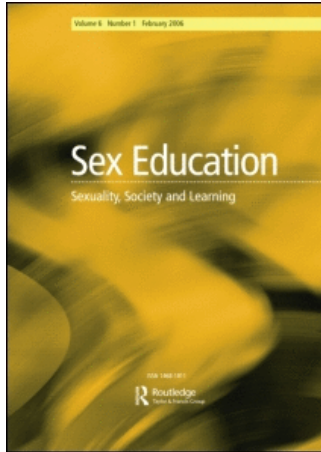


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Sex education, homosexuality, and social contestation in 1970s New Zealand

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This essay examines the relationships between homosexuality and sex education in New Zealand during the 1970s. It argues that reading sex education debates and resources provides a useful way of exploring connections between the ontologies and politics of sexuality at that time. In particular, the advent of social movements concerned with sexual issues marked a turning point in homosexuality's appearance within formal and informal modes of sex education. During the 1970s, sex education and related debates became a key site at which various conceptualisations of homosexuality were constructed and contested. By analysing the struggles between radical and conservative perspectives, we can see how same-sex desire came to symbolise changing sexual mores, as well as broader ideas about social order and social change.

Introduction: sex education and social movements

The 1970s were turbulent years for sex education in New Zealand, as they were elsewhere (Rubin, 1984). Several government reports recommended comprehensive programmes in primary and secondary schools, and while none of the reports effected much change within the formal education system, some of the groups working outside it created their own sex education resources for young people. Sexual relationships were no longer universally assumed to be monogamous and heterosexual, and sexual diversity came to occupy a central space within the wider debates.

This essay examines the place of homosexuality within the debates around sex education in this period, as well as some of the resources that were produced for and by young people. I suggest that we can explore the representation of homosexual relationships and identities in this context by examining two interlinked sets of questions. The first concerns sexual ontology. What *is* homosexuality, how does it come about, and who is involved? The second set of questions concerns the political

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implications of the first. How have conceptualisations of homosexuality reflected political, social and moral concerns at a given time and, conversely, to what degree are beliefs about homosexuality themselves directed by wider social and ideological shifts? In one important, ideological, sense, homosexuality exists as a social phenomenon only within a particular social and political context in which broader beliefs about social order and social change operate to shape its meaning.

It is particularly pertinent to ask such questions of the 1970s, a decade when social contestation around matters of sexuality formed an increasingly important strand in the warp and weave of cultural politics. The 1960s in New Zealand had seen some questioning of older notions of sexual morality and rigid gender roles. Reformers began to lobby for the decriminalisation of sex between men during that decade, but homosexuality remained heavily medicalised. Aversion therapy was used in attempts to 'treat' homosexual patients (James, 1967; Guy, 2000, 2003), and liberal newspaper editors argued that a diagnosis of sickness was surely preferable to one of sinfulness (Holcroft, 1964).¹ The challenges to moral conservatism were much more publicly marked from the early 1970s. In one year (1972), gay liberation was established and challenged the reformism of its predecessors, Australian feminist Germaine Greer visited and spoke to large and receptive audiences, the first National Women's Liberation Conference was held and a Labour Government took office after more than a decade of rule by the conservative National Party. These events coincided with the last years of the war in Vietnam, at which time pacifist and anti-authoritarian views were taken up more widely in New Zealand. The clash of socially oppositional (gay liberationist, feminist, pacifist and anti-racist) and conservative (often Christian-based and moral traditionalist) movements for change started to fundamentally alter the terrain on which debates around sex education and its provision took place.

In the discussion that follows, I argue that the emergence of influential social movements signalled some crucial new interventions into both sex education and its relationship to homosexuality. This marked a departure from the situation in earlier decades, when school-based sex education was sporadic, and when most of the sex instruction literature for young people was written by either doctors or lone religious writers (Brickell, 2005). I develop this argument through an examination of key texts and debates from New Zealand in the 1970s, many of which had their parallels elsewhere in the world.

Textual materials, and the debates embodied by them, transmit and rework the meanings that circulate within social worlds. In turn, these both shape and are shaped by social relationships. Jay Lemke has used the term 'social semiotics' to encapsulate the ways in which meanings function as historically specific social practices rather than 'merely' ideas. Therefore, meanings operate both symbolically and materially (Lemke, 1995, p. 2). Lemke writes that 'all meanings are made within communities and ... the analysis of meaning should not be separated from the social, historical, cultural and political dimensions of those communities' (1995, p. 9). Particular discourses, then, support the power of particular social groups, while

alternative discourses can challenge power relationships by offering up new and potentially transgressive forms of meaning-making (Lemke, 1995, pp. 10, 12).

This conceptualisation of meaning, discourse and political contestation proves useful for an analysis of sex education debates during the 1970s. It presents us with a reflexive, rather than deterministic, model of language and social change, which allows room for the actions of communities of interest. Lemke's analysis dovetails with the writing on social movements that was widely employed in sociology during the 1970s (Lyman, 1995). To take the example most readily at hand, a movement such as Gay Liberation sought material changes to laws governing sexuality, but also advocated new ways of writing and thinking about sexual expression. As a result, traditional alignments of power were challenged. Social movements have often sought not only to clear a space for new understandings of sexuality, but also to achieve ascendancy for their own perspectives. During the 1970s, sex education lay at the very heart of the cultural struggles between conservative and radical groups.

Following a brief outline of the relationship between state initiatives and the provision of sex education to young people, I examine the impact of both radical and conservative social movements in this area. In particular, I am interested in how these movements constructed homosexuality at the time. I proceed from the understanding that the organisation of, and responses to, same-sex desires are meaningful only within particular discourses and wider social relationships. So, I explore how explanations of homosexuality have been formulated from various discursive positions, within a context of social contestation.

Sex education and the state during the 1970s

John Clark has argued that during the 1960s public opinion surveys started to reveal that most New Zealand parents supported sex education for school pupils (Clark, 2001, p. 25; also see Levine, 1976). During the 1970s, however, efforts at teaching about sexuality remained sporadic. Primary and intermediate schools were not permitted to teach their pupils about such topics during school hours. Sex instruction could take place at parent/child evenings, so long as approved instructors were used and contraception was not discussed (Smyth, 2000, p. 168). In secondary schools, sexuality education sometimes took place under the guise of health or physical education, and decisions about instructors and content were made by individual principals in consultation with boards of governors (Gow, 1971, p. 41; Smyth, 2000, p. 171).

Three government reports recommended that further consideration be given to developing comprehensive sex education programmes. The 1973 Ross Report, written for the new Labour Government, advocated classroom discussions of relationships, abortion, changing gender roles, masturbation, the ethical implications of contraception and the 'social implications of homosexuality', but it was shelved following a degree of public protest (Department of Education, 1973, p. 26; Clark, 2001, p. 25). In 1977, under a new and conservative National Government, a Royal Commission of Inquiry investigated contraception, sterilisation and abortion

in New Zealand. The Commission's report supported school-based sex education, provided it was informed by an emphasis on human relationships, social responsibility and the centrality of 'the family' to the maintenance of social stability (Royal Commission of Inquiry, 1977, p. 91).

That same year, the work of another committee, whose conclusions became known as the Johnson Report, argued that the Ross Report had placed too much emphasis on sex. Instead, it was considered that 'morality' and 'spirituality' should be stressed, along with an insistence that sexuality 'involves self-discipline and involves loving and caring for another person—not the mere seeking of self-release ... It can be a spiritual force' (Committee on Health and Social Education, 1977, p. 37). The Johnson Report recommended that school-based programmes be created to address relationships and human development. Like the sex education provisions of the inquiry into contraception, sterilisation and abortion, however, the Johnson Report ran up against the morally conservative views of Les Gandar, the then Minister of Education (Smyth, 2000, pp. 166–169; Clark, 2001, p. 27). When the minister moved on in 1978, his replacement, Merv Wellington, held much the same view, and in an election year he, too, refused to ratify the findings of the report (Smyth, 2000, p. 171).

There was obvious conflict within the apparatus of the state (c.f. Hampshire, 2005). Although several reports were released, their findings were blocked by senior government ministers. The Health Department did not take an active role, although it did revise and reprint a series of pamphlets designed for parents to use with their children that it had first published in 1955 (Gooder, 2005). Many educators in the government-run schools expressed their frustration at the lack of progress. The Post Primary Teachers' Association was 'appalled' at Gandar's actions. Meanwhile, members of the New Zealand School Committees Federation supported a school-based human development programme, and despaired that no discernible progress was being made (Smyth, 2000, p. 167). Just like in Britain, a 'strategy of non-decision-making' prevailed (Hampshire, 2005, p. 91). As it turned out, government schools were not required to provide sexuality education programmes until 2001 (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2001, p. 55).

The opposition to sex education was not without its irony: during the first half of the century many conservatively minded New Zealanders supported sex instruction as a means of inculcating young citizens with the virtues of self-control (McGeorge, 1977; Brickell, 2005). I will suggest that the change in attitudes by the 1970s reflected the political minefield that sex education had by then become. No longer was sex education the terrain of the state, medical practitioners and religious writers; rather, it had started to underpin attempts to steer social and sexual change in a more politically and culturally volatile world.

Gay Liberation and youth countercultures

Gay Liberation emerged in New Zealand during 1972. The local groups were influenced by similar developments in the USA and Europe, and New Zealanders

took a great interest in the trajectory of gay politics overseas (Te Awekotuku, 1992; Laurie, 2004).² They drew upon a number of other political movements, including pacifism, socialism and feminism, and shared in their discourse of 'liberation' and 'revolution'.³ Gay Liberation supplemented those organisations, such as the New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society, which were established in the late 1960s and lobbied to have sex between men decriminalised (McNab, 1997; Guy, 2003).⁴ While the earlier law reform organisations were generally content to encourage 'sympathetic public and professional opinion' toward homosexuality, sometimes on the grounds that it constituted an unfortunate 'personality disturbance' (Parkin, 1968, pp. 4, 10), members of Gay Liberation were much less reserved. They rejected the legacy of the 1960s, when the links between homosexuality and pathology were perhaps stronger than they had been at any point in New Zealand's history (Guy, 2000).

Not only did the activists of Gay Liberation refuse to make polite requests for sympathy and reject assumptions of pathology, but many also eschewed the ontological and political assumption that same-sex desire was a matter of concern only for a small, identifiable number of people. Instead, in line with their overseas counterparts, they argued that it could better be understood as a universal potential. An embrace of same-sex desire provided one way of liberating individuals from the straightjacket of conventional sex roles and traditional patterns of social authority (Gay Liberation Front, 1975; Stychin, 2005, p. 93).⁵ The new term 'gay', Lindsay Taylor suggested, promised to dissolve the assumption that same-sex and opposite-sex desire 'cannot be found in the same person' (1977, p. 128), and so offered a way to free individuals from the stifling restrictions of social categorisation. The Auckland University Gay Liberation Group cited the famous 'Kinsey Report' in order to demonstrate the fluidity and complexity of human sexuality (1974, p. 2); while the Gay Liberation Front suggested a future completely free of labels, where anybody might 'just be a sexual being without classifying himself at all, or being forced into any sort of sexual role' (1972, n.p.). At the same time, and in tension with this strand of sexual fluidity and complexity, gay liberationists represented homosexuality as a matter of personal identity and minoritarian oppression (Scroggie, 1999, pp. 240, 252).

New Zealand Gay Liberation writings tended not to mention the importance of sex education for young people, although some of those involved did venture into secondary schools in order to talk to students, much to the chagrin of conservative groups and the populist news media (*NZ Truth*, 1979c, p. 1). Much of the Gay Liberation literature focused upon the sexual education of adults, through the dissemination of the new ideas about gender and sexuality already mentioned. Although the (abandoned) Ross Report supported the inclusion of references to homosexuality in the health curriculum, members of Gay Liberation worked with other countercultural groups in order to produce their own, alternative literature for teenagers; one that bypassed the official school channels.

These alternatives combined the notion of a beleaguered sexual minority with countercultural ideas about a new, less regimented society. Sometimes they appealed

to polymorphous sexuality and the fluidity of desire, but not always. The earliest of the countercultural texts was a New Zealand translation and adaptation of *The Little Red School Book*, published in 1972. This was originally written in Denmark, and was translated and revised for use elsewhere, including Britain and Australia. In New Zealand, it was controversial on at least two fronts. First, its writers demonstrated a strong anti-authoritarian streak, a carry-over from the social movements of the 1960s (Boggs, 1995, p. 350). The book questioned the moral authority of parents and teachers, arguing that the latter in particular were not only fallible, but that they were often themselves the victims of their superiors' power.

Secondly, the *Little Red School Book* advocated new possibilities for intimate and sexual life. The nuclear family was portrayed as merely one possibility among other household forms, which included 'group marriages', communes and 'homosexual marriage' (Thornberry *et al.*, 1972, p. 108). The book's authors noted that those 'attracted to their own sex are called homosexual or queer or gay' (Thornberry *et al.*, 1972, p. 107). Their stance on homosexuality was an intriguing mixture of rebelliousness and liberal pluralism. While they supported the 'militant' Gay Liberation Front and railed against 'outdated laws' that required those exhibiting 'sexual difference' to 'live underground', they also noted that '[t]heir love and their feelings are just as real and genuine and natural as anybody else's' (Thornberry *et al.*, 1972, pp. 107–108). The indicator of sexual well-being was no longer a matter of 'tradition' or 'naturalness', but of sexual pleasure, mutuality and openness between partners (Thornberry *et al.*, 1972, p. 106). In this way, discussions of homosexuality were woven together with attempts to address other social concerns: sexism, the articulation of freely chosen desire, the power of the state, and the status of young people within a relatively conservative society. In some ways, same-sex relationships were defined as an integral part of the counterculture, even though in this particular book gay liberationist ideas about sexual fluidity and universality were subsumed under an overarching symbolic opposition between sexual conventionality on the one hand, and an oppressed minority on the other.

Such minoritising appeals were somewhat less pronounced in *Itch*, an underground magazine aimed at secondary school students that first appeared in 1973. Like *The Little Red School Book*, *Itch* railed against authority, 'the blue meanies [police], headmasters, teachers, prefects and all other forces of mindless mediocrity', as well as sexism and exploitation in general (Anonymous, 1974a, b). Its writers told of being chased by police around the New Zealand countryside as they attempted to sell the magazine at various secondary schools. One issue of the magazine was declared indecent by the Indecent Publications Tribunal for its article on sexual techniques and the importance of sexual pleasure.⁶ This piece told *Itch* readers not to believe the:

bullshit written in papers like *Truth* about 'homosexual perverts'. It's important not to close your mind to things like fucking with people of the same sex ... A difficulty of lesbianism and homosexuality is the very strong pressures from our society, but don't be afraid to explore the possibilities of all sorts of relationships whatever society says. (Anonymous, 1973, p. 13)

Here homosexuality was linked to social rebellion, much as it had been in *The Little Red School Book*, but it was offered as a potentially liberating possibility that anyone might find satisfying. It was argued not that a few individuals might overcome social proscriptions in order to realise their innermost, transgressive desires, but that same-sex sex afforded everybody the opportunity to realise their full sexual potential. The magazine's advice columnist offered a rather more mixed view when she reassured a student who wanted to make sense of his sexual feelings towards his male classmates:

Some people think that human beings are naturally bi-sexual. That means they are capable of enjoying sexual relationships with people of the same sex or people of another sex. Our society teaches people to show their feelings only to people of the other sex. Anyone who is different, who loves someone of the same sex or who shows completely natural desire for people of both sexes, is branded as deviant, a queer ... Don't let your parents or school or church or anyone bully you into believing that you are wrong, dirty or immoral. It can be hard to cope with people who react badly to the news that you are gay, especially at school. ('Aunty Mabel', 1974, n.p.)

In her advice, 'Aunty Mabel' slipped between an appeal to universal pleasures ('capable of enjoying sexual relationships ...') and a minority sexual preference ('news that you are gay'). In one moment her response engaged notions of potential polymorphousness, in another she invoked a minority sexual identity. That such positions should be offered side-by-side is perhaps unsurprising, given the tension within the Gay Liberation movement between dissolving social classifications on the one hand, and consolidating and defending gay and lesbian identities on the other.

In 1976 a further example of counterculture publishing appeared, a volume titled *Down Under the Plum Trees*.⁷ This was a collaborative enterprise, produced by a number of young people. Puberty, masturbation, pregnancy and birth, sexually transmitted diseases and sex in its various permutations were discussed, often in what the editors rather euphemistically termed 'vernacular' language. The writers perceived a need for an alternative to much of the existing literature on sex, most of which downplayed the diversity of sexual possibilities, shied away from frank discussions of bodies, and omitted references to female sexual desire in particular (Tuohy & Murphy, 1976, pp. 7–9). The book included many photographs and pencil sketches, among them images of people masturbating, embracing or having sex with same-sex or opposite-sex partners. In March 1977, *Plum Trees* was declared indecent in the hands of persons under the age of 18, unless they were instructed by parents or professional advisors, and one local bookshop was fined \$1100 for 'exhibiting' both this volume and the *Joy of Sex* (Smyth, 2000, p. 169).

Plum Trees made extensive use of interviews with young people about their sexual experiences, and the ways in which they—and others—understood sexual acts and sexual categories, as well as the social responses to these. Among the narratives were several that referred to same-sex desires, along with the social possibilities and the difficulties these engendered:

The first time I classified myself as a homosexual was when I ran away from home and went to stay at my sister's flat. There was a woman there who was involved in Gay Liberation and was talking about this pamphlet they were doing. She turned to me as she was talking and said 'Would you like to come along? You're gay aren't you?' I said

'yes' out loud and thought to myself 'Fuck, I'm a homosexual!' All that time I'd been screwing guys, fantasizing about guys, having wet dreams about guys—but I'd never faced it. It was only then that I could collect my thoughts about it all. (Tuohy & Murphy, 1976, p.187)

This particular young man's contact with Gay Liberation consolidated his own feelings and experiences, and gave a name to them. The identity offered by a social movement was central to the way he came to construct his own sexual identity. In being retold in such a forum, his story could provide guidance for other young readers, too.

A booklet simply titled *Sexuality* was written by the Dunedin Sexuality Group and reprinted for tertiary students nation-wide, and it received more favourable reviews from those working in the field of sexual health than had the earlier books (for example, Jones, 1978). *Sexuality* consisted of a series of personal narratives, and the overt language of social rebellion that characterised the other works was mostly absent—although, like them, it included a substantial amount of information on anatomy, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and abortion. The section on male homosexuality engaged a liberal, individualist discourse of accepting one's teenage awareness of being attracted to those of the same sex, its author suggesting the essential sameness between homosexual and heterosexual men: '[t]here's no way you can pick other gays—they look exactly like male human beings and include All Blacks, politicians, clergymen and cops' (Dunedin Sexuality Group, 1977, p. 36).⁸

The lesbian account was more radical, however. First, it critiqued heterosexual sex: 'the essentials of heterosexual sex are pretty basic: he gets it up; puts it where he likes best, and stays there till he comes. No wonder so many women never have orgasms' (Dunedin Sexuality Group, 1977, p. 38). Secondly, essentialist narratives of sexuality were sidelined in favour of an analysis that combined physical attraction and the making of a political stance: 'I've realised that lesbianism is more than a sexual and emotional preference—it is also a direct challenge to an oppressive patriarchy, and as such it scares men shitless' (Dunedin Sexuality Group, 1977, p.38). In its critique of patriarchal (hetero)sexuality, the account reflected the analysis put forward by some of the lesbian feminist writers working in Britain and the USA, most notably Jill Johnston (1973).

While some in the Family Planning Association thought *Sexuality's* lack of an openly rebellious anti-authority stance made it suitable as a resource for young people, its radical feminism and critique of heterosexuality did not endear it to its critics any more than the earlier works had. It is to these critics that I now turn.

Conservative activism

Gay Liberation was not the only social movement to emerge during the 1970s. Conservative moral entrepreneurship started off in a small way, but was well organised, and the members of local organisations applied pressure to legislators, referred material to the Indecent Publications Tribunal, and made appearances in the popular media. Such moves arose as a response to the 'perceived tidal wave of permissiveness that emerged out of the sixties and early seventies' (Ryan, 1988,

p. 56), and, like their overseas counterparts, New Zealand moral entrepreneurs attempted to reassert 'traditional values' at a time of changing sexual mores (Wallis, 1979, pp. 126–128).⁹ Such movements for moral conservatism were usually Christian-based, and used religious arguments in their rhetoric. During the 1970s, however, they did not exhibit quite the degree of religious fervour displayed during the mid-1980s when conservative morals groups waged an unsuccessful campaign to stop the decriminalisation of sex between men (Atmore, 1995; Guy, 2003).

In 1970, Patricia Bartlett, a former nun, established the Society for the Promotion of Community Standards (SPCS).¹⁰ This group's concerns included the distribution of pornography and sexually explicit books, violence in films and television programmes, public displays of 'nudity, sexual intimacies and perversions', and school-based sex education (Kirkman, 1983, p. 34; Moynihan, 1995). Bartlett (1973) argued that sexuality was a 'God given natural instinct', one that was best left alone and not potentially corrupted by discussion in schools. This said, she warned of the dangers posed by a moral vacuum with no 'guidelines of right and wrong', and stressed the importance of 'purity, chastity, virginity, modesty, self-control, marital fidelity and prayer' (Bartlett, 1973, n.p.). Bartlett has been compared with British moral entrepreneur Mary Whitehouse, who established the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association; and, indeed, Whitehouse visited New Zealand in 1973 at Bartlett's invitation (Kirkman, 1983, p. 30; Moynihan, 1995, p. 52).

During 1974 the Concerned Parents' Association (CPA) was established in response to the Ross Report (CPA, 1977a, p. 2). As a result, sex education was the main focus of CPA members' activism. Other Christian-based morals groups were founded, too: the anti-abortion Society for the Promotion of the Unborn Child in 1970, the Family Rights Association (which argued that families were under attack by 'permissive elements') in 1973, Feminists for Life in 1974, and the Council of Organisations for Moral Education (COME) in 1978 (Ryan, 1988, p. 57). These groups worked together on particular issues, and shared membership. For instance, SPCS worked closely with the CPA on sex education issues, and, along with COME, was a founding member of the Family Rights Association.

These organisations acted both reactively and proactively. They opposed the Ross and Johnson Reports, arguing that they placed insufficient emphasis on Christian morality and allowed for inappropriate forms of sexual discussion in the classroom (Moynihan, 1995, pp. 66–67). CPA members worried that the Johnson Report subtly shifted definitions of 'family' away from marital households and toward more varied models of familial interdependence. This opened the way for government recognition not only of same-sex relationships, they thought, but also of 'de facto relationships, group marriages, mixed flatting and commune living' (CPA, 1978, p. 3).

The CPA found support in the most unlikely of quarters, including *New Zealand Truth*, a tabloid newspaper with a long history of dealing in sexual scandal. Its reporters supported attempts to block what they called:

this nightsoil approach to sexual instruction and social engineering of the young [by] trendies and the sexually sick ... Lesbianism and homosexuality is being promoted

increasingly in New Zealand schools. Parents just don't know the half of what is going on. (*NZ Truth*, 1979b, p. 4)

Under the heading 'Perversion on the campus', the newspaper suggested that the Dunedin Sexuality Group's book *Sexuality* 'is a collection of smut that rivals *Down Under the Plum Trees*', and presented 'a disturbing view of subjects such as lesbianism ... The contributor of one article describes heterosexual sex as "pretty gross" [and] extol[s] the virtues of lesbianism' (*NZ Truth*, 1978, p. 48). Interestingly, this somewhat inaccurate reading blunted the original article's critique, by recasting its political challenge to heterosexuality into an assumed distaste for opposite-sex encounters.

As this excerpt implies, *NZ Truth* and conservative organisations spoke out against the counterculture literature already in circulation. Bartlett's SPCS regarded *The Little Red School Book* as 'an exercise in anarchy', in which sex was reduced to 'mere animal activity', and homosexuality was offered as an innovative alternative to marriage (Moynihan, 1995, p. 55).¹¹ *Down Under the Plum Trees* came in for the most criticism, however. The CPA described it as a 'pathetic paperback' that contained 'indecent' photographs, used 'the notorious four letter word probably in excess of 500 times', and made 'all other objectionable sex education books look mild in comparison' (CPA, 1977a, p. 5; 1977b, p. 7). Members of the Balclutha Salvation Army wrote to their local Member of Parliament, protesting that the book's 'contents strike deep at the roots of common decency, let alone Christian principles and the sacredness of sexual life, the decency of the family, the benefits of self control which helps to build strong character' (Smith *et al.*, 1977, p. 1).

Conservative groups also responded by producing literature of their own. For instance, in 1973 Anderson Elliot published a Christian discussion programme for senior school pupils entitled *What do You Think?* Elliot's booklet reprinted excerpts from letters to the editor, newspaper reports and notable philosophers, and followed them with discussion questions about gender roles, parenting and the relationships between love and sex (Elliot, 1973).

Another resource was *Home and School*, put together by the CPA in 1976 and intended as a guide for teachers and parents. This emphasised the 'sanctity of marriage', pre-marital chastity and a 'traditional Christian approach' to sexuality (CPA, 1976, p. 25). Neither *Home and School* nor *What do You Think?* mentioned homosexuality, however. An insistence that sex ought to take place only within marriage seemed to preclude an acknowledgement of alternatives, almost as though homosexuality was considered so unacceptable that it ought not even be discussed. Non-normative forms of sexuality simply did not belong in the classroom, as the merest hint of sexual immorality or 'perversion' might be enough to embed them. As Bartlett stated elsewhere:

Sensitive children could be psychologically and emotionally disturbed by some of their classmates' explicit questions on lesbian and homosexual practices ... Such questions ... could develop morbid interest in abnormal sexual behaviour. (Bartlett, 1973, n.p.)

One publication did mention homosexuality. Like the *Little Red School Book*, the *The Little White Book* was originally published in Scandinavia and modified for use in

New Zealand, with the support of Bartlett and other local conservative Christians. *The Little White Book's* (nameless) authors expressed their reluctance to openly discuss matters such as homosexuality, but they felt they must do so if they were to counter all the 'foul material available today' (Anonymous, 1972a, p. 23). Like other sins, homosexuality was considered a temptation that 'starts out as an adventure [and] becomes a vice-like obsession' (Anonymous, 1972a, p. 31). Those so tempted would try and corrupt others, and thereby 'have their filthy way with an increasing number of people'. The book did contain some advice for the afflicted, however: when overcome with their 'vile aberrations', they might restore their self-control by 'count[ing] to 100 and tak[ing] a cold shower' (Anonymous, 1972a, p. 45).

In such texts, homosexuality appeared as neither a mental illness nor a minority identity. Instead, it was a matter of sin, corruption and the power of persuasion. The latter was made all the more possible in a world saturated with sexual symbolism, which threatened to spin out of control as a consequence. Dangers lurked everywhere: the 'friendly Hippy' offering flowers to passers-by was most probably the devil in disguise, oral sex was a 'filthy habit', and 'peeping toms' lurked beneath open-backed steps in public places in order to take 'perverted photos' up the skirts of unsuspecting young women. The innocent were warned to 'wear dull shoes' because shiny ones could 'easily reflect the innermost secrets beneath your petticoats' (Anonymous, 1972a, p. 47). Homosexuality was not the only sign of the sexually incontinent times.¹²

In some ways, resources such as *The Little White Book* carried on a common practice from earlier decades, when activist Christians wrote sex-instruction booklets for young people. 'Purity', for instance, was the pseudonym for one Mary Manse, who warned in 1941 about the dangers of double beds for adults and the 'moral ruin' precipitated by youthful masturbation ('Purity', 1941, p. 10). At about the same time, Methodists Joan and Bruce Cochran warned their young readers of the sanctity of marriage and the perils of 'sexual aberrations' such as masturbation, sadism and homosexuality (Cochran & Cochran, 1943, p. 10). Although some early-twentieth-century opponents of sex instruction worried that it could arouse unwholesome curiosities, others did support such initiatives on the grounds that they would instil self-control and an adherence to chastity before marriage (McGeorge, 1977; Brickell, 2005). By the 1970s, however, the climate in which such resources were written and circulated had changed dramatically.

By this time feminism had shifted its focus from questions of labour to questions of sexuality, and homosexual men and women had started to speak, and more assertively, on their own terms. Several countercultural publications were available in the shops or through mail order, and if sex education did become common in schools then no one could be sure just who might appear in front of a class. Parents could not guarantee that their children would only be taught in line with the sexual value systems that they themselves supported (Ryan, 1988, p. 71; Smyth, 2000, p. 161). Indeed, a number of conservative organisations argued that 'homosexual groups' were invited into schools by sympathetic teachers, and the CPA suggested

that pupils were likely to become more accepting of 'sexual deviates' as a result (CPA, 1975, p. 6; 1977a, p. 2; *NZ Tablet*, 1976, pp. 6, 27; SPCS, 1980, p. 1).¹³

The 'acceptance' of homosexuality was not the only issue of concern, however. There was a fear that feminists would introduce textbooks sympathetic to the abolition of 'sex-role stereotyping', and in so doing 'retard the development of psychosexual maturity' and facilitate homosexual desires among those vulnerable to persuasion (CPA, 1976, pp. 22–23). Conservatives worried that gay and lesbian groups might even tell youngsters that homosexuality was preferable to heterosexuality—as, indeed, some did. *Sexuality* aside, the CPA cited a booklet called *On Being Homosexual*, which the organisation claimed was used in sixth-form liberal studies classes and listed the 'advantages' of homosexuality: freedom from the fear of pregnancy, a dedication to work or leisure pursuits, ready social networks, and escape from entrenched gender roles and stereotypes (CPA, 1979, p. 3).

Gay Liberation and feminism were seen as dangerous 'liberationist ideologies' that sought to create their own 'conformist pressures' (CPA, 1976, pp. 22–23). C. W. Haskell argued that these new social movements sought the 'abolition of the hetero-homo distinction in sexual activity', and wanted to create a 'radically new society' with an altered 'consciousness' (Haskell, 1977, p. 26). This reflected a concern that schools would pre-empt parents' 'rights' to have children educated in a manner of which they approved, and a claim that leftist groups were dabbling in 'social engineering' (*Timaru Herald*, 1977, p. 3; *NZ Truth*, 1979a, p. 8).

In this way, conservative commentators spoke up for liberal notions of 'rights' at the same time as they opposed what they saw as liberal permissiveness. Traditional family forms, for example, were to be defended from leftist 'social engineering'. This argument preceded US liberal theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain's assertion that feminism and Gay Liberation sought to intervene in domestic life as they set about reconstructing civil society (Elshtain, 1982/83). Given that conservative moral entrepreneurs attempted to defend the 'private' sphere of the home from unwanted outside influence, their attempts to maintain the illegality of 'private' as well as 'public' homosexual expression were not without their irony (Hill & Zwaga, 1990, p. 184). The framing of opposition to homosexuality within liberal discourses about rights and privacy foreshadowed what would become a key arena of discursive struggle during the 1990s (Brickell, 2001).

Unsurprisingly, some commentators claimed an ostensibly reasonable middle ground, midway between conservative and radical positions:

For once I respect the 'experts' who are concerned about the growing emphasis on the desirability of the homosexual lifestyle. Homosexuals who live quietly and decently, concentrating on their jobs in life without advertising their sexuality, particularly to school children at their most impressionable, are NOT my concern. But for heaven's sake, let's have a sense of proportion and decent values. ('A Mother', 1979, p. 30; emphasis in original)

While the notion of a more or less tolerable, individualised homosexuality proved reassuring in its containability, the universalising view adopted by some in Gay Liberation circles, as well as the politicisation of gay and lesbian identities more

generally, generated significant social anxiety. Gay liberationists were not interested in adhering to strategic claims about the need for tolerance of a fixed sexual minority, as were their counterparts in the more reformist movement. The former sought to be more transformative than accommodating of others' anxieties. Within the wider community, some—such as the letter writer above—did not wish to condemn homosexuality outright, but thought that limits needed to be placed on the extent of gay and lesbian influence. The fault lines in the debates were not always clear-cut.

Contested sexualities

During the 1970s, homosexuality appeared within New Zealand sex education debates in very different ways than had been the case during the middle of the century. The emergence and influence of new social movements fundamentally altered the terrain on which the debates took place.

These movements were broadly exemplified by conservative Christianity on the one hand, and Gay Liberation, feminism and counterculturalist approaches on the other. Both sides of the debate employed many of the same tactics: writing letters to newspaper editors, lobbying politicians and developing their own educational resources. At stake were not only the immediate battles over sex education—whether, how and by whom—but also the broader shape of sexual and social mores.

Homosexuality became a particularly potent symbol of social change, although not for the first time during the century (Brickell, 2005). The new visibility and politicisation of same-sex desire reflected the social agitation promised by other leftist social movements. This particular linkage was something on which leftist and conservative movements agreed, although they valued it differently. Liberationists heralded the connections between leftist social movements, perceiving them as the harbingers of a new and more socially inclusive age, while conservatives worried that leftist successes would precipitate a breakdown in society's moral values. For instance, readers' letters to the *NZ Truth* asserted that homosexuality flourished with the support of the welfare state, it appeared in classroom discussions alongside masturbation, contraception and 'studies in the occult', and that it accompanied the promotion of 'trendy' ideas about working mothers and stay-at-home fathers (Tooley, 1978, p. 17; 'Parent Teacher', 1978, p. 13; *NZ Truth*, 1979a, p. 8).

While the debates over sex education and homosexuality were polarised—the escapades of *Ich*'s writers and distributors contrasted sharply with dire warnings about homosexual 'aberrations', devilish hippies and shiny shoes, after all—it would be misleading to imply that the leftist social movements were completely unified. While they drew upon each other's points of reference, they did not always present a united front. Not all feminists were sympathetic to lesbian activism, for instance, and joint enterprises were not without their internal tensions (Collard, 2006).

Some feminist writers even pathologised homosexuality, regarding it as a by-product of the gender inequalities they were arguing against. For instance, the authors of a book entitled *Sexist Society* argued that:

One of the reasons why there are more gender difficulties (homosexuality, transvestism and transsexualism) among men is that boys have more difficulty separating their identity from their mothers. This would not happen if fathers shared more actively in child rearing. (Kedgley & Cederman, 1972, p. 12)

In another pamphlet, homosexuality was portrayed as an outcome of moral repression, with a doctor quoted as saying that 'in a permissive society, little boys sexually interested in other little boys did not, apparently, grow up into homosexuals' (Anonymous, 1970, p. 4). Clearly, some of those who supported a departure from traditional patterns of gender and sexuality also embraced the conservative implications of Freudianism and the mid-century assertion that masculine 'role strain' provided fertile ground for sexual transgressions (Kardiner, 1954, chap. 6; Hacker, 1957, p. 232). As Kedgley's and Cederman's text illustrates, such ideas were rehabilitated during the 1970s by some of those on the left who did not necessarily share the gay liberationists' views about the radical potential of homosexuality. Of course, there were those who did advance these ideas. For instance, Germaine Greer suggested that heterosexual couples might learn from lesbians a new, more egalitarian, form of eroticism (Wallace, 1972, p. 8).

Such tensions were reflected in school-based sex education materials by the end of the decade. One interesting example is provided by a booklet of questions and answers provided to students at a small town secondary school, which echoed both gay liberationist and more traditional perspectives. This stressed that an attraction to those of the same sex is not abnormal, same-sex attraction can be found in everybody to a certain extent, 'sexual stereotyping' imposes constraints on human expression and that 'pressures to conform' are brought to bear on 'homosexuals' (Dunstan High School, 1981, pp. 9, 10, 23). On the other hand, the booklet's authors argued that 'confirmed, constant and habitual homosexuality always arises from some difficulty in the formation of the learned capacity to love' and from an inability 'to regard oneself highly enough to think one is loveable' (Dunstan High School, 1981, p. 24). In the final analysis, homosexuality was assumed to be an undesirable form of arrested development:

Most of the statistics about the number [of homosexuals] in any country are incomplete and some are downright misleading, especially the figure used by societies of homosexuals who are attempting to get legal and social recognition of themselves ... It is quite true that many homosexuals have played and are playing constructive roles in society. Many have come to terms with their situation and live stable, cultured, integrated lives. But it is also true that homosexuality in adulthood represents an inhibition of normal sexual development ... However adequate the lives of homosexuals may be, it could surely be more adequate and worthwhile if they had not been fixed physically and emotionally at this level of sexual immaturity. (Dunstan High School, 1981, p. 24)

What this resource gave with one hand it took away with the other. Although the writers echoed gay liberationists' resistance to conformist social pressures and the rigidity of gender stereotypes, they also clearly signalled the 'problems' posed if young people got stuck at a sexually 'immature' level. In this way, they shared ground with the conservative Christian commentators who argued that if young

people travelled too far 'along the homosexual road' it would probably become 'too late' for them to change paths (Haskell, 1977, pp. 38–41). In turn, this echoed the developmental sexual psychology that Havelock Ellis had developed so assiduously from the start of the century (Ellis, 1923, chap. 3; Crozier, 2000, p. 450). According to this perspective, homosexuality and heterosexuality were not immutable aspects of an individual's personality, but outcomes of sexual developmental processes. Clearly, a mixture of discourses about sexual ontology was negotiated within some of these texts.

While conservative Christian groups saw these processes as perilous, the idea of sexual fluidity had its more enthusiastic adherents, well into the 1980s. These individuals and groups drew upon gay liberationist discussions of sexual mutability, which had their own genesis in nineteenth-century sexology (Brickell, 2006). For instance, the Family Planning Association wrote of the possibility that sexual desire might change over the course of a person's life, and combined this with a liberal appeal to the respecting of 'differences' (1985, pp. 19–21). By the 1990s this had mostly disappeared, having been replaced by a discourse that stressed young people finding out who they 'really' are sexually, and 'acknowledging and expressing' their homosexuality, heterosexuality or bisexuality. These were thought to lie deep within the individual and await detection at the appropriate moment, and sexuality was said to be 'something each of us has to discover for ourselves' (YWCA, 1993, p. 6; Family Planning Association, 2000, p. 7).

Conclusion: politically mediated sexualities

As these arguments demonstrate, understandings of how same-sex desire comes about were central to the political and pedagogical debates in which they were enmeshed. In many ways, sexual aetiology was as much a function of the social visions to which social movements subscribed as it was a matter of the medical and religious discourses already in circulation. In the texts examined here, aetiological, moral and political arguments operated in mutually reinforcing ways. Gay liberationists argued that people could choose to embrace their complex desires as they strove for personal and political emancipation, while conservative Christian groups focussed on sinful temptations and the perils offered up by illicit forms of sexuality. Each approach reflected wider notions of tradition and progress, social order and social reconstitution.

That these contestations were played out over young people's sexuality was not incidental. Instead, their bodies and pleasures were critical to both projects. Young people were the bearers of a new age, and the sexual values they imbibed would critically affect the future course of society. The desires of the young were assumed to be more malleable than older people, partly as a result of developmental psychological perspectives that suggested that adolescent sexuality remained somewhat fluid, but also because young adults were still at a formative stage ideologically. In a political sense, the young formed a crucial constituency.

In New Zealand during the 1970s, social movements became important arbiters of debate about the form society would take, particularly with respect to questions of gender and sexuality. No longer did medical or religious perspectives define issues such as homosexuality in ways that were relatively uncontested publicly. Instead, same-sex desire came to speak on its own behalf, and forcefully. In part, this reflected more widespread attempts to secure greater democracy within the household, the workplace and the schoolroom, the rejection of the harsh psychiatric 'treatments' for homosexuality proffered through the 1960s, the displacement of organised religion's unquestioned hold over society, and the new quest for freedom embarked upon by cognate social movements. After all, the struggles between movements played an important role in transforming the debates over sex education, and, along with them, the meanings of homosexuality itself.

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Notes

1. This contrasts with the periodisation in Stychin's account of the situation in the USA, where he argues that 1960s revolutionary consciousness gave way to reformism and rights-based approaches during the 1970s (Stychin, 2005, p. 93).
2. Good discussions of the rise of Gay Liberation movements elsewhere on the globe can be found in Adam (1995) and Adam *et al.* (1999).
3. Men and women worked sometimes together, sometimes apart (Hall, 1992). Most of the New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society hierarchy was male, while Gay Liberation was mixed; many lesbians were involved with more general feminist initiatives, even though their relationships with other organising women were not always straightforward (Dann, 1985; Te Awekotuku *et al.*, 1993; Collard, 2006).
4. Decriminalisation did not finally occur until 1986. Sexual relationships between women had never been illegal in New Zealand. Boggs (1995, p. 349) notes that during the 1970s the new social movements in the United States and Europe became more diverse in ideology and strategy than the 1960s groups, and this was certainly the case in New Zealand too.
5. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick contrasts these views, characterising them as either minoritising or universalising. The minoritising view concerns itself with a 'small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority', while a 'universalizing view' understands homo/heterosexual definition as an 'issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities' (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 1). While the minoritising view suggests homosexuality's containment to a limited number of individuals, the universalising view evokes a set of universal sexual potentials and socially contingent, open and contested sexual categories (Sedgwick, 1994, pp. 1, 85).
6. The Tribunal criticised *Itch* for offering advice 'at a crudely physical level, and pursuing gratification for its own sake'. *Itch's* editors wondered whether the ruling of indecency 'is not

as a result of the sexual material but as the result of the political attitudes that are conveyed' (Anonymous, 1974a).

7. While the title implies youthful exuberance outdoors, the book was actually named after a completely innocuous painting by Flora Scales, a little-known New Zealand artist (Alister Taylor, personal communication, 20 June 2005).
8. The All Blacks are the members of New Zealand's national rugby union team.
9. Some have argued that New Zealand moral conservative groups were yet insufficient in number, coherence and influence to constitute a social movement as such, something that did not happen until the 1980s (for example, Ryan, 1988, p. 79). This seems debateable; there were interconnections between groups, just as in the gay liberation movement. In any case, given that moral crusades have been defined *as* social movements, ones that resist 'social changes in the nature of norms and values relating to moral issues', or seek to create and enforce 'moral rules', the argument over when a crusade becomes a movement quickly becomes circular and rather pointless (Wallis, 1979, p. 92).
10. On moral entrepreneurs, be they righteous crusading reformers or the reinforcers of new rules and norms, see Becker (1973, chap. 8). On Whitehouse, see Wallis (1979, chap. 7).
11. Meanwhile, the British edition of the *Little Red School Book* was a target of Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners' Association (Wallis, 1979, p. 127).
12. There was no discussion of peeping toms or hippies in the British edition of the *Little White Book*, so this may have been added specifically for the New Zealand edition (Anonymous, 1972b).
13. *NZ Truth* took the credit for its 'exposure of homosexual activists peddling their wares in secondary schools', a theme that was endlessly repeated by other commentators (*NZ Truth*, 1979d, p. 17).

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