



**Sexing the Subject: The Politics of Sex Education
in South Australian State Schools 1900-1990**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the politics of sex education in South Australian state schools in the twentieth century. It provides a political history of the debates about making sex education a formal part of the school curriculum. In mapping these debates the thesis provides an explanation of why it was an issue. Central to this explanation is the view that the struggles over sex education involved more than arguments for and against its inclusion in the school curriculum. It is argued that underlying the debates was what is termed in this thesis 'sexing the subject'. That is, the shaping of sexed subjectivities to perpetuate a prevailing gendered social order -- a complex and sometimes contradictory social process to which schools contribute in various ways. Participants in debates over sex education took for granted certain supposed differences between the sexes, positing such differences as facts of nature. These differences were discursively constructed as bio-political 'facts', on the basis of which gendered social relations were constituted and upheld. Although particular arguments about sex education were prompted by diverse interests and objectives, examination of these discourses reveals an underlying common thread. This was the active promotion of gendered heterosexual norms as the most natural of social relations. The thesis demonstrates how such norms permeated the debates and thereby shaped the politics of sex education in twentieth century South Australia.