

Sex Cells: A postmodern feminist analysis of Nova Scotia's sex education curricula,  
1970 and 2004

By  
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**Canada**

Sex Cells: A postmodern feminist analysis of Nova Scotia's sex education curricula,  
1970 and 2004

by Jennifer Crawford

**Abstract**

In 1973, the Halifax Family Planning Association lobbied for comprehensive sex education to be trial-run at the Alexandra School in Halifax. Couched in heated public debate, this project records and offers analysis of the public response garnered, and compares it with the public response to the new Nova Scotian manual *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource* (2004). It evinces a fraught panic surrounding adolescent sexuality, particularly girl's sexuality, and points to an urgent need for reconsideration when forming sex education curricula. Accompanied by a discourse analysis of the given curriculum materials and the accompanying manual, this project will also work to situate these materials in the long and burdened history of women's bodies and scientific knowledge. Contextualizing each of these "moments" in Nova Scotia's sex education will create an understanding of what grounds the possibility of the strict surveillance of adolescent sexual bodies, including how and why this might be resisted.

July 19, 2007

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## Preface

In the fall of 2005, I began a Master of Arts in Atlantic Canada Studies at Saint Mary's University. Leading up to this, I had worked in residence life at three different universities in the Maritimes. Saint Mary's University was one of these.

Concurrently, as I began my first year of the MA program, I became the coordinator of the Women's Centre at Saint Mary's University. Prior to this, my main experiences with feminism had been limited to production work and acting in *The Vagina Monologues*. Meaningful and formative as this was for me at the time, when I began my position at the SMU Women's Centre, it became starkly clear that I knew little about feminist thought, theory and activism.

As I read all that I could from the shelves of the Women's Centre, and asked endless questions to the (thankfully patient and wonderful) Women's Studies students who frequented our events, my awareness of both privilege and power became acute, and my desire to resist structures of oppression became evermore passionate and urgent. In my long history in residence life, many young women had confided in me about the sexual violence they had experienced in their lifetimes. In retrospect, what I find most unnerving, alarming and very sad was my near-complete *lack* of alarm at the staggering rates with which such disclosures occurred. I was, of course, sad for these women, as I very intimately knew the pain they were enduring; my experience at the SMU Women's Centre had given me the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, vocabulary and courage to identify systemic sexism and to question the structures that served to perpetuate

violence against women. Finally, I felt the all-consuming shock and outrage only appropriate to such horrific violence.

Many events shaped my outlook on this project. In September of 2006, the assault on six girls, and the murder of one, at Platte Canyon High in Colorado threw me into a state of despair; this was compounded by the atrocity of Nickel Mines only two weeks later. There, ten girls were taken hostage, shot at point-blank range, and five were later pronounced dead. Later, Virginia Tech shook me to my core as I tried to complete a draft of this project. News coverage of these events glaringly lacked any feminist analysis, reinforcing my desire to communicate, through this project, how feminist analysis must, especially in education, be a priority.

Also punctuating the course of this project was Canada's Conservative government announcing major cuts and closures to Status of Women Canada. My feminist activism reached a fever pitch during this time, and there was not a day – not a moment – where I was not thinking about the status of women in Canada and around the world. As I worked through this project, and through what was a completely new way of seeing the world, I swung frequently (sometimes in the same second) between rage, despair, hope, triumph and complete disbelief.

With a rural Nova Scotian background, and a passionate feminist future, I feel that the stakes in sex education are high. Sex education curricula have the opportunity to teach us non-oppressive ways of sexually relating, and can work to deconstruct the sexual subjugation of women. Conversely, it is also possible for such materials to reinforce, however subtly and coercively, the gruesome violence with which women are met, each and every day around the world. Sex education is but one of many ways in which we

acquire our sexual knowledge, but it is one of the only formal ways in which we learn about sex. As an analytical tool, formal sex education affords us the opportunity to analyze how larger systems of power and priorities play out on adolescent bodies, and of particular interest for me, on the bodies of girls. It is the aim of this project to demonstrate the ways in which the current curricula, however liberal-seeming, continues to expose women and girls to the kinds of oppressions they face each and every day.

Judith Butler worries in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* “that the critiques of poststructuralism within the cultural Left have expressed strong skepticism toward the claim that anything politically progressive can come of its premises” (Butler ix). Much of my project views the sex education curricula through a Foucaultian lens. As a young feminist reading *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* or *Discipline and Punish* for the first time, I breathed a sigh of relief to see detailed, in thoughtful ways, the unintelligible and seemingly-impermeable sites of violence and oppression that I had been painstakingly considering. While a Foucaultian analysis is merely one of many ways in which to study sex education, I believe such analysis is a key tool in providing a vocabulary of resistance, a way to write for those who are left out, ignored and omitted. This is not to say that many other sites of resistance are not springing up in varying forms even as I type this, and it is not to say such sites are not of equal, or perhaps even greater, importance. It is to say that I believe postmodern theorizing of sex education is a key critical voice that must not be omitted in ethical activism, and when deployed with women in mind, can only serve to strengthen the movement towards a world where women are both safe and equal.

By referencing Butler here again, I do not purport to be writing such a seminal work as *Gender Trouble*, but I do feel passionately aligned with her aim, which she describes as such: “to open up the field of possibility ... without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. One might wonder what ‘opening up possibilities’ finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is ‘impossible’ ... and illegitimate is likely to pose that question” (viii). By deconstructing the formal structures of sex education in Nova Scotia, I hope to demonstrate that there can and *should* be other options, even if I do not delve into the details of what such alternatives might be (or what such alternatives might already be in existence). My hope is that when someone decides to take it upon themselves to create such alternatives for the formal school system, that this text will be one of many helping to form their materials in an ethical way.

Ultimately, I include these thoughts on the formation of this project to foreground my ultimate interest: a world where women are safe and equal. Until we have achieved exactly that, our education systems must engage with and work to resist the structures that continue to oppress women, girls and sexual minorities. By adding my critical voice to the conversation of sex education, I see myself as seizing agency in the formal structures of sex education that have often omitted feminist considerations. A final invocation of Butler before we begin: “the challenge is in the service of calling taken-for-granted truths into question, when the taken for grantedness of those truths is, indeed, oppressive” (xviii). We now call these oppressive truths into question, in what I hope is – above all else – a project of liberation.



## Introduction

Sex education in Nova Scotia has taken up varying forms since its initial realization in 1973. No longer relegated to private furtive whispers on the playground, sex was exposed and held up for students to study, examine, learn, implement and inscribe on their own bodies. Private knowledge became increasingly public, making it ever more available for scrutiny and surveillance. Our popular culture has gone through what Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1990), has termed as a “veritable discursive explosion” with respect to sexual activity (17). That is, sex is talked about more than ever – on covers of magazines, in movies, television, online – and it is this talking about sex, the need to classify and regulate sexual activity, that allows for instruction in sexual activity. Panic surrounding the corruptibility of children sustains the requirement to instruct children in the delicate practice of “proper” sexual activity. As Lee Edelman writes in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), we are always at work to protect the Child: “the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behavior; the Child who might find information about dangerous “lifestyles” on the internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library” (21).

Alongside the above are the perpetual fears of students’ impending pollution by their surroundings; the dread of the perverse or reckless; fear that children engage in sex and transmit disease or create unwanted pregnancy (creating the need for abortion); these are arguably the primary anxieties which constitute the backbone of the sex education curriculum.

First, we must more fully comprehend what locates, grounds and motivates the current sex education curriculum. In its initial implementation, sex education stood as a unit on its own, grounded largely in biology and scientific discourse. In recent years, sex education has been appropriated by the “Health Education” component of the curriculum, reflecting the rise of healthism in our culture. Narratives of risk and personal responsibility have become dominant in sex education curricula, and the bulk of this responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of girls and women. In the first chapter of this project, I will address these queries: what has triggered and allowed for this transition in understanding the sexual body? Looking to feminist scholars of science and medicine, we will come to see how the science-based narrative of “health” come to be legitimized as “the” voice of sex education, and what, in particular, this meant for women. Engaging feminist theorists and studies of sex education programs, I will offer a critical examination of these methodologies used for teaching the sexual body.

Often, it is only in retrospect that we come to realize the errors of science and damaging misinformation. With an understanding of feminist science studies as detailed above, we are equipped to turn our attention to the 1970 “Family Life Education” curriculum, as compiled by the Nova Scotia Department of Education. To do so, I will call upon critics of sexual reproduction and social regulation, particularly Emily Martin’s essay, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles” (1999), “Natural Facts: A Historical Perspective on Science and Sexuality” (1999) written by Ludmilla Jordanova, and Mary Louise Adams’ *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (1997). It is my aim to demonstrate the misinformation, prejudice and sexism inherent (yet undetected

at the time, extended to students as “matter of fact” and “natural”) in Halifax’s school curriculum less than 40 years ago. By doing so, it will become clear that there are valid and urgent reasons to be wary of accepting current sex education (and indeed “Health Education”) narratives with open arms; sex education in the classroom may be one of the few opportunities for students to learn (without misinformation and myths) safe and pleasurable ways of enjoying sexual activity. For that reason, materials which have been used to teach sex must be met with our scrupulous criticism. Previous curricula are the platform from which the current mechanisms for teaching sex education have evolved and, for that reason, must not be omitted from this project.

Next, it is imperative to consider the roots of the current curriculum – that is, we must turn our attention to the onset of a comprehensive (inclusive of birth control) sex education program in Nova Scotia, particularly the proposal for sex education at Alexandra School in 1973. Alexandra School served as the “protestant or nondenominational school for the north end” (Fells 1). By detailing and analyzing the media response to this event (which has heretofore not been done in any comprehensive manner), I will provide a snapshot of the political climate and ideologies surrounding sex education at that time. Invoking Michel Foucault’s ideas surrounding regulating bodies, governance, surveillance and self-surveillance from *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1990), and *Discipline and Punish* (1995), as well as Petersen and Lupton’s depictions of responsibility and health in *The New Public Health: Health and Self in the Age of Risk* (1996), I will offer explanations as to how sexual health has become a public concern, something to be governed and regulated (through such means as school curricula). Nova Scotia is fertile ground for a discussion of what health and

responsibility have come to mean; where extra-curricular bands and sports teams once sold once sold chocolate bars to fundraise on a regular basis, there are now limitations or even bans on such activities and, as Caroline Alphonso writes in September 2005 in *The Globe and Mail*, the Nova Scotia government has also “eliminated chocolate bars, soft drinks and many deep-fried foods from public schools,” in an effort to curb “childhood obesity” (“Will Canada”). Calling upon the work of theorists such as Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1995), and Lee Edelman’s polemic *No Future* (2004), I will assert that “health” and “the child” have come to represent romantic ideals for the larger public (and particularly, parents), ideals which are universally understood as the unquestionable good. Ideals such as “the future,” “innocence,” “purity”: such quixotic understandings have subsequently created prejudices and problems ripe for our analysis.

By this point, I will have created an understanding of the crucial need to meet school curricula, often taken as “factual” information, with our critical eye. In the fifth and final chapter, I will turn my own critical eye to the current sex education materials of the Nova Scotia Health Education Curriculum, and in particular, the new sex education manual, *Sex?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource* (2004). How are sexual bodies understood, given the frameworks of health and risk that the students must learn through? Through a rigorous discourse analysis of the *Sex?* manual, it will become clear that sex education is largely motivated and influenced more by a desire to regulate the bodies and actions of adolescents than for educating students about desire, well-intentioned as it may be. By first providing an analysis of the public reception of the *Sex?* manual (ranging from enthusiastic support to outright slander), we will see similarities and common narratives

shared between the release of this book, and the inception of comprehensive sex education in 1973.

Largely, I will focus on the discussions of pleasure, self-pleasure and desire. How are pleasure and desire explained in the curriculum (if at all), and what implications does this carry for the students' understanding of their bodies? How are gendered images of the body configured in the teaching materials? What do these bodies look like, and how are the students instructed to identify with them? Students are predominantly offered the negative risks of sex; how does the gendered nature of such negative content affect sexual decision making? Citing research projects regarding adolescent sexual activity conducted by the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health ("Why is HIV/AIDS a Women's Issue?" 2005), as well as Deborah Tolman's *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality* (2004), among other studies of adolescent girls' sexual experiences, I will assert that the poor instruction and lack of inclusion insofar as female pleasure and desire in the *Sex?* manual (in other words, a complete absence of female sexual autonomy) not only lends itself *to*, but is actively productive *of* gendered, uncertain, potentially traumatic and damaging sexual experiences for young women. Moreover, I suggest that the manuals' perpetuation of commonly-held oppressive beliefs about the sexuality of girls and queer youth are what enabled the vast majority of the public to accept the manual. That is, by failing to question or destabilize some of the most troublesome sexual stereotypes, the manual remained palatable for a lay audience, dangerous as it may be for girls' sexuality. To do this, I will critically assess the manuals' discussions of sexual assault, sexual definitions and the anatomical images used in the *Sex?* manual.

Finally, to conclude, I will assert that the curriculum requires an absolute reconstitution of mechanisms for teaching (and learning) about bodies. Anecdotally speaking, though I would contend that this experience speaks volumes regarding sex education in Nova Scotia – in my own Grade 6 sex education class, we were asked to anonymously write down one (only one) question about sex on a piece of paper, fold it carefully in half, and put our questions in a box; our teacher would answer them for us. I hardly need to point out the shame and secrecy involved with such an escapade; but it was also exciting to have my question, “What does sex feel like?” adequately and professionally answered. When the box had been sorted through, questions answered, mine had not been responded to – it had been discarded with the “inappropriate” questions, which upon reading, the teacher would enact embarrassment, guffawing and indignant mannerisms. I was mortified, embarrassed, and felt I must be perverse, even though my question was anonymous. Another friend had her question, “If boys get boners, then what do girls get?” discarded as well. It is harmful to continue maintenance of the idea that, as detailed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*,

for example, that children had no sex, which was why they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closed one’s eyes and stopped one’s ears whenever they came to show evidence to the contrary, and why a general and studied silence was imposed. (Foucault 4)

Concluding the project with the imagining of a different sexual body, one free from the regulation, domination and tyranny of feverishly gendered images and teaching in sex education (not to mention film, television, magazines, pornography, fashion, and the list goes on) will envision a body perhaps not free from risk, but absolutely with the potential

for pleasure. I will put into conversation theorists who have questioned the given nature of the ideal body in their work on transgressive sexual bodies. Through this lens, I will propose that we must reconstitute beliefs we unquestioningly (obediently?) “know” about our bodies. I will re-imagine the ideal sexual body: is it necessarily both risk free and healthy? Must it have a partner? Can the partner be synthetic/prosthetic? Must it be in physical contact with itself/others? How tangible/virtual can it be? Can we push ourselves to imagine other than what exists? Why should we? By reorienting ourselves to current schemata of bodily learning, we can creatively oppose current dominions of health, risk and responsibility and recreate for ourselves ways to teach, enact and live in positive, sexually pleasurable, embodied realities.

## Methodology

Having detailed what this project aims to do, it is equally imperative to detail what it will not do. As stated, this project seeks to explore two crucial moments in Nova Scotia's sex education curriculum, as well as the curriculum materials which accompanied these moments. Research for this project began at the site of media response to the release of the new *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource* manual in 2004. Responses ranging from impassioned anger to enthusiastic support provided a microcosm in which to analyze the fraught understandings of adolescent sexual activity. It was a site where the status of the body was somewhat uncertain, which is telling of our anxieties, priorities and agendas, and for this reason I was drawn to studying it further. Given the fervor with which some responded to this manual, I was propelled to consider what the very onset of sex education must have prompted insofar as public response. For this reason, I then began researching the first attempt to implement comprehensive sex education at Alexandra School in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

While studying these two moments together may not seem intuitive, what strikes me as most important about doing so is that it allows for a recording of change (or, I will argue, lack of change) over time. Though there have been massive upheavals in educational styles and priorities, changing attitudes towards sex, drastic changes in legislation with regard to abortion, divorce and queerness, and a changing status of the family, considering these two moments together allows us to see the ways in which the deployment of power and inscriptions of gender and control continue to play out in our formal education system. In relation to the current sex education curricula, the 1970s



Family Life Education materials may seem antiquated, even absurd; what I hope to demonstrate is the ways in which our current curricula, however unintelligibly, continues to regulate adolescent bodies, and especially female bodies, in much the same way. Time and change in educational philosophy does not necessarily equal progress, and this is what studying these two moments together will permit us to see: that changes in formal legislation and education do not necessarily play out in our lived experiences, nor in our formal education systems.

The first of the moments considered is the request from the Halifax Family Planning Association to the Halifax Regional School Board that a comprehensive sex education curriculum be tested as a pilot program at the Alexandra School in Halifax, in 1973. The second of these moments is the release of a new sex education manual, entitled *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource* (throughout this project, this will be referred to as the *Sex?* manual, for purposes of continuity). These two moments are grounded in politically charged Canadian climates, namely, they took place during the broad reforms made by the Liberal government in the 1960s, and during the impassioned debate surrounding the legislation of same-sex marriage in the early twenty first century. Moreover, this social change was reflected in the activism taking place in the Halifax and larger Nova Scotian communities as well. For example, it was in 1970 that the Family Planning Association was established in Halifax, and worked in tandem with the Junior League of Halifax whose driving force was “unity among women” (Fingard 34). The JLH had, in 1969, had recently moved its daycare services to the North End Neighbourhood Centre, handy to Alexandra School (Fingard 33). “In 1973,” Judith Fingard writes, “the Council of Women at the provincial level teamed up with the Nova Scotia Human Rights

Commission to produce a report on pay scales for men and women in the wake of the anti-sex discrimination legislation that took effect in 1972” (37). As Norene Pupo details in her essay, “Preserving Patriarchy: Women, The Family and The State,” new legislation and resulting activism makes it clear that “state decisions regarding private life are profound” (207). In keeping with this profound change, it was early in 1970, “the year after the repeal of the relevant sections in the Criminal Code made it possible, the Halifax-Dartmouth Family Planning Association, soon known as the Metro Area Family Planning Association, was launched following the first family planning workshop” (Fingard 40). MAFPA soon (in 1974) opened a birth control clinic in the heart of Halifax’s North End, located on Gottigen Street (41).

The first of these moments took place in the midst of massive upheaval in areas such as access to birth control and abortion, changes to divorce legislation, and heavy research and activism by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women Canada. It was a time when positive change seemed not only possible, but was taking place with such momentum that it would continue long into the future. As McLaren and McLaren write in the book, *The Bedroom and the State* (1986), “only in 1969 was the Canadian Criminal Code amended so that the provision of contraceptives ceased to be illegal” (9), and further, “Dr. Henry Morgentaler in 1973 publicized the fact that he had successfully carried out over 5,000 [abortions] in Montreal” (137). Jean Sharp, the women’s editor for the Canadian Press in 1973, wrote that “the law was also reformed to allow medically approved abortions to be carried out in hospitals” (Sharp A55). As detailed by McLaren and McLaren, women had long been practicing various ways of limiting their births; these sorts of amendments and changes “stand as classic examples of changes in the law

tardily following changes in social behaviour” (McLaren and McLaren 9). By way of changes to the status of the family, in the Divorce Act of 1968,

the first general divorce act in Canadian history, the grounds for divorce were widened beyond adultery .... While the legislation, with its broader grounds for divorce and limited acceptance of marriage breakdown, was a step forward, the concept of a guilty party was not yet eliminated from Canadian divorce law. (Burr 409)

The Canadian Census data from 1971 also pointed to the dramatic change that education bears on the lives of women; “Education was inversely related to fertility. Here again, length of education of women was crucial; women in the twenty-five-to-thirty-four-year-old cohort who had less than a grade nine education had on average 2.6 children; university-educated women had 1.3 children” (McLaren and McLaren 126). This was a time when the status of women was certainly not static, and it appeared as though it could only continue to change for the better. Organizations in Halifax reflected and worked towards such aims: in 1969, the agenda of a Voice of Women Halifax meeting (who were at the centre of Halifax’s peace movement) included the topic “women’s lib” (Early 270). It was a year later that Muriel Duckworth, at the metropolitan public planning exercise “Encounter on Urban Environment,” that when “affronted by the all-male panel of experts, [she] took the microphone and criticized the twelve-man committee for its gender exclusivity” (Early 271). Feminist organizing in Halifax was influential, passionate and “grandly subversive” (Early 272). The history and tales of each of these interconnected movements are simply too massive to be comprehensively detailed in this project. However, it is my hope that the description I have provided allows for an

understanding of the context in which the proposal for sex education at Alexandra School was steeped.

McLaren and McLaren write that “in defending these sections of the 1967 omnibus bill introduced to overhaul the statute books, Pierre Trudeau made what might well remain his best-known assertion: ‘The state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation’” (9). Though such changes were made to the legal structures of Canada, this does not always translate well into the lived experiences of Canadian citizens. During Nova Scotia’s Education Week in 1977, Halifax’s weekly publication *The 4<sup>th</sup> Estate* included a supplement featuring a young boy reading a *Playboy* magazine, with the caption “Sex education in Halifax schools,” and the article inside reads as such:

Back in 1973 Keith Sullivan, principal of Alexandra School, realized some of his grade 9 students needed to get some authoritative information on birth control. With Dr. Sullivan’s urging, two people from the Metro Area Family Planning Association (the local affiliate of Planned Parenthood) put together a brief outline of a program on human sexuality for junior high students. It covered everything from anatomy to contraception to sex roles and was intended as the barest outline for educators to develop ....

What they did not know, perhaps, was they were dropping a buck into the school system destined to be passed around for a long time (Zierler 2).

At the time in 1977 when this article was published, not one teacher had yet tried to teach the modified sex education program that had eventually been approved in October of 1974 (Zierler 2). Sex education continued to be a topic of contestation, disagreement and

debate. This debate rages on today, which brings us to the second moment which I will consider in this project.

The release of the *Sex?* manual came directly amid a time when tempers were (and continue to be) hotly ignited in impassioned debate over the legislation of gay marriage in Canada, and its release was shortly followed by massive cuts and closures to Status of Women Canada's offices and programs. Though Trudeau said decades ago that the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation, it seems that, in many ways, little has changed. Access to abortion continues to be tenuous at best (especially in the Atlantic Provinces, where PEI offers no abortion services whatsoever) and a picture of Ashley MacIsaac very prudently kissing his new husband in *The Daily News* incites a "barrage of absolutely vile language in response" (Lisk). In February 2007, in the neighbouring USA, Texas became the first state to legislate the administering of the HPV (Human papillomavirus) vaccine to girls, though this decision was later overturned (Matthews). The *Sex?* manual comes at a time when women's bodies continue to be sites of struggle, and it appears that what were thought to be permanent and effective gains are, in fact, painfully tenuous. This is not to say that the period between these two moments was not politically charged in a multiplicity of ways – but these two moments unleashed a particularly fierce torrent of panic surrounding adolescent sexuality.

This project will not exhaustively document the formal discussions surrounding these two moments – it will not delve into minutes of Board Meetings, the notes of the Healthy Sexuality Resource Group (who created the *Sex?* manual), or even claim to exhaustively analyze the text of the curricula involved. It will not exhaustively detail the activities of activist organizations and other sites of resistance. The limitation of a

postmodern analysis is that it poses the “difficulty of the ‘I’ to express itself through the language that is available to it” (Butler xxiv). As stated, there are a multiplicity of ways in which to view sex education: by interviewing teachers who have and who now teach sex education; by documenting the modes of resistance from feminist organizations; by speaking with students engaged in the curricula; by documenting the process of curricula creation; by examining the subversive modes of sex education and interviewing those who strive to create them, to only name a few. It is my hope that by providing this particular analysis of Nova Scotia’s formal sex education structures, that others might take up these other equally crucial projects. Having worked to narrow and limit my scope for this particular MA thesis, there is much of the sex education story being omitted, which I am painstakingly aware of, but optimistically hope that this will lend opportunity for other further projects and analysis.

What this project *will* do is provide a reconnaissance of two pivotal moments in the history of sex education in Nova Scotia, and will foreground the discussions of sex education in both public debate, local history and the theory of feminist science scholars. By engaging with the media coverage of the local Nova Scotian newspapers surrounding these two moments, this project will create a record of public opinion and situate those opinions in the theory of feminist scholars. It will take into account two local papers; in the 1970s, the morning provincial paper in Nova Scotia was *The Chronicle Herald*, the afternoon city publication was *The Mail-Star*. Halifax’s weekly at the time was *The 4<sup>th</sup> Estate*, which I have not included in this research due to both constraints of time and in an attempt to limit the focus of this project. In the present day, there is an additional paper, *The Daily News*. By searching through the microfilm records available at the

Halifax Public Library, I was able to organize and analyze a record of information surrounding sex education (from September, 1973 – March, 1974) which had heretofore not been collected in any meaningful fashion. After exhaustively reading all of the articles pertaining to sex education throughout this period in the papers described, I settled upon the quotes that I thought were most telling regarding the oppressions inherent to formal sex education curricula. Pairing this with a copy of the 1970 sex education curriculum obtained from the Nova Scotia Department of Education made for a robust analysis of not only the curriculum available to students in 1970, but of the impassioned dissent that followed the proposal for change. In this project, I have not included quotes from every single article published during this period, but instead, the ones I considered most representative of the tenor of debate in the local news at that time.

A copy of the *Sex?* manual was obtained by writing to the Department of Education, though the full text is also available online. The media coverage precipitated from its release was broad in scope, ranging from outright fury to enthusiastic acceptance. The sheer volume of this media coverage has made it impossible to exhaustively include it in this project; what I have done is choose articles from several different perspectives, and only omitted articles with an aim to prevent repetition and duplications of opinions. This is a representative cross-section of the articles that precipitated from the release of the *Sex?* manual. Pairing these articles with the text of *Sex?* itself, and a rigorous discourse analysis of a selection of its contents, creates a comprehensive understanding of both the panic and praise that followed its release.

It is crucial to note that not only is the curriculum grounded in messages of risk-avoidance, but so are the letters of opposition to the curriculum changes, both to the 1973

proposal, as well as to the *Sex?* manual. We are at a point in time where health and personal responsibility have become inextricably linked; “by linking medicine with the destinies of states,” Foucault writes in *The Birth of the Clinic*, “they revealed in it a positive significance ... it was given the splendid task of establishing in men’s lives the positive role of health, virtue, and happiness” (39). Medicine has grounded itself as the all-knowing means of ensuring health – one only need look as far as the anti-smoking conscription of Canadian citizens and widespread smoking bans. This is not to say that research surrounding the dangers of smoking is not accurate or worthwhile, but it is undeniable that it is the power of medicine and new notions of personal responsibility for the health of not only one’s self, but others as well, that lend heavily to such changes in legislation.

Such medical notions of personal safety, health and responsibility inevitably saturate sex education curriculums, and Nova Scotia’s is certainly no exception. As we are heaped with ever-higher personal health responsibilities, our personal autonomy is conversely correlated, and it is this chipping away of autonomy, especially female autonomy, with which this project predominantly concerns itself.



## Chapter 1 | Let's Talk about Talking about Sex

In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Michel Foucault comments as such on the past three centuries of human history: “around the apropos of sex, one sees a veritable discursive explosion” (17). All around us, there are continual flare-ups and eruptions, and the frequency with which we hear about sex seems unlikely to regress anytime soon. Canadian-born artist Nelly Furtado sings unabashedly about promiscuity (her hit song in 2006 was “Promiscuous”), which, some would argue, is a welcome change from the gangster rap that positions women as having little or no power over their sexual choices. Informal modes of learning about sex may have never been so manifold: numerous magazines, television shows and, perhaps most influential, the internet, provide a wealth of easily accessible information for adolescents grappling with sex and the multiplicity of questions that arise from sexy feelings and body changes. Biographies of former porn stars and celebrities whose sex tapes were leaked accidentally top our bestseller lists with some frequency (Levy 5). With this vast proliferation of sex all around us, surely our education system is comfortable with the subject, and well-equipped to make sense of what Foucault names “a dense web” (96) of sexual discourses?

On first glance, it seems the answer is a resounding *no*. Discourse, in a Foucaultian understanding, is about “organized systems of knowledge that make possible what can be spoken about and how one may speak about it” (Adams 6). Systems surrounding the topic of sex have necessitated silences between some speakers, most notably between children and their parents or teachers (Foucault 30). This is not to say that parents and teachers are silent regarding the sex acts of their children and students; in

fact, “since the eighteenth century it has multiplied the forms of implantation for sex; it has coded contents and qualified speakers” (Foucault 29). What we have come to know through the educational institution as “sex education” is one such (dis)organized system of thought regarding the sexuality of children, and has been met itself with a massive explosion of opposition, support, panic, and revulsion over the past six decades.

Pairing the words *sex* and *education* is not a naturally occurring organization of terms; putting those words together is a recent development in the understanding of adolescent sexuality, health, risk and the notions of a “responsible citizen.” Though we may not know the exact date and the name of the person who initially thought to pair up these terms, it is undeniable that the fervor with which the words stuck together over decades is telling of the weight and solemnity given to the term. While there have been derivatives of the term (“Family Life Education” for example, in 1970s Halifax), even in media coverage of the time, “Sex Ed” became the pop name for the curriculum component. How these two words – *sex* and *education* – came together to assert objective knowledge deemed appropriate for adolescents is a process with which we must concern ourselves.

In her study of the regulation of post-war youth and the creation of compulsory heterosexuality, Mary Louise Adams writes that “following Freud, heterosexual development was seen as a fragile process, one open to corruption. Adult heterosexuality was not taken to be an inevitability; it was an achievement, a marker of safe passage through adolescence” (10).

Understanding heterosexuality as something other than compulsory and therefore open to “corruption” makes for a strange ally in arguing that queerness, without the

wealth of strict mechanisms to keep it in check, might indeed proliferate. As it is, though acknowledging heterosexuality as a fragile process concurrently acknowledges a certain unnaturalness about the condition, sex education worked to make heterosexuality the marker of normalcy for post-war youth. Regarding the panic surrounding the corruptability of children Lee Edelman writes that our culture is held in a grasp that does not allow us to deny “the sacred child”;

the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behaviour;  
the Child who might find information about dangerous “lifestyles” on the Internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library; the Child, in short, who might find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult’s adulterating implication in desire itself.... (21)

Dread of the sexuality of children has led to a policing of information available to them. Sex education is only one vein in the complex system of controlling the sexual vocabulary of children; it is a “policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses” (Foucault 25). When, as analyzed by Adams, the Toronto Board of Education disputed whether or not to implement sex education curricula in 1948, the cause was not mere good-will for the sexual pleasure of the students. Instead, it was suggested as “a means of combating pervasive social problems: venereal disease and sexual deviation” (Adams 107). Sex education for the sake of itself would have been unlikely. Grounding the proposal in moral panic and a desire to combat venereal disease – claimed to be “Canada’s number one health scourge” (Adams 108) – afforded the program credibility and the moral high-

ground in what was a testy subject. Nova Scotia did not choose to implement sex education curricula in the immediate postwar period; British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba were the Canadian pioneers of sex education. In fact, Nova Scotia followed decades later, the first proposal not until 1970.

Adams correctly writes in response to Foucault “that [though] our era suffers from an explosion of sexual discourse, it is not always easy to identify or classify the debris” (17). The sheer volume of sexual discourses make it difficult to understand from *where* power is asserted and heterosexual normalcy created in adolescents; my work will operate under Foucault’s assertion that “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (93). In sex education, power is in the hands of the curricula creators, the parents who choose to discuss or not discuss sex with their child, with the teacher – anywhere but in the hands of the children learning sex education. As Adams details, what began as a fight against venereal disease in the Toronto school system, soon became a panic surrounding normalcy, preventing sexual perversion and instilling good moral values: “If VD was the object of the first round of sex education discussion at the board, teenage sexual development was the object of the second. In both cases, actual teenagers were nothing more than the vehicles carrying ‘concerned adults’ to their desired goals” (120). Sex education was a means to create the ideal citizen, and it was not taken lightly by the Toronto school board. Alternatives to marriage, or difficulties in family living would not be included in the curriculum as that information might prove too negative, deterring students from the desired social aim (Adams 129).

Forms of sex education in the late 1940s were thus rarely concerned with addressing the reality of sex, and instead with the normalization of heterosexuality. It was “about making distinctions, performing exclusions” (Adams 130). This was even the case with the teachers considered appropriate for teaching sex education. The *Globe and Mail* ran an editorial in 1949 on the topic of sex education, as the Toronto school board grappled with how (and with *whom*) to properly administer the program; “It is not just a question of knowing facts and being able to recite them to a class, but a teacher of sex must have the manner, moral attitude and psychological balance which are absolutely essential [to this topic]” (qtd. in Adams 131). Even more detailed was the work of American sex educator Frances Bruce Strain. In her book *Sex Guidance in Family Life Education: a Handbook for the Schools* (1942), she asserted that if sex education were to be successful, teachers of such a topic had to be appropriate manifestations of their given gender role: “Men must be definitely masculine with that quality which used to be called manly, and women must be feminine with that quality which used to be called womanly. It won’t do to shade even slightly in the opposite direction” (qtd. in Adams 127). By acting as role models, the teachers were the means to set an ideal example of womanhood or manhood for the students to relate to; gender ambiguity would cause confusion in the budding adolescent.

In spite of its seemingly conservative nature, the proposal to introduce sex education in the Toronto school system was, at the time, a radical one, and was contested, opposed and was hotly debated for years. Grounding the curriculum in sound “morals” was of great concern to those implementing the program, but such a task was difficult to negotiate – how to be sure that the teacher administered it properly? What if the

information enticed the students into sexual activity? What if the moral teachings were overshadowed by the nature of the explicit sexual material? One of the most notable moves in how to talk about sex and sex education was the transition from stringent moral teachings to shrouding sex in the language of ‘objective’ medicine and science – this is the language of Nova Scotia’s sex education curriculum today. The history of this medical gaze is long; here we will examine what is most relevant to us – the history of the science of the sexes.

## Chapter 2 | Power, Medicine and Gender

Before delving into what science deemed biology and sex to *be*, it is necessary for us to examine the act of science itself as saturated with sexual potential. That acknowledgement in itself is a crucial consideration; how science was/is perceived could, potentially, affect what were and often continue to be called “objective” outcomes. As sex education in Nova Scotia continues to be housed in what is called the “Health Education” curriculum, it is imperative to consider the history of how such narratives of health and medicine came to dominate objective understandings of sex. In a very important way, medicine was the inaugural “objective” sex education program as we know it, and it is its history that our current curricula are predicated upon. Ludmilla Jordanova’s analysis of early medical practices describes the way in which the body itself became feminized, and practices of health and medicine, masculinized. In the heterosexist imperative of the time, this also positioned the work of health and medicine as profoundly sexualized. Jordanova writes that “science and medicine as activities were associated with sexual metaphors, which were clearly expressed in designating nature as a woman to be unveiled, unclothed and penetrated by masculine science” (158). As this understanding of the body is a foundation of our current system, it demands our scrupulous analysis.

Jordanova asserts her reason for beginning with the Enlightenment was that this was when “rational knowledge based on empirical information derived from the senses was deemed the best foundation for secure knowledge” (158). Moreover, it was during the Enlightenment that science and medicine enjoyed great privilege, as they were seen as

the institutions that would provide alternatives to religious and orthodox understandings of nature and the body (Jordanova 158). Her work employs compelling examples of utilizing sexual metaphor to elevate the status of health and science over women. One such example is the “late nineteenth-century statue in the Paris medical faculty of a young woman, her breasts bare, her head slightly bowed beneath the veil she is taking off, which bears the inscription ‘Nature unveils herself before Science’” (164). Women came to stand in for all that is “nature,” and science to stand for all that was knowledgeable, cultural and male; “female nature had been unclothed by male science, making her understandable under general scrutiny” (Jordanova 164).

Of special consideration in terms of sex education, Jordanova’s work includes a comprehensive analysis of the wax models used for anatomical instruction in the late eighteenth century. Sex education continues the longstanding tradition of using anatomical images to teach biology, and it is only by exploring the history of this tradition that we will be able to view current anatomical images through a critical lens. She describes the wax models (notably named “Venuses”) as such:

In the wax series, many of which were made in Florence at the end of the eighteenth century (Assaroli 1975), the female figures are recumbent, frequently adorned with pearl necklaces. They have long hair, and occasionally they have hair in the pubic area also ... [they] lie on velvet or silk cushions, in a passive, almost sexually inviting pose. Comparable male figures are usually upright, and often in a position of motion. (164)

In the culture of the time, this sort of anatomical model was considered an objective representation of anatomy and sex; it was common knowledge in the eighteenth century



that males and females were incommensurately different by virtue of their entire corporeal being (Jordanova 160). Such biases are important to consider, as they may point to similar undetected biases in our own current cultural understandings of men and women's bodies; how we learn about our bodies is largely affected by what medicine and science deem *true* about our bodies. It is this "truth" which continues to enjoy often uncontested acceptance that we must work to analyze and disrupt, and it is for ourselves to decide whether or not to accept it.

Consider this tradition of science enjoying a distinctly male privilege and of female bodies being the fetishized objects of analysis *alongside* the practice of grounding current sex education curricula in similar methodology (even if unintentionally or unknowingly); it is easily conceivable that the prejudices inherent in the former (is it former?) system continue to persist and alienate the minds and bodies of adolescent girls. Jordanova demonstrated the sexual imagery of science, and with disturbing effect the "figures of recumbent women" who "seem[ed] to convey, for the first time, the sexual potential of medical anatomy" (164). Not only was science positioning itself as a sexualized process, it also strictly sexed the bodies it analyzed.

Sex was a category open to interpretation, and science claimed the right to speak with authority on the subject. As sex education curricula are largely dependent upon the harsh and limiting distinctions of "boy" and "girl," attention must be lent to how such categories came to rule with such decisive authority. Grounding this analysis in the sexualized nature of science itself, we are given opportunity to question and challenge the currently divisive and oppressive nature of "sex."

### Chapter 3 | Rethinking “Opposite Gender”

Current popular sex education (in North America, including Nova Scotia) presupposes and is reliant on, perhaps more than anything else, a dichotomous system of two types of sexed bodies: boys and girls. Such distinctions are taken at face value, as matter of fact, as though free from interpretation. Boys and girls, treated as “opposite sexes,” are the two categories that the current sex education curriculum works to instruct. This binary structure has been widely accepted as the state of things, the way things have always been, the way things will always be in the future. A common sentiment would perhaps look much like this: *why question a given as given as the fact that there are boys and girls, which grow up to be men and women, who are essentially different, both physically and mentally?* What I propose here (as have many theorists, whose work I will draw upon) is that boys and girls are not a natural category; biological constructions of boys and girls are heavily imbued with (if not completely fictionalized by) cultural influence, both contemporary and historical.

My argument is not that male and female bodies are the same (obviously, there are some easily notable differences), but instead, that the category of “sex” that we are familiar with is relatively recent, rigid, and a well established *system*. That is, it is a mechanism for sorting and organizing power structures, and is perhaps being more violently enforced than ever. I use the word “violent” as opposed to “aggressive” here, and it is not without reason. Gender deviants and transpersons are, in varying degrees of severity, met with horrific violence, harassment and even murder. The rape and murder of Brandon Teena in 1993 is one such example; after having passed as a man in Fall City,

Nebraska, he was exposed as having been born a woman (Halberstam 23). This is a hyperbolic example of the violent policing of gender that takes place, each and every day. It is with urgency and passion that we must deconstruct and resist the harassment and violence that restricts our gender expressions and severely compromises the safety (and the very lives) of transpersons. Here, we will examine historical models of biological “sex,” before taking up an in-depth criticism of the curriculum itself. By introducing historical models of the category “sex” into my research, I hope to destabilize, upset, disrupt and uproot the belief that scientific and biological models of the body (such as are prescribed in the curriculum) are, as much as an artists interpretation of the body, saturated with cultural beliefs, power structures, and are, as asserted by Thomas Laqueur in his book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, a product of a specific historical moment. He writes that the “context for the articulation of two incommensurable sexes was ... neither a theory of knowledge nor advances in scientific knowledge. The context was politics” (Laqueur 152). Beliefs of the day permeate every understanding of embodiment and, thus are imperative to consider in this analysis of a curriculum that works to *teach* mechanisms and behaviors of appropriate gendered embodiment.

### *The Medical Gaze*

Privilege of presentations, representations and re-presentations of sex has been held almost exclusively in the hands of science and men of medicine for much of the past three centuries. Interiors of bodies (perhaps especially since the 19<sup>th</sup> century) have been made increasingly visible; today, scientists and medical professionals (but normally not

your average person) are able to scrutinize and trace bodily pathologies (both behavioral and physical) right down to the very molecules and DNA structures. Michel Foucault has traced this permeating gaze in his archaeology of medical perception, *The Birth of the Clinic*. He writes:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, doctors described what for centuries had remained below the threshold of the visible and the expressible .... A new alliance was forged between words and things, enabling one *to see* and *to say*. Sometimes, indeed, the discourse was so completely 'naïve' that it seems to belong to a more archaic level of rationality, as if it involved a return to the clear, innocent gaze of some earlier, golden age. (Foucault xiii)

A desire "*to see* and *to say*" leads us to consider the work of Donna Haraway, who writes that there is no passive "camera obscura" and reminds us to consider and interrogate the "cultural practice of hunting with the camera" ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 169). As the interior and microscopic functions of our bodies become increasingly visible in the realm of the laboratory or the clinic, we must consider Foucault's description of the "clinical gaze": "This gaze ... which refrains from all possible intervention, and from all experimental decision, and which does not modify" (133). Believing that the body is purely a text to be read, decoded, all of its programming laid out before us (if only we can figure out how to decipher it) is loaded with political agency and concern. Notions such as "reading" the genome, or the DNA "language" and "alphabet" conjures for us an image of a passive body, a body as text; Jose van Dijck writes in "The Language and Literature of Life" that "metaphors may actually change our concept of reality instead of

merely providing convenient translation tools” (69). Understanding the body as a passive object which only needs to be read by one who knows the language influences our beliefs about our bodies and embodiment, and works to pacify the owner of the body who must hand it over for deciphering and interpreting.

While this “clinical gaze” rests upon and is validated through claims to objectivity and passivity, which are themselves widely accepted, it is nevertheless completely saturated with cultural influence. Personal attributes have, in the past and today, been traced to biological functions by means of the “clinical gaze”; the category of sex is no exception here. Marchessault writes in her article “David Suzuki’s *The Secret of Life*: Informatics and the Popular Discourse of the Life Code”:

DNA fingerprinting is far more ambiguous in terms of delineating biological identities. The taxonomy of sameness (the human species) and difference (absolute individuality in the form of the genetic print) is undermined by the fact that species differences are difficult to discern; by the gender problem, according to genetic studies not all women are women (some women carry the male chromosome); and by the reality that race is not a category of biological identity. (62)

Victor José wrote in 1895 that “woman exists only through her ovaries” (qtd. in Laqueur 149). Following with this, it later became so that intersexed individuals (described as those with “doubtful sex”) would be prescribed their sexual identity by the nature of his/her gonadal tissues, regardless of the individuals desired and lived gender identity (Dreger 6). In her article “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body,” Siobhan Somerville writes that the influence of current evolutionary theory was heavy in

the creation of races: “notions of visible difference and racial hierarchies were deployed to corroborate Darwinian theory” (68). Also, as written by Colette Guillauman, “the slave system was already constituted when the inventing of the races was thought up” (89).

Here we will trace past applications of this clinical gaze, how it worked to create the system of sex we are familiar with today, and hopefully, dislodge and upset our belief in the (un)natural heteronormative category of “sex.”

“Sometime in the eighteenth century,” Thomas Laqueur writes, “sex as we know it was invented” (149). Prior to this, the “one-sex” model had been a commonly held knowledge about the body; this was the belief that the sex organs of men and women were essentially the same, and that women were simply inverted versions of men. As the dominance of medical discourse grew, so did the distinction between male and female bodies. Bodies became decisive:

As the natural body itself became the gold standard of social discourse, the bodies of women – the perennial other – thus became the battleground for redefining the ancient, intimate, fundamental social relation: that of woman to man .... Two sexes, in other words, were invented as a new foundation for gender. (150)

Laqueur’s seminal analysis of the shift from the one-sex model to the two-sex model (the model with which we are so familiar today) in *Making Sex* will largely influence my interpretation of the current sex education curriculum, accompanying anatomical models and films. For that reason, we will now turn our attention to his work in order to dislodge, denaturalize and question current binary assumptions of gender and sex as inscribed by Nova Scotia’s sex education curriculum.

Today, what continues to matter is “the flat, horizontal, immovable foundation of physical fact: sex” (Laqueur, 151). Laqueur demonstrates the undulations, transitions, and delicately balanced territory that our sexes are grounded upon. Sex is not a category made available to us by advances in medical technology, science or new epistemologies of the body. Technological advance and the increasing ability to “see” the body does not necessarily create new knowledge about the workings of the body; it does, however, extend new ways to talk about the body and reinscribe the culture already imposed upon it. Seeing the body and deciding what it means, in the Foucaultian sense, could be interpreted as a network of power;

There were endless struggles for power and position in the enormously enlarged public sphere of the eighteenth and particularly the postrevolutionary nineteenth centuries: between and among men and women; between and among feminists and antifeminists [...] the battle ground of gender roles shifted to nature, to biological sex. (Laqueur 152)

In a time when the medical profession was almost exclusively male, the categories and differentiations of male and female were decided by this new (male) category of medical “experts.” As the authority of medicine and doctors grew, so did the divide between what constituted men and women; these interpretations of male and female continue to affect our understanding of men and women, male and female bodies, behaviours we associate with each, and how the body is taught to students. Deconstructing and delineating a brief history of male and female bodies will demonstrate how our current understandings of bodies are no less saturated with cultural and political struggles than they were at the inauguration of sex in the late eighteenth century.

What is so pervasive about models of sex today is that they are entrenched so staunchly and strictly; in the eighteenth century, sex and the authoritative understanding of it was still up for grabs: “the framework in which the natural and the social could be clearly distinguished came into being” (Laqueur 154). I am primarily interested in what this new framework meant for women’s bodies. As described by Laqueur, women’s bodies “in their corporeal, nerves, and, most important, reproductive organs, came to bear an enormous new weight of meaning. Two sexes, in other words, were invented as a new foundation for gender” (Laqueur 150). This enormous “weight of meaning” continues today and is evidenced in the teaching of sex education; anatomy and sexual behaviors carry the same weight today, in similar and dissimilar ways. Before analyzing today’s sex education and the weight of sex that adolescents labor with, it is important to understand how sex came to be considered crucial enough to teach in school curriculums, and how the body became the decisive site of sex and associated behaviours.

### *Biological sex | Biological Inequity*

Laqueur writes that: “Political theorists beginning with Hobbes had argued that there is no basis in nature, in divine law, or in a transcendent cosmic order for any specific sort of authority – of king over subject, of slaveholder over slave, or, it followed, of man over woman” (156). Hobbes was not the only political theorist who was ensnared by the task of differentiating men and women: Poullain de la Barre, writing even before Hobbes, took up the “Cartesian premise that the self is the thinking subject, the mind, and that it is radically not body” (qtd. in Laqueur 155). De la Barre worked to depoliticize the body and, invoking Descartes’ skepticism, argued that commonly held views about



sexuality might be nothing more than a massive error: that “the organic differences corresponding to the social categories of man and woman do not, or ought not to, matter in the public sphere” (qtd. in Laqueur 156). Laqueur points to de la Barre’s criticism not in order to prove that there were (though a minority) those progressives who argued that biology of sex should not matter in sex relations; what is important is that the very language of the debate was now centered on biological sex. Gender as a natural category had become questionable and the work of political theorists indicates a turn to scientific biology in order to argue the very “nature” of sex differences.

Locke argued alongside Hobbes that while there was no divine reason for the rule of man over woman, the inequity of the situation could be traced to biological difference. Laqueur traces part of Locke’s argumentation, which results in Locke’s simple assertion: “the last Determination, the Rule, should be placed somewhere, it naturally falls to the Man’s share, *as the abler and the stronger*” (qtd. in Laqueur 156). Woman’s body becomes her downfall in Locke’s interpretation of the differentiation between the sexes. The Hobbesian conclusion is not put in so explicit a phrase, but points to the incapability of women to participate publicly due to their “reproductive function” (qtd. in Laqueur 156).

Laqueur takes pains to extrapolate from these arguments that “the tendency of early contract theory is to make the subordination of women to men a result of the operation of the *facts* of sexual difference, of their utilitarian implications” (157). The biological tack taken by these political theorists is an indication that bodies, more than ever, were the site of all sex inequities. All anatomic models had once been based on the Galenic scale – where all genitals, male and female, were considered derivatives of the

penis – the only difference in women is that the genitalia were interior, making them lower on the teleological scale of power. In the late eighteenth century, the interpretation and creation of these models drastically shifted, and now illustrated what Laqueur terms “incommensurable difference” (157). What used to be known as the “stones” in both sexes now became the “testes” and “ovaries,” and were used to explain a variety of pathologized symptoms in females:

the removal of healthy ovaries [...] made its appearance in the early 1870s and became an instant success to cure a wide variety of “behavioral pathologies”: hysteria, excessive sexual desires, and more mundane aches and pains whose origins could not be shown to lie elsewhere. (Laqueur 176)

There were no parallel surgeries performed on males, except in the case of “criminal insanity or to treat cancer of the prostate” (176).

Women’s orgasm came under scrutiny as well, and especially in the case of conception during rape. It was recorded in the first English legal medicine text (1785) that “without an excitation of lust, or enjoyment in the venereal act, no conception can probably take place” (Laqueur 161). In this way, as described by Laqueur, whatever “a woman might claim to have felt or whatever resistance she might have put up, conception in itself betrayed desire or at least a sufficient measure of acquiescence for her to enjoy the venereal act” (161). Laqueur cites several arguments of this sort, where pregnancy is used to prove that the woman, as recorded in the 1756 edition of Burn’s *Justice of the Peace*, “can not conceive unless she doth consent” (qtd. in Laqueur 162).

This belief that conception must indicate pleasure, and thus consent, was soon widely rejected. However, interpretations of the female orgasm continued, with some very bizarre analyses. While it was once believed that female orgasm indicated consent, it came to be widely understood that a female orgasm could occur under “physical constraint”: this pointedly indicates that “women could experience the tension of sexual intercourse and even orgasm, in the nineteenth century sense of the word as a turgescence or pressure, without any concomitant sensation” (Laqueur 163). Orgasm in females was still thought to be identical to the processes of the male: that orgasm was absolutely required for conception. In the absence of a visible marker of orgasm (now that it was no longer tied to pleasure or consent), it was assumed that orgasm for women must be an internal occurrence, and could happen without the women ever having known (Laqueur 163).

As sex education continues to largely ignore the fact of female orgasm, multiple orgasms, transpersons, the function of the clitoris (and often ignores its presence altogether), and does not even make mention of female ejaculation, it is crucial to assess and detail this tradition of ignoring women’s pleasure, desire and the complicated ways in which our gender comes to even exist in these difficult relations. There is a long standing history of starkly differentiating the rather arbitrary distinctions of male and female, and it continues in sex education programs today, right down to the very cells that begin life.

### *Sex Cells | The Reproductive Romance of Egg and Sperm*

With the rise of medical inquiry from the eighteenth century onward, Michel Foucault comments that “in the name of a biological and historical urgency, it justified

the racisms of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in ‘truth’” (*The History* 54). New scientific knowledge promised (and was widely trusted to be) objective and revealing of our biological and more importantly, our *cultural*, reality. It meant that “traditional fears could be recast in a scientific-sounding vocabulary” (Foucault 55). Used to justify a plethora of prejudices, medical inquiry enjoyed uncontested privilege in its biological analyses. As the medical gaze became ever more penetrating, down to the very level of the cell, these medical biases became all the more acute and with further reaching implications. The discovery of the egg and the sperm provided a new means to validate sex differences. As the tale of the sex cells has a rich and largely sexist history, it must not escape our attention. It is through an analysis of the sperm and the egg that we will be able to closely critique the biological component of the current sex education curriculum.

Deconstructing a biology that has for so long been given precedence is imperative work, a task that Emily Martin takes up with critical rigor in her article, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male—Female Roles.” Through an analysis of contemporary medical texts used to instruct students and doctors, she arrives at the question:

How is it that positive images are denied to the bodies of women? A look at language – in this case, scientific language – provides the first clue. Take the egg and the sperm. It is remarkable how ‘femininely’ the egg behaves and how ‘masculinely’ the sperm. The egg is seen as large and passive. It does not *move* or *journey*, but passively ‘is transported,’ ‘is

swept,' or even 'drifts' along the fallopian tube. In utter contrast, sperm are small, 'streamlined,' and invariably active. (181-182)

This tendency to assign correlations such as [male = active] and [female = passive] dates far back to the Aristotelian version of life's conception;

If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute ... would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon. This is just what we find to be the case, for the catamenia [menstrual material] have in their nature an affinity to the primitive matter.

(Bordo 12)

Female's "primitive" matter is the stuff of molding and requires "work(ing) upon" (12).

Like the fable of God creating man from mud (and then woman from man), so too the sperm take up the work of forming a life out of that "primitive matter." Such sexist bias continues in the curriculum today, for which reason it is imperative to note that it has a long standing tradition; the tales of conception told by philosophers and medical experts alike have offered little, if any, agency to the egg, and have framed the task of the sperm so courageously and with such impossibility that it almost seems a wonder (or, to use a loaded and common term for reproduction, "miracle") that women conceive at all. Robert Eberwein, writing on the history of sex education, asserts that, "femininity and masculinity are seen as natural facts of life connected with the secretions. . . . When they present gendered differences as a function of anatomy and destiny, they are in fact constructing the very roles they claim are natural" (107). Steeped in this tradition of biological determinism, sex education continues to be affected by these assumptions of

“natural” masculinity and femininity, as opposed to culturally structured and created belief systems.

Martin, in “The Egg and the Sperm,” points to yet another difficulty in the established system of creating a personifying romance between the sperm and the egg; in doing so, it establishes (however wrongly) that a new human being begins even well before fertilization. Framing the fertilization process as a work of impossibility and “destiny” makes reproduction into a pervasive love story, nobly conquering all in the name of fate, in the end. Most tales of the egg and the sperm take a form such as this: the sperm traverses across valleys, plains and deathly obstacles to reach the ovum, which by impregnating, saves it from sure death (in menstruation). “Endowing egg and sperm with intentional action, a key aspect of personhood in our culture,” Martin writes, “lays the foundation for the point of viability being pushed back to the moment of fertilization” (“The Egg and the Sperm” 186). Martin’s contribution to the analysis of egg and sperm is significant, but she has underestimated her own analysis in this case; the moment of fertilization seems only the realization of a romance, and the “point of viability” might actually be established earlier, by the disparate sex cells, waiting to find each other. As such, anti-choice advocates are given scientific ammunition with which to frame their arguments, and are offered the credibility, privilege and un-questionability that come with scientific rhetoric and authority.

Martin’s “The Egg and the Sperm” rightly argues that a main concern is not only the fact that egg and sperm act suspiciously “femininely” and “masculinely,” nor is it only the way in which this creates a love-defeats-all tale befitting Hollywood; she writes that it is “more crucial, then than what *kinds* of personalities we bestow on cells is the

very fact that we are doing it at all” (187). What lends to the need to personify these sex cells? Martin continues, stating that, “This process could ultimately have the most disturbing social consequences” (187). As stated, the act of personifying sex cells lends to the idea that the “miracle” of human life begins well before conception even occurs. If we have, indeed, personified sex cells, every egg is suddenly a potential (or wasted) pregnancy; this is an interpretation which we must work to resist.

### *Menstruation Matters*

In her article “Medical Metaphors of Women’s Bodies,” Martin analyzes the ways in which medical texts (which are often the models for sex education) explain and understand female processes such as menstruation and menopause, and argues that framing the processes in terms of a capitalist production schema leaves little room to understand them, save for in terms of failed productivity. Here we will invoke a highly subjective description of menstruation from an otherwise “extremely objective (and) factual” (29) standard text for medical students; “When fertilization fails to occur, the endometrium is shed, and a new cycle starts. This is why it used to be taught that ‘menstruation is the uterus crying for lack of a baby’” (Martin “Medical Metaphors” 29).

Understanding menstruation only in terms of a failed attempt at pregnancy contributes to the negativity of an already staggering amount of images that depict menstruation as a secretive and negative process. Given that the vast majority of menstrual periods *do not* end in pregnancy for women (and desirably so), this framing of menstruation as “failure” seems at odds with the reality. Is it impossible for us to imagine that every month without pregnancy might actually be a success? Such a stance

highlights the absurdity of the well accepted notion that menstruation is the result of an egg not being fertilized; non-pregnancy is often the most desired outcome. Can we re-imagine the egg as having evaded the spermatozoa?

Sex education has long counted on this explanation of *failure* for menstruation, and as we will see, continues to rely on this notion. Such representations lend to the alienation of girls from their bodies; they, coupled with sex education that continues to ignore girl's desire, "constitute a narration of how a patriarchal society tries to keep girls and women at bay by forcing, or attempting to force, a wedge between their psyches and their bodies and how girls deal with these forces" (Tolman 24).

### *Dilemmas of Desire for Girls | Writing a New Story*

Situating sex education in the rhetoric of clinical science and biology is rooted in a history rich with bias, cultural influence and power; those constructing the definitive condition of the body were wielding the bulk of this authority. Women's voices and experiences were rarely included in the stories that were *about* them. Mediated through medical language and analysis, female experience and stories were largely omitted from scientific "objective" analysis. Current sex education curriculums are no exception – but why does this matter and deserve our critical attention? How are the practices of ignoring women's desire, culturally influenced depictions of anatomy, and an empirical health/science-based curriculum affecting the girls who are immersed in it? Researcher Deborah Tolman pondered this question, and came up with a solution: ask them.

In her work, *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk About Sexuality*, Tolman reports her findings based on interviews with adolescent girls in the United States.



Pointing out one of the most influential misconceptions regarding sex education, she writes that

sexuality is so often thought of only in negative terms, so frequently clustered with problem behaviours such as smoking and drinking, in our minds as well as in research, that it is easy to forget that ... we are supposed to develop a mature sense of ourselves as sexual beings by the time we have reached adulthood. (4)

Paired with what Tolman calls “problem behaviours,” sex as a positive act for teens becomes largely unimaginable. In a culture saturated with evaluation and worry about risk, it should come as no surprise that often (and such is the case in the Nova Scotia sex education curriculum) sex education is no exception to risk analysis. Experts create charts which rank sexy activities from “No Risk” (Flirting), “Low Risk” (Kissing), “Medium Risk” (Oral sex with a condom), and “High Risk” (unprotected sexual activities) (*Sex?* 14-15). Compounding this is the additional assertion of potential “emotional risks” (*Sex?* 15). These concerns about risk are felt in widely diverse and gendered ways. As Lupton and Petersen discuss in their work *The New Public Health*, “women’s bodies are understood as ‘leaky’, as contaminating objects. As a result, women are routinely charged with the responsibility for protecting both their own health and that of their male sexual partners by insisting on the use of condoms” (75). A timely example of the above is the relatively recent (and before unheard of) widespread panic surrounding HPV, the Human Papillomavirus. Though both females and males are susceptible to the virus, it is women who are being specifically bombarded with the responsibility of preventing it. The state of Maine is currently debating as to whether or not to force (legally require) girls entering

the 6<sup>th</sup> grade to take the vaccine (Kim, "Proposal"). While women bear the brunt of impact as far as HPV is concerned (it causes some forms of cervical cancers, though certainly not all), this new vaccine follows in a long tradition of medical experimentation and responsibility placed on women's bodies. Keeping with Tolman's analysis, this pressure on girls to be the protectors of health and eliminators of risk is made increasingly acute by the well accepted notion in sex education that "boys will be boys ergo sexuality is dangerous for girls" (Tolman 15). Nova Scotia's sex education continues to compound this belief, which does make sex *education* dangerous for girls. In couching these responsibilities placed on the bodies of women in terms of enacting a "social good," students are able to absorb the teachings in a manner of being a responsible citizen. Robert Eberwein writes in his book *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire* that "early in the history of sex education for youths, the authorization for learning about their bodies is rendered in terms of a social good. Femininity and masculinity are seen as natural facts of life connected with the secretions" (107). When taught about the dangers of their leaky, menstruating bodies, while adolescent boys are conversely reassured time and again that nocturnal emissions are normal and acceptable, it is no wonder that girls and women alike take on that weighty pressure of upholding that "social good," morphing into the form of a "good girl." What other choice do they have? Tolman suggests that they have but one acceptable sexual story to tell, given the oppression they face from all sides. From Tolman's interviews with adolescent girls, she writes that

the main theme, that sex "just happened," is an explanation girls frequently offer for how they come to have sex. In a world where "good,"

nice, and normal girls do not have sexual feelings of their own, it is one of the few decent stories that girls can tell. That is, “it just happened” is a story about desire. (2)

This is not to imply that girls simply lack desire; this story is as much about disguising desire and preserving the pious exterior that adolescent girls are expected to uphold (Tolman 2). When the alternative to this is being labelled with sexist terms by their peers (slut, whore, ho, tramp – the sheer volume of terms is staggering), “it just happened” becomes one of the only safe stories a girl can tell about her desire. However, Tolman argues, and I agree, that this “is an unsafe and unhealthy story for girls” (3). Studying sex education and how it confines girls to this particular story of “it just happened” is one politically charged way to resist that story.

In *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, editors Bruhm and Hurley write about another story: “There is currently a dominant narrative about children: children are (and should stay) innocent of sexual desires and intentions. At the same time, however, children are also officially, tacitly, assumed to be heterosexual” (ix). They go on to ask, “Who tells the story, to whom, and how?” (ix) Researchers, curriculum creators, Department of Education officials and educators are all tellers of stories, and they tell stories much like those outlined above. My aim is now to tell a story about those stories, the stories that have been, and continue to be told by the sex education curriculum in Nova Scotia. In so doing, it will write an alternative sexual tale, one that places greater emphasis on female sexual autonomy, pleasure and desire. James Kincaid worries about these dominant stories in his essay, “Producing Erotic Children,” asking “what is happening to us and to our children as we tell our customary stories of the child and of

sexuality?" (12) In telling a new story, my aim is to open up new ways of understanding what is happening to us, as we (as a populace) continue to reproduce the already dominant narrative, whether it be through parenting, through our treatment of others, or through how we treat and understand our own sexuality. In telling a new story about sex education and female sexuality, I take my cue from Kincaid, who says, "why not snub the authority and change the stories?" (15) And after this particular story is authored, I hope others will continue to do the same.

## Chapter 4 | Sex Education in Halifax, 1970

On 28 September 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada submitted its report to the Governor General in Council (Commissioners 1). In this 451-page document, there are 167 recommendations for improving the status and equality of women in Canada. The discussions are exhaustive, ranging from education, to “the treatment of women within the administration of criminal justice,” to immigration, and multiple other discussions (Commissioners 1). The Royal Commission envisioned the decades to come as decades of positive change, of consciousness and awareness raising; “Although a rigid definition of woman lives on today as a stereotype despite rapidly changing circumstances, a new consciousness and concern about the status of women are indicated by the creation of a number of national commissions to study and report on the matter” (1). It was a time when the Commission could imagine the “... role of women changing as society itself evolve[d]” (17).

In 1973 there were, as detailed in the *Methodology* section (see pages 13-18) many factors influencing women’s lives. For the first time in history, Article 45 of the criminal code (“medical necessity”) had been used in defense of an abortion case, and Dr Henry Morgentaler was acquitted on “a charge of illegally inducing an abortion”; the Crown indicated that the move “might lead to abortion on demand” (Sharp 55). Having the choice to terminate an unwanted pregnancy would allow women more control over their bodies, and lives. Also in 1973, the popular women’s health book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: a Book by and for Women* was published (Collective 1). Initiated by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, it tackled rarely discussed topics such as

female orgasm, abortion, the clitoris and the pill, among many other subjects. By giving voice to women's experience, it challenged the generally accepted, restrictive beliefs about women's bodies.

Informing and influencing women's bodies was also Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (29 July 1968), which explicitly stated that all Catholic couples should not use artificial birth control (von Hildebrand 4). In Dietrich von Hildebrand's book discussing and defending *Humanae Vitae*, he says that, "as soon as we assume that the nature and the meaning of sex in man can be treated as mere biological reality, we have blinded ourselves to the mystery of the sphere of sex – to the meaning and value it can have, on the one hand, and the terrible moral evil of impurity, on the other" (6). He goes on to criticize birth control; "Every *active* intervention of the spouses that eliminates the possibility of conception through the conjugal act is incompatible with the holy mystery of God" (36).

The possibility of abortion upon request, the publication and embracing of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the decision of *Roe vs. Wade* and the condemnation of artificial birth control by *Humanae Vitae*, while perhaps seemingly unrelated, all bespeak an impassioned and fraught political struggle over the control of women's bodies. The choice to legally terminate a pregnancy, to learn in detail about the female orgasm, and to prevent pregnancy by use of the birth control pill all have direct effects on women's sexual autonomy and their ability to exist free from the tyranny of politically governing bodies. In controlling the body, there is greater control of one's life; the ability to choose whether or not to bear children exerts a massive impact on a woman's life and future. While these three examples are not exhaustive of all the various influences on women's

lives and bodies during the late sixties and early seventies, they certainly provide insight into the narratives that informed the hope and possibility for change. The drive for change and the struggle over women's bodies were active in many places, one of these places being the classroom.

The educational institution is a powerful one. Foucault discusses the educational institution not as motivated by a desire to educate but to regulate; in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, he says that "educational or psychiatric institutions, with their large populations, their hierarchies, their spatial arrangements, their surveillance systems, constituted, alongside the family, are another way of distributing the interplay of powers and pleasures" (54). The Royal Commission was critical of how these powers were playing out in Canada's classroom, especially in the "Family Life Education" curriculum. One of the Commission's recommendations was that "the provinces and territories set up courses in family life education, including sex education, which begin in kindergarten and continue through elementary and secondary school, and which are taught to girls and boys in the same classroom" (36).

The next year, in 1971, the Halifax Family Planning Association began the construction of a new sex education curriculum for the Halifax District School Board. In 1973 (the same year as the *Roe vs. Wade* decision), it was submitted as a proposal to the Halifax District School Board by the Halifax Family Planning Association in collaboration with Keith Sullivan (who was the principal of Alexandra School at that time), and was fully supported by the education director, A.T. Conrad (Perry 33). The request was that the sex education program be used as a pilot project at Alexandra School.

If we are to understand the high political stakes involved with sex education, then it is crucial to understand why the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada and the Halifax Family Planning Association saw need for change to the already existing curriculum. Moreover, what grounded the possibility for public and institutional opposition to these proposed changes, if the sexual health of young women was the aim? Finally, these narratives of protest and support tell us volumes about notions of control, regulation and education, and the tightening of these controls, especially when dealing with adolescent sexuality.

#### *Reinterpreting the sex education curriculum*

Broadly, the 167 recommendations proposed by the Royal Commission had a common aim: for women of all ethnic backgrounds, races, and socio-economic status to be equal with men in Canadian society – in the workforce, the home, business, professions, and politics (Commissioners 11). They criticized the notions of being “naturally feminine” and “naturally masculine,” saying that, “each culture imagines that the qualities and functions it attributes to men and women are part of the natural order .... What then are the innate differences between men and women and what are the ones imposed by education and culture?” (11).

The Royal Commission indicates that notions of masculinity and femininity are constructions of culture – the Report frequently makes reference to the work of Margaret Mead, as well as Betty Friedan (author of *The Feminine Mystique*) and Simone de Beauvoir (author of *The Second Sex*), and it is well to say that their discussions were grounded in a feminist understanding of cultural gender manufacturing. The work and



recommendations of the Royal Commission identify the cultural implantations in the “Family Life Education” curriculum as problematic and lending to women’s inequality. They were aware that the educational institution is one of the most explicit and effective forms of population regulation and control, and were rightly concerned with what gendered (and often sexist) messages and behavioral instructions were included in the curriculum at that time.

The Royal Commission was cognizant of the fact that, as Shari Buchan and Ingrid Johnson have argued in their essay “Culture, Gender and Power,” that “power is manifest in such questions as what constitutes knowledge, and who decides what should be taught and how it should be taught .... Whatever else education is about, it is also about power” (Buchan et al 351). A curriculum created without the equality of women in mind very arguably has, at worst, the subjugation of women in mind, and at best, a pathetic perpetuation of the inequity inherent to the status quo.

What were Halifax students being taught through the “Family Life Education” curriculum in 1970 that necessitated change and restructuring? What was grounding the Royal Commission’s recommendation for change in the “Family Life Education” curriculum? What prompted the Halifax Family Planning Association to submit its own proposal and vision for sex education? To determine this, we will turn our attention to the 1970 manual, *Elementary School Health: Primary Level Programs, Intermediate Level Programs, Special Health Topics, School Health Services Guide*. Created by the Nova Scotia Department of Education, this instructional guide for teachers will provide an understanding of how teachers were instructed to lead a discussion of sex education. In careful deconstruction of the curriculum – the explicit and embedded messages – it will

become apparent how the calls for change by the Royal Commission and the Halifax Family Planning Association were grounded.

*Elementary School Health, 1970 | The Construction of Biology*

Before we consult the “Table of Contents” of the *Elementary School Health* manual, it is necessary to consider the “Introduction” for teachers to the grades four, five and six levels. During these grades, instruction in the “Reproduction of Life” will begin, and the teachers will begin with entrenched gender roles in mind:

A point to be remembered is that ... there is a greater difference in the interests of the boys and girls .... Boys are becoming more interested in muscle building and sports participation and the girls are perhaps more interested in cleanliness and good grooming .... The wise teacher can use different interests to achieve a desired result. For instance, good food habits will help the boys to be stronger and help the girls to improve their appearance. (NS Dept of Education 145)

This quote demonstrates the desire to regulate bodies in such a way that boys will “be stronger” and girls will “improve their appearance” because of healthy eating habits (NS Dept of Education 145). Today, approximately 90 percent of those suffering from eating disorders are women (Bordo 50). The above quote makes it clear that, as Susan Bordo writes, “culture – working not only through ideology and images but through the organization of the family, the constructions of personality, the training of perceptions – is not simply contributory but *productive* of eating disorders” (50).

Moreover, this is an example of the struggle over women's bodies as carried out through the regulation of the educational institution. Couched in terms that indicate the boys will inherently be more interested in "muscle building and sports participation" and the girls in "good grooming," the teacher is presented with what seems to be a fact of biology (NS Dept of Education 145).

My aim in including this discussion is to call the notion of "biology" as simple fact – free from culture – into question. In doing so, I am questioning the notion of science and biology as innocently presenting the "truth," as if through a lens of complete impartiality. The Royal Commission criticized sex education programs as being "merely biological information" (Commission 184). But biological information itself is also imbued with cultural constructions of gender, and this is apparent in the "Family Life Education." It is imperative to a discussion of sex education to question how and, as Judith Butler has discussed in *Bodies that Matter*, "why 'materiality' has become a sign of irreductibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction?" (Butler 54). Biology – as much as it is about science and objectivity – also bears (and produces) cultural constructions, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. This makes for a problematic and biased system through which to learn about sex.

#### *Biology as framework for "The Reproduction of Life"*

Continuing at the Table of Contents of the *Elementary School Health* manual, it is already apparent that sex education is considered a difficult topic to address. The title of the unit, "Reproduction of Life," is listed alongside the heading, "Special Topic,"

whereas all other chapters are simply labeled as “Level Four Program,” “Level Five Program” and so forth (NS Dept of Education 145). Framing the discussion in the narrative of “reproduction” indicates that this unit is focused on the functionality of reproduction, the biology of procreation. The scientific, functional explanation is considered to be the most important – it is not that sex is not discussed, but there is a very particular way in which to discuss sex in the context of the classroom. Foucault discusses the “veritable discursive explosion” regarding sex, and how sex became, as he discusses in *The History of Sexuality*, a “public issue” (54). However, it is not only the things one says about sex that work to regulate or impose regulations on others; *silence* can also wield significant power in the regulation of sexual activity. Foucault writes that “silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers ... [there are] many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27). For a discussion of sex and the body to be exclusively framed in biology is problematic, especially for women. Any discussion of a personal relation to this scientific body and the culture which it comes to represent is absent. For Susan Bordo, the body is “... the focal point for struggles over the shape of power,” and especially for women, the concern of the body is not merely science and function:

What, after all, is more personal than the life of the body? And for women, associated with the body and largely confined to a life centered *on* the body (both the beautification of one’s body and the reproduction, care, and maintenance of the bodies of others), culture’s grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life. (17)

The choice to omit the construction and imposition of culture on the body from the “Reproduction of Life” curriculum is choosing silence, not impartiality. Choosing a specific patriarchal narrative indicates that the chosen clinical voice is somehow better, more impartial, more valid.

The irony of this choice is that it protests what it essentially is; on page 147 of the manual, there is a “general introduction” page for the teacher. It is in order to note “that there are several steps to be followed before [the reproduction of life unit’s] introduction into the classroom” (NS Dept of Education 200). The general instruction claims that in order for the unit to be successful, there “... must be an attempt to transfer the biological facts to a higher plane of human physical and spiritual needs” (147). It seems that the constant references to the need for a “mother’s love/care” (on pages 147, 148, 210, 212, 216, 220, 226) coupled with the need of a hetero-normative family for healthy development are equivalent to the “spiritual needs.” The manual claims that

... studies have been carried out in recent times on babies during the first few months after they are born .... If it does not have this mother’s loving care, it has a feeling of insecurity which affects its disposition. When a baby has a mother’s love and the protection of a happy and secure home it is likely to develop into a well-adjusted human being. (226)

In this way, the students are taught “spiritual needs” as well as an accusatory discourse towards mothers. It allows for the belief that any child who is not “well-adjusted” is essentially a product of a mother who did not offer enough love – a failure as a woman and nurturer. In this way, as discussed by Alan Petersen and Deborah Lupton in *The New Public Health*, women are made responsible not only for their own bodies, but also for

the health and well being of the bodies that surround them – their children and their husbands (76).

*Sexism in the “Reproduction of Life” unit*

Aside from the flawed and insufficient discussion of biology and “spiritual needs,” there are other problematic components of the “Reproduction of Life” unit. Explicit in its narrative of what behaviours are appropriate for men and women, the curriculum reads much like a veritable gender instruction manual. Examining several of these instances will enable us to create an understanding of what the dominant behaviour instruction looks like in the “Reproduction of Life” unit.

The students are initially taught how amoebas, plants, fish, birds, and foxes reproduce (framing and reinforcing the importance of a biological discussion, and romancing heteronormativity, as discussed in the previous chapter). Concurrent with this discussion is what is framed as a “natural” progression to family life, with the desire for a family becoming stronger as the complexity of the life form increases:

Introduce the subject with a discussion about family life. Review what has been found out about family life among birds and animals. . . .We have studied about reproduction and family life in animals who are mammals. We also learned human beings are like other mammals in many respects but they live on a higher spiritual and social level. (NS Dept of Education 223)

As the unit continues to discuss humans in the context of the nuclear family, it is stressed that humans need be more careful than any other animal when deciding whether or not to

mate: “They have to have a house or place to live in which will be comfortable for their children and the father should be able to earn enough money to support a family” (223). In this way, women are not expected to be working. Girls instructed by this curriculum in 1970 were not encouraged or expected to be active members of the workforce; they were, instead, expected to be mothers and unpaid caregivers. In this way, the curriculum serves to regulate the career ambitions of students, creating within them a desire (and the necessity) for a hetero-normative family.

This notion is again perpetuated during the discussion of giving birth. After the doctor has helped the mother with the birth, “he gives it a pat on the back to help open up the baby’s lungs so it can begin to breathe through its nose and mouth” (224). Often, the word “he” is used as a term to represent any person whose sex we are unable to know. This notion on its own is problematic; however, as previously indicated in the “Reproduction of Life” unit, the women are not expected to be wage earners (and especially not a wage earner of high status, such as a doctor). In this way, it is expected and obvious that the doctor in this scenario is a male.

In the “Reproduction of Life” unit, the discussion of the sperm fertilizing the egg is worthy of examination. This is how the students were taught about the fertilization process:

After a man and woman begin to live together as husband and wife they may start to have children. In order for a family to have a baby, the father has to put his sperm into the vagina of the mother. This may fertilize a tiny egg in her body .... Sometimes there is no egg to be fertilized so the sperm

simply leaves the mother's body. Also, sometimes there is an egg ready but the father does not put any sperm into the mother's vagina. (224)

If bodies are, as Susan Bordo invokes Foucault to discuss, "the focal point for struggles over the shape of power," this process of fertilization is describing a process where one person has control, while the other does not (Bordo 17). In this case, the father is in control of the fertilization process; it is he who will "put his sperm into the vagina of the mother" (NS Dept of Education 1970 223). The sperm, in this case, seems to be acting in such a way that its interests are exclusive from that of the egg; the egg which is, in this example, helpless to do anything else but patiently wait for the sperm so that its potential can be realized. (33 years later, in the 2003 Health Education Program of the Nova Scotia School Board, there is a note for the teacher, indicating that often, "the egg is depicted as passive and fragile; the sperm as aggressive and heroic. Medical research suggests that eggs and sperm are in fact mutually interactive" [NS Dept of Education 2003 103]). The sperm are also discussed as being able to leave the mother's body independently; could it not be that the women's body is expelling the sperm? Or that the semen is simply leaking out of the vagina due to gravity, the sperm not being strong enough to stay inside the woman?

The assignment of which cells possess ability and agency – which cells have power – is loaded with meaning about who (males or females) are capable of action. For the notion of the passive female and aggressive male to have been applied to the very cells that begin life implies that these traits are necessarily biological; that from the very beginning, the female cells are passive, the male sperm active. When the baby is being born, the "baby is pushed out through the mother's vagina which leads to the opening



between her legs where the sperm entered. Thus the baby is born” (NS Dept of Education 224). The sperm is cited as the active player in this analysis. There is no discussion of who or what is actively pushing the baby out through the mother’s vagina. There is also an absence of discussion surrounding the mother’s labour process. In this example, it seems that the sperm initiated this process of birth – and the baby is the fruit of its own labour.

Already mentioned was the discussion of the need for a mother’s love so that the baby will be able to be a healthy citizen. The “Reproduction of Life” discusses the process of birth and the nuclear family as necessarily good: “When the baby gives its first cry, it is a sign that it is alive and everyone feels happy. It is washed and put in a cosy crib and soon it will be admired by the father and mother. Perhaps also there will be brothers and sisters to come to the hospital to see their new little brother or sister” (225). Continuing to interpret educational institutions as a means to regulate citizens, this quote is an excellent example of that desire. It is promotional literature for the hetero-normative family, omitting many discussions: unhappy marriages, abuse, unwanted births, family violence, birth defects, stillborn births, labour, risks of childbirth, infection, birth control methods, among others. It creates an image of a mother, father and children as a necessarily positive institution.

Birth control is absent from the discussion in “The Reproduction of Life” unit. The prevention of pregnancy is mentioned only in such a way that explains that the “sexual instinct – the desire to have children ... must be controlled” (226). Even more so, this promotes the prevention of (hetero)sex as opposed to pregnancy. It is an explicit school-room lesson, teaching that abstinence is the only acceptable form of birth control.

This statement is not only about controlling birth, but controlling the self. It is important to consider that the “Reproduction of Life” equates sexual desire with the desire to have children. To frame sexual desire as such is another way in which to promote the hetero-normative family; if one desires sex, they must also desire children. While discussing sex in the classroom, the only discussion of “desire” permitted was that of the desire to procreate.

The examples given here of sexism embedded in the “Reproduction of Life” unit in the 1970 curriculum in Halifax are not exhaustive. The examples discussed are enough to provide an understanding of the narrative which framed the classroom discussion of sex, the bodies of women, and the problem of biology and to understand why both the Royal Commission and the Halifax Family Planning Association saw a need for change.

#### *The proposal for sex education at Alexandra School*

In November 1973, a proposal was made to include a course on “human sexuality” at Alexandra School on Brunswick Street in Halifax (today, known as “St. Patrick’s – Alexandra School”). Keith Sullivan, the principal of Alexandra School and the Halifax Family Planning Association collaborated in making the request to the school board (Perry 33).

The implementation of the course had the support of several individuals and organizations, one of these being the Education Director, A.T. Conrad. He indicated that the program would include “instruction on birth control, femininity and masculinity, reproduction, the anatomy of the male and female reproductive systems and dating discussions” (33). He was vocal that there were “many other sources where students

could acquire the information on sexual matters” and that “several parents as a result feel the schools should provide this kind of instruction” (33). This desire for an all-encompassing sex education program is aligned with the desires of the Royal Commission, as stated in its report: “Sex education in Canadian schools is haphazard and random. Some provinces encourage its inclusion more than others, but the extent to which it is incorporated in any school programme depends on the policy of the local school board” (Commissioners 184). The commissioners expressed the need for a more holistic sex education, one that had the same aims as the proposal submitted for Alexandra School and was grounded in the belief that “what [was] needed [was] a family life programme on traditional and changing concepts of masculinity and femininity” (Commissioners 185). While the proposal for the sex education program at Alexandra School does not make direct reference to the Report of the Royal Commission, the aims of the program were directly in line with the recommendations of the Commission.

In Halifax, there was support from outside the school system as well. On 11 December 1973, the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers (NSASW), in collaboration with the Atlantic Child Guidance Centre (ACGC), released a statement to the press, and also forwarded a copy to Alderman Margaret Stanbury. Stanbury had been very vocal about her disapproval of the sex education program. She had, as reported in *The Mail Star*, “voiced opposition to the course, especially emphasizing the inclusion of birth control as part of the instruction” (Perry 33). Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford, in *Mothers of the Municipality*, indicated that for feminists in the 1970s,

in their effort to promote sex education, birth control freedom from male violence and access to abortion ... much effort had to be spent combating

anti-feminists, anti-choice advocates, and others who had the support of a few prominent women such as municipal politicians Margaret Stanbury and Eileen Stubbs. (19)

Stanbury held much political sway, and was vocally and staunchly opposed to the inclusion of birth control in the curriculum.

The NSASW and the ACGC urged the endorsement of human sexuality programs in the schools. They pointed to the “reality of sexual activity among teenagers. The young cannot be expected to be responsible unless such programs are provided” (“Sex Education Urged”). Sexual activity was a reality among teenagers in Halifax in 1972, as Suzanne Morton discusses in her article “Halifax Maternity Homes.” In the statement issued to the press and Stanbury, the NSASW and ACGC went on to express their “grave concerns for the future quality of family life for many of our young people who are ill-prepared to meet the challenge” (131). Indeed, the concerns of the NSASW and ACGC were grounded; eleven years later, the Halifax *Daily News* published the article, “Metro sex ed lacking (But teen mums aren’t)”, stating that “in 1982, 931 Nova Scotia females aged 14 to 20 gave birth, and 569 in the same age group had abortions, according to Stats Canada” (Moore ).

There was parental support for the program at Alexandra School as well. On 30 November 1973, *The Mail-Star* published an editorial called “Education or Pornography?” In it, it claims that sex education has been,

as surreptitiously as the Arabs folding their tents and quietly stealing away ... finding its way into many of the schools of the province. In some places, advance meetings with parents were called to assure anxious

fathers and mothers that the courses would be modest and discreet ....

Elsewhere, parents were not adequately informed ... that their children are being confronted with information which could only pass through the mails in a plain wrapper.

Harry and Glen Flemming responded in a 'letter to the editor;'

It strains credulity that in this day and age any newspaper could publish so tragically misguided an editorial as "Education or Pornography?" (Nov 30) .... (At the advance meeting) no parents objected to having their children attend the course; those who expressed opinions were highly in favour ... sex education, unfortunately, is still treated by the department of education as a highly experimental innovation. For this timid – or as you put it, surreptitious – approach, we have the likes of you and Alderman Margaret Stanbury to blame. (Flemming A7)

Another parent wrote in to the *Halifax Mail-Star* on 31 December 1973: "As a parent of two children ... I want to support the Halifax Board of School Commissioners in their efforts to dispel ignorance in our children. We need more sex education in our schools, not less" (Ellis A6).

There was support for the human sexuality course at Alexandra School from numerous fronts; the Halifax Family Planning Association, Keith Sullivan (the principal of Alexandra School), A.T. Conrad (the Education Director), the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers, the Atlantic Child Guidance Centre, as well as parental support for the initiative.

With the degree of concern for teenage sexual activity and mounting support for a human sexuality program, what grounded the opposition to this program? Through the medium of the media, many groups lobbied to have their concerns and voices heard. It is to that narrative we will now turn our attention, so as to identify the basis for opposition to this program.

*The opposition to sex education in the Halifax Mail-Star*

From the beginning of November 1973, until the end of January 1974, the *Halifax Mail-Star* acted as a sounding board for the Halifax community's support and concerns regarding the sex education curriculum. The articles printed included editorials, letters to the editor, news briefs, and staff reporters detailing the outcomes and updates of the sex education program. The newspaper often acts as a public forum for concerns; it is by looking at the opposition as detailed in the *Halifax Mail-Star* that we can arrive at an understanding of what was grounding the narrative used to oppose sex education.

Approaching these articles in a chronological manner, the first was printed on 28 November 1973, and is entitled "Board defers request for sexuality course," written by one of the staff reporters (Perry A33). In this article, Alderman Margaret Stanbury is said to have "voiced opposition to the course, especially emphasizing the inclusion of birth control as part of the instruction" (A33). Later in the article, she is quoted as saying "There are still a great many persons and church groups who 'strongly' reject birth control. The schools are going a little too far if these people's feelings are ignored" (A33). The article explicitly depicts a strong religious opposition to the program.

The next article, from 12 December 1973, is “Board members feel course too advanced for grade 9,” and is written by a staff reporter (Remington A22). It explains that Alderman Margaret Stanbury moved “that the board as a whole oppose the teaching of sexual habits and prevention in Halifax schools.” Another Alderman, Dennis Connolly, after having reviewed the curriculum, said in the same article that “There were a number of things in the requested syllabus which disturbed me. Some of the case histories should certainly be left out. The film strip ... smacks of a skin flick.” Another Halifax School Board member, again in the same article, indicated that the schools must “teach (the students) what it means to be a family first, and then work up to the prevention level.” The educational institution has the ability to regulate and create desired citizens: people who will want to wait to have sex, and later, to get married and begin a hetero-normative family.

The opposition of the sex education program was largely based on the idea that it would compromise fundamental Catholic values; as explained earlier, the *Humanae Vitae* condemned Catholics who ignored the instruction that they are not to use artificial birth control. An article from 22 December 1973, written by a *Halifax Mail-Star* staff reporter is entitled “CSSC opposes sex education proposition” (the CSSC is the Catholic Social Services Commission). The CSSC had released a statement “opposing a program of sex education for Alexandra School in Halifax.” They expressed concern that the sex education program had “too great an emphasis on contraception and sexual activity” (Chambers A21). While it might be difficult today to imagine a sex education program that did not have an emphasis on sexual activity and contraception, it is important to keep

in mind that the CSSC was looking for a very different sex education, one that was based on a “respect for life ... and that sex education is still a parental responsibility.”

The CSSC indicated that it does “favor sex education in the public school system, if it is tailored to stress the sense of personal dignity and worth in every individual.” This statement can be widely interpreted, but it seems to indicate that the proposed program from the Halifax Family Planning Association failed to stress a sense of personal dignity and worth. What is meant by stressing the “personal dignity” and “worth” of a student?

There is a very explicit of analogy of personal “worth” in an article submitted to the *Halifax Mail-Star* by a “group of 40 parents, led by Rev. John Bartol, minister of Mulgrave Park United Baptist Church” (Bartol A7). They had written a document of 8 recommendations, “condemning the proposed sex education course” and submitted this document to Halifax City Council. These eight guidelines explain what they believe would be an appropriate outline for sex education. On the discussion of saving sex for marriage, Bartol writes that “purity before marriage is building an ‘affection savings account’ to be withdrawn and spent with joy during marriage. It is waiting until Christmas to open your presents” (A7). This is one very specific interpretation of the notion of “worth,” saturated with notions of self-denial, self-control and, given the metaphor of creating a “savings account,” also speaks to a belief in the applicability of capitalist prudence to our sexuality.

Finally, on 4 January 1973, the *Halifax Mail-Star* ran the article “Stanbury seeks public hearing on proposed sexuality course.” In it, she indicates that “the general public, and not just school board officials [should] be fully aware of the explicit nature of the syllabus as outlined” (Golding A1-A2). She went on to say that teaching sex education



without morals would only contribute to “the breaking up of a home ... we would, in fact be discouraging marriage” (A1-A2). Also, she expressed concern that “this type of philosophy would be most detrimental to the woman because she stood to lose much more than the male partner” (A1-A2). In this way, the teaching of sex education and the bodies of women become a public concern, subject to public debate. It is not explicitly clear what Alderman Stanbury is suggesting when she indicates that women have much more to lose than men (though arguably she was pointing to virginity and respect), but it does irrefutably point again to the struggle for control over women’s bodies.

The opposition to the proposed sex education program for Alexandra School was grounded in religious values, beliefs and concerns. They (the CSSC and the concerned parents with Rev. John Bartol) indicate that they are supportive of sex education: a sex education curriculum grounded in an abstinence-only program with, as the CSSC stated, not as “great an emphasis on contraception and sexual activity” (“CSSC Opposes” 22 December 1973).

### *Final Decisions | Sex Ed at Alexandra School*

On 27 November 1973, the “request to implement a course on ‘human sexuality’ at the grade nine level at Alexandra School was deferred for further study ... by the Halifax School Board” (Perry 33). There were Halifax District School Board meetings held in January and February of 1974, much newspaper commentary on the subject, but the draft curriculum and supporting materials as initially proposed by the Halifax Family Planning Association were not implemented at Alexandra School. Sex education in Nova Scotia has gradually morphed over the years, and has, however slowly, moved closer in

ideology and practice to the original proposal by the Halifax Family Planning Association. What is key to note is not whether or not that specific, original curriculum was eventually accepted as the years went by – what is important is the vehement opposition with which it was originally met, and originally rebuked. As the former curriculum became antiquated in the minds of the larger public, changes eventually took place. It was a time when the school board could have chosen to claim political stakes in the sex education debate, but instead deferred, deciding on the ever-popular, never-offending choice of “further study.” The recommendation of the Royal Commission in 1970, had been that, “the provinces and territories [should] set up courses in family life education, including sex education, which begin in kindergarten and continue through elementary and secondary school, and which are taught to girls and boys in the same classroom” (Commission 36). This was not met by the end of 1974 in Halifax. Nor is this recommendation being met today, more than thirty-seven years later.

After a thorough examination of the “Reproduction of Life” documents, it is clear that there was a need for change. The proposal for sex education at Alexandra School promised to include discussions of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, which would have helped to remedy the existing curriculum and challenge the existing entrenched gender roles, and arguably, a step towards eliminating and creating understanding regarding inequity in the larger society. Teen pregnancy was not uncommon at Alexandra School; principal Keith Sullivan once stated on a radio program that “one-tenth of all the female children in his junior high school have been pregnant” (Savage). Considering this alongside the problematic language and discussion in the

“Reproduction of Life” unit as created by the Nova Scotia School Board was reason for immediate change.

As demonstrated, the opposition to these changes proposed by the Halifax Family Planning Association and Keith Sullivan was grounded in religious doctrine and values. The brief presented in *The Mail-Star* by the concerned parents group, led by Rev. John Bartol, sums up their approach to sex education in this way;

We believe that it is possible to teach truths, which they will need to reach levels of their development throughout life, without expressing these facts in the language of the brothel and back alley. To say that “all knowledge is power” is about the same as saying that “all eating is strength.” Now we know that some food can be poisonous and destructive, and so in the same way, there are poisonous facts, and a pollution of the mind and heart as well as of the body. Some things are better left unsaid. (Bartol A7)

It has been demonstrated that educational institutions are controlled by much more than the desire to educate; instead, the desire is to educate individuals so that they become ideal citizens. To oppose sex education is to oppose the sexuality of adolescents; an acceptance of sex education would not only speak to an acknowledgement of adolescent sexuality, but also to a rejection of both parental and church authority over the bodies of youth and sexuality itself. The school becomes a locus of control for limiting and eliminating these behaviours, for asserting parental governance, and to invoke Foucault’s notion from *Discipline and Punish*, effectively produces the “docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (136). The Royal Commission and the Halifax Family Planning Association saw the opportunity for educating students and

making changes to the way students were both regulated and educated, but were met with opposition. A challenge to the sex education program was also a challenge to what the ideal citizen should be; in 1973, it is clear that the Halifax District School Board was not prepared or willing to contest the notion of an ideal citizen, nor parental authority over children's sexuality.

## Chapter 5 | Contemporary Contestations

Steeped in a history fraught with convention, conservatism and vocal protest from the political right, controversy surrounding sex education is far from over. By delineating a history of the inaugural attempt for comprehensive sex education in Nova Scotia, we are better able to understand current sites of both accolade and protest with regard to the sex education curriculum, of which there are vocal proponents of both. If we turn our attention to our national neighbours, the United States of America, we find that in 1997, the U.S. Congress dedicated “a quarter billion dollars over five years’ time to finance more education in chastity, whose name has been replaced by the less churchy, more twelve-steppish, *abstinence*” (Levine 91). This in the face of glaring evidence which indicates that abstinence-only education is ineffective and downright destructive. As Judith Levine has researched and recorded in *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*, in European countries,

where teens have as much sex as in America, sex ed starts in the earliest grades. It is informed by a no-nonsense, even enthusiastic, attitude toward the sexual; it is explicit; and it doesn’t teach abstinence. Rates of unwanted teen pregnancy, abortion and AIDS in every Western European country are a fraction of our own; the average age of first intercourse is about the same as in the United States. (102)

If we turn our attention even closer to home, only months after the release of the *Sex?* manual was first distributed in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick Education Minister Madeline Dubé “reaffirmed her commitment to providing a comprehensive sexual health

education program while strengthening the message of abstinence” (Communications New Brunswick). The press release celebrating this message went on to quote Dubé directly, where she said,

We believe that a comprehensive approach to sexual health education that advocates abstinence best meets the health needs of students. As the minister of education, I feel it is my absolute duty to offer a health curriculum that helps protect our students from potentially life-threatening or life-altering consequences now or in the future. (Communications New Brunswick).

Given these conservative political ideologies that surround Nova Scotia, and are indeed embedded in the current Canadian and American political climates, it is reasonable to expect that such right wing political values will come to influence and slowly take away ground from feminist gains which had been thought to be permanent – access to safe abortion services, for example, or to birth control or comprehensive sex education. Considering the policies of our neighbours, this makes Nova Scotia’s recent publication of *Sex?* all the more interesting, political and worthy of our attention and criticisms.

Nowhere were the polarized opinions in Nova Scotia regarding sex education more visible than in the recent introduction of the new sex manual, aptly titled, *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource*. Introduced in the fall of 2004, the book garnered both high praise as well as panicked opposition. As with the analysis of the 1973 proposal for a comprehensive sex education program at Halifax schools, it is imperative to turn our attention to public response. By briefly examining and providing an overview of the response in local newspapers, both in articles as well as letters to the editor, we are

afforded opportunity to critically examine what both the popular opposition and supporters had to say, and more importantly, what ethics such responses are imbued with. Moreover, by then scrupulously analyzing the text of the sex manual (of which, at this time, there is no published feminist analysis of its contents), we will be able to move beyond simple accolades and rejections of its contents, and begin to assess the embedded and more subtle social controls written into, or illustrated in, the manual. It is not enough to merely subscribe to ideas of whether the manual is dichotomously “good” or “bad.” In coupling an analysis of the public response with an analysis of the text itself, it will provide a more complete picture of why so many were able to embrace the more-explicit-than-usual sexual content. I argue that the writers of the manual, by continuing to reinforce many popular notions about women and sexuality, have made the messages more palatable for mainstream consumption at the expense of women. While this manual is, in many ways, a very positive step in sex education, it continues to feed into a heteronormative, family-oriented structure that the populace is more comfortable with, sacrificing important gains which could have been made with regard to adolescent sexuality, and more importantly, girls’ sexual desire and autonomy. Bruhm and Hurley invoke Michel Foucault in order to caution us that

reveling in this proliferation of stories about the sexual child does not guarantee a new, free world. This proliferation may herald new ways of expressing sexuality, especially for children, but ... it also invents new regimes for controlling and regulating the sexuality we think we are affirming – regimes that have a long history in modern thought and culture. (x)

And so, many revel in the belief that the new Nova Scotia manual is a long awaited matter-of-fact way of simply communicating the unfettered, neutral facts in a sexually liberated manner; instead, I suggest that the prevailing success of the manual is grounded largely in not only its failure to challenge dominant ideologies about adolescent sexuality, but in its tendency to reinforce and perpetuate very dangerous and widely accepted messages about the sexuality of women and girls.

Additionally, I argue that the opposition that the manual faced was not born out of a concern for the adolescent children who would be the recipients of the sexual information. Instead, as will be demonstrated in the slew of media coverage, the efforts to censor were borne out of a parental panic at having to acknowledge that their child – innocence embodied – was also a sexual being. This manual ruptured the squeaky clean childhood narrative of boring sex ed, taught out of clinical necessity, from a risk management perspective with a focus on pleasureless conception (especially for females) which parents had grown so comfortable with. *Sex?* spoke of children as autonomous sexual beings, which disrupts what most parents are willing to believe – despite the fact that 8% of grade seven students and 58% of grade twelve students have already had heterosexual intercourse (Healthy Sexuality Working Group, *Background* 9). Bruhm and Hurley write: “To talk about child sex outside of sweeping generalizations is tantamount to invading the innocent, pristine body of the child” (xxxiii). Daring to speak of the child as anything but a neutered, sexless, drive-less character excited the opposition of many, but this was definitely *not* borne of a fear for the loss of *children’s* childhood innocence it was the loss of the parent’s vision, their fantasy of childhood innocence which caused such revulsion and fury. Lee Edelman writes in “The Future is Kid Stuff” that



the political right [invites us] to kneel at the shrine of the Child: the Child ... in short, who might find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult's adulterating implication in desire itself: the Child, that is, made to image, for the satisfaction of adults. (21)

By disrupting this pure and innocent (and as Edelman argues successfully, fantastical) image of the Child we have grown to accustomed to seeing and desiring to protect, Nova Scotia's new sex manual did not just upset parents; it harshly upset the fantasy notion of the wanting-for-nothing, ours-to-protect Child, a notion that has become central to even the most liberal of political discourses.

## Chapter 6 | A Bit about *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource*

On the cover of *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource* the manual is covered with an ambiguous pattern of bright shapes and curlicues, and no title. This fails to offer even the faintest hint of what information might be inside. On the back, looking much like a race to the finish line, what faintly resemble sperm make their way towards “The End,” which is the seemingly inactive ovum. Moreover, this book is not a part of the curriculum – students must seek it out independently, discreetly, from the school guidance counselors. In this way, as Foucault has outlined, we continue to dedicate ourselves “to speaking of [sex] *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret” (Foucault 35). It is crucial to note that *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource* is not a required curriculum handbook. As Sherri Aikenhead wrote in the Daily News article “Sex Book Hot as Tempers Cool,” originally, in the fall of 2003, all school boards rejected the book, deeming it “too hot to handle” (21). After many board meetings and with parental controls built in, the school boards reconsidered. However, “the Strait regional school board still bans distribution of the Department of Education produced booklet *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource*, and many high schools on Cape Breton Island require a note from parents before handing out the book” (Gillis B4). Additionally, it comes with a handbook *for* the handbook, a manual for parents, a seeming justification for the *Sex?* book’s existence. It explains to the parents and guardians:

*Sex — A Healthy Sexuality Resource* is NOT a school textbook. It is a personal health resource developed for youth age 12 and older that is being distributed through participating schools .... *Sex?* has been listed in

the Department *Resources* as a teacher resource. This aims to assist them in planning related to sexuality education. (Healthy Sexuality Working Group, *Background 17*)

Often introduced at public parent-teacher meetings, and released to students only with a signed permission slip from one's parent or guardian, parents could be assured that the book was under a strict regime of control – one that would warrant them the opportunity to make certain that their child would not be harmed or dirtied by the manual's contents. (Aikenhead 21)

The book itself was created by a team of health educators, and was largely formed with feedback from focus groups involving more than 500 youth, as well as with the feedback from parent-teacher focus groups (Healthy Sexuality Research Group, *Background 10*). In the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the accompanying handbook, the question "Isn't it the parent's job to talk to their children about sex?" is posed. And the answer reinstates and confirms this parental authority:

Yes, absolutely. Parents are their children's first and best teacher and their most important sexual health educators. You have the opportunity to ensure that your children know about sexual health and healthy sexual choices and are their best source of information, guidance, and support. (19)

While this may be true in many cases, it ignores the reality of violent parents, homophobic parents, sexually inactive parents, parents who have never achieved orgasm, sexually abusive parents, and more. This statement is less about praising the virtues of the job-well-done by adults (why would this manual exist if parents were effective sexual

health educators?), and has much more to do with re-placing the control over the Child's sexuality firmly back into the hands of the parents.

Turning attention to an overview of both the media response and the materials directed toward parents, I will demonstrate how and why such disavowals of control over adolescent sexuality were, effectively, necessary for the manual to come into existence, let alone be distributed publicly.

## Chapter 7 | Making Headlines

In one of the earlier news stories regarding the *Sex?* manual, it was reported that “according to Joe MacLellan, a pro-life leader in Antigonish, ‘filth’ is too mild a word to describe the manual” (“Sex Education Threatens”). Catholic Archbishop Terrence Prendergast of Halifax warned parents “that the book is too explicit and graphic” for consumption by children (“Sex Education Threatens”). Immediately, the tone of protest echoed the sentiments of the 1973 opposition to a comprehensive sex education program; alighted with the fervour of preventing moral impurity, the religious right was vocal in their opposition. One of the complaints of Joe MacLellan was that

he reports that the words ‘morality’ and ‘marriage’ never appear in the document. The only guidelines offered to students are about avoiding STDs and unwanted pregnancies. After that, “feeling good” about engaging in sexual activity is the only criterion for deciding. (“Sex Education Threatens”)

Such opposition relies on the image of a Child in peril: and inasmuch as it relies on that image of the child, it also relies on a particular image of the adult – the adult who cares about the future of the world (embodied, however rightly or wrongly, in the image of the Child), and thus, as adults, we must care about preserving the innocence of the Child, must be willing to be the gate keepers of the well being and protection of Children, guarding against any pollutants, and to be willing to do so at any cost. The notion we must work to refute and deconstruct is the dominant narrative that tries (usually successfully) to posit that any of our failures to protect children, in any instance, would

mean a failure to believe in the fantasy of the future, the future we protect when we protect a child. Paul Kelleher writes in his essay, "How to do things with perversion: Psychoanalysis and the 'Child in Danger,'" that this, though it seems inescapable and irrefutable, does not necessarily have to be the case: he calls on us to interrogate "the strange insistence that, in order to reflect on our relationships with children, in order to conceive of childhood as such, we must put the child in danger" (151). Opposition to *Sex?* is firmly rooted in this image of the child in danger, that we, then, are called upon to protect. This is a narrative that dominates the day: Kelleher goes on to write that, "when we encounter concepts such as "the general population," "national security," or the "universal human condition," we find the child buckled into the logic of these abstract bodies, and, more often than not, this child is in danger" (151). This position has taken on a life so irrefutable that it is employed on both sides of the argument for the *Sex?* manual. Instruction in sexual activity would never take place for the sake of itself, or with the intention of improving the style or sensation of adolescent sex. Instead, both arguments, for and against, are buckled in firmly with the image of the child in danger.

In the accompanying handbook, one of the frequently asked questions is "Why is this book necessary?" (Healthy Sexuality Research Group, *Background* 15) Before the question is even answered, we are being told that this is not a flippant matter, not a just-because sort of casual undertaking: it is *necessary*. With the sex of children, we must always wait until things are *necessary*, as speaking gratuitously could be interpreted as prurient (as many consider the *Sex?* manual to be). Had students been given this information earlier, such as at the initial proposal of a comprehensive sex education program in 1973, would things now be necessary? To speak of child sexuality, one must

have urgent and significant reason to do so: the wealth of statistics outlining sexual risk-taking, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections with which the parent's handbook begins foregrounds why everything being said is not gratuitous, but an obligatory responsibility to the safety of our children in danger. To make the book itself palatable, the manual necessitated the foregrounding of the "grave" situation of adolescent sexuality today, painting a paralyzing and irrefutable image, and one that requires our commitment and protection – the child in danger. Who could say "no" to the child in danger?

It is this same image which has been used in the name of the religious right, the right to protect the life of the child from perverts and especially queer people. In fact, one of the panicked questions in the "Frequently Asked Questions" of the handbook smacks of religious indoctrination; "Does this resource promote homosexuality?" (Healthy Sexuality Research Group, *Background* 20). In a letter to the editor printed in the Halifax paper *The Daily News*, Jim Christian writes that, "I have just read the 124 page *Sex?* book that our provincial government is aiming at 12 year old school kids ... The "sex manual" contains not only misinformation on human sexuality, but outright propaganda from the militant homosexual movement" (Christian 15).

Fear of the queer is evident not only in the response by the religious right, but in the very people who created the sex manual. The resounding answer to whether the manual promotes homosexuality (and is even given the weight of its own one-word sentence) is "No." It goes on to say that "This resource contains basic information on many topics related to sexual health. Homosexuality is one of them" (Healthy Sexuality Research Group, *Background* 24). Again, homosexuality, much like adolescent sexuality,

is painted as a matter-of-fact, apolitical sexual orientation; were it not for the fact that it were completely “normal” (i.e. queers are the exact same as heterosexuals, save for object choice) it seems it would not be included at all.

In *Curiouser*, Bruhm and Hurley write about children’s books that feature gay characters; “Anxieties are quelled by the assurance that [the queers] are just like everyone else, that love makes a home ... and in these books the child becomes a cipher into which adult desires and anxieties are poured” (xii). The *Sex?* manual operates in much the same way. Given the conservative climate in which we live, my aim is not to ultimately align this move as “bad” or “good,” but instead, to demonstrate the ways in which the seemingly liberal left actually makes strange alliances with the far right in their desire to de-politicize and carve the queer world into a place rapt with marriage, love, families and robbed of desire (and most importantly, any trace of queer sex). *Sex?*, as with the fictional gay children’s books, was created in a time “where panic about (at best) recruitment and (at worst) pedophilia in gay and lesbian culture is rampant” (xii). After all, the *Sex?* manual was being researched and written as the wrongly accused Lindsay Willow fought against accusations that she had a sexual encounter with one of her female high school students at Halifax West High School. The *Globe and Mail* reported:

Judging by the apparent look of guilt and embarrassment on Ms. Willow’s face, the two [male teachers] assumed that Ms. Willow, a lesbian, had had a sexual encounter with the student, Nadia Ibrahim, now 22.

On that flimsy suspicion – contradicted by the student, who said nothing happened – Ms. Willow’s teaching career and emotional well-



being began to unravel. The two male teachers took their thinly based concerns to the school principal, who called in the police. (“Targeted”) Given this homophobic climate, it is commendable that the *Sex?* book worked so hard to include gay, lesbian and transgender lives at all. But they were only able to do so at the expense of any actual queerness, and again, with the innocent eye of the child-in-danger peering knowingly over their shoulders.

*Sex?* was able to come into existence through the active refuting of any attempt to undermine parental controls and authority. By negotiating this fraught complication through the means of introducing the book via parent-teacher school meetings and permission slips, control of Child sexuality fell back soundly to the parents who gave the book their blessing. While the book aimed to treat adolescents as sexually autonomous individuals, the need for such strict regimes of parental control made it clear that though School Boards might permit the material, it is only with the approving nod of the parents involved, regardless of whether or not adolescents have requested the material – how could they possibly know what is best for themselves? It is largely positive that students have this manual that attempts to treat them as responsible sexual beings; however, the outcry and controls placed on the manual simultaneously demonstrated that we believe adolescents are anything but responsible or, really, sexual.

Once the book was wrestled from the hands of School Board officials and parents were given opportunity to see the book, there was an overwhelmingly positive response to its contents. As previously stated, it is my hope that we will now be able to move beyond assessments of the *Sex?* manual as either simply good or bad, and to begin critically assessing its contents. I argue that the largely positive response is made possible

due to the manual's tendency to uphold some of the most accepted notions about adolescent sexuality, and about sexuality in general. Most dangerously, it reiterates some of the most commonly accepted and dangerous beliefs about female sexuality and desire, which demand our urgent inquiry if we are to believe that sex education has the potential to alter the inequity of the gender-status-quo. Through several specific but telling examples from the manual itself, a pattern of heterosexism and absent female desire will emerge.

## Chapter 8 | Sexing the Text of *Sex?* A Healthy Sexuality Resource

Through three specific examples from the *Sex?* manual, I will demonstrate how the information continues to uphold some of the most common and oppressive beliefs about adolescent sexuality and, especially, about female bodies and desire. Sections regarding sexual assault, the anatomical illustrations of male and female, and finally, the list of “definitions” offered to the students will be given consideration in this analysis. This is not to condone or reject the remaining content of the manual itself, or to claim that these three examples are an exhaustive analysis of the manual’s contents; instead, my aim is to provide a snapshot of what some of the most common and potentially damaging messages are embedded within the manual, and how it perpetuates very common (mis)beliefs about sexuality. The decision to do this is grounded in my belief that it is these damaging and oppressive messages that has made the manual palatable for use by parents, adolescents and health educators alike. By leaving some of the most ubiquitous and oppressive sexual ideologies unchallenged, the lay person’s sense of adolescent and female sexuality remains intact when perusing the manual, making it agreeable and inoffensive for popular consumption and use.

### *Asking For It | Sexual Assault and Blame Narratives*

One of the reasons the manual has received such high praise is due to its inclusion of “quotes from teens,” which were gathered during the course of the focus groups conducted in the assembly of the project. It claims to be a “non-judgmental presentation

of facts” (Healthy Sexuality Research Group, *Background* 10). As has been demonstrated, it is imperative that we treat the term “facts” cautiously; facts are always imbued with cultural understandings of what is important, what is not important and the assembly of power. Facts are a particular and not-at-all-accidental way of telling a story; as Bruhm and Hurley write,

Whether that storyteller is a novelist, a filmmaker, a researcher, a photographer, a day care leader, or a parent, he or she decides what is inside and outside the narrative world, which is also, implicitly, a decision about what is inside or outside a world whose language tries to normalize some behaviours at the expense of others. (ix)

As pointed to in the above quotation, the *Sex?* manual, by virtue of the impossibility of recording impartially, has performed some dangerous exclusions, sometimes by merit of what it *has* included.

Consider the two pages entitled “Clear Head, Clear Thinking” (*Sex?* 30-31). This section cautions adolescents of the dangers of unplanned intercourse when drunk or high; “In 2002, 35% of grade 7 to 12 students in Nova Scotia who had had sex during the previous year said that they had unplanned sexual intercourse while they were drunk or high. Drugs and alcohol can lead to sexual choices you might regret later” (30). This statistic, seemingly high, is not what requires our immediate attention. What compounds the problem of consent and personal responsibility is the quote from a young woman on the accompanying page. Framed by a colourful box and emblazoned with a caption, “Quotes From Teens,” it reads:

About two weeks ago I was out with my friends and we were drinking and I drank a little too much and we met some guys and I liked one of them and I was pretty much loaded at the time and he took advantage of me and I only have a faint recollection of this and I'm scared about meeting up with him when I'm sober. He might think I'm like that normally, and I am not! (*Sex?* 31)

This is a story of “it just happened,” as delineated by Deborah Tolman in *Dilemmas of Desire*, a story where a girl does not *choose* to have sex (as to do so would seem “slutty”), but where unplanned (and unplanned sex is more likely to be unprotected sex) sex “just happens.” Most importantly, and what is most egregious about the inclusion of this quote and lack of accompanying analysis, is that what this young woman has described is rape. On the very next page of the *Sex?* manual, it explains, “If you are sexually assaulted, it is never your fault .... You are not to blame because you were drinking or high” (33). However, following the young woman’s quote on the previous page, it reads: “THE BOTTOM LINE: Don’t put yourself in a position where you start off kissing and end up having sex because you’re not thinking clearly” (31). Indeed, it is difficult to think clearly about what consent is and *is not* with regard to young women and alcohol in the *Sex?* manual. The young woman’s story, with the accompanying text, echoes the narratives of blame for sexual assault that are all too common in Canadian culture.

Seemingly unrelated, early in 2007, retail store Bluenotes sold a t-shirt emblazoned with the slogan, “No means have aNOther drink,” a play on the Canadian Federation of Students’ “No means No” campaign. It was pulled from the stores only

after receiving nationwide negative press (Summerfield A2). This is important to consider, as it is the same sexist rhetoric which the *Sex?* book adopted in order to teach young women to fear for their safety, and moreover, that all responsibility is placed on the victim of a sexual assault. Accepting that this is a fact of a young woman's life – that she will be “taken advantage of” while “loaded” – ignores the sexual violence implicit to such an act (*Sex?* 31). Painting it as a sort of “coming of age, I should have known better” quote is irresponsible and dangerous for young girls. It feeds into the notion that “boys will be boys ergo sexuality is dangerous for girls” (Tolman 15). How are young women to make sense of these confusing messages? Moreover, in the quote, the young woman is not worried about seeing the young man again because he might, again, rape her – she is worried that he might think she's “easy” – “he might think I'm usually like that, and I'm not!” (*Sex?* 31). Already, this young woman is under the weighty pressure of upholding the organization of adolescent sexuality, concerned more with what others will think of her than with what she, herself, desires or will not tolerate. “Girls' *lack* of desire,” Tolman writes, “serves as the necessary linchpin in how adolescent sexuality is organized and managed. To the extent that we believe that adolescent sexuality is under control, it is adolescent girls whom we hold responsible, because we do not believe that boys can or will be” (15). For the *Sex?* manual to have appropriated and played into this violent rhetoric is oppressive, and not at all different from the confusing, contradicting and sexist messages young women are barraged with every day about their sexuality. By failing to uproot the notion that females are the ones who must insist upon adolescent sexual inactivity, the *Sex?* manual not only missed a valuable opportunity, but is actively confusing and further hurting the young women who are reading it. Moreover, I suggest

that it is such violent narratives which have allowed this book to come into the public sphere; it reassures the reader that women and girls continue to stand as the protectors and keepers of adolescent sexual responsibility, bearing the brunt of such responsibility with shame, a sense of humour, and prudence.

### *Defined Sexuality*

At the back of the sex manual, much in the way answers are found at the back of mathematics texts, *Sex?* offers the reader some “Words to Know” (93). It offers adolescents some “definitions of words you might not know, drawings of the male and female bodies, and places to find more information” (*Sex?* 5). Exclusions performed by both the definitions and the drawings are cause for concern, and both will be taken into consideration here; first, the definitions, followed by a critical analysis of the anatomical drawings.

Found at the back of the *Sex?* manual, the catalogued nature of the “Words to Know” posits them as authoritative and definitive definitions. A dictionary of sexual terms, definitions are meant to be taken at face value, as clean, sterile and free from interpretation and bias. It is a veritable adolescent archive for sexual knowledge; definitions promise no errors, no omissions. However such a set up might be structured in order to convince the reader of its unprejudiced credibility, it would be credulous to think that such a set up, and the information contained within, is everything it claims to be – trustworthy, definitive, untainted. Derrida, in *Archive Fever*, writes about the “violence of the archive itself:”

The archive ... is not only the place for stocking and conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (17)

Derrida warns us of the danger of archiving, the exclusions it performs, and the way in which what is considered *archivable* actually shapes what our future understandings will be. Such are the definitions in the *Sex?* manual – a definition, by nature of existing, excludes both nuance and experience; in turn, it also thus promises a fixed generality about a word. One way of understanding this arrangement is that it effectively reproduces commonly held simplifications regarding sex and gender, lending itself and convincing readers of a future assured to be much like the present.

There are thirty-five terms defined in the “Words to Know” (93-96). Considering a sample of the terms, it will become clear how definitions themselves work to perpetuate the status-quo. Most problematic are the discussions of anal sex, the hymen, and transgendered persons. Even in this attempt to discuss the violence of omissions, I omit many of the definitions included in the back of the *Sex?* manual; mindful of this, I must point out that the definitions chosen to be discussed are most relevant to the project as they demonstrate the ways in which sexual minorities (and insofar as our culture is concerned, I would argue that this includes women) continue to be alienated and depoliticized. Though I believe no definition to be innocuous, for the sake of this



discussion, this sampling of definitions provides us with the best understanding of the ways in which, in this *Sex?* manual, defining dominates.

*Up yours! Refusing homophobic depictions of anal sex*

Anal sex is described as a “form of sexual intercourse in which one person’s penis enters another person’s anus” (93). This is, generally, accurate enough. But the definition continues, saying, “Unprotected anal intercourse is the sexual activity with the highest risk for sexual transmitted infections” (93). What is important to consider alongside this definition is the definition of “vaginal sex/sexual intercourse: Sexual activity during which the penis enters the vagina” (96). Moreover, the definition of the anus is perfunctory and devoid of sexuality, described only as “the opening from which stool leaves the body during a bowel movement” (*Sex?* 99). In her book, *Witnessing Aids: Writing, Testimony and the Work of Mourning*, Sarah Brophy writes that the “homophobia of AIDS discourse is thus symptomatic of, as much as it is initiated and sustained by, a more encompassing discourse of prohibition and disavowal vis-à-vis sexuality” (5). Such a prohibition of sexuality, and especially with regard to any queer sexuality, is especially amplified and feverishly impressed upon the sexual adolescent body, and the *Sex?* manual is one such case-in-point. Moreover, Brophy continues, writing that “AIDS discourse represents the nuclear family as the guarantor of the body’s integrity, as the single site of safe sex” (5-6). Considering the analysis of anal sex alongside what the manual calls “vaginal sex,” neither definition is, in essence, factually incorrect. But the emphasis with which anal sex is foregrounded as the most risky of sexual activities bespeaks a panic surrounding HIV/AIDS, adolescent sexuality and most

of all, about queer youth. Vaginal sex comes without any caveat – it is thus understood to be safer than anal sex. This may be true in some ways; however, it fails to mention that (as reported by the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health), “since the early 1990s, the rate of new HIV infections has declined among men who have sex with men and among injection drug users. In contrast, infections arising from heterosexual contact have risen steadily, from 13% in 1993 to 43.8% in 2003” (*Why* 1). What is more, they additionally report that the “greatest increase in new infections has been among young women, aged 15 to 29. At present, heterosexual transmission accounts for nearly 75% of all new infections in women” (*Why* 1). Once this is taken into account, vaginal sex is quite clearly fraught with risk as well, most especially for women.

It is important to note that high rates of HIV infection in women are, undeniably, linked to a predominance of unprotected heterosexual intercourse, and that there are a multiplicity of reasons behind this increase; one such reason for the steep incline is that many young people now believe that HIV is not a chronic illness. Health Canada’s 2003 *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study* demonstrated that 44% – 66% of youth surveyed “didn’t know that HIV/AIDS cannot be cured” (Healthy Sexuality Research Group, *Background* 10). However, it is undeniable that these depictions of anal sex not only single out an already marginalized group of queer young men, but also limit the sexual menu for heterosexual youth and queer women. In this way, not only could this definition of anal sex (and the accompanying description of vaginal sex) be read as bespeaking a panic and covert homophobia surrounding anal sex, but they also very unfortunately manage to miss an opportunity to discuss in a comprehensive and contextualized manner what is a profoundly serious health concern for women.

### *The Myth of the Hymen*

The hymen is defined in the *Sex?* manual as “a thin membrane that covers the opening of the vagina. For most girls, this is broken or stretched during normal physical activity, long before they have sexual intercourse. However, if it isn’t already stretched or broken, it may be torn during first intercourse and may bleed a little” (94). There is much to be said about the hymen and its history, the ways in which it has been used to oppress women and the ways in which it continues to be used to do so today. Still, many brides are forced to undergo gynecological examinations to ensure that the hymen is still “intact,” ensuring a woman’s virginity. In July of 2005, as described by Emily Wax in her in-depth *Washington Post* article, a member of the Ugandan parliament promised to give university scholarships to virgin girls in his district when they graduate from high school in an attempt to fight the spread of HIV (Wax). In order to qualify, the young women would then have to undergo gynecological examinations to ensure the completeness of their hymens. Again, women are laden with the burden of protecting healthy sexuality, and for women, this means no sexuality at all.

With such a fraught history and given current abuses, it is alarming that the *Sex?* manual continues to play into the myth of the hymen – while it is helpful to mention that a young woman may bleed, helping to alleviate any surprises, it fails to mention how adequate sexual stimulation and plenty of lubricant can deter bleeding and pain (which might be more useful and pleasurable than the simple, “it’s a fact of life” tone of the definition). Moreover, though the manual indicates that the hymen might be stretched or broken (“broken” being a careless word choice, laden with heavy cultural meaning), it

points only to the culprit of physical activity as the way in which a hymen might have been previously stretched. In truth, and given that sex toys are mentioned in the *Sex?* manual, could it not be imagined, or even seen as *likely*, that a girl might have already “broken” her own hymen through masturbation with a sex toy, her own fingers, or even something entirely different? Women are often told time and again that hymens can be broken through “normal physical activity,” with that then usually being accompanied by tales of horseback riding or inserting tampons. Unless masturbation is included under the umbrella of “normal physical activity” (which, given the many failures of the *Sex?* book to acknowledge independent female sexual activity, I would argue female masturbation is not encompassed under this umbrella term), this definition of the hymen lacks context for a topic fraught with oppression and power, and again missed an opportunity to acknowledge girls’ sexual autonomy and desire.

“Hymenoplasty” has become an increasingly prevalent surgical procedure, wherein which a woman’s hymen is sewn to appear as though it is tight, “virginal.” In 2004, “9.2 million cosmetic procedures were performed in the U.S., 24 percent more than in 2000,” at a cost of approximately \$5,000 US for each procedure (Chozick). In a world where women are expected to be sexy, but not actually have sex, and to so acutely feel the pressure to appear virginal on their wedding nights (and in some cultures, face violence, disowning or death if they are not virgins), it is not simply enough to make a fleeting mention of the hymen in a curt definition. We must acknowledge female sexual autonomy, and the history and current status of the hymen, which is steeped in oppressive violence. This certainly does not have to be the case, and if education is as much a way to

resist oppression as it is a mode of oppression itself, we must ensure that the curricula in Nova Scotia is the former of the two.

*We need to Trans-form Sex Ed | Defining “Transgendered”*

While many transgender narratives fall under the rhetoric of being in a “wrong body,” this is certainly not always the case. The manual offers the following definition for a transgender person:

People who feel that their gender identity conflicts with their sexual anatomy – that is a girl who feels like she ought to have been a boy or a boy who feels like he ought to have been a girl. People who are transgendered often choose to live the role of the opposite gender. Some have surgery to alter their physical bodies to match the gender they feel.

(96)

Creating a definitive answer for who and what a transperson is (and thus, limiting what, in the minds of adolescents, a transperson *can be*) violently excludes a host of gender variants who are already continually marginalized, omitted and subjected to horrific violence. As well, what the above definition does is depoliticize and undermine any person who is dissatisfied with the status of gender. That is, though the definition outlines *trans* as someone who feels that “their gender identity conflicts with their sexual anatomy,” it could well be argued that there are many transpersons who, though satisfied with their own anatomy, feel that our culture conflicts with their own gender ideologies. Gender variants are not limited to those who wish to be a boy, or a girl – if only they could be in the “right” body. Bodies are sites of struggle and protest; one of these protests

taken up is a protest against the binary, limiting and oppressive notions of dichotomous gender (as reproduced in this definition in the term “opposite gender”). Trans can be a place of liminal existence, of resistance and of powerful political activism. To reduce it to a definition of “one or the other,” as the manual has serves to further alienate those who are most actively working to deconstruct and destabilize the oppressive binary systems that surround us. Well-intentioned as the definition may be, a more fluid conception of gender identity could better serve the aims of breaking down gender barriers (as opposed to recreating them in a different form), in this case.

### *Anatomy Illustrates*

Of the three examples offered from the *Sex?* manual, the anatomical illustrations are perhaps one of the less predictable form of social control, and the shaping of gendered thought. Though presented as mere line drawings, the minimalist “facts” of sexual anatomy are loaded with political and sexual ideologies. Anatomical illustrations, in as much as they claim to authoritatively and objectively represent our bodies, also illustrate cultural beliefs regarding our anatomy.

Thomas Laqueur demonstrates in *Making Sex: Sex and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* that “anatomical illustrations, in short, are representations of historically specific understandings of the human body and its place in creation, and not only of a particular state of knowledge about its structures” (164). In other words, how we illustrate male and female anatomy today is not only a reflection of how much medical knowledge is available to us or the illustrators; the form anatomical illustrations take is inextricably linked to what we think, understand and believe about what bodies mean. By turning our

attention to the history of the anatomical model, and then to the male and female anatomical models used in Nova Scotia's sex education curriculum, we will be able to see how the graphic interpretation of the body has changed (and/or has not), which boundaries are being shored up perhaps more than ever, how students are instructed to take pleasure in their organs, and how mechanized the process has become. It will enable us to deconstruct an educational institution which employs, as Halberstam describes, "the signifiers of 'normal' sexuality [which] maintain a kind of hegemonic power by remaining invisible" (13). Normal sexuality takes for granted its invisibility; it is, traditionally, the one that exposes, the one that all other models of sexuality are held up against. It is this status of invisibility we must make visible, and in so doing, identify the far reaching implications that can be deduced from these heteronormalizing images. Haraway reminds us in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" that "who controls the interpretation of bodily boundaries in medical hermeneutics is a major feminist issue" (169), for which reason we will now turn our attention to the medical history of the anatomical image.

Anatomical images and models enjoy a rich and widely influential history; they commonly frequented medical texts from the sixteenth century onwards (Jordanova 164). However, as Jordanova demonstrates in her work "Natural Facts: A Historical Perspective on Science and Sexuality," these images took up a dramatically different and widely influential meaning at the end of the eighteenth century, when wax began to be used as a medium to create bodily likenesses. In her examination of this wax series, she explains that

these models are distinctly different ... the female figures are recumbent, frequently adorned with pearl necklaces. They have long hair, and occasionally they have hair in the pubic area also. These 'Venuses' as they were significantly called lie on velvet or silk cushions, in a passive, almost sexually inviting pose. (164)

These recumbent models convey, for what Jordanova argues is the first time, the "sexual potential of medical anatomy" (164). Nature was the feminine and untainted "other," which only needed be revealed by masculine "science." Nature, understood as the feminine to be unclothed, positions science itself as a sexual and heterosexually saturated activity.

Anatomical illustrations have taken widely varying forms over the centuries; where in early nineteenth century renderings of the uterus depicted even the slightest undulations, fissures and "shadows," today's drawings are minimalist, line drawings, mechanistic. These illustrations reflect Laqueur's assertion that "all anatomical images ... are abstractions; they are maps to a bewildering and infinitely varied reality" (164). Like the construction of a "female skeleton" in the late eighteenth century, which spliced several women's skeletal systems together (each having *one* of the "ideal" feminine features, and no one skeleton having them all), anatomical illustrations make use of the "highest aesthetic standards" (Laqueur 167) and banish those features considered undesirable.

Let us first consider the image of "The Female Body" and the accompanying text. (These images, and the complete *Sex?* manual, can be viewed by visiting <<http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/healthysexuality.html>>.) A highly abstract image, free from



blemish, hair, fat, asymmetry, scars, stretch marks, menstrual blood, secretions or excretions – this is the body young women are taught to live in. Text accompanying the image also gives measurements of what our vaginas should, *normally*, look like (the clitoris is pea sized, uterus is 7.5 cm long, fallopian tubes are 10cm long, and the vagina is precisely, normally, 9cm long). As Catherine Waldby has proposed, medical and pornographic genres often converge in a quest for maximized bodily visibility (37). This image of woman on her back with legs spread, while also the prone position known for gynecological exams, is a frequently employed pornographic gaze. Removal of hair allows us to *see everything*: while the unfettered gaze is a medical priority, is also a trend popularized by pornographic images. These images are in direct contrast with past images of anatomy, which did not fail to include hair. With the ever multiplying options available to women for removing pubic hair (shaving, waxing, sugaring, threading, electrolysis, laser removal, depilatories, plucking, and more), perhaps it should come as no surprise that the ideal female anatomy is clean shorn.

The vagina as wide, gaping hole is absurd to anyone who has taken even the briefest of peeks at one's own vagina, or perhaps someone else's. Here, it serves as a reminder that it *is* what our civilization considers to be a heteronormative and misogynist hole, something that inevitably must be filled, probably by whatever is on the next page of the manual. This gaping depiction represents, as Irigaray has explained, "... the horror of *nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A 'hole' in its scopophilic lens" (250). Like the mainstream heteronormative pornographic gaze that posits women not as "whole," and instead as "hole," this image accentuates the (very fictional and absurd) hollowness of the vagina so as to imply to the viewer that it requires

filling. The vagina is anything but hollow; in “This Sex Which Is Not One,” Irigaray points to women’s autoeroticism, that women “touches herself” always – “for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact” (249). Moreover, again to invoke Irigaray, “if woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallogormorphism.” (251). The anatomical rendering of the vagina in the *Sex* manual omits the possibility for self pleasure, that the vagina might not inevitably require “filling.” In her analysis of women and film, Laura Mulvey writes that the “paradox of phallogormorphism ... is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world ... it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence” (1). Without this image of a gaping, empty, vagina, the image on the next page could not be afforded the privilege and importance it currently enjoys.

The vagina is described in the accompanying text as a “passage that goes from the uterus to the outside of the body.” According to this definition, the uterus is the point of departure, the “start” of the vagina, which then extends to the outside of the body. Nothing starts at the “mouth”(as it is depicted here – a yawning mouth, bored by it’s own emptiness) of the vagina – no initiation of sex, no indications that it might actively respond or initiate a sex act, and certainly no pleasure, in this case. Sex education culminates with the act of heterosexual penetrative sex, and this image reinforces the penetrative imperative. Theorist Annie Potts criticizes the routinely accepted idea in sex and health education materials that “real” sex is only constituted in heterosexual penetration. “The powerful position of coital sex in western constructions,” she writes, “of ‘real’ and ‘normal’ sex leaves little space at present for conceptualizing heterosexual

encounters that do not culminate eventually in penile-vaginal intercourse” (260). Sex education ultimately culminates in heterosexual penile-vaginal intercourse as *the* act to reckon with.

While there are numerous instances of this heterosex pinnacle in the *Sex?* book alone, it is perhaps most pronounced in the denial of sexual pleasure anywhere outside of the “sexual organs” (*Sex?* 101). While the book itself asserts that there are many ways to experience pleasure, and even discusses anal sex in some detail, this fails to be reflected in the anatomical images and definitions. In both the male and the female, the anus is described as the “opening from which stool leaves the body during a bowel movement (BM)” (*Sex?* 99), which soundly works to strip the anus of any sexy sounding potential.

In stark contrast to the image of the female body, for “The Male Body” there are no approximate measurements (which I would suggest is a panicked assurance that size does not matter), and the text goes so far as to apologize for the asymmetry of the testicles, that “testicles are usually a bit lopsided, with one hanging a little lower than the other” (101). Use of descriptors such as “loose,” “hanging,” “sack” (101) paint a picture of flouncing genitals that may vary in great degree from person to person (far less measured precision than that of the female anatomy). Most importantly, the penis is illustrated as both relaxed (flaccid) and active (erect); in this way, it is made clear through the illustrations that the male penis is *the* sexual actor, the vagina being the passive hole (which, by merit of its status as “hole,” is understood as always ready and accessible for male penetration).

But how does relating to these highly abstract images of ideal sexual organs affect our lives? Where in the past, ovaries were removed to remedy a variety of symptoms,

today, women voluntarily have their labia surgically cut and reduced, severed to symmetry, remove all of their pubic hair, sometimes permanently, purchase vaginal sugar dust to ensure their vagina has a pleasing taste, have anuses bleached, work to keep themselves dry with powders and pads, plug up leaks at all costs, and have little or no idea that females can, indeed, ejaculate liberally. This begins to literally look like the mechanized, always white, dry, reasonably sized, hairless abstract image before us. Images such as these are not merely representations – they come to *create* what they allege to be merely representing. It is, in the words of Baudrillard, “hyperreal ... More real than real ... that is how the real is abolished” (*Simulacra* 81).

Elizabeth Grosz writes that

if the body is plastic, malleable and amenable to social re-inscription, this means that the female body is *a priori* capable of being seen and understood outside the notion of castrated privation. This is only one of a number of possible meanings, but the very one men and women have up to now had little possibility of refusing. (270)

Anatomical images, in the face of their biased history, continue to promise both objectivity and impartial knowledge. It is such representations and meanings that we must, in the words of Grosz, *refuse*: understanding the anatomical image as a cultural snapshot of popular understanding with regard to gendered bodies can only have positive effects, especially for girls, learning from these models. Engendering ideal and measured visual bodies in the name of “objectivity” and “medical knowledge” from which to learn creates a power dynamic to which adolescent girls are reticent to object; in the words of Haraway, “vision is *always* a question of the power to see” (“Situated Knowledges” 192).

Sex education's anatomical images are situated in a vast and biased history that has done little to serve the interests of women and their sexual autonomy, and much to prop up the flaccid notions of the insatiable male sexual performer. As feminist study continues to be largely, if not entirely, omitted from school curriculums, it is important for us to oppose these images and present alternatives. Annie Potts calls for "those involved in sex education and sexual health promotion to be critically aware of the types of texts they design, recommend, and use in their teaching" (261), and certainly, our analyses can help reconceive adequate and equal representations of the body, ones that can imagine a body in multiplicity, bodies that cannot be captured in purportedly dichotomous representations of the supposed male and female epitomes. When conducting their independent sex workshops, the Halifax women's sex store Venus Envy makes use of a hand drawn sketch of a woman's anatomy: hair, bumps, excretions, folds, ejaculations and all, challenging the smooth, sterile, cleanly ideal. Tee Corrine's *Cunt Coloring Book* (1975) is another challenge to the medicalized, symmetrical and detached vaginas of sex education; this book features real life sketches of women's vulvas, sometimes complete with the woman's own fingers resting on her inner thigh, or spreading the labia. As creative representations such as this become more commonplace, we will have increasingly fewer reasons to feel gray about anatomy.

## Further Considerations and Conclusion

### *A New Sex Education*

In her article, “The Science/Fiction of Sex,” Annie Potts writes, “how such alternative self-defined versions of female sexuality might be conceptualized and embodied remains a matter for speculation, imagination, and experimentation *for and by women*” (263). What I hope to begin here is a dialogue based on the principles of inclusion, non-violence and the prioritizing of female adolescent sexuality; in truth, this entire project has been fuelled by a desire for a sex education that would encompass sexual multiplicity and above all else, encourage adolescent girls’ sexual autonomy. Continuing with sex education as it is now – failing to address gendered natures of sexual violence, sexual decision making and culturally accepted heterosexed and gendered norms – only serves to perpetuate, compound and reproduce current discriminations and marginalizations. What might girls’ sexual autonomy look like in sex education? Here, I suggest a few possibilities, and it is my hope that many more will follow.

Modes of acquiring sexual knowledge are numerous and diverse; whether it be porn found in a parent’s closet, or from television commercials, it is imperative for sex education to be a resource that opens up dialogue, as opposed to offering definitive answers. To begin a discussion of where sex education could take us, it is essential to acknowledge *how* we have arrived at our current location. This project aimed to create an understanding of the history of sex education in Nova Scotia. Given the analysis of the curriculum, this understanding is in part encompassed through a quote from “Producing Erotic Children,” where James R. Kincaid writes, “we know that a child’s memory is

developed not simply from data but from learning a canonical narrative; we know that what we are and have been comes to us from narrative forms that take on so much authority they start looking like nature” (15). Sex education has the potential to disrupt these canonical narratives that Kincaid speaks of; it would, given its institutionalized nature, actually work to reconstitute the canon itself. If we are concerned with the state of female sexual autonomy, then sex education is an obvious place to begin.

Given the panic of assuring that if adolescents *do* have sex, it must be *safe sex*, perhaps this could be an in road to the inclusion of female desire in the sex education curriculum. Through this fevered effort to eliminate any “risk taking” behaviours, we may be able to re-route what this means, so as to include the desires of girls to be sexually active. This acknowledgement, that girls are desirous and able to act on that desire, would be a radical and positive move for the sex education curriculum and for women’s equity as a whole. If we are truly serious about ending the adolescent female narrative of “it just happened,” serious changes much be considered with regard to how sex education defines sexual activity.

I suggest here that the “safe sex” narrative is the most likely means for the inclusion of female desire and sexuality. In a time where, as demonstrated, there are few kinds of sex that are actually *safe* for girls (given susceptibility to STI, the possibility of pregnancy, the fear of rape and violence), they should be given other options to experiment with their sexuality. Curriculum creators must consider alternative understandings of sexual activity and practice in order to create materials that are inclusive, positive and non-violent. For girls (not to mention for women), there is a very real threat to both their emotional and their physical safety with regard to heterosexual

relationships. This must be taken into account, and alternatives for exploring sexuality must be suggested.

Masturbation would be the most obvious of risk-free sexual activities for young women; however, the curriculum itself does not indicate how climax occurs for women. Even in the *Sex?* manual, the clitoris “plays an important part in sexual arousal and orgasm” (99). Female masturbation is rarely given attention in sex education curriculums, and Nova Scotia’s is no exception. Robert Eberwein describes two films used to teach sex education, *Boy to Man* and *Girl to Woman*, both of which are currently in use in the Nova Scotia sex education curriculum:

Throughout, the operative word is “normal”: for the boy, such experiences as nocturnal emissions and masturbation; for the girl, different physical sizes and patterns in menstruation. Both films use animation that illustrates how erections occur. Although the film for girls acknowledges the clitoris in the animated drawing (the first sex education film for teenagers to do so as far as I know), it is not very specific, identifying it only as “a small, highly sensitive organ” .... Nothing is said about masturbation in the girls’ film. (111)

Silence surrounding female self-pleasure is not an innocuous omission; through omission, girls are silenced and shamed into believing that their desire is out of place, inappropriate. At the onset of this project, I described the day I asked in the anonymous-question-box during sex ed, “What does sex feel like?” Made to feel embarrassed and ashamed for having asked, I would suggest that such informal disciplines are what maintain the silences surrounding girls’ sexuality. Female masturbation and female ejaculation (which



is not discussed at all, though many females *do* ejaculate) must be given much more prominent place in the sex education curriculum, as *the* safest way to experiment with one's own sexuality and pleasure.

In an age of digital-friends, online chat, instant messaging, text messaging, email, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and other computer mediums, we are told again and again of the danger of internet predators and the need to protect children from the potentially sexually threatening internet. However, I would instead suggest that the inclusion of digital mediums as a form of safe sex could help adolescent girls explore their own sexuality, and to decide for themselves what actions and textual sex they are willing to participate in. Online, instant-messaging, heterosexual intercourse is not something that can "just happen." Should a situation become unpleasant, a girl is able to log off, block a user, close the offending window, free from immediate threats of physical danger. Online sexual experimentation might be one of the safest ways in which adolescents can freely explore their desires, their dislikes, and to learn to exercise the right to say "no" without risk of violent repercussion. My aim here is not to dismiss the various dangers of conversing online, but instead, to try and suggest that activities such as instant messaging with a friend, the exchange of emails between two young people dating and text messaging (among many other mediums) could indeed serve adolescents well if included in the sex education curricula. Most importantly, such activities offer opportunity to experiment in such a way that a person is not at risk for sexually transmitted infections, nor do the participants have to worry about pregnancy. It affords queer youth an opportunity for community, and to explore their desires on their own terms, desires that are rarely mentioned in the Nova Scotia sex education curriculum. Donna Haraway

writes, “in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 178). This, especially for girls and women, is something that must be taken into consideration with regard to the sex education curriculum. It must move past the predatory narratives that surround the internet, and instead offer it as an additional option for exploring sexuality and learning about sexual decision making.

Creators of sex education curricula have a responsibility to take into account the cultural understandings of bodies, adolescent sexuality, and the history in which these are steeped. In addressing this responsibility, a re-created sex education has the power and ability to restructure sexual power dynamics; such a restructuring is desperately needed.

Annie Potts writes that the

development of autonomous versions of female desire might be facilitated through the endorsement in sexual education and sexual health promotion of female bodies *as* sexually active and desiring ... and by promoting a critical awareness in women of the ways in which female desire and pleasure have been constructed for them in/by conventional masculinist representations of femininity and maternity. (265)

Sex education should be about much more than simple function and the suppressing of risk-taking behaviours – and it can be. The *Sex?* manual was an impressive first step toward a reconstituting of the sex education paradigm, but it is one that must be pushed even further.

### *Conclusion*

Sex education is steeped in a fraught history, rich with bias, specific intentions, and troubled by the panic that continues to surround the sexuality of adolescents, and especially, of adolescent sexual minorities. To comprehensively understand the current state of sex education, and for those who aim to improve the state of sex education now, this history must not be omitted; this project has worked to provide a snapshot of not only the very recent history of sex education in Nova Scotia, but to foreground that history with the work of feminist theorists, whose work has disrupted the status of what was long considered “natural” with regard to scientific and biological assessments of female sexuality. Considering these theorists alongside the 1970 Family Life Education text, the public response to the proposal for a comprehensive sex ed program at Alexandra School in 1973, and the content of and subsequent response to the *Sex?: A Healthy Sexuality Resource* released in 2004, it is clear that though there may be a “veritable discursive explosion” (Foucault, *History* 17) with regard to sex taking place all around us, as Mary Louise Adams writes, “it is not always easy to identify or classify the debris” (17).

We saw that the 1970 Family Life Education text, were it to be used today, would be cause for great contestation, given the oppressive sexed roles being explicitly taught. Abstinence until marriage was the only choice presented insofar as sexual activity, and the sexual drive itself was described as a desire to have children (thus having nothing to do with physical pleasure). The Halifax Family Planning Association worked to create a comprehensive sex education curriculum, which was, in the end, deferred for further study. As sex education did eventually change somewhat over the years, it was a case of

the curriculum “tardily following changes in social behaviour” (McLaren and McLaren 9).

Years later, the release of the *Sex?* manual incites similar patterns of dissent and accolades. Though the contents of the manual are largely well within the dry paradigm of medical language (disguised in a more colourful font), it dared to include discussions of pleasure and non-heteronormative sexualities. I hesitate to say “queer,” as the basis of the material continues to be grounded in strictly monogamous, “born that way,” non-fluid sexuality, and as demonstrated, omits considerations of performing gender and sexuality in such a way to challenge cultural conservatism and heterosexism. Desire is a complex experience, and it is one that can be affected by the world around us, and it can absolutely impact our own desires, sexualities and pleasures.

However much support the *Sex?* manual was granted by the public, it is clear that it gained this acceptance through a deployment of normalizing heterosexual rhetoric; it is this sort of rhetoric that feeds into the disenfranchising of female sexuality, and must be met with our urgent criticism and desire for change. Made palatable by the way in which it failed to challenge some of the most pervasive and oppressing beliefs about the female body, the *Sex?* book, though well intentioned and progressive in some ways, fails to depict young women as sexually autonomous persons. *Sex?* even compounds some of the most problematic assumptions regarding sexual minorities (and for adolescents, in my estimation, “sexual minority” includes women). Narratives of blame, responsibility and desire-less-ness saturate the rhetoric surrounding girls’ sexuality in the *Sex?* manual, and the anatomical illustrations within play into a long history of exploiting the anatomical image as “the” image of impartial reference. However, anatomical images are inundated

with cultural beliefs, much in the way our own living bodies are; as demonstrated, the anatomical images, as much as they claim to merely represent, also, effectively, lend to the production and re-production of already assumed cultural beliefs about the body.

Studying these two moments together allows for an analysis of how sex education has changed over time, and also, how it has not. However seemingly-liberal the current curricula may appear in relation to the former 1970s Family Life Education text, it continues to reinforce, in varying degrees, the oppression and regulations expected of adolescent, and especially female, sexuality. By considering these two moments in tandem, we are given cause to raise our suspicions, awareness and to hone in our critical analysis on the lessons being explicitly taught to students. As stated previously, these two moments were chosen not because they were the *only* contentious times in Nova Scotia's sex education, but because these moments were pivotal insofar as the context for each moment was politically fraught, the sex education materials new and seemingly-radical and the outcries of support and criticism, passionate. Formal sex education is a site of the deployments of power, inscriptions of gender and a tenuous understanding of adolescent (and especially female) bodies. A postmodern feminist examination of how these powers play out on the body makes available to us a more comprehensive and robust vocabulary of resistance and offers capacity building for the movements that seek a world where women are both safe and equal.

The discomfort prompted by considering adolescent sexuality is laden with the adult fantasies of children as sex-less creatures, whose innocence wants for nothing, which as I have argued, is what largely grounded much of the protest to the *Sex?* manual; parents' discomfort of no longer being in control of their child's sexuality prompted

vocal discontent, which could only be quelled with the promise of parent-teacher meetings and permission slips. Moreover, the *Sex?* manual entertains the idea that sex often happens for reasons which have nothing to do with reproduction, even discussing non-reproductive forms of sex; anal sex and sex toys, for instance. Such a discussion is wildly at odds with the long standing tradition of teaching only the “biological facts,” and is one such dialogue that many Nova Scotians (and the Strait Regional School Board, who continue to ban the book) were not compelled to accept, entertain, much less allow their children to have access to.

If the current state of sex education is unsatisfactory, and even oppressive, then how are we to change it? And moreover, what should a responsible sex education program ultimately look like? Categories such as boy/girl, gay/straight, sexually active/abstinent must continue to be met with our skepticism, especially given the definitive way in which sex education even *today* continues to box in, limit and ultimately define the acceptable modes of adolescent sexuality. Sex education, by the very nature of its writing down, publishing and gathering of information, “produces as much as it records” (Derrida 17). How can we imagine a sex education which might not limit the body, and especially female bodies, in this way? What is being missed? *Who* is being missed? With an understanding of where sex education has been and where it currently is, we can take up the task of imagining and reconstituting a sex education curriculum which takes the above worries into consideration, and works to eliminate the minor (and not so minor) violences and exclusions performed by such a curriculum.

This project does not purport to answer the above questions, nor is this author certain of what the answers might be. What this project aimed to do was find the

appropriate and ethical inquiries of formal sex education curricula, and to demonstrate the urgency with which such queries must be asked and, hopefully, answered. The ways in which we learn about our bodies; the ways in which power plays out on our lived sexual experiences; the ways in which we might resist the structures that alienate and oppress; these are serious and daunting considerations, but are exactly the tasks we must take up in order to exist, happily, in our world. “Even as I think that gaining recognition for one’s status as a sexual minority is a difficult task within reigning discourses of law, politics, and language,” Butler writes, “I continue to consider it a necessity for survival” (xxvi).

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