

## A [statement of support](#) for equal age of consent reform in Queensland

by **Paul Martin**, Principal Psychologist, Centre for Human Potential, Brisbane

18<sup>th</sup> November 2011



Paul Martin Principal Psychologist  
Centre for Human Potential  
[www.cfhp.com.au](http://www.cfhp.com.au)  
Level 9/243 Edward Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000  
GPO Box 1492  
BRISBANE QLD 4001  
P: 07 3211 1117  
F: 07 3211 9689  
M: 0419 0055 55

[\(click here for a fullsize 3mb publicity photo\)](#)

I am a psychologist with over 25 years experience specializing in mental health in LGBTI populations. I run a practice which sees many young same sex attracted people and am actively involved in PFLAG where I spend much time with parents of same sex attracted young people. I have worked with parents who have lost their child to suicide as a result of their conflicts around being same sex attracted and young people who were close to dying as a result of suicide attempts. These are extremely vulnerable segments of Australia's young population. Clinical and research evidence strongly suggests that the Queensland Sodomy Law which sets a higher minimum age of 18 for anal intercourse not only exposes many of them (any person who engages in anal intercourse) and any of their sexual partners to criminal prosecution, but also causes psychological harm and increases risks of negative outcomes including suicide.

The mental health statistics for same sex attracted youth are alarming and they are at much higher risk of negative mental and physical health outcomes. This includes that 64% of young men and 23% of young women who are same sex attracted had harmed themselves or had mentioned thinking about or attempting suicide (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005).

The mental health issues of young same sex attracted people are primarily a result of negative beliefs that are absorbed from a young age regarding what it means to be gay or lesbian. This is reinforced in the school yard including the worst thing to be called is a 'faggot'. The negative psychological impact of bullying, and/or the adverse mental health outcomes of pretending to be heterosexual to prevent bullying and social exclusion has been widely documented. The negative outcomes of these beliefs can include substance abuse, suicidality, depression, anxiety, self harm and other self destructive behaviours.

When young same sex attracted people hear homophobic remarks from community leaders or are aware of inequities in the law that favours heterosexuals, this confirms and reinforces these negative beliefs. I had a young person in my practice recently who was very close to dying after a suicide attempt. He stated that when he heard the Prime Minister of our country say that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, he "realized that all of his negative beliefs about gay relationships were true", and that his future was bleak and he then concluded: "what's the point."

The evidence is therefore clear, that a law which specifically targets and discriminates against same sex attracted youth, such as the Sodomy law, sends a very clear message that they are not equal, are not valued, are at risk of a criminal offense, and are therefore defective. This confirms their internalized homophobia and this causes psychological damage.

Whilst the Premier's 'It Gets Better' video would have had a positive impact on the mental health of some same sex attracted youth, the impact may be largely negated by her refusal to change discrimination in the Sodomy Law. This law quite clearly causes psychological harm and it is imperative that our Premier acts urgently to change this for the sake of the most vulnerable youth in Queensland.