

# CHAPTER 19

## SEXUALITY, MORALITY AND SOCIETY

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In 1905 Herbert Barraclough, a general practitioner from Auckland, stood before the annual meeting of the New Zealand Medical Association and delivered an address titled 'Human Instincts: Normal and Pathological', outlining his views on 'the sexual instinct' and its relationship to questions of morality.<sup>1</sup> The doctor asserted that the sexual instinct—the 'greatest of all instincts'—incorporated a base animal element and a noble spiritual one. When these were combined in proper order, and controlled by the apparatus of civilised society, the greatest function of human life ensued: motherhood. The desire to be a mother is present in 'every normal woman', Barraclough suggested, but it was thwarted by the practices of contraception and abortion. These twin evils were promulgated by the middle and upper classes in general and the 'New Woman' in particular. Other failures were possible, too. A lack of control by parents over their young charges led to a raft of sexual 'problems' in future years: promiscuity, prostitution, sadism, sodomy and masturbation.

Sexual character, Barraclough argued, differed according to people's ethnicity, class and gender. It was brutish and uncontrolled within 'the lower orders' and non-Western civilisations, but attained its most elevated form of eternal love among the members of 'our own great Aryan race'. The 'masculine element' in sex was strong, brusque, determined and selfish, while the 'feminine' was soft, plastic and devoted. Barraclough thought such gendered qualities were complementary, in an ideal world at any rate, but the perceived reality was less straightforward. Although women rose to greater heights of purity than men could ever hope to, Barraclough argued, they risked falling to even greater depths of sexual depravity.

This chapter explores ideas about sexual propriety in New Zealand between the beginning of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. It indicates that the ideas expressed in Barraclough's speech were hardly idiosyncratic,



and demonstrates that these discourses of criminology, moral judgment and gender difference went on to shape professional and public understandings about sexuality for decades. The chapter also argues that locally articulated ideas about sexuality reflected similar ideas and practices to those in circulation overseas. The wider world informed New Zealanders' sexual beliefs, while local conditions—such as the pace of urbanisation and the development of local political movements—influenced the precise ways in which particular ideas about sexual behaviour took hold here. The local scene, in other words, was something of a node in a global network of discourses and practices.

Why might we study sexual morality specifically? The study of sexuality has grown rapidly in recent decades, and the literature is vast. Some scholars have explored the history and meaning of sexual identities and some the dissemination of sexual advice, while others focus on the patterns and politics of sexual activity in historical and contemporary context. Some examine visual and textual representations; others the gritty realities of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> This chapter contends that a focus on one particular aspect—the professional and popular evaluation of eroticism in New Zealand's recent past—illustrates the centrality of sexuality to everyday debate and citizens' lives. It allows us to see how attitudes have changed in some respects and continue in others, and how various proscriptions and exhortations have been taken up, negotiated and resisted by Antipodeans over a period of (more or less) 100 years. This specific topic also reveals some of the points of connection between New Zealand and the wider world. Sexual 'morality', then, is a vantage point from which we can explore a range of interconnected issues in the historical study of human sexuality.

The tentative inverted commas around the term 'morality' indicate that it cannot be taken for granted. Most scholars of history agree that neither the 'sexual' nor the 'moral' natural facts; that is, neither exist as such outside of social and historical processes. Both come into being as human bodies, sensations and experiences are interpreted and organised within the social meanings and power relations prevalent in a certain place at a certain time.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that people's lives are wholly determined by dominant modes of understanding sexuality and morality, any more than individuals exercise totally free choices about their sexual lives. Instead, the social construction of sexuality and morality is a reflexive process. People negotiate their places in the sexual world as they interact with each other and within the communities of meaning provided by their society.<sup>4</sup> As people weave together a sense of their own sexuality, they also form opinions about which modes of sexual expression they consider more or less 'moral'. Of course, not everybody reaches the same conclusions. Individuals and groups have tended to disagree, sometimes quite vehemently, about how sexual lives should be lived. Sexual morality is a matter of constant negotiation and not infrequent social conflict, and it constitutes an especially powerful field of social debate.

New Zealand scholars have approached the historical evaluation of sexuality in several ways, and three modes of analysis stand out. We might refer to them as the expression/repression approach, the feminist approach and the Foucauldian approach. James Belich and Caroline Daley have explored the extent to which repression and expression underpin New Zealand's sexual history. Belich writes of the 'tight society': one characterised by strong rules and norms and a lack of sexual freedom. This 'great tightening', he argued, took place between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Where repression did take place, its agents were multiple: medicine (Barracrough and his colleagues included), popular attitudes, religion, the law, state institutions and compulsory education. Daley comes at this problem from the other end. She suggests that historians have overemphasised the social restrictions on sexual behaviour and downplayed the possibilities for pleasure in New Zealand's past. Our history, she argues, is one of 'pleasure seekers' as well as 'puritans'.<sup>6</sup> Although these two historians reach different conclusions they ask much the same question: to what degree were New Zealanders sexually inhibited?<sup>7</sup> Belich suggests that large numbers of New Zealanders strictly controlled their sexual desires through much of the century, while Daley documents some of the avenues through which people expressed their sexuality.

In partial contrast, a feminist approach focuses on the ways in which sexuality has been constructed through gender difference. This begins with the assumption that gender—masculinity and femininity—is inextricably intertwined with sexual expression. Feminist scholars point out that gendered inequalities in society at large have long made their way into intimate, private lives.<sup>8</sup> Barbara Brookes traces the debates over power, gender and sexuality, and concludes that the women's movement made some headway in reworking the 'sexual contract' between women and men.<sup>9</sup> Over time, Brookes writes, a growing equality between men and women has made its way from the wider society into the bedroom.<sup>10</sup> Brookes and Bronwyn Dalley have highlighted the state's contradictory stance on gender and sexuality. While women's groups lobbied for and sometimes won legal protection for New Zealand's female citizens, they reveal that the asylums, reformatories and other government institutions controlled women's sexuality in various ways.<sup>11</sup>

A third group of scholars draws its inspiration from the work of Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian. Foucault emphasised the role of knowledge in the construction of sexual subjectivities, and suggested that sexual discourses may be productive as well as proscriptive.<sup>12</sup> Allanah Ryan applies Foucault's insights to the New Zealand context. She explores how the New Zealand state attempted to produce healthy populations through the dissemination of particular knowledges and discourses of public health. From the nineteenth century onwards, Ryan argues, incitements to self-control and self-governance constructed notions of sexual normality. Over time the focus moved from naming and shaming 'dangerous sexualities' to managing 'risk'.<sup>13</sup>



Recent work on the history of male homosexuality adopts elements of this approach. It argues that men in the past actively adapted and reconstituted knowledges about same-sex desire as they built sexual identities for themselves. Homoerotically inclined men pieced together alternative ways of knowing about masculinity, intimacy and eroticism, and in this way they did more than simply resist repression and inequality.<sup>14</sup>

These approaches are not mutually exclusive, and nor does any one of them ever supersede the others.<sup>15</sup> All have their contributions to make and sometimes they overlap; if we treat them as complementary we can study sexuality in all its multifaceted complexity. Throughout our history people have made decisions about how—or whether—to express their sexual desires in particular contexts, and have had to negotiate society's rules. Similarly, bodies and pleasures have been subject to considerable regulation and surveillance over time. Inequalities between men and women have profoundly influenced the sexual landscape, and gendered hierarchies have underpinned the very meaning and expression of the intimate and the erotic. A wide range of knowledges—medical, criminological, literary, religious and populist among them—have also combined to inform and guide people's experiences of and attitudes towards sexuality.

This chapter takes up this interlocking set of approaches and explores notions of sexual morality in New Zealand during the twentieth century. In particular, it focuses on the debates over venereal disease, reproduction, eugenics, sex education, adolescence and homosexuality. As we explore these debates it becomes apparent that ideas endure as well as change. For instance, we still encounter the concern that sexual morality is somehow 'in crisis' and that sexuality is a powerful drive that leads to ruin if not closely monitored. Sometimes—as in the case of eugenic discourse—prevailing reference points seem to disappear, only to resurface at a later date. The chapter also suggests that we can observe both similarities and differences between our own country and others. There are various reasons for this. Many of the specific ideas about sexual morality were imported; Herbert Barraclough, for one, gave voice to a set of discourses about sexuality common across the Western world. Many medical, criminological and religious commentators were immigrants, and New Zealand-born professionals often trained in England. In turn, many of them drew from European studies. The building blocks of Barraclough's address and the mid-century anxieties over 'juvenile delinquency', to give just two examples, were imported and then became enmeshed in specifically national debates.

## SEXUAL ANXIETIES

'Far from being "God's Own Country"', declared the *Truth* newspaper in 1909, New Zealand 'is a Sodom and Gomorrah of the Southern Pacific'.<sup>16</sup> The *Truth* went

on to declare that New Zealand was one of 'the most sinful countries blessed with Christian civilisation'.<sup>17</sup> If they did not realise it already, the many readers of this sanctimonious tabloid would be told that all was not well in paradise. 'Immorality of the grossest kind' ran rampant, the courts' calendars were swollen with cases of sexual crime, and citizens could purchase 'immoral postcards' featuring 'filthy poses' of scantily clad men and women.<sup>18</sup> Not only were moral restraint and propriety under sustained attack, *Truth* argued, but the gender order also had been turned upside down. Naïve young men were led astray by female counterparts to whom 'the mystery and secret of sex are no mystery or secret at all'.<sup>19</sup> No longer the master of 'his' own destiny, the male adolescent had become an 'innocent and ignorant angel' in need of protection from his seducing female contemporaries.<sup>20</sup> In a world where women were supposed to be sexually passive and to desire marriage and motherhood, female sexual assertiveness constituted a serious problem.<sup>21</sup>

The sexual world was a deeply troublesome place, but what could be done? The *Truth* posed as the arbiter of moral decency and offered answers. Unbridled passion and lust must be carefully controlled, its journalists wrote, motherhood should be reaffirmed as 'the most beautiful thing in all the universe' and the young must forswear reading materials likely to inflame their passions.<sup>22</sup> 'Sexual offenders' and those committing 'unnatural acts'—a term that usually meant sodomy but could incorporate rape, prostitution, promiscuity and bestiality—would be dealt with by the moral approbation of the citizenry and the repressive apparatus of the state. As a bully pulpit, albeit a popular and influential one, the *Truth* played an important role in arbitrating the limits of dangerous sexuality and disseminating correct ways of knowing about morality. At the same time—and not without contradiction—its salacious details titillated readers. Sexuality was described as both dirty and exciting.<sup>23</sup>

The law helped to shape public understandings of sexual morality, too, and the state controlled the material aspects of citizens' lives to a certain degree. Several pieces of late-nineteenth-century legislation remained on the statute books into the twentieth century. The Criminal Code Act of 1893 was one. Several clauses prohibited all sexual relations between men and laid down hard labour and flogging as punishments; before 1893 only sodomy was legally proscribed.<sup>24</sup> Over time the Code was amended to increase the age of consent for young women from 14 to 16.<sup>25</sup> In 1898 marital dissolution became more readily available.<sup>26</sup> Incest became illegal in 1900, although other forms of social control—especially the guidance of the church—were probably brought to bear in earlier years.<sup>27</sup>

A number of censorship laws were enacted throughout the late nineteenth century, and the Indecent Publication Act—which left the definition of indecency to judges—was passed in 1910.<sup>28</sup> The 1869 Contagious Diseases Act, which subjected female prostitutes to genital examinations and sometimes imprisonment, remained on the books until 1910, although it was rarely enforced beyond the 1880s.<sup>29</sup> The efforts



of first-wave feminist lobbyists were reflected in some of the law reforms, especially those dealing with divorce and the age of consent.<sup>30</sup> As Barbara Brookes argues, theirs 'were changes written in small print, but they signalled future possibilities'.<sup>31</sup>

Venereal diseases caused a great deal of concern during the early years of the nineteenth century, and the First World War made the anxieties especially acute. The newspapers declared that New Zealand men were at risk of contracting syphilis and other diseases at home and abroad.<sup>32</sup> One doctor declared in 1914 that a third of all men in Wellington were infected with the 'red plague' (or the 'scarlet scourge'), while soldiers posted overseas were said to be in even more danger.<sup>33</sup> Ettie Rout's response to the situation is perhaps the most well known. After a heated debate Rout persuaded the authorities that all New Zealand soldiers embarking on leave would be issued with prophylactic kits containing calomel cream and condoms.<sup>34</sup> In that way, Rout reasoned, soldiers would minimise their chance of infection.

Rout waded into a relatively complex debate, one that nicely illustrates the tensions between different approaches to sexual behaviour. Rout agreed with her critics that abstinence and self-control were desirable in theory, but, she argued, they were not always observed in practice. Male sexuality, she insisted, was impervious to external attempts at restraint, and sooner or later it would find its expression. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) advanced a rather different argument. Rout's plan, its members thought, entrenched the double standard in which men's sexual desires were allowed free rein and women's reputations—and health—suffered. Prostitution, the WCTU insisted, inevitably sacrificed 'somebody's daughter' to male lust.<sup>35</sup> The WCTU feminists took the ideas about sexual self-control advanced by many conservative commentators and combined them with a rather more radical gender analysis. Their approach, like many since, transcends easy categorisation.

Neither the WCTU nor Ettie Rout advanced their arguments in a vacuum. Frank Mort points out that European feminists had been criticising the double standard for some time, and for similar reasons.<sup>36</sup> There were other international linkages, too. Rout drew heavily on European ideas about sexual health and, conversely, her books on the subject sold well in Great Britain.<sup>37</sup> During the First World War her suggestions for combating venereal disease among the troops influenced American army officials as they attempted to deal with the problem among their own men.<sup>38</sup> Rout, who moved to England in 1920, was enmeshed in an ongoing exchange between the local and the global.

## THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION

The eugenic movement was another transfer point between Europe and the Antipodes. Developed by Charles Darwin's cousin Sir Francis Galton, eugenic

philosophy promoted the intelligence and physical strength of a population at the expense of weakness and ‘feeble mindedness’. New Zealanders took up the theory with alacrity. Eugenicists advocated the promotion of fertility among the respectable middle classes, and a close check on childbearing among the sick, the poor and the otherwise ‘uncivilized’.<sup>39</sup>

Middle-class commentators embraced the eugenic philosophy at a time when the birth rate fell steadily.<sup>40</sup> They feared that the wrong types of people were having children. Barraclough and his colleague William Chapple, for instance, worried that ‘savages’ and the ‘unfit’ were reproducing at an alarming rate.<sup>41</sup> In 1922 the report of a government inquiry added that too many female ‘mental defectives’ were giving birth to large numbers of ‘degenerate children’.<sup>42</sup> The eugenic theory of ‘degeneration’ was developed by Benedict Morel, a French physician and another friend of Darwin. Morel argued that men and women of tainted mentality passed their weakened state to their children, and they, in turn, to theirs. This chain of degeneracy, Morel thought, could be set off by alcoholism or syphilis.<sup>43</sup> Ettie Rout adopted this theory, and proposed that a syphilitic taint would manifest itself in the breeding of ‘idiots, imbeciles [and] mental or moral deficient’ who would further muddy the genetic pool.<sup>44</sup> Eugenic concerns drove Rout’s attention to venereal disease as much as did humanitarian ones.

While Truby King’s Plunket Society positively encouraged fertility among the healthy and morally respectable, others suggested negative eugenic sanctions. The most controversial was sterilisation. In 1903 William Chapple advocated the practice, although he noted the need to find a safe and socially acceptable method.<sup>45</sup> Evidently there was none: sterilisation was never taken up with any great enthusiasm,<sup>46</sup> although a handful of ‘sex offenders’ and several adolescent boys from the Burnham Industrial School did undergo ‘desexualisation’ surgery.<sup>47</sup> The other eugenic ‘solution’ was segregation, and large numbers of New Zealanders were committed to residential institutions for the ‘feeble-minded’.<sup>48</sup> Some went to jail. Between 1917 and 1952 most male sex offenders served out their sentences in a special unit at the New Plymouth Prison.<sup>49</sup>

Eugenic philosophy picked up several strands in a wider cultural and sexual politics. First, eugenics reflected nationalistic ideas about New Zealand as a healthy country, a land of milk and honey. As Margaret Tennant writes: ‘The consequences of this decline [in national fitness] were considered especially tragic in the case of New Zealand, a country bountifully endowed by nature with a climate so favourable to health and vigour’.<sup>50</sup> Second, eugenics brought together feminists and women’s groups. Despite their other disagreements, Ettie Rout, the WCTU and the National Council of Women (NCW) all worried about sexual offending, ‘oversexed’ girls and the falling birth rate, and they supported a eugenic approach.<sup>51</sup> Angela Wanhalla argues that the eugenics movement was both empowering and disenfranchising for women. Eugenicists upheld ‘the importance of women’s work for empire’<sup>52</sup>—motherhood especially—but they



also advocated repressive sanctions against women who did not conform. Wanhalla has noted that the voices of 'unfit' women remained silenced.

Eugenic approaches to sexuality were also explicitly racialised. Commentators—the NCW included—worrying that bad breeding and venereal disease would weaken the white races, and sometimes they named racial 'others' as the vectors of degeneration. Soldiers posted overseas were informed that the prostitutes who passed venereal disease on to the Allied forces were the agents of the Hun.<sup>53</sup> The New Zealand news media suggested, too, that senior German politicians were riddled with insanity and took great pleasure in sexually 'degenerate' orgies.<sup>54</sup> Back at home, the *Truth* recoiled with horror as it revealed that fifty or sixty syphilitic women lived with Chinese men in Haining Street in Wellington and received 'paying guests' to whom they transmitted the disease.<sup>55</sup> Some years later it was reported that white women were taken out to the Chinese market gardens near Auckland for the purposes of prostitution.<sup>56</sup> This was known as 'white slavery', and it prompted considerable social anxiety. People were especially disturbed by the practice, Bronwyn Dalley argues, because 'white slavery reversed the racial characteristics of both slave and enslaver'.<sup>57</sup> Not only was white slavery sexually dissolute, but it also reduced white women to the degraded status usually reserved for ethnic minority women.

Such degradation was the antithesis of white motherhood, the exalted outcome of appropriate sexual activity. The symbolism of motherly purity was widespread. Women's organisations argued that the mother symbolised all that was good about womanhood in general and sexuality in particular.<sup>58</sup> In 1928 the *Mirror*, a magazine aimed at middle-class women, reminded its readers of their true calling: 'the bearing of children and filling the world with homes upon which rests the whole of our civilisation'.<sup>59</sup> Eugenic attitudes continued into the 1940s, although their more extreme proclamations wilted in the face of Adolf Hitler's appeals to a pure Aryan race. The new manifestations were phrased more positively. As the sex educator Joan Cochran wrote in 1944, 'children are good for a nation. We cannot have too many children of good stock'.<sup>60</sup>

Motherhood—and its role in securing nationhood—came under threat when abortion and contraception impeded fertility. Many women terminated pregnancies at home with the aid of quinine, knitting needles or crochet hooks, and sometimes they went to private ('backstreet') abortionists who demonstrated varying levels of skill.<sup>61</sup> The rhetoric around abortion was fierce—the *Truth* bemoaned the 'constant stream of human life pouring into the River of Death'<sup>62</sup>—but few of those who procured their own abortions were prosecuted.<sup>63</sup> In 1937 a Committee of Inquiry into the subject, whose findings became known as the *McMillan Report*, concluded that about 20 per cent of all conceptions were terminated. Its members maintained a certain optimism in the face of the statistics, hoping that improved wages and welfare provision under the Labour government would encourage women to pursue their pregnancies.<sup>64</sup>



Like abortion, contraception was seen as a problem by many. Ettie Rout and Plunket opposed contraception on eugenic grounds.<sup>65</sup> Others declared that a refusal to procreate was anti-patriotic, and questioned the motives of those who either refused to start families or curtailed their size. Too many married couples had become ‘selfish’, some commentators suggested, seduced by paid work opportunities and the pleasures offered by an expanding consumer society.<sup>66</sup> There was an older discourse, too; one that insisted that contraception ran against the virtues of self-control. If a baby was not desired then abstinence was the answer. The MacMillan Report, for example, determined that ready access to contraception should not undermine self-restraint in sexual matters.<sup>67</sup> If couples resisted their procreative duty, then they might at least restrain themselves in the bedroom.

Slowly a crack opened between the twin pillars of eugenics and marital abstinence. In 1936 a new voice began to be heard. The Sex Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society, later renamed the Family Planning Association, favoured providing contraception and birth control information, if only to married couples.<sup>68</sup> The broader question of sex within marriage received some discussion during the 1940s, and opinion spanned a fairly wide ideological spectrum. Some thought sex was solely a matter of procreation, while others stressed its pleasurable aspects. At one extreme was Mary Manse, who, under the pseudonym ‘Purity’, complained that double beds incited inappropriate desires between husbands and wives.<sup>69</sup> Joan Cochran and her husband Bruce were at the other end of the scale. They argued that married people should embrace sexual pleasure, and added that this was women’s prerogative as much as it was men’s.<sup>70</sup> New Zealanders were avid readers of Marie Stopes’s famous book *Married Love*, which also argued that marriage should be an equal relationship between partners.<sup>71</sup>

Some voices may have been heard more loudly than others, but the politics of reproduction was multifaceted. For instance, there was an uneasy relationship between the law and public policy on the one hand, and New Zealanders’ practices on the other, as the widespread resort to abortion demonstrated. Ideas about childbearing were deeply gendered, too. Discourses of motherhood shaped the popular debate about the role of women in society. None of this is to say that New Zealanders passively adopted the ideas their culture offered them. Instead, they actively engaged with a number of divergent discourses from which they might formulate their own views—as was evident in Manse’s and Cochran’s writings, as well as elsewhere—and they managed their sexuality as best they could.

## THE ‘CRISIS’ OF ADOLESCENCE

A turn of the century complaint—that adolescents’ loose morals were driving the country to ruin and inverting the gender order—became widespread as the decades



wore on. In 1931 the *Truth* ran the headline ‘Shocking Juvenile Precocity’ and declared that adolescent girls and boys were ‘misconducting themselves’ with each other throughout the country.<sup>72</sup> There was much talk of abandoned moral standards, ‘the sins of modern youth’, ‘juvenile delinquency’ and ‘adolescent immorality’ in venues as diverse as the newspapers, the government’s Social Science Research Bureau and the study materials printed for servicemen during the war.<sup>73</sup> Comics and pulp magazines fuelled adults’ anxieties about their offspring’s morals during the 1940s.<sup>74</sup> *Korero*, a bulletin for New Zealand military personnel, claimed that two million ‘pulp magazines’ arrived in New Zealand each year in the lead-up to the Second World War. These made young people impatient with quieter stories, *Korero* argued, by providing them with ‘hypodermic injections of sex and murder’.<sup>75</sup>

Then in 1954 matters came to a head. Allegations of sexual immorality among Hutt Valley adolescents led to a parliamentary inquiry. Copies of the Mazengarb Report, named after Oswald Mazengarb, the committee’s chair, were posted to most New Zealand households on the eve of the 1954 election. The report told a shocking tale. It alleged that rebellious teenagers participated in ‘milk bar gangs’ and underage ‘orgies’ of heterosexual and homosexual activity. Inappropriate encounters were said to have taken place under the cover of darkness in ‘second-rate Hutt Valley theatres’ and in private homes when parents were out.<sup>76</sup> There was a gender shock, too: Mazengarb alleged that sexually ‘precocious’ girls took the lead in sexual matters and ‘have in many cases corrupted the boys’.<sup>77</sup>

The Mazengarb Report concluded that teenage immorality was ‘a new feature of modern life’,<sup>78</sup> but in some ways little was new about the discourses of ‘juvenile delinquency’. As we have seen, these concerns were expressed at the very beginning of the century. However, the social changes of the postwar years added a new twist. First, an increasing number of women worked outside the home and, it was alleged, many left their adolescent charges to fend for themselves.<sup>79</sup> Second, postwar urbanisation and the rapid expansion of Auckland and the Hutt Valley—where much of the concern was centred—resulted in a concentration of young people in particular urban centres.<sup>80</sup> Third, adolescents’ sexual mores were heavily influenced by the rapidly developing postwar consumer culture. Increasingly sexually explicit American films were screened in New Zealand’s cinemas, and advertising became increasingly subliminal and provocative. Permissive values, the critics fretted, could slide effortlessly into the popular consciousness, and burgeoning wages and materialistic pleasures—cosmetics, comics, records and the radio—posed a thoroughgoing challenge to the credo of self-discipline.<sup>81</sup>

The New Zealand debate was powerfully shaped by international influences. While local critics complained that American films and comics contributed to the sexual depravity of youth, a book written by a German psychiatrist warned of the dangers.

Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* denounced the pulp novel's violence, suggested that Wonder Woman had lesbian tendencies and raised questions about the wholesomeness of Batman's and Robin's relationship.<sup>82</sup> Wertham's book provided ample evidence, if any was needed, that such imports were warping New Zealand teenagers' minds and desires. There were other international linkages, too. The terms 'bodgie' and 'widgie', which referred to rambunctious young men in motorbike leathers and their girlfriends, originated in Australia. One of their chroniclers, A. E. Manning, studied each type on both sides of the Tasman. He could see little difference between the attitudes or the lives of the two research populations.<sup>83</sup>

Not everybody agreed about the extent—or even the existence—of the youth 'problem', just as they took different stances on such issues as prostitution and contraception. Manning was sympathetic to his interviewees, and pointed out that older generations had always accused their offspring of exhibiting their moral laxity.<sup>84</sup> Some social scientists quietly dismissed much of the Mazengarb Report and its assertion that the Hutt Valley seethed with uncontrollable teenage sexuality.<sup>85</sup> David Ausubel suggested that such panics reflected adults' assumptions that young people were inherently hedonistic and amoral, and some years later Keith Sinclair dismissed the very concept of juvenile delinquency as 'a crisis invented by ageing, frustrated newspaper editors'.<sup>86</sup>

If youthful misconduct was a problem, perhaps the solution lay in sex education. Mazengarb and his colleagues did not think so, but during the early decades of the century both religious and non-religious groups saw an opportunity to stress the virtues of chastity and self-control. From 1906 R. H. W. Bligh from the Australasian White Cross League, an organisation modelled on a British counterpart, visited schools and urged sexual purity upon the pupils.<sup>87</sup> Bligh did so with the apparent encouragement of the Auckland Education Board, although the *Truth* accused him of spreading 'purity piffle' and of showing physiological diagrams that made schoolboys faint.<sup>88</sup> Unfazed, the White Cross League continued to instruct adolescent youth about the pitfalls of unrestrained sexuality well into the 1920s. A strand of public opinion supported Bligh and his colleagues, and suggested that sound guidance would help prevent the young from sinking into 'the depths of degradation'.<sup>89</sup> An opposing view held that adolescents might find their curiosities excited by talk about sex, and that instruction in sexual matters would be better managed within the family.<sup>90</sup>

Many sex education pamphlets were produced during the 1940s and 1950s and were intended for use in the home. The government published a few, but doctors and religious writers wrote most of them. These contrasted acceptable forms of sexual expression with the 'aberrations' that all respectable citizens would avoid: illegitimacy, promiscuity, illicit intercourse, abortion, prostitution, homosexuality and masturbation. Some even mentioned voyeurism, bestiality, sadism and masochism.<sup>91</sup>



Such vices were not restricted to certain types of person, and many writers thought that they might ensnare anybody. The Cochrans, for instance, doubted that every person could 'look in his heart and claim to be entirely clean'.<sup>92</sup>

Of all the 'aberrations', masturbation was the most commonly discussed. At the turn of the century many physicians insisted upon its harms, and most claimed to know of cases in which female and male enthusiasts of the practice spiralled into an abyss of incurable mental disturbance.<sup>93</sup> Masturbation was even an officially listed—although not especially frequent—cause of committal to the nation's mental asylums. Doctors and the writers of sex education tracts realised that the problem was not easily overcome. One physician believed that the only really successful cure 'is to be found in matrimony', while a pamphleteer ruefully noted that there was no prospect of the law dealing with 'secret sin'.<sup>94</sup>

When indulged in by girls, masturbation was said to express a 'masculine protest': a subconscious desire for those pleasures and achievements available only to males.<sup>95</sup> Although sex pamphlets written for the guidance of adults referred to masturbation among teenage girls, those aimed directly at young women were reluctant to mention it.<sup>96</sup> Young men were warned off auto-eroticism on the grounds that it weakened their powers of self-restraint and stimulated 'sexual desire in the unmarried',<sup>97</sup> but the topic was deemed unsuitable for discussion with their female companions. Their priority was motherhood, after all, and such a focus could not be diverted by discussions about alternatives to intercourse.

### 'UNNATURAL ACTS'

Homosexuality was frequently referred to in these sex education pamphlets, but in respect to men more often than women. By the 1940s a range of views had come to predominate. Some pamphleteers declared that all men and women passed through a 'homosexual phase' on the way to heterosexuality, or that exceptional circumstances—especially prisons and military camps—gave rise to transgressive desires.<sup>98</sup> Others thought that only a few people were ever involved, and that a distinctive internal condition propelled their wayward longings. One author, for instance, proposed that 'such a predisposition might be wholly physical, possibly having to do with the ductless glands'.<sup>99</sup> The overall tone was surprisingly calm. Authors suggested that a same-sex attraction was undesirable and they mentioned that homosexual activity was illegal among men, but their language was not as condemnatory as we might suppose.<sup>100</sup>

Homosexually inclined men were subject to legal penalties, but policing was sporadic for most of the century. In most cases only the involvement of a minor or

a complaint from another party resulted in arrest, although occasionally constables caught men out in public places. Sodomy was punished more harshly than mutual masturbation or oral sex. Sexual relationships between women had never been criminalised, reputedly because nineteenth-century decision-makers had great difficulty in accepting that women might be sexual together.<sup>101</sup>

Not all members of 'square' society were hostile, and by no means did all homosexual New Zealanders live an isolated existence. Throughout the early decades of the century the larger towns offered informal private networks of like-minded men and women, and those who were sympathetic towards them, and these were often based around theatre or artistic interests. Boarding houses, nurses' hostels, ships, coffee shops and the streets of the inner cities were other spaces where those with same-sex interests could meet friends and sexual partners.<sup>102</sup> By the 1930s exclusively queer networks had begun to develop, and these provided alternative spaces in which to socialise. One Dunedin man, for instance, remembers the country cribs he and his friends used to hire from time to time:

You had to cook on an open fire and we'd spend the weekend there and we'd go tramping over the hills, and fishing in the creek, and it was absolutely wonderful, and you were with people you knew were of your own ilk. [One place] was a railway ganger's house. It was full of rats, but it was just something, it was a getaway. It was really like a valve, that you could let yourself be yourself. We'd get the seaside train back on Sunday at about four o'clock, and then you'd live your normal life again, or your so-called normal life, and you'd look forward to another weekend when you went away.<sup>103</sup>

Many, like this man, saw themselves as leading 'double lives', but at the same time they managed to create liveable spaces for themselves within the fabric of a generally disapproving society. However, things began to change during the 1960s. In 1963 some members of Wellington's new Dorian Society set up a legal subcommittee to challenge the legal situation. The early movement was conservative, though, and appealed for sympathetic understanding for a group whose constituents were said to have an unfortunate sexual condition.<sup>104</sup> Once again international influences played an important part in the New Zealand scene. The relaxation of the British laws in 1967 boosted the morale of the local reformers, while the British campaigners' tactics informed the New Zealanders' political strategies.<sup>105</sup>

Heterosexuality changed, too. 'The Pill' became available during the early 1960s, and ten years later fifty varieties were available.<sup>106</sup> The Family Planning Association, which had seemed so radical during the 1930s (as the Sex Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society), was cautious about changing sexual mores; like the early



homosexual law reformers, it was unwilling to facilitate wholesale social change. Although the popularity of eugenic discourses had waned, ideas about self-restraint remained strong. Alice Bush, the Family Planning Association's President, argued in 1964 that teenagers had to be taught the desirability of chastity. As a consequence, young, unmarried women were not to be provided with contraception. Bush harked back to the concerns of the 1950s. She instructed the unmarried to resist the temptations of modern life, especially the glamorising of sexuality that featured in the media. The newfangled television, she reasoned, only made matters worse.<sup>107</sup>

In 1969 *Thursday*, a new magazine for women, denounced the Family Planning Association's stance. It suggested that 'spinsters are now freely participating in what bachelors have been doing since time began', but that many were plainly not prepared to acknowledge the fact.<sup>108</sup> The following year the Family Planning Association decided that contraception was preferable to extra-nuptial pregnancies, and relaxed its policy.<sup>109</sup> The *Truth* agreed, and lobbied for doctors to follow suit.<sup>110</sup> By 1974 half the nation's women of reproductive age took out prescriptions.<sup>111</sup> As women's control over their own fertility increased they found themselves better able to plan childbearing and paid work opportunities.

The tenor of the debate changed markedly during the 1970s as the new countercultural movements challenged what they perceived to be outmoded and authoritarian sexual mores. Various groups, which involved many young people, demonstrated against the laws governing abortion and homosexuality, challenged prevailing views through the news media and produced their own literature. Not only did the new groups assert the right to express their sexuality, but they also actively produced and disseminated new forms of sexual knowledge. One of the most famous examples of the latter was a New Zealand adaptation of the Danish *Little Red School Book*. Published in 1972 and aimed at high school students, this replicated the strong anti-authoritarianism that had characterised the international student movements of the late 1960s.<sup>112</sup> The book's authors questioned the moral authority of parents and teachers, defended 'militant' gay and lesbian rights groups, and proposed that communes, polygamy and same-sex marriages offered good alternatives to the nuclear family.<sup>113</sup>

Several young people collaborated on another project: *Down Under the Plum Trees*, which was edited by Felicity Tuohy and Michael Murphy and published in 1976. Tuohy and Murphy perceived the need for an alternative literature on sex; one that would address diverse forms of sexual expression. This did not shy away from frank discussions of bodies, and affirmed female sexual desire.<sup>114</sup> Puberty, masturbation, pregnancy and childbirth, sexually transmitted diseases and same-sex relationships were discussed, and, even more shockingly for some, illustrated with line drawings and black and white photographs. (One sex therapist thought

the book resembled ‘the wall of a school lavatory’.)<sup>115</sup> Another collective of young people produced the newspaper *Itch*. They distributed it outside schools around the country, and drew the attention of the police on several occasions.<sup>116</sup> *Itch* railed against sexism, exploitation and the ‘mindless mediocrity’ of adult society. Although the government continued to prevaricate over the provision of sex education for teenagers, young people found ways to create their own alternatives.<sup>117</sup>

As these examples imply, feminist and gay liberation movements played particularly important roles in the counterculture. The Australian feminist Germaine Greer visited in 1972, and her use of the words ‘fuck’ and ‘bullshit’ in public caused a stir. Suddenly, writes Barbara Brookes, ‘feminism was nationally identified with rebellion’.<sup>118</sup> In the years following Greer’s visit, local feminists formulated a strong critique of gender relations and sexual roles. Sue Kedgley’s and Sharon Cederman’s book *Sexist Society*, for example, argued that conventional masculine and feminine roles were ‘straightjackets’, and marriage a ‘prison’ for men and women alike. They concluded that most New Zealand citizens were ‘brainwashed’ by ‘society’s conservative values’.<sup>119</sup> During the 1960s the National Council of Women pleaded for moral rectitude in sexual matters, but by the 1970s a more revolutionary critique of the sexual order challenged that stance.<sup>120</sup>

Feminist organising around issues of sexuality drew upon two strands of thought. The first rejected the imposition of a code of silence on sexual matters, the implicit notion that women had no need for or right to sexual pleasure, and assumptions that sexuality was a topic that ‘nice girls’ did not discuss.<sup>121</sup> Instead, the importance of sexual pleasure for all partners was stressed and frank discussions of sexual experiences were encouraged. Feminist writers shared ground with such magazines as *Forum* and *Thursday*. These opposed moves to sweep sexuality under the carpet, and declared that New Zealand society should no longer be ‘puritanical’ and ‘prudish’.<sup>122</sup>

Felicity Tuohy ventured into schools to talk with students about ‘women’s liberation’,<sup>123</sup> and in so doing she picked up the second strand of feminist thinking on sexuality. Personal lives, Tuohy and others argued, had important political ramifications. This analysis was summed up in the phrase ‘the personal is political’, and sexual equality was the primary goal. Representations were important sites of contestation. During the 1960s more and more advertisers embodied women as ornamental but unintelligent, and by the 1970s the university capping magazines were not alone in portraying women as the passive, near scantily clad objects of men’s desires. One of the first feminist publications, *Up from Under*, took to task ‘sexist advertising’ and the use of ‘sexy women’ to sell products. Such imagery was degrading to women, its writers argued, and hampered the attainment of sexual equality.<sup>124</sup> Private lives came in for attention, too, and some heterosexual couples worked with feminist ideas in order to create more sexually egalitarian relationships.<sup>125</sup>



Feminist politics influenced those working in Gay Liberation, which burst into life in 1972, and drew further inspiration from the similar movement in the USA and Europe.<sup>126</sup> This new approach challenged the accommodationist politics of the earlier law reform movement. It shared with Marxism and feminism a struggle for widespread social change: ‘oppression’ was the problem and ‘liberation’ the solution. As some activists wrote, ‘we are declaring war—we are fighting for a world worth living in’.<sup>127</sup> Although law reform was high on the agenda, this was not so much a plea for society’s consideration as an expressed desire to restructure society. Oppressive gender roles would be abolished, activists hoped; families would become more diverse, and the education system more inclusive and egalitarian. During the 1970s numerous social and political groupings sprang up in the larger centres and some of the smaller provincial cities. Among them were Sisters for Homophile Equality and the National Gay Rights Coalition, the latter an umbrella grouping that represented many smaller organisations.

The new social movements of the 1970s spoke stridently in the name of sexual freedom and equality, but they met an opposing force amassing on the conservative side of the debate. Patricia Bartlett’s Society for the Promotion of Community Standards was established in 1970 and vowed to oppose sexually explicit books, school-based sex education, public displays of nudity and ‘sexual perversions’ in general.<sup>128</sup>

Other Christian groups were founded during the decade. The Family Rights Association appeared in 1973, and its members argued that families were under attack by ‘permissive elements’.<sup>129</sup> In 1974 the Concerned Parents’ Association and Feminists (later Women) for Life were established, while the Council of Organisations for Moral Education was set up four years later.<sup>130</sup> Often these lobbyists played down the Christian dimensions of their views, and couched their arguments about ‘immorality’ in secular language. There was nothing especially new in this, for explicit religious arguments had been sidelined in favour of exhortations to self-control throughout the century. The most long-lived of the conservative groups was the Society for the Promotion of the Unborn Child, established in 1970 in order to oppose abortion.<sup>131</sup> Reproduction had long been a key focus in debates over sexuality and morality, as we have seen, but its significance was finally reinterpreted after many decades in which eugenic concerns dominated. Where feminists saw a matter of bodily self-determination, the opponents of abortion spoke of the foetus’ ‘right to life’.<sup>132</sup> The latter was a new and novel discourse, and one that owed more to liberal concepts of ‘rights’ than eugenic concerns about moral ‘fitness’.

From the early 1970s feminist groups referred women to the more competent private abortionists or to services in Australia. Such journeys continued after a law change in 1977 that tightened women’s access to abortion services. This was the result, at least in part, of successful conservative lobbying, but ultimately the outcome was paradoxical. Although the new law was more restrictive than the old



one, it was soon observed liberally. By 1980 abortion services became much more readily available, and the mercy dashes across the Tasman ceased.<sup>133</sup>

The conservative organisations had a measure of success in another area, though: they managed to stall proposals for comprehensive sex education in schools. The *Ross Report* and the *Jobnson Report*, both initiated by Norman Kirk's Labour government, supported sex education. However, the strength of conservative organising and an unsympathetic minister of education in the subsequent National administration prevented their recommendations from proceeding.<sup>134</sup> In earlier decades many Christian commentators were happy for the young to be taught about 'sex hygiene', as they called it. By the 1970s, however, they feared that 'permissiveness' would be promoted by liberal teachers at the behest of feminists and gay liberationists.<sup>135</sup> Once again, the production and circulation of sexual knowledge was at issue, and it proved highly contentious.

Conservative lobbyists were less successful in their campaign against the Homosexual Law Reform Bill in 1985, although the vehemence of the debate remains the most memorable aspect of that particular moment in history.<sup>136</sup> The Labour MP Fran Wilde sponsored the two-part Bill. The first part proposed to decriminalise sex between males over the age of 16, while the second was meant to outlaw discrimination against gay and lesbian citizens. After an intense debate and some strategic voting the first section of the Bill passed, but the second did not.<sup>137</sup> The debates around homosexual law reform featured some old but still potent symbols. Nationalistic fervour featured when a petition against the Bill was presented on the steps of Parliament. Opponents formed a guard of honour in front of the New Zealand flag, wore sashes inscribed 'For God, Country and Family' and sang the national anthem.<sup>138</sup> This time religious rhetoric was used quite openly, a fact some attributed to the influence of 'moral missionaries'—American tacticians brought in by local religious groups.<sup>139</sup> The Bill's detractors argued that reform would further marginalise the role of Christianity in a rapidly secularising society, and some insisted that the reforms would undermine the foundations of civilisation itself.<sup>140</sup> A eugenic undertone reappeared in suggestions that local youths would be defiled by gay tourists pouring across the borders. Family life and New Zealand nationhood, it was suggested, would be further weakened when married men discovered the pleasures of same-sex liaisons and deserted their wives and children.

Pro-Bill activists and some parliamentarians responded angrily to the symbolism of anti-Bill campaigners, insisting that God, family and the national anthem were not the exclusive preserve of the reform's opponents.<sup>141</sup> Overall, though, supporters of reform tended not to appeal to representations of nation and family. Instead, they argued in liberal terms, and repeatedly referred to individual human rights.<sup>142</sup> The revolutionary account of social change that characterised the discourse of 1970s Gay Liberation had disappeared. There were no openly gay and lesbian voices in



Parliament, and this influenced the tenor of the debate, too. As Christopher Burke notes, the fact that the Bill's subjects had no voice in the debating chamber meant they were constantly positioned as the sexual 'others' whose fate lay in the hands of heterosexual lawmakers.<sup>143</sup>

The arrival of AIDS in New Zealand served to heighten the symbolism circulating within the homosexual law reform debate. AIDS, a cluster of opportunistic infections caused by the HIV virus, was as much an epidemic of meaning as it was a virological phenomenon.<sup>144</sup> Sander Gilman, writing in an international context, argues that representations of AIDS echoed the complex mesh of symbols that had characterised syphilis in much earlier decades.<sup>145</sup> Both invoked death and decay—and, implicitly, racial degeneration—while the association of AIDS with male homosexuality further fuelled social concern. As the impacts of AIDS on other social groups became clear, distinctions were made between 'innocent' or 'guilty' patients. The young haemophiliac came to exemplify the former; the sexually active gay man the latter.<sup>146</sup> By the mid 1990s the disease was associated with immigrants, and some called for the tightening of border control in response to a few high-profile cases of heterosexual transmission involving African men and Pakeha women.<sup>147</sup>

While the anti-discrimination provisions of Fran Wilde's Homosexual Law Reform Bill were defeated, the National's Katherine O'Regan sponsored an amendment to the Human Rights Act in 1993. O'Regan added sexual orientation to the list of grounds on which discrimination would be prohibited. Supporters of the human rights amendments argued that they would foster a new openness and assist with AIDS prevention initiatives. The new law would enhance self-esteem, they argued, and encourage New Zealanders to embrace safer sex practices and better manage sexual risk. At a time when AIDS remained in the headlines, supporters of reform combined an appeal to both public health and, once again, the liberal language of human rights.<sup>148</sup>

The legislation's opponents took up two types of discourse. The first, the notion that homosexuality was 'immoral' and a threat to civilisation, was very old. The second was much newer. Any legal protection, ran this argument, would provide gay men and lesbians with 'special treatment' (or 'special rights') at the cost of other heterosexuals' freedom to express their discomfort with gay and lesbian people. As I have argued elsewhere, this argument was imported directly from the USA.<sup>149</sup> The New Zealand law change protected heterosexual as well as homosexual citizens, and in this sense the imported discourse of 'special rights', with its implication that gay and lesbian New Zealanders would receive legal protections unavailable to their heterosexual counterparts, did not quite ring true. Nevertheless, the discourse of 'special rights' held a certain rhetorical impact.

The idea that individuals differed markedly in their sexual—and political—interests took other forms during these decades. These new debates were guided by

neo-liberalism, a doctrine first introduced by the Labour government of the 1980s. Its adherents attempted to dispel the idea that the state moderated the needs and interests of the community and its members, and sought to replace it with a vision of separate competing individuals. Where people engaged with governments it was no longer as citizens but as taxpayers, each of whom had a vested interest in contributing as little tax as possible to any collective endeavour.<sup>150</sup>

Neo-liberalism sometimes dovetailed with older eugenic ideas. While the ‘mentally unfit’ category no longer existed, there was a new group: those mired in ‘welfare dependency’.<sup>151</sup> These New Zealanders—some policy-makers and commentators insisted—were an imposition on the taxpayer and the wrong people to be having and raising babies. As Kim Johnstone and Ian Pool observed at the time, ‘moral and eugenics questions are interwoven with wider public policy issues relating to the fiscal burden of the welfare state’.<sup>152</sup>

Some commentators argued that the new sexually disreputable group—those in receipt of state aid—should be segregated from the rest of society. *From Welfare State to Civil Society*, written by visiting British academic David Green in 1996 at the behest of the neo-liberal Business Roundtable, echoed eugenic discourse. Green argued that fertility should be channelled into nuclear families, and that ‘never married mothers’ posed a social problem. They ought to be segregated in supervised accommodation, he suggested, in order to ‘bring out the best in mother and baby’.<sup>153</sup> Green’s suggestions echoed the NCW’s much older insistence that the segregation of single, ‘promiscuous’ women would stop any further sexual activity,<sup>154</sup> and he fused this with a neo-liberal exhortation: New Zealanders would be sent the message that women without access to a man’s market income should not have children.

A new set of legislative proposals was debated early in the new century and these, too, were framed in terms of sexual morality. In 2003 the Prostitution Law Reform Act made it legal to offer sex for money in a public place. Men’s payments to women for sex had never been illegal, a double standard that feminists had long criticised. Debate over the Bill generated several different sorts of response. Many saw the double standard, where brothel owners and sex workers were criminalised and their clients were not, as ‘Victorian hypocrisy’. Some feminist organisations supported the Bill, perceiving a chance to address the double standard, improve health and safety provisions for sex workers, and manage risk. Others, though, were reluctant to endorse what Sandra Coney described as ‘a form of repeated, sequential slavery’.<sup>155</sup> Some conservative organisations argued in not dissimilar terms. The Maxim Institute think tank, for instance, suggested that sex work was coercive and inherently harmful to women, and added that legalisation ‘sent the wrong message’ to society.<sup>156</sup> This was a complex debate, one in which various themes interwove continuously: Victorianism, gender inequality, harm and risk.



The lines were drawn a little more clearly the following year when New Zealanders debated a Bill that set up a framework for civil unions. Supporters of these marriage-like arrangements for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples embraced a new model of legal recognition that would provide for diverse types of intimate relationships. This new approach, they suggested, recognised the 'rights' of gay and lesbian citizens and provided an alternative to those heterosexual couples uneasy with the religious connotations of marriage.<sup>157</sup> Conservative commentators focused almost entirely on the question of same-sex unions, and foresaw weakening moral codes and declining community standards.<sup>158</sup> Some worried about 'political correctness' and derided the initiative as a form of 'social engineering' and government 'pink think'.<sup>159</sup>

Spurred on by the civil unions legislation, members of the evangelical Destiny Church took to the streets of Auckland and Wellington to protest the changing moral landscape. Their marches generated a range of responses. Some observers were spooked by the column of black-shirted men, punching their fists in the air and shouting 'Enough is Enough!', while others saw 'a group of Christians that looks like an army'.<sup>160</sup> Counter marchers, meanwhile, decked themselves out in brighter colours and flew the rainbow flag for a different kind of sexual future. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, sexuality, and its place in society, generated just as much debate as it had a hundred years earlier.

## CHANGING DISCOURSES OF MORALITY

Much changed in New Zealanders' lives between 1900 and the early years of the new millennium. For one thing, the discourses of morality varied considerably. The language of sexual 'degeneracy' and calls for the lash, to give two examples, are rarely heard today. The spaces of engagement have also changed, as new technologies provided new sites of debate and sexual expression. Herbert Barraclough addressed a professional conference and similar comments to his were reproduced in the newspapers, but as time went on these forums would be augmented by the cinema, the radio and the television. The latter brought animated—and increasingly explicit—portrayals of intimate life into New Zealanders' living rooms. During the 1990s the internet offered new options. Web-based pornography flourished, and newsgroups and web logs ('blogs') allowed geographically scattered populations to 'meet'—sometimes online and at other times face to face—and further their diverse sexual interests. Debates on relevant legislation, and discussions about sexual mores in general, could be posted immediately and reach a wide audience, while internet dating brought New Zealanders together.

Over time New Zealanders came to adhere to more individualistic ways of understanding sexuality, and perhaps this represents the most thoroughgoing change across our period. Appeals to self-development and self-fulfilment slowly supplanted the demand that individual be subordinated to notions of the common good. Whether they sought to uphold 'civilisation', 'purity' or 'motherhood', many early-twentieth-century commentators insisted that people must channel their sexuality in a common direction. By the 1930s, though, a more extensive and influential consumer culture, changing work patterns and the 'emancipation' of women had begun to undermine such demands. During the 1950s married women's increasing participation in paid work, and their perceived abandonment of their domestic tasks combined with rapid urbanisation, fuelled anxieties about their children's sexuality. Twenty years later new social movements sought to make more room for pluralistic sexualities. In the era of hippies and flower power, sexual authoritarianism was to be challenged rather than obeyed. These movements asserted a new set of goals: human rights for sexual minorities, and equality between men and women. Those of a more conservative disposition remained suspicious of arguments for individuals' 'rights', preferring to uphold moral 'standards', and they said so forcefully.

While some changes were pronounced and permanent, other aspects of the morality debates waxed and waned across the period. For example, cries of 'juvenile delinquency' issued from the turn of the twentieth century, echoed loudly throughout the 1950s and still find an audience today. In another example, the interventions of the neo-liberal 'New Right' during the 1990s illustrate that the new focus on individual prerogatives could still overlap with older notions of moral restraint. While the New Zealand 'New Right' was less socially conservative than its British and American counterparts, its local spokespeople hinted that the individual 'taxpayer' had an interest in restraining the sexuality of those whose procreation challenged the new and dichotomised contract between 'taxpayers' and 'welfare recipients'.<sup>161</sup> Notions of economic purity influenced popular and professional understandings about sexual morality. Those on its vanguard insisted that those without a market income had to exercise good old-fashioned self-control. It is worth noting that although elements of this discourse are relatively new, they did not fully replace what went before. Some keenly feel that ours is a society in moral decline, and they might even concur with *Truth's* early claim about a 'Sodom in the South Pacific'.

As the debate over prostitution law reform clearly demonstrates—and there are other examples—the field of opinion is complex. While the newspapers report that some young people eagerly embrace sexual expression, they note that others feel pressured by a society where sex is commodified and, at times, seems to be compulsory.<sup>162</sup> Not everybody welcomes the T-shirts for babies that read 'Future Porn Star', and feminist critics have revealed the confounded character



of the commercialised sexual terrain.<sup>163</sup> Some New Zealanders have attached the emancipatory discourse of sexual self-determination to elective celibacy, while others eagerly embrace a sexually active life. Perhaps the greatest irony lies in the suggestion that while our society might 'flaunt' sex, many New Zealanders remain 'squeamish' when it comes time to talk openly about the topic.<sup>164</sup> What appears to be freely expressed in one moment is relegated to the realm of the unspeakable in the next. Still New Zealanders remain uneasy about sexuality.



We can step back from these contradictions by thinking about the different analytical approaches that pertain to sexuality. In recent times New Zealand scholars have conceptualised questions of sexuality in at least three ways. Each of these three—the repression/expression approach, the feminist analysis of gender inequality and a Foucauldian focus on the construction of sexual knowledge—help to account for the terrain of sexual morality since 1900. It becomes clear that some expressions of sexuality, notably contraception, homosexuality and the erotic lives of those deemed socially 'unfit', have been constrained over our period. Popular proscriptions have been just as important as the laws on the statute books, and sometimes more so. Gender inequality, too, has underpinned many sexual interactions. Feminist writers, as both analysts and advocates, have addressed this aspect of New Zealanders' sexual experiences since the turn of the twentieth century. Last, but by no means least, a wide range of knowledges about sexuality has characterised the period. Both dominant and oppositional ways of knowing about sex influence our sexual experiences. Only by examining all of these aspects of the debate can we explore the multifaceted character of New Zealanders' sexual history.

It becomes clear, too, that our own sexual spaces—the bedrooms, streets and news media of a small society—have always been informed by what has gone on overseas. Many of the prevailing ideas, from Barraclough's views about normal and pathological sexual instincts to the liberationist vibe of the 1970s, have been imported and reformulated under local conditions. Sexological, religious and social movement literature have all fuelled local debates and have helped New Zealanders understand their own lives. Teenagers' involvement in sexualised consumer cultures cut across geographical borders, as did developing homosexual subcultures. By the early twenty-first century, television and the internet has further eroded national boundaries. As a space of debate and transformation, New Zealand has taken up a place in a much larger sexual world.