A hostile environment: affect, emotion and power in lesbian teachers' reflections on Section 28

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Abstract: This article discusses interviews with lesbian teachers working in English schools in the 1980s during which time Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act (UK) became law. It examines how they were affected by and responded to this homophobic piece of legislation, focussing on the role of affect and emotion in the exercise of power. It examines the analytical potential of the concept of affective atmosphere and the use of oral history in exploring how subjects may encounter and experience atmospheres as discomforting or comforting, disempowering or empowering.

Keywords: Section 28; affective atmosphere; affect; emotion; discomfort; power; lesbian teachers

Introduction

This article examines atmospheres and their capacities to affect subjects. It analyses the felt environments experienced by some lesbian identified teachers working in schools in the 1980s during the period leading up to and including the introduction of a controversial and homophobic piece of legislation, contained in Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act (UK). Drawing on interviews with lesbian teachers, it considers how many came to feel unsafe and fear for their jobs while some found alternative spaces of safety and belonging through political activism and resistance to the legislation. Using the concept of affective atmosphere, the paper examines the exercise of power and resistance through the affects and emotions provoked by Section 28. It considers the role of oral history in exploring how subjects encounter and experience affective atmospheres and their consequences.

Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act (UK) was highly controversial. It stated that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.[1] This legislation was sponsored by a Conservative government and energetically supported by right-wing news

media. Arguably, it reflected a (political and popular) backlash against the increasing visibility of lesbian and gay identities and culture in previous decades.[2] It certainly helped to fuel homophobia, yet it also galvanised a vibrant heterogeneous gay movement to oppose it and later campaign for its repeal.

Section 28 in context

The broader context for the introduction of Section 28 is what Stuart Hall identified as a 'swing to the Right' and the emergence of Thatcherism in the 1970s.[3] Crucially, Margaret Thatcher was elected as prime minister in 1979 with strong a mandate for economic reform and an emphasis on 'traditional' family values. Thatcherism, Hall argued, popularised discourses of 'social market values', focussed on competition, personal responsibility, individualism and eroding various forms of collectivism and social solidarity, such as that exercised by trade unions, local authorities, professional associations and so on.[4] Thatcherism also tended to promote the rhetoric of 'national interest' and mobilised discourses of nation and people against class and unions, interpellating vast numbers of people in this way.[5] It successfully marshalled the idea of threat to the British people, emanating from various figures and institutions framed as the enemy within: the welfare recipient, the immigrant, the urban school.[6] Importantly, and characteristically, Thatcherism effectively instrumentalised affect for political ends: for example, through intensifications of anxiety 'temporarily attached to various "othered" objects/figures/scenes'.[7] The Right-supporting press played a pivotal role in publicising the themes and goals of the Right.[8]

Education policy under Thatcher, Derek Gillard argues, was directed at making the education system 'more responsive to the needs of industry and more susceptible to market forces'.[9] This agenda was advanced during the 1980s on several fronts: through extending the rights of parents to choose schools, imposing a national curriculum, controlling teachers' training and role in curriculum development, and diminishing the power of (progressive Labour-led) local authorities to resist central government policy. Such measures combined to effectively dismantle Labour's 1976 Education Act, with its focus on egalitarianism through comprehensivisation.[10] The National Curriculum, introduced in the 1988 Education Reform Act, also cemented the demise of a post-war ethos of child-centred learning in favour of accountability and results.[11] When it came to promoting traditional family values,

the 1986 Education Act (no 2) was especially significant. It gave school governing bodies much greater responsibility for curriculum, discipline and staffing. It made governing bodies responsible for devising school policy on sex education, specifying that it should encourage pupils to have 'due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life'.[12] The passage of the legislation through Parliament prompted lively debate on the content of sex education in schools and much disquiet over initiatives to challenge prejudice and include positive images of homosexuality.[13] For some in the Conservative Party, this legislation did not do enough to neutralise the equal opportunities policies of left-wing local authorities and, to a considerable extent, Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act was an attempt to rectify this. Arguably, the two pieces of legislation coalesced to create a febrile atmosphere of danger and constraint surrounding sex, family and education, which temporarily attached to homosexual teachers and the classroom. Attempts to advance lesbian and gay rights were presented as a threat to family and nation.[14]

Thatcherism profoundly affected many areas of social and economic life, although scholars have cautioned against positioning it as the key reference point of the 1980s. They have drawn attention to 'longer and deeper historical processes' at play and a wealth of other histories.[15] Significantly, the decade also saw growth in political activism and collective action focussed on issues such as gender, race, sexuality, the environment, disability, mental health, housing, the peace movement and campaign for nuclear disarmament. Also, during this period, many local governments began to pursue collectivist policies aimed at social reform, sometimes referred to as municipal socialism, which were in direct opposition to those pursed by central government.[16]

Anti-sexist and anti-racist activism in the late 1970s and early 1980s did much to challenge and change left-wing politics, especially in local government.[17] The onset of the HIV/AIDs epidemic helped to further politicise lesbians and gays, who started to emphasise rights and legal reform and lobby Labour-controlled city councils in the mid-1980s.[18] As a result, Kelly Kollman and Matthew Waites argue, several councils in large metropolitan areas 'began to implement anti-discrimination policies that included sexual orientation'.[19] So, when Section 28 was formulated, it was clearly about more than sexual identity. Sue Sanders and Gill Spraggs argue that it was part of a strategy by the Conservative administration to 'erode the

powers and scope of local government' and with it the power base of the Labour opposition.[20] Section 28 was repeatedly presented not as an attempt to 'curtail the freedom of lesbians and gays' but to curb 'abuses' in local government, with supporters consistently expressing concern that rate payers would resent the money spent on lesbian and gay projects.[21] Examples from inner London attracted particular attention.

In 1984, Haringey Labour Party included gay rights in its election manifesto and the Labour-controlled council was one of ten councils to donate more that £600,000 to gay projects and groups.[22] In 1986, a re-elected Labour council created the Haringey Lesbian and Gay Unit (opened on 1 April 1986) and sent letters to headteachers in all Haringey schools offering assistance with implementing a policy to promote 'positive images' of lesbians and gay men, an action that was vigorously attacked by the right-wing press.[23] In May 1986, the *Islington Gazette* ran an article about the Labour-controlled Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) making gay-themed books available in classrooms.[24] The national tabloids latched onto the story, using it to attack the Labour Party and homosexuality. *The Sun* ran the story on its front page under the headline 'vile book in school'.[25] Such stories were used by the Conservative Party to reignite arguments from the 1960s, which centred on the threats posed to younger men by predatory individual homosexuals and grounded these in a new narrative about a leftist political agenda that promoted homosexuality in schools.[26] At a grassroots level, many local Conservative organisations campaigned against positive images.[27]

Following a media-fuelled moral panic about education and sexuality, Lord Halsbury, an independent hereditary peer, introduced a Private Members Bill entitled 'An act to refrain local authorities from promoting homosexuality' in December 1986.[28] The text of the Bill included a definition of homosexuality (not previously inscribed in law) as 'a pretended family relationship'.[29] This Bill lacked government support and failed. However, during its 1987 general election campaign, the Conservative Party drew on media representations to again fuel fear and hostility towards lesbians and gays as a way of discrediting Labour.[30] Following a Conservative victory, Margaret Thatcher made a triumphant address to the Conservative Party conference (October 1987) in which she attacked 'hard-left education authorities and extremist teachers' on the grounds that 'children who need to be taught to

respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay'.[31] In December 1987, a new clause was inserted in the Local Government Bill, proposed by Conservative MP David Wiltshire. The text was verbatim that of the Halsbury Bill, but this time it had government support and Section 28 of the Local Government Act was enacted on 24 May 1988.[32]

The relationship between gay rights and Labour politics was complex and uneasy. There were clear differences between the actions of more radical left labour-controlled councils in metropolitan areas and the parliamentary Labour Party. At first, the party in parliament failed to oppose the legislation and tried to distance itself both from 'loony left' councils and the gay and lesbian issue, which was perceived to be a vote loser.[33] It took a long time for mainstream Labour to find 'a palatable way of articulating its support for gay and lesbian rights'.[34] When eventually the parliamentary Labour Party did oppose Section 28, it did so on the basis of defending equality and individual rights, rather than challenging conservative idealisation of the heteronormative family, constituted through the demonisation of homosexuality.[35] Labour repealed Section 28 in 2003 when in government.[36]

Legally, Section 28 had very little impact: it did not create a criminal offence and so no prosecutions were ever brought.[37] Nevertheless, its impact was felt ideologically and affectively. The ideological potency of Section 28 for conservative politicians and media, Jeffrey Weeks suggests, lay in its configuration of a nexus of emotive issues: 'the family under threat; an assault on the sexual purity of children; the pernicious nature of sex education; proselytising homosexuals; all funded by the local government tax, the rates'.[38] The legislation appeared to license physical and verbal abuse of lesbians and gays (boosted by the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic). It created 'an atmosphere of fear and intimidation' among local authorities and their employees, encouraging repression and self-censorship.[39] It discouraged policies, practices and activities seen by some as being inclusive of sexual minorities and by others as promoting homosexuality, as staff feared loss of funding.[40] The impact of Section 28 was powerful and enduring to the extent that many LGBTQ+ teachers living through its enactment continue to be affected by their experiences to this day.[41]

Nevertheless, the introduction of Section 28 met with energetic resistance and, together with the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic, galvanised the LGB community and mobilised activists. In this context, two of the most influential LGBTQ+ organisations in British political history were formed: Stonewall and OutRage![42] A broad-based 'Stop the clause' campaign drew support from gay rights advocates, the gay press, a range of organisations and prominent individuals concerned with the arts and civil liberties, local authorities and some political parties.[43] Local campaign groups sprang up and huge numbers joined a series of lively mass marches. There were also some imaginative and spectacular acts of resistance such as lesbians abseiling in the House of Lords and an invasion of the BBC news studio, where a lesbian chained herself to the desk of the news reader while she was reading the news live on TV.[44] Significantly though, a vast number of ordinary lesbians and gay men resisted the restrictions of Section 28 in everyday interactions and activities and more and more people began talking openly about their sexuality to relatives, colleagues, neighbours and so on. Some spoke on local and national television and radio, some wrote letters to the press.[45]

Section 28, its origins, implications and forms of resistance it provoked, have been discussed by others.[46] Few have focussed on personal stories, although a recent exception is Catherine Lee's vivid account of the challenges she faced as a closeted lesbian PE teacher in inner-city Liverpool and rural Suffolk, drawing on diary entries she made at this time.[47] Her diaries together with the film *Blue Jean*, which drew inspiration from them, powerfully evoke feelings of fear, shame and isolation associated with the heteronormativity enshrined in the legislation and everyday casual homophobia.[48] This article differs in significant ways: it focusses on the spoken accounts of a group of (largely London-centred) lesbian teachers, who were working in schools during the period in which the legislation was being debated and enacted, and it offers a detailed examination of the part played by feeling in the exercise of power. To this end, the article concentrates on affect and emotion in teachers' reflections on their working environments and positionality. It explores the analytical potential of affective atmosphere in investigating how felt environments may contribute to the micro-workings of power in everyday situations.[49] It reflects on the use of oral history interviews to elicit detailed accounts of how events were experienced in emotional and affective terms, as well as the articulation of both individual and collective feeling. It

considers how memories of atmospheres can enrich understandings of the past and present.

Affective atmospheres

Atmosphere is often used as metaphor for a felt environment and as a way of naming collective affects.[50] Ben Anderson suggests that atmosphere (a term often used interchangeably with mood, feeling, ambience) unsettles the distinction that has emerged between affect and emotion in scholarly work.[51] Where affect has been associated with the impersonal and objective, and emotion with the personal and subjective, atmospheres both elude and mix such categories and distinctions. (Affective) atmospheres are indeterminate: they 'are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal'.[52] They are neither inside nor outside of an individual but something in between, traversing 'distinctions between people, things and spaces'.[53] At the same time, affective atmospheres may constitute 'the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge'.[54] Anderson suggests too that atmospheres are local, enveloping 'particular enclosed forms' such as an occasion, network or particular bodies.[55] In such spaces, atmospheres move and change form, becoming 'capacities to affect and be affected' such as 'sustaining a belief' or 'the feeling of being emboldened'.[56] People encountering particular affective atmospheres both contribute to them and are affected by them.[57]

Significantly, Sara Ahmed argues, affects are unevenly experienced.[58] While shared feelings may sometimes seem to surround us 'like an atmosphere', and we may we feel that we have the same feeling, 'we don't necessarily have the same relationship to that feeling'.[59] This is because we encounter an atmosphere from a particular 'angle' and feel from 'a specific point'.[60] Particular atmospheres may lead some to experience feelings of comfort and others discomfort. While comfort may easily go unnoticed, discomfort becomes noticeable through an intensification of affect and the accumulation of intensity.[61] Jack Leff helpfully suggests that an affective atmosphere can be used as an analytical tool to help with understanding how inequalities are felt.[62]

In this article, I explore affective atmospheres that enveloped particular sites and bodies – schools, classrooms, teachers – focussing on their capacities to engender feelings of comfort or discomfort, and strong emotions that emerged from these subjective states. I consider how emergent emotions might in turn work to encourage/discourage, bolster/subordinate, empower/disempower.

Oral history

Oral history interviewing provides a way of exploring how specific affective atmospheres have been encountered and their consequences for subjects, relations and power. It can elicit detailed descriptions of how some subjects experience discomfort (feeling awkward, out of place and unsettled) while others experience comfort (feeling at ease).[63] My research involved interviewing individuals who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) and worked as schoolteachers in the 1980s. It focussed on the local and specific assemblages that constituted and framed their everyday working environments, consisting of human subjects, sites, networks, temporalities, hierarchies, affects, rules, materials, resources.

Between 2019 and 2021, I interviewed nine individuals who identified as LBG. Interview participants were drawn initially from my own circle of friends and acquaintances and later their contacts. Interviews lasted up to two hours and focussed on participants' working lives as teachers in schools in inner London, outer London and some rural areas. I asked participants: how they entered teaching and where they worked; whether they identified as LGB at the time and whether they were open about their sexuality at work; the introduction of Section 28 and its implications for their work as teachers; their involvement in any forms of resistance and activism. I also asked them how they remember feeling about the wording of Section 28, which I read aloud in the interview. I was especially struck by the spontaneous and repeated reference to a hostile environment or atmosphere in which interviewees were working at the time, and how this made them feel.

This article discusses six of the interviews with women who were in lesbian relationships in the 1980s, when Section 28 was debated, reported and resisted. Five participants were in their thirties, one was in her forties, in 1988. At the time of interview, five identified as lesbian and one as bisexual. I choose to focus on these interviews here because of certain

similarities and differences in participants' experiences. They were of a similar age, discussed encountering sexism as well as homophobia, and the importance to them of feminism and the women's movement. However, they worked in different contexts (in inner London, outer London and rural schools), some were isolated, others were part of expansive networks of support and activism. All interview participants expressed a passionate commitment to teaching and their students. In the decades following the introduction of Section 28, two left teaching altogether (in the early 1990s), two left mainstream education to work with children with special educational needs and disabilities (one as a deputy headteacher) and two went on to become headteachers in secondary schools.

An atmosphere of hostility and danger

Those interviewed considered it very difficult, hazardous even, to be open about their sexuality at work. Following the introduction of Section 28, Gill and Maggie feared they might lose their jobs for being known to be lesbian.[64] Gill, working in an outer London borough, said: 'I was very much not out. I never felt that it was safe to be so'.[65] Maggie, working in an inner London borough, was out at work to staff but not to students. She said that 'there was a great tension in schools' and she didn't know 'any teacher that was out in a relaxed way', feeling able to refer to their partner in the same way as a heterosexual person might. Maggie described Section 28 as 'toxic' in the sense that it was interpreted in many schools as 'you're not allowed to say anything about the existence of lesbians and gay men' in teaching 'PSHE or any other subject'.[66]

Jo, working in a rural setting, referred to 'the tone and the climate and the atmosphere, nothing that direct' produced by Section 28 and said that 'it influenced my confidence at the time'. Known to be in a lesbian relationship by her deputy headteacher, Jo was warned against speaking about sexuality with a gay student who had actively sought support, and explained this by saying, 'I suppose she considered me dangerous, because I could have said something positive or demonstrated … [it]'.[67] Maggie said that Section 28 'definitely created a hostile environment for lesbians and gay men and for young people', making it even harder for them to come out or be out. Asked to elaborate on this environment, Maggie said: 'Well, it was scary. It was properly scary because, bottom line, it felt like you could lose your job because you were a lesbian, actually'. At another point in the interview, she

describes the abiding sense that she could lose her job for being openly lesbian as ‘nerve wracking’.[68]

Returning to teaching in outer London in the mid-1980s after a year abroad, where she had been ‘very out’, Linda said: ‘it felt like I was moving from the literal sunshine and openness to something that was quite closed. Yeah, I’ve sort of just remembered, just remember it just being a bit of a dark time really’.[69] Linda experienced this darkness as ‘really depressing’ and was not open about her sexuality at work because ‘you thought it would damage your career and things like that’.

Participants considered the wording of Section 28, especially the use of the word ‘pretended’, offensive and denigrating.[70] Maggie said ‘it meant that our relationships had no worth. That’s what it was saying to everybody. It was wrong and it had no worth’.[71] Gill said:

> the wording of Section 28 I took very personally and felt that that meant that I was regarded as a lesser person, particularly the second part of the quotation […] You know not promoting it as a suitable familial option […] I was incensed by the word “pretended”, completely incensed by it. I’m still angry about that […] *pretended*!

The legislation, she said, ‘completely denigrated who I was, who I am’.[72]

For Jo, Section 28 compounded the sexism she already experienced in school and made her feel doubly ‘second class’. She said:

> And I think what got to me with Section 28, was being told – I was very much in love – and being told that your relationship is lesser. I actually think it’s affected me to this day, if I’m really honest. […] It was particularly disgusting piece of legislation, and very hurtful […] it’s just the message you’re getting that you’re not as good.[73]

Emphasising the enduring impact of Section 28, Jo said ‘I can still pitch into that hurt’ and, even now, ‘I carry a lot of anger’.[74]

For Gill, Section 28 was 'a shocking experience' and rendered her job increasingly untenable to the extent that she decided to leave teaching in the early 1990s, 'just to continue being who I was […] I wasn't prepared to pretend any longer'. She felt especially undermined and angered by the idea percolating through Section 28 that homosexual teachers might pose a threat to children.

> I think what I remember most about it was my anger and despair about how retrograde and how wrong this legislation was because it genuinely tied paedophilia into homosexuality and that of course was absolutely groundless, completely groundless, and at the same time, it seemed to me, that children were being sexually abused by paedophiles who weren't necessarily gay. I mean paedophilia is a different thing and my anger and my despair about that being tied together in my opinion by the wording of Section 28 was something that I was incandescent with rage about and felt so strongly about that I knew that I just had to leave teaching. And as I said, that broke my heart, because I was a career teacher and very good at it. I cared about it.[75]

Gill was 'bitterly disappointed' to quit teaching and, at the end of the interview, she said that Section 28 had been 'a devastating blow' and 'one of the worst things that's ever happened to me'. Gill's spoken account, like that of others, communicated considerable strength of feeling through naming and owning a range of very strong emotions. She also underlined an intensity of feeling by describing herself 'incensed' and 'incandescent', swearing and using repetition, intonation and increased volume. Gill was the only interview participant to explicitly mention paedophilia, but other researchers have reported that lesbian and gay teachers felt constantly under suspicion and fearful of being labelled paedophiles and hypersexual.[76] Lee argues that, for lesbian teachers supervising changing rooms and showers, this fear was especially acute.[77]

The atmospheres that developed around speaking about sex and sexuality in schools during the build up to, and the enactment of, Section 28 were experienced by interview participants as sexist, emphatically heteronormative and hostile, making them feel out of place, awkward and unsettled.[78] Their accounts describe how discomfort became noticeable

through an intensification and accumulation of affect and how this led to a sense of worthlessness and disempowerment. The prohibition against teaching 'the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship', and headteachers' anxious responses, further stimulated an atmosphere in which subjects felt silenced and unsafe. While such atmospheres belonged to a collective situation, they were felt as intensely personal and gave rise to specific strong emotions: fear, offence, anger, hurt, disappointment, despair, rage, shock and grief. Nevertheless, anger was also a ground for acting back (as discussed below).

Atmospheres can work to 'orient' us through 'the repetitive circulation of associations and symbols'[79] and, in the mobile assemblages constituting Section 28 with its many meanings and affects, repetition of the strange and ungrammatical phrase 'a pretended family relationship' was especially discomforting. 'Pretended family relationship' inscribes a particular relationality of subjects, affects, emotions and power, which interview participants experienced as negating, subordinating and ultimately disempowering. In other words, the phrase was interpreted as an attack on personal and collective identity and promoted a sense of ontological insecurity. All participants felt offended and angry.

'Pretend' and 'pretended' further underscored a distinction between an authentic and inauthentic version of self (in Gill's narrative) and family (in the wording of Section 28). For Gill, the legislation required an erasure of 'who I was, who I am'. In school, she felt pressured to pretend to be heterosexual and single.[80] With regard to family, Section 28 worked to bolster heteronormativity by discrediting, and attempting to render invisible, alternative patterns of relationships and affective ties. Indeed, Susan Reinhold argued that Section 28 was part of the 'ongoing negotiation of the meaning of the family in British society', revealing it to be a highly contested concept and site of the state's ongoing struggle 'to regulate both family forms and sexual behaviour'.[81] The drive for legislation that became Section 28 helped to further naturalise an idealised concept of family rooted in the nineteenth century but at odds with 'actual family life'.[82] The 'pretend family', 'with its fluid relation to sex, physical and social reproduction, and a gendered division of labour in the household' posed a threat to the existing social order.[83] Further, it illustrated an

understanding of family as neither essentially authentic nor inauthentic, but performative and intelligible through the ways people 'do' family.[84]

In the early 1990s, Maggie and Gill left teaching altogether and Jo moved out of mainstream education. They attributed these decisions to the introduction of Section 28, continuing sexism and a failure to tackle inequalities in schools. Linda, experiencing considerable 'discomfort', decided to move from an outer to an inner London school in 1989 to find 'somewhere where I will fit in' and people like her who thought that Section 28 was wrong and wanted to do something about it.

The affective atmospheres generated by Section 28 were unevenly felt. For teachers in lesbian relationships, the experience of being openly lesbian and the impact of Section 28 on their felt environments depended on 'where you were, and who you were', with teachers in (inner) London and other metropolitan cities less affected. [85] Sue said:

> So, I was not somebody who was, if you like, persecuted or felt afraid, or felt that I was being silenced, because I was in London. And because I was already a feminist, and I was already an activist. But I was talking to a friend a couple of days ago and she said that she was afraid, she wasn't in London, and she wasn't out. [86]

Here, Sue underlines the importance of context – location, local politics and social networks – in mitigating adverse and hostile atmospheres. In some instances, alternative atmospheres circulated, facilitating forms of resistance.

An atmosphere of solidarity and resistance

Along with hostile affective atmospheres in schools, some interview participants experienced alternative local atmospheres, which fostered a sense of community, mutuality and solidarity and afforded a ground for acting together. Maggie and Sue spoke of the importance of having security and strength in the numbers of LGB staff in their schools and other neighbouring schools in inner London (Hackney). They also mentioned networks of activists, and activism around equalities more generally, and both stressed the significance for them of feminism and socialism. Maggie mentioned 'a lot of activism around all kinds of

things' with which she felt connected and specifically 'the miners' strike and lesbians and gays support [of] the miners and lots of marches'. This, she said, was 'helpful' in coming out in her personal life and feeling supported in what was otherwise 'a very difficult hostile environment'.[87]

Maggie said that Section 28 enraged and disgusted people, including people who were not lesbian and gay, and there were 'some fantastic allies amongst the teachers'. She experienced this as 'energising'. She said, 'I think it was both a difficult time but also it was energising in a sense because Section 28 was so revolting in my view that it angered people. And a lot of people who weren't lesbian and gay were horrified that it was there'. She also mentioned that ILEA had produced 'some great resources' to be used in teaching PSHE, which made it easier to ensure that Section 28 was not 'a gagging order'.[88]

Indeed, throughout the early 1980s, ILEA had been working with 'Black groups, women's groups, community groups and "front-line" teachers' to define a vision of 'equal opportunities' that was not centred on equal access but on 'the more radical stance of equal outcomes'.[89] This was at odds with the policy approach of the Thatcher government, which was based on the ideological assumption that 'market forces' could empower individuals by affording 'choice'.[90] Within ILEA, education was seen as a means of challenging the power of the status quo.[91] According to Kate Reynolds, 'what was unique about ILEA's anti-racist and anti-sexist strategy was its focus. This approach focused on issues of class, gender and "race" in education as part of the wider structures of inequality'.[92]

Sue was a member of various (feminist, lesbian and gay, radical teachers) activist groups and the equalities officer for her school in Hackney, where a working group met regularly to discuss how to implement ILEA's policies. She and activist colleagues were watching closely as the Halsbury Bill was debated in Parliament and reported in the media. She said that the statements made by politicians and journalists were 'so aggressive, pernicious and hateful' that they created 'an atmosphere of fear and doubt' for many but, she said, 'that isn't what happened with us'. She and other activists saw Section 28 as an opportunity to ramp up their work on inequalities and to 'out the injustice and the prejudice and the persecution

that sits behind the statements [that] were being made' and create something 'far more rigorous, and thoughtful, actually'.[93]

> I think we saw an opportunity, certainly in my department, because we were all feminists, we, we found a way of using what was now happening historically, to write a module to use this as an example of social control, and how social control manifests itself. And so it became a topic or theme, a module in itself in an examined piece of work. So, yeah, I mean, quite the reverse for what was intended. [94]

Sue and colleagues used press cuttings and headlines from media coverage related to Section 28' as 'resources for young people to look at, to think about how prejudice is formed, where it comes from, the influence of the media'.[95]

Sue said that Section 28 and the 1986 Education Act had coalesced to create a wave of 'moral panic'. However, there was confusion over what the Section 28 legislation actually meant and who it affected: 'A lot of people thought that it was attacking lesbian and gay teachers and this created an atmosphere of fear – it was actually about curtailing local authorities'. With other activist teachers, she went into neighbouring schools to run workshops to dispel the misapprehension promulgated through the right-wing media that 'you could never talk about homosexuality and family life' and address the concern that some might feel that they needed to *promote heterosexuality* through PSHE teaching in schools.[96]

> What we were saying was, that's not what the legislation says. In fact, what you can do is look at what we mean by family life in its variety of forms. And through that, talk about people who choose or are gay or lesbian, as part of a balanced curriculum.[97]

She and colleagues felt they had a duty to open debate in the classroom about 'the family' and how we live in families in a balanced way. Again, they saw Section 28 as an opportunity and resource to be used in education as part of ongoing work on equality.

Pat, in her role as a deputy headteacher in a special education school in inner London, was responsible for writing school policy on sex education. She too thought that there was confusion around the wording of the legislation and especially the meanings of ‘intentionally promote’ but concluded that ‘promoting’ meant ‘pushing it’ and elevating homosexuality ‘above all other lifestyles’. She decided to ignore Section 28 and emphasised the idea of freedom to ‘choose your sexuality, who you live with, what you do with your life’ and presenting to students the idea of being lesbian or gay as ‘a possibility amongst a whole range of things’, an approach similar to Sue’s.[98]

> But I thought I’m going to blooming well put down what I think we ought to do. And so I did. And so that would be teaching about gay relationships and material about that, you know still those kinds of books, and supporting gay students […]. We were very heavy on any kind of bullying about sexuality as well as we were about race and gender.[99]

While underlining the importance of being able to be gay, Pat particularly emphasised ‘looking after students’ and dealing with bullying. She spoke too of her involvement in equalities work in schools in the 1980s and the importance to her of feminist lesbian groups in coming out, developing a lesbian identity and resisting Section 28.

For Maggie, Sue and Pat, standing up to homophobia was also part of broader activism around equality and education. They stressed the importance of the women’s movement and feminism in their politicisation and activism around Section 28 as well as having strength and security in the numbers of lesbian and gay staff in ILEA schools. For them, networks and solidarities embodied in physical gatherings, small groups and on mass marches and discussion afforded a significant degree of ontological security. Maggie said ‘marches were, lesbian and gay marches, were a big deal for me in the 80s […] it was like a literal, demonstrable show of strength in numbers’ and ‘[I …] would never have missed a march in the 80s because there wasn’t social media […] you had to be there physically to connect and be seen’.[100] Such statements illustrate perhaps how gathering, as an embodied form of action and mobility, may sometimes signify more than can be said.[101]

In contrast, Jo, Gill and Linda spoke of how Section 28 was largely ignored in their (rural and outer London) schools. Linda said that it was 'sort of sad' that when Section 28 was mentioned the dominant view was 'let's just toe the line and not get into trouble, we don't want inspectors coming and all of that' and 'we don't want to fall foul of clause 28'.[102] Pat and Linda also talked about deep concern in their schools over what parents might think and say. Jo, Gill and Linda were isolated and silenced, and Jo especially, as discussed earlier, experienced considerable discomfort and insecurity.

Overall, interview participants evoked a sense of multiple felt environments in tension with each other. Alongside hostile affective atmospheres in schools and beyond, fomenting insecurity, inhibition, self-censorship and isolation, there also existed affective atmospheres that were helpful to others, engendering solidarity, resistance and collective action. And, for some, Section 28 was an opportunity and resource to be used in education as part of ongoing work on tackling inequalities.

Atmosphere and place

Drawing on their experience of working in different schools, most participants depicted school as a place or meaningful location, bounded by the school gates.[103] Most expended considerable energy negotiating this border as they endeavoured to manage separate professional and personal identities. School comprised a number of significant spaces – notably, the classroom, the staffroom, the playground and the passages between them – each embodying a mix of atmospheres, connections, meanings and experiences, which helped to shape a sense of place in school.[104]

The classroom was the site where participants, all enthusiastic and imaginative teachers, felt anxious, constrained and compelled to exercise caution in speaking about sexuality. It was a space that gave rise to other ambivalent feelings: on the one hand, it was lively, creative and full of possibilities and, on the other, it was often fraught, overcrowded, noisy and demanding, lacking adequate resources for teaching and supporting students with diverse needs and intellectual abilities.[105] Maggie mentioned having classes of over thirty students (higher than the average at the time) and described this as 'quite brutal for students'.[106]

Several participants mentioned the effects of cuts to public services on student learning at that time.

The staffroom as a separate space was shaped by relations between the individuals who collected there, its internal micro-geography (mapped out by chairs, their users, tables and kettles) and the broader geographical area in which the school was located. Use (and access to) the staffroom seemed to map out much bigger struggles. For Gill and Jo, the staffroom was persistently discomforting and isolating, as they were not out to other staff. Jo described it as a competitive and sexist space, where her promotion to head of PE and attempts to de-gender PE lessons were resented and derided, and she was mocked for lacking a sense of humour. Pat described the staffroom in her school as smoky and 'very blokey', a place where she felt isolated and lonely, although this changed when a lesbian headteacher was appointed and encouraged other lesbian and gay teachers to join the school. Lee also describes the staffroom as 'a very daunting place', clouded with smoke and gossip, which she often avoided by spending lunchtime in her office with the door closed.[107] Maggie and Sue evoked a more convivial staffroom where the presence of other lesbians, gay men and staunch allies was a source of comfort and support. They also indicated how the staffroom might be re-imagined as a more fluid space embracing a network of staff extending across schools. They worked with staff from neighbouring schools to further an equalities agenda and Sue, in particular, participated in a number of activist groups.

The playground and other areas outside of school buildings were more turbulent and menacing spaces where students might be taunted and bullied and, in a couple instances, staff outed by graffiti daubed on walls.[108] Any attempt to challenge such outings potentially ran the risk of drawing accusations of promoting homosexuality.[109]

All interview participants looked beyond the school gates for comfort, connection and support from others. Jo and Linda found this with other lesbian teachers playing on local hockey fields. Other spaces of openness and comfort included meetings with LGB staff in other schools to discuss resistance to Section 28 and increasing gay and lesbian visibility in the curriculum, marches (against Section 28 and in support of other campaigns) and nightclubs. But these spaces had permeable borders and included an element of risk.

Maggie described meeting students on marches as ‘slightly discombobulating’ and being knocked off balance by hearing ‘Hello miss!’ on a dance floor in a lesbian club. She said ‘it was a significant thing […] it was not easy to be out with students. Obviously, I don’t mean talking inappropriately about my life and so on but just as a matter of course, it would have been tricky’.[110] In addition, going on a march ran the risk of being filmed and/or interviewed and appearing on television, possibly holding a banner saying ‘lesbians unite’ […] ‘was that *promotion*?’ she asked.[111]

The interviews discussed here depict a highly personalised, contested and struggled over sense of place in different school settings in the 1980s from the perspective of some lesbian teachers. They indicate how some teachers who were engaged in advancing an equalities agenda helped to create a culture of acceptance, which was appreciated by some students and parents. Sue said, ‘once you start doing equalities work, some students and parents come to you’.[112] Some parents, especially lesbian parents, might choose a school where they can see there is acceptance of difference. The significance of this work is highlighted by the findings of a survey conducted in 1983 by the London Gay Teenage Group, which led Hugh Warren to conclude that school was a ‘bleak’ place for a lot of young lesbians and gay men.[113] Survey responses indicated that the majority of schools were ‘failing to provide any information about homosexuality that could counteract the negative and stereotypical images that are presented outside of the classroom’ and failing to provide any form of support for young homosexuals.[114] For young people, this augmented ‘feelings of confusion, isolation and guilt, as well as reinforcing the taboo surrounding their sexuality’.[115] Individuals reported that school was a hostile and isolating place, where they were subject to verbal and/or physical abuse and that teachers did not know how to deal with threats and homophobic bullying.[116] Often lesbian and gay teachers feared the consequences of offering support: being outed, subjected to homophobia and accused of promoting homosexuality.

Atmospheres and oral history

Affective atmospheres, I argue, are a vital but elusive element in the micro workings of power.[117] They appear to circulate in particular contexts – sites, networks, bodies, occasions – orienting and affecting subjects unevenly. The construct affective atmosphere therefore

affords an analytical tool for understanding how inequalities are felt.[118] In the oral narratives discussed in this paper, hostile atmospheres contributed to a sense of discomfort, unsettling and undermining some subjects, and gave rise to strong emotions such as fear and anger. These emotions were often experienced as disempowering but, in some instances, also provoked acts of resistance, which were felt to be empowering. Significantly, the construct affective atmosphere illustrates how collective and individual feeling might be linked in subtly producing and maintaining power relations at a micro level. Oral history testimony can elicit detailed descriptions of felt environments and their role in a microphysics of power.[119] However, investigating feelings in the past is a complex task: atmospheres recalled and named are nevertheless indeterminate and hazy;[120] they are inevitably influenced by atmospheres of telling and listening, discourses and lexicons in the recent past and present, and the relationality of the interview.

It is striking that interview participants repeatedly deployed the term hostile environment. In the UK, hostile environment has become a deeply ideological phrase communicating a political stance on immigration articulated by Theresa May (as Home Secretary) and made public in a newspaper interview in 2012, where she heralded the introduction of a 'really hostile environment for illegal migration'.[121] It mobilised once again a discourse of threat to the nation's interests, resources, way of life and identity, from othered figures and scenes, reinforcing a division between those who belong and those who do not, as part of (Conservative) party politics and statecraft. Interview participants' repeated mention of hostile environment indicates both the familiarity this terminology has accrued in everyday contexts and how narrators deploy cultural discourses available to them at a particular historical moment. In this instance, they used hostile environment to name collective affects and critically assess the implications of the policy of a previous conservative administration from a position of otherness, which incorporated feelings of unease, discomfort and unbelonging. Participants' deployment of hostile environment demonstrates how memory interacts with subsequent lived experience and how a particular discursive device can work to other and subordinate while also serving as a rallying point for acting back.

As oral history enquiry invites reflection on and negotiation of relations between present and past, current discourses and narratives are inevitably part of meaning making in

personal accounts. In this project, interview participants tended to locate their lived experience on a path leading from a restrictive past to a more open present, from considerable discomfort to greater comfort, reflecting and contributing to an established narrative of struggle for LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms gradually won. Well aware of current discourse on inequalities and processes of minoritisation, several participants highlighted aspects of a significant history of equalities work in education and their place in it. Indeed, Maggie said that the 1980s were 'fantastic' because of 'all that stuff, all that work on anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-homophobia, I mean it was quite ground-breaking and radical'.[122] In this way, some participants constituted and expressed pride in their identities as active agents working for change through various solidarities around diversity and equality in the 1980s. They alluded to a sense that this history (of feminist and lesbian activism) may not be sufficiently recognised by younger generations.

Cultural, social and political shifts (particularly in attitudes and legislation) and changing emotional and affective economies make some narratives easier to tell and to hear. The liberalisation of attitudes, to an extent, and the repeal of Section 28, as well as the increasing prominence of emotion in thinking and speaking about self and relations with others, have played a part in the production of the narratives discussed here.[123] The relationality of the interview too has variously facilitated and hindered meaning making. I decided to begin this project in 2018 on the thirtieth anniversary of Section 28 passing into law, an occasion for reflection on its origins, impact and energetic opposition. I had been on many of the same marches as my interview participants and was involved in various feminist and lesbian groups during the 1980s, although I had not taught in schools. Fragments of shared experience in turn helped to engender an atmosphere in interviews conducive to exploring aspects of an often-fraught past.

Abrams has suggested that emotions, particularly negative or upsetting emotions, are hard to 'express in retrospect', although the causes of such feeling may be easier to recall.[124] While this proposition potentially diminishes the part feeling can play in accounts of the past, I argue that atmospheres recalled can demonstrate the power of feeling as it animates events, moves subjects and infuses the dialogical relationship between past and present. The participants in my research recalled atmospheres and their effects in the past with great

clarity, communicating intensity and strength of feeling, and indicating how they were moved to the margins or/and to action. In recalling atmospheres, they also recognised and named emergent strong emotions such as fear and anger. Some insisted that feeling in the past continues to provoke feeling in the present: 'I'm still angry about that'.[125] For Jo, carrying a lot of anger in the present invigorated her desire to speak about the past. Strong emotions, simultaneously past and present, were key elements in all participants' narrative construction of self and relationship to their past in interview.

Affective atmosphere is a useful tool for analysing aspects of the micro-workings of power, but it may be limited by its association with particular sites or 'enclosed arrangements'.[126] Further work is needed to relate such enclosures to broader structures and contexts. Here, Raymond Williams' concept 'structure of feeling' may be helpful.[127] In contrast to atmospheres, conceptualised as local and site specific, structures of feeling, Anderson suggests, may be felt across disparate sites and occasions, creating a shared 'affective present'.[128] In relation to Section 28, an exploration of structures of feeling might focus on other contemporary forms of resistance and collective affects as well dominant discourses and associated affects and how these may be differently felt and lived.

Conclusion

This article sought to provide insights into the political and affective consequences of Section 28 from the perspectives of some lesbians working as teachers in the 1980s. Interview participants described a prevailing atmosphere of hostility following the introduction of Section 28. This led to feelings of discomfort and insecurity and specific emotions: fear, anger, hurt, offence, despair, disappointment and grief. At the same time, hostile atmospheres circulated within and beyond school settings alongside alternative local atmospheres which engendered connection, solidarity and resistance, and this made a huge difference for some. Section 28 materialised relations of power that marginalised, subordinated and disempowered some sexual subjects through fear and silencing. The affects generated by Section 28 circulated widely but were unevenly felt. It depended on who you were, gay or straight, and where you were, with teachers in London and other metropolitan cities less affected. Such insights remain highly relevant as ideological and affective traces of Section 28 are evident in more contemporary contexts: for example, in

demonstrations (since 2019) by faith and parent groups across England against plans for a new, inclusive relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) and the introduction in Florida (2022) of an Act banning teachers from discussing sexual orientation or gender identity in class.[129]

As an analytical tool, affective atmosphere can help with understanding how inequalities are felt and, beyond this, possibilities for agency and resistance.[130] In other words, it can help to illuminate aspects of the micro-workings of power in a particular circumstance.[131] Oral history interviews can generate detailed descriptions of felt environments or atmospheres, which enrich understandings of the past, present and a micro-physics of power. However, future analysis needs also to take account of the broader contexts and conditions – political, social, cultural, affective – in which narratives are spoken and heard.

NOTES

1. Local Government Act 1988. Accessed online at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted, 1 June 2018.
2. Kelly Kollman and Matthew Waites, 'United Kingdom: changing political opportunity structures, policy success and continuing challenges for lesbian, gay and bisexual movements', in Manon Treblay, David Paternotte and Carol Johnson (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State: Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship,* Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, pp 181-96, p 190; Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp 90, 111.
3. Stuart Hall, 'The great moving right show', *Marxism Today,* January 1979, p 14.
4. Hall, 1979, p 17; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p 230.
5. Hall, 1979, p 17.
6. Hall, 1979.
7. Ben Anderson, 'Neoliberal affects'*, Progress in Human Geography*, vol 40, no 6, 2015, p 765.
8. Hall, 1979, p 18.
9. Derek Gillard, *Education in England: A History*, 2018. Accessed online at www.educationengland.org.uk/history, 9 December 2022. See Chapter 15: www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter15.html.
10. They reflected an odd mix of neoliberal and neoconservative ideas: for example, parents' freedom to choose schools (neoliberal) and the imposition of a national curriculum (neoconservative) (Gillard, 2018).
11. Gillard, 2018.
12. Carol Jones and Pat Mahoney (eds), *Learning Our Lines: Sexuality and Social Control*, London: The Women's Press, 1989, p xii. Sex education first became established as part of the school curriculum in the 1960s and largely functioned to normalise monogamous heterosexual relationships and marginalise deviations from this norm. See Joe Moran, 'Childhood sexuality and education: the case of Section 28', *Sexualities*, vol 4, no 1, 2001, pp 73-89, p 78; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800,* London: Longman, 1989, p 255; The Newsom Report on Secondary Education, 1963. Accessed online at www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/newsom/newsom1963.html, 20 December 2022.
13. The biological aspects of sex were taught within the science curriculum and social aspects such as contraception, disease and sexual orientation were optional. Moran (2001, p 79) suggests that Section 28 was a

reaction against moves in the 1970s and 1980s by some LEAs to extend teaching about sex to social education and tackle prejudice. See also: Rachel Thompson, 'Unholy alliances: the recent politics of sex education', in Joseph Bristow and Anglia R Wilson (eds), *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993, pp 219-45; *Positive Images* (September 1986), a guide to resources on homosexuality for teachers and librarians in secondary schools, produced by the Relationships and Sexuality Project of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) (Gillard, 2018).
14. Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p 227.
15. Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, '*New Times* revisited: Britain in the 1980s', *Contemporary British History*, vol 31, no 2, 2017, p 147. For example, histories of gender, sexuality, family, race and empire, mental health services, work, the everyday and ordinary, and so on.
16. Martin Loughlin, 'The challenge of municipal socialism', in Martin Loughlin, *Legality and Locality: The Role of Law in Central-Local Government Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; online edition, Oxford Academic, 22 March 2012. Accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198260158.003.0004, 30 September 2022.
17. Sue Sanders and Gill Spraggs, 'Section 28 and education', in Jones and Mahoney, 1989, p 79.
18. Kollman and Waites, 2011, p 189.
19. Kollman and Waites, 2011, pp 189-90. However, not all councils embraced sexual politics. For example, see Daisy Payling, 'City limits: sexual politics and the new urban left in 1980s Sheffield', *Contemporary British History*, vol 31, no 2, 2017, pp 256-73.
20. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 86.
21. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 86.
22. Haringey Vanguard archive. Accessed online at www.hqbh.co.uk, 30 September 2022.
23. Sebastian Buckle, *The Way Out: A History of Homosexuality in Modern Britain,* London: IB Taurus, 2015, pp 103-104. Haringey Labour Party had made promoting positive images of gay men and lesbians along with people with disabilities a key plank in its election manifesto. The *Sun* and *Daily Mail* were especially vigorous in attacking attempts to provide positive images.
24. Buckle, 2015, pp 103-104. ILEA had recommended a book – *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, about a girl living with her father and his male lover – as a teaching aid, although it had never actually been given to students in London (Buckle, 2015, p 104).
25. Buckle, 2015, p 104.
26. Buckle, 2015, p 105.
27. See Brooke, 2011, p 248.
28. Stanley Cohen developed the concept of moral panic when defining and analysing societal reaction to 1960s youth subcultures as a social problem in the UK. Moral panic refers to an exaggerated public fear over the cultural behaviour or morality of a social group, whose perceived deviance threatens dominant societal values. Moral panics are generally fuelled by intense and sensationalist media coverage of a specific social issue. See Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, third edition, London: Routledge, 2002 [1972]. Cohen's concept has been criticised and revised but is still used in sociological and criminological analysis.
29. For the first time, women were explicitly mentioned.
30. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 93. Sanders and Spraggs provide a detailed account of the context in which Section 28 emerged, its formulation and passage through Parliament, and the opposition it attracted.
31. Margaret Thatcher's anti-gay speech. Accessed online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VRRWuryb4k, 12 January 2023. See also Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 94.
32. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 95.
33. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 87; Brooke, 2011, pp 225-54. Loony left was deployed pejoratively in the 1970s and 1980s to describe councils perceived as hard left, such as the Greater London Council.
34. Brooke, 2011, p 237. Brooke documents the relationship of gay rights and Labour Party politics, at a national and local level, between the 1970s and 1990s (Chapter 8). It was only in 1985 that the Labour Party conference first formally adopted gay rights as a policy. See also Payling, 2017.
35. Brooke, 2011, p 237.
36. In fact, the legislation was repealed first in Scotland on 21 June 2000 and then in the rest of the UK on 18 November 2003. For further discussion and a chronology of events leading up to the introduction of Section 28 and its passage through Parliament, see Buckle, 2015; Brooke, 2011; Moran, 2001; Sanders and Spraggs, 1989; Rob Field, 'Love, law, liberty: queer lives and public policy', British Library - LBGTQ Histories, accessed online at

www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/articles/love-law-liberty-queer-lives-and-public-policy, 9 December 2022; Juan Nicholls, 'Growing up in silence - A short history of Section 28', accessed online at www.twentysixdigital.com/blog/growing-up-silence-short-history-section-28, 9 December 2022.

37. The Department of Education confirmed in 1994 that 'Section 28 did not affect schools and did not prevent them from dealing with lesbian and gay issues in sex education' (Moran, 2001, p74); Department of Education, 'Sex Education at School', circular 5/94, 1994.

38. Weeks, 2007, p 95.

39. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 110.

40. Weeks, 2007, p 95.

41. Catherine Lee, 'Fifteen years on: the legacy of Section 28 for LGBT+ teachers in English schools', *Sex Education*, vol 19, no 6, 2019, pp 675-90. Lee conducted a survey to examine the ways in which LGBT+ teachers in England experienced their work environments in 2017-2018, comparing the perceptions of those who experienced Section 28 with those entering the profession after its repeal. She found that those who lived through Section 28 were less likely to be open about their sexuality despite advances in equalities legislation and are still 'deeply affected by their experiences'.

42. As Kollman and Waites observe, they were very different organisations. Stonewall was a lobbying organisation made up of social elites whereas OutRage! was inspired by queer activism and street protest. However, both focussed on 'formal equalities legislation' (Kollman and Waites, 2011, p 190). For Stonewall, see www.stonewall.org.uk/stonewalls-history. Accessed online, 9 December 2022. OutRage! was dissolved in 2011.

43. At the time, Section 28 was widely referred to as Clause 28.

44. Buckle, 2015, p 115. See also Chris Godfrey, 'Section 28 protesters 30 years on: "We were arrested and put in a cell up by Big Ben"', *Guardian*, 27 March 2018. Accessed online at www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/27/section-28-protesters-30-years-on-we-were-arrested-and-put-in-a-cell-up-by-big-ben, 9 December 2022.

45. Sanders and Spraggs, 1989, p 101.

46. For example, see Buckle, 2015; Brooke, 2011; Weeks, 2007; Moran, 2001; Sanders and Spraggs, 1989; Paul Baker, *Outrageous! The Story of Section 28 and Britain's Battle for LGBT Education*, London: Reaktion Books, 2023.

47. Catherine Lee, *Pretended: Schools and Section 28: Historical, Cultural and Personal Perspectives*, Woodbridge: John Catt, 2023.

48. Georgia Oakley (dir), *Blue Jean*, London: Film Constellation, 2022. Released in UK cinemas on 9 February 2023.

49. Michel Foucault (translated by Alan Sheridan), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage, 1977, p 26. Foucault understands power as a strategy rather than a property, something exercised rather than possessed and evident everywhere in the relations between people everywhere and in every relation.

50. Jack R Leff, 'Expanding feminist affective atmospheres', *Emotion, Space and Society*, vol 41, 2021, 100844. Accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2021.100844, 6 June 2022.

51. Ben Anderson, 'Affective atmospheres', *Emotion, Space and Society*, vol 2, no 2, 2009, pp 77-81. Emotion and affect, and the difference between them, have been the focus of extensive scholarship in recent decades. See Jennifer Harding and E Deidre Pribram (eds), *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader,* London and New York: Routledge, 2009; Jennifer Harding and E Deidre Pribram, 'Losing our cool? Following Williams and Grossberg on emotions', *Cultural Studies,* vol 18, no 6, 2004, pp 863-83; Jennifer Harding and E Deidre Pribram,'The power of feeling: locating emotions in culture', *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* vol 5, no 4, 2002, pp 407-26; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002, p 28; Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p 82; Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

52. Anderson, 2009, p 80.

53. Anderson, 2009, p 78.

54. Anderson, 2009, p 80.

55. Anderson, 2015, p 761.

56. Anderson, 2015, p 759. Affect has been understood as a body's capacity to affect and be affected; that is, as the force or intensity of an encounter, involving process, change and possibility. See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988.

57. Deborah Lupton, 'How does health feel? Towards research of the affective atmospheres of digital health', *Digital Health,* vol 3, 2017, pp 1-11, p 1.

58. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010, p 40.
59. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p 10.
60. Ahmed, 2010, p 41.
61. Ahmed, 2010, p 175.
62. Leff, 2021.
63. Ahmed, 2004, pp 147-48.
64. Pseudonyms are used throughout.
65. Interview with Gill; recorded by Jennifer Harding, 24 November 2019.
66. Interview with Maggie; recorded by Jennifer Harding, 2 December 2019. The interview participant used present-day terminology. 'Social and Personal Education' (PSE) was first identified as a cross-curricular part of the National Curriculum in the 1990s. Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) became a non-statutory framework for schools in 2000 and statutory in September 2020 under the Children and Social Work Act, which introduced compulsory relationships education in primary schools and compulsory relationships and sex education in secondary schools. See *Personal and Social Education from 5 to 16*, HMI series: Curriculum Matters, no 14, London: HMSO, 1989. Accessed online at www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hmi-curricmatters/pse.html, 21 December 2022.
67. Interview with Jo; recorded by Jennifer Harding, 15 July 2021.
68. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
69. Interview with Linda; recorded by Jennifer Harding, 10 December 2021.
70. I read aloud the following text: 'Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act (UK) stated that "a local authority shall not a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality, b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship"'. Accessed online at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted, 1 June 2018.
71. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
72. Interview with Gill, 24 November 2019.
73. Interview with Jo, 15 July 2021.
74. Interview with Jo, 15 July 2021.
75. Interview with Gill, 24 November 2019.
76. Lee, 2023, p 89; Gill Clarke, 'Conforming and contesting with (a) difference: how lesbian students and teachers manage their identities', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, vol 6, no 2, 1996, pp 191-209, p 201.
77. Lee, 2023, p 182.
78. Ahmed, 2004, p 148.
79. Leff, 2021, p 4.
80. Lee also describes the many ways in which she had to pretend while working as a lesbian PE teacher: she pretended to live alone, to be a private person (who did not want to talk about her life outside of school), not 'hear homophobic language at school' and 'not to be ambitious or interested in school leadership' (2023, pp 126-27).
81. Susan Reinhold, 'Through the parliamentary looking glass: "real" and "pretend" families in contemporary British politics', *Feminist Review*, vol 48, no 1, 1994, pp 61-79, pp 61, 62.
82. Reinhold, 1994, p 63. Reinhold argued that an idealised concept of normal family life – consisting of husband, wife and children and dependent on strict gender differentiation and subordination – was at odds with actual family life. It had been subject to an ongoing process of change (rather than sudden attack) in relation to the number of children born to unmarried and married women, the numbers of parents in families and marriage and divorce rates. Since the idealised family could not be defined in relation to people's lived experience of family life, it was defined in opposition to homosexuality.
83. Reinhold, 1994, p 75.
84. See David Morgan, 'Locating "family practices"', *Sociological Research Online*, vol 16, no 4, 2011, pp 174-82. Accessed online at https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2535, 3 February 2023; David Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Morgan (p 6) suggests a focus on doing rather than being family 'moves us away from ideas of family as relatively static structures or sets of positions or statuses'.
85. Interview with Sue; recorded by Jennifer Harding, 19 November 2021.
86. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
87. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
88. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019. ILEA was the acronym for the Inner London Education Authority.

89. Kate Reynolds, ‘Maybe it’s because I’m a Londoner? A policy journey through the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority and the introduction of local management of schools in inner London’, PhD thesis, Open University, 1999, p 36. Accessed online at https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.000049aa, 6 June 2022.
90. Reynolds, 1999, p 34.
91. Reynolds, 1999, p 36.
92. Reynolds, 1999, p 36.
93. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
94. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
95. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
96. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
97. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
98. Interview with Pat; recorded by Jennifer Harding, 7 February 2022.
99. Interview with Pat, 7 February 2022.
100. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
101. Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly,* Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2018, p 8.
102. Interview with Linda, 10 December 2021. At the time, Section 28 was also referred to as Clause 28.
103. Tim Cresswell defines place as a space that has been made meaningful, in particular ways, by particular individuals and groups. See Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, second edition, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.
104. John A Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*, Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987. According to Agnew, ‘sense of place’ refers to attachments between people and place.
105. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
106. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019. In 1988 the average size of a class in secondary schools in England was 20.7, with 6.3 per cent of classes having 31 to 35 students. See Department for Education and Employment, ‘Statistics of education: class sizes and pupil teacher ratios in England’, *Statistics Bulletin*, no 12/00, December 2000. Accessed online at https://core.ac.uk/download/4162469.pdf, 9 January 2023. In 2022, the average size of a class in secondary schools in England was 22.3. See gov.uk, ‘Schools, pupils and their characteristics’, academic year 2021/22, 2022. Accessed online at https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics#explore-data-and-files, 9 January 2023.
107. Lee, 2023, p 195.
108. Linda and Sue both reported this in some schools where they worked.
109. Lee, 2023, p 78.
110. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
111. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
112. Interview with Sue, 19 November 2021.
113. Hugh Warren, ‘School’, London: London Gay Teenage Group, 1984, p 18. The London Gay Teenage Group conducted a survey in 1983 to identify the needs of young lesbian and gay people in London and make recommendations for meeting them. The research findings, based on a survey of 416 individuals aged 15-20, were presented and discussed in Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, ‘Something to tell you: the experiences and need of young lesbians and gay men in London’, London: London Gay Teenage Group, 1984.
114. Warren, 1984, p 11.
115. Trenchard and Warren, 1984, p 58.
116. Warren, 1984.
117. Foucault, 1977, pp 26-27.
118. Leff, 2021.
119. Foucault, 1977.
120. Anderson, 2015, p 755.
121. Melanie Griffith and Colin Yeo, ‘The UK’s hostile environment: deputising immigration control’, *Critical Social Policy,* vol 41, no 4, 2021, pp 521-44, p 521. Accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018320980653, 18 March 2022; James Kirkup and Robert Winnett, ‘Theresa May interview: “We’re going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception”’, the *Telegraph*, 25 May 2012. Accessed online at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/theresa-may-interview-going-give-illegal-migrants-really-hostile, 18 March 2022.
122. Interview with Maggie, 2 December 2019.
123. In recent decades, emotion has increasingly come to the fore in academic and cultural imaginations and has become part of a contemporary lexicon for speaking about self and relations with others and producing

narratives of experience. For example, see Lauren Berlant, 'The intimate public sphere', in Harding and Pribram, 2009, pp 280-99.
124. Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, p 88.
125. Interview with Gill, 24 November 2019.
126. Anderson, 2015, p 752.
127. Williams first described structure of feeling as 'the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time' and later as 'social experiences in solution'. See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1965, p 63; Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, p 133.
128. Anderson, 2015, p 31.
129. Lee, 2023, p 235, 240. The Department of Education first introduced plans for RSHE in 2019 and on 1 September teaching RSHE, which includes reference to LGBTQ+ relationships, became a statutory requirement in primary and secondary schools in England. This met with a number of protests, for example, see Donna Ferguson, '"We can't give in": the Birmingham school on the frontline of anti-LBGT protests', *The Guardian*, 26 May 2019. Accessed online at www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/may/26/birmingham-anderton-park-primary-muslim-protests-lgbt-teaching-rights, 9 February 2023.
130. Leff, 2021, p 6.
131. Foucault, 1977.