

PROJECT TITLE: Gender and Sexual Politics: Changing Citizenship in Australia Since 1969

AIMS AND BACKGROUND:

Australian political culture is now crowded with identities anchored in the once-private vocabularies of sexual and intimate life. Whilst 1970s activists radically challenged the exclusions of public life when they asserted ‘the personal is political,’ intimate experiences have since been normalised as platforms to claim the rights and obligations of citizenship. In Australia, the family court, no-fault divorce, reproductive assistance, non-heterosexual relationship recognition and myriad other rights have emerged in response to claims that began to proliferate in the 1970s. At the same time, these transformations have also created new norms and obligations. Healthy citizenship now entails the disclosure of sexual pasts; acquiring the benefits of taxation, superannuation and social policy requires a declaration of once-private intimate arrangements; and arguments for marriage equality often mount these claims through a comforting story of white middle-class respectability. Internationally, scholars suggest the notion of ‘sexual citizenship’ captures the ways in which ‘various practices have demanded the recognition of once-private concerns within the public sphere.’ (Albury et al 2010) Seen in this way, sexual citizenship emerged at a ‘fateful juncture’ between ‘public languages’ of rights and protection and ‘private claims’ to pleasure and self-determination (Weeks 1998) and has reshaped the relationship between citizens and the liberal democratic state (Stychin 2003, see also, Plummer 2001, Reynolds 2002, Bell and Binnie 2000, Baird 2006). We have clearly seen a profound change, and yet there has been **no systematic study of the effects and legacies of the feminist and sexual revolutions for citizenship in Australia.**

The 2015 Australian of the Year and domestic violence campaigner Rosie Batty exemplified the narratives of these proliferating identities when she remarked, ‘I am not a politician. What I have is personal experience’ (2015). Similarly, in 2013, then-Governor General Quentin Bryce mobilised a well-worn progressive historical narrative to suggest that stories told in public about domestic violence and same-sex love ‘are our best hope of building a more inclusive...citizenship’ (2013). On closer examination, however, it is clear that liberal democracies are struggling to negotiate the terms of sexual citizenship and the proliferating identities through which it is organised. For all its rhetorical power, a teleological story of inclusion (whether achieved or yet to come) **cannot explain why certain claims have been recognised and others have been rejected, nor can it illuminate the fracture lines and contests that have occurred within and between these political identities.** Recent reforms to Victorian provocation legislation, for example, had to navigate between gay groups who sought to eradicate the homosexual advance defence and feminist groups who saw this legislation as a protection for vulnerable women. Similarly, white feminist campaigns for access to abortion in the 1970s were contested by Aboriginal women fighting for the recognition of their right to motherhood. **Whether these new forms of political identity have delivered inclusive citizenship, and for whom, is an open question.** The sexual and feminist revolutions have clearly transformed the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens, but **histories of liberation and incremental recognition offer few resources to critically assess their uneven consequences.** These stories dull our capacity to critically engage with these proliferating claims in the present and obscure the patterns and paradoxes of their emergence.

This project will examine 14 contests over sexual and intimate life in Australia since 1970 and the political identities in whose name they were fought (such as the lesbian mother, disenfranchised father or transgender citizen). Drawing on the approach of feminist cultural historians this project will employ the notion of ‘political subjectivity’ to trace the ways in which even our most intimate identities are shaped by the cultural context in which they emerge (Rose and Canning 2002). Examining a diverse set of political subjectivities will help us to reveal the ‘implicit rules that (have) shaped collective intentions and actions’ even as these political subjectivities speak in the language of private life (Hunt 1994). Whilst there is a rich historiography of specific identities in Australia, scholars have not investigated their

cumulative reconfiguration of the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship. This project will thus trace the emergence of diverse political subjectivities, the character of their public campaigns, and the political and legal consequences of these contests. Placing these contests and their effects in a broader historical context will clarify how the relationship between Australian citizens and the state has been remade in modern Australia, and will **offer Australians a new vocabulary to critically evaluate the complicated legacies of the sexual and feminist revolutions.**

Internationally, this project will contribute an important case-study to debates about the effects of 'sexual citizenship' and bring the work of Australian policy makers and scholars alike to international attention. For some, 'sexual citizenship' is a useful 'metaphor' that helps scholars to 'index' the remarkable success of rights-claims as mechanisms to pursue sexual and gender politics since the 1970s (Weeks 1998). For others, it represents the privatisation and individuation of political life (Evans 1993). Similarly, scholars of sexuality have suggested ideas about citizenship, neoliberalism and intimate life intersect to produce self-regulating subjects who manage their lives according to the reproductive norms of racialised nationhood (Brown 2003, Puar 2007). However, whilst these theoretical positions often depend on historical narratives, international work on sexual citizenship has rarely taken an historical approach (Sanos 2011). We need, as Richardson and Turner suggest, to investigate the **'specific political and social conditions that shape the provenance and practice of sexual citizenship'** (Richardson and Turner 2001), and a team of Australian historians with expertise in gender, sexuality, race and liberalism are ideally situated to conduct this research. Practices of sexual citizenship have clearly intersected with the racial dynamics of settler nationhood (Moreton Robinson 2000), changing ideas about the relationship between Australian citizens and the state, and been shaped by other historical forces such as the long-standing social liberal consensus in Australian political life (Sawer 1990) and the increasing influence of neoliberal political philosophies (Dean and Hindess 1998). This project thus aims to:

1. *Historicise how the sexual and feminist revolutions produced new political subjectivities in contemporary Australia*
2. *Consider how these political subjects transformed the rights and responsibilities of citizenship*
3. *Investigate the historical relationship between the claims of diverse sexual citizens and the state, and changing modalities of governance in Australia.*

Historicise how the effects and legacies of sexual and feminist revolutions produced new political subjectivities

The 1960s and 1970s generated new ways for Australians to think about gender and sexuality and, consequently, produced new vocabularies to seek social and political change (Lake 1999, Grimshaw et. al 1994; Bongiorno 2012). While some activists expressed unease about an entanglement with government, the wider strategies of Australian activism usually framed these contests through the rights and figure of the citizen (Genovese 2000, Reynolds 2002). Ensuing campaigns reframed discussions about abortion and contraception (Siedlecky and Wyndham 1990), divorce (Swain 2012), domestic violence (Genovese 2000), and single motherhood (Swain and Howe 1992). New discussions unfolded about homosexual criminality (Willett 2000), age of sexual consent (Angelides 2005), safe-sexual practice (Dowsett 1996a), transsexuality (Hooley 2006) and the recognition of same-sex relationships (Baird 2006). The proliferation of public discussions about intimate life and experiences was astounding, and the language of liberation implied that publicising once-private experiences could produce political and social inclusion. Understood in this way, feminism improved the lives of women through making personal stories public and gay and lesbian activism produced a journey towards 'tolerance and even acceptance' (Willett 2000). However, the consequences of the sexual and feminist revolutions cannot be explained by a story of liberation alone.

Feminist scholars have encouraged historians to employ the concept of political subjectivity to examine how categories like feminist, homosexual, and father, for example, are made

coherent through their cultural inscription rather than their essential experience (Lake 1994, Damousi 1997). Sexual citizens were not simply 'liberated' from behind closed doors: they enacted historically contingent political subjectivities that made sense in relation to each other and to a wider historical landscape. Settler-national ideas about race, for example, clearly encode and differentiate these intimate identities (Riggs 2006). A cultural history approach to sexual citizenship will interrogate how specific subjectivities took shape, their intersections with other discourses of difference, the kinds of narratives that anchored their claims, and the changing vocabularies of intimate life. This will enable the project to trace how practices, strategies and effects reverberated across and between ostensibly discrete contestations and campaigns, **yielding insights that have been obscured by studies of specific identities.**

Consider how these political subjectivities transformed the rights and responsibilities of citizenship

In Australia, the absence of codified rights and responsibilities for Australians has produced a dynamic domain of citizenship; historically malleable narratives, identities and ideals constantly reshape its 'content and nature' (Irving 2000). The proliferation of intimate and sexual identities since the 1970s have thus marked out a new political space through which contests about the relationship between citizens and the state unfold. International scholars have even identified an 'Australian model' to secure protections and rights for sexual minorities and women (Charles 1995). This model seems to have been seeded during the Whitlam Government's 1974 Royal Commission on Human Relationships. The Commission sought to make policy reflect private 'realities' by inviting everyday Australians to speak about their intimate lives in a public forum authorised by the nation state (Arrow 2014). Soon, the distinctively Australian figures of the 1970s 'femocrat' and the 1980s 'poofycrat' (Dowsett 1996b) danced what Dowse (1982) wryly called a 'fandango' with the state to secure new rights and entitlements.

The recent and proposed changes to domestic violence protection capture the contradictions of this emerging regime of citizenship. After Batty's campaign, Australian (usually) women are now encouraged to speak out about their experiences of violence and, moreover, claim new entitlements as a consequence. Australian employers are being encouraged to provide employees with leave to deal with domestic violence. The price of this public legitimacy could thus be understood as the puncturing of a woman's right to privacy and does not entail any apparent concomitant responsibility for the perpetrator. So too, questions about child sexuality and protection have loomed large in this period (Angelides 2005); contests over the 'safe-schools' program seem like yet another manifestation of tensions about the demarcation of sexual citizenship. Just as the sexual and feminist revolutions ushered in a series of contests over sexual education in schools, so too, this anti-bullying program has provoked public debate about the relationship between the state, children and intimate knowledge. **We need to historicise the emergence of these political identities and their effects in order to understand the paradoxical consequences they have produced in the domain of citizenship.**

Investigate the historical relationship between the claims of diverse sexual citizens and modalities of governance in Australia

Sexual citizenship in Australia seems to have been made possible by traditions of social liberalism and a consensus about the state's obligation to maintain the 'welfare' of its citizens (Sawer 1990). However, almost as soon as the claims of activists were recognised, liberal democratic governance underwent a major transformation as western liberal democracies moved to a form of 'advanced liberalism.' Whilst a progressive federal Labor Government and neoliberal thought made strange bedfellows, the Australian variant of 'economic rationalism' centralised market-based ideas in 1980s public life. By the 1990s, political rationalities of market efficiency and individual autonomy had far-reaching consequences for both the organisation of citizenship and the social and economic policy settings that framed its operation

(Pusey 1991, Dean and Hindess 1998). Whether the state has delivered justice in the 'private' realm or whether the rights-claims of sexual citizens to freedom represent a newly efficient form of self-government has rarely been considered in Australian research.

The languages of neoliberalism and the rights-claims of sexual citizens had unexpected resonances; theorists point out the consonance of the 'life politics' of the sexual and feminist revolutions and the radical individualism of neoliberal governance (Giddens 1992). Because 'advanced liberal democracies' aim to govern through the 'accountable choices of autonomous agents' rather than through social programs, the individualising logic of sexual citizenship has the capacity to consort with neoliberal political rationalities (Rose 1999, see also Brown 2003). Many have noted how neoliberalism, globalization and rights discourses have worked in complex and contradictory ways to generate 'mutations' in citizenship across the democratic world in the past few decades (Ong 1999, Greenhouse 2011). Advocates for marriage equality, for example, sometimes mount arguments in favour of marriage reform that converge with neoliberal imaginings of the self and the state whilst appealing to 'global' ideas of human rights. Some scholars even suggest that sexual citizens have ushered in the 'twilight of equality' because rights-claims support neoliberal ideas about responsibility, national belonging and security (Duggan 2004, Puar 2007). We need careful histories of the connections between contemporary governance and sexual citizenship to consider these claims in specific contexts. Are sexual citizens the unwitting agents of neoliberalism or do their claims animate the ghosts of social liberalism to offer protection in market-driven times? We need to understand **the historical relationship between the claims of diverse sexual citizens and changing norms about the reach and responsibilities of the contemporary Australian state.**