

# Sex instruction and the construction of homosexuality in New Zealand, 1920–1965

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Historical analysis of sex education materials, as well as of the debates that surround them, can shed light upon the construction of sexuality in particular contexts. This article examines some of these materials and debates as a window into the construction of ‘homosexuality’ and ‘the homosexual’ in mid-twentieth century New Zealand. It is argued that ‘the homosexual’ as a category was not clearly demarcated during this period, and that ‘heterosexuality’ *per se* did not appear in debates over ‘sex instruction’ until the 1950s. Earlier notions of self-control were reasserted during the post-war moral panic over young people’s sexuality, and homosexuality was sometimes regarded as a symptom of social rebellion and thus a universal potential as much as a characteristic of a fixed sexual minority. Contemporary psychology and responses to the war blurred the boundaries between ‘homosexuality’ and ‘normal’ sexuality, ensuring the ongoing instability of what has more recently been termed the ‘homo/hetero binary’.

## **Introduction: sex instruction, sexuality and social control**

The domain of ontology is a regulated domain: what gets produced inside of it, what gets excluded from it in order for the domain to be constituted is itself an effect of power. (Butler, 1998, p. 280)

Debates over sex education, variously known as ‘sex instruction’ or the teaching of ‘sex hygiene’,<sup>1</sup> constitute one site or context where we might investigate how the ontologies of sexuality have been historically constructed and regulated. More specifically, I am interested in New Zealand during the middle decades of the twentieth century, and the ways in which ‘homosexuality’ and ‘the homosexual’ were discursively constituted and, simultaneously, excluded from the realm of respectable sexuality. That same-sex sexuality was invoked at all in sex instruction literature and

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debates at such a time strikes many as surprising,<sup>2</sup> but in fact it proved crucial to the ways that normative sexuality was itself constructed.

We might assume that sex education is a recent phenomenon, emerging during the 1970s with the support of those of a 'liberal' persuasion. However, from the late nineteenth century some New Zealanders who held eugenicist or conservative Christian views hoped that sex instruction would inculcate self-control and moral respectability among the young (Allen, 1995; Smyth, 2000). Some thought sex instruction should be taken directly to the classroom, and as early as 1906 R. H. W. Bligh from the Australasian White Cross League<sup>3</sup> was visiting schools with the encouragement of the Auckland Education Board. Bligh lectured boys on the evils of masturbation and the purity of mind required to resist it (McGeorge, 1977, p. 135). By the 1920s several authorities supported direct sex instruction for school children, while others advocated educating parents so they might discharge their child-raising duties more effectively. In 1943 one religious pamphlet advocated lectures for young factory workers as well as classes for parents run through the YMCA, the YWCA or the Workers' Education Association (Cochran & Cochran, 1943, p. 22). Not everybody supported sex education, however, and some worried it might arouse curiosity or emotions unable to be comprehended or controlled by young people (McGeorge, 1977, p. 140; Robertson, 2001, p. 207).

The State took an active interest in the relationship between sex instruction and morality. In 1921 the Director-General of Health reported to Parliament that '[s]ex education is ... primarily a moral matter ... fostering in young people a wholesome, frank and dignified attitude to questions of sex' (Department of Health, 1921, p. 31). A year later a committee investigating venereal disease blamed the absence of 'proper training and instruction of the young' for 'a great deal of the evil that has been shown to exist', and argued that parents should be given brochures to help them to instil in their children 'a sane and normal outlook on sex matters' (Committee of the Board of Health, 1922, pp. 12–13). The Committee concluded by 'stress[ing] in the strongest terms the duty of moral self-control' (p. 21). Two decades later, self-control in matters of sexuality remained a concern for the Government when it re-examined the post-primary school curriculum (*New Zealand Listener*, 1944, p. 13).

In 1924 the New Zealand chapter of the White Cross League replicated officials' concern with self-control, and lay the blame for declining morality with specific degenerate individuals. The League argued that 'instruction in sex hygiene' would serve to:

indicate the pitfalls to adolescent youth[,] to cleanse in course of time the 'social weal' of all its many degenerates and perverts, many of whom have sunk into the depths of degradation through sheer ignorance and lack of proper teaching. (Martyn-Renner, 1924, p. 10)

According to the White Cross League, sex instruction had a role to play in demarcating those forms of sexuality deemed socially normative. While the precise characteristics of the 'degenerates' and 'perverts' were not spelled out, the writer suggested the existence of certain persons who threatened to undermine desirable socio-sexual norms.

In order to explore further the relationships between individuals and sexuality as a whole, I take as a starting point Michel Foucault's *The history of sexuality* (1990). Foucault famously contended that late nineteenth century sexology invoked 'the homosexual' as a distinct personage, and with this in mind I chart the construction of 'the homosexual' within debates over young people and 'sex instruction' in New Zealand between 1920 and 1965. What becomes apparent is not a clear-cut and enduring invention of 'the homosexual' as a specific identity category in the late nineteenth century. Instead, what we observe is a series of overlapping and competing discourses about homosexuality that changed slowly and unevenly throughout the twentieth century. In addition, 'the heterosexual' did not emerge in New Zealand in the context of sex instruction before the 1950s.

In the second part of the article I explore in greater depth the ways in which debates around sex instruction, homosexuality and young people were inextricably intertwined with social changes and notions of social order more broadly. The Second World War was significant, representing as it did heightened tensions in gender arrangements. Women became involved in essential industries and used this as the basis for new claims for involvement in the public sphere, while events on foreign battlefields exemplified a homosocial masculinity which had its own ambiguities and tensions. In the years that followed, social anxieties around youth, sexuality and gender were expressed through a set of interconnected discourses in which 'juvenile delinquency', homosexuality, 'permissiveness' and even the enervating influences of a benevolent welfare state were all constructed as interlinked social problems.

### **Category questions**

Of central importance are the ways in which the materials produced for the purposes of sex instruction, as well as the surrounding debates, were implicated in the construction of 'the homosexual' as an identifiable type of person. When and how was 'the homosexual' produced as a discernible object of knowledge?

Foucault contended that the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of 'the homosexual' as a particular type of personage ('a species') within the new psycho-medical institutions of sexology (Foucault, 1990; for a recent discussion see Halperin, 2002). This 'homosexual' was characterised by 'a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul', and replaced earlier understandings in which sexual activity between those of the same sex denoted a behaviour possible amongst a broader range of persons.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the emergent social power of medicine and psychiatry played a significant role in constituting the figure of 'the homosexual' who came to possess a case history and 'a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology' (Foucault, 1990, p. 43).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has subsequently taken Foucault's analysis of this historical rupture as a starting point for her own theorising. She writes of the popularisation of the term 'homosexual' in the last third of the nineteenth century, and suggests that the turn of the twentieth century heralded a new 'world-mapping'

according to which everybody was ‘now considered necessarily assignable ... to a homo- or hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity’ (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 2).

Like Foucault, Sedgwick is interested in examining how the complexities of sexual desire, behaviour and identity came to be institutionally enshrined in the homo/heterosexual binary, and how this binary garnered popular purchase. She usefully reformulates Foucault’s distinction between ‘the homosexual’ as a personage, and the less individual-specific forms of sexuality that preceded it, as a distinction between ‘minoritising’ and ‘universalising’ views. The ‘minoritising’ view concerns itself with ‘a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority’, while the ‘universalising’ view regards sexuality in terms of universal potentials and socially contingent, open and contested sexual categories (Sedgwick, 1994, pp. 1, 83–85). Sedgwick proposes that the minoritising view has grown in popular appeal since the nineteenth century, although the universalising view still holds some sway today (for example, in the idea that contemporary masculinist culture relies upon a phobic rejection of its own homoerotic possibilities) (p. 85).

As Sedgwick’s discussion implies, sexuality is laden with meaning, and as social subjects we attempt to account for particular sexual commitments in ourselves and others (Plummer, 2001). This has given rise to a widespread interest in the aetiologies (‘causes’) of these commitments. We might, however, understand searches for aetiologies as the effects of historically contingent processes which imbue them with deep symbolic significance (D’Emilio, 2002, Ch. 10; Rahman, 2000, pp. 55–56). We can then explore the meanings granted to aetiologies and investigate their status as cultural products and their role in structuring understandings about sexuality more widely.

In suggesting the historicising of aetiological questions I affirm Foucault’s fundamental insight that the category of ‘the homosexual’, as we currently understand it, is a result of social and historical processes.<sup>5</sup> However, I would question the reach and pervasiveness of the ‘binarized calculus of homo- or heterosexuality’ at any time before 1965, within the context of sex instruction at least.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of this context suggests that the available categorisations of sexual personages during the twentieth century were not as tidy as Foucault’s work might lead us to believe. What we see in the discourses of medicine, psychiatry, education and religion in this period is not a binary with clear demarcations between hetero- and homosexuality, but something rather more complex.

Matt Wilcox (2001) has recently argued that at the turn of the twentieth century New Zealand’s popular press offered a range of intermingling constructions of gender and sexuality that co-existed in sometimes fluid ways. ‘The homosexual’ as a specific personage was not yet apparent; tropes of ‘lust and luxury, decadence and degeneracy, madness and evil’ competed for attention. Overall ‘there was a presentation of sexual dissoluteness which might just as well draw men or women into its orbit’ (p. 2). Importantly, this immorality was often considered a temptation to which anyone might fall prey (p. 5).<sup>7</sup>

In 1924, while the White Cross League argued in favour of teaching ‘sex hygiene’ to young people in order to cleanse the social body of its ‘degenerates and perverts’,

a Committee of Inquiry investigating the problem of 'mental defectives and sexual offenders' reported to the Government. Although most of the submissions to the Committee dealt with 'mental defectives' alone, others interwove discourses of mental instability or deficiency, sexual offending and moral control. Often the remedies for both mental deficiency and sexual offending were similar: the restoration of parental control and the teaching of eugenics, self control and a 'healthy respect for bodies and minds', although the submitters disagreed over whether such teachings should take place at home or at school (Duncan, 1924, p. 2; Rawston, 1924, n.p.; Watson, 1924, pp. 148–149).

The term 'sexual offence' covered a multitude of socially undesirable acts: indecent exposure, under-age prostitution, the sexual assault of children and sex between men (sex between women had never been illegal in New Zealand). Even masturbation was included in the discussion, although it was not illegal. Among the pages of the submissions, sexual acts among those of the same sex were rarely mentioned outside of the context of the sexual abuse of minors. The intersecting of concerns, however, is tantalising. The superintendent of a Presbyterian orphanage suggested that sexual abuse of boys by men 'probably extend[ed] back to Sodom' and was 'often due to a medical condition induced by self-abuse' (Mills, 1924, pp. 105–106),<sup>8</sup> while a Catholic priest submitted that the 'the boy masturbator becomes dull, silly, listless, embarrassed, sad [and] effeminate [sic]' (McGrath, 1924, p. 94).<sup>9</sup> The latter excerpt is reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing's idea that masturbation could induce neurasthenia, draining the body of its vitality and leading to effeminacy and sexual perversion (Terry, 1999, p. 50).

However, when the Committee's report was submitted to Parliament a much clearer statement on sexual relationships between men and between women appeared:

Another class [of sexual offender] to be considered is the confirmed homosexualist. There are well-known examples of men eminent in the arts and literature given to this unnatural practice, and of the offenders who come before the Courts only a small proportion can be described as feeble-minded ... Many parents are unaware that girls as well as boys may contract bad habits and fall into sexual abnormalities ... (Triggs *et al.*, 1925, p. 26)

The report-writers separated these 'unnatural practices' from notions of mental deficiency, and wrote of 'practices' and 'habits' which presumably anyone may 'fall into' or be tempted by. Although a specific type of person was named (the 'homosexualist'), he or she was usually characterised by a habitual commitment to 'unnatural practices' rather than congenitality. According to the report, the 'worst pervert of all is the one who flagrantly offers himself for the purposes of sodomy', particularly noted among 'middle aged and elderly men' (Triggs *et al.*, 1925, p. 25). It was also reported that 'sodomy' was 'quite common' among the wayward young men confined to the Burnham Industrial School (p. 33).

By the 1940s mention of sexual activity between those of the same sex had started to appear among the pages of sex instruction pamphlets, usually those written for young men. E. A. Gornall was a doctor who hailed from Australia and wrote a

number of such pamphlets. These were advertised in the popular press and could be purchased by mail order.<sup>10</sup> In Gornall's pamphlets the meaning of sexual acts between men varied somewhat. In *Biosex M*, written for young men, Gornall voluntaristically codified 'sexual connection' between young men in terms of 'pranks' that apparently any boy might engage in:

Any attempts at sexual connection with another man or with an animal are heavily punishable offences. They are called *unnatural offences*, and *bestiality*, respectively ... These additional crimes are brought to your attention because sometimes young people have been known to indulge in them in the belief that they were little more than boyish pranks. But such conduct will convert a fine young man into a gaolbird. (Gornall, 1944, p. 29, emphasis in original)

In *Biosex M* the 'gaolbird' was otherwise a 'fine young man', free of any taint of congenital degeneracy. (A similar view was expressed in the Department of Health's pamphlet for boys, published in 1955.<sup>11</sup>) Willpower and self-restraint were the key, as they were in the case of masturbation, which the doctor insisted was 'both harmful and disgusting' (Gornall, 1944, p. 22). However, Gornall implied that young people's sexuality was quite different from that of adults; his *Biosex A*, written for adults only a year after his pamphlet for young men, adopted a somewhat different position on homosexuality:

All human beings, to a greater or lesser extent, possess both male and female characteristics. Poles apart are the strongly sexed, but the weaker ones are closer to the other sex ... All of us, then, have some degree of tendency, even though we may be unconscious of it, toward some characteristics of the opposite sex. If some of these tendencies in the opposite direction predominate, or come to do so in later life, serious psychological derangements can occur. Of these, perhaps the most serious leads to homosexuality. (Gornall, 1952 [1945], p. 107)

Here an understanding based on temptation and pranks had given way to the notion of gender inversion popularised by Havelock Ellis (whom Gornall cites elsewhere). According to this view a psychically hermaphroditic state underlies same-sex attraction (Ellis, 1948 [1933], pp. 194–199). Both Ellis and Gornall conflated gender and sexuality so that 'characteristics of the opposite sex' included sexual attraction to those of the same sex. Gornall mentioned both men and women, informing his readers that 'male homosexuals are usually known as sodomists, and the females are often called Lesbians' (1952 [1945], p. 108). Gornall's texts combined universalising and minoritising views. *Biosex M* rejected the notion of a relatively fixed homosexual minority in favour of a universal potential requiring restraint and self-control. *Biosex A* postulated an identifiable minority (those exhibiting homosexuality, i.e. 'sodomists' and 'Lesbians'), while arguing that everybody possesses some characteristics of the 'opposite sex', hence by implication degrees of propensity to homosexuality over the life span. Gornall was somewhat ambivalent in his understanding of sexual ontology, although not in his moral judgement on homosexuality *per se*, which he described as a 'perverted sexual abnormality'. The following excerpt demonstrates the tension in his writing between the universalising view ('widespread') and the minoritising ('tendencies'):

In law the practice of homosexuality between men is called 'the abominable crime of buggery or sodomy' and is a penal offence. This practice is sometimes widespread where men are congregated for long periods without the opportunity of ordinary sexual relations and where those with homosexual tendencies are brought together. (Gornall, 1952 [1945], p. 108)

In 1935 the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants had reported in the US that homosexual sex was a potentially universal and pleasurable temptation that threatened to derail the difficult path to sexual 'normality' (Terry, 1999, p. 219). Likewise, the suggestion that homosexuality might be 'a permanent habit' later formed one strand within the discourse of the Wolfenden Report in the UK (UK Parliamentary Committee on Homosexuality and Prostitution [UKPCHP], 1957, p. 263). During the 1930s these conceptions were joined by a neo-Freudian psychogenist narrative, which suggested that one's sexual development could be diverted off its normal path toward an opposite-sex object of desire and thus veer in the direction of sexual 'perversion' (Terry, 1999, p. 43).

Such a psychogenist narrative combined universalising and minoritising impulses: we all move through a 'homosexual phase' in our journey to adulthood and, for all but a small minority, 'mature' sexuality. Ellis had argued in 1933 that 'homosexual affection' among boys or 'enthusiastic devotion for other girls' was part of an 'inevitable youthful phase' (1948 [1933], p. 203), while Edward Griffith thought that 'adolescent homosexuality', or 'interest in our own sex', was a phase 'through which we all pass' (1944, p. 195). However, he worried that 'we cannot afford to linger too long' in the homosexual phase, lest it transmogrify into 'true homosexual feeling': 'an abnormal development of the sex feeling of the individual' (p. 182). Among girls this could take the form of 'violent affection' and 'possessive' friendships (p. 183).

One senses that the placement of boundaries between a 'true' homosexual minority and a universal potential was considered crucial. Ironically, however, within this developmental narrative such boundaries remained worryingly blurry. British educationalist Cyril Bibby argued that:

there is no hard and fast boundary between normality and deviation—the one grades insensibly into the other [so it may be difficult to ascertain] just what degree of activity or feeling is sufficient to label a person as homosexual ... as long as the phase is a temporary one, it cannot be regarded as a deviation. (Bibby, 1946, pp. 30–31)

The final years of the 1940s saw psychoanalysis attracting renewed interest in New Zealand (S. Grant, 2001, p. 238), and this may have enhanced the appeal of these types of developmental narratives here. As late as 1966 one New Zealand sex education pamphlet took up this formulation, suggesting that all pass through a 'stage of relative homosexuality from which the transition is made to heterosexuality', with 'genuine inversion' being the result of a failure to pass through successfully (Hughes, 1966, p. 74). The pamphlet's author instructed genuine inverts to try either 'sublimation' or offering themselves up to 'the grace of God' (p. 76). The earlier ambiguity remained, as the phrase 'genuine inversion' implied that the universal 'stage' of homosexuality itself involved a temporary or artificial

kind of inversion. One assumes that is not what was meant, but clearly this was rather unstable terrain. Of note also is the appearance of the term ‘heterosexuality’, absent from the sex instruction materials in earlier decades.

During the 1940s sexual ‘normality’, not yet named as ‘heterosexuality’, was a precarious proposition. It was not explicitly named, its boundaries were not set, and it was never entirely determinable. This was the case, too, in some of those tracts heavily influenced by evangelical Christianity, where homosexuality was equated with a range of other sins and social ills including masturbation, divorce, juvenile delinquency and prostitution. This is evident in the following excerpt from Bruce and Joan Cochran’s booklet:

Masturbation, sadism and homosexuality are but three of the ugly, and largely unrecorded, forms that sexual aberration may take. Naturally they vary in significance, but can anyone look in his heart and claim to be entirely clean? (Cochran & Cochran, 1943, p. 10)

The possibility of temptation, a mainstay of turn-of-the-century discourse, remained.<sup>12</sup> Another pamphlet from the 1940s, Horn’s *Digest of hygiene for father and son*, came somewhat closer to Foucault’s notion of ‘the homosexual’ as a minority personage implanted with an abnormal sexuality:

Homosexuality is a form of sex perversion in which a woman loves a women [sic] and a man loves a man and its practice is as old as history ... one must come to the conclusion that there is a predisposition in some persons and not in others. It is thought that such a predisposition might be wholly physical, possibly having to do with the ductless glands. (Horn, 1947, p. 70)

Horn saw homosexuality as a form of ‘sex perversion’ and ‘love’ which stretched far back in time, unlike some (whose writings I will examine in the next section) who thought it in part a manifestation of war, moral laxity or social rebellion. His statements on biology, while probably somewhat puzzling to today’s reader, suggest that he did understand homosexuality in similar terms to Foucault’s nineteenth-century sexologists. However, Horn moved beyond an ‘interior androgyny’ or ‘hermaphroditism of the soul’:

Male homosexuals are not necessarily effeminate in appearance nor are female homosexuals always mannish. Some males cultivate mannishness in order to compensate for their feeling of impaired virility, and others look for mannishness in their partners. Some women perverts of this category seek to emulate men, while others are content with their own sex. (Horn, 1947, p. 71)

It becomes apparent that a range of different discourses co-existed in the New Zealand sex instruction literature during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Some authors prioritised universalising notions of habit or sin, others adopted the developmental narrative of a ‘homosexual phase’ that combined minoritising and universalising impulses, while still others wrote of a minority with particular personal characteristics. Several even engaged more than one discourse at once. But what role did these various understandings play in the contemporary social order? How did wider social changes reflect and refract these conceptions of homosexuality and, eventually, heterosexuality? What does this



suggest about the investments held in particular 'explanations' of homosexuality and heterosexuality?

### **(Homo)sexuality in the post-war years**

A number of important and related axes of concern emerged around the time of the Second World War. First, the war itself profoundly affected gender relations. In the absence of male workers at home, women stepped into jobs traditionally reserved for men, including taxi driving, tram conducting, railway portering and farm work (Guy, 1943; Bardsley, 2000). These women provided a potent symbolic challenge to earlier identifications of women with bodily frailty and the private sphere (Brickell, 2002), although overseas Havelock Ellis had warned about feminism, 'mannish women' and the need to shelter women from the deleterious effects of modern life (Terry, 1999, p. 66), while French fashion designer Christian Dior developed the wasp-waisted 'New Look' in an attempt to vanquish the war-time 'Amazon' (Walsh, 1984, p. 77).

Andrewes (1995) has argued that the post-war years saw chinks appear in those forms of masculinity that had been hegemonic in New Zealand life. As elsewhere on the globe, the importance of physical strength started to decline as the number of white collar jobs increased and new forms of masculinity grew in significance, notably the family man and the male consumer (J. Grant, 2001).<sup>13</sup> Although the war epitomised the strength of New Zealand masculinity, a number of anxieties required redress. In local literature the tensions between homosociality and homosexuality were papered over with portrayals of 'loving mateship' that recognised the intimate potential of close male relationships without spelling out their sexual possibilities (Jensen, 1996, p. 123). 'Softness' was a cause for concern, and one Member of Parliament relayed his constituents' worry about a 'softening and deterioration of our young men' in the early months of the war, although he went on to note with some relief that 'these young men, by their gallant conduct, have confounded their critics' (Martin, 1943, p. 1002).

These worries about 'softness' were sometimes directly connected to homosexuality. One article written in 1949 by an employee of the Child Welfare Services of the Department of Education and published in *New Zealand Science Review* mentioned a number of 'unmanly' and thus undesirable traits in six boys whom he reported 'subject to the influence of adult homosexuals over brief periods' (Ferguson, 1949, p. 70). The boys were said to possess 'poor physique' and 'weedy' posture. All were 'easily led' and exhibited 'symptoms' such as lying, stealing, apathy and day-dreaming, none of them expressive of the muscular, gallant masculinity called for at the time. The study's author concluded that 'if there is amongst boys any susceptibility towards participation in homosexual practices with adults then the type of boy here described would appear to be more prone than some to this type of conduct' (p. 72).

While men at war were commonly seen to express the very epitome of masculinity, the homosociality of war threatened to facilitate homosexuality. In 1924 one

Government official had blamed ‘conditions in the Army during the recent war’, as well as segregation of the sexes in schools, prisons and institutions, for producing an increase in the number of ‘sex offenders’ (Duncan, 1924, p. 3). While he thought some offenders mentally defective, he considered others victims of these historically specific circumstances. After the Second World War, by which time homosexuality was more clearly demarcated from other ‘sexual offences’, war’s potential to aid and abet same-sex desires (within men, at least) became clearer. In the UK the Wolfenden Report had suggested that the war ‘occasioned homosexual behaviour which in some cases has been carried over into peace time’ (UKPCHP, 1957, p. 258), while in New Zealand a similar argument was made by the Auckland branch of the National Council of Women (NCW).<sup>14</sup>

This organisation’s multifaceted conceptual schema drew upon the expertise of unnamed medical, psychological and social workers. First, the Auckland branch’s reports argued that men’s disappearance to the battlefield led boys to identify with their mothers instead of ‘modelling their fathers’. Second, it was suggested that the segregation of men in the armed forces had trapped some men in the ‘homosexual phase’. It was feared that ‘normal close friendships’ might have become ‘sex relationships’, preventing the development of ‘heterosexual relationships in the normal way’ (NCW, 1960, p. 2).<sup>15</sup> Prison held out the same promise:

[i]mprisoning homosexuals is like treating alcoholics by giving them occupational therapy in a brewery. Deprivation of the female is the condition where homosexuality flourishes and deprivation is the stimulus to drive people to homosexuality. If anyone has these propensities they would become alive in prison. (NCW, 1964b, p. 6)

Third, the reports suggested that the ‘emancipation of women’ during and after the war made some ‘more aggressive and unapproachable’, leading men to choose other men instead (NCW, 1960, p. 2). This problem was exacerbated by the dictates of consumer culture, for the emerging ‘emphasis on glamour’ could cause young men to retreat from apparently inaccessible young women and ‘seek refuge in the security of familiar friends’ (1960, p. 2).

The tensions of war were made clear. While combat on fields afar reinforced masculinity through ‘gallant conduct’ and heroism, men’s segregation abroad and their absence at home, along with women’s ‘emancipation’, created the risk of homosexuality. The cause for concern in this case was a universal psychological potential of New Zealand men that might be enlivened by particular social conditions.

Somewhat contradictorily, these reports also showed an interest in genetic research, particularly the idea that heredity may account for the male ‘homosexual ... born with more female than male tendencies’ (NCW, 1960, p. 1). As late as the 1960s a number of different aetiological narratives, some more minoritising than others, jostled for attention. The one constant in the branch’s discourse was the absence of any reference to intimate relationships between women. For these women the greatest concern was not female sexuality, but the ongoing tensions between male homosociality and homosexuality in a changing post-war world.

These reports did suggest that one antidote to this sexual uncertainty lay in parental education. Arguing that 'wise and loving parenthood is the best insurance in the world against deviation from the normal', the committee members considered that the 'education of parents and prospective parents, therefore, seems to be the best, perhaps, the only way to control the causes of this unfortunate condition' (1964a, p. 1).<sup>16</sup> Like so many others from the 1920s onwards, the National Council of Women saw education as a means of diffusing sexual norms throughout society in order that social control might be secured.

### **Youth, sexuality and social upheaval**

Hall *et al.* have suggested that in Britain young people were considered the very harbingers of post-war change and social anxiety (1978, pp. 159, 234). In New Zealand many argued that young people required restraint amid concerns over permissiveness, 'juvenile delinquency' and a weakening of self-discipline (*Freedom*, 1948, p. 1; Yska, 1993, p. 56). In Government, the Labour Party expressed a desire to structure young people's leisure time in order to ensure they looked forward to 'a proper future' and developed healthy bodies (Labour Party, 1946, 1949). This was particularly important in the light of post-war pronatalist rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> The Opposition National Party advocated educating youth in 'moral and spiritual values' as well as 'citizenship, personal relations, and parenthood' (National Party, 1943, 1946).

During the 1950s worries about young people reached a high point, and moral depravity joined moral laxity on the list of social concerns. On the eve of the 1954 Parliamentary election most New Zealand households received a copy of the 'Mazengarb Report' which catalogued the extent of 'moral delinquency' among 'teen-agers'. According to the police officer who prosecuted several of those responsible:

The police investigations revealed a shocking degree of immoral conduct which spread into sexual orgies perpetrated in several private homes during the absence of parents, and in several second rate Hutt Valley theatres, where familiarity between youths and girls was rife and commonplace. (Mazengarb *et al.*, 1954, p. 7)

This was a sordid and shocking tale of 'bodgies' (rebellious young men in motorbike leathers) and their 'widgie' girlfriends, 'milk bar gangs' and underage sex. The Mazengarb Report relayed Australian stories of 'sex and drug parties' and bodgie 'sex cults' (pp. 8–9), elucidating the phenomenon of juvenile immorality which the Committee considered 'a new feature of modern life' (p. 21). A number of social concerns were woven together into a fine mesh, with many social changes held responsible for this new immorality: 'pulp comics' and other 'indecent' literature (p. 21), increasing wages for young people and thus an erosion of thrift and asceticism in favour of 'luxuries' and 'materialistic' values (pp. 40, 43), and the cossetting of the young by the post-war welfare state (p. 49). Changing gender relations came in for criticism, too, particularly 'working mothers' (p. 39) and sexually 'precocious' girls who 'have become the leaders in sexual behaviour and have in many cases corrupted the boys' (p. 18). The report noted that the publicity

generated by events in the Hutt Valley had 'caused some heads of schools to arrange for sex instruction' (p. 7), although members of the Committee did not agree with this move (p. 30).

The Mazengarb Report invoked homosexual activity as part of its picture of youth run amok, introducing on the second page the 1954 case of Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme, two girls said to be 'abnormally homosexual in behaviour' who murdered Parker's mother with a brick wrapped in a stocking.<sup>18</sup> Also referred to was a British 'vice wave' involving 'a steep increase in homosexual offences' (p. 10). The report suggested that New Zealand intermediate school pupils were involved in 'depravity, both heterosexual and homosexual' (p. 29), and the Committee considered it 'wise to remind parents that sexual misbehaviour can occur between members of the same sex' (p. 20).

Homosexuality appeared in a way that intensified the image of a world whose morals had reached crisis point: 'sexual immorality among juveniles has become a worldwide problem of increasing importance ... there is evidence that homosexuality may be increasing' (Mazengarb *et al.*, p. 63). In turn, this traded upon connections between homosexuality, delinquency and criminality that had already been established in New Zealand. In 1949 Ferguson's study had drawn clear links between homosexuality and petty crime, while the Cochran's sex education pamphlet suggested that juvenile delinquency involved 'sex perversion', of which homosexuality was one form (Cochran & Cochran, 1943, p. 10). Meanwhile, in the United States a McCarthyist chain of equivalence symbolically connected homosexuality, depravity, crime and Communism (United States Senate, 1950, p. 243).

The New Zealand debate over young people's sexuality concerned itself less with a congenitally-inverted, fixed homosexual minority than with homosexuality as one deviant behaviour among several that threatened to spread throughout the entire social body during a time of moral crisis. This view was replicated in A. E. Manning's book *The Bodge: a study in abnormal psychology*, published in 1958. Manning interviewed thirty self-identified boddies and widgies. When seven divulged 'homosexual experiences' and fourteen 'homosexual tendencies' he concluded that homosexuality was becoming a 'more and more a serious social problem' (p. 15), particularly among 'youth in revolt'. For Manning homosexuality was a social variable, able to be contained in times of social order but increasing during periods of social disruption and rebellion.

### **Conclusion: reflecting upon the hetero/homo binary**

'Sex instruction' played a significant role in the ongoing social construction of sexuality and its categories during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Many writers foregrounded the development of moral self-control, a notion in which both sexuality and young people have long been implicated. Through guidance and teaching the young would learn to discipline themselves so they might take their assigned places within regimes of socio-sexual normalisation. As psychoanalytic

narratives gained traction in the mid-twentieth century and joined these discourses of self-control, distinctions between 'proper' and 'arrested' development also became important. Therefore, the child and the newly invented 'teen-ager' required surveillance in order that the formation of socially appropriate sexualities could be assured.

The historical sources examined here, some of which reflect debates around sex education more directly than others, allow a close examination of the development of 'the homosexual' as a category, and by extension 'the heterosexual'. My analysis suggests that these categories of sexuality have coalesced and shifted in dynamic tension with a range of other social concerns and changes, including the effects of homosociality, war, work and consumer culture. It is also worth noting that not everybody is represented in these sources: the dominant voices belong to doctors, psychiatrists, community and religious leaders and State functionaries. It is somewhat less clear how others may have adopted, resisted and modified these discourses in order to understand their own sexuality (see Brickell, in press).

The 'new world mapping' of which Sedgwick writes, and which allocated everybody to a 'binarized identity' of 'homosexuality' or 'heterosexuality', was not fully entrenched within sex education debates at any time during the period. In various combinations, notions of congenitality and gender inversion existed alongside the idea that 'homosexuality' might be a 'habit' or a universal potential until some time after the Second World War. It would seem that the decades prior to the 1950s saw the term 'heterosexuality' used sparingly, if at all: the salient division was one that counterposed marital sexuality and a multifarious sexual deviance.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes 'homosexuality' appeared morally comparable to other sexual abjections: divorce, prostitution, abortion, masturbation, sexually transmitted diseases and even sadism and bestiality. Distinctions between 'normal' and 'perverse' forms of sexuality did not cleave across a tidy line demarcating a respectable heterosexuality on the one hand and a derogated homosexuality on the other. As such, 'heterosexuality' took its time to be consolidated as a category and named as the norm.

The lines around respectability and abjection were disconcertingly blurry. The discourse of 'the homosexual phase' featured the term 'homosexual' itself at the core of the psychic processes leading to 'maturity', and in a universalising move, everybody was said to experience a 'homosexual phase'. This did not pose a problem as long as 'homosexual' specified same-sex identification and not same-sex desire,<sup>20</sup> but difficulties arose when identification threatened to transform into desire and become both a permanent feature of the personality and a widespread index of social life. According to some, the war and 'teen-age' social rebellion expedited the latter.

Homosexuality, then, was located both inside and outside of sexual normality and maturity (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 10). Normality, in the process of being configured as heterosexuality, included homosexuality at the same time as it excluded it – even as heterosexuality required homosexuality's exclusion in order to define itself (Fuss, 1991, p. 1; Sedgwick, 1994, p. 10). Importantly, however, the reverse was not the case: homosexuality did not depend for its meaning on heterosexuality, which was

consolidated as a category somewhat later. The anxieties generated by such a precarious arrangement doubtlessly proved troubling, especially in a culture where male homosociality has long proved pivotal (Phillips, 1987). Bibby's claim that 'there is no hard and fast boundary between normality and deviation—the one grades insensibly into the other' (1946, p. 30) would hardly have proved reassuring.

The boundaries between the normal and the abnormal were somewhat unstable; what was to become 'heterosexuality' was clearly precarious, and acknowledged to be so. It was therefore unsurprising that the moral panic of the 1950s introduced homosexuality in ways that intensified concerns over youth, rebellion and social change. The social, sexual and moral order was changing markedly, but against a backdrop of local sexologists' failure to reassuringly confine sexuality's ambiguities.

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### Notes

1. While the term 'sex hygiene' generally preceded the later 'sex instruction' and 'sex education', all terms were in use by the 1920s in New Zealand and were employed more or less interchangeably.
2. For example, Wotherspoon (1995, p. 209) suggests there was very little, if any, mention of homosexuality in sex education books in Australia during the 1940s.
3. The White Cross League, founded in Britain during the 1880s, was an Anglican organisation which promoted moral purity among men and boys. In the years following its establishment the League spread to the US and throughout the British Empire (McGeorge, 1977, p. 135).
4. Following Halperin's discussion (2002, p. 14), I will use the term 'homosexuality' *descriptively* (to denote same-sex sexual contacts) rather than *substantively* (to name basic categories of sexuality). After all, the categories themselves, and their characteristics, remain contested across the time period.
5. It is worth noting, however, that Foucault's historical analysis is open to competing readings and is not accepted by all scholars of sexuality (Halperin, 2002; Murray, 2002).
6. I take Chauncey's point that medical and psychological categorisations did not necessarily determine the ways people understood their own and others' sexualities, at least not in the early decades of the twentieth century (Chauncey, 1991, 1994). Chauncey suggests that the sexual meanings circulating within the 'sexual underground' may well have been more influential.
7. For a broader discussion of male homosexuality in New Zealand since the nineteenth century, see Brickell (in press).

8. However, the late 1920s saw the notion that masturbation could cause insanity lose favour among New Zealand's doctors and psychiatrists, although it seems that more general social concerns over the impropriety of masturbation were slow to change (Smyth, 2000, pp. 161–162; Holloway, 2001, p. 164).
9. It turns out this phrase was lifted directly, with the exception of the spelling mistake, from the writings of German physician Gottlieb Wogel (see Bullough & Bullough, 1977, p. 65).
10. Allen (1995, p. 40) also suggests there is some evidence that these booklets were advertised on the radio.
11. The Department's *Sex and the adolescent boy* mentions 'sexual behaviour between males' solely in terms of illegality. *Sex and the adolescent girl* does not mention same-sex activity at all, or even masturbation (Department of Health, 1955a, 1955b). This may be partly because self-mastery was seen as more difficult for boys than for ostensibly naturally chaste girls (Allen, 1995, p. 77).
12. In some religious texts the references to temptation, with their clear conceptual link to sin, continued into the 1980s. When the legalising of sex between men was debated in 1985, one religious group argued that 'married men with homosexual tendencies will be tempted to seek homosexual outlets, causing the breakdown of their families' (Society for the Promotion of Community Standards, 1985), and another wrote of the 'prospect of socially acceptable homosexual behaviour becom[ing] another alternative for those who wish to be free of the traditional constraints' (Bethel Chapel, 1985). This latter quote also reflected the connection between homosexuality and social rebellion drawn during the 1950s, which I discuss shortly.
13. This is not to say that the status of masculinity was until then (if ever) entirely stable in New Zealand (Phillips, 1980). The Catholic priest who submitted to the Committee of Inquiry on Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders in 1924 rejected the idea that young men might become 'kitten coddlers and Pomeranean petters', and reasserted the virtues of 'manly men, born to valiant women' (McGrath, 1924, p. 99).
14. In some ways these views reflect the arguments by activists and scholars that the war was significant in providing opportunities for gay and lesbian subcultures to develop (e.g. Bérubé, 1991; Wotherspoon, 1995; Jirvani, 1997).
15. Again, similar views had been expressed in the Wolfenden Report (UKPCHP, 1957, p. 258).
16. At this point, the NCW diverged from Wolfenden, where the idea that 'faulty sex education may be a factor in the "cause" of homosexuality' was rejected (UKPCHP, 1957, p. 256).
17. For a useful international and historical analysis of the connections between youth, leisure and notions of national well-being, see Cross (1993, pp. 102–104; 137). A discussion of post-war pronatalism in New Zealand is provided by Molloy (1992), and in Australia by Lake (1996).
18. This case formed the basis for the film *Heavenly Creatures*. See also Glamuzina and Laurie (1991) and Molloy (1993).
19. The formulation in a pamphlet written by a military services Chaplain for young men entering the Services is fairly typical: 'Sex ... is the impulse that makes a man fall in love, and eventually desire to marry and have a home and family of his very own. That, and nothing less than that, is the only true satisfaction the human sex instinct can know' (Dalby, 1943, p. 4).
20. For example, Griffith argued that this phase did 'persist in adult life in such activities as clubs and societies devoted to the one sex' (1944, p. 182).

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