sex, reproduction, eugenics and parenting. Rosamund drew on her mother's ideas that sexual pleasure was natural and good for both men and women, but that desire must be contained within purity (though not necessarily formal marriage).⁴

If the key theme of Rosamund's book was the creation of the ideal environment for reproduction (through a loving, harmonious home and healthy body), elsewhere she wrote even more explicitly about sex. In 1905 and 1906 Benham and her radical husband Thomas Gilbert published two volumes of a new journal, *Free Speech*, which showed a consistent challenge to the sexual order. Benham wrote about female pleasure, which she constructed as a powerful force. In her poem entitled "I Was Afraid," published first in *The Bulletin* and then in *Free Speech*, she wrote of her own passion:

And all my body ached to be caressed
By your strong hands and supple clinging mouth
Oh! hot fierce fire...
O longing limbs and passionate red rose
That is my heart.⁵

Whilst this passion was acknowledged and even celebrated, Benham's poem suggests it should ultimately be denied, for no man would love and respect a woman who gave in too readily to desire. A woman's sexuality was, then, both passionate and constrained.

While their estimation of female desire was both controversial and unusual, the Benham's writings were illustrative of many of the broader concerns of the age. Numerous other writers and theorists were similarly grappling with the "problem" of the female body, in particular the intertwined relationship between pleasure and procreation. This chapter will explore the establishment and maintenance of a female sexual ideal – and identity – of modesty, marriage and maternity. It will also consider the plentiful evidence to suggest an alternative reading: women did engage in sex outside of marriage, sex for pleasure, sex outside of reproduction and outside of heterosexuality. Pre-marital sex, extra marital affairs, the need for contraception and abortion, the evidence of same-sex desire, all suggest a rich, if largely hidden, world of female sensuality and sexuality.