



'The apartheid of homosexuality'

'HOW can we be fully human unless we act sexually?" South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu asked when interviewed in 1999 by the author of a new book on homosexual rights and a lecturer at Southern Cross University in Lismore.

Yet for a significant proportion of society, to fulfil their sexuality still means they experience discrimination and hostility: a phenomenon Bishop Tutu referred to as the "apartheid of homosexuality", in the Sydney interview with cultural studies senior lecturer, Dr Baden Offord.

It was only in May this year that the NSW Parliament voted to lower the legal age of consent for homosexual males from 18 to 16, bringing it in line with the age of consent for heterosexuals. This change comes after 20 years after homosexuality was decriminalised in NSW.

Offord, who is also a principal researcher in SCU's Centre for Law, Politics and Culture, looks at the subject in his new book, *Homosexual Rights as Human Rights: Activism in Indonesia, Singapore and Australia*. The book is based on his PhD and four years of research, including travelling to Indonesia and Singapore.

The book was launched by Chris Puplick, former president of the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, and former NSW Privacy Commissioner, at Gleebooks in Sydney on earlier this month. The book's forward is written by High Court Judge, Justice Michael Kirby, AC CMG.

"Australia is a hostile place for diverse sexualities," Offord said. "When it comes to explicit recognition of same-sex love, for example, there are entrenched discriminatory social and cultural practices that basically keep homosexuals apart from the mainstream.

"I have been with my partner for 20 years, but I'm well aware of the parameters that exist through laws on superannuation, or when Archbishop Pell speaks, or when I read the tragic statistics on youth suicides among males. Walking in the street hand in hand is not always safe even in so-called 'designated' areas like Oxford Street.

"Whether in popular culture, playing AFL, kissing in a public place, taking out a bank loan, attending church, visiting the relatives, or simply going to the corner store for milk, being explicitly homosexual still means often facing hostility, stigmatisation and alienation."

Justice Kirby says in the foreword that Offord makes an important and new contribution to this important subject, and that the book is an illuminating study in contrasts of the three, very different, societies.

"In Indonesia the exact legal positioning on homosexual conduct is unclear, but the personal stories of Dr Offord's interviewees bear out his conclusion that tolerance is often bought at a price of silence," Kirby says.

"Cultural, religious and other factors still reinforce the shame that homosexuals (and their families) are taught to feel on this score. In Singapore, such feelings are reinforced by colonial laws, governmental hostility, and occasional talk about 'Asian values'. This last excuse is invoked to portray homosexuality as a western phenomenon. Leaders of Africa and Latin America have expressed similar views. But, go behind the veil of shame and silence, and, unsurprisingly, the universality of sexual variance is quickly discovered in every land."

However, gay bashing is unheard of in Indonesia and Singapore, in contrast with Sydney and the bashings reported soon after the 1996 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

"By sharing with us his research and deriving common themes, Baden Offord has pushed forward the boundaries of understanding, knowledge and acceptance. These are words that have a stronger foundation in love than in mere tolerance. Love for each other, I believe, is the ultimate foundation of our felt need to observe universal human rights."



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"They suggested that we unlearn or reverse-learn when we dream. A consequence of this is that we forget unwanted memories and reduce obsession by dreaming. I agree with that, but Crick and Mitchison also suggested that we dream to reduce parasitic or spurious memories.

"However, I have found by simulation experiments on neurobiologically realistic neural networks that reverse-learning actually increases the proportion of spurious memories. This is great news for my theory that spurious memories are important."

Christos theorises that we dream to generate roughness - spurious memories - in our memory space so we are better disposed to learn and be more adaptive in a new and ever-changing environment.

"Dreaming also aids creativity. Without enough REM sleep our learning capacity is diminished, we are unable to think, adapt and be creative."

In reviewing other theories on the function of REM/dream sleep, he contends that the great psychologist Sigmund Freud "had it all wrong" on this topic.

"Freud was not aware for example that babies and children have so much more REM sleep than adults. What psychological need could an infant have for so much dream sleep?"

On the cause and trigger of SIDS, Christos asserts that his new theory is the only one that fits in with all of the known facts about SIDS.

His theory says that lucid dream research has shown that we try to act out our dreams, as much as is possible.

He tells *Campus Review/Education Review*: "When a researcher dreamt that he was swimming underwater, he really held his breath while he was asleep. We also dream about our own

personal memories. Adults dream for about two hours each night, whereas a baby can dream for up to eight hours a day, but what could a baby be dreaming about? What memories can it possibly have?"

"I suggest that it could dream of being back in the womb where it did not have to breathe, because the mother supplied it oxygen through the blood, and just as the researcher held his breath while dreaming he was swimming underwater, the baby may stop breathing." He says this theory explains why all the neurological alarms are not activated and why there are no physical signs of death such as struggle.

"Remember that a SIDS death is only diagnosed after every other cause of death is excluded. The first and only symptom of SIDS is death. I am also saying that the reason why

medical researchers have not made any advances in understanding SIDS is because it is in the mind of the infant.

"My theory explains all sorts of things, such as why the risk is higher in the prone position, why it is more prevalent in colder climates, why dummy (pacifier) sucking helps but thumb-sucking is a risk, etc. I also suggest how the incidence of SIDS can be reduced further by making the environment of the sleeping infant less womb-like."

Among many other things, Christos also posits an explanation of déjà vu, based on the confusion of spurious memories with real memories.

"Déjà vu results when for some reason the brain converges to a spurious memory, quickly giving us the impression that we know that 'memory', whereas it has not been formally learnt as yet, and is unknown to us."

Christos's book is a fascinating read for anyone concerned with how the human mind works.

Grey matters



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