A Queer Existence

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The lives of young gay men
in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Foreword

Life stories are wonderful things. Gay men who talk about their coming-out experiences, relationships and views of the world, and have these published, put their voices on the public record. Personal accounts are politically important: until 1986, when sex between men was made legal in New Zealand, to talk publicly about intimate gay lives was an act of bravery. These life stories are more important than ever in the twenty-first century. They tell of the intensity of formative friendships, partnerships, pleasures and conflicts. Their readers recognise aspects of their own lives while gaining new insights when they learn of others' experiences.

Mark Beehre has brought together 27 stories in *A Queer Existence*, a successor to his earlier volume *Men Alone — Men Together*. This new book reflects the lives of millennials, young men born in the late 1980s and early 1990s after the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill. New political challenges have asserted themselves in the years since. Some of the men participated in the campaign for marriage equality, others organised support groups for young queer people in their local communities, and several found a home in the Radical Faerie movement. Alongside activism, their life stories reflect educational and career opportunities, shifting forms of spirituality, continuing urbanisation, the rise of social media, and the emergence of new identity categories. The young men in this book are sentinels of a changing world, even though aspects of their lives remain recognisable to many baby boomers and Generation Xers. (One man's reference to Judy Garland echoes an even earlier generation.)

Mobility is an especially striking theme. 1984 was the year before the Law Reform debates ramped up in New Zealand, and as a 13-year-old I nervously watched Bronski Beat's music video about a young gay British man who left his family to move to London. 'Smalltown Boy' was a sad tale of a youth who felt pushed out of home, but most of the men in *A Queer Existence* moved to the cities out of a sense of excitement and opportunity. Some went further afield on OE, a New Zealand tradition, and tell of their time in Sydney, London or Berlin. These locations invited new ways of being. Domestic and international migrants, including the men who relay their experiences in this book, ask the question: 'Who am I in this new place?'

If place is an important marker of gay history and identity, so too is HIV/AIDS. The disease loomed large for earlier generations faced with treatments that were non-existent or difficult to tolerate. Its meaning and significance have shifted over time, including among the men interviewed for *A Queer Existence*. Mark Beehre conducted his earliest interviews in 2012, but he recorded his later ones during the era of PrEP. The earlier nervousness about HIV is familiar to me as a Gen Xer who learned of the latex imperative at an Icebreakers group in the early 1990s. We shared the view held by interviewee Reece Thomson: 'HIV does put the shits up me.'

This book shows that some historical shifts take place over a single generation, in this case as the result of advances in biomedical technology. Social media is technologically enabled, too. Some

of the men talk about the early Yahoo chat rooms and NZDating, two forums popular in the pre-smartphone era. Facebook and Grindr, both available as apps, have taken over. They offer electronic pathways to friendship, sexual connections and relationships that sit somewhere in the middle. As these young men show us, mates and lovers are not always mutually exclusive.

There are other kinds of fluidity. The men in *A Queer Existence* hint at the flexing of identity categories: sometimes 'gay' gives way to 'queer', 'pansexual' or a reluctance to give any label to sexuality. Jacob Dench suggests that 'A "queer" community sounds like one that's accepting of people of all different genders and sexual identities, but "gay" feels really narrow.' There is something else here, too: To what extent is being gay the basis of a man's life? These men shared a range of views. Some frame their sense of who they are primarily in terms of their sexuality, while others draw on different elements. As Jonathan Selu puts it, 'I realised that being gay means a lot of different things to different people.'

The concept of intersectionality, the intertwining of elements of social identity, has increasingly framed public commentary on identity. Some who feature in *A Queer Existence* define themselves as gay and Christian, for instance, gay and Māori, or gay and Pasifika. '[A]s I've been embracing my queer identity, I can't let that ever become more than my Māori identity. All boats will rise up with my tide of pride,' says Tongaporutu Neha, while Matt Sollis describes himself 'as a young Māori man and an artist with creative flair'.

The life stories in this book are fascinating, compelling and often intensely moving. Men reveal some of the hardest times in their lives: parents behaving badly, broken relationships, loneliness and social dislocation. But theirs are also inspiring stories of young gay men finding their place, working out how they want to be, and actively building connections with those around them. They tell of the contradictions of life in a time of neoliberal individualism that has also offered new opportunities for community building. These special stories will live on well into the future. One day they will provide valuable information for future generations of historians exploring gay life in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

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Introduction

The 1980s was an eventful decade in Aotearoa New Zealand's history. In 1981 the country erupted as police in riot gear confronted protestors opposed to the visit of the Springbok rugby team from South Africa, where the racially segregated apartheid regime still held sway. In 1985 Prime Minister David Lange's Fourth Labour Government, elected on a nuclear-free platform, refused entry to the American destroyer USS *Buchanan* and precipitated a tense downscaling of New Zealand's longstanding political and military alliance with the United States. That same year the country witnessed its first act of foreign terrorism on domestic soil when French secret service agents sunk the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour. And once again the nation was embroiled in controversy as politicians — and the public — debated the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, a piece of legislation that proposed to decriminalise sex between men and outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Men have, of course, been having sex with each other since the dawn of time, and different manifestations of what is now subsumed under the label 'homosexuality' have been described in practically every society, globally and historically, for which we have documentary or ethnographic evidence. Pre-European Māori seem to have been accepting of same-sex intimacy. Activist and art historian Ngahuia Te Awekotuku cites several chants and songs that reflect the enjoyment of sexuality in many forms, and describes being 'high for weeks' after she discovered, in the closed-storage section of the British Museum, a papa hou or carved treasure box decorated with seven males having sex with each other.[1] When the Reverend William Yate arrived in the Bay of Islands in the 1820s and scandalised the Church Missionary Society with his deficiencies in moral character, the Māori youths with whom he was accused of engaging in oral sex and mutual masturbation 'showed no shame'. They were familiar with these practices and unaware of any sinfulness attached to them.[2]

The well-known tale of the heterosexual lovers Hinemoa and Tutānekai also tells how Tutānekai lamented, 'I am dying of love for my [male] friend, my beloved, for Tiki.' It is from a nineteenth-century written account of this story that we take the word 'takatāpui', an intimate companion of the same sex.[3] Although the word fell out of use during the colonial period (before being revived in the late twentieth century as a descriptor of Māori gay, lesbian and transgender people), in rural areas takatāpui continued to be accepted by their whānau through to the 1930s and beyond.[4]

The colonisers brought with them a different set of values. The wholesale import of English law in 1858 carried with it the death penalty for 'buggery' (i.e. anal intercourse), although in 1867 this was reduced to imprisonment for between 10 years and life. From 1893 the addition of the undefined crime of 'indecent assault' made any sexual connection between men punishable by flogging, whipping, or imprisonment with hard labour. Consent was no defence. By 1954 flogging and hard labour had

been removed, and in 1961 the Crimes Act reduced the punishment for committing an 'indecent act' to five years' imprisonment, and for 'sodomy' between adults to seven years. Landlords who provided a place of resort for such 'crimes' by renting accommodation to male homosexuals could be imprisoned for up to 10 years.[5]

Nonetheless, men in New Zealand continued to seek out and enjoy same-sex erotic connections. During the colonial era, sex between men was common, and in his encyclopaedic work *Mates and Lovers* Chris Brickell outlines the range of spaces in which these connections were made: from the goldfields and hotels where bed-sharing was the norm, through to the theatres, music halls, public gardens, boarding houses and wharves of the burgeoning cities.[6] Ironically, much of the documentary evidence for this comes from court records. Prosecutions arose when the recipient of unwanted attention complained to the authorities, or a policeman stumbled upon an unwitting couple in the dark. Alongside the purely physical manifestations of desire, the nineteenth-century tradition of romantic friendship offered a framework for the formation of emotionally intense relationships between men, and left an archive of letters filled with effusive declarations of love and affection for later generations of historians to ponder.[7] For the more literary-minded, the classical metaphor of 'Greek love' represented a way of thinking about sex that elevated it from the base level of carnal lust to something altogether more noble and spiritual.[8]

The ways in which people think about same-sex acts, and the meanings they give to their own desires, have changed over time. Despite the cultural 'common sense' by which everyone today understands what we mean by 'homosexuality', when subjected to careful analysis the concept turns out to be a complex one that is often fraught with inconsistency and internal contradiction. Themes of 'same-sex genital sexuality, love and friendship, gender non-conformity and a particular aesthetic or political perspective' are all interwoven in sometimes ambiguous and contestable ways.[9] These themes are all played out in the queer histories of Aotearoa New Zealand* and the individual stories told in *A Queer Existence*.

For centuries, western European discourse around sex in general, and same-sex relations in particular, had focused on specific actions — 'sodomy', 'buggery', the 'crime against Nature' — that were viewed

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* The words used to describe same-sex relations and the people who engage in them have changed over time and I have tried to avoid using them anachronistically. 'Homosexual' has medical or clinical overtones and is now very rare as a term of self-reference. 'Gay' came into use in the 1970s and I have not applied it to men living in earlier periods. I have, however, taken 'queer' in its contemporary sense as a general descriptor for people, attitudes and behaviour that stand outside the norms of conventional heterosexuality and applied it to any point in time.

as sinful and immoral. New ideas emerged in the nineteenth century as men who particularly enjoyed sex with other men came to be seen as a particular type of person. It is claimed that photography was invented in 1839 by the French,[10] and if that is the case, then 'homosexuality' was invented 30 years later by the Germans. In 1869 a journalist living in Berlin, Karl-Maria Kertbeny, coined the word in a pamphlet demanding the abolition of criminal sanctions against 'unnatural acts'.[11]

The following year, German neurologist and psychiatrist Carl Westphal published a paper on 'contrary sexual feeling', and this was followed by a flood of other publications that set out to analyse a wide range of deviant sexual desires and practices in medical and pathological terms. Notable among them was Richard von Krafft-Ebing's 600-page *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which featured over 200 case histories, including many examples of the 'antipathic sexual instinct' that led men to pursue sex with other men.[12] Another physician, Havelock Ellis, in his six-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*,[13] also first published in German, articulated the concept of the 'congenital sexual invert' as a distinct category of individual with a particular psychosexual constitution that remained stable over time. As the twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault famously put it: 'The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.'[14]

In parallel with the sexological theories, there arose the beginnings of a homosexual emancipation movement. Among the first 'gay rights activists' was another German, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who in the 1860s began writing about the 'riddle of man-manly love' and described himself as a woman's soul in a man's body.[15] In 1894 the English radical socialist and intellectual Edward Carpenter privately printed a pamphlet entitled *Homogenic Love*, criticising the then-current psychiatric views of 'inversion' and arguing that homosexual love followed the same laws as heterosexual love, but with a special capacity for elevation to higher and more spiritual levels of comradeship.[16] American poet Walt Whitman celebrated the 'dear love of comrades' with lines such as 'The curious roamer the hand roaming all over the body . . . The limpid liquid within the young man . . . The like of the same I feel, the like of the same in others',[17] and remained a touchstone for men-loving men into the twenty-first century.

Although many of these writings were circulating in New Zealand by the early decades of the twentieth century,[18] their readership was largely restricted to those with professional, literary or other special interests, including those who wished to understand their own sexual and romantic feelings. What did bring the question of homosexuality to public attention at the end of the nineteenth century was a series of scandalising British court cases involving cross-dressing aristocrats suspected of male prostitution, telegraph messengers sidelining as rent boys to prominent members of the establishment, and especially the infamous trial in 1895 of playwright Oscar Wilde on charges of 'gross indecency'.

Wilde's predicament was extensively reported here as well as overseas,[19] and newspapers adopted

the veiled and euphemistic jargon that was characteristic of Victorian discourse around sex, referring to 'degeneracy' and 'unprintable' 'bestial' practices, so that public discussion of homosexuality perversely became a 'form of erasure' that refused to name the unmentionable thing about which it claimed to speak the truth.[20] Nonetheless, the scandal served to link the public perception of 'sexual inversion' with the stereotype of effeminacy, dandyism, aestheticism and artistic or literary pretensions. At the same time, these reports reinforced the 'feeling of normality in the average reader of the popular press', who could safely cover his titillation with a sense of moral outrage.[21]

In New Zealand, the early part of the twentieth century brought with it a certain hardening of attitudes. Officials expressed anxiety about the temptations of homosexuality in prisons and the military, passionate male friendships became questionable, and words like 'queen', 'Oscar' and 'homosexualist' appeared in the press. Newspapers like the lowbrow scandal-sheet *Truth* aroused anxieties — and titillation — with reports such as that of the iniquitous goings-on at the Lyttleton Gaol. Here a group of 'sexual beasts' with 'fancy monikers like "Rosebud", "Ruby" . . . and the like' were 'at the disposal of all and sundry for an inch of [tobacco]'.[22] In one breath the newspaper offered a vision of constitutional sexual deviancy, gender nonconformity, and a 'theory of corruptibility' whereby anyone might succumb to 'horrid temptations' for the price of a packet of cigarettes.

At the same time, the more technical language of the European sexologists gradually gained currency, and psychiatrists and other medical practitioners positioned themselves as experts and regulators of disordered erotic instincts. Meanwhile, novelist James Courage travelled abroad and read Havelock Ellis; he styled himself an 'invert', and wrote in his diary of his appealing affairs with 'normal men'.[23] Another writer, Eric McCormick, hinted at the notion of homosexuality as identity when he confided that he learned about 'the sexual habits of my own kind' by 'reading the classics in three languages'.[24]

By the end of the 1930s, distinct networks of men with homoerotic interests were beginning to form in New Zealand cities. Groups of friends met for parties in a secret, parallel world that intersected with those of the theatre and the artistic and bohemian set. Men continued to pick each other up in streets and public places, and welcomed overseas sailors into their arms, not to mention the US Marines who arrived in 1942.[25] The combat conditions of the Second World War fostered the formation of intense bonds of comradeship amongst servicemen; some of these relationships became sexual, and a few endured in peace time. Cross-dressing and gender inversion have been a feature of male homosexual communities since at least the eighteenth century, when the 'molly houses' appeared in London and other European cities, and wartime concert parties gave drag a public outing when 'female impersonators'

performed for their fellow soldiers.[26] Pubs and bars remained popular meeting places, and by the end of the war places like Wellington's Royal Oak had become established queer hangouts.

The acceleration of urbanisation during the 1950s and 1960s was accompanied by a consolidation of these subcultures. Every city had its favoured bars and pubs, and although they closed at 6 p.m., the coffee shops stayed open until late and attracted a clientèle of intellectuals and bohemians as well as homosexuals and petty criminals (and were occasionally subject to police raids). Queer men referred to themselves as 'camp', and, as always, there were 'dozens of parties', 'which you were either invited to or you weren't'.[27]

Homosexuality increasingly became the subject of public discourse. The 1954 Mazengarb Report on 'moral delinquency in children and adolescents' raised alarms about a possible increase in 'homosexual practices', a 'pattern of immorality . . . not previously manifest in New Zealand'.[28] Internationally, in the United States, the purges and FBI surveillance instigated by Senator Joseph McCarthy meant that accusations of homosexuality were readily followed by job loss, social stigma and family upheaval. In Britain, on the other hand, the 1957 Wolfenden Report recommended decriminalising consensual, private sex between men over the age of 21.[29]

Writing at the beginning of the 1990s, the American literary critic and queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued that the binary split between homosexuality and heterosexuality had become so deeply embedded in Western culture as to constitute an organising principle of twentieth-century thought and logic.[30] Heterosexuality became the culturally determined norm from which homosexuality deviates, and, just as any given person was assigned to a male or female gender, they were also assignable to a homo- or hetero-sexuality. As a consequence, all people now needed to construct their sense of self in terms of the marginalised and less desirable category of the homosexual. Gay men simply (or with difficulty) buy into that category, but straight men must set themselves up in opposition to it. Although Sedgwick's position is that the 'homo/heterosexual definition has been a presiding master term' from the late nineteenth century onwards, others have suggested that throughout the period leading up to the Second World War, and probably beyond, the realities of sexual definition were much more complex and unruly than a simple binarism would suggest.[31] However, in New Zealand, by the 1960s the dichotomy between homosexual and heterosexual was coming to be part of everyday thinking.[32]

The Dorian Society, formed in Wellington in 1962, was New Zealand's first formally constituted 'homophile' organisation. Seeking to counter the public perception of homosexuality as a threat to decent society, it cultivated an air of discretion and respectability, and aimed to help its members become well-adjusted citizens and avoid scandal.[33] Although the legal penalties for homosexual

offences had been reduced in 1961, the number of convictions skyrocketed as police pursued suspects ever more vigorously and embarked upon a campaign of entrapment in public toilets. In 1963, the Dorians established a legal subcommittee to promote law reform, the precursor of what eventually became the New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society. Reformist rather than radical, the society appealed for sympathy and understanding, presented homosexuality as an affliction or developmental anomaly rather than vice or immorality, and enlisted prominent liberal heterosexuals as members. In 1968 a petition with 75 signatures calling for law reform was rejected by Parliament.

The gay liberation movement took an altogether different approach and, internationally, traces its incendiary origins to New York, where in 1969 a police raid on the Stonewall Inn (popular with drag queens and other members of the 'queer community') ignited a series of riots that lasted for days and led to the formation of the Gay Liberation Front.[34] In the wake of Stonewall, gay liberation organisations — politically radical groups that challenged the social and sexual norms of bourgeois capitalism in a way that their more assimilationist predecessors like the Dorians had not — sprang up around the world. Gay liberation drew ideas from feminism, Marxism, pacifism and black rights, and came to embrace an identity politics in which homosexuality was seen not as a perverse behaviour, but as an innate part of the makeup of an oppressed minority group. 'Coming out' — the public declaration of one's sexuality — was a vital step in asserting one's true identity. The freedom to express an essential part of one's personhood was claimed as a basic human right. In iconic terms, Stonewall became the *anno domini* of gay liberation, a symbolic turning point in history; 'pre-Stonewall' marked the era of shame, secrecy and repression, while 'post-Stonewall' embraced the revolutionary and transformative pride of 'coming out'.

In New Zealand, gay liberation was launched in 1972 with a demonstration in Auckland's Albert Park, after the activist Ngahuia Te Awekotuku was refused a visa to enter the United States because she was lesbian.[35] 'Poofter, queen, queer, fairy, bugger, ponce, swish, faggot, mincer, . . . lesbo, lessie, homo, dyke . . . We are the people you warned us against,' proclaimed the New Zealand Gay Liberation Manifesto. 'We intend to stand firm and assert our basic rights. Remember: Gay is good. Gay is beautiful. Gay is angry. Gay is proud.'[36] Groups were soon set up in Wellington, Christchurch and Hamilton, and subsequently in provincial centres, and remained active throughout the 1970s. The first National Gay Liberation Conference was held later in 1972. In 1977 the National Gay Rights Coalition was formed as an affiliation of gay and lesbian organisations around the country and co-ordinated the first national Gay Pride week, featuring social events, theatrical performances, seminars and street demonstrations.

Gay liberation was part of a broad range of radical social movements that challenged prevailing attitudes of sexism, racism and 'homophobia', and called for widespread social transformation. The

liberationists insisted on being visible, and rejected the notion that lesbians and gays were second-class citizens. This led to conflict with more conservative and integrationist organisations such as the Dorians, who were focused more narrowly on amending the legislation that criminalised male same-sex activity.[37] As things unfolded, the age of consent became a major sticking point. A 16-year-old could consent to heterosexual intercourse, and the radicals demanded equal treatment for homosexual sex. The more conservative gay men would have been content to follow the British model, where in 1967 the age of consent for sex between men had been set at 20. The two attempts at law reform that were made during the 1970s foundered largely over this issue.

Any discussion of gay history must take into account the impact of HIV/AIDS and, in the New Zealand context, its critical role in the campaign for law reform. Beginning in 1981, the epidemic undercut the euphoria of gay liberation and devastated the gay community. In the words of one man: 'Everybody was down with HIV . . . Constantly tripping up to [the hospital], going to different funerals, sitting next to a mate who's recently come out of hospital himself: it was awful . . . I developed private little rituals . . . naming all the people I knew, trying to remember everyone and form a little mental picture of how they looked [when they were alive].'[38] The first generation of gay men to assert their right to sexual freedom thus fell victim to a terrifying, and at the time fatal, sexually transmitted virus. It was not until the advent of 'highly active antiretroviral therapy' in 1995[39] that HIV infection became a chronic but manageable illness compatible with an essentially normal lifestyle.

Pink Triangle, the newsletter of the National Gay Rights Coalition, ran its first story about AIDS in 1981,[40] the same year that as a Sixth Former I read *Time* magazine's early reports of outbreaks of *Pneumocystis* pneumonia and Kaposi's sarcoma in gay men. Because sex between men was illegal, the Department of Health was unable to promote safer-sex practices. Condoms in gay saunas would have been construed by the police as evidence of criminal activity, and in any case could not legally be supplied to persons under the age of 16. The safer-sex leaflets that appeared in the early 1980s were produced by gay community groups and funded from donations raised by the coalition. Health officials asked for copies to distribute to general practitioners. Activists argued that legislative change was essential in order to carry out an effective public health campaign around HIV/AIDS prevention, and eventually won the guarded support of the Health Department. On the other hand, in the debates that followed, conservative opponents of Law Reform added fears of infection and contagion to their rhetoric, and asserted that legalising gay sex would lead to the uncontrolled spread of disease.

RIGHT Auckland University Gay Liberation Group, Albert Park, c. 1973.
ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, LAGANZ MS PAPERS 0607-86-01; PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

BELOW Picket at Parliament following the conclusion of the National Gay Rights Conference, Easter 1978.
ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, LAGANZ MS PAPERS 0607-87-01; THE DOMINION/STUFF LTD

Just before the 1981 general election, Fran Wilde, a 'young urban liberal' who became the Labour MP for Wellington Central, was approached by an emissary from the gay community asking whether she would be prepared to sponsor a Bill for homosexual law reform.[41] She agreed, but the 'Equality Bill' that was proposed in 1983 was dropped after opposition from lesbian groups, who were concerned that it could potentially criminalise sex between women. However, in 1984 Fran Wilde met again with members of the gay and lesbian community, the Wellington Gay Task Force was formed (followed by similar groups in Auckland and Christchurch), and by the beginning of 1985 the Homosexual Law Reform Bill had been drafted. Originally it had two parts: the first decriminalised all homosexual acts between consenting males in private, with the age of consent of 16, while the second outlawed discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

From the start, lesbian involvement was an essential part of the campaign. Wellington activist Alison Laurie explained that during the 1950s and 1960s gay men and lesbians 'had all been outcasts together' and that 'when any form of homosexuality is illegal then every homosexual, male or female, is seen as criminal'.[42] Another key supporter, Tighe Instone, had seen the devastating effect on gay friends who had lost their jobs or otherwise had their lives 'wrecked' after being convicted or accused of homosexuality.[43] The human rights component of the Bill clearly also protected women's interests, but even when it was defeated the lesbian supporters 'stood solid'.[44] Many lesbians, as well as some gay men, had been involved in 'feminist, peace, anti-racist, socialist and other progressive politics',[45] and their expertise in organising marches and other political actions proved invaluable. On the other hand, much of the funding required came from gay men with established professional or business careers. Despite their differences, each needed the other.[46]

Fran Wilde initially believed that reform would have its best chance of success if publicity was avoided and lobbying restricted to Members of Parliament, who would have a conscience vote.[47] However, opposition arose as soon as she introduced her Private Members Bill in March 1985. A small group of reactionary politicians and businessmen immediately launched a petition against the Bill, which was taken up by the Salvation Army and circulated door-to-door and in workplaces, schools, churches and other institutions around the country,[48] leading many to sign under pressure or for fear of being outed. The petition was presented at Parliament in what activists described as a Nuremberg-style rally with rows of New Zealand flags, and the singing of hymns and renditions of the national anthem,[49] but some of the boxes of forms were nearly empty and there were many irregularities in the signatures.

Supporters of the Bill realised they would have to mobilise, and the Gay Task Force was backed up by other organisations: the more radical Campaign for Homosexual Equality, Heterosexuals Unafraid of Gays (HUG), and the Coalition to Support the Bill, which included trade unions and women's groups. The 16 months that followed represented the most intense period of political debate New Zealanders had

experienced since the Springbok Tour of 1981. Gay rights activists disrupted anti-Bill meetings and held rallies of their own. Street marches around the country attracted thousands of supporters. In Dargaville, one brave lesbian marched alone. In order to keep up morale and avert violence, organisers deliberately created a 'carnival atmosphere of balloons and fun'.[50] Members of HUG dropped leaflets, set up stalls, held meetings and pasted up posters with messages like 'Mums support the Bill — your child might be gay'.[51] As Gay Task Force spokesman Bill Logan commented, 'There was a traditional way of looking at gays as victims . . . We had to transcend the victim mode and show ourselves as strong political actors.'[52]

Although some more progressive churches, such as the Methodists, the Quakers, and certain groups of Anglicans and Presbyterians,[53] were supportive of reform, the bulk of the opposition came from conservative Christian groups who mounted an organised and well-funded campaign. American fellow-activists told Laurie that they thought the fundamentalist opponents of the Bill were being advised and partially funded by the US religious right, and indeed the homophobic American clergyman Lou Sheldon soon arrived to speak at meetings.[54] The presentation to Parliament of the anti-Bill petition was said to have been choreographed by another American, John Swann, a PR consultant whose fee was US$500 per day.[55] The Church of Christ placed advertisements in *The New Zealand Herald*, one of which was headlined 'God Defend New Zealand'.[56] At a meeting on Auckland's North Shore with MP Geoff Braybrooke and Pastor Richard Flynn — who soon became notorious for having called for the death penalty for homosexuals — gay and lesbian infiltrators 'disrupted proceedings with interjections, singing, whistleblowing and dancing in a giant queer conga line'.[57] The Christian-based Coalition of Concerned Citizens published a booklet, *The Social Effects of Homosexuality in New Zealand*,[58] which the Gay Task Force countered with *A Rebuttal to a Handbook of Homophobia*.[59]

At its beginning, the gay liberation movement had sought to throw off bourgeois society's repressive sexual roles and definitions and find the freedom to explore a 'polymorphous sexuality' where the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality disappeared.[60] There was a common thread here with lesbian-feminist politics, which asserted that 'any woman can be a lesbian' and presented lesbianism as a positive choice for all women.[61] However, as the campaign evolved, the supporters of Law Reform began to emphasise the idea of sexual orientation as an innate and fixed part of one's being. In large part this was strategic. Focusing on 'who we are' rather than 'what we do' put gay men (and lesbians) in the same category as ethnic and other minority groups and allowed an appeal to humanistic principles of human rights. Moreover, if sexual orientation was established early in life, then young people were not in danger of corruption and 16 was appropriate as an age of consent. 'Arguments of biological determinism' were 'more convincing for MPs and the public than a more political analysis.'[62] However, Chris Brickell argues that this change in emphasis may also have reflected a shift in societal beliefs about the nature of the self. During the 1970s people