

TITLE PAGE:

Memories of Entanglement: conflicts around sexuality at the Sydney Women's Commission 1973

By Emma Torzillo

and Heather Goodall (corresponding author: heather.goodall@uts.edu.au)

ABSTRACT

The Women's Commission held in Sydney in March 1973, was organised by Women's Liberation as a 'speak out', allowing the theories and practices of the new wave women's movement to be shared and contested. This paper investigates tensions around lesbianism and feminism by considering both archival evidence from 1973 of the Commission's 'Women as Sex Objects' session and oral histories undertaken in 2003 with five participants, each at some stage identifying as lesbian. Both archives and the later reflective interviews have been revisited recently in the light of feminist and queer theory. The paper identifies three themes in Commission tensions: emotions, including entangled relationships, as motivations; changing views on gender fluidity; and marginalisation. Both archive and oral history are needed to allow a deeper understanding of each theme, all three of which continue to shape the women's movement.

Keywords:

Lesbianism, Women's Liberation, CAMP Inc, speak out, oral history.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank the 2003 interviewees for their time and thoughtful contributions, first in taking part in the interview then in reviewing the drafted analysis: Sue Wills, Wendy Bacon, Suzanne Bellamy, Dorothy McRae-McMahon and the late Margaret Jones. In our recent revisiting, each of the surviving interviewees has again reviewed the paper and have given us careful and generous feedback. We thank the State Library of NSW for access to the First Ten Years Collection and the anonymous reviewers for *Australian Feminist Studies* for their helpful comments. During this revisiting, we have valued feedback from Amy Claire Thomas, Sophie Robinson, Samia Khatun and Allison Cadzow.

Disclosure statement:

No potential conflict of interest is held by either author.

Author biographies:

Emma Torzillo completed a BA (Adv), majoring in modern history and philosophy, then graduated in medicine, MBBS, in 2011, from the University of Sydney. She undertook her specialist physician's training in neurology & was awarded the Australian & New Zealand Association of Neurology (ANZAN) Fellowship to complete her Neurology training at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford where she became a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Physicians in Neurology in 2019. She is currently Clinical Fellow in Complex Epilepsy, University College London, National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery.

Heather Goodall: Corresponding author: heather.goodall@uts.edu.au

Heather Goodall is Professor Emerita in History, Communications, Arts & Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney. Her publications include *From Invasion to Embassy* (Allen and Unwin, 1996); *Isabel Flick: The many lives of an extraordinary Aboriginal woman* (co-authored with Isabel Flick, Allen and Unwin, 2004); *Rivers & Resilience* (co-authored with Allison Cadzow, UNSW Press, 2009); *Beyond Borders: Indians, Australians & the Indonesian Revolution, 1939-1950* (AUP, 2018); and, co-authored with Helen Randerson & Devleena Ghosh: *Teacher for Justice: Lucy Woodcock's Transnational Life* (ANU Press, 2019)

Memories of Entanglement:

conflicts around sexuality at the Sydney Women's Commission 1973.

In 1973, in a crowded union meeting hall on Sussex Street in Sydney Australia, women gathered for the first Women's Commission, a public inquiry organised by Women's Liberation. A challenge came from a woman in the audience: lesbians had been left out of the conference. A member on the organising committee replied with the withering 'we didn't give a separate thing to women who are bus conductresses either'. Her lover at the time, Suzanne Bellamy, stood shaken. What Suzanne heard that day reverberated not just through her politics but also her intimate relationships, deeply interconnected as they were for many at the conference, and remained so over the decades that followed (Bellamy, correspondence to the authors, 2020).

With this beginning, it would have seemed to many that their worst fears had been realised. Perhaps Australia's women's movement was headed for the same fate as America's, with a 'pervasive hostility between lesbians and others within the women's movement'. (Lynch 1974) However, the situation was more complex than this, not least because the organising committee member speaking was herself a lesbian. (Wills, 1982:131) The intricate, diverse and often contradictory perspectives of the activists involved in this discussion give insights into the development of lesbian identities and politics in the women's movement in the early 1970s, as well as into the broad spectrum of women's politics and feminism in Australia.

Women's Liberation was a loose federation aiming to make visible the power exercised over women in the 'private sphere' of home and family life where women were

trapped and disadvantaged in income, workload and, for many, sexual and emotional vulnerability. (Greer 1970; Millet 1970; Morgan 1970; Mitchell 1971) In earlier political theory this 'private sphere' had been invisible, unproblematised and un-theorised. Women's Liberation meetings tried to open this 'private sphere' to critique and change through 'consciousness raising' sessions, small groups where women would be encouraged to express their concerns verbally to allow other women to recognise them, to share burdens and to collaborate on strategies for change. A closely related and more public strategy was the 'speak out': an assertive event where women could 'speak out' their concerns and demands about any aspects of personal and public life.

This was a time of exciting and ground-breaking mobilisation for activist women in Australia (Lake, 1999; Arrow 2019; Robinson 2018). It was also a time of passionate - and often unresolved - conflicts. It came after many decades of difficult conditions for homosexual women and men, who had adopted a range of strategies from self-censorship to assertive transgressional lifestyles, in order to survive and undertake productive lives. (Jennings 2010, 2015; Henderson 2006; Newman 2002) Activists in the women's movement during the early 1970s considered themselves to be breaking new ground, but this often meant that the histories of earlier campaigns for change or other strategies for survival were obscured or denigrated. The archives of the 1970s show the resulting tensions.

Lesbian activists were involved in both the new phase of the women's movement, Women's Liberation, and in the militant gay and lesbian movements like CAMP Inc. (the Campaign Against Moral Persecution, see Wills, 1982, 1994 for Australia; Boyd and Ramirez, 2012 for the United States). The ideologies and praxes of these movements were not always aligned, and political debates about what should define this new feminist

movement offer sites for considering tensions and conflicts around sexuality and sexual identification. Much of the debate in Australia can be found in movement publications like *MeJane* and *Refractory Girl*, (Young 1973; Antolovich, 1973; Kingston, 1974; Wills, 1987; Tiffin 1993; Thompson 1993) but there are also some archival collections.

One was the Women's Commission, which generated a significant archive documenting the debates occurred around lesbianism and the women's movement. The idea of a public inquiry into women's concerns had been raised during Federal election campaigning in 1972. The conservative Government offered a limited economic inquiry, while the opposition Labor Party promised to address much broader concerns. Yet despite winning the election, the new Labor government was slow to proceed. So Sydney Women's Liberation held the Commission, on the weekend of 17th and 18th March 1973, as a 'speak out' to allow women to recognise that their concerns were shared by others and to build common goals for empowerment and change.

The organisers explained in the opening session that although the Commission was widely publicised, its primary goal was to allow the free expression of women's concerns. Press conferences were held on both days of the Commission to publicise the concerns women had raised, (see *SMH*, 22 March) but there would be only one official audio recording, made by the organisers, and no filming, despite proposals from feminist filmmakers. This audio-recording was transcribed by Sue Wills in 1997, but there were many technical problems. The transcript is punctuated with lines like 'Tape finishes and this is all the recording held of this session', 'Break in recording', 'Section of tape stuffed up' and Wills concluded with the cautionary note: 'Clearly some tapes missing or some parts of sessions not recorded'. (p65) This transcript was included in the *First Ten Years Archive*

(FTY), an extensive collection of archival material gathered by activists Joyce Stevens, Suzanne Bellamy, Penny Ryan and Sue Wills.¹

Even with the limitations of technology, these transcripts of the Women's Commission debates could be expected to offer the clearest insight into how the tensions of the day were expressed – but given the complex history of earlier discrimination and repression, there were many undercurrents which were never spoken out loud to be recorded. The existence of tensions is clear from another item bundled with the Women's Commission – a leaflet circulated by the CWA – the CAMP Women's Association – arguing that lesbians had been ignored in the first advertising leaflet and then included only in a tokenistic way in the final Commission leaflet. The handout continued:

LESBIANS DO EXIST

LESBIANS ARE PERSECUTED

WE WILL NOT DISAPPEAR SIMPLY BECAUSE WE ARE IGNORED²

In order to learn about those undercurrents, we turned to oral history to better understand the motivations of speakers and their response to the words which may – or may not – be recorded in the archival transcripts and leaflets. Each of the narrators reflected in their interview on the ways in which their perspectives may have changed with time, offering both insights and raising further questions. The paper closes with a reflection on the 'speak out' strategy as well as on the role of both archives and memory in knowing about the past.

This research has taken place in two stages. The first author, Emma Torzillo, was an early career historian in 2003 but also a young woman who had recently 'come out' as a lesbian. She first read the FTY archive and then undertook oral histories with five women

who had been present at the 'Women as Sex Objects' session of the Women's Commission in March 1973. The process of conducting these interviews offers insights into the approaches of both the interviewees and the young researcher. Four interviews were recorded: those with Sue Wills, Suzanne Bellamy and Wendy Bacon (all born in the later 1940s or 50s) and Dorothy McRae-McMahon (born in 1934). Each of these narrators in 2003 was a very public activist. The use of the recorder reflected their comfort with oral history generally and the confidence of the researcher in approaching them. The fifth interview was with Margaret Jones, a woman born in 1927 and so somewhat older than the others and part of different history of lesbianism, identifying as working class and stone butch. Significantly, Margaret did not wish to be recorded but read over and confirmed the notes made during her long, informal conversation with the young researcher. The important questions around Margaret's account of the Commission will be taken up in the final section of this paper.

All five narrators reviewed the transcript of the session before they were interviewed and they each later read early drafts of the author's conclusions.³ The goal of this first phase of the research was to understand better what might have motivated the speakers. The drafted piece was not published at the time as the researcher moved into further study in medicine, specialising in neurology. She has returned to these interviews now with an expanded interest arising from her medical practice in the ways that memory may have shaped the narrators' accounts. However, a key element has also been her recognition that the resistance to lesbians within the feminist movement in 1973 is echoed today in the continuing marginalisation of transgender people within some parts of the feminist movement. The second author, Heather Goodall, an older historian, had frequently used oral history among other methodologies. As Emma Torzillo's mother, Heather had been aware of the 2003 research but had not been directly involved, nor had she participated in the 1973 events. She has however recently

taken part in a number of different but relevant projects, some around both the defensive and assertive strategies among lesbian and gay activists in the mid twentieth century and another about post-1970s interactions in Australian Indigenous settings around sexuality.⁴ These had turned her attention also to the 1970s debates, to consider both how archives might be used as well as how memory may reshape later oral histories about marginalisation.

Reading the archive

The Women's Commission was planned to have five major sessions: 'Women as Mothers' and 'Women as Workers' on the Saturday and then 'Women as sex objects', 'Women and Marriage' and 'Other forms of discrimination' on Sunday 18th March. Much of the first morning, however, was taken up with two debates over inclusion and exclusion in the Commission. One was about the demand of gay men to speak about gendered discrimination and sexual orientation. The other arose because Aboriginal women demanded that, although sexism was a burden for them, they believed that Aboriginal men should be recognised – and included – because they saw their principal oppression to be racism, by which Aboriginal men were equally damaged.

Both these issues prompted long discussion about the inhibitory role of the recording and publicity for the Commission. The organisers explained they wished to foster a situation for this 'speak out' where women felt they could express their personal concerns, and not feel restrained by identification unless they chose, which was why the proposal to film had been rejected. Amid much debate, the Chair explained that the organisers hoped to distribute the tapes and transcripts of their official audio recording as widely as possible, saying: 'All we

can say to women is that if you don't want to be identified when you speak, don't give your name.'

Despite these debates about exclusion, it was the Sunday 'Women as Sex Objects' session that the tensions about lesbianism became most evident. This was a crowded session, with many people wanting to speak and a wide range of issues raised, ranging from jail conditions to thrush infections. The transcript records, however, a number of occasions when women tried to discuss the experiences of lesbians but where their attempts were not followed up at all. As one activist associated with CAMP said:

I asked for permission to speak twice yesterday, so if you'll forgive me I'll return to the general question which has been - if not swept under the carpet - then skated around - during this Commission, that is to say the whole question of female sexuality, of lesbianism and what attitude the Women's Movement is going to take to it.⁵

Another lesbian speaker asked bluntly: 'I feel maybe Women's Liberation women are too afraid to be labelled lesbians'⁶ while a heterosexual woman admitted regretfully that she had indeed tried to distance herself from women who were lesbians because she saw the word 'lesbian' as a 'term of abuse.'⁷ Another speaker argued that both straight and lesbian women wanted to speak about issues of lesbians and lesbianism but that these topics had been suppressed and sidelined at the Commission, as well as more broadly across Women's Liberation.⁸

In response to the speakers who raised issues about lesbianism, there was the 'bus conductresses' dismissal, discussed earlier, and an intervention blaming lesbians themselves - and in particular activists asserting the rights of lesbians - for any hostility they

experienced.⁹ In both cases, these statements were made by women identifying as lesbians themselves, suggesting the conflicts among self-identified lesbians were about how assertion might be approached.

This session also saw a long discussion about conditions for women in gaols and an implication that imprisoned women ‘turned to’ lesbianism in the absence of men, suggesting lesbian relationships were imitations of heterosexual ones. This implication was challenged by another speaker (again a self-identified lesbian), but their rejection of the ‘imitations’ suggestion was expressed in terms of a criticism of ‘butch-femme’ lifestyles. A number of other speakers – some self-identifying as lesbian and others as heterosexual – spoke in terms which similarly denigrated butch-femme relationships as imitative of patriarchal power relations. One example was that of a lesbian not associated with CAMP, who described it and Gay Liberation as ‘these people that group together with their singlets and their boobs showing’.¹⁰ In another transcript example, there was a depiction of a ‘traditional type’ lesbian relationship as ‘a very sexist type relationship with the “butch” girl who was doing everything she could to behave like a heterosexual male and the other girl who used to sit around crocheting.’¹¹ The limitations of these interpretations will be discussed in a later section.

.....

Oral History and Memory

Oral history theory is helpful in understanding the early 1970s when, in Women’s Liberation terms, the personal really did become political. (Arrow and Woollacott 2018) The transcript of the Commission offers evidence of the way tensions were expressed, but can

offer little to explain the motivations or emotions of the speakers. While interviews conducted 30 years after the Commission took place can suggest these dimensions, they had been shaped by the climate of debate and analysis which had continued over those years.

Yet among the Australian analyses which may have contributed to those 2003 memories, there were few detailed references to lesbianism. One account of 1973 events referred to debates around lesbianism as ‘an early controversy’ (*Refractory Girl* collection, 1993: 76-87), but there was little written which engaged overtly with women activists who were lesbians or with lesbianism. (Ion 1997; Henderson 2002) One of the few Australian historical publications reflecting on tensions around same-sex relationships in the women’s movement was Ann Curthoy’s *For and Against Feminism* (1988), exploring her own responses to the debates as a woman living with her husband and son. Otherwise, there were brief references in autobiographies (eg Mitchell (ed) 1987; Summers 1999) and some historical work on Australian women’s movements, (eg Summers, 1975; Lake, 1999). Critiques had been published (Ion, 1997; Henderson, 2002), and there was rising frustration about the absence of gay and lesbian voices in both mainstream histories and in collecting bodies. While some Australian work was done by the late 1990s (Hurley, 1996; Willet 2000), Peter Williamson commented on its rarity, pointing out that although ‘gays and lesbians around the world have been recoding descriptions of their lives and adventures...since the advent of the portable recorder and magnetic tape... this kind of information is rarely collected.’ (2002:76)

The memory making of the interviewees, and the approach of the historian during the 2003 oral history project, was shaped by a politics of gay and lesbian activism and identification, as it had developed over the more than 30 years since the Women’s Commission. Robert Reynolds and Shirleen Robinson (2016a, 2016b) described their own

much larger project as being ‘gay and lesbian oral history’ because it has been ‘unquestionably constrained by the boundaries of participant self-identity’ and was ‘more constrained by identity politics than a queer politics of sexuality’ (2016b:367; Murphy et al 2016:14).

Revisiting our previous work on ‘gay and lesbian oral history’ in 2020 must be done in conversation with Queer Theory, heavily influenced by thinkers such as Judith Butler, whose work was in fact circulating in Australia before these interviews in 2003. Butler’s analyses, including that of heteronormativity, have stressed the power of speech and language to create coercive gender identities, which are neither biological or fixed. (Butler, 1990, 1993; Jagger, 2008; McCann and Monaghan, 2020) For an emerging Queer movement this has facilitated theorisation of a varied experience of body and identity. However, these ideas might seem to sit uncomfortably with the politics of the activists of 1973, who were building a movement to resist sexism around the concept of a previously repressed and marginalised, but nonetheless relatively fixed, identity of ‘woman’. However, Butler’s concept of the instability of identity – the ‘queering’ of gender, race and other identities – has been helpful in considering the shifting sexual identification of some of the narrators interviewed in 2003 for this study. (Boyd, 2008; Boyd and Ramirez, 2012) Murphy, Pierce and Ruiz in ‘What makes Queer oral history different?’ (2016) take up this challenge and explore it through an analysis of Alessandro Portelli’s 1981: ‘The Peculiarities of Oral History’ (1981), stressing the importance of disrupting and unsettling the ‘normative narratives of the past’, in ‘resisting the reification of historically constructed identity categories’ and in ‘reaching beyond narrowly defined boundaries of community’. While drawing on recent work in lesbian history which has been specifically based in oral histories (Jennings, 2015, Robinson 2018a, 2018b), we have also drawn on another Portelli essay, ‘The Death of Luigi Trastulli’, (1991). Portelli

argues that while oral history may not offer empirical 'fact', it is a crucially important source for the emotional meaning of events for narrators.

We found three major themes emerged from our revisiting of the 2003 oral histories about the events of 1973 as well as its aftermath. First is the value of oral history in allowing a better understanding of the motivations and concerns of the speakers, allowing insights into emotional and sexual dimensions of the session which are not visible in the transcript. The second theme is the changes in beliefs of 'fluidity' of sexual identification. The third is the process of marginalisation, which has become more apparent in our revisiting of the interviews. The absences or silences in the 1973 transcript became more apparent and brought new questions to the interpretation of the interviews. These themes emerged in all the recorded accounts but are interwoven, so they are not entirely separated here but we identify them in the following sections.

1. Context, motivations and emotions

Sue Wills' 2003 memories of the Women's Commission drew on her own extensive involvement with CAMP Inc (of which she was Co-President from 1972) and the CWA, as well as her own analyses as a historian and political analyst of the 1970s movements. Wills saw the context and preceding events to be central to understanding the concerns which women brought to the Women's Commission.

Almost from the beginning, lesbians in CAMP had been subjected to sexism and exclusion by gay men in the organisation. In 1971 some women had seriously considered leaving in protest.¹² Sue believed that many lesbians were cautious about Women's Liberation but for mixed reasons: some refused to give the media an excuse to trivialise the

women's movement, while others felt that they would not pass what Wills sarcastically identified as the movement's 'ideological soundness' test (Wills, 1989). For others again, difficulties they experienced as lesbians simply outweighed any they experienced as women, and almost all of these women had found Women's Liberation unwelcoming.

Following the adoption of a new constitution, the re-activated women's group in CAMP renamed itself the CWA¹³ (CAMP Women's Association) with deliberate irony. (Wills 1994) It was in this group that Wills saw something important happening: 'the slow, at times erratic, development...of a women's liberation consciousness.' (Wills 1982, 154-160). Women from Sydney Women's Liberation frequently attended these meetings, and many CWA members were active in Women's Liberation groups and went to Gay Liberation meetings.¹⁴

Women's Liberation Theory Conference, Mt Beauty January 1973

Two months before the Women's Commission in Sydney, a conflict had occurred at the Women's Liberation Theory Conference in Mount Beauty Victoria in which many of the CWA women perceived themselves and lesbianism to have been confronted with hostility. The Hobart Women's Action Group (HWAG) presented a paper called "Sexism and Women's Liberation or Why do straight sisters sometimes cry when they are called lesbians?" which provoked a passionate and vocal response. The paper argued on two grounds: one theoretical and one personal. It expressed concerns held by many lesbians in and around Women's Liberation,¹⁵ that sexism (as distinct from patriarchy) existed within Women's Liberation.¹⁶ The HWAG paper analogised lesbians in the women's movement with women in leftist movements, where both oppressed groups 'are acceptable as long as they subordinate their demands or individuality to the 'broader' aims of the movement.'

Participants at the Mount Beauty conference, and certainly members of the Hobart authoring collective, felt that the attack was being directed at least as much towards them personally as towards the paper. Opinions on the debate differ, but Lesley Lynch, then a member of Women's Liberation, wrote a thoughtful paper the following year in which she pointed out that few women in Women's Liberation appeared to have read the contents of the paper but were rather reacting to the challenge that the authors seemed to pose. (1974) Lynch argued, although others disagreed, that at least some of the most vocal attackers were themselves lesbians. Sue Wills wrote similarly: 'The irony for most CWA women was that the Women's Liberationists who were most openly hostile...to the raising of lesbianism as an issue Women's Liberation should address, to coming out...were themselves lesbian' (Wills 1989).

The link between sexual relationships and political ideology was a key concern in the emerging Women's movement, and was up for debate at the Women's Commission. This was not just about the place of lesbianism in feminism, but also the relationships of heterosexual women with men. There was an undercurrent of anxiety about heterosexual relationships, and the political as well as personal threat that feminism or 'political lesbianism' may have represented. Despite relatively little overtly lesbian intervention overall, the transcript shows some heterosexual women to be uneasy about the implications for their relationships with men:

For heterosexual women in the Movement and in society today in relation to men, there are two choices: either we withdraw from relationships with men and concentrate on relating to other women or we try again to make another go at our hashed-up relationships with men. (WC transcript, p 65, FTY, SLSNW)

Such anxieties fed questions about how best to organise in the new movements which were forming and reforming throughout this period. Should women be organising in groups related to sexual practice? Did this imply a theoretical position? Was this ‘separatism’? This term had long circulated across many areas in left-wing debates. There was a rising discomfort and defensiveness among some heterosexual women in the movements of both Sydney and Melbourne about perceived pressures for ‘lesbian separatism’ (Lake 1999: 242-247)

.....

In her 2003 interview, Suzanne Bellamy explained that she had been an organiser of the Women’s Commission and saw herself in 1973 as being a member of Women’s Liberation. She explained that she had not been aware of the hostility that lesbians in CAMP had perceived to be directed towards them (Bellamy, 2003). She felt that while there were individual variations, it was in general the different experiences and political ideologies of lesbians from CAMP and those lesbians like herself from within Women’s Liberation which were a key source of tension at the Women’s Commission.

Suzanne was at that time a university student and member of the *Mejane* Collective who had been involved with Women’s Liberation for a significant period. This background is reflected in her view of sexuality as distinctly political in nature, and as anchored in her feminism. Suzanne advocated a view of lesbianism as ‘not just an equal option [to heterosexuality] but as a development of the female consciousness.’¹⁷ She believed she developed the confidence to embrace her own sexuality through her involvement with Women’s Liberation, in which she became aware of organisations like the American

Radicalesbians. Yet during the course of her 2003 interview, Suzanne acknowledged that she had felt unable to talk openly about being a lesbian:

So when I look now at the explosion that came around the beginning of '73 and the commission, and look back at the roots of that, I think you have to say that all kinds of women – young women in particular – were at a moment where consciousness was really, really changing about what was political. And that personal and sexual identity was where that whole explosion was going to happen. But I can look at that now and at the time I couldn't see that. You know. All I could see was from my personal experience, was that I loved everything about consciousness raising, but I also knew that you couldn't talk about being a lesbian. So there were these contradictions.

This caution is suggested in a transcribed discussion held by the *MeJane* collective soon after the Women's Commission, when Suzanne said that she would not use the word lesbian to describe herself, preferring 'woman-identified-woman' as more reflective of her feminist-based sexuality.¹⁸ In the transcripts of the *MeJane* meeting, Suzanne said that it was not "really necessary" to use the word lesbian. She was also critical of what she felt was the very aggressive stance of many of the CAMP women like Gaby Antolovich, with their emphasis on 'coming out, this sort of melodramatic form of sexual identification...there were a hell of a lot of women in the room who really can love women in every way possible but they don't identify with that kind of old camp structure'.¹⁹

Yet in her 2003 interview, Suzanne remembered that just hearing the use of the word 'lesbian' at the Commission - hearing it spoken aloud – was exciting and momentous for her. The disparity between these positive memories and the opinions she expressed immediately after the Commission at the *MeJane* collective meeting suggests the difficulties women faced in articulating lesbianism – even in the context of the women's movement.

This issue was raised in the interview with Sue Wills, who argued that many lesbians in Women's Liberation had not had much positive exposure to the ideas of gay liberation, and were unwilling or unable to come out, 'So, in order to justify not coming out, you trivialise the whole thing of coming out.' (Wills, 2003). Sue's comments provide one explanation for the belittling of the importance of a distinct and prioritised lesbian identity embedded in the comment about bus conductresses at the beginning of the 'Women as Sex Objects' session.

The other hidden context revealed in the 2003 interviews was the sexual inter-relationships linking many of the speakers from both sides of the debate in 1973. It was through description of a complex web of sexual relationships that many of those interviewees explained political positions taken at the meeting, as well as the ramifications of the event in the days and years that followed. These intimacies were not just a backdrop to the political arguments but often transformative experiences. It has only been in 2020, as Suzanne Bellamy reviewed the draft of this current paper, that she has talked about how 'underlying eroticism' played a part in the 'dynamism that drove things'. So the ramifications of these activist women's politics were also felt in relationships, and Suzanne's own lover's arguments, in her contemptuous rejection of the demand for a voice for lesbians, created 'massive frictions' between them from which they 'never really recovered as a couple.' (communication 2020)

.....

2. Changing beliefs about fluidity of sexual identification

The strong 'personal is political' philosophy of the women's movement, and indeed the gay liberation movement, meant that an understanding of sexuality was closely linked to identity and self-identification. Although there was some discussion of fluidity of sexual identification in the 1973 transcripts, it was clear from the interviews with Suzanne Bellamy and Sue Wills that in fact there had been a strong sense of fixity in sexual identification. This had changed to some extent by 2003. Suspicion around sexual experimentation was another of the emotional undercurrents which was circulating in 1973 but invisible in the transcript of the Commission.

As Suzanne Bellamy explained it in 2003:

A lot of straight women just changed. And that was a completely other component. And I think that made a lot of older lesbians, who came from the tradition from CAMP, very uncomfortable. In fact, there were all sorts of put-down terms, you know. I didn't like it but friends from Perth used to call them 'hets on holidays'. ... They had relationships with women for a time, but then they went back, you know. And I think a lot of lesbians are uncomfortable with that.

Sue Wills recalled what she saw happening:

...a lot of women felt more able to explore their own sexuality. And they had all of these really close, intimate relationships with women through the women's movement. It's just that it hadn't been physical. So, a lot of people started experimenting...which annoyed us born lesbians (Wills 2003).

Reflecting on this position in later years, Sue explained that her views had changed:

'women's sexuality has turned out to be a lot more fluid than I ever thought possible' (Wills 2003).

The transcript of the 1973 Commission shows that Wendy Bacon's contributions explained changes in sexuality through political awakening, or as a coming to consciousness. During the 1960s and 1970s, Wendy was involved in the Sydney Push for libertarianism, was an editor of *Tharunka*, a student at Sydney University, and later an activist in the Women Behind Bars campaign. She spoke at the Commission about the repression of the homosexuality in most women through adolescence, and argued that 'when heterosexual women are in a situation where men are removed, well then it's possible that some of those feelings and some of the repression will unfold itself,' expressing ideas of the naturalness of lesbianism, which should return through women's liberation.²⁰

Interviewed in 2003, Wendy confirmed her feelings that 'most women are bisexual' and that if society wasn't so patriarchal 'then a lot more people would just be bisexual.' This view has much in common with the idea of an eventual 'bisexual paradise', identified and repudiated by the Hobart Women's Action Group (HWAG 1974). The controversy over this ideology is interesting in its polarity: the Hobart Women's Action Group saw it as attempting to diffuse a lesbian identity and experience through explaining her into a 'real woman' who will eventually relate to men, while Wendy Bacon and many others at the time saw it as the final step in sexual freedom, and the ultimate emancipation from repression and oppression.

Wendy was involved in relationships with women during the 1970s and 1980s, before later having relationships with men. As she reflected on the tensions of 1973 in her later interview, she explained her own position in this way:

a lot of lesbians later felt that there was a whole group who had relationships with women when it suited then went back to men...I had two different relationships with women where it was certainly a totally heartfelt experience...It's not something I would ever want to disown. (Bacon 2003).

Yet another different position in 1973 was that of Dorothy McRae-McMahon who had had a very public coming out between the Commission and her 2003 interview. She used the interview as a way to reflect on her memories of the Commission and her understanding of the motivations for her intervention. At that time, Dorothy was in a heterosexual relationship and also a member of Christian Women Concerned. She found that the Commission challenged her ideas of sexuality. Looking back, she saw more to her words and her tone than she believed at the time to be there.

At the Commission, Dorothy spoke about an experience she had had before the Commission. She had written a poem about feeling a 'love of women' after an all-women conference. One of her colleagues read it and exclaimed 'That's a lesbian thing!' Dorothy had been distressed and asked her listeners at the Commission:

...how dare a woman suggest that when we use words of love about each other as women that it is necessarily sexual?...I'm suggesting that, OK, lesbians can make it sexual and that's fine as far as I'm concerned...but why should we not as heterosexuals be permitted to use words of love by each other, the sort of words that we use about our male partners if we want to.²¹

In 1997 Dorothy, then an ordained Uniting Church Minister, came out as a lesbian. Though a difficult time, she remembers that the National Conference of the Church gave her a strong vote of support (McRae-McMahon, correspondence to the authors 2020). Her awareness of her sexuality has changed her perspective on the argument she was making at the Women's Commission, and the reactions from others that it garnered at the time. By 2003, she had come to feel that her plea for heterosexual women to be able to express love for other women without being lesbian stemmed from the fact that she actually was a lesbian but was in a heterosexual relationship at the time and:

had shut down my sexual being in defence without realising that. And so when people accused me of being sexual at all, I found that quite difficult'. (McRae-McMahon 2003).

After her widely publicised coming out and her subsequent experience within the gay and lesbian community, Dorothy had come to a view of sexuality as 'a continuum of sexual orientation and that at one end there are really hard line heterosexual people...and at the other end are the same in the gay and lesbian community...and then I think you move toward the centre and at the centre are bisexual people...' (McRae-McMahon, 2003).

The disparities between the 1973 transcript and their 2003 memories – and the lived experience of many of the participants over the intervening 30 years – mirrors the diversity and change in sexual identification – the fluidity – which has been increasingly considered through Queer Theory. (Boyd, 2008; Boyd and Ramirez, 2012; Murphy, 2016; Jennings, 2015, Robinson, 2018a, 2018b). The 2003 interviews demonstrate that many of the women had changed their view of innate and binary sexuality to one that incorporated the idea of a continuum, a vision which had been regarded with much suspicion in 1973.

.....

3. Silences

The 1973 Women's Commission transcript has a number of expressions of overt hostility towards the lesbian relationship style known as 'butch-femme', some cited earlier. Sue Wills pointed out such hostility in her interview in 2003 as she read over the 1973 transcript. She argued that women from Women's Liberation at the Commission – whether heterosexual or 'woman-identified', were reacting to:

... the old-fashioned ideas about dykes, bull dykes... Whether that was there or not, they saw it. (Wills, 2003)

In 1973 there had been little recognition of the complex histories of the resistant assertiveness which was later revealed in US studies based on oral history like Kennedy and Davis' (1994) nor Halberstam (1996). By 2003, however, the activists interviewed here were more aware of the complex histories of resistance associated with the butch-femme identities. Suzanne Bellamy charted her changing awareness since 1973:

... it was an enlightenment to me to realise there were all these amazing lesbian clubs, including the ones for older women. Like the Mosaics Club and all that, which we thought were like going to Mars, you know. But it was fantastic. And you realised over time eventually that there had been, obviously, this long and brave and extraordinary tradition of lesbian organisations. The Ladder and all those sorts of ones overseas as well. But I didn't know about them in the beginning [...] And now when I look back I can't tell you how differently I see it. (Bellamy 2003)

Revisiting both the 1973 transcript and the 2003 interviews made the earlier hostility more evident. But more particularly, it made the absences in the transcript come into view. There was simply no visibility in the transcript at all of Margaret Jones, and oral histories from all our participants suggested a number of reasons for this. With more attention to the histories of repression, the impact on methodologies for oral histories have become apparent. Many of the authors in Boyd and Ramirez' edited volume, *Bodies of Evidence* (2012) have highlighted the impact of years of secrecy, self-censorship and hostility on the ways that oral histories have been undertaken – or have been impossible – among older lesbian and gay narrators, who have faced marginalisation in many forms and developed complex strategies to resist it. (Reynolds and Robinson, 2016a, 2016b)

Such experiences shaped Margaret Jones' reluctance, even in 2003, to be recorded but meant she was supportive to the young, lesbian researcher, Emma Torzillo, who came to her home. As this young woman took notes, Margaret explained her own identity as a 'stone butch lesbian', which was intimately connected to her working-class background and a history of butch or masculine-presenting working-class lesbians.²² This identity was deeply felt and hard-fought-for, finding at times violent repression from heterosexual culture as well as misunderstanding and simplification from the women's movement. This was not a history she felt able to 'speak out' about at the Women's Commission, but she was prepared to pass on her history and her views about the Commission in the more relaxed setting of her kitchen in Balmain thirty years later, reflecting her greater confidence as well as the interests held by Emma, as interviewer and young queer woman, in exploring these worlds. This was an interview which emerged from the 'shared authority' about which Frisch (1990) and Thomson (2011) have written. Margaret explained further that she had been interested in many of the session topics and felt she had had much to say, but had not in fact said anything at the Commission because she felt intimidated by the language and attitudes of other

participants, most of whom were university students. She had also felt, as an older woman, that she was isolated to some degree from the predominantly younger participants.²³

Margaret was again interviewed in 2007, by Rebecca Jennings, when she was more comfortable still in recounting her experiences. (Jennings, 2012:58-74, 137) Drawing on many women's memories, Jennings described the resistant culture among butch lesbians, who so frequently drew hostility and yet asserted themselves and their relationships in the face of it. Yet, as she also pointed out, lesbian cultures in Sydney were more diverse than those in US centres like Buffalo in the 1930s, described by Kennedy and Davis (1994). Margaret Jones passed away in 2019 but not before her role as a courageous trail blazer for all women, lesbian and straight, was recognised. She was honoured by Redfern Legal Centre as 'formidable' in 2018.²⁴ It is an indication of the limitations of the 1970s period in the women's movement in Australia that this 'formidable' woman had been reluctant to contribute to the Women's Commission 'speak out', feeling marginalised by her age and her working-class background.

There were no doubt other women there like Margaret who were interested in the ideas being discussed but whose lifestyle, age or experience limited the accessibility of 'speaking out'. Yet as Suzanne Bellamy had explained in 2003, she too had felt reluctant to express herself. The strategy, widely used in later feminist events, has been since criticised on a number of grounds, including 'eliding the complicity of more privileged women in the oppression of other women and for imbuing a false sense of unity' but also for missing opportunities to critique the prejudices of participants or overcome differences between women's experiences and beliefs (Barrett Meyering 2018:72). Despite the Commission advertising itself as 'open to all women to speak and listen', there had been constraints at

many levels which meant that some women were not able to speak. The ‘speak out’ strategy was most accessible to women who were articulate and comfortable with debate, pointing to issues around class and education as well as age.

.....

Conclusions:

Comparing the transcript of the 1973 Women’s Commission with the later oral histories of the events suggests that both need to be read together to gain a stronger understanding of the meaning of the ‘speak out’ session for those involved. Considering the three themes we found most striking, the value of the oral histories was outstanding in offering context, motivations and emotional dimensions of the sessions. The adversarial statements shown in the transcript reveal little of the context and preceding events which motivated the speakers or generated their underlying concerns. Recognising that some participants, like Sue Wills, brought an experience of marginalisation from CAMP Inc and of hostility from the Mt Beauty Conference enables a more nuanced understanding of their role at the Commission and their memories of it. Just as valuable is the recognition, available in the later oral history, that participants like Suzanne Bellamy, even while placing such a high value on the supportive environment she found within Women’s Liberation, nevertheless felt unable to speak with frankness in 1973 about her sexual identification.

Oral histories again were important in exploring changing conceptions of the fixity or fluidity of sexuality, and the life histories of the narrators certainly speak to this. Despite the awareness of sexual experimentation which was present in 1973, the debate in the transcript

demonstrates a clear hostility to the idea of sexual fluidity from some participants and it emerged as a key area of debate. By 2003, many of our interviewees had incorporated this idea into their own lives and politics. This was most strongly felt of course in the recordings made with Wendy Bacon and Dorothy McRae-McMahon, both of whom had been involved in very public changes in their relationships and sexual identification. Yet the recognition of the fluidity of sexual identification was also expressed in the recollections of Sue Wills and Suzanne Bellamy, who had both become aware through their political, theoretical and personal experiences of a fluidity which had not been part of their world in earlier years.

Yet while the recorded 2003 oral histories with these four activists offer valuable insights into the transcript, it is the 1973 transcript which demonstrates most starkly the effect of the hostility to lesbians who identified, like Margaret Jones, as ‘stone butch’. Her voice is simply absent from the transcript and any of the associated archives. The silencing of dissenting voices – and lifestyles – began to be recognised by participants in the oral histories of 2003, but it was only the conversation with Margaret Jones in 2003, and the caution with which it occurred, that demonstrates how complete this silencing had been. It has then been later published work, like Rebecca Jennings’ *Unnamed Desires* – and Margaret’s own courageous refusal to be silenced – which have opened up the lesbian histories of Australia as diverse histories of resistance and resilience, a view simply unrecognised in 1973.

Overall, the activists who participated in the ‘Women as Sex Objects’ discussion at the Women’s Commission in 1973 engaged in a discourse about lesbians and lesbianism that was being acted out in day-to-day lives, political allegiances and actions, and personal relationships. There were undercurrents of emotion which are explained in the interviews, in the way that Alessandro Portelli suggested is characteristic of oral history, even though these

undercurrents were not visible in the accounts made at the time. (Portelli 1991; Frisch 1990) These activists were entangled in working, sexual and political relationships which made clear-cut, adversarial positions difficult to sustain but also hard to forget.

No single event should ever be understood as a platform for final positions – and the contribution of the interviews done for this project is that they reveal *more* than the complexity of views recorded among lesbians in the transcripts of the Commission in 1973 itself. The interviews make visible the emotional context and the pervasive anxieties with which all participants approached these debates, something which neither the transcripts nor the analyses that immediately followed reveal. These interviews also reveal the many ways that time and personal changes have shaped and reshaped memories of and judgements on those past events.

Recent media analyses of ‘listening’ have investigated access to ‘voice’ and ‘speaking out’ among marginalised communities through alternative media sources as well as activist training. As Dreher, Husband and others have pointed out, there is no automatic ‘listening’ or ‘understanding’ across difference, given the barriers of linguistic structures, audience expectations and neoliberal media industries. (Dreher, 2012; Husband, 2009; O’Donnell et al, 2009) In the 1973 Women’s Commission, the women’s movement was attempting to nurture empowering expressions of previously silenced and ‘private’ concerns and to use ‘speaking out’ to build recognition, understanding and shared action. Instead, the underlying but unspoken currents of anxiety on all sides ensured that in this large scale and oppositional ‘debate’ setting, women made statements of hard-line positions rather than expressing the more complex and subtle approaches that were actually taking place in everyday

relationships. There was no space on the floor of the Commission for the ‘ambiguity’ which Husband argues is necessary for the listening which leads to understanding. (Husband 2009)

Nevertheless, both the archival records and the memories expressed in interviews do demonstrate that what the 1973 Women’s Commission offered at the time was a new opportunity to explore many options, to express strong emotions – including those of anger and frustration – and to hear other people voice their own emotions. These were not necessarily the personal situations (of domestic oppression or violence) which the ‘speak-out’ strategy was intended to expose – but they were a chance to understand the passion invested in ideas and principles by the activists of the time. A polite conference with a speakers’ list and respondents could never have offered that.

At least some activists view the Commission and its participants more positively with the contribution of distance. Yet many issues remain unresolved – and there continues to be ambivalence about butch-femme lifestyles and marginalisation of transgender people within feminism. So it might be that listening – that part of ‘speak out’ which seemed so little in evidence in 1973 – was a long-term process rather than a short-term one – and that there is still some distance to travel.

.....

References

Interviews

(recordings and notes held by the authors and interviewees.

All interviewed by Emma Torzillo)

Bacon, Wendy. 22 February 2003.

Bellamy, Suzanne. 9 April 2003.

Jones, Margaret. 26 April 2003.

McRae-McMahon, Dorothy. 12 April 2003.

Wills, Sue. 13 April 2003.

Archives

First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation Collection, c.1969-c.1980, [FTY] MLMSS 9782/1-90, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

Partially restricted. The State Library has reviewed this paper and advised that it meets the access and publication requirements of the restrictions. (7 July 2020)

*All material can be viewed but restrictions exist on identification of individuals in the following material marked with *. The women interviewed for this paper have approved the use of their names from material in the FTY archive in relation to their own contributions.*

Women's Liberation Press Release, 18th December 1972, on the planning of a Women's Commission, MLMSS9782, Box 31

* Women's Liberation Theory Conference, Mt Beauty, Victoria, January 1973. Box 31

* "Women as Sex Objects" transcript of discussion at Women's Commission 11th March 1973, MLMSS 9782, Box 31

"Can you sexually love a woman?" Leaflet, Women's Commission, March 1973 by CWA, Sydney, MLMSS9782, Box 31 (Women's Commission), Box 31

**"MeJane Discussion Group", transcript of discussion, April 1973, Glebe, Sydney, MLMSS 9782, Box 50

Newspapers and newsletters:

CAMP INK

Liberation

MeJane

Refractory Girl

Publications

Antolovich, Gaby. 1973. 'Women's Commission 1973' *CAMP INK* 3, (4): 9.

Arrow, Michelle. 2019. *The Seventies: The personal, the political and the making of modern Australia*. Sydney: New South Press.

Arrow, Michelle and Angela Woollacott. 2018. "How the Personal Became Political: The Gender and Sexuality Revolutions in 1970s Australia" Introduction to Special Issue, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 33 (95): 1-8, DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2018.1498730.

Atkinson, Judy. 2002. *Trauma Trails – Recreating Songlines: The transgenerational effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Barrett Meyering, Isobelle, 2018. "Feminism in Sydney's Suburbs: 'Speaking Out', Listening and 'Sisterhood' at the 1975 Women's Commissions" *Australian Feminist Studies* 33 (95): 61-80. DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2018.1498734.

Boyd, Nan Alamilla 2008: 'Who is the Subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17(2):177-189

Boyd, Nan Alamilla and Horatio N. Roque Ramirez 2012: 'Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History', pp 1-22, in Boyd and Ramirez (eds): *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burgmann, Meredith. 1982. "Black sisterhood: The situation of urban aboriginal women and their relationship to the white women's movement." *Politics* 17 (2): 23-37.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd ed. 1999, Routledge: London.

Butler, Judith. 1993: *Bodies that Matter: on the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge: New York.

- Carbery, Graham. 1995. *A History of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*. Parkville: Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives Inc.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé 2001: 'Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of colour', paper presented at the World Conference Against Racism; at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/grhf/WoC/feminisms/crenshaw.html
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 1989: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989:1, Article 8: 139-167.
- Curthoys, Ann 1988: *For and Against Feminism: a personal journey into feminist theory and history*. Allen and Unwin: Sydney.
- D'Emilio, John: 2012: 'Afterword' in Boyd and Ramirez *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, pp
- Dreher, Tanja 2012: 'A Partial Promise of Voice: Digital Storytelling and the Limits of Listening', *Media International Australia*, 142: 157-166
- Fela, Geraldine and Hannah McCann. 2017. "Solidarity Is Possible: Rethinking Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s Australia." *Australian Feminist Studies* 32 (93): 325–334.
- Frisch, Michael 1990: *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, State University of New York Press: Albany.
- Goodall, Heather, Randerson, Helen and Ghosh, Devleena. 2019b. *Teacher for justice: Lucy Woodcock's transnational life*. ANU Press: Canberra.
- Goodall, Heather & Devleena Ghosh, 2019a: 'Reimagining Asia: Indian and Australian women crossing borders' to *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 53, Issue 4 July 2019, pp. 1183-1221 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000920>
- Goodall, Heather 2018: *Beyond Borders. Indians, Australians and the Indonesian Revolution, 1939 to 1950*. Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam
- Goodall, Heather 1996: *From Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics, 1770-1970*. Allen and Unwin, St Leonards.
- Greer, Germaine. 1970. *The Female Eunuch*. 1st ed. McGraw-Hill: New York.
- Halberstam, Judith. 1996. "Lesbian masculinity or even stone butches get the blues" *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 8 (2): 61-73. DOI: 10.1080/07407709608571231
- Henderson, Margaret, 2006: *Marking Feminist Times: Remembering the Longest Revolution in Australia*, Peter Lang: Bern, NY.
- Henderson, Margaret. 2002. "The Tidiest Revolution: Regulative Feminist Autobiography and the De-Facement of the Australian Women's Movement." *Australian Literary Studies*. 20 (3): 178-191.
- Hobart Women's Action Group (HWAG). 1974. "Sexism and Women's Liberation or Why do straight sisters sometimes cry when they are called lesbians?" Presented at the Women's Liberation Theory Conference at Mount Beauty, Victoria, January. Reprinted in *Refractory Girl: "The Lesbian Issue"* Summer, 1974.
- Hurley, Michael. 1996. *A Guide to Gay and Lesbian Writing in Australia*. Allen and Unwin: St. Leonards NSW.
- Husband, Charles 2009: 'Between listening and understanding', *Continuum: journal of media and cultural studies*, 23(4) 441-443
- Ion, Judith. 1997 "Degrees of separation: lesbian separatist communities in northern New South Wales, 1974-1995." In *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures*, edited by Julius-Mathews, Jill: 97-113. Allen & Unwin: Sydney.
- Jagger, Gill 2008: *Judith Butler: sexual politics, social change and the power of the performative*, Routledge: London and New York.

- Jennings, Rebecca. 2015. *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History*, Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing.
- Jennings, Rebecca. 2010. "'It Was A Hot Climate And It Was A Hot Time!'" *Australian Feminist Studies* 25 (63): 31-45. doi: 10.1080/08164640903499877.
- Kingston, Bev. 1974. "Lesbianism & Feminist Theory." *Refractory Girl: The Lesbian Issue*, Summer 1974: 3-5.
- Lake, Marilyn. 1999. *Getting Equal: The history of Australian feminism*. Allen and Unwin: St. Leonards NSW.
- Lynch, Lesley. 1974. "Mythmaking in the Women's Movement" *Refractory Girl: The Lesbian Issue*, Summer: 34-38.
- McCann, Hannah & Whitney Monaghan 2020: *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures*, Red Globe Press & Macmillan International: London.
- Millett, Kate. 1970. *Sexual Politics*. Rupert Hart-Davis: London.
- Mitchell, Juliet. 1971. *Woman's Estate*. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Middlesex
- Morgan, Robin. 1970. *Sisterhood is Powerful: an anthology of writings from the Women's Liberation movement*. 1st ed. Random House: New York.
- Murphy, Kevin P., Jennifer L. Pierce and Jason Ruiz 2016: 'What Makes Queer Oral History Different.' In *Oral History Review* 43 (1): 1-24.
- Newman, Sally. 2002. "Silent Witness? Aileen Palmer and the Problem of Evidence in Lesbian History." *Women's History Review* 11 (3): 505-30. doi.org/10.1080/09612020200200333.
- O'Donnell, Penny, Justine Lloyd and Tanja Dreher 2009: 'Listening, Pathbuilding and Continuations: a research agenda for the analysis of listening', in *Continuum*, 23(4): 423-539.
- Poll, Christobel. 1973. "Jo Stalin and the Sisters", *Liberation* April 7.
- Portelli, Alessandro 1991: *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York, Albany.
- Portelli, Alessandro 1981: 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12: 96-107
- Rapp, Linda. 2004 (archived 2015). "Radicalesbians" In *The GLBTQ Encyclopedia*, edited by Claude Summers, Wik Wikholm, www.glbtq.com (via <http://www.glbtqarchive.com/>)
- Reynolds, Robert. 2001. *From Camp to Queer: Re-making the Australian Homosexual*, Melbourne University Press: South Carlton, Victoria.
- Reynolds, Robert and Shirleene Robinson 2016a: *Gay and Lesbian, Then and Now: Australian Stories from a Social Revolution* Melbourne: Black Inc
- Reynolds, Robert and Shirleene Robinson 2016b: 'Australian Lesbian and Gay Life Stories: A National Oral History Project', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 31 (89): 363-376.
- Robinson, Sophie. 2018a. 'The Lesbian Presence in Australian Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements 1970s-1990s.' unpublished PhD dissertation, University of New South Wales.
- Robinson, Sophie. 2018b. "'The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution': Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s." *Australian Historical Studies* 49 (4): 441-456. doi: DOI: 10.1080/1031461X.2018.1522654.
- Summers, Anne, 1999: *Ducks on the Pond: an autobiography, 1945-1976*, Viking: Ringwood, Vic.
- Summers, Anne 1975: *Damned Whores and God's Police*, New South Press: Sydney.
- Thomson, Alistair 2011: 'Moving stories, women's lives: Sharing authority in oral history', *Oral History*, 39 (2): 73-82.

- Thompson, Denise. 1993. "Another Perspective." in *Refracting Voices: Feminist Perspectives from Refractory Girl*, edited by Cox, Eva et al, 85-87. Southwood Press: Marrickville NSW Australia.
- Tiffin, Susan. 1993. "Lesbianism - an early Controversy." in *Refracting Voices: Feminist Perspectives from Refractory Girl*, edited by Cox, Eva et al, 76-84. Southwood Press: Marrickville NSW Australia.
- Williamson, Peter 2002: 'Missing in Action: where are the gay and lesbian oral histories of the Australian story?', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 24: 76-79
- Willet, Graham, 2000. *Living Out Loud: A history of gay and lesbian activism in Australia*, Allen and Unwin: Sydney.
- Wills, Sue 1982. 'The Politics of Sexual Liberation.' unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Sydney.
- Wills, Sue. 1987. 'I'm going down the road... some recollections of what it was like then' in *What is lesbian discrimination? Proceedings of a forum held October 1987 by the Anti-Discrimination Board*, Sydney: Anti-Discrimination Board, 1990.
- Wills, Sue. 1989. 'Lesbians and the Women's and Gay Movements; In both but of Neither Sydney 1970-1973.' Unpublished article, Sydney. In possession of author.
- Wills, Sue. 1994. 'Inside the CWA - The Other One.' *Journal of Australian Lesbian Feminist Studies*, 4, June: 6-22.
- Wills, Sue, 2007. "They think we didn't do anything." *Australian Feminist Studies*, 22 (53): 167-171.
- Young, Linda. 1973. "After the Commission" in *Mejane* 2, (1) July 1973: 4-5.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira, 2006: 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Volume: 13 issue: 3: 193-209

Websites

- 'Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives: Living History', <https://alga.org.au>
Accessed 22 April 2019
- 'Pride History Group', <https://www.facebook.com/pridehistory/>,
<https://www.pridehistory.org.au/> Accessed 22 April 2019

¹ *First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation Collection, c.1969-c.1980, MLMSS 9782/1-90, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW*. This transcript and other archival material is available for research with restrictions on identification of speakers, unless approved by the Library (a requirement fulfilled for this study, 7 July 2020)

² CAMP, the Campaign Against Moral Persecution, was 'the first openly homosexual and avowedly political organisation established in Australia' in the winter of 1970 (Reynolds 2001)

³ All agreed then with the publication of their names and the surviving narrators have reviewed the draft for this paper and again agreed to be identified.

⁴ One (Goodall, Randerson, Ghosh, 2019b) has drawn on Rebecca Jennings' insights (2015) into the lives of Australian lesbians prior to the 1970s, when self-censorship was one strategy for making a life in hostile environments. Another has utilised Crenshaw (2001) and later work on intersectionality to consider approaches to gender diversity and transgender in NSW Indigenous settings (Goodall, Norman, Russon, under review). A third (Goodall, Ghosh, 2019a) is investigating the situations of gender transgressive individuals in the international links of social justice and peace movements of India, the USA and Australia, drawing on d'Emilio's biography of Bayard Rustin (2003) and Devi Prasad (2005).

⁵ "Women as Sex Objects" 1973: 36. FTY, SLNSW

⁶ "Women as Sex Objects" 1973: 38. FTY, SLNSW

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Women as Sex Objects” 1973: 37. FTY, SLNSW

⁹ “Women as Sex Objects” 1973: 39. FTY, SLNSW

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Women as Sex Objects” 1973: 25-26. FTY, SLNSW

¹² The adoption of a constitution with a mandatory two sex leadership policy and an increased emphasis on political aims had eventually persuaded most of the women on the verge of leaving to return. Margaret Jones described vividly for this research the manner in which she ‘lead the women out of CAMP’ and then the way that Sue Wills, who was to become the next Co-President along with Lex Watson, had convinced them to return, before leading them out again some years later.

¹³ The irony lay in other well-known use of the initials ‘CWA’, which was by the Country Women’s Association, a conservative, heteronormative and ‘family-centred’ women’s organisation associated with the Country Party.

¹⁴ Gay Liberation was a group established after CAMP Inc with an agenda which was for the most part more revolutionary.

¹⁵ Women’s Liberation, as discussed earlier, was fluid in its interactions with other groups and movements and many members of women’s movements groups shifted between ideologies and groups frequently, without implying disloyalty, facilitating the flow of ideas.

¹⁶ The HWAG paper, delivered at Mount Beauty in January 1973, explained that “sexism means organizing people according to sex and sexual behavior, and attributing various behavior, personality and status traits to people on the basis of sex... In other words, sexism is a way of structuring society; patriarchy and matriarchy point out who get the goodies...”, HWAG 1974 “Sexism and the Women’s Movement”

¹⁷ “*Mejane* Discussion Group”, Transcript of discussion, April 1973, Glebe, Sydney, MLMSS9782, FTY, SLNSW

¹⁸ “*Mejane* Discussion Group”, Transcript of discussion, April 1973 FTY, SLNSW

¹⁹ “*Mejane* Discussion Group”, Transcript of discussion, April 1973, FTY, SLNSW

²⁰ ‘Women as Sex Objects’ Transcript of discussion, 1973:25, FTY, SLNSW

²¹ ‘Women as Sex Objects’ Transcript of discussion, 1973:40, FTY, SLNSW

²² Margaret Jones interview, 2003. For a discussion of the complex of meanings around the term ‘stone butch’, see Halberstam 1996.

²³ Margaret Jones interviewed by Emma Torzillo, Sydney, 26 April 2003. Margaret explained this reticence during her interview with Emma Torzillo. These concerns are different from those noted by Isobelle Barrett Meyering, 2018, who points to the exclusions on racial and cultural grounds, but not on those raised by Margaret of age or education.

²⁴ Redfern Legal Centre, one of the many social justice and community centres which were indebted to Margaret Jones’s determined tenacity. <https://rlc.org.au/article/margaret-jones-receives-top-honours-2018-redfern-waterloo-volunteer-awards>; and, on her death, ‘Honouring Margaret Jones: 1927-2019’ <https://rlc.org.au/article/honouring-margaret-jones>. Both accessed 24 April 2019.