

## Dilemmas of Delivery: Gender, health and formal sexuality education in New Zealand/Aotearoa classrooms

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### Abstract

Sexuality education in schools has been identified by a number of feminist scholars as a space of ‘roaring silence’ around not only young women’s sexual desire but also its inability to deliver a critical education that challenges constraining sexuality discourses. In this article we provide a critical analysis of sexuality education in New Zealand/Aotearoa that traces the historical, socio-political and educational contexts of its delivery. Our critique uses a feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis to identify the discursive resources employed in policies and practices related to the provision of sexuality education. We also present material from a focus group study that investigated students’ perceptions of the delivery of four different sexuality education programmes by way of illustrating versions of sexuality education in practice. Our examination of sexuality education in New Zealand/Aotearoa currently and historically suggests that policy is dominated by a safer sex/victimisation discourse that spills over into schools’ delivery of sexuality education. The educational context similarly appears to constrain the content of sexuality education through its assessment requirements. Within such constraints we argue that a feminist sexuality education that nurtures girls’ sexual agency may be barely possible. On the other hand, encouragement can be taken from the students’ recognition of a need for more of the ‘good’ aspects of sex and from the opportunities for challenging some of the dominant discourses of sex that may be provided by a feminist educator.

**Dee:** Well of course you’re going to be taught that sex is bad you’re like **I wanna know if it’s bad or not**

**Becks:** Cos if they say oh it’s really good then everyone will just go out and you know be having sex all over the place

**Cassie:** We’d be like rabbits

**Becks:** Yeah.

We open with this conversation amongst girls participating in a research discussion group to highlight the tensions between pleasure (“good”) and risk (“bad”) that have historically inhabited school sexuality education. For these girls, repression of “good” pleasurable sex doesn’t necessarily suppress desire; potential for desiring sex is imagined in being “like rabbits” who are “having sex all over the place” and in desire to find out whether it really is “bad or not”. Whereas sexuality education may work to suppress desire, the social worlds of contemporary girls in the affluent West are saturated with texts of sexuality and desire (Jackson, 2005; McRobbie, 1996). The feminist scholars who contributed to a Special Feature in *Feminism & Psychology*, (vol, 15, no. 1, 2005) on sexuality education critiques this disjuncture between the versions of sexuality available to girls educationally and those available socially via various media. Contributors asked what had changed in sexuality education since Fine’s (1988) influential article about the ‘missing discourse of desire’ in US school sexuality education policy and practices. In other words, were the discourses Fine (1988) identified – victimisation (positioning girls as victims of abuse, disease), violence (informing students about sex, rape, infections a terrorising act) and individual morality (abstinence as the correct sexual decision) – still characterizing sex education in schools?

Feminists writing in the Special Feature variously offered optimism and pessimism about opportunities for young women to become sexually desiring subjects within current practices across different social, political and cultural contexts. Harris (2005), for example, argues the

production of actively, sexually desiring women has become central to consumerism so that discourses of sexual desire are now readily available to young women. Burns and Torr  (2005), on the other hand, noted the social suppression of sexual desire within current abstinence-only sexuality education programmes that focus on ‘education in consequences rather than possibilities’. Both Fine (2005) and Tolman (2005), while acknowledging ways forward identified in feminist research and theory on young women’s sexuality, similarly ventured that the structural obstacles to a positive discourse of desire within social institutions persist. Reflecting on the situation, Fine commented “Yet I find myself growing agnostic about schools as a site for critical education” (Fine, 2005: 54).

Schools are a crucial site for the re/production of sexuality discourses and in this paper we direct our analytic gaze specifically at school sexuality education. We use the term discourse in its Foucauldian sense as encompassing knowledge, practices and power (Weedon, 1987). Our aim is to identify and elaborate the socio-political and educational discourses that have constructed sexuality education in New Zealand since its inception through to contemporary times. Working within a feminist framework, we examine how these discourses constrain and enable sexual possibilities for girls. We ask what spaces, if any, exist for embodied sexual desire to be articulated, expressed and engaged with, for and by girls. Our examination is based on a variety of material, including policy documents, media reports and also the views of girls themselves gathered in the course of our sexuality education research project.

### **Historical New Zealand context**

Early calls for sex education in New Zealand arose during the 1920s fuelled by two quite different social anxieties. One related to the number of out-of-wedlock births, and the other to racist population concerns that aimed to boost the Anglo-Saxon population as a means of suppressing ‘undesirable races’. So, from the outset arguments about sex education in New Zealand were underpinned by two interwoven threads; a Christian based morality (moral discourse) and a colonial racist eugenics (racist discourse). The Christian morality discourse, evocative of Fine’s (1988) discourse of individual morality, condoned sex within marriage only; it was conservative and anti sex education, presuming that schooling in was effectively schooling to. The racist colonial discourse was liberal in so far as it supported sexuality education in schools. It had resonances with what Fine (1998) identified as discourses of victimisation and individual morality. It proposed anti-masturbation (because of its alleged associated risks for mental health), anti-contraception, and pro-eugenic lessons (see Smyth, 2000). These earliest calls for sex education did not meet with success. A conservative position effectively shaped social practice preventing any formal sex education in schools.

It was not until the 1960s and the permissive sexual climate of the era that the matter of sex education was again highlighted in the political arena. A strong liberal voice embodied by organisations such as the then New Zealand Family Planning Association (NZFPA; now FPA) argued for school based education programmes in human development, relationships (including sexuality), abortion and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Conservative opposition not only blamed liberalism for rising rates of teen pregnancies and STIs but also lobbied (as did the Concerned Parents’ Association and Church based groups) against formal schooling in any issues pertaining to sex (Smyth, 2000; Tasker, 2001). As in the earliest debates about sex education, those in the 1960s and 1970s continued to revolve around moral issues but now also had health concerns about STIs folded into them. Some secondary schools, acting on recommendations of government reports and with community support voluntarily delivered courses on relationships and sex education. An additional hurdle for these liberal schools was the Police

Officers Amendment Act, 1954 – legislation in response to a particular highly publicised instance of ‘sexual immorality in teenagers’ (teenagers engaging in sexual behaviours in public spaces); the Act prohibited instruction in contraception use for any child under 16 years old.

In the late 1970s moral conservatives’ attention was diverted away from sex education by debates about the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act (1977; CS&A Act), which paved the way for accessible, legal contraception and abortion. The Royal Commission of Inquiry informing the CS&A Act was liberal on the inclusion of sex education in schools but remained conservative on contraception and youth (see Clark, 2001). So, the CS&A Act did not repeal the Police Offences Amendment Act 1954 but amended it to allow parents, doctors and family planners to provide contraception advice for under-16s. In light of the CS&A, the then Education minister strongly discouraged schools from offering sex education. The rationale behind that lack of support was that giving students’ information about sex could be interpreted as encouragement to engage in sex. Here, we see sex education in terms of what Fine (1988) described as discourses of violence (informing as terrorising) and victimisation (risk of disease).

The first case of HIV/AIDs in New Zealand in 1984 brought sexual health matters again to the fore. By the late 1980s the Health Education curriculum contained a sexuality component. That part of the curriculum is unique in that it requires school principals to consult with parents and that School Boards (made up of democratically voted community members) approve the process of consultation and the content of the courses. Politically, the motivation for the curriculum could be seen in the spectre of HIV/AIDS and the safer sex discourse that rapidly followed. For example, in 1990 the government legislated to remove impediments to providing under 16s with contraceptive advice. The discursive fabric of sex education resonated with Fine’s (1988) discourse of victimisation in its motivation to inoculate against sexual diseases. Health concerns here appear to take precedence over moral ones, but as we shall discuss below sexual health issues are pervasively moral and political. Despite a seemingly more tolerant social climate the delivery of sex education in the mid-1990s was, according to the Education Review Office (1996), ad hoc and largely emphasised prevention/abstinence through the teaching of ‘biological facts’. The mandatory teaching of sexuality education came into being relatively recently with the introduction of a new Health and Physical Education Curriculum (1999). Within that curriculum the sexuality component is compulsory for Year 9 and 10 students (first two years of secondary school).

## Current socio-political context

Coinciding with development of the new curriculum, the NZ Ministry of Health drafted a *Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy* (SRSH) that became a policy document in 2001 (Ministry of Health, 2001). The document begins by stating that positive sexuality and sexual health are Government priorities. Then quickly, and unsurprisingly given the health policy context (see Ingham and Kirkland, 1997), the focus shifts to ‘negative’ aspects of sexual activity; New Zealand’s increasing rates of STIs and high levels of unwanted pregnancies. The strategic priority is ‘developing a specific plan for reducing STIs and unintended/unwanted pregnancies’. Young people in general, but young women in particular, are targeted within the strategy because they are interpreted as disproportionately contributing to New Zealand’s seemingly increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections and high levels of abortion and adolescent pregnancies. So, Fine’s (1988) discourse of sexuality as victimisation is a clear thread in the SRHS (2001). That discourse is doubly negative for young women who can suffer from STIs and get pregnant.

Although the Government’s strategy is focused on disease and unwanted pregnancies, the

SRHS does also endorse positive expressions of sexuality. The policy places itself in the context of international and national agreements that align it with charters and declarations on the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. Thus it moves beyond issues of disease and pregnancy to engage with free expressions of sexuality as part and parcel of human rights. The strategic directions section of the policy identifies positive experiences of sexuality as central to well-being, while at the same time giving recognition to sexual abuse and violence and the constraining nature of rigid gender roles. So too does the policy articulate a discourse of desire in its recognition of passion and fun to positive experiences of sexual expression. Consistent with neoliberal discourses (see Walkerdine, 2005) the policy document is underpinned by notions of choice and contains assumptions of people as rational free-willed subjects where, given appropriate education and services, sexual health is an individual responsibility. “Failure” to achieve “positive sexual well-being” accordingly is viewed as largely stemming from ignorance and irresponsibility.

Despite the sexual and reproductive health strategy being explicitly (at least) socially inclusive and grounded in human rights and health promotion frameworks, its emphasis is clearly on the socially undesirable outcomes of intercourse particularly for young people. Thus it highlights a ‘coital imperative’ and the ‘hegemony of heterosexuality’ (see McPhillips, Braun & Gavey, 2001). It also points to possible social anxieties around adolescent sexuality. A further reading of the strategy that we would like to offer is the ways that it manages stake and interest in terms of its trajectory within a history of Christian morality and colonialism.

The SRHS strategy is written as a document that is seemingly transparent in its political agenda – that is the pursuit of a general social good – but otherwise is presented as an objective description of New Zealand’s sexual health status and as a rational response to it. It is a document that is seemingly free from more moral or social agendas. A bio-medical view is used to justify a focus on STIs, which lead to disease, infertility and, in some cases, death. The problem with adolescent pregnancy is also described in bio-medical terms, for example babies from adolescent mothers being at higher risk of low birth weight than those born from older mothers. However, the ‘problem’ of adolescent pregnancy is also justified using discourses of economics and psychology. The strategy reports that giving birth to children in adolescence leads to welfare dependency, maternal depression and less competent parenting. The use of statistics functions to present the government’s attention to the sexual health issues as rational and free from more subtle moral or population concerns.

The broader range of discursive resources drawn upon to justify the Government’s focus on adolescent pregnancy hints at more subtle and the arguably less conscious politics of sexual reproduction. Those politics were brought to the fore in a widely reported criticism during November 2004, that the government’s focus on teenage pregnancy was racist. Teenage pregnancies are highest amongst young Māori and Turiana Turia, the leader of the then newly formed Māori political party, questioned why Māori fertility and not (older) Pakeha women’s infertility was the issue when the latter was as much an economic and health problem to New Zealand society as the former. Perhaps predictably Turia’s comments were derided in the media as ridiculous, irresponsible and/or condemning Māori to further social disadvantage. However, the flurry of media interest in Turia’s comments highlighted for us an arguably contemporary manifestation of what we had already identified as an earlier racist element about population concerns in New Zealand.

After the publication of the SRHS (2001) the next relevant Government document was *Sexual and reproductive health: A resource book for New Zealand health care organisations* (2003). That publication was produced with the aim of supporting the health strategy and was effectively a ‘self-help’ manual for relevant service providers to improve their clients’ safe



sex practices. Like the strategy that preceded it, the resource book was framed positively. It was described as having the goal of providing a society where individuals enjoy their sexuality safely and are free to make reproductive choices. However, as a government health policy document it is predominately concerned with advising services how best to address the negative effects of sexual activity, with a focus on youth.

A public health initiative linked to the government's sexual health strategy was the *No Rubba Rubba, No Hubba Hubba* campaign that ran from late 2004 until mid-2005. The campaign had the aim of reducing rates of sexually transmitted infections in teenagers, targeting Māori and Pacific Island youth, by encouraging sexually active youth to use condoms. It used a wide range of media including television, radio, cinema, magazine and outdoor advertising to convey the 'no condom, no sex' message. The concept that was used to develop the campaign material was youth hip hop culture. For example, in the television commercial a cartoon animation rap singer at a concert 'raps' the campaign's slogan ('if there's no rubba rubba, there'll be no hubba hubba'). There were two versions of the television campaign, one that depicted a heterosexual couple 'kissing' and one that represented gay, not lesbian sexuality, with two men kissing. By incorporating some plurality in sexuality, the campaign avoided a homosexual or heterosexual bias but, in common with the majority of safer sex campaigns, slipped into the 'coital imperative' as the object of sex, obliterating wider meanings of being sexually (and safely) active. Another campaign to capitalize on the current salience of hip hop culture emanated from the Destiny Church, a recently formed right-wing fundamentalist religious movement. Here the message was not about safer sex but about chastity pledges until marriage; the Church also conducted national protests against homosexuality and same sex civil unions. Media reports and television documentaries showed the church's use of STIs to 'scare' young people into chastity. Thus the Destiny Church would appear to mobilize both moral and victimization discourses to promote its abstinence message.

Echoing the patterns documented in the historical account of sexuality education, our examination of the socio-political context reveals dilemmatic tensions that reside in opposing discourses of sexual pleasure (neoliberal) and victimization (also safer sex and public health). In principle government policy documents appear to endorse positive sexuality that emphasizes 'pleasure', 'fun' and 'rights' to sexual expression. In practice 'concerns' about STIs and teenage pregnancy function to erase sexual pleasure, highlight individual responsibility and narrowly define sex within a coital imperative. These same sexual health concerns are harnessed with moral purpose to augment the promotion of chastity in fundamentalist religion.

## Educational context

As noted earlier in the historical context of sexuality education in New Zealand, sexuality education became mandatory for Year 9 and 10 students with the introduction of the *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* in 1999 (Ministry of Education, 1999). The curriculum describes sexuality education as providing students with 'knowledge, understanding and skills to develop positive attitudes towards sexuality, to take care of their sexual health, and to enhance their interpersonal relationships, now and in the future' (p. 38). These goals are set within the broader curriculum framework that draws on an indigenous Māori model of well-being ('Whare Tapa Wha'; Durie, 1994) which conceptualises health in four interconnected domains – physical, mental and emotional, social and spiritual. Thus the sexuality education component of the curriculum has students consider how these four aspects of sexuality influence their well-being. The sexuality education curriculum also claims to mobilise a "socio-ecological perspective" with the goal that:

“... students will critically examine the social and cultural influences that shape the ways people learn to express their sexuality, for example in relation to gender roles, the concept of body image, discrimination, equity, the media, culturally based values and beliefs, and the law” (p.38)

In this goal there are clearly elements of possibility for a feminist sexuality education programme unchained from a ‘plumbing and prevention’, utilitarian, reproductive model (Lenskyl, 1990; Tasker, 2001; Thorogood, 2000). By specifying examples of gender, discrimination and equity the goal points to a sexuality education programme that addresses power in relation to sexuality, opening the way for discussion, for example, about the operation of compulsory heterosexuality, the sexual double standard and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Examining the curriculum at the more specific level of ‘achievement objectives’, however, reveals a considerably less promising picture. These objectives construct sexuality education as an outcome oriented enterprise rather than a process. Indeed, the term ‘achievement’ embraces the notion of ‘passing’ or ‘failing’ in the acquisition of sexual knowledge, skills or understanding. The kinds of ‘achievements’ listed in the curriculum objectives include such tasks as describing (e.g., characteristics of puberty change; differences in gender, sexual orientation), accessing information, distinguishing (e.g., between real and perceived risks) and, at higher levels of the school, critically evaluating (sexual health data), and analysing (e.g., dilemmas/ethics related to abortion, reproductive technology). So while the broad goals of the curriculum orient toward wholistic constructions of sexuality, the curriculum in practice appears to narrow sexuality education down to a checklist of knowledge, skills and understanding that can be ticked off as variously ‘taught’ and ‘learned’.

Within the curriculum objectives a discourse of risk that resonates with public health concerns can be identified. For example, making and actioning ‘safe choices’ when dealing with abuse, having strategies to ‘manage risks of sexual decisions, rape or harassment, understanding reasons for choices of sexual activities, and understanding responsible behaviours in safe sex practices. These objectives also draw upon a neoliberal discourse that positions the individual as a responsible, rational decision-making subject on sexual matters, a positioning that then locates blame with the individual in matters of ‘failure’ to achieve ‘positive sexual well-being’. Additionally, the emphasis in these objectives is on students’ understandings rather than on teachers’ understanding and acceptance of the diverse sexual experiences of students, as reported to be the case in Swedish sexuality education (cited Fine, 1988). Such an emphasis produces a passive positioning of students as receptacles or ‘empty vessels’ in opposition to the teacher’s powerful positioning as imparting knowledge to students.

Nor do the ‘achievement objectives’ listed give any indication of space in the curriculum for a discourse of desire. Yet incorporating notions of sexuality as involving pleasure within educational objectives is possible as can be seen, once again, in Swedish sexuality education where acquisition of knowledge relates to the “experience of sexual life as a source of happiness and joy in fellowship with other [people]” (Brown, 1983, p.88, cited Fine, 1988). Conversely, the curriculum objectives resonate with a discourse of danger that requires arming students with knowledge to fend off threats to safety. We do not wish to imply that sexual safety issues should not be included in sexuality education. Rather, our point is that the objectives run the risk of alienating students who may view sexual experience as a pleasure quest rather than something to defend themselves against.

This brings us to the point of considering what this sexuality education in practice might look like from the perspectives of students themselves.

## Curriculum in practice

Our interest in how students themselves may view the delivery of a sexuality education curriculum that focuses on sexual risks to the exclusion of both pleasure and wider sexuality issues (e.g. sexual identities, gender, relationship negotiation) led us to undertake a research project in collaboration with FPA. Details of the projects are reported elsewhere (see Jackson & Weatherall, 2010). Here we want to briefly consider some examples of students' understandings and critiques regarding the delivery of school based sexuality education. Although the project included male students, our focus in the material we present is on meanings of sexuality for girls by way of connecting our work with the feminist scholarship discussed in the opening of our article. The girls in the project were from the co-ed school in our school sample (one of the other schools was a male single sex school and the other an alternative school with all boys except for one girl who did not participate in the student research). By way of brief background, the school provided two different programmes taught by the Health and Physical Education teacher within the Health Curriculum; one was a nine session mandatory programme for all Year 11 students and the other was a six week sexuality education block in a Health Option programme. Both of these Health programmes covered wide-ranging topics incorporating matters of gender, sexual identities, sexual violence and sexual safety. Despite the apparent breadth of the core curriculum programme, girls' descriptions suggested that a scientific 'facts and figures' discourse underpinned, at least in part, the educational approach. For example girls in two different groups described an emphasis on definitions in the programme:

### Extract 1

**Ali:** It's just like the big words like heterosexual and all that words like that. It's what does that mean? To learn about it but if you-

**Tanya:** Like monogamous, non-monogamous

**Ali:** But if I hadn't done this course and just read that I wouldn't have known what they were talking about. I wouldn't know

**Viki:** But like we always do definitions and stuff and like she makes sure we know what we're talking about.

### Extract 2

**Int:** Okay what kinds of things do they teach you about um other types of relationships like is it just telling you what it is or-

**Tamsyn:** It's just um like just giving the definitions really just explaining what two genders or which one gender is-

**Sara:** Yeah

**Tamsyn:** -involved in a relationship, doesn't really go too in depth with it.

Learning definitions renders the content measurable: students can be tested and given a mark that is taken to represent their knowledge. A curriculum driven by assessment needs rather than what students may usefully need to help them negotiate their sexual relationships and understandings of sexual self contributes to the problem of schools as a site for sexuality education. From a student perspective, Ali and Viki seem to appreciate that they now know what concepts like monogamy mean and perhaps, as Viki intimates, an effect of knowing the 'facts' is the bestowing of confidence from "know[ing] what we're talking about". In the second example, Tamsyn's comment suggests that gender is made salient in some way but that the attention to gender in a relationship is glossed. Similarly, we found girls commonly talked about the focus on sexual health to the exclusion of topics around relationships. This was articulated particularly clearly by girls in a third co-ed high school group.

### Extract 3

**Int:** Ok. Could you tell me a bit about the programme that you did? Like what you remember from it and what topics you looked at

**Hanna:** Our teacher showed us about different kinds of contraception and what sexuality is and what sex is and that stuff-

**Ingrid:** relationships

**Julie:** and STIs

**Ingrid:** Well she didn't really go into relationships that much. It was just kind of

**Julie:** The different kinds really

**Int:** What do you mean by different kinds?

**Ingrid:** Like um being like either being homosexual, heterosexual, bi or transsexual or transgender and oh and like to do with like identity like whether you were - oh there was all those weird ones but I don't remember what it was it was all to do with sexuality or something hh

**Hanna:** Not all of it's bad I just mean that like they don't really tell you about the right kind of relationships to have or stuff like that. They just tell you that you can get STIs or you can get pregnant when you're a teenager or something like that

**Ingrid:** They didn't ever like we didn't ever get like things about people who'd had good relationships. It was always about 'Oh yeah I my boyfriend raped me um 'What do I do?' Like there was nothing good-

**Hanna:** 'I'm pregnant and he left'

**Ingrid:** Cos I'm sure there has to be good things out there I mean most of the world seems to work like that and there's like can't like all be full of these bad things. And that was all we seemed to get you know like kind of shown.

As noted earlier, the Health Option and Curriculum programmes took a broad perspective on sexuality beyond a 'disease' and problem-focused model (pregnancy, rape) and this is acknowledged in Hanna's comment that 'not all of it's bad'. However, both Hanna and Ingrid express the lack of information about positive sexual relationships and 'good things'. These girls' comments resonate with Vance's (1992) concerns about overemphasizing sexual danger for women which she observes "runs the risk of making speech about sexual pleasure taboo" (p.7) while also embedding female sexuality within a climate of 'shame'.

Girls' critiques of their sexuality education underline the importance of listening to the voices of young people as recipients of the programmes that are delivered. Researchers here in New Zealand (e.g. Allen, 2001, 2004) and internationally (see Alldred & David, 2007) have consistently identified students' wishes for sexuality education to be taught in the context of relationships. Students' involvement in sexuality education as active participants has also been highlighted in research (Kehily & Nyak, 2000), for example having input to the topics of discussion and having ample opportunities for discussion. Within the Health Education classes we investigated, girls did speak about the opportunities for discussion, particularly those within the Health Option class. One example of the way student participation provided a platform for discussion of important and relevant discussion was Deidre's story of her experience of sexual coercion:

### Extract 4

Yeah oh I went to this party and I was going out with this guy and um this guy was being real sleazy and he was really drunk and he was like sleazing onto me and I was wearing jandals at the time and um I was really really drunk and he like pulled me and started wandering off down the road and things kinda got intimate and I got really scared so I took off my jandal and whacked him really hard and ran away and I told everyone and they all laughed at me.

Deidre's story offers the girls in her audience a resource about resisting coercion that highlights female agency. Such stories may have a greater impact than teacher information because it is experiential knowledge that, as Allen (2001) found, is often more highly valued by



students. Students' accounts from both the Health option and core curriculum programmes generally portrayed their teacher as attending to emotional and experiential aspects of sexual relationships, with abundant opportunities for questions and discussion. Moreover, although they identified an emphasis on definitions and safer sex in their classes, girls also conveyed the notion that there had been some breadth in their programme that extended beyond constructions of sex as coital and physical. In the next example, girls discuss differentiating sex and sexuality:

### Extract 5

**Int:** OK yeah and the difference between um sexuality and the sex what is that that you learnt?

**Viki:** Sex is like the um physical act and also like the gender of the person that they were born

**Ali:** Physical

**Viki:** And sexuality is like everything else, like your identity, your intuitions, emotions

**Carla:** And the biology

**Ali:** Your emotions feelings

**Viki:** Sexuality is a much more wider- wider spectrum of what it means. It's like it can do, it can be towards your culture everything you know, whereas sex is a kind of straight forward thing. Sex between two people or more doing the physical act

**Tanya:** Yeah

**Int:** And what about the other topics that you said. What kinds of things were you doing in those?

**Ali:** Rape. We had people from the rape crisis come in

**Tanya:** That was really good.

Differentiating sexuality from sex potentially opens up for exploring important aspects around sexual feelings and sexual identities. Viki in particular demonstrates her awareness of the breadth of sexuality as encompassing much more than the "physical act" and draws in cultural aspects of sexuality. Nonetheless, the separate categorization of "sex" and "sexuality" may reinforce sex as necessarily coital and heterosexual rather than a more fluid construction of "sex" as merely one form of expressing one's sexuality. We note with interest, however, that although Vicki constructs "sex" as "straightforward" she simultaneously allows for possibilities other than 'straight' sex with her allusion to sex being "between two people or more doing the physical act". The provision of opportunities for discussing the broad realm of sexuality, specifically female sexuality, was most evident in the mention of the sessions taken by the Rape Crisis educator whom Ali refers to in the extract. Uniformly, girls' accounts referenced not only their enjoyment of the sessions but also the different kinds of learning that her sessions made possible. It was only in girls' talk of her sessions that we found a small whisper of pleasure discourse in constructions of girls' sexuality. The girls in the next example illustrate:

### Extract 6

**Bryn:** Oh we talked about - well that happened when the rape people came in she was all asking us what the positives and negatives of having sex were and no one said it and then the woman who was taking the talk she said having fun and we were just like really?, you know

**Carla:** Cos we thought it was - we were just like hard out-

**Bryn:** Yeah we were so, we were so, yeah-

**Deidre:** It was such a serious thing it's like-

**Bryn:** Like all we learnt about was all the serious stuff and all the things that go wrong we didn't ever think about people have sex to have babies or to have fun mm yeah.

Of most concern to us here is Bryn's account that none of the girls in the class were able to identify any "positives" about "having sex". Yet it is unsurprising concern in the context of persistent moral discourses of girls' sexuality and the lingering absence of a legitimating

discourse of desire on the one hand, and the dominance of a sexual risk (heavily gendered around pregnancy and responsibility) discourse on the other. As the girls articulate, the dominant sexual discourse to which they had been exposed, at least in their sexuality education, has emphasized the “negatives”, “all the things that go wrong”. The notion of sex as “fun”, introduced by the Rape Crisis educator, seems to provide something of a ‘eureka’ moment for the girls who jointly convey a sense of the unexpectedness of being permitted to talk about sex as ‘having fun’. Such apparent surprise on the part of the girls is perplexing from the perspective of the prolific production of Girl Power girls having fun, being sexually desiring and desirable, across media texts for a girl audience (e.g. *Girlfriend* and *Crème* magazines). At the same time, the articulation of sexual pleasure in girls’ lived worlds is constrained by the sexual double standard wherein girls continue to be regulated by requirements of ‘good girl’ femininity (Walkerdine, 1990). For the girls in the group here, we suggest that the educator made possible a small space within the curriculum that gave them permission to articulate and contemplate a discourse of sexual pleasure. It would seem from Bryn’s comments that such pleasure could extend to having sex “to have babies”, countering negative constructions of pregnancy within a discourse of risk, as an event to be avoided. The educator’s use of more enabling and empowering discourses of girls’ sexuality also drew mention from these same girls, an example of which is given below:

### Extract 7

**Deidre:** With all the rights and responsibilities it’s really good we did like these are your rights and your responsibilities and I didn’t realise that in like I was trying to write out my list and my friend was next to me and she had the right to enjoy sex and it was all about no this is your right to say no to sex, this is your right to use contraception-

**Ellie:** Mm yeah contraception

**Cara:** Your responsibility to respect people saying no to sex

**Deidre:** -but I never really realised that it was your right to enjoy sex-

**Int:** mm

**Deidre:** -and it’s your response you know.

Themes of both constraint and empowerment run through the girls’ talk of “rights” and “responsibilities”. On the one hand, the rights listed by Deidre orient to the “serious”, dangerous aspects of sex – the “right to say no”, the “right to use contraception”. On the other hand, the rights she mentions are important tools for young women in their negotiation of heterosexual relationships. The ‘problematic’ around a “rights” and “responsibilities” discourse is their individualization, placing the onus on girls for managing sexual relationships, as has historically been the case (Thorogood, 2000). Over-emphasis on a rights discourse may also deny girls access to any discourse of enjoyment, desire or pleasure. In contrast, Deidre’s friend’s list orients to a location of sex within a discourse of pleasure rather than danger. As with Deidre’s earlier story of sexual coercion, here is another example of how other students can play a significant role in disrupting dominant gendered sexuality discourses. While the “right to enjoy sex” strikes an important chord in connecting girls with notions of sexual pleasure in their sexual encounters, we share the concerns of other feminists who worry that girls’ “right to enjoy sex” is drowned in a sea of cautions, responsibilities and restraints about their sexuality (e.g., Burns & Torr , 2005; Fine & McLelland, 2006; Tolman, 2005 ). As historically, in practice the abiding constraint of sexual reputation in girls’ lives (Kehily, 2002; Kitzinger, 2005) continues to construct girls’ sexual pleasure as “slutty”.

## Concluding comments

We end our review of sexuality education in New Zealand schools with some reflections on the ways that the various socio-political discourses we identified in our review are being taken up and resisted (albeit tenuously) in contemporary educational practices. We organize these reflections around the dilemmas that we have identified throughout this article as emerging from tensions and contradictions between the different discourses that are mobilized within and across different contexts.

The tension between a discourse of pleasure and a discourse of danger (or victimization) is a recurrent theme in feminist work on sexuality, in particular the matter of balancing the need to promote young women's sexual health needs with the need to promote their sexual pleasure and agency (e.g., Thompson, 1990; Vance, 1992). In this article we have shown how the victimization discourse identified by Fine (1988) 20 years ago is more prominently mobilized than a pleasure discourse historically, socio-politically and educationally. Its prominence is largely fuelled by public health concerns about teenage mothers and high rates of sexually transmitted infections in youth. From our examination, these concerns seem to be as usefully employed by fundamentalist religion as by health policy makers. In the practice of sexual health education the burden of victimization becomes apparent in girls' talk about the absence of the positives of sex and sexual relationships. As some of the girls articulated, a discourse of victimization can have a thinly veiled motive of stopping them going out and "having sex all over the place 'like rabbits'", which is explicitly the case in the kind of advice about sex offered, for example, by the Destiny Church. Thus a safe sex discourse is separate but related to moral discourses.

The practice of sexuality education harbours another dilemma that relates to the context of delivery. Delivering sexuality education within a school curriculum has significant implications for what gets delivered and how it is delivered. Contextualising sexuality education within achievement objectives creates a dilemma around what receives emphasis. While the girls we spoke with reported enjoying discussions across a broad range of topics, the requirement that they pass the achievement test was reflected in learning about topics in a utilitarian way, such as definitions of sexual identities and sexual practices. Positioning sexuality education as a factual enterprise within a scientific discourse impacts on both the 'what' and 'how' of delivery, although in the Health option course the girls reported an atmosphere of 'free' discussion, debate and opportunities to tell their own stories. If sexuality education is reduced to an examinable subject rather than a relational one, then its meaningfulness for students is seriously compromised.

As feminist researchers our focus is particularly on possibilities for enabling a positive sexuality for girls. To some extent we are drawn to Michelle Fine's (2005) "agnostic" pessimism about the inability of schools to deliver a sexuality education curriculum that can be enabling of girls' sexuality. In girls' accounts of their classes (here and across the groups more generally), there seemed to be little available around alternative sexual practices that focus specifically on subjective pleasuring for girls (e.g. masturbation, mutual masturbation, oral sex). The stubborn, persistent absence of pleasure in sexuality education observed by feminist scholars over time leads us to ask whether a curriculum that incorporates a "discourse of erotics" (Allen, 2004) is possible within the 'structural obstacles' of gender hierarchies (Tolman, 2005), the constraints of an assessment driven education, and the mobilization of the conservative right politically. Furthermore, in a contemporary context of a so-called 'crisis' in youth sexual health in New Zealand it seems likely a discourse of victimization will dominate. However, we do not wish to erase moments such as those provided by the Rape Crisis educator and by girls themselves that countered constraining constructions of female sexuality within discourses-

es of danger and victimization. Nor do we want to discount girls' appreciation of being more informed and knowledgeable about the more utilitarian aspects of sexual health such as STIs and contraception. Nonetheless, until cultural barriers to incorporating a discourse of pleasure in the sexuality education curriculum are dismantled, spaces for girls to interrogate and articulate emancipatory possibilities for their sexuality will continue to be limited.

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