The Privacy of the Bedroom? Fifty Years on from The Wolfenden Report Reforms

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The fiftieth anniversary of The Wolfenden Report–which may seem like ancient history to some–has a powerful meaning for me in the changes I have witnessed and lived through in this span of my lifetime. Furthermore, it is only forty years since the reforms recommended by The Report were implemented, with some significant amendments, in The Sexual Offences Act (1967) after a decade of intense debate, campaigning and counter-campaigning. It was this Act which resulted in the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales, limited to ‘consenting adults in private’ over the age of 21, and not applying to the Armed Forces, Northern Ireland and Scotland–although these limitations were subsequently lifted as a result of further campaigning. The Act itself only brought the UK into line with many other European countries at the time. The Wolfenden Report and the subsequent legislation are often hailed as a classic piece of liberalising reform, along with the other reforming acts of the 60s regarding abortion, divorce, and censorship. The liberalising impact of this legislation lay in the space that it opened up for many gay men at the time, and for the wider message that it conveyed about homosexuality, especially its assertion that homosexuality was not a disease, but rather a state or a condition which was compatible with full mental health. It also implied that there was no convincing evidence for psychopathological causes of homosexuality.

We can compare the circumstances of gay and lesbian lives in the 50s, with the substantial legislative improvements in the UK during the last 10 years. We now have a picture of greatly increased legal freedoms, rights and protections that currently frame our discussions and reflections. In comparison with many other aspects of politics today, it would be churlish or perverse not to call this progress; as such it can be an enormous source of confidence in our lives that has not existed hitherto. However, this does not mean either subscribing to a notion of the historic unfolding of freedom as the advance of a modern hegemonic civilisation, or ignoring the many different stories that may be told alongside these advances, both locally and globally.

In this paper, I raise some questions about the interactions of law reform, politics and psychoanalysis as these relate to homosexuality, and a significant piece of our history. I do this somewhat in the spirit of Oscar Wilde–who else?–‘The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it’ (cited in Higgins: 1996). The notorious Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885)\(^2\) under which he was prosecuted definitively criminalised male homosexuality in private and put Britain in a much more repressive position than in many other European countries for the first half of the last century. In this context, the first part of this paper raises some issues about liberalism and sexual politics and in the second part I consider some of the more specifically psychoanalytic themes.

The Wolfenden Report itself relied on John Stuart Mill’s essay, On Liberty in deciding where the proper limits of the state’s authority over the individual lay, maintaining that the function of law was not to intervene in ‘private lives’, except or unless there was the possibility of harm to others. The use of this definition raised the problem of how to define the meaning of both ‘harm’, and ‘private’, since all definitions depend upon particular viewpoints about morality and human nature. The Wolfenden Report stated that part of the role of law was to preserve public order and decency. It also argued that homosexuality did not cause harm to either society or the family–arguments which still rage as the Hansard records of debates in the Lords about recent enabling- and anti-discrimination legislation show. Many of the hostile views and arguments expressed
now have not changed in 50 years, although their influence has diminished greatly. Once *The Wolfenden Report* was published in 1957, there followed a decade of fierce campaigning and public debate, with many motions unsuccessfully laid before parliament. The politics of the campaign for the implementation of *The Wolfenden Report* were spearheaded by the Homosexual Law Reform Society. They embraced many familiar liberal arguments concerning the rightful province of law in matters of sexuality and the distinction between private morality and public law. *The Wolfenden Report* itself saw the creation of a realm of private morality as a way in which individuals, whom the writers termed ‘mature agents’, would take responsibility for their actions, i.e. be internally self-regulating. The writers also repeatedly emphasised ‘continence’, i.e. self-control, which seems to me to speak to an unconscious association between homosexuality and urination.

To raise other perspectives and frameworks in which to look at our history apart from the basic liberal narrative of progress, is not in any way to underestimate the significance of liberal reforms which can make such huge differences to the lives of lesbians and gay men. You only have to read accounts about the lives of gay men in the 50s and 60s, the ever-present fears of discovery, police witch hunts, arrest and exposure, to realise how things have changed. For example, of the three homosexual men who alone gave evidence to *The Wolfenden Report* two had to do so anonymously. Alan Horsfall’s description of the difficulty of campaigning openly for the implementation of *The Wolfenden Report* is stark, ‘Any working-class homosexual who expressed the view that change was possible was regarded as deluded and any who proposed assisting the process of change was thought of as recklessly insane.’ (Horsfall, 1988: 19) He also records the fierce opposition to reform within the Labour party although it also has to be said that most progressive legislation has been passed during periods of Labour Government.

To raise other perspectives is rather to embrace plural and contesting narratives, to approach what Judith Butler has called the fractious constellation of sexual politics, in which emancipatory movements of various kinds jostle with each other, for example, feminist, queer, socialist, libertarian, liberal reforms and rights-based arguments. There may be contestations as to how freedom or progress are described, and the specificities of historical time and cultural location can be of crucial importance. Thus a somewhat different story—in which there is an emphasis on the ways these reforms attempted to initiate new forms of regulation of sexuality, of containment and prevention, as well as creating new freedoms—can be told about *The Wolfenden* reforms. This is not an alternative, but an addition to the mainstream view. Such a perspective, which could be called a revisionist history, is to be found in the work of Patrick Higgins (1996) as well as in the various writings of Jeffrey Weeks (1981).

The impetus for setting up the Wolfenden Committee did not come from any concern for homosexuals or prostitutes, nor from notions of promoting the rights of sexual minorities; rather, it arose from a pragmatic reaction to the rapidly rising number of prosecutions relating to homosexual acts and prostitution, involving some high-profile men. Reading *The Wolfenden Report* itself is an exercise in time travel: sessions of the committee were held in private because of the allegedly ‘delicate and controversial’ nature of the topics. At best the tone of the report is one of tolerant dismissal. It was considered too shocking and distressing for the secretarial staff to have to type out the words ‘homosexuals’ or ‘prostitutes’ in recording the evidence presented, and so they were called ‘Hunteleys’ and ‘Palmers’, to spare the staff’s feelings. The emphasis throughout *The Report* is one of containment of something rather distasteful; no-one spoke positively about homosexuality, nor about rights. The single exception was a homosexual man who gave oral evidence, an upper class surgeon who described the
elevated cultured social world he lived in and said with evident disdain, ‘I do not wish to meet a strictly normal person’—perhaps an early aristocratic advocate of a queer position. (Wolfenden 1954-57, HO 345: 14)

The increase in recorded homosexual offences and prosecutions in the 40s and 50s is striking (six to ten times greater than before the war); it was regarded by The Wolfenden Report as the main reason for advocating law reform. The great increase in prosecutions was caused by heightened police activity driven by the post-war shift towards the reassertion of the primacy of the nuclear family. This increase can also be seen in the context of the Cold War ‘Lavender Scare’ being waged in the USA at the same time (see Johnson: 2003). The threat perceived as emanating from homosexuals in government service in the United States was taken to be as serious as that from communists, and large numbers were summarily dismissed from their jobs in a wide-ranging purge. The association of homosexuality with treason was promulgated. According to another historian of sexual attitudes, in 1951 the American government, following the defections of Burgess and Maclean to the USSR, pressured the British government to campaign against homosexuals in government service (Davenport-Hines: 1990). In 1952 Scotland Yard consulted the FBI for advice on conducting a purge. This was the period of the most extreme psychoanalytic homophobia in the US, as is well documented (e.g. Lewes: 1989). When The Wolfenden Report was published in the USA in 1963, it included an introduction by Karl Menninger, a leading psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, strongly arguing against its assertion that homosexuality was not a disease (cited in Isay: 1985). Despite the pathologising nature of the evidence given to the Wolfenden Committee by leading psychoanalysts (see below), The International Journal of Psychoanalysis for that period gives a more varied picture. Some articles put forward less stridently pathologising views, and some reviews criticised the more extreme homophobic books of the time, and welcomed the less prejudiced ones.

Between 1951 and 1954, there were mass arrests in the UK, including some high-profile upper class people, and the resulting furore over police techniques led to the subsequent decision, albeit by a very reluctant Cabinet, for an enquiry into the law. The association with treason was to recur in the subsequent public debates, with Devlin, a leading judge, arguing against decriminalisation, on the grounds that homosexuality could lead to a loosening of moral bonds and that the suppression of ‘vice’ was as much the law’s business as the suppression of subversive activities. This anti-liberal argument assumes a notion of society which is held together by a common and imposed morality. The view of homosexuality as a threat to the social order in general and marriage in particular, as articulated in the recent debates about civil partnership, is a recurrent one. It speaks to a conception of society in which, seemingly, individual ‘immorality’ can seep out into society—a view of influence and contamination between individuals, which is rather different from the liberal ideal, however fictional, of the autonomous boundaried subject making rational choices relatively independently. It was this latter view of the individual that was enshrined in The Wolfenden Report with its concern also to discount the prevalent idea of the time that homosexuality was caused by malign influences and contamination by others, for example, by seduction.

The Wolfenden Report and the consequent legislation of 1967 only partly succeeded within its own pragmatic terms: whilst the number of prosecutions for homosexual offences fell in the ten years after the report, in the 1970s they rose to greater numbers than before The Report because of increased police activity (mainly with regard to public indecency offences). In this sense, the effect of the decriminalising reform was that of a re-regulation of male homosexuality, as much as a liberalisation. The ‘logic’ of the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ was that since private behaviour was decriminalised, the legal sanctions on public acts could be strengthened. Furthermore,
The Sexual Offences Act (1967) in its timidity and limitations did nothing to mitigate the legislation of the subsequent Thatcher years. Under Section 2A of the Local Government Act (1988), although homosexuality in private was not as such re-criminalised, the public ‘promotion’ of homosexuality (in which gay and lesbian families were dubbed ‘pretend’ families) was attacked. Although the law was sufficiently vague to deter local authorities from undertaking prosecutions, nevertheless many gay and lesbian initiatives were closed down or simply dropped as a result.

‘In private’ was defined in The Wolfenden Report as, ‘Not in a place where members of the public were likely to see and be offended’, and it was left to the courts to decide whether public decency was offended. What is private could not be self-evident, but rather remained open to all sorts of qualifications, including the likelihood of giving offence—despite the passages in The Report which state clearly that disgust or offence, whilst often strong emotions, cannot be the basis for either morality or the law. Devlin and later homophobic writers have often tried to claim that the opposite is the case. ‘In private’ was defined even more restrictively when a last minute amendment to the 1967 Act was secured in the Lords by the then Lord Chancellor. The latter was bitterly against the legislation and as a result of his amendment privacy was defined as an act taking place with only two people present—one might say, with psychoanalysis in mind, a couple. If three or more people were present, then it became a public act.

The emphasis on privacy chimed amongst other things with some of the pro-decriminalisation arguments put forward by the Homosexual Law Reform Society, where the respectability and non-offensive nature, that is the social invisibility of the majority of homosexual relationships, was asserted as part of its campaigning tactics. Such a stance, whilst wholly understandable in the climate of the time, and bearing in mind the extreme bravery required to campaign openly, accepted the terms of the proposed reform: that is sexual ‘outlaws’ were to be tolerated on condition of privacy. This position brings out one of the ambiguities of liberalism; tolerance does not necessarily mean real acceptance of difference. Davenport Hines considers that the 1967 legislation was not so much a triumph for tolerance as the acme of the traditional and increasing middle-class taste for privacy. Jeffrey Weeks (1981) emphasises how, increasingly towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, sex of all kinds was ‘ideologically privatised’, ideally confined to marriage, with discretion and control becoming the mark of respectability.

Things were however to change radically after 1967 in the terms of gay and lesbian politics, spearheaded by the Gay Liberation Front. Their theorising and campaigning offered severe challenges to the private/public distinction, to the need for discretion, and to the notion of liberal tolerance. The slogan ‘the personal is political’ which originated in feminism but spread to gay and lesbian and anti-racist politics, sought to demonstrate how, in many ways, there was no area of personal life untouched by the state or unformed by society. This was given added meaning by the notion of internalised oppression, originating in Frantz Fanon’s writings about the psychology of the colonised, and extended to the idea of internalised homophobia (Weinberg, 1972). The notion of internalised oppression challenges the idea that there is any absolute privacy of the self unstructured or unaffected by social forces. Vitally, the oppression of the closet—of the need to keep everything private and secret—was countered by the energetic political emphasis on coming out, with all its dynamic, radical and life-changing consequences. For present purposes, it is important to note that these radically new discourses of gay and lesbian politics were built on the liberal reforms that preceded them, but in many ways now familiar to us they have far exceeded them. The terrain of this dynamic tension has shifted in historic ways but the same arguments can be seen in the differences between, for example, the politics of the pressure group
Stonewall, with its concern for law reform and equal civil rights, and the politics of queer positions where the different, questioning, queering status of homosexuality is seen as a vital parts of its value, to be asserted and celebrated.

I turn now to the role that psychoanalysis played in the deliberations of The Wolfenden Report, and to some further considerations on liberalism and privacy in relation to psychoanalysis. Part of The Report is taken up with formulating an understanding of homosexuality, drawing on the evidence of a wide variety of professionals, amongst them psychoanalysts from the Tavistock Institute, the British Psycho-Analytical Society and the authors of the 1948 Kinsey report (Kinsey himself was informally interviewed). The general tone of Wolfenden was a mixture of Kinsey’s notions with some liberal Freudianism, viz, that homosexuality was not an ‘all or nothing’ condition but rather a universal propensity, varying enormously in its behavioural expression.

Three very senior psychoanalysts from The British Psycho-Analytical Society gave oral evidence, Wilfred Bion, Elliot Jaques and William Gillespie. The prevailing tone of their evidence can be gauged by Bion’s statement that no-one who has a real choice in the matter is likely to choose homosexuality. Throughout they emphasised in various ways the pathologies they considered to underlie what they called homosexual ‘outlets’—these were not, they said, symptoms, but alternatives to psychotic or neurotic formations, means of dealing with deep internal anxieties. They also gave the impression that change of orientation was possible through psychoanalytic treatment. However, when they were pressed by the doctors on The Wolfenden Committee to provide evidence and case histories to support this view, they could not produce them—a familiar clash of empiricism with psychoanalysis. With therapeutic zeal Bion averred, ‘There is no patient I would like to call an ingrained homosexual.’ This seems to be a claim for the supposedly fundamental nature of heterosexuality to which people can be restored. (Wolfenden 1954-57, HO 345: Box 14) The Tavistock Clinic therapists emphatically distinguished between treatable and untreatable, where this seems to have meant change of orientation and were even more gung-ho than those from the British Society: they maintained that of the 20% they thought were treatable, 100% success could be claimed. They also advocated the setting up of specialist clinics.

It is clear that the Wolfenden Committee did not accept much of the psychoanalysts’ evidence. The Committee saw any concurrent psychiatric abnormalities as due to the strain and conflict of the circumstances of homosexual lives, not as causal; whereas the psychoanalysts unequivocally saw homosexuality as an indication of underlying psychological disturbance, and as an unsatisfactory way of dealing with internal anxieties. In this sense, The Report is much more normalising of male homosexuality than the psychoanalytic evidence. The psychoanalysts, like Freud in his often quoted 1930 letter to the mother of a young American man, advocated decriminalisation. This was on the basis that the law increased feelings of persecution and made treatment more difficult, and that decriminalisation would not increase the prevalence of homosexuality—one of The Committee’s preoccupations. As Bion stated, ‘The homosexual is not going to be treated by the law, he has to be treated by medical people.’ (Wolfenden 1954-57 HO 345: Box 14). Much of their argument can be read as a claim for territory—that of psychoanalytic treatment—which did not convince The Committee. The final version of the report stated that there was no evidence that change of orientation was possible through treatment.

In the unpublished written evidence of the British Psycho-Analytical Society to the Wolfenden Committee (Memorandum, 1955) there is some discussion of the irrationality and violence of other people’s responses to homosexuality. This is seen as due to the severe repression and denial of a universal latent homosexuality, described in passages
that read like transcriptions of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. In their oral evidence the analysts comment on what they deem others’ ‘horror’ of sodomy, what Bion describes as, ‘The powerful emotions aroused by disgusting excretions which makes the law lose its aim’. The tone of this is as if they themselves were somehow outside and above any such irrationality in their formulations about homosexuality – an abiding problem with psychoanalysis. *The Wolfenden Report* reflected some of these ideas about repressed and latent homosexuality in its comments on irrational responses, and also in its position, like that of Freud’s in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, that disgust and repulsion, whilst very common in sexual matters, should not serve as a basis for morality or law. In this sense, as in many others, Freud’s position has much in common with classic liberalism. These passages on the irrationality of reactions to homosexuality point to the positive potential (very underdeveloped, in my opinion) of psychoanalysis to address homophobia. The question also arises as to whether this particular Freudian model, of latent and manifest homosexuality on which this irrationality is seen as being based, is a useful one. What it also brings out is how this distinction, latent versus manifest, co-terminous with, but not the same as, private versus public, is used to sustain a psychoanalytic position in which homosexuality is seen simultaneously as both normal and abnormal, with often extremely porous and precarious dividing lines between them.

The liberal notion of privacy enshrined in *The Wolfenden Report* has strong resonances with the practice of psychoanalysis which also takes place between two consenting adults in private—and which depends heavily for much of its theorising on a radical distinction between inner/private, and outer/public. It is only with difficulty and even then very incompletely that contemporary mainstream psychoanalysis has been able to acknowledge that the private analytic relationship may bear and enact the signs and emotions of the wider society. The leading proponents of this position within psychoanalysis are the various relational schools, exemplified in the work of Stephen Mitchell and Lewis Aron. For the most part, these relational schools maintain a traditional individual/society, inner/outer, dualism, albeit paying more radical and critical attention to the ‘social’ aspect and the dynamics of e.g. racism or homophobia that can arise within therapy relationships and that are structured by wider social forces and histories.

It is only with the incorporation of a more Foucauldian/Butlerian approach that we can raise questions as to the pre-suppositional nature of these categories and dualisms, and the performative functions they can come to serve. For example, in the case of homosexuality, with latent and manifest, and within the associated Freudian assumption that bisexuality is universal, then the manifest could always become sublimated or latent, anyone could be heterosexual and prevention and cure are possible; this fuels therapeutic omnipotence. Historically however, it has been those psychoanalysts who abandoned the Freudian notion of bisexuality in favour of some more naturalistic version of heterosexuality who have been most pathologising of homosexuality. Whilst the Freudian version is more liberal in many senses, Freudian bisexuality ultimately, as Butler has pointed out, only reinstates heterosexuality since the gender dualisms of male/female, masculine/feminine are inherent in it.

Before leaving *The Wolfenden Report* however, I want to make two further points. The first is to raise a question about the effect of these reforms on individuals: to wonder in what ways and to what extent they not only opened up a more viable space in which to forge identities and have relationships but also facilitated greater degrees of internal freedom in relation to homosexual desires; how or whether the kinds of conflicts that as therapists we may hear about were touched by the changes in legislation; to what extent the personal legacy of years of illegality, secrecy and oppression could be affected by
these social changes. This is an issue which is still with us, despite the far-reaching legislative and social changes we are now living through. It is evident in some of the clinical material in the papers that follow in this issue. I think one of the contributions that psychoanalysis can make is to understand the trans-generational legacies of these kinds of histories in the personal lives of people now. Another is to understand the considerable personal strengths required to forge lives and loves under conditions of stigma, danger, and discrimination, as well as the conflicts and ambivalences produced by this.

Secondly I would argue that despite the very obvious shortcomings of The Wolfenden Report, in the kind of society we live in we cannot do without the support of a substantial liberal constituency, in parliament as well as outside. It is noteworthy that the basic liberal arguments put forward by The Wolfenden Report regarding the limits of law in matters of sexual morality have been used to further the repeal of criminalising laws in many American states. In the USA, with their rather different historical, constitutional and legal frameworks, the discussions about rights have often been more high profile than the equivalent UK ones—at least until recently. In this respect, it is noteworthy that it was the American psychiatric professions who, in the face of fierce opposition, succeeded in deleting homosexuality from the classifications of mental illness in the DSM manuals in 1973. Subsequently, many American psychoanalytic institutes have issued public non-discriminatory policy statements as regards training and so forth. Nothing so public has happened here in the psychiatric or psychoanalytic bodies, apart from within UKCP. Kaplan, an American lawyer and gay activist, in Sexual Justice (1997) usefully lays out three essential aspects of lesbian and gay rights: decriminalisation; protection by the state against discrimination along the lines of civil rights arguments; and social recognition of lesbian and gay forms of relationship and association, in which he includes a right to privacy, or freedom of intimate association. This is a more positive spin on privacy as a right to sexual freedom, in which sexual relationships and identities can be forged and lived out, as opposed to the more negative one of the freedom of solitary individuals to be left alone, free from the criminalising intrusion of the law, which was the version of privacy offered by the Wolfenden reforms. We only have to remind ourselves of the many countries where all homosexuality is illegal and heavily punished to appreciate the advantages that come with liberalism, whatever its obvious insufficiencies.

I am making a plea for strategic political alliances, and I would especially apply this to the somewhat recalcitrant case of psychoanalysis, where I have always felt that it is the liberal middle ground, rather than the out-and-out homophobes, towards whom it is most worthwhile directing our arguments, within the prevailing terms of professional discourse as well as more radically. The critiques of psychoanalysis in relation to homosexuality, that in the 80s and 90s were being made from the margins (e.g. O’Connor and Ryan, 1993) are now much more a part of mainstream discussions and publications. There have been significant shifts in access to most forms of training. To take only a few examples: a book published under the auspices of the International Psychoanalytic Association contains a chapter critical of traditional psychoanalytic beliefs about homosexuality (Fonagy et al., 2006); a recent issue of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis contains a closely-argued article offering a critique in theoretical and clinical detail of the psychoanalytic pathologisation of homosexuality (Phillips, 2003); and in one issue of the British Journal of Psychotherapy in 2006, there are three articles which put forward different ways of working with gay and lesbian patients, including an important consideration of countertransference issues. Such a degree of diversity, albeit modest, was not evident 10 years ago, and this is only a sample of the many publications that can be found. In the recent debates in the House of Lords about adoption rights for lesbians and gay men, all the same old spectres and chestnuts were
raised, but the countervailing voices are now significantly stronger and better supported.

To return to the intersections of classical liberalism and psychoanalysis, it is of interest that Freud himself, when visiting England as a young man, was apparently very taken by the philosophy of J.S. Mill and the ideas of utilitarianism; he subsequently translated some of Mill’s writings into German. There are parallels between utilitarian ideas about maximising happiness and avoiding harm, and Freud’s theories concerning the primacy of seeking pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Both early Freudian theory and utilitarianism conceptualise these emotions in quantitative and economic terms (Govrin, 2004). Philip Rieff emphasises the ways in which the liberal defence of the individual against the incursions of the state was formative in the beginnings of Freudian psychology, and how for Freud, society and social norms demanded a sacrifice of individuality (Rieff 1959). Psychoanalysis, despite the social conservatism of many of its subsequent adherents, in its more socially liberal guises came to be seen as very much on the side of the individual, particularly in its advocacy of less punitive forms of child-rearing and nursery education, as well as many of its basic ideas about the meaning of symptoms. There are of course also vast differences between utilitarian liberalism and Freudian psychoanalysis, most especially in Freud’s deconstruction of the rational subject on which the moral psychology of liberalism depends. Consequently the connection between Freud and J.S. Mill cannot be pushed too far, but it is striking when compared to the very different philosophical traditions of nineteenth century central Europe with which Freud is more usually associated. These links nonetheless help to underline how some of the conceptions of the individual current within psychoanalysis resonate with those of liberal individualism, and especially with the notions of individuals in relation to society, conceptions which limit the ability of psychoanalysis to understand lesbian and gay lives.

The defining practice of psychoanalysis is that of privacy, consent and confidentiality in the clinical relationship between two adults. In many ways, the privacy of this relationship, its abstraction from the demands of everyday life, the boundaried nature of the consulting room free from intrusions, all the familiar routines and rituals of many therapeutic relationships—this privacy—is one of the conditions of psychoanalysis being able to be practiced and work at all. This same privacy is part of what allows the creation of a highly specific kind of relationship between analyst and patient, the particular intimacy that helps form an analytic relationship, part of what makes it work; but they are very contested and hard won conditions, frequently misunderstood, and require much effort to maintain adequately. However, the requirement of these conditions seems to create—or at least fit too well with—the fiction of both the individual and the designated object of psychoanalysis (the mind and its workings) as distinct and autonomous from social forces as in important ways separate from society. This has impeded thinking differently within psychoanalysis or more generally about individuals as inextricably formed by and part of historical and political structures.

Thus there are many ways in which the practices and ethics of psychoanalysis sit more easily with the politics of liberal individualism than with identity-based politics or anything queer, and this may be one aspect of why psychoanalysis has often found itself so uncomprehending of gay and lesbian lives, and especially of the centrality of coming out, that is, making public rather than keeping things private or secret. It would be interesting to know what the different parts of the psychoanalytic profession make of the current progressive legislation, civil partnerships, adoption rights and the like, or whether, as in the case of The Wolfenden Report, important sections of the profession lag far behind current social changes.
References

1 The list includes The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act (2000) which equalised the age of consent; the Civil Partnership Act (2004); The Equality Act (2006); The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2007); the various changes to child, fostering and adoption laws that secured the position of lesbian and gay families; the repeal of the prohibition on the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ and ‘pretend family relations’ of the 1988 Local Government Act, (the infamous Section 28), and the removal of any offence of gross indecency and sodomy in The Sexual Offences Act (2003) which finally fully decriminalised male homosexuality.
2 It was only repealed in 1967.
3 An interesting if incidental question arises: what are the political interests or forces that lead New Labour to pass the contemporary raft of legislation–given that it probably doesn’t buy itself a significant increase in popularity by doing so?
4 Huntley & Palmers was the name of a well-known biscuit manufacturer of the time.
5 Of course the opposite argument is also possible–as in the 70’s slogan, ‘Any woman can!’