

Winter 3-18-2015

# "Children Need Protection Not Perversion": The Rise of the New Right and the Politicization of Morality in Sex Education in Great Britain, 1968-1989

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10.15760/etd.2204

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“Children Need Protection Not Perversion”: The Rise of the New Right and the  
Politicization of Morality in Sex Education in Great Britain, 1968-1989

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

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Portland State University  
2015

## **Abstract**

Two competing forms of sex education and the groups supporting them came to head in the 1970s and 1980s. Traditional sex education retained an emphasis on maintaining Christian-based morality through marriage and parenthood preparation that sex education originally held since the beginning of the twentieth century. Liberal sex education developed to openly discuss issues that reflected recent legal and social changes. This form reviewed controversial subjects including abortion, contraception and homosexuality. Though liberal sex education found support from national family planning organizations and Labour politicians, traditional sex education found a more vocal and powerful ally in the New Right.

This thesis explores the political emergence of the New Right in Great Britain during the 1970s and 1980s and how the group utilized sex education. The New Right, composed of moral pressure groups and Conservative politicians, focused on the supposed absence of traditional morality from the emergent liberal sex education. Labour (and liberal organizations) held little power in the 1980s due to internal party struggles and an insignificant parliamentary presence. This allowed the New Right to successfully pass multiple national reforms. The New Right latched onto liberal sex education as demonstrative of the moral decline of Britain and utilized its emergence of a prime example of the need to reform education and local government.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee: Joseph Bohling, Richard Beyler, Patricia Schechter and Jamie Ross. I am especially thankful for Joseph Bohling for diving headfirst into the thesis process in his first year here. He has been a great sounding board during this tumultuous process. I am also grateful for the encouragement from my first advisor, Victoria Belco, now luxuriating in retirement.

Thank you to the Education Department at Planned Parenthood for their continued curiosity, support, and knowledge.

I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional support and encouragement. Without them, grad school may not have been a feasible possibility.

And most of all, I would like to thank my friends since without them I could not have remained sane throughout this process.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One	
The New Right Versus Positive Depictions of Homosexuality.....	17
Chapter Two	
Youth and the Need for Moral Protection.....	40
Chapter Three	
Family as the Basis of Sex Education.....	62
Conclusion: Comparing Britain with the United States.....	76
Bibliography.....	81

## Introduction

The politics of sex education in Great Britain in the 1970s and 1980s reflects the rise of the British New Right. Though sex education appeared in British schools at the turn of the twentieth century, little controversy arose over its content prior to the 1970s. This decade presented a tumultuous time for Britain and followed a period of significant civil rights changes. Certain sex education programs began to reflect these changes and accepted increasing societal deviations including the rise of premarital and teenaged sex. This new liberal sex education sculpted its curriculum to discuss contraceptive options, venereal disease prevention and even abortion. Public and political actions by conservative pressure groups and politicians against liberal sex education occurred immediately following its development and continued to escalate into the 1980s. These conservative opponents focused on maintaining a Christian-based morality within sex education rather allowing the subject to morph to reflect public health needs. The fears liberal sex education encouraged promiscuity and homosexuality, legitimized teenage pregnancy, and negatively affected physical and psychological development supported the New Right's emphasis on preserving a traditional sex education. This focus on morality increased under the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The New Right utilized moral concerns surrounding sex education to increase support for two political initiatives: local government and education reform. Focus on the moral dangers of liberal sex education increased until the late 1980s when the Conservative government instituted both reforms.

. Sex education first emerged in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. During the first half of the century, sex education focused on hygiene and the future goals of marriage and family. The subject mainly targeted teenaged students, and it was uncommon for primary school students to receive lessons in sex education.<sup>1</sup> This customary approach to defer the subject until the teenage years was problematic as “nearly 60% of children left schools at the age of 14 and 83% had left by the age of 15,” as noted by historian Hera Cook.<sup>2</sup> Teachers were tentative to integrate sex education into their curriculum as for a teacher during the first half of the twentieth century “to mention sex is still to run the risk of...being charged with having low morals.”<sup>3</sup> When instructors did teach sex education, they often avoided discussions on the mechanics of human sex and reproduction and instead based lessons on these topics in the natural sciences.<sup>4</sup> Schools often separated the sexes to provide gender specific lessons, and girls received sex education more often than boys. Lessons for girls focused on mothercraft and menstruation hygiene.<sup>5</sup> These main foci intended to produce physically and morally healthy adults. The central argument aimed to uphold this goal as evidenced through the Board of Education’s handbooks on health education. The first three editions, published between 1928 and 1939,

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<sup>1</sup> The education system in England and Wales was split into primary education and secondary education in 1944. Secondary school began at the age of 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hera Cook, “Getting ‘Foolishly Hot and Bothered’? Parents and Teachers and Sex Education in the 1940s,” *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning* 12, no. 5 (2012): 558.

<sup>3</sup> Cook, “Parents and Teachers and Sex Education in the 1940s,” 557.

<sup>4</sup> Lesley Hall called it “the ‘stamens and pistils’ school of sexual enlightenment” due to the reliance of botany to understand reproduction. Instructors also discussed animal reproduction. Lesley Hall, “Sex Education in Britain, 1870-1995,” *History Review* 23 (1995): 48.

<sup>5</sup> Cook states three girls’ schools taught sex education to every one boys’ school that did so. Cook, “Parents and Teachers and Sex Education,” 563.

emphasized “hygiene education as a key means of improving ‘national efficiency,’ through raising levels of physical health.”<sup>6</sup> The Board of Education only provided guidelines and avoided endorsing a national policy, an action continued for decades by the Department of Education and Science.

Following World War II, officials used sex education to emphasize the traditional morals seemingly ignored during wartime.<sup>7</sup> Sex education in the mid-1940s focused on the prevention of venereal disease, as disease rates had significantly increased during the war, before it reverted back to a concentration on traditional sexual morals. The 1956 edition of the health education handbook illustrated this quick shift as it portrayed sexuality as an impulse best channeled into marriage and parenthood. This edition also stated head teachers were responsible for instituting and determining sex education, a duty that continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This meant head teachers could decide against instituting sex education despite the 1956 edition rating sex as the “single most immediate problem.”<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in 1968, sex education possessed many of the same lessons and qualities the subject held since its introduction. Teenaged students remained the main beneficiaries of the subject, as parents and local education authorities remained apprehensive over the possible benefits sex education could provide to grammar school students. Though the Department of Education and Science

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Pilcher, “School Sex Education: Policy and Practice in England 1870 to 2000,” *Sex Education* 5, no. 2 (2005): 156.

<sup>7</sup> Angela Davis, “‘Oh, No, Nothing We Didn’t Learn Anything’: Sex Education and the Preparation of Girls for Motherhood, c.1930-1970,” *History of Education* 37, no. 5 (2008): 670.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook of Health Education* (London: H.M.S.O, 1956), 44.



issued recommendations, each school's head teacher determined both whether their school provided sex education and, if so, to what degree. The schools that did provide sex education struggled to determine where to place it and whom would teach it as higher education programs did not provide sex education training. Some schools treated sex education as its own subject and invited outside instructors to teach a condensed course several hours annually. Other schools incorporated the subject into multiple of disciplines including English, science, and history. The decentralized nature of the British school system complicated attempts to control the content and scope of sex education, whether traditional or liberal.

The history of postwar Britain shaped the response to and the development of sex education. Britain lost its role as a superpower in the 1950s following the Suez Crisis and the decolonization of its Empire. Despite this, Britain's economy boomed in the 1950s and 1960s and saw a rise in the standard of living with some exceptions.<sup>9</sup> Under a Labour-led government in the late 1960s, the counterculture movement coincided with concerns over the class system. During these postwar decades, young people increased as a proportion of the total population and saw a sharp increase in earnings. Anxieties began to rise over youth morality due to their new social status and increased freedom.

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<sup>9</sup> Education in Britain, especially England, remained class-bound in the post-war era. Following the war, over three-quarters of students left school by the age of fifteen. A planned raising of the school-leaving age to sixteen (from fifteen) was postponed due to the economic crisis of 1968. The government eventually raised it in 1972. For more see Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

By the Liberal Hour of the late 1960s, multiple legal changes occurred and were “a sign of a new determination to assert personal and civil rights...conversely it was a sign of the erosion of traditional norms of social behaviour and deference, which was making Britain a less easy nation to govern.”<sup>10</sup> These changes included the decriminalization of homosexuality, reform of divorce law, erasure of censorship laws, and the widening of eligibility criteria for abortion.<sup>11</sup> Further, oral contraceptives became available to all adult women, regardless of their marital status. Sociologist Jane Pilcher considers these changes as recognition by the central government of the separation of sex from both marriage and reproduction.<sup>12</sup> The legacy of this era became labelled as “the permissive society” by conservatives. Despite this political recognition, newly emerging pressure groups, focused on maintaining Christian moral values and the centrality of the traditional family, pointed to these changes as detrimental to Britain’s overall health and future. Moral pressure groups first emerged in the 1960s in reaction to the changes instituted by the Labour government. These many groups varied in membership composition, but the majority rooted their work in Christianity. Moral pressure groups first began to speak against liberal sex education. The Conservative Party saw these groups as essential allies and needed votes in the late 1970s, and the necessity to maintain traditional values gained prominence on their political agenda. This is clear as Thatcher publicly

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<sup>10</sup> Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 308. Clarke and others point out these liberal changes were common in other western countries during this period.

<sup>11</sup> Homosexuality became legal for men 21 and older even though the age of consent for heterosexual sex was 16.

<sup>12</sup> Pilcher, “School Sex Education,” 163.

stated sex education should be based on Christian principles during her campaign in 1979.

The struggle to define a proper moral standard in sex education reflected a growing divide between the major political parties in Britain, Labour and Conservative. While Labour held power in the second half of the 1970s, the Conservative Party began to shift its focus and political strategy. Keith Joseph, a key figure in the creation of Thatcherism, led the Conservative Party to focus on social developments and not solely the economy. As Conservative politicians began to integrate the concerns of and ally with moral pressure groups, the New Right emerged. Thatcher promoted the family as Britain's moral foundation during her campaign and upheld this throughout her tenure as prime minister. For her, "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families."<sup>13</sup> This ideal harkened to a period when Britain held significantly greater economic and political power. This connection was not lost on Thatcher as she blatantly made the connection: "Victorian values were the values when our country became great."<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on family values alongside the neoliberal ideas of Thatcherism affected the New Right's actions and views towards sex education.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The context of the quote was to support Thatcher's aim to dismantle the welfare state. "Interview for Woman's Own," Margaret Thatcher Foundation, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>.

<sup>14</sup> This quote arose from a January 1983 interview for London Weekend Television's *Weekend World*.

<sup>15</sup> Admittedly the main contradiction is Thatcherism's emphasis on individualism. Instead of allowing the content of sex education reflect this, the government instead allowed parents to decide if they wanted the subject taught to their children.

Labour held little power following Thatcher's instatement as prime minister. Labour had led the British government in the second half of the 1970s and failed to reinvigorate its struggling economy and stifle the power of the unions. During the 1980s, Labour held little Parliamentary power. Instead, they focused their work within local government. Turmoil within the Party further hindered any potential influence. Right and Left factions struggled to redefine the Party's economic stance, and Labour also lost many members with the formation of the Social Democrats. This tumultuous time for Labour led the Party to focus on rebuilding itself, and they remained quiet on many Conservative initiatives including sex education.

As politicians within the Labour Party often remained silent in the battle over the content of sex education, two liberal pressure groups, the Family Planning Association (FPA) and the Brook Advisory Centres (Brook), became the most vocal opponents through their increased work in sex education. Established in 1930, the FPA first focused on family planning and education for married women. The organization, and other birth control pioneers such as Marie Stopes, initially based their work on eugenic motives and targeted to lower the fertility rates of impoverished women. The FPA continued to expand its services, and eventually its clientele, and remained vital after the establishment of the National Health Service (NHS) as the NHS did not cover family planning services. By 1970, all FPA clinics gave contraceptive advice to single and married individuals and had begun their first foray in sex education. By 1974, the NHS announced

the inclusion of family planning services and took possession of all FPA clinics.<sup>16</sup> As the FPA struggled to determine its new role and reorganize amid a greatly reduced budget, sex education became a greater focus.<sup>17</sup> Helen Brook, a former FPA employee, established Brook in 1964. Brook distinguished themselves from the FPA by only serving unmarried people under the age of 25. Brook's sex education work slowly grew after its establishment and never became quite as pervasive as the FPA as their work veered toward the experimental and controversial.<sup>18</sup> These two organizations increasingly became targets of the New Right beginning in the 1970s as their education began to reflect negatively perceived social changes and lacked the desired moral focus.

The two factions within sex education, conservative and liberal, represented two different approaches to the subject. The moral pressure groups and Conservatives, constituting the New Right, focused on traditional morality.<sup>19</sup> The majority within these groups found traditional sex education essential to instill proper moral values within youth. They wished sex education to focus on puberty, hygiene, and future parenthood. Supporters of traditional sex education believed parents were the ideal providers of sex education, but acknowledged

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<sup>16</sup> "Our Achievements," accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.fpa.org.uk/our-history/our-achievements>.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the history of the FPA, see Audrey Leathard, *The Fight for Family Planning: The Development of Family Planning Services in Britain, 1921-74* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Rosalind Sharpe, "Happy Birthday, Brook," *Family Circle*, September 1986, SA/BRO/J/1/6, Brook: Archives, Wellcome Library, London. The article points specifically to their pioneering work with the mentally and physically handicapped.

<sup>19</sup> The British New Right differed from the New Right of the United States. Though the British New Right based their moral ideals on traditional Christian morals, fundamentalist ideals more heavily influenced the American New Right. Also, there was no British body similar to the Moral Majority or Christian political lobby in the United States. Both New Rights did stress the importance of family and chastity before marriage and feared an increase in homosexuality.

they often failed at this due to lack of knowledge and embarrassment.

Comparatively, liberal sex education focused on public health initiatives. The FPA and Brook particularly acknowledged sex education needed to reflect societal changes whether individual members personally agreed with or not. Liberal sex education discussed a variety of topics including contraceptives, abortion, venereal disease, and homosexuality. Instructors employed open discussion rather and refrained from presenting their personal opinion. This new approach led supporters of traditional sex education to question the motives and the worth of liberal sex education and its instructors.

The historiography for the history of sex education in twentieth century Britain remains small, though the overall academic interest in the topic continues to grow. Academics from multiple disciplines have examined political, educational and social issues within and the consequences surrounding sex education, its dissemination and the arguments surrounding it. Despite the complexities and rapid changes during the period, works continue to be small in scale. Those few books dedicated solely to the topic of the history of sex education are edited volumes, comparative studies, or expansive histories.<sup>20</sup> The articles devoted to sex education in twentieth century Britain often focus on a specific time period

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<sup>20</sup> These include Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson, ed., *Shaping Sexual Knowledge: A Cultural History of Sex Education in 20th Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2009); Claudia Nelson and Michelle H. Martin, *Sexual Pedagogies: Sex Education in Britain, Australia, and America, 1879-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Roy Porter and Lesley A. Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

rather than examine the entire century, though a few exceptions do apply.<sup>21</sup>

Works examining sex education in Britain prior to World War II are rare, but still help to show how development and focus of early sex education informed the traditional ideal held by the New Right.<sup>22</sup> Lucinda McCray Beier examines how working-class children learned about sex and reproduction. Beier states parents in the early twentieth century hoped to maintain their child's innocence and only discussed sex education topics to protect their children. This idea of protection and the maintenance of respectability through moral action continued to shape the agenda of traditional sex education propagated by the New Right. Hera Cook's examined sex education within a similar timeframe and further showed how moral discourse remained consistent throughout the century.<sup>23</sup> The dialogue surrounding sex education in the late twentieth century echoes the quote "The price of the pleasure of sex is the responsibility of marriage" from 1944.<sup>24</sup> Cook also sees a minority of progressive sex educators arising during this time.

However, David Limond shows developments in sex education in the 1940s and

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<sup>21</sup> These exceptions include Lesley A. Hall, "Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment: Sex Education in Britain, from Social Purity to Section 28," in *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, ed. Richard Aldrich (London: Woburn Press, 2004), 98-115; Jane Pilcher, "School Sex Education Policy and Practice in England 1870 to 2000," *Sex Education* 5, no. 2 (2005): 153-170.

<sup>22</sup> These works include Lucinda McCray Beier, "'We Were Green as Grass': Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-Class Lancashire Communities, 1900-1970," *Social History of Medicine* 16, no. 3 (2003): 461-80; Angela Davis, "'Oh No, Nothing, We Didn't Learn Anything': Sex Education and the Preparation of Girls for Motherhood, c.1930-1970," *History of Education* 37, no. 5 (2008): 661-77; Jane Pilcher, "Sex in Health Education: Official Guidance for Schools in England, 1928-1977," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, no. 2-3 (2004): 185-208.

<sup>23</sup> Cook, "Parents and Teachers and Sex Education."

<sup>24</sup> Cook, "Parents and Teachers and Sex Education," 560.

1950s, considered progressivist by other historians, remained connected to the endorsement of heterosexual marriage.<sup>25</sup>

Most academic works on sex education in Britain focus on the 1980s and 1990s. These scholars often examine the Thatcher years and their lasting repercussions. Many focus on the cooperation between moral pressure groups and Conservative politicians, a coalition that formed the New Right.<sup>26</sup> For instance, Martin Durham exams sex and politics during the Thatcher era and argues against previous academic works. Durham states the New Right was divided on family and moral issues and “moralism played a far from consistent or coherent role” within the New Right.<sup>27</sup> This may apply to other areas he examines, including stances on abortion and pornography, but I would argue his assertions do not apply to the sex education case. Though academics differ on the extent of moral pressure groups’ influence on Conservative actions, it is apparent their desires often aligned. The New Right often reasoned that morality within Britain declined beginning with the permissive society.<sup>28</sup> Historian Jane Lewis sees moral pressure groups first vocalizing this connection in the 1960s. However, this anxiety only began to apply to sex education in the 1970s, and

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<sup>25</sup> See David Limond, “Frequently but Naturally: William Michael Duane, Kenneth Charles Barnes and Teachers as Innovators in Sex(uality) Education in English Adolescent Schooling: c. 1945-1965,” *Sex Education* 5, no. 2 (2005): 107-118.

<sup>26</sup> These works include Martin Durham, *Sex and Politics: The Family and Morality in the Thatcher Years* (London: MacMillan, 1991); Philip Meredith, *Sex Education: Political Issues in Britain and Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Tim Newburn, *Permission and Regulation: Law and Morals in Post-War Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Durham, *Sex and Politics*, 142.

<sup>28</sup> The work of Jane Lewis focuses on moral pressure groups and Conservatives and the role of the permissive society. James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, “‘The Ravages of Permissiveness’: Sex Education and the Permissive Society,” *Twentieth Century British History* 15, no. 3 (2004): 290-312; Jane Lewis and Trudie Knijn, “The Politics of Sex Education Policy in England and Wales and The Netherlands since the 1980s,” *Journal of Social Policy* 31 (2002): 669-694



Conservative politicians quickly began to express similar concerns in Parliament. The remaining works closely examine views on homosexuality and how this led to increased and successful restrictions on sex education.<sup>29</sup> One author, Anna Marie Smith, particularly stresses the New Right's negative depiction of homosexuality was crucial in its attack on local government. Smith also discusses the homophobic discourse as one inextricably linked with Thatcherite racism.<sup>30</sup> My research does point to a connection between the politics surrounding immigration and sexuality in education, but the intimate association stressed by Smith is not apparent. Smith's thesis suffers from her stated connection to the then recent events and her apparent bias. Other works examined discuss the negative ramifications of Section 28 and its continued influence on British sex education.

This thesis explores how the reactions against liberal sex education reflected the rise of the New Right and its political initiatives. Conservatives and moral pressure groups concentrated their moral concerns around the future of British youth and the family and fought against public acceptance of homosexuality. The chapters of this thesis examine these three arenas. Chapter

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<sup>29</sup> These include James Curran, Ivor Gaber, and Julian Petley. *Culture Wars: The Media & the British Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2005); Katy Greenland and Rosalind Nunney, "The Repeal of Section 28: It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over," *Pastoral Care in Education* 26, no. 4 (2008): 243-51; Sarah E.H. Moore, "Controlling Passion? A Review of Recent Developments in British Sex Education," *Health, Risk & Society* 14, no. 1 (2012): 25-40; Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Rachel Thomson "Unholy Alliances: The Recent Politics of Sex Education," in *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, ed. Joseph Bristow and Angelia R. Wilson (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), 219-244; Matthew Waites, "Regulation of Sexuality: Age of Consent, Section 28 and Sex Education," *Parliamentary Affairs* 54, no. 3 (2001): 295-508.

<sup>30</sup> Smith mainly discusses the racism toward immigrants.

One traces the rise of positive depictions of homosexuality and the New Right's response and role in preventing their occurrence. Prior to the 1970s, sex education either discussed homosexuality negatively or not at all. The presence of homosexuality in liberal sex education increased alongside the rise of the gay rights movements. The New Right believed positive representations of homosexuality ultimately damaged both youth and family. The New Right continuously depicted homosexuality as abnormal a label they felt justified its absence or negative depiction in sex education. Homosexuality became not only morally unhealthy, but physically unhealthy with the arrival of AIDS, deemed "the gay plague" by the press. The New Right ultimately passed Section 28 in 1988 to prevent a feared increase in homosexuality and legitimize their moral stance on it.<sup>31</sup> Section 28 also placed restrictions local government and was an example of education reform.

The focus of Chapter Two addresses how the proposed protection of youth through traditional sex education led to support and the apparent need for local government and education reform. The New Right embraced youth as malleable "symbols of social hope" and the golden future of Britain.<sup>32</sup> They asserted that the results of the permissive society endangered youth due to a lapse in traditional morality and increased freedoms. Before and during Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, she often discussed the importance of

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<sup>31</sup> Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 stated that a local authority could not intentionally promote homosexuality or promote the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

<sup>32</sup> Heather Nunn, *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (London: Lawrence & Wishart): 98-9.

children for the future health of the nation. As her agenda was to return independence to the private sphere, it was essential to instill traditional moral values into the nation's youth. The New Right regarded the new liberal sex education as dangerous to this goal as it appeared to lack an acceptable moral framework, encouraged inappropriate behavior, and endangered the mental, physical, and moral health of youth. These concerns on liberal sex education the absence of traditional moral values provided the New Right the needed support to garner support and pass new reforms in the 1980s.

Chapter Three examines how the New Right defined family and its centrality in traditional sex education and how the Conservative government utilized this to legitimize political measures toward sex education. The New Right's anxiety over the state of the family appeared alongside the concerns over homosexuality and youth. The traditional family model was in danger due to continued increase in the divorce rate and decline in the marriage rate. Thatcher frequently referenced the family as the foundation of Britain, as she believed "the family is the first place where we learn those habits of mutual love, tolerance and service on which every nation depends on for its survival."<sup>33</sup> The New Right believed Britain needed stable, traditional families to combat against the need for welfare benefits.<sup>34</sup> The New Right hoped to uphold traditional gender roles despite the continued increase of women in the workforce and the example of

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Reinhold, "Through the Parliamentary Looking Glass: 'Real' and 'Pretend' Families in Contemporary British Politics," *Feminist Review*, no. 48 (1994) 76.

<sup>34</sup> The work of Charles Murray supported the view single parents, especially mothers, socialized their children into a culture of dependency on welfare and thus leads to a continuous cycle of poverty.

Thatcher as Prime Minister.<sup>35</sup> According to its detractors, liberal sex education discouraged marriage and stable traditional families through its supposed promotion of contraception, abortion and homosexuality. The New Right utilized the family to gain support for its political initiatives toward sex education.

With these three concepts, the New Right emphasized the continuance of a traditional moral standard through traditional sex education as an imperative. Liberal sex education endangered this goal and therefore necessitated political interference. Though sex education did continue to become increasingly available in British schools, the scope of liberal sex education remained small. The most common topics, reproduction and childbirth, focused on the prevention of teenage pregnancies rather than the acceptance of them. Still, the New Right found liberal sex education threatened the moral health of British citizens and the nation. This paper will the focus on these ideals escalated throughout the 1980s and how the New Right utilized in their political initiatives. The New Right depicted these Christian-based ideals as inherently British to justify their concern and push for legal restrictions against and a legal definition of sex education. This thesis will show the dominant role national and local politics, rather than public health concerns, play in shaping sex education curriculum. The rising concern and focus on the place and curriculum of sex education within Britain

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<sup>35</sup> The rise of the Women's Movement in Britain was influential in increasing the provision of birth control and widening the eligible criteria for abortions among other provisions and rights. Though gender ideas are implicit in ideas surrounding sex education, they rarely explicitly appear in the sources examined for this thesis and will not be further discussed.

parallels the rise of the New Right and the strength of Conservative politics in the 1980s

## Chapter One: The New Right Versus Positive Depictions of Homosexuality

“Children who need to be taught to respect traditional values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay.”<sup>1</sup>

The 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalized homosexual acts between adults twenty-one and older but only applied to England and Wales.<sup>2</sup> Sex education immediately following the Act showed a lack of acceptance and an uncertainty with how to represent homosexuality following its new legal status. When liberal sex education, led by the FPA and Brook, emerged at the start of the 1970s, it began to integrate discussions on homosexuality and depicted it as normal. Moral pressure groups quickly countered this new portrayal, and by the 1980s, Conservative politicians also spoke against the positive representations of homosexuality. The concerns over the promotion of homosexuality escalated in the 1980s and culminated in the ratification of Section 28. Together as the New Right, both moral pressure groups and Conservatives first perceived homosexuality as morally dangerous to British youth. Concerns over the physical health of youth only became more pertinent with the arrival of AIDS. The battle against the promotion of homosexuality mirrored the Conservatives' complaints against and eventual reform of local government, a body they found increasingly extremist. The New Right used fears surrounding homosexuality to raise public support for the Conservatives and their political actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Thatcher quoted in Curran, et al., *Culture Wars*, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Lesbianism was never illegal. Scotland and Northern Ireland decriminalized homosexuality in the early 1980s.

Once Britain decriminalized homosexuality, sex education programs and instructors struggled to determine how to depict it. Decriminalization in 1967 came in response to 1957's Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution and the trend of increase in civil liberties in the late 1960s. However, decriminalization did not reflect public acceptance of homosexuality. The Report came during a time of change despite deeply rooted prejudice toward homosexuality.<sup>3</sup> The Wolfenden Committee was to determine whether current laws were the most effective means of control. Jeffrey Weeks states the Report, published in 1957, "articulated principles which, though themselves were not new, were to provide the pragmatic basis for the...social reforms of the 1960s, and the framework for all the major 'official' proposals on morality throughout the 1970s as well."<sup>4</sup> The number of indictments for male homosexual offenses rose from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, yet the Committee found that the number of incidences had not increased.<sup>5</sup> New scientific research, including Alfred Kinsey's work, work showed homosexual practices were more common than previously believed or acknowledged.<sup>6</sup> This, along with concern over violent police action, led the Report to recommend that

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<sup>3</sup> As Weeks points out, "The Mass Observation survey had found 'a more genuine feeling of disgust towards homosexuality...than towards any other subject tackled.'" Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 241.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London and New York: Longman, 1989): 239.

<sup>5</sup> Instead, the rise of offenses reflected an increase in police zeal.

<sup>6</sup> Kinsey's reports included *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co., 1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953).

homosexual behavior between consenting adult males be decriminalized.<sup>7</sup> The dichotomy between private and public heavily influenced the decision to sanction homosexuality. As long as homosexuality remained hidden, it could be accepted. The rise of gay and lesbian rights groups' actions in the 1970s and 1980s began to publically expose this "abnormal" lifestyle, and the New found it legitimized their push against its positive integration into sex education.

Following the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, discussions on homosexuality in sex education programs were rare and 40 percent of schools felt no information about homosexuality should be given.<sup>8</sup> This reflected the acceptance of homosexuality as long as it was neither seen nor heard. Discussions of homosexuality to young people became further complicated due to the differences between the laws of age of consent. For heterosexual intercourse the age of consent was 16, while for homosexual sex it was 21. The 1968 edition of *A Handbook of Health Education*, published by the Department of Education and Science excluded any discussion on the subject though the previous version referenced nascent homosexuality. The new version instead emphasized heterosexual marriage and future parenthood as normal sexual behavior. The belief homosexuality is negative or abnormal was further apparent in a booklet used by instructors employed through the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). A quote from the book labeled homosexuality as a "sex problem" and

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<sup>7</sup> The Report specified its recommendation of decriminalization and did not advocate legitimizing or legalizing homosexuality.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Turner, "Schools Play Down Sex Talks," *Observer*, 2 November 1969, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.



linked it with prostitution and the feared world population explosion.<sup>9</sup> Programs organized by liberal organizations also neglected to ignore homosexuality at this time. For instance, the Community Education Project for South London, a pilot program under the FPA, shied away from the subject.<sup>10</sup> This is in part due to its focus on family planning, inherently focused on reproduction between heterosexual couples rather than disease prevention. Television and radiovision programs developed by the BBC and under the guidance of the School Broadcasting Council similarly neglected to mention or discuss homosexuality as they only showed homosexual families.<sup>11</sup> Despite its new found legality, disparate sex education programs continued to discuss homosexuality negatively or avoid the subject entirely at the end of the 1960s.

Discussions of homosexuality grew as the 1970s began, but they remained a minor concern for sex education instructors whom often had only several hours to cover all desired areas within the topic.<sup>12</sup> However, discussions on homosexuality by the FPA and comparable organizations, increased and they presented it positively. This coincided with the FPA's new focus on sex education

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<sup>9</sup> Marguerite Smithwhite, "The I.L.E.A. Health Education Unit," 1969, SA/FPA/A17/46, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>10</sup> The Community Education Project merged the interests of the South East London and South West London Branches of the FPA and consisted of nine boroughs. The FPA insisted the Project was "family planning education" and insisted it never viewed the endeavor as one in "sex education" as such. Though the Project did direct school work, its focus was on "educating the educators." The Project lasted for two years, 1968-70.

<sup>11</sup> The BBC released two radiovision programs and three television programs for in class use in 1970. The radiovision programs consisted of a recorded soundtrack alongside colored filmstrips. The BBC created the programs together with School Broadcasting Council (composed of head teachers and other educationalists) for eight to nine year olds. They mainly discussed conception, birth, and puberty. Though initially used by nearly 3,000 schools in the first year, it appears their popularity quickly waned.

<sup>12</sup> The time and content an instructor devoted to sex education was dependent on the wishes of the head teacher. Times ranged greatly from several hours to multiple weeks.

following major organizational changes in 1974.<sup>13</sup> Unlike its predecessor the Community Education Project, the FPA's Grapevine embraced its title as a sex education program.<sup>14</sup> Grapevine examined heterosexual and homosexual relationships without judgment, and it lacked the emphasis on marriage and family maintained by common school-based sex education programs. Grapevine recognized homosexuality as an important issue among young people and one commonly ignored by other sex education and family planning services.<sup>15</sup> It supplied young people with information on other supportive organizations involved in gay rights. However, Grapevine's positive stance on homosexuality reached minimal schools as it only covered two London boroughs.<sup>16</sup> Its coverage remained tenuous during its time in the 1970s as it struggled to acquire funding annually. The program also received little national awareness. Local educators and press deemed Grapevine's work in sex education as inappropriate despite receiving some favorable response. The emergence of Grapevine marked a turning point in the FPA's definition of beneficial sex education and initiated the New Right's attack on the organization.

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<sup>13</sup> After the NHS took over the FPA's family planning services in 1974, the FPA lost the majority of its annual income and members. The FPA reformed into regional development centers and maintained a small national office. Its new role was in the field of public information and education.

<sup>14</sup> The FPA established Grapevine in 1972. Grapevine used a network of trained volunteers, aged 16-30, to approach young people in a variety of public setting. The young people targeted were often lower class and "alternative." Grapevine emphasized the use of peer education to help young people in matters of sex and relationships. In 1974, the FPA announced it would no longer to fully fund the program and Grapevine struggled to received sufficient each year from several sources before ultimately folding in 1980.

<sup>15</sup> "Grapevine," 1975, SA/FPA/C/B/3/9/1, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>16</sup> Grapevine began school work in Camden and Islington in summer 1974 and reports from 1979 show the organization working with 13 small educational units. "Grapevine Annual Report," 1979, SA/FPA/C/B/3/9/3, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

Positive depictions of homosexuality were uncommon outside small, non-school-based programs like Grapevine yet as these positive depictions emerged, the New Right attempted to stop them. This was the case with the controversy surrounding the publication of a translation of the Danish guide *The Little Red Schoolbook*.<sup>17</sup> First published in Denmark in 1969, *The Little Red Schoolbook* possessed a reputation before its British publication due to its content and a near anarchistic stance on sex education, drugs, and student rights. The publication presented its information in a straightforward manner and employed slang to better accommodate and speak directly to its target audience, adolescents. Moral pressure groups feared the moral repercussions brought upon by the guide, even though evidence suggests schools rarely used it. These concerns led to political action and significant negative press coverage on the book's content.

Concerns over *The Little Red Schoolbook's* depiction of homosexuality arose as the publication refused to represent it negatively. The authors, Søren Hansen and Jesper Jensen, stressed that "Everybody is different - in sexual matters too" rather than label homosexuality as "abnormal."<sup>18</sup> They further stated homosexuals' "love and feelings are just as real and natural as anyone else's."<sup>19</sup> The emphasis is the acceptance of variant sexual practices and preferences in this section and the others, and the authors wrote the use of "abnormal" is dangerous as "It's often used as an excuse for the persecution and repression of

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<sup>17</sup> The 1971 English edition was translated specifically for a British audience.

<sup>18</sup> Søren Hansen and Jesper Jensen, *The Little Red Schoolbook*, trans. Berit Thornberry (London: Stage One, 1971): 105.

<sup>19</sup> Hansen and Jensen, 106.

some people by others.”<sup>20</sup> *The Little Red Schoolbook* also advocated to legalize homosexual marriage. The acceptance upheld by Hansen and Jensen was in direct opposition to the homogeneity espoused by the traditional sex education curriculum. This progressive presentation led moral pressure groups to publicly and legally attack the authors and the book’s publisher despite its negligible use in the British school system.

Moral pressure groups feared *The Little Red Schoolbook*’s supportive and informative section on homosexuality, together with the remainder of the chapter on sex, would lead to deleterious effects on British youth. Mary Whitehouse, the leader of the National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association (NVALA), was the most vocal opponent. Whitehouse and her organization were a powerful moral pressure group in Britain. They based their organization’s work on a strict Christian morality and believed their efforts were imperative to save Britain’s children and the country itself. The NVALA maintained a consistent media presence, and its membership continued to grow throughout the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> Whitehouse was a former sex educator herself and believed appropriate lessons instilled a Christian moral welfare and provided marital and familial guidance. Whitehouse further stressed homosexuals were abnormal, potentially threatening and in need of treatment. The NVALA often found a partner in the Conservative Party, especially in the 1980s, due to its emphasis on the protection of children and restoration of traditional family values. Their association with Conservatives,

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<sup>20</sup> Hansen and Jensen, 108.

<sup>21</sup> By the mid-1970s, their membership had passed 30,000.

public support, and persistent media presence allowed Whitehouse and the NVALA to receive widespread notice on their campaigns against works they declared morally dangerous. This included their work against *The Little Red Schoolbook*.

Whitehouse feared *The Little Red Schoolbook* “would deprave and corrupt young children,” making its confiscation essential.<sup>22</sup> She initiated the attempt to stop the book’s 1971 release through collaboration with the Metropolitan Police vice squad.<sup>23</sup> An obscenity case against the publisher quickly followed and ended with a conviction. Two appeals, one in the UK courts and the other heard by the European Court of Human Rights, failed to overturn the verdict.<sup>24</sup> Whitehouse and other similar groups remained vocal on the book’s perils throughout the trial and afterwards through the press. *The Little Red Schoolbook* became a public representation of the new liberal sex education and its detractors used this negative publicity to garner support and further attempts to hinder its development.

Medical opinion and practice well into the late 1970s supported derogatory views on homosexuality. They endorsed the New Right’s assertion that homosexuality, in particular male homosexuality, was inherently wrong and abnormal. Beginning in the 1950s, clinics for the treatment of homosexuality used techniques including aversion therapy and covert sensitization. These

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<sup>22</sup> Newburn, *Permission and Regulation*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> The squad collected over 1,000 copies of the book from the publisher’s office just prior to its publication.

<sup>24</sup> For a more in depth history of The Little Red Schoolbook, see David Limond, “The UK Edition of *The Little Red Schoolbook: A Paper Tiger Reflects*,” *Sex Education* 12, no. 5 (2011): 523–34.

clinics focused on male homosexuals and few lesbians received these treatments. Though the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, works published in British medical journals continued to classify it as an abnormality and recommended treatment as a necessity.<sup>25</sup> These and earlier articles depicted homosexuals as potentially exhibiting deviant, impulsive or obsessive behavior. One doctor viewed male homosexuality as the real danger as female homosexuality is “less of a problem...Being potential mothers, women are generally more caring except in the most severely pathological and sadistic cases.”<sup>26</sup> Beginning in the early 1980s, several British medical publications agreed with the earlier American declassification, but others continued to depict it as a deviation from normality. This earlier view and later discord gave inherent support to the efforts of the New Right though they rarely referenced medical opinion to validate them.

Conservative political concerns over the representation of homosexuality in sex education remained quiet until a House of Lords debate in January 1976.<sup>27</sup> The debate, led by Baroness Elles, discussed perceived “problems involved in the sex education of children in schools and elsewhere.”<sup>28</sup> Elles attacked a variety of moral targets, but focused on the FPA and its role and motives in sex

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<sup>25</sup> The World Health Organization only declassified homosexuality as a mental illness in 1990.

<sup>26</sup> A. Hyatt Williams, “Problems of Homosexuality,” *The British Medical Journal* 3, no. 5980 (1975): 428.

<sup>27</sup> The House of Lords is one of two chambers of British Parliament. The positions in the House of Lords are hereditary or appointed. Though the House of Lords holds less power than the elected House of Commons, bills must be passed by both to receive “royal assent.” Recent changes to the House of Lords, affecting its composition, occurred after the period discussed. Previous sessions discussed sex education, but this was the first to explicitly discuss homosexuality for a prolonged period.

<sup>28</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)*, vol. 367, col. 134, 14 January 1976.

education. Elles and fellow likeminded members aimed to ultimately defund the FPA and end its role within sex education. The debate quickly became a broader discussion on moral ethics and the perceived problematic effects of liberal sex education on children.<sup>29</sup> Members continually referenced Christian morals and found these increasingly absent in sex education. Despite briefly referencing religious diversity, these members represented Britain as homogenous by stating citizens shared Christian morals no matter their practice religion. As one member stated, “You do not need to be a Christian to believe these things.”<sup>30</sup>

Homosexuality fell outside this so-called universal moral stance, and allowed these members to justify the need for political interference to remove it from sex education curricula.

The emphasis on the role of morality in sex education illustrates homosexuality represented a threat to the “normal” heterosexual family, and in turn, a threat to the nation. Members represented homosexuality as inherently wrong by connecting it with other believed perversions. Earl Ferrers indicated those who supported a new campaign for sexual law reform that liberalized the current law on homosexuality were abnormal and inferior citizens. Another member referenced the same act to support his argument sex is morally right only between a married man and a woman. He equated the laws to propaganda and questioned its ethics as, “Are we not really teaching them to break the

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<sup>29</sup> Elles defines children as “any boy or girl under the age of 16.” *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 135, 14 January 1976.

<sup>30</sup> Lord Bishop of Chelmsford in *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 204, 14 January 1976.

law?”<sup>31</sup> This implied breaking both an unspoken moral code and the law itself due to the higher age of consent for male homosexuals. These simplifications presented sex education’s positive depiction of homosexuality as both morally and legally treacherous. The Conservatives hoped to provide protection for British youth by legally insuring the absence or negative representation of homosexuality in sex education.

Throughout the debate, members continued to discuss homosexuality as fundamentally wrong and connected it with British political enemies to support this claim. Lord Clifford of Chudleigh believed the International Socialists, together with the Gay Liberation, plotted to cripple the nation. This was to occur by persuading children to become homosexual.<sup>32</sup> Clifford stated since the family was “a bastion of capitalism,” this plot would dismantle the “basis of our civilization.”<sup>33</sup> He linked the FPA to these enemy groups to invalidate their sex education work to establish the organization and its works as dangerous to youth and the nation. Several members commended his overall argument. The concern over the FPA’s reach to school youth was curious as its funding in 1976 was significantly lower than at the start of the decade and it began to move away from in-school instruction. The FPA also was an easy target as it was not present to defend itself in the House of Lords despite the use of questioned evidence. Still,

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<sup>31</sup> Viscount Monckton of Brenchley in *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 229, 14 January 1976. He also links morality to self-control.

<sup>32</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), cols. 237-8, 14 January 1976.

<sup>33</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), cols. 237-8, 14 January 1976.



the severity of the claims brought the FPA's motives into question by both political sides.

This concern over the ramifications of teaching homosexuality positively continued to build during the 1980s and eventually resulted in the passing of Section 28. Section (or Clause) 28 was a part of the Local Government Act of 1988. It specifically targeted local education authorities, the local councils responsible for their jurisdiction's education. Section 28 forbid local education authorities from intentionally promoting homosexuality or publishing material with the intent to promote homosexuality. Further, the clause specified local education authorities could not promote teaching that homosexuality is acceptable as a pretended family relationship. The section misled many teachers into believing it applied directly to them, but it pertained only to local education authorities and not the actions of specific teachers, schools or school governors. The new clause and the confusion that followed caused uncertainty within sex education and would continue to affect teachers and students after its repeal in 2003.<sup>34</sup> Though Parliament passed several acts in the 1980s that impacted sex education, the most well-known remains Section 28.<sup>35</sup>

Britain's government remained Conservative under the leadership of Thatcher throughout the 1980s and the New Right lacked a formidable opponent. The Labour Party, the Conservatives' main opposition, found a place to rebuild influence within local government during this period. Local government and

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<sup>34</sup> Greenland and Nunney, "The Repeal of Section 28."

<sup>35</sup> Section was later denounced by Prime Minister Tony Blair and repealed in 2003. David Cameron formally apologized for his party introducing the law in 2009.

Labour represented the changes facing Britain as the party became influenced by the women's movement, immigration and the middle-class move into the inner cities. Labour, particularly in major cities such as London, represented those marginalized or discriminated against by the New Right. The London Left's work on minority, women's and gay rights connected them to the 1960s permissive society, an era the New Right designated as the root of Britain's subsequent moral decline. Labour and local government, namely the Greater London Council and the ILEA, thus became targets of the New Right. Discrepancies between the two further fueled the New Right's desire to reform local government as they "argued that local councils were 'monopolistic' providers of services that put the interests of bureaucracy and staff unions before those of the public and were consequently costly and inefficient."<sup>36</sup> They wished to restructure local government through privatization and streamlining, a reflection of Thatcher's neoliberal changes. The proposed promotion of homosexuality within sex education by Labour local authorities further supported the New Right's need to reform and reduce the role of local government.

The promotion of homosexuality became tied with the "Loony Left" of British local authorities.<sup>37</sup> The media perpetuated this characterization of the Labour Party, expressly London Labour, throughout the 1980s to emphasize the faction's irrationality and paranoia over problems the New Right deemed unimportant. The "Loony Left" became associated with not only gay and lesbian

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<sup>36</sup> Curran, et al., *Culture Wars*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Both the Conservative Party and their newspaper supporters used this term beginning in the mid-1980s.

rights, but also radical developments in race. Similar to earlier arguments concerning homosexuality, little to no evidence supported the claims against them, but the “self-affirming cycle” of reiteration only increased the belief of the negative accusations toward Labour.<sup>38</sup>

The local education authorities’ promotion of homosexuality occurred alongside the advocacy of an anti-racist curriculum and this received similar push back from the New Right. The New Right feared the new program would bring undefined “fragmentation and discord” into the national education system.<sup>39</sup> They instead favored a quick assimilation for immigrants rather than embrace their differences, and the desire to stop a new multi-racial curriculum reflected this stance. This, along with the anxiety over homosexuality is also evident of the New Right’s rejection of a diverse Britain. The New Right equated local government autonomy with “subversive black activism,” similar to their public attacks on local education authorities’ stance on sex education.<sup>40</sup> Conservative actions regarding immigration during the 1980s also believed “a homogeneous ‘British way of life’ is the basis of nationhood.”<sup>41</sup> Through the rejection of these educational developments the New Right attempted to define Britain as a nation similar to its past self.

The ILEA showed caution as it integrated support of gay rights into its work. This advocacy included the promotion of supportive counseling for gay

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<sup>38</sup> A more in-depth discussion on this can be found in Curran, et al. *Culture Wars*.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Brooke, “Articulating the Nation: British Conservatism, Race and the 1988 Education Act,” *Left History* 14, no. 2 (2010): 18.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Amy Elizabeth Ansell, *New Right, New Racism: Race and Reaction in the United States and Britain* (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 169.

teenagers and the objection to the victimization of gay teachers and discrimination against homosexuals in council jobs and housing. The majority of councils advocated these with little fanfare and attempted to not bring public attention to their actions, with the exception of Haringey Council.<sup>42</sup> Labour held power in few places and wanted to retain these by avoiding more negative publicity. Despite this, the actions by Haringey Council and the believed use of the Danish book *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* by the ILEA created a media storm centered over what exactly schools were teaching their children. This media backlash, led by Conservative papers, focused on the danger the promotion of homosexuality would cause to families and children. The Conservative papers discussed it as a national problem, despite under thirty percent of students reporting any education on homosexuality to emphasize the importance for political reform.<sup>43</sup>

*Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* created anxiety as it showed homosexual families as the same as the average “normal” family and targeted a young audience. Illustrated through photographs, the author, Susanne Bösche, presented the mundane details of a weekend shared by five-year-old Jenny, her father Martin and his live-in partner Eric. Bösche showed the couple as similar to any other as they shared parenting and household responsibilities. Jenny’s

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<sup>42</sup> Labour’s manifesto in Haringey in 1986 committed the council to ensuring school curriculum’s represented homosexuality positively. It also supported the rights of school workers to be openly gay at work and supported homosexual students in realizing their sexuality. National and local media attacked Haringey’s positive images policies and claimed the policy was “anti-heterosexist” and encouraged students to become homosexual.

<sup>43</sup> Isobel Allen, *Education in Sex and Personal Relationships: Research Report No. 665* (Oxford: Policy Studies Institute, 1987): 31.

mother, Karen resides nearby and visits often and maintains a friendly relationship with Martin and Eric. Eric and Martin tell Jenny a verbally disapproving neighbor is only frightened as she does not know enough about gay people. *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* is in many ways the antithesis of *The Little Red Schoolbook* and its innocuous presentation frightened the New Right.

Concern over the use of *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* became perpetuated by the media, as the press informed the public of its existence and content. The New Right focused on the book and its use during the May 1986 London local elections in a failed attempt at stifling votes for Labour. Multiple local and national papers stated the book was available and actively used in London schools though a later judgment showed this was not the case. According to a statement by the education officer and chief executive of ILEA, the ILEA did not consider the book suitable for general use in primary schools. The one copy of the book possessed by the ILEA was held at the teacher's center, where only older students could use it under exceptional circumstances and after a parent consultation.<sup>44</sup> Despite this fact, the story perpetuated by the press still raised the ire of both the general public and politicians, including Education Secretary Kenneth Baker. Even after a Council judgment clarified the ILEA only possessed one copy in its center, one member still suspected the ILEA as "Presumably one only stocks books in a centre in case teachers wish to use

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<sup>44</sup> A Press Council judgment against the *Sun* in February 1987 revealed, through the testament of the education officer and chief executive of ILEA, revealed this information.

them.”<sup>45</sup> The Left and local authorities became seen as unresponsive to parental concerns and allowed the New Right to depict themselves as upholders of child protection.

According to one Conservative House of Lords member, the “basic principle is the family, on which all life and civilisation depend. We owe it to our forebears, to ourselves, to our children and to God, who created us, to keep it so.”<sup>46</sup> To maintain this basic principle, the New Right continued to push the stance homosexuality was dangerous to the family and youth. Sex education undermined the concept of the traditional family by presenting homosexuality as both positive and normal.<sup>47</sup> Fear over acceptance of homosexuality as normal led to discourse over the detriments of homosexual families. The New Right and the press helped create the issue as a critical national one. As one member stated in the same debate, “the future of our society depends upon the relationship between man and woman and the product of man and woman.”<sup>48</sup> They saw homosexual families as morally dangerous and harmful to Britain’s future as homosexual couples could not naturally reproduce, a fear due to a steep decline in the national birthrate in the 1970s. Parliament members regarded it as a duty of the House to ease national concern over homosexuality “being financially promoted to the detriment of normal family relationships” through the enactment

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<sup>45</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (124), col. 1008, 15 December 1987. Member corrected by others following his statement.

<sup>46</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (492), col. 611, 16 February 1988.

<sup>47</sup> Reinhold, “‘Real’ and ‘Pretend’ Families,” 63.

<sup>48</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (493), cols. 609-10, 16 February 1988.

of Section 28.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the debates, members stated the nation shared in their beliefs and concerns over the potential increase in homosexuality and its consequences to the family to support the ratification of Section 28.

The New Right feared promoting homosexuality in sex education would affect British youth negatively. They found the promotion of homosexuality dangerous as many believed sexuality was fluid during teenage years. Though certain theories stated sexuality was inherent rather than taught, multiple speeches in the House of Lords and Commons show this was not a universally held belief. Individuals who believed in fluid sexuality considered homosexuality a “curable disease” if caught early enough.<sup>50</sup> They referenced the Wolfenden Report to support their argument. Since the belief was sexual orientation did not stabilize until an individual’s mid-twenties, students were “open to seduction” and must be protected until then.<sup>51</sup> The New Right believed children would not only learn the mechanics of gay sex if sex education promoted homosexuality, but also be encouraged to “become” gay.<sup>52</sup> Lord Boyd-Carpenter speech illustrates this belief:

After all, it is a fact that young males at a certain stage of life--that is, soon after puberty--in many cases have a homosexual element or tendency in them which the vast majority of them succeed in restraining, to their credit. But if attempts are made deliberately to emphasise that side of their nature and to suggest that the homosexual way of life is just as good as ordinary married life--indeed, perhaps better, as my noble friend says--it is fairly certain that some of those young people will be led to adopt a

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<sup>49</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (492), col. 1000, 2 February 1988.

<sup>50</sup> Carol Lee refers to this as the “Mary Whitehouse view.” Carol Lee, *The Ostrich Position: Sex, Schooling and Mystification* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1983): 33.

<sup>51</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (493), cols. 593-4, 16 February 1988.

<sup>52</sup> Greenland and Nunney, “The Repeal of Section 28,” 244.

homosexual orientation which they would not otherwise have adopted. That is the basic problem.<sup>53</sup>

The New Right used this theory to further justify the necessity to exclude homosexuality from sex education or present it negatively to instill proper British moral values in youth.

Many House of Lords members rested on this moral notion of youth protection when arguing their support for Section 28. This separated sex education from its public health connection. In the debate on the clause, one member stated its “first and more important objective is to prevent the corruption of children and adolescents.”<sup>54</sup> Further, he found the threat of promoting homosexuality, and thereby persuading youth to become homosexual, so dangerous, he believed the clause should extend to other areas such as youth groups. Another member agreed with this assessment of potential corruption and impressionability and believed focus should instead be on encouraging youth “to follow a lifestyle which is for the health and future of our society.”<sup>55</sup> The believed use of public funds by local authorities to attract youth to homosexuality further supported the push to reduce their power.<sup>56</sup> The call for the New Right as youth protectors permeated the debates, and members continued to use this as justification for their interference in sex education.

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<sup>53</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (124), col. 1004, 15 December 1987.

<sup>54</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (493), col. 594, 16 February 1988.

<sup>55</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (493), col. 493, 16 February 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Lord Monsoon stated public money was specifically used to target young people. *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (493), col. 598, 16 February 1988.



Further complicating the argument and view of homosexuality was the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. AIDS's association with homosexuality and deviant behavior justified the New Right's view of homosexuality as dangerous and abnormal. As they believed the homosexual community perpetuated the spread of the disease, the New Right hoped the disease would further warrant attempts to ban homosexual propaganda in schools.<sup>57</sup> The New Right again depicted Labour as contrarian and detrimental to Britain as the New Right viewed the proposed promotion of homosexuality assisted the spread of AIDS.<sup>58</sup> Banners from conservative pressure groups included slogans such as "Gay = AIDS = Death" to make the connection to homosexuality and AIDS clear.<sup>59</sup> Through Section 28, the New Right claimed the government would in effect protect children from potential early deaths. In debates shortly before the bill passed, one member pointed to the rise of AIDS as a reason the Government became supportive after having previously shown indifference toward the bill. The awareness of the escalation of AIDS led to an increased concern over homosexuality and defended the approval of Section 28.

When HIV/AIDS education occurred, national organizations tended to ignore homosexuals and promoted safe sex in a heterosexual context. The work of these organizations shows how their limited power, scope, and funding led them to target a select and noncontroversial audience. These organizations, including the FPA and Brook, worried about the effects Section 28 would have on

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<sup>57</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (112), cols. 139-41, 10 March 1987.

<sup>58</sup> Reinhold, "'Real' and 'Pretend' Families," 62.

<sup>59</sup> This slogan was on a demonstration banner used by the New Patriotic Movement.

sex education though they only dedicated a small portion of their work to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among youth. AIDS work by the FPA took place outside of the schools and focused first on adult rather than youth as it cooperated with government initiatives. Pamphlets promoting the use of condoms created by Brook targeted adult heterosexual men and women. The FPA program ASSERT attempted to “correct and share mis-information, trace the origins of myths, discuss media images” of AIDS.<sup>60</sup> Work on HIV/AIDS awareness later became a main initiative by ASSERT, but it only covered general information aimed at an adult audience. The national AIDS campaign also targeted heterosexual adults, and Conservative government members led the campaign. Though certain groups within the New Right did not support the national campaign, its leaders placed its message within the moral paradigm supported by the New Right through its focus on heterosexual couples, celibacy, and monogamy.<sup>61</sup> The national campaign used stark television commercials stating “there is no known cure” and “anyone can get it, man or woman” to convey the gravity of the disease.<sup>62</sup> Mailed leaflets provided further information on the disease and ways to protect oneself. Though the government stressed the connection between AIDS and homosexuality in Parliament discussions and departmental correspondence, the public education on the disease largely ignored the community.

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<sup>60</sup> “ASSERT,” SA/FPA/C/D/1/1/1/2, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>61</sup> More information on the campaign can be found on “The 1980s AIDS campaign,” last modified October 16, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/4348096.stm>

<sup>62</sup> “Scary British AIDS PIF (Don’t Die of Ignorance-1987),” last modified February 28, 2010, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT-RH\\_2gfog](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT-RH_2gfog).

Labour often remained silent on concerns over incorporating positive discussions of homosexuality in sex education due to their lack of power and focus on other issues. Still, several liberal Parliament members vocalized their apprehension over the Section 28 due to its stance on homosexuality and as a potential for civil and human rights. Not all liberal members defended homosexuality as such, but believed homosexuality was a choice that did not intrude on others' lives and found the definitions of the clause dangerous to freedom of choice.<sup>63</sup> Other members went further: "Among these needs is the right of homosexual people and adults to be recognised by society as they are-as human beings...Recognition of lesbians and gay men is not a threat to those of us in the heterosexual majority."<sup>64</sup> Members also stressed concern over the validity of the examples presented by conservative members. Without concrete evidence, the "sort of generalized hearsay is not sufficient to base a fundamental attack on civil liberties."<sup>65</sup> Despite this, supporters of Section 28 continued to reiterate the clause was not an attack on gays and/or lesbians in general and even blamed the militant members of the gay and lesbian community for bringing the restriction on themselves. The New Right asserted the clause protected youth from these extreme views and took precedence over the demands of the gay and lesbian community.

The political focus on homosexuality in sex education continued to increase in the 1980s though Conservative politicians voiced initial concerns

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<sup>63</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (124), col. 994, 15 December 1987.

<sup>64</sup> Joan Ruddock in *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (124), col. 1003, 15 December 1987

<sup>65</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (124), col. 1008, 15 December 1987.

during the 1970s. The New Right utilized the alarm over the moral and physical dangers homosexuality presented to British youth to their political advantage. The New Right depicted traditional sex education as most important for Britain's moral health and future and fears over a rise in homosexuality allowed them to further their larger education and local government reforms. These anxieties also allowed them to legalize their moral stance through the restrictions on sex education listed in Section 28.

## Chapter Two: Youth and the Need for Moral Protection

“Children come first because children are our most sacred trust.”<sup>1</sup>

Both Conservative politicians and members of moral pressure groups voiced concern over liberal sex education and its moral repercussions to British youth. Both factions found liberal sex education and its instigators, including the FPA and Brook, as representative of a believed moral decline initiated by the permissive society in the late 1960s. Both separately and together as the New Right, moral pressure groups and the Conservatives viewed sex education as a moral educational, rather than a public health, tool. The New Right depicted the instillation of traditional moral in youth as important for national strength and economic and moral rehabilitation as Thatcher found the economic and supposed moral crisis inextricably linked. The New Right’s attacks on the FPA and Labour, associated with the new liberal sex education, increased throughout the 1980s in both the press and Parliament and often focused on the defense of youth. The moral paradigm needed in sex education and the defense of youth reiterated by Thatcher and her government in the 1980s helped to gain public and political support for the New Right’s initiatives surrounding the subject.

The literature surrounding sex education in the period discussed rarely defined the distinction between “child” and “adolescent” (or “youth”). The category of youth ran from mid-childhood to mid-twenties depending on the author or speaker. The term “adolescence” commonly appeared in the Western

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Thatcher quoted in Nunn, *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy*, 105.

world by the late nineteenth century to define the period between childhood and adulthood. The term arose as laws began to designate adult rights, such as voting, defined juvenile delinquency, and secondary education emerged. The term also began to distinguish between the sexual behavior of older children and the benign sexual curiosity of pre-pubescent children. Society saw adolescence as a time of confusion and emotional tumult. These ideas informed the New Right's efforts to control sex education curricula and mold it to reflect their political and societal concerns. They believed emotional and/or physical harm could occur without their interference. Without their interference, the New Right feared economic and social harm would occur to the British state itself.

Conservatives and moral pressure groups, both together and separately, fought to instill a traditional moral imperative into British youth. Moral pressure groups consisted of a myriad of organized factions. Though many held religious associations, this was not universal. These groups emerged beginning in the 1960s in conjunction with the legal changes led by the Labour government. The NVALA and Mary Whitehouse, discussed in the previous chapter, are perhaps the most prominent, but many other groups emerged during this time including CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) and the Responsible Society (later renamed Family and Youth Concern). These groups found the increasingly common societal behavior beginning in the 1960s troubling as it deprived children of "the reliability of their essential relationship," namely heterosexual

marriage.<sup>2</sup> Some groups produced their own sex education material promoting premarital chastity and claimed organizations such as the FPA and Brook used sex education to undermine marriage and encourage promiscuity.<sup>3</sup> These groups focused on British youth as the main victims of the permissive society. The Conservative ideology during the 1970s and 1980s also viewed youth as negatively affected by the prior changes. Though religious reasoning was not consistently used in Conservative rhetoric on sex education, both moral pressure groups and Conservatives shared concerns on youth and the future effects of sex education and used these to support their political efforts.

The emergence of a new youth culture in the 1960s raised the concerns of the Conservatives and moral pressure groups. The decade's prosperous economy led to economic independence for many young people and an increase in their disposable income. This created an environment where parental controls held less power and led to issues of inter-generational conflict. Concern over youth morality, due in part to the increase in illegitimate births and venereal disease, is evident in official reports from the time.<sup>4</sup> The 1968 edition of the Department of Education and Science's *A Handbook of Health Education* addressed these concerns in its chapter on sex education. The handbook presented sex education as a necessity for teens due to the new "atmosphere

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<sup>2</sup> "The Responsible Family," PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>3</sup> This included a leaflet focused on the negatives of sex, including venereal disease, cervical cancer, and contraceptive failures, as scare tactics against promiscuous sex.

<sup>4</sup> Illegitimate births rose from five percent in 1955 to eight percent in 1967. It continued to climb and by the 1980s constituted 25 percent of all births. Though rates of venereal disease by over 30 percent following World War II, Weeks sees this as a indication of a greater willingness to seek advice from clinics, rather than an actual significant increase.

that reveals not only a greater facility for acquiring and spending money, but a greater permissiveness in moral attitudes.”<sup>5</sup> To combat increased cases of “irresponsible behaviour,” the handbook recommended discussions in informal small groups. This structure aimed to create a less domineering environment which the Department hoped would prove successful in steering young adults on the correct moral path. The handbook’s publication under a Labour-led government shows liberal and conservative authorities held similar concerns over the future and morality of British youth as the 1960s ended.

The protection of children began with the “correct” educational method, one approved by both state-supported programs and FPA-led sex education in the late 1960s. Educators and medical professionals saw individual education, especially for sex education, as the best and least harmful method for young children. The 1968 Department of Education handbook justified the method by stating children learn gradually and at their own pace. As parents often failed to teach their children sex education, the knowledge of same age students differed greatly. Information on sex and development presented before a child could comprehend it could negatively affect him into adulthood. This belief led the Department to advocate for teachers to answer questions individually if they did not pertain to the lesson. By answering questions “simply, naturally, and as fully as a child is capable of understanding at the stage which he has reached,”

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook of Health Education* (London: H.M.S.O, 1968), 100.



teachers protected the other unprepared students.<sup>6</sup> The handbook warned teachers to answer questions rather than ignore them as the alternative proved dangerous. If not in school, young students would find answers elsewhere, such as “from immature or undesirable sources” whom would provide immoral and/or incorrect responses.<sup>7</sup> Michael Schofield’s 1965 survey indicated students obtaining sex education from peers had sex at an earlier age.<sup>8</sup> The information from Schofield’s survey showed it was necessary for sex education to remain in schools to prolong youth chastity.

The FPA’s Community Project of South London also valued the protection of children through individual development as an important part of sex education at this time. Like the Department of Education and Science, the Project utilized the same teaching method as conference papers stated: “The education needed must vary with the individual and his or her stage of development.”<sup>9</sup> Participants from the conference felt answering questions “personally to the inquirer out of lessons, rather than the whole class” was the best approach, though it is unclear if this was to avoid potential embarrassment or not to endanger other students.<sup>10</sup> Other sex education pioneers supported the individual approach backed by both

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook* (1968), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook* (1968), 96-7.

<sup>8</sup> Schofield’s survey showed youth had sex at a younger age when they learned about the subject from their peers. It further showed youthful promiscuity was not a major problem as previously thought. Still, this information did not prevent the growing concern over the sexuality of youth. Michael Schofield, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> David Barnard, “Family Planning Education and L.E.A.,” 1968, SA/FPA/A17/46, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>10</sup> David Barnard, “Conference Report on Family Planning Education and the Secondary Schools,” 27 February 1968, SA/FPA/A17/48, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

the Department of Education and Science and the FPA. Leading proponents of sex education James Hemming and Kenneth Fawdry highlighted this approach in their small handbook: “No matter what the age group is in a class, it is important to realize that though the chronological age may be the same the physical and mental age for the reception of sex information may be greatly disparate.”<sup>11</sup> Each organization approached the issue of individuality similarly as they worried sex education could imperil the psychological development and future of a mentally unprepared child.

Medical professionals’ concerns over the psychological effects of sex education permeated the discussion on the subject. They supported the need for a specific type of sex education. Presenting at a Community Project of South London conference, doctor Faith Spicer illustrated how psychiatry and psychology integrated with and shaped sex education lessons. Spicer’s findings explained the importance of sex education and the prescribed individual approach. Spicer believed attention to the individual was imperative to determine how to best teach sex education, as “in any discussion on family planning, the teacher must...look deeper at the kind of person in front of her.”<sup>12</sup> She explained previous individual development in the home determined a child’s reaction to sex, whether positive or negative. Spicer discussed the potential ramifications of severe parental reactions as the “parent who reacts violently to this enquiry and

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Fawdry, James Hemming, Maud P. Menzies, and Marjorie Proops, *Sex Education of Schoolchildren*, (Royal Society of Health): 16, SA/FPA/CB/13/4, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>12</sup> Faith Spicer, “The Influence of Upbringing in Personality Development and its Relevance in Sexual Understanding,” SA/FPA/A17/46, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

pleasure seeking by intense anxiety, dismay, or punishing technique may, as we know, produce a severe and very frightening series of feelings in the child with development of guilt and fear of castration of great intensity.”<sup>13</sup> Both liberal and conservative approaches to sex education could utilize Spicer’s presentation as she presented parental reaction and approach as the most important factor in child development. Spicer further supported the need for school-based sex education to counter any negative parental lessons.

The professional concerns over psychological development and its later effects continued into the early 1970s. Several psychiatrists saw sex education as a positive when taught in the “correct” manner but expressed anxiety over new approaches. The vocal psychiatrists believed satisfying sex could not occur outside of a loving relationship. They implicitly depicted children as innocent and believed children would remain so through protection from certain knowledge. These psychiatrists found the increased use of visuals in sex education books and films most concerning. Detractors felt new liberal sex education books were “cold and calculatedly impersonal when sex is not, or if it is, something is wrong.”<sup>14</sup> Even books that included “warm and personal” text contained “unnecessary” illustrations. Psychiatrist Mary Miles, interviewed in several news articles, protested against the use of photographs. Such gratuitous illustrations included depictions of childbirth and close-ups of genitalia. These professionals believed these illustrations endangered youth due to overstimulation and a lack

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<sup>13</sup> Spicer, “The Influence of Upbringing,” SA/FPA/A17/46.

<sup>14</sup> “Stealers of Dreams,” *The Times*, 8 December 1971, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

of realism. Miles felt children instead learned best through experience and impulses. Miles also found demonstration through visuals problematic since “do children really need to have masturbation and sexual intercourse demonstrated? Do you teach a young child to walk by demonstration?”<sup>15</sup> These psychiatrists feared new variations of sex education would result not only in precocious promiscuity, but also encourage violence. By monitoring sex education and the use of certain educational aids, children would be protected from harmful behavior to themselves and others. This assessment by medical professionals further supported the curriculum advocated by the New Right and opposed newly emerging liberal sex education.

The release of Martin Cole’s sex education film *Growing Up* caused a public uproar as it depicted adolescent sexuality and sex outside of marriage.<sup>16</sup> Moral pressure groups in particular decried the potential negative ramifications Cole’s film would cause to British youth. This resulted in political actions as many local education authorities, including the ILEA, prohibited its use. Still, before and after the ban, only a handful of educational organizations showed *Growing Up* to adult audiences, and no evidence indicates any school showed the film to minor students. The film became the perfect target for both moral pressure groups and Conservative politicians as it epitomized the most negative aspects of the

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Miles, “Must We Show Children Sex?” 9 May 1971, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>16</sup> Cole founded the Institute of Sex Education and Research (ISER) at Aston University in Birmingham. His work within the field also included support for the legalization of abortion and the promotion of the use of surrogacy as a means of sex therapy. For more on Cole, the film, and the reactions, see David Limond, “‘I Never Imagined That the Time Would Come’: Martin Cole, the *Growing Up* Controversy and the Limits of School Sex Education in 1970s England,” *History of Education* 37, no. 3 (2008): 409–29.

permissive society with scenes of adolescent masturbation and apathetic intercourse. *Growing Up* became the perfect vehicle for dissenters' voices as it "may make their voices heard."<sup>17</sup> Debates over the film were ones "where evidence based on established facts was scarce, and emotion and prejudice were dominant," an issue which would continue to plague sex education.<sup>18</sup> This applied to Whitehouse's and the NVALA's work against Cole's film. Whitehouse stated the film promoted adolescent sex and therefore must never be used for sex education. According to Whitehouse, the film was destructive as it "brought out into the open, in no uncertain fashion, the nature of the contemporary assault upon the young and upon the ethical structure which should support them."<sup>19</sup> Medical professionals also found *Growing Up* unsuitable for children as it lacked the "subject of transmission of infection" and the film's references to contraception were "inadequate and misleading."<sup>20</sup> Proponents of a newly emerging liberal sex education found the extremities of Cole's film detrimental to the subject's development, as the subject still struggled to proliferate and evolve.

The visual content and context of the BBC radiovision and television programs, created in cooperation with parents and school officials for eight to nine year olds, also concerned the moral pressure groups and Conservatives. The visuals of these programs worried detractors before the commencement of

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<sup>17</sup> Christine Doyle and Peter Wilby, "Schools Fear Film Will Hold Back Sex Teaching Revolution," 2 May 1971, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>18</sup> W.T. Jones, "Sex Education Today," *British Journal of Hospital Medicine*, (1972): 53, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>19</sup> Newburn, *Permission and Regulation*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> N.G. Nicholson and Dermont Lynch, "Growing Up," *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 5795 (1972): 315.

their official use in schools throughout Britain. An article in national newspaper *The Observer* explained authorities believed the programs were potentially psychologically dangerous for the target demographic as children were “vulnerable to emotional pressures,” concerns echoed by the psychologists discussed earlier.<sup>21</sup> This is in contradiction to the aim of the School Broadcasting Council as later publications stated the organization chose to develop the program for the age group due to their stage in emotional development. Beyond psychological damage, their detractors feared the programs would encourage sexual experimentation due to curiosity and compared the nationwide use of the program to factory farming.<sup>22</sup> Apprehension over its classroom use became one of the main reasons schools declined to integrate the use of the programs due to the belief the “mass education” characteristic was inappropriate.<sup>23</sup> Though perhaps suitable in select settings, the belief that “methods, materials and attitudes have to vary greatly between different schools and the local environments of the pupils” held strong.<sup>24</sup> Though the majority of the content fit within the moral designs of the New Right, the individual approach and use of imagery created their apprehension.

Worries over the English translation of *The Little Red Schoolbook*, the controversial guide for adolescents, stemmed from its lack of moral context within

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<sup>21</sup> Barry Turner, “Schools Play Down Sex Talks,” *Observer*, 2 November 1969, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>22</sup> Article by Ismond Rosen also feared detailed information “may over-stimulate sexual fantasy,” and provoke “premature sexual exploration by children.” Ismond Rosen, “Fact, Family, and the Under-10s,” PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>23</sup> “School Broadcasting,” PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>24</sup> Hemming, et. al, “Sex Education of Schoolchildren,” 16, SA/FPA/CB/13/4.

its discussion of sex and advocacy for student rights. The New Right feared the knowledge espoused by the book endangered the traditional and distinct roles of adults and youth. Hansen and Jensen's introduction stated though adults have control over children, they can never control them completely. The authors' statement "grown-ups themselves have little real control over their lives" further downplayed the power of adults.<sup>25</sup> The book's detractors viewed its stance as perilous to the traditional power hierarchy of teacher over student and parent over child. The book's potential to disrupt traditional power structures worried moral pressure groups, and Whitehouse described it as "a political and sexual revolutionary primer."<sup>26</sup> The detractors feared the book's anti-authoritarian position threatened to overthrow their endorsed moral standard. They also believed its discussion on sex advocated promiscuity as the authors discussed the act separately from marriage and supported sexual experimentation and homosexuality. Despite the conservative press claiming the majority of reports represented the book positively and thus chose civil liberties over the protection of youth, little evidence supports this though liberal organizations did lend their support to the authors and publisher.<sup>27</sup>

The New Right feared other civil liberty agencies would pit children against their parents. An article by David Holbrook, a renowned British writer and member of the Responsible Society, was one example of the extreme reaction to

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<sup>25</sup> Hansen and Jensen, *The Little Red Schoolbook*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> David Limond, "The UK Edition of *The Little Red Schoolbook*," 526.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Butt believed liberal civil rights organizations swayed the public's opinion of the book. He hoped to persuade the public of the book's obscene nature. Ronald Butt, "The Little Red Schoolbook," *The Times*, July 8, 1971, 14.

such groups. Holbrook elucidated concern over both sex education and children's rights organizations. He saw these linked through the publication of the Draft Charter of Children's Rights by the Advisory Centre for Education. The charter's civil rights tenets included "the right, at the appropriate age, to such knowledge as is necessary to understand the society in which they [children] live," "freedom of access to suitably trained and appointed people to whom they can take their complaints and grievances," and other rights similar to those in *The Little Red Schoolbook*.<sup>28</sup> Holbrook likened the charter to "certain manifestations of Nazism" and believed it was potentially catastrophic for Britain and its society.<sup>29</sup> According to Holbrook, the charter and its organization threatened a child's development by turning him against the home. This endangered the traditional family model supported by moral pressure groups and Conservatives. Holbrook reasoned "Nazism was but the product of the 'fanatical immoralism' that pervaded the youth of Germany" to show the potential ill effects of liberal sex education.<sup>30</sup> The freedom liberal sex education represented was dangerous to Britain morally, socially, and politically according to this assessment and supported the need for national political interference.

The FPA began to steer away from traditional sex education in the 1970s and increasingly became a target of moral pressure groups and Conservatives as the decade progressed. The FPA began to integrate societal changes into its

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<sup>28</sup> David Holbrook, "Our Children at Risk," *The Sunday Times*, 25 April 1971, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>29</sup> Holbrook, "Our Children at Risk," PP/ROS/E/7/31.

<sup>30</sup> Holbrook, "Our Children at Risk," PP/ROS/E/7/31.



sex education work by discussing previously ignored topics alongside the standards rather than focusing on traditional moral values. The FPA also initiated programs that targeted oft-ignored audiences. One such program was Grapevine. Grapevine approached “anti-establishment” youth on the street, in pubs, and discos and occasionally worked in schools. Grapevine urged volunteers to start conversations rather than lecture as, “Today, we seem to be in the position where young people are still talking but we have stopped listening. I think that if this is true it is a potentially explosive situation.”<sup>31</sup> The use of peer volunteers and casual conversation rather than a structured setting differed greatly from standard lessons. Grapevine encouraged volunteers to neither steer the direction of lessons nor discuss sex within a predetermined context, an approach in conflict with traditional sex education.<sup>32</sup> Though the majority of its work occurred outside the London school system, its work represented the worst elements of liberal sex education. House of Lords member Elles politicized Grapevine’s education work and listed its “blatantly anarchistic” work as one reason to abolish the FPA.<sup>33</sup>

*The Ostrich Position* illustrates the everyday school work of an FPA-trained instructor, Carol Lee. Lee’s desire for open dialogue and mutual respect

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<sup>31</sup> Letter from B. Imeson to Colleague, 8 April 1975, SA/FPA/C/B/3/9/2, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>32</sup> “Report on the Experimental Period,” 1974, SA/FPA/C/B/3/9/1, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>33</sup> Members believed the FPA held financial ties with contraceptive manufacturers and therefore the organization purposefully encouraged sexual promiscuity. Baroness Elles used a pamphlet allegedly circulated by Grapevine as proof of this connection. Though she recognized Grapevine received no national government funding, it still showed the FPA as socially dangerous. *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 238, 14 January 1976.

between teacher and students again shows how FPA-led lessons differentiated from those propagated by the New Right. In her book, Lee often questioned the teaching strategies of traditional sex education. While the new Right stressed the importance of preserving a child's innocence, Lee maintained young people did not live in a void, and the FPA's teaching strategies reflected this. She found traditional sex education irresponsible as "One cannot argue on the one hand that it is wrong for sex to be discussed outside the context of feelings and relationships (which is what it is claimed is wrong with sex education in schools) and yet at the same time suggest that these matters be left aside until someone is eighteen."<sup>34</sup> Lee found it imperative to present sex education realistically as she found teenagers often "have very confused ideas about what they [sexual words] mean."<sup>35</sup> She found the FPA-approved approach raised sex "from a lustful into a considered, informed and caring activity," the goal of both the FPA and their opponents.<sup>36</sup> Still, opponents to liberal sex education believed the subject must either ignore or negatively present taboo topics and to steer students towards a traditional moral path. The New Right found the education motives and methods employed by the FPA called for and supported the need for political interference and reform.

An article by the Responsible Society's Valerie Riches, writing in support of the Education Act of 1981, further delineates why the New Right suspected the work of liberal sex educators and groups such as the FPA and Brook and

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<sup>34</sup> Lee, *The Ostrich Position*, 40

<sup>35</sup> Lee, *The Ostrich Position*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, *The Ostrich Position*, 24.

justified the act's ratification. The act required local education authorities and school governors to publish information on the manner and context of sex education. Riches believed the work of liberal sex educators was dangerous to youth as they found "no rights or wrongs about any form of sexual activity at any age provided only that no conception results" and thus encouraged promiscuous behavior from an early age. She believed the FPA and Brook shared sinister motives and only desired financial gain as "Facts about the health and social consequences of premature sexual intercourse are carefully screened out so that children are given a one-way prescription for regular and permanent doses of sexual activity."<sup>37</sup> Riches believed any concern expressed by these organizations over the new act was due to fear over potential economic loss and a "rooted contempt for parents."<sup>38</sup> Riches painted the organizations and their attacks on the Act as both detrimental to youth and resistant to the traditional family model advocated by the New Right to both justify the new act and further disparage the work and motives of the FPA and Brook.

During multiple House of Lords debates, Conservative members expressed disapproval of the FPA and the necessity to end its work within sex education. Members presented concerns over nearly every aspect of the organization, from its instructors to its lessons to its manufacturing ties.<sup>39</sup> They viewed the FPA as morally dangerous for teenagers and directly responsible for

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<sup>37</sup> Valerie Riches, "The Sex Industry Versus the Parents," SA/FPA/C/B/6/7/1, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>38</sup> Riches, "The Sex Industry," SA/FPA/C/B/6/7/1.

<sup>39</sup> Conservative members focused on financial arrangements with the London Rubber Company, the manufacturer of Durex.

an increased rate of sexual activity among teenagers.<sup>40</sup> The FPA's work only increased the divide as it began to advocate for sex education at an early age and accepted the rising occurrence of non-monogamous sex. The FPA believed sex education from a young age was important as children "are potential sexual adults and need all the help and reassurance they can get from birth onwards in order to develop a healthy and responsible attitude towards their sexuality."<sup>41</sup> They believed answering difficult or controversial questions honestly was more beneficial than avoiding them. The FPA's programs and pamphlets from the 1980s espoused both self-esteem and self-awareness.<sup>42</sup> One example of this is a pamphlet issued by the FPA on safe sex and condoms in the late 1980s.<sup>43</sup> It pushed for self-reliance by carrying condoms despite the potential for negative comments or reactions.<sup>44</sup> The FPA found guarding physical and mental health more important than protecting moral health as defined by the New Right and this led to continued political attacks against their work.

Dueling *Times* articles from 1980 by Ronald Butt, a Conservative political correspondent, and Barbara Davis, chairman of the FPA, further show how their differentiating views on the best sex education model for British youth divided the liberal sex education advocates and the New Right. His article published first,

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<sup>40</sup> Viscount Buckmaster in *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (473), col. 648, 15 April 1986.

<sup>41</sup> Revised draft of sex education leaflet for parents, 13 April 1981, SA/FPA/C/B/2/6/11/1, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>42</sup> The FPA began the program ASSERT in 1985. This provided education on all aspects of personal relationships and sexuality. ASSERT changed its mission multiple times and eventually focused on self-esteem education and AIDS/HIV awareness. Like the earlier Community Project of South London, it also moved away from work with students to training teachers.

<sup>43</sup> "Your Guide to Safer Sex and the Condom," 1988, SA/FPA/C/E/8/11, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>44</sup> The pamphlet aimed to prevent the spread of AIDS, particularly among heterosexuals.

Butt expressed his suspicion of the FPA and other “morally down-market” organizations.<sup>45</sup> He found liberal sex education spared nothing “in instructing in every sort of activity, however perverse.”<sup>46</sup> Butt supported the Education Act of 1981 as a protective barrier between children and liberal sex educators associated with the FPA. The New Right hoped to prevent the instruction of morally questionable topics and material since the act required local education authorities and school governors to publish information on a school’s sex education curriculum. Butt endorsed the act as he feared the instructors of liberal sex education “deliberately encouraged [students] to take as a norm, standards of behaviour which are bound...to turn some of them into customers for the abortion market, and reduce many more to deep unhappiness.”<sup>47</sup> The dangers of liberal sex education necessitated the education reform according to Butt.

Davis portrayed Butt, and by proxy the New Right, as ignorant due to his refusal to accept societal changes. Davis and the FPA believed knowledge rather than ignorance was the best tool as “We do little service to the young in denying them that information and that choice.”<sup>48</sup> Davis incorporated statistics from Christine Farrell’s then recent survey on teens and sex into her article to support the FPA’s stance.<sup>49</sup> Further, she asserted liberal sex education assisted young people in making responsible decisions and protected their future. Davis stressed

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<sup>45</sup> Ronald Butt, “What Every Parent Should Know,” *The Times*, 14 February 1980, SA/FPA/C/B/6/7/1, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>46</sup> Butt, “What Every Parent Should Know,” SA/FPA/C/B/6/7/1.

<sup>47</sup> Butt, “What Every Parent Should Know,” SA/FPA/C/B/6/7/1.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Davis, “What Every Child Should Know,” *The Times*, 22 February, 1980, SA/FPA/C/B/6/7/1, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>49</sup> Christine Farrell, *My Mother Said: The Way Young People Learned about Sex and Birth Control* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

the ideals practiced by FPA-associated instructor Lee, that despite the best intentions, children did not remain innocent if certain information was not taught. Children either found answers through suspect sources or puberty provided bodily sexual awareness. Davis explained traditional sex education neglected to acknowledge these realities, and thus she depicted the New Right's moral focus as dangerous to youth. This defense of liberal sex education and the FPA was rare. Instead, political and media discussions on sex education tended to focus on the negative elements of (liberal) sex education to support the political initiatives of the New Right.

Several House of Lords debates in the 1970s from this decade show the New Right felt the continued use of traditional sex education quintessential to instill youth with their prescribed moral beliefs. Vocal Conservative members viewed traditional sex education necessary as "it is our duty to help them [young people] to influence their environment and to make the best of their lives."<sup>50</sup> They believed liberal sex education would lead British youth to negative life choices and must be prevented. During a 1973 debate, one member depicted children as "completely powerless" and reasoned only the most suitable teacher must present sex education. Another pushed for a national curriculum for sex education to combat suspect knowledge from liberal sources such as *The Little Red Schoolbook*.<sup>51</sup> In a 1976 debate, one member expressed the opinion that sex education at a young age destroyed the innocence of youth. Sex education

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<sup>50</sup> Hemming, et. al, *Sex Education of Schoolchildren*, 18-9, SA/FPA/CB/13/4.

<sup>51</sup> Baroness Macleod of Borve, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (338), col. 1289, 12 February 1973.

at a young age stimulated “underdeveloped natural instincts prematurely” and would result in negative consequences according to one House member.<sup>52</sup> With traditional sex education, young people could overcome temptation and exert self-control, while liberal sex education promoted promiscuity and negligent use of birth control. Elles, a leader on the House of Lords debates over sex education, believed traditional sex education that addressed the negatives of contraceptives over their benefits would protect young people.<sup>53</sup> Within the debates, Elles feared liberal sex education could result in unwanted pregnancy or disease by pointing out “the teaching of sex education can lead to irreversible effect on the human body of so many girls.”<sup>54</sup> Others worried about the psychological damage caused by promiscuity and the irreversible side effects from abortion. Though Conservative politicians referenced public health concerns to support their political intervention within sex education, these concerns remained linked to traditional morality.

The 1980’s debates continued to emphasize the New Right theme of protection by espousing traditional moral values in sex education. This included the encouragement of self-restraint and self-respect. With these, the New Right believed “the foundations for loving and caring relationships and a stable family life” would be set.<sup>55</sup> The prevention of promiscuity was essential as promiscuity’s believed harmful effects included fostering “the attitude of the aggressive male

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<sup>52</sup> Lord Stamp, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (473), col. 211, 14 January 1976.

<sup>53</sup> She discussed during debates in 1973 and 1976, but it became the main focus in the 1976 debates.

<sup>54</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (338), col. 1319, 12 February 1973.

<sup>55</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (475), col. 569, 2 June 1986.

and the passive female” along with undisclosed effects on young children.<sup>56</sup>

Healthy familial relationships and self-respect were essential to stop the cycle of poverty as Thatcherism viewed poverty as cultural. Happy and productive future families were further necessary following Thatcher’s plan to reform the welfare state. By nurturing children through traditional sex education, the New Right hoped to reverse economic discrepancies and create a stronger Britain.

The mid-1980s Gillick case, and its subsequent reversal, further illustrates how the New Right defined youth and parental rights during the 1980s. The Gillick case arose following the Department of Health and Social Security’s publication of a revised version of the 1973 National Health Service (Reorganization) Act. This new version condoned the “practice of providing contraceptive advice and services to young people below the age of consent to sexual intercourse, principally on the grounds of doctor-patient confidentiality and the need to protect young people.”<sup>57</sup> After attempting and failing to forbid local health authorities from providing contraceptive or abortion advice to her daughters, Victoria Gillick began legal proceedings against the health authority and the Department. After her case’s initial success, the House of Lords overturned it based largely on conceptions of children and childhood. The two who voted for Gillick reflect the common New Right depiction of children. The members presented underage girls as “infants” unable to comprehend the

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<sup>56</sup> Viscount Buckmaster, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (473), col. 648, 15 April 1986.

<sup>57</sup> Jane Pilcher, “Contrary to Gillick and After: Children and Sex in the 1980s and 1990s,” in *Thatcher’s Children?: Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s*, ed. Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (London: Falmer Press, 1996), 79.



complexities of sex or contraception and necessitating the guidance of a parent. This understanding of youth, as immature and incompetent, reflects the political battle over the content of sex education.<sup>58</sup>

Education reforms led by the New Right in the 1980s aimed to protect students from liberal propaganda, including liberal sex education, and to ensure a productive future. The reform movement culminated in the ratification of the Education Reform Act of 1988. This introduced a national curriculum, abolished the ILEA, and allowed for “state schools to ‘opt out’ of local authority control and instead become maintained by direct government grant.”<sup>59</sup> The bill followed Thatcher’s economic policies, as it transferred power to the “consumers,” the parents. The new national curriculum established sex education as inconsequential to youth education despite the New Right’s assertion it was important to moral development. Instead, the national curriculum allowed the government to instill students with the traditional morals endorsed by the New Right as the curriculum aimed to promote “the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society.”<sup>60</sup> The national curriculum required ten compulsory subjects, including religion, but excluded sex education. Sex education became even less imperative as exams increased in

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<sup>58</sup> The other Lords believed a child could consent if he or she fully understood the treatment proposed regardless of age. The split decision shows the New Right held varied beliefs on the competency and maturity of youth.

<sup>59</sup> Wagg, “Politics, Childhood and the New Education Market,” 18.

<sup>60</sup> “Statutory guidance: National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4,” last modified December 2, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>. Changes with later acts included requirement of sex education in secondary schools; however, the current curriculum remains similar to the original.

importance. Since sex education did not have a corresponding exam, schools found it not essential. As sex education lacked such an exam, schools often devoted little time to it. This development included awareness of British heritage. The New Right trumpeted the national curriculum's introduction and saw it as "first and foremost a knowledge of British history which restores the lost dimension of British experience...it also reinforces the loyalty on which our survival depends."<sup>61</sup> The New Right's successful bill allowed sex education to remain in schools, but through its new subject requirements and explicit aim to promote moral development, their national curriculum ensured schools would struggle to find the need for liberal sex education. Through its focus on the health of youth, the New Right found a widespread support on its political initiatives toward sex education. This concentration spread to other areas within the Conservative government's political agenda including its economic proposals. The New Right found the moral health of youth (and the family) would better the nation in multiple realms and thus justified its stance on sex education.

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<sup>61</sup> Brooke, "Articulating the Nation," 23.

### Chapter Three: Family as the Basis of Sex Education

“A nation of free people will only continue to be great if family life continues and the structure of that nation is a family one.”<sup>1</sup>

Alongside the concept of innocent youth, the New Right used the traditional family model as a political tool. The traditional family model consisted of a happily married mother and father and their children. Family was at the center of the work of moral pressure groups from their inception, and this became a focus of the Conservatives alongside the rise of Thatcher. Both depicted family as the center and foundation of Britain, and they believed capitalist society would crumble without nurturing it.<sup>2</sup> This representation emphasized the necessity of traditional moral sex education and the danger of liberal sex education. Traditional sex education taught both chastity before marriage and prepared students for married life, while the New Right heralded liberal sex education as a harbinger for divorce and promiscuous behavior. Thatcher and her party continued to highlight family to strengthen its position on sex education and other reforms.

Family was an important concept to both traditional and liberal sex education, though the definition of family began to morph in liberal sex education in the 1970s and 1980s. The Department of Education and Science’s 1968 edition of *A Handbook of Health Education*’s chapter on sex education shows

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<sup>1</sup> Thatcher quoted in Newburn, *Permission and Regulation*, 181.

<sup>2</sup> Several House of Lords members saw the absence of stable marriages and family in Rome and Russia as the reason for their failed governments/civilizations.

both parties found the traditional familial model important to maintain.<sup>3</sup> Though the handbook only provided recommendations for head teachers, whom determined the curriculum for sex education, its association with the Department undoubtedly carried weight. This edition presented more expansive recommendations than previous ones, this included new discussions on the reproductive systems and contraception, yet its emphasis on marriage and family remained its central focus. The chapter's title, "School and the Future Parent," shows the main priority of sex education in 1968 remained providing lessons for future marriage and parenthood.

The handbook depicted marriage, followed by family, as the natural progression following adolescence. It stated the desire for marriage and children as an inherent human need. The handbook found the focus of future parenthood important as it stated the majority of children will eventually satisfy this desire. This focus on family and marriage was essential to Britain's future as they played "an important part in the building up of society."<sup>4</sup> Sex education was a key tool to assist in the creation of a future successful marriage and household. Though the handbook acknowledged not everyone would eventually marry, it believed the skills instilled by traditional sex education would benefit all students in the future. The handbook only briefly discussed sex itself; however, the brief discussion illustrated how education could benefit married couples as a "Lack of sensible

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<sup>3</sup> As previously noted, a Labour government published this edition.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook* (1968), 93.

guidance on sex can lead to unhappiness and broken marriages.”<sup>5</sup> Though many saw sex education as best provided by and about the family, the handbook referenced recent evidence illustrated parents often neglected to provide sex education lessons to their children to support the necessity for sex education.<sup>6</sup> The Department of Education and Science acknowledged educators needed to fulfill the work of parents to instill traditional familial values.

The initial sex education work of both Brook and the FPA emphasized the centered their lesson around the traditional family. In a 1966 address, Helen Brook, Brook’s founder, stressed the importance of sex education as the rate of illegitimate births increased. Brook believed these rates could be lowered in three ways: through education, legalized abortion, and the “reversion to a stricter sexual morality.”<sup>7</sup> Though Brook did not state explicitly what form this stricter morality should take, sources show she previously equated loose morality with unwed motherhood.<sup>8</sup> In one interview, Brook stated: “I feel sad that women should be encouraged to be one-parent families. Human beings have only one right—to have a mother and father to see you through till you’re ready to go.”<sup>9</sup> This “problem” of young unmarried pregnant girls motivated Brook’s initial work as in the 1960s “the young unmarried still present special problems...more should be

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook* (1968), 95.

<sup>6</sup> More in depth discussion on young people and sex education in school and the home can be found in Schofield’s *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* .

<sup>7</sup> Helen Brook, “Address to Westminster Social Workers,” 5 September 1966, SA/BRO/J/1/7, Brook: Archives, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>8</sup> In a later interview, Helen Brook insisted single motherhood was the only facet of the sexual revolution of which she disapproved.

<sup>9</sup> Lesley Garner, “The woman who launched the sexual revolution,” *The Mail on Sunday*, 14 October 1984, SA/BRO/J/1/6, Brook: Archives, Wellcome Library, London.

learnt about the reasons why unmarried girls have intercourse, and why some let themselves become pregnant.”<sup>10</sup> Though Brook advocated for sex education, she and her organization found a clear connection between sex, marriage and family.

The family unit, or similar structures, was central to the FPA’s first foray into sex education. Through the Community Education Project for South London, the FPA focused on family planning rather than sex education from 1968 to 1970. Their emphasis of this label illustrates they still saw contraception use as most acceptable between monogamous, heterosexual couples. Work during a Project conference emphasized mothercraft and moral guidance for teens.<sup>11</sup> As discussions of “ethical and social issues should precede the giving of factual information,” the organization placed precedence on moral discussions tying sex with marriage.<sup>12</sup> Only as the 1970s began, did FPA instruction begin to acknowledge societal changes as sex became discussed with personal long-term relationships rather than marriage. Still, the accentuation of heterosexual monogamy as the norm remained. Only within the FPA’s sex education projects in the following decade would the organization begin to detach sex’s connection to love and long-term relationships. This transition marked the start of attacks by moral pressure groups and Conservatives.

The highly publicized arrival of two sex education aids, the BBC television and radiovision programs and *The Little Red Schoolbook*, at the start of the

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<sup>10</sup> “Brook Advisory Centres-Their Future Role,” 2-3, SA/BRO/J/1/7, Brook: Archives, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>11</sup> Smithwhite, “The I.L.E.A. Health Education Unit,” SA/FPA/A17/46.

<sup>12</sup> David Barnard, “Conference Report on Family Planning Education and the Secondary Schools,” 27 February 1968, SA/FPA/A17/46, Family Planning Association, Wellcome Library, London.

1970s marked a new separation between sex and family in sex education. Moral pressure groups began their attacks on liberal sex education due to this disconnect. Fear over the content of the BBC programs released in 1970 began before their official use in schools. These complaints mainly occurred from adults whom had yet to watch or listen to the programs, illustrating the influence of vocal moral pressure groups and Conservative newspapers.<sup>13</sup> The purpose behind the programs was to “mould and modify subsequent behaviour and this behaviour will, it is hoped, to be ‘healthy’ and ‘normal.’”<sup>14</sup> This normal behavior included family creation, as the programs focused on conception, pregnancy and birth. However, the programs only insinuated the representation of a normal family, a married mother and father. Though it showed the family as a mother and father, the programs avoided the use of the word “marriage” as “there were areas of Britain where the rate of illegitimacy was high.”<sup>15</sup> Explicitly equating family and marriage was potentially emotionally harmful to children from such families. The programs also avoided the use of the word “love” and instead attempted to make the program “warm and loving” as the creators feared children may not have understood love in the presented (romantic) context. The choices made by the programs’ producers show the complexities of British families in this period. Despite this, opponents requested to maintain the familial ideal of married heterosexual parents rather than integrate increasingly common alternatives.

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<sup>13</sup> Jones, “Sex education today,” PP/ROS/E/7/31. It is important to note the BBC was Whitehouse and the NVALA’s main opponent for several years beginning with in the mid-1960s. Their joint rivalry may have colored her response to the programs and their content.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, “Sex education today,” PP/ROS/E/7/31.

<sup>15</sup> “BBC Unveil TV Sex Lessons for Under-Tens” *Evening News*, 27 October 1969, PP/ROS/E/7/31, The Papers of Ismond Rosen, Wellcome Library, London.

Moral pressure groups found *The Little Red Schoolbook* dangerous to youth as it divorced sex from marriage and family. Instead, it depicted sex as a strictly physical act. The book's chapter on sex "says nothing about love and very little about feelings," staunchly defying the conservative concerns over sex education at the time.<sup>16</sup> Though the book acknowledged sex can occur between two people in love and whom perhaps want to have children, this included both heterosexual and homosexual couples. Following this, mentions of family and marriage are absent. The remainder of the chapter discussed the mechanics and facts of sex outside the traditional moral context. The book's opponents feared it taught promiscuity due to its content. This fear, alongside concerns over how this would affect youths' views on marriage, legitimized the necessity for the obscenity case against the book's author and publisher to prevent its distribution.

The new sex education work by the FPA in the 1970s became the focus of Conservative concerns over the loss of traditional moral standards within sex education and its projected effect on traditional family structure. This occurred as the FPA increased its work within sex education following its reorganization in 1974. This is evident through its new local programs and its role in instructor training. Initially, both the FPA and the National Marriage Guidance Council received government funding for instructor training, but the Council quickly passed full responsibility to the FPA as they viewed the FPA's medical background as more pertinent towards developing a sex education training

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<sup>16</sup> Hansen and Jensen, *The Little Red Schoolbook*, 94.



program.<sup>17</sup> Since no similar training program existed, the FPA developed its own, and liberal educational pedagogies influenced the final program rather than traditional methods.<sup>18</sup> Lee's *The Ostrich Position* presents an example of the sex education curriculum used by FPA-trained instructors. Lee avoided placing sex within the context of marriage and stressed the use of open-ended discussions was "infinitely more valuable than dogmatizing about morality."<sup>19</sup> Lee considered the proselytizing methods employed by traditional sex education ineffective and found the FPA-approved method morally sound as she believed it discouraged teen sex rather than promoted promiscuity.<sup>20</sup> Opponents of the FPA disagreed with this argument and instead viewed their methods and emphasis as cause for alarm and political intervention.

A 1973 House of Lords debate, which attempted to place restrictions on sex education, shows members rooted their concerns on the subject in its representation of and effects on the family. Members stressed the importance of family life for Britain's future as "The main strength of our society lies in its family life. If you destroy family life you destroy the country."<sup>21</sup> Conservative members depicted the FPA and related organizations as perpetrators of the permissive society's legacy and therefore the organizations' sex education needed to be controlled. Vocal members continued to believe the FPA's methods encouraged

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<sup>17</sup> Rachel Thomson, "Prevention, Promotion and Adolescent Sexuality: The Politics of School Sex Education in England and Wales," *Sexual and Marital Therapy* 9, no. 2 (1994): 117.

<sup>18</sup> Discussed in Thomson, "Prevention, Promotion and Adolescent Sexuality;" Allen, *Education in Sex and Personal Relationships: Research Report No. 665*; D. Reid, "School Sex Education and the Causes of Unintended Pregnancy: A Review," *Health Education Journal* 41: 4-10.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, *The Ostrich Position*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *The Ostrich Position*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Viscount Ingleby, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (338), col. 1291, 12 February 1973.

promiscuity, and the New Right instead advocated for restraint over indulgence. Conservative members asserted the FPA's generalized advice on contraceptives and venereal diseases assisted in the destruction of family life. Conservatives continued to find sex education necessary. However, they feared rates of promiscuity would continue to rise without an emphasis on traditional moral values as members argued pregnancy and illegitimacy no longer held the same barriers or stigma. During the debate, Conservative members advocated for sex education combined with moral education.<sup>22</sup> This combination would allow schools to cover sex without making it the central focus. These members hoped this emphasis on morality and stability would prevent the creation of "broken" homes and thus tied youth education with divorce prevention. They explained the environment of broken or single family homes created "disturbed parents at best and criminals at worst" and thus damaged British society.<sup>23</sup> The climbing divorce rates exacerbated the concern over broken families. The FPA's opponents feared their liberal sex education either led to these types of homes or failed to prevent their occurrence.

A House of Lords debate in 1976 continued to express concerns over the future of the family and the FPA's negative role. This debate focused heavily on the role of the FPA and its government-funding and integrated discussions on traditional morality to strengthen Conservative member's arguments against the

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<sup>22</sup> Lord Beaumont of Whitley described moral education as a way for students "to make moral judgments for themselves in a more informed and a more intelligent way that they have in the past." With a correct moral basis, sex education would become unnecessary as youth would make correct moral choices. *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (338), cols. 1292-3, 12 February 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Earl of Lauderdale, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (338), col. 1308, 12 February 1973.

organization. Anxieties over the traditional family's future are visible in Elles' introduction, as she stated, "Above all, Government policies should take into account their responsibilities and should be concerted to support and not to divide the unity of the family."<sup>24</sup> Other members continued to see traditional sex education as a necessary method to strengthen traditional marriage and family.<sup>25</sup> Members stressed the necessity to continue traditional sex education rather than shift to the liberal model and depicted their intervention against it as their "duty" to the nation.

Conservative members of the House of Lords equated moral health with marriage and family in attempts to prevent the growth of liberal sex education. They also viewed these entities as innate desires since an "overwhelming number of young people in this country still want and look forward to marrying...[and having] healthy children and a happy family life."<sup>26</sup> It was only natural to provide traditional sex education, in support of these goals, according to these members. Though traditional sex education focused on matters related to sex, the New Right still found the discussion of the act itself important to maintain happy marriages. For instance, properly framed discussions on contraception could help maintain marital fidelity.<sup>27</sup> This preservation of the traditional family gained significance since, "if we destroy the family we destroy

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<sup>24</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 149, 14 January 1976.

<sup>25</sup> Earl of Longford, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 196, 14 January 1976.

<sup>26</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), cols. 138-9, 14 January 1976.

<sup>27</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 193, 14 January 1976.

the country itself.”<sup>28</sup> The New Right thus depicted liberal sex education possessing the potential to hinder the growth of the unstable nation through its supposed disregard to the traditional marriage and the family unit. This framework helped the New Right to solidify the need for political initiatives against liberal sex education.

At the start of the 1980s, the houses of Parliament pushed to provide parents more consumer power within sex education. Throughout her tenure, Thatcher presented the family as the foundation of a healthy and successful Britain, and the New Right’s actions toward sex education in the 1980s reflected this. The first act affecting sex education, passed in 1981, required local education authorities and school governors to publish information on the manner and context of sex education within a school and followed the tenets of neoliberalism. The New Right supported the act and stated the new act was a defense for the traditional family. According to the New Right, liberal sex education and its perpetrators divorced sex from love and ridiculed “marriage by the rather degrading reference to stable relationships.”<sup>29</sup> They believed this would help hinder this work on liberal sex education, as the New Right continued to see it as dangerous to the traditional family and the maintenance of traditional moral values. Members further believed the new act would ensure schools would reinstate sex education “given within a truly responsible marriage pattern

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<sup>28</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (367), col. 196, 14 January 1976.

<sup>29</sup> The Earl of Lauderdale, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (406), cols. 1386-7, 14 March 1980.

of lasting relationships.”<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on marriage became especially important as marriage rates further declined in the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> The strengthening of the family became especially important to justify the New Right’s political changes including individualism and decreased interference in the private sphere.

The New Right continued to present family as the fundamental unit of society and in the second half of the 1980s, focused on homosexuality as the family’s main enemy. This concern over protection of the traditional family structure led to further Parliament action in the form of the Education Act 1986. This act allowed schools to not provide any form of sex education, and in schools with sex education, the act permitted parents to withdraw their children from the subject. The act required instructors to provide lessons with “due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life.”<sup>32</sup> Members of the House of Lords supported these stipulations on sex education as “much abuses and matters which go wrong in marriage are due to ignorance in sex education.”<sup>33</sup> The Department of Education and Science later published a circular further explaining the new legislative framework and illustrated the New Right’s stance on the presence of homosexuality within both the classroom and British society. First,

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<sup>30</sup> The Lord Bishop of Norwich, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (406), col. 1381, 14 March 1980.

<sup>31</sup> At the start of the 1970s, the rate of marriages averaged around 400,000 a year. By 1980, this rate had declined to approximately 365,000 a year. The rate hovered around 350,000 for most of the decade before a steep plummet to 300,00 in 1989. Further information on marriage and divorce rates in England and Wales is available at the website of the Office of National Statistics. “Marriages in England and Wales, 2010,” Office for National Statistics, accessed February 1, 2015, [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_258307.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_258307.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> “Education (No. 2) Act 1986,” accessed January 6, 2015, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/61/enacted>.

<sup>33</sup> Lord Denning, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)* (475), col. 571, 2 June 1986.

the circular called sex education to present the risks of promiscuous sexual behavior and appreciate “stable married and family life.”<sup>34</sup> It then followed that “there is no place in any school in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which present it as the ‘norm,’ or which encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils.”<sup>35</sup> The reaction from the liberal opposition illustrated the strength of the Conservatives. Little resistance from Labour politicians was visible following both events. Labour was continuing to rebuild support following a brutal defeat in the 1983 general election and likely believed denouncing the act would only strengthen the public image of the “Loony Left.” Interdepartmental letters from both Brook and the FPA discussed the feared ramifications of the act, but both remained publicly quiet on the matter.

As previously discussed, concerns over the promotion of homosexuality arose as local education authorities began to support gay and lesbian rights. Following a local election in 1986, the new Lesbian and Gay Unit in Haringey advocated for schools to promote positive images of lesbians and gays. This public request incited the campaigns against liberal sex education and the liberal organizations supporting this initiative. Local conservatives heralded the Unit’s proposal as “a bigger threat to normal family life than even the bombers and the guns of Adolf Hitler.”<sup>36</sup> The New Right utilized the proliferation of sensationalistic

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<sup>34</sup> Pilcher, “School Sex Education,” 165.

<sup>35</sup> Pilcher, “School Sex Education,” 165.

<sup>36</sup> Durham, *Sex and Politics*, 111.

headlines and stories in the press and media to generate further public support.<sup>37</sup> This media campaign helped to further the emphasis on the traditional family as normal and legitimized the view homosexuality was dangerous to not only youth but also Britain. This garnered support for Section 28.

This New Right fear over a positive representation of homosexuality in schools continued through the remainder of the 1980s. Conservative Education Secretary Kenneth Baker led the charge that positive depictions of homosexuality had infiltrated youth education. Baker supported the uproar over *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* as it contained the motive of parents whom believed “that a normal moral framework is the bedrock of the family.”<sup>38</sup> The “pretended family relationship” of homosexuals presented not only a danger to traditional moral values, but also a danger to the continuation of Britain’s population. As one Parliament member reasoned, “the future of our society depends upon the relationship between man and woman and the product of man and woman—the child...there is no future for society in women with women and men with men.”<sup>39</sup> The 1989 Children Act further established the traditional family unit as the preferred family as it stated: “the chosen way of life of some adults may mean that they would not be able to provide a suitable environment for the care and nurture of a child. No one has the ‘right’ to be a foster parent. ‘Equal rights’ and

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<sup>37</sup> Examples of headlines included “Scandal of gay porn books read in schools” and “Lesbians to adopt kids. Schools to get lessons about homosexuals. HarinGAY!” Curran. et al., *Culture Wars*, 163, 166.

<sup>38</sup> Curran, et al., *Culture Wars*, 165.

<sup>39</sup> Reinhold, “‘Real and ‘Pretend’ Families,” 73.

'gay rights' policies have no place in fostering services."<sup>40</sup> The New Right's repeated invocation to maintain the traditional family model its importance to Britain's health and future led to significant public support for its reforms to education and local government. The battle over sex education became the perfect tool for the New Right to further its connected moral and political ideals

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<sup>40</sup> This Paragraph was later amended after lobbying by gay and lesbian activists. Smith, *New Right Discourse*, 211.



## Conclusion

The escalated reaction to developments in sex education in Great Britain reflected the rise of the British New Right. It illustrated how the Conservative Party latched onto moral concerns surrounding sex education to support reform initiatives. The New Right's focus on morality demonstrates the politicization of sex education and its struggle to be primarily a public health enterprise. An examination of the responses to sex education in another country, the United States, shows how another similar government utilized and politicized sex education. A significant difference referenced by historians of the American case is the factor of racial discrimination. Alexandra Lord goes so far to state the diverse racial and ethnic identities, alongside religious diversity, have made it impossible for the government to create a successful uniform sex education campaign, though this both oversimplifies the situation and neglects to acknowledge diversity in other successful nations.<sup>1</sup> Still, sex education did hold negative racial connotations in the United States. Following Nixon's inauguration, the federal government aimed to increase family planning services for poor mothers to decrease the need for public assistance. This concern over high birthrates among "low income women of childbearing age" became depicted as an anxiety over the problem of population growth.<sup>2</sup> However, its main target was racial minorities. Non-white communities, notably blacks and Latinos, became

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Lord, *Condom Nation: The U.S. Government's Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010): 147.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis L. Carlson, *The Education of Eros: A History of Education and the Problem of Adolescent Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2012): 41.

suspicious of sex education, most particularly the promotion of contraception, due to this connection and its former association with eugenics. Though British sex education and family planning carries a similar history tied with eugenics, this often targeted the poor other rather non-whites.

Prior to the link to racism, protesters in a battle over sex education in in Anaheim, California portrayed the subject as the harbinger of a communist revolution.<sup>3</sup> While the community at first wanted the progressive sex education program introduced into their schools in the early 1960s, by the end of the decade detractors saw it as an attack on the dissolving family. This perception arose due to the program's candor on non-reproductive topics within sex education. Discussions on homosexuality became dangerous due to the common Cold War association between homosexuality and communist subversion. Though similar fears regarding communism appear to only briefly arise in arguments against sex education within Britain, dissenters in Anaheim used similar rhetoric on the family and the nation to depict sex education negatively.

Similarly to the British case, the New Right of America held a powerful influence on depictions and decisions regarding sex education during the 1970s and 1980s. They, too, based their concerns over sex education on the perceived deterioration of the family. President Ronald Reagan held moral and political views similar to Thatcher's. Reagan also found it essential to strengthen the family as the basis of American society to maintain its economic and political

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the episode, see Mary Breasted, *Oh! Sex Education* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970) and Natalia Mehlman, "Sex Ed...and the Reds? Reconsidering the Anaheim Battle over Sex Education, 1962-1969," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2007): 203-232.

strength. The ideal family was the traditional model. Reagan espoused rhetoric analogous to Thatcher's that emphasized the restoration of the family values and protection of children. Under Reagan, the conservative-led federal government passed the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) in 1981. AFLA funded abstinence-only sex education and encouraged pregnant teens to carry to term. Critics saw AFLA as legitimizing a specific set of religious sexual values. Still, Janice M. Irvine states "AFLA helped secure the transformation of community sex education debates away from conflict over *whether* sex education would be taught in public schools."<sup>4</sup> While, AFLA initiated the abstinence-only sex education industry, Britain continued to lack a similar curriculum for the New Right to rally around.

Multiple historians see the Christian New Right, also known as the Moral Majority, possessing greater cultural power than sex education advocates in debates on the topic. Though religiously-affiliated pressure groups in Britain held sway with the Conservatives, their influence never reached the scope of American evangelicals. As the 1980s progressed, evangelicals built a large voting bloc and media presence through television and radio.<sup>5</sup> The Christian New Right sought to increase its influence through the creation of the National Christian Action Coalition that acted as a political lobby. The pro-family movement also enhanced its impact through organization building such as research centers and think tanks. Irvine sees these organizations utilizing certain

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<sup>4</sup> Janice M. Irvine, *Talk About Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 94.

<sup>5</sup> By 1987, televangelism was a billion dollar industry.

tactics including the invention of depravity narratives and the repetition of evocative sexual language to create successful anti-sex education rhetoric, and the British New Right utilized similar tactics.<sup>6</sup> These organizations legitimized numerous fallacies by using scientific research. This included misleading information on condoms. A report, published by a conservative research council, asserted condoms contained tiny holes through which the HIV virus could pass.<sup>7</sup> Though nearly all evidence shows this is not true, this did not prevent conservative national organizations from distributing materials claiming condoms as unsafe. Irvine asserts such claims operated as an indictment of comprehensive sex education and supported the emerging abstinence-only sex education.<sup>8</sup>

Abstinence became the key word in a national AIDS campaign. Education Secretary William Bennett and other allies in the Reagan administration believed discussions on AIDS should discuss morality and how it shaped sexual behavior. A national mailer and other educational material pushed for abstinence with one poster stating “You want to be risk-free from AIDS? Don’t have sex.”<sup>9</sup> Further, Bennett and others attempted to place the fight against AIDS as one against “the moral degeneracy they associated with the ‘homosexual agenda and lifestyle.’”<sup>10</sup> Despite being appointed for his shared conservative values, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop diverged from his fellow conservatives on his approach to combat

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<sup>6</sup> Others are blaming sex educators and secularization of religious argument. Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, 116.

<sup>8</sup> Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Lord, *Condom Nation*, 156.

<sup>10</sup> Carlson, *Education of Eros*, 81.

the AIDS epidemic. *The Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, authored by Koop, best illustrated this. Koop refused to assert all Americans opposed homosexuality and promiscuity. Though Koop declared sex education should stress abstinence and monogamy, he also recognized the importance of explicit discussions on the use of condoms for protection. He also differed from his fellow conservatives by stressing the need for sex education beginning at a young age and covering both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Britain created a similarly messaged national AIDS campaign, but a discussion on the need for sex education was absent from it.

Both British and American cases show how political groups shape sex education into political tools. Developments and restrictions in sex education in Britain mirrored the rise and action of the New Right. The Conservative Party and Prime Minister Thatcher viewed sex education as a tool to further emphasize and develop its ideas to maintain a Christian morality. This moral ideal infused an array of Conservative political actions in the economic and social realms. Rather than denounce sex education entirely, moral pressure groups and Conservatives recognized the importance of maintaining traditional sex education to instill their traditional moral values. These groups came to focus on the moral dangers of liberal sex education rather than also acknowledge its possible public health benefits. The New Right garnered political and public support in its attack on liberal sex education as they depicted it as harmful to youth, family, and the stability of the nation. This focus enabled the New Right to further justify the need for education and local government reforms passed in 1988.

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