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## Sensation and the Making of New Zealand Adolescence

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## Sensation and the Making of New Zealand Adolescence

### Abstract

*Many historians associate adolescent pleasures and subcultures with the mid-twentieth century. Sensations and their personifications, this article suggests, also formed a focus for commentary and experience during the second half of the nineteenth century and the years leading up to the First World War. There was a noisy public discussion around adolescence in New Zealand in which notions of sensation and pleasure played a key role. In scrutinizing a number of young, sensation-loving characters—larrikins and larrikinesses, mashers, dudes and the flapper—the discussion considers the intersections of social changes (urbanization and gendered work and leisure), cultural influences (literature and language), the significance of gender, and anxieties over morality and propriety. The making of New Zealand adolescence, I suggest, involved broad social transformations as well as the local rearticulation of internationally-inflected cultural ideas about sensation and its social control.*

### Introducing Adolescence

According to conventional wisdom, teenagers are an invention of the 1940s. They burst into public awareness as the Second World War drew to a close, wrapped in the heady embrace of motorbikes, milk bars, record shops, bobby socks and “petting.” With money to spend, the newly minted “teen-ager” embraced the myriad pleasures offered by an affluent post-war society, buying makeup, enjoying movies and poring over comics celebrating crime and sex.<sup>1</sup> As the 1940s gave way to the 1950s and '60s, the “teen-ager” came to signify a rebellious, anti-authoritarian breed of youth. Teenage subcultures took shape, from the USA to Europe and Australasia: the teddy boys, bodgies, widgies, mods and rockers. Perched halfway between childhood and adult status, the teenager was often a repository for adult anxieties.

Teenagers, though, were the products of a longer time span and a much more complex set of social processes than the conventional account implies.<sup>2</sup> There was little especially new about young people’s fondness for pleasure and sensation, for these themes defined youth in the nineteenth century too. This article focuses on New Zealand’s young people between 1860 and the First World War, and explores a little of the intertwined history of sensation and adolescence.

Historians of the nineteenth century have not previously considered this entanglement in any sustained way.<sup>3</sup> New Zealand youth reflected, adopted and modified international trends, and their experiences demonstrate how place and time structure young people's experiences.

Adolescence is both a social category and a set of collective and individual experiences.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars suggest the modern European and North American concept of adolescence took on a particular importance during the late nineteenth century. Middle-class boys and girls began to spend more time in secondary schooling and less in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> Ever-increasing numbers of school-based adolescents, in their half-way state between "childhood" and "adulthood," forged their own social milieus and pursued their own pleasures.<sup>6</sup> The following discussion draws upon a range of sources—newspaper and magazine reports, diaries, case files, visual materials and popular literature—in order to explore the ways in which nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealanders came to know and experience adolescence in general, and the relationship between youth and sensation in particular. During the second half of the nineteenth century, I suggest, sensation came to distinguish the youthful personality from his or her adult contemporaries.

In her recent work on Australian youth, Melissa Bellanta suggests that youth cultures emerge as a result of both "top down" and "bottom up" processes. On the one hand, concepts are imposed upon young people by those with the power to define: news media outlets, doctors, academics and influential cultural commentators. Youth movements and subcultures also develop from within, and their members may or may not speak in similar terms to the adults who presume to know about them.<sup>7</sup> Our sources reveal both representational and experiential aspects of adolescence.<sup>8</sup> Media reports are mostly prescriptive sources, outlining adults' perspectives, while diaries convey youthful understandings. Sometimes we can read between the lines of the newspaper reports, winnowing details of young people's own experiences from their hiding place among the adult agendas. When taken together, the available sources demonstrate both top-down and bottom-up constructions of adolescence, sensation and pleasure.

Symbolically, the discursive trope of sensation served to separate youthful follies from the relative sobriety of adulthood. As the opposite of self-control, that all-important Victorian concern, sensation was an important fulcrum on which questions of age and generation pivoted. First I address sensation in broad terms, with a particular focus on popular literature and its reception by adolescents and others. The next section explores how the trope of sensation came to be instantiated in different character types: "larrikins," "larrikinesses," "mashers," "girl mashers," "dudes," "dudines" and "flappers." These types often drew attention to the social boundaries around acceptable behavior for young men and women, and they tell us about the roles played by pleasure, urbanization, work, class and gender in transforming adolescent experience over time. The final section considers the broader patterning of adolescence, sensation, gender, work and social change during our period.

### Sensations, Boundaries

One evening in 1860, accountant John Jones addressed members of the Young Man's Mutual Improvement Society in Nelson. Jones talked of education,

“the cultivation of the senses and the discipline of the mind.” The young person is “naturally like a colt, wild and ungoverned,” he said, and “must be broken to the bit.” While “the exercise of the senses is naturally pleasurable to children and young people,” self-control and discipline made an adult.<sup>9</sup> For the young men of this mutual improvement society, sensation was firmly on the agenda.

The theme returned later that decade. In an 1869 article titled “Vain then Vile,” Presbyterian magazine *The Evangelist* warned of the perils sensation posed to the young. “The young maiden gives way to the love of dress and fondness of company—yields herself up to the fascinations and excitement of the ball-room, the theatre, and such-like ensnaring vanities,” claimed the *Evangelist*’s writer; she develops a “mere butterfly existence.”<sup>10</sup> The consequences for male youths were more severe. Sensation threatened “vanity and light-mindedness” and a future life of sexual dissolution as “the libertine or the rake, or, deeper still, the gross, degraded debauchee.” The writer continued: “The syren voice of pleasure, with its merry laugh and witching song, lures on and on, and faster, ever faster glides the current with its gay, thoughtless victim.”<sup>11</sup>

As the *Evangelist* article suggests, sensation vexed those of a religious persuasion.<sup>12</sup> Another commentator, this time on the letters page of Wellington’s *Evening Post*, made a similar point about the temptations of Victorian society, complete with biblical reference: “Opera or play, concert or penny-reading, ropedancing or walking-match, poem or sensation novel, the trail of the serpent is over them all.”<sup>13</sup> James Grant was an eccentric Dunedin preacher and pamphlet-writer. He worried about the actions of his fellow Christians, especially those who encouraged church picnics. Such pleasures, he fumed in 1875, are “perfectly irrational and tend to degrade the mind at the very dawn of its existence . . . They are earthly, sensual and devilish.”<sup>14</sup> More generally, Grant suggested, public holidays “are simply a miserable apology for drunkenness and dissipation.”<sup>15</sup> Others backed away from such extremes of view. Completely “querulous” mothers and fathers, warned *The White Ribbon*, the newspaper of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, denied all “fun and frolic,” but this created its own problems: young people “form[ed] the habit of going out to seek the pleasure denied them at home.”<sup>16</sup> Still, the general principle held. Sensation and pleasure were the preserve of the young in particular. If badly handled, they threatened to divert adolescents into a life of hedonism and degradation.

Grant was one of the few to fret about church picnics, but popular literature caused others to worry. Some literary thrills were doubtless acceptable: during the 1890s, for instance, Thames adolescent Jessie Hetherington treated herself to a “luscious diet” of stories that made girls’ boarding schools “seem a romantic, exciting and enviable life.”<sup>17</sup> Other genres were more problematic. “Sensation novels,” serialized works dealing with “the mysteries and secrets surrounding questions of insanity, illegitimacy, sexual transgression, or mistaken identity,” were blamed for much of the troublesome feeling.<sup>18</sup> The *Evangelist* claimed these examples “are greedily devoured, and soon displace, as they give a distaste for, all more profitable reading. And thus the demoralizing and drifting process goes on.”<sup>19</sup> In this view, “the innocent enjoyment of the pleasant excitement” gave rise to self-gratification and indulgence. None of this is to say that sensation novels weren’t widely available and popular. The novels—*The Woman in White*, *Armada*, *East Lynne* and the rest—were read by women in New Zealand’s towns and men on the farms.<sup>20</sup> Booksellers offered mail-order copies for sale and the theatres

adopted the novels for the stage.<sup>21</sup> But such literature became a particular problem when enjoyed by the young.<sup>22</sup>

Youthful readers avidly devoured this worrisome literature. In February 1892, law student Charles Knight bought a copy of Ernest Feydeau's 1858 novel *Fanny*, and read it on board ship as he sailed from Christchurch to Wellington. In his own diary, Knight noted: "We left at 6 o'clock. I turned in at 9 and read the Introduction to *Fanny*. Had Dean Jacobs in my cabin as well as two other clergymen."<sup>23</sup> *Fanny* was a tale of a young man's affair with a married woman ten years his senior.<sup>24</sup> It contained lots of overblown sentimentality and a moderate amount of "voluptuous thrilling" and bodice ripping.<sup>25</sup> On page 51, "her white satined bodice swelled and strained to the pressure of her bosom," and on page 137 "she seized my head in both her hands, and kissed me convulsively on my lips." In the midst of reading, Charles Knight noticed "There was among others a Mrs Jones and two daughters on board. One of these was rather good looking and possessed a neat ankle which she seemed to take pride in showing."<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the critics were right: such books sensitized readers, Knight among them, to the pleasures of the flesh. It was only a small step from the soft sensuousness of *Fanny*'s protagonist—enjoyed in the presence of three clergymen, no less—to the "neat ankle" of Knight's fellow passenger. At any rate, the lad's enthusiasm was undimmed. Two mornings later, he wrote: "Read *Fanny* in bed, got up in time to have a bath."<sup>27</sup> This was not the first time Knight enjoyed such novels. Only the previous month he worked his way through Paul Bourget's *A Love Crime*—"a story of a man who seduces his friend's wife although he did not love her, and the remorse he feels in consequence"—and then passed his copy on to friends.<sup>28</sup>

Some newspapers' writers—and not only the overtly religious—were horrified at this racy French literature. In 1860 the *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle* complained about the "gloomy foulness of Feydeau" and derided the French as "horribly immoral."<sup>29</sup> The *Wairarapa Daily* told of peril at the subscription library in the town of Masterton, where a mother discovered her son reading a "wretched novel," and another subscriber found a book of poems "in the most abominable and filthy slang that the English language is capable to be employed in."<sup>30</sup> Sadly, curious newspaper readers—and future historians—were not informed of the names of either volume.

Sensation was not only the preserve of the bodice-rippers and novelettes that documented affairs and jealousies in overblown language. Other adolescents read *The Dead Bird*, a salacious late-nineteenth century paper published in Australia and widely available in New Zealand. This time, libraries and bookshops were not the sources. Rail passengers on the Oamaru to Dunedin line could pick up a copy from a hawker who made his way from carriage to swaying carriage, and indulge themselves in tales of divorce, debauchery, sodomy and the seamy underside of middle-class life. There were thrills and titillation aplenty. Detractors decried *The Dead Bird* as "vile and impure"; they complained about the text and the saucy cartoons: line drawings of short bathing costumes, lacy bloomers and all-but-bared breasts (Figure 1).<sup>31</sup>

Dunedin schoolboys shared around copies of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, an early midwives' guide and marriage advice manual that told of sex and reproduction. They swapped sensational pamphlets too.<sup>32</sup> One such tract, penned by L. L. Smith, described "man in relation to his sexual nature," and others detailed



Figure 1. *The Dead Bird*: breasts, bloomers and challenges to Victorian modesty. Some of the images are numbered and captioned: #2 is “She’s got ‘a little ankle, a pretty little foot,’” and #4 reads “They’re afloat.” *The Dead Bird*, November 10, 1889, 4.

“various sexual crimes and how they were done.”<sup>33</sup> Percy Ottywell, a youth committed to Seacliff asylum after he fell in love with another boy, told the superintendent: “I came to read things like that until after a while they seized quite a fascination over me. I don’t know why I read them either because they were quite repugnant to my feelings but somehow I could not help it; one thing led to another. I actually took a pleasure in reading the beastly things about sodomy and masturbation.”<sup>34</sup>

As Peter Gay notes in the European context, “licentious” books—including overtly pornographic examples—could easily be found by those who knew where to get them.<sup>35</sup> But Truby King, superintendent at Seacliff, was something of a campaigner against unrestrained pleasure. Like the newspapers, he had little good to say about the French. Paris, he wrote, was “the city of free-love and early sexual indulgence.”<sup>36</sup> King was enraged by Zola’s *Nana*, a novel about an adolescent prostitute. In 1890, in a two-part article titled “A Plea for stringent legislation in the matter of corrupt and immoral publications,” King warned against the printing presses’ role in disseminating “immorality.” He worried that “useless and pernicious” publications—*The Dead Bird* among them—would attack “the weak points of adolescence” and lead to enduring moral harm.<sup>37</sup> If that weren’t bad enough, King claimed over half of all New Zealand’s young men had read *The Elements of Social Science; Or Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion*, a book “freely scattered throughout the community.” This paean to “sexual indulgence in adolescence” railed against abstinence, recommending frequent intercourse for the young.<sup>38</sup> “The function of control,” King wrote in response to such books, “should be assiduously cultivated in youth.”<sup>39</sup>

Working class youths—among whom rates of literacy were rapidly increasing—enjoyed the “penny dreadfuls” (or “penny horrors”) that told of heroism, larceny, mayhem and murder.<sup>40</sup> These were less an evocation of sexuality than the French novel, *The Dead Bird* or the circulated pamphlets, but pleasure appeared in other guises. The “sensational” and “thrilling” exploits of *Revolver Dick* and *Jim, the Slayer of the Prairies* poured across New Zealand shores from America and England, along with the likes of *Sweeny Todd*, *Varney the Vampire*, *Deadwood Dick* and *Spring Heeled Jack*.<sup>41</sup> One writer for the *Taranaki Herald* claimed the “low class” and “trashy” books “debauch[ed] the minds of thousands of our young who are, of course, the consumers of this class of literary offal.”<sup>42</sup> This was a fairly typical type of complaint. The cover art caused concern too. According to the *Observer*, a typical example showed “a schoolboy of about fourteen, (a fainting and beauteous maiden thrown across his shoulder like a railway rug), defying a host of howling savages.”<sup>43</sup>

The “thrilling” penny dreadfuls spurred an “unhealthy excitement” and—the *Evening Post* claimed—are “doubtless very bad for the puny half-developed creatures who are the chief patrons of this class of literature.”<sup>44</sup> Sensation quickly slid into another, not unrelated trope: foolishness. The *Tuapeka Times* had this to say about penny dreadfuls: “Shop boys and the factory hands, pit boys and telegraph boys devour them eagerly, and fill their foolish brains with rubbish about highwaymen, pirates, and other objectionable people.”<sup>45</sup> The trope of foolishness, like sensation, ran against the grain of Victorian social norms. It stood in direct opposition to the demands for self-control, thrift and application, the ability to manage one’s own affairs in a sensible, self-directed way.<sup>46</sup> Adulthood required these attributes in abundance and, accordingly, such attributes delineated youthfulness from adult status.

Complaints about reading tastes did not always circulate in a top-down way. Sometimes opposition came from young people as well as adults. In 1895, members of the Gore Young Men’s Literary Society, an organization with its roots in the temperance movement, worried that “the taste of the young men of the present day seems to crave for literature of a frivolous and trashy nature exciting to a high degree and calculated (if indulged in to excess) to produce the most baleful

results.”<sup>47</sup> Luckily, there was a solution at hand. The Literary Society had been established for the purposes of “mutual improvement” and “intellectual culture.”<sup>48</sup> Its members turned their backs on the “excess” of sensation novels and penny dreadfuls. Instead they engaged in worthwhile discussions of Shakespeare and Emerson, archaeology and abstinence.<sup>49</sup>

Uncontrolled sensation, the ideologists concluded, could be a problem. Poor literature, with its incitement of thrills and unbridled excess, was blamed for countless juvenile crimes in the streets and backyards of New Zealand’s towns and cities: the robbery of a tobacconist’s shop, an attempt to “stick up” a neighbor, a homicide, and multiple counts of arson.<sup>50</sup> The association between youth and wayward pleasure strengthened as tales of thrill-seeking “juvenile delinquents” spread through the newspapers during the 1880s and ’90s. Sensation served as a boundary marker, with a hedonistic childhood and adolescence lying on one side of the imaginary line, and a more restrained adulthood on the other.

### Sensation Personified

During the late nineteenth century, and on into the early years of the twentieth, a number of different character types embodied the trope of sensation. The larrikin, the larrikiness, the masher, the girl masher, the dude, the dudine and the flapper were all widely imagined as adolescents, aged between 13 and their early 20s.<sup>51</sup> The term “larrikin” had entered circulation during the 1870s, in Australia as well as New Zealand.<sup>52</sup> In 1875, the *Hawkes Bay Herald* reported that “larrikinism is making itself unpleasantly felt in Napier.”<sup>53</sup> Five years later, Wellington’s *Evening Post* newspaper offered further detail. The larrikin, the *Post*’s journalist suggested, was a part-time “colonial street boy”:

A larrikin is rarely or never seen in daylight. Indeed in most cases it is only really after dusk that he becomes a larrikin. During the day he is a school-boy, errand-boy, office-boy, factory-boy, or butcher-boy, and maintains this disguise with tolerable success until the shades of night have fallen . . . [then he enjoys] smoking in clumps at street corners, spitting on the pavement, and insulting females.<sup>54</sup>

Adolescents in Christchurch recognized larrikinism when they saw it in their contemporaries. The practice, they wrote, involved “mafficking”: mucking about and making “a fair amount of noise and clangour.”<sup>55</sup> One Wellington adult complained about “a gang of larrikins” carousing in the streets, “yelling like fiends, and generally making themselves merry.”<sup>56</sup> William Wright, 14, offers one example. Wright was arrested in 1889 for a breach of the peace, and imprisoned for a month (Figure 2).

There seem to have been subtle differences between the New Zealand larrikin and his counterparts elsewhere. In the Australian context, Bellanta suggests the late-nineteenth-century larrikin was a working class adolescent, a “profoundly urban” phenomenon in an era of rapid industrialization.<sup>57</sup> Like his urban European correlate the “hooligan,” New York’s “soap lock” street gangsters, and Manchester’s “scuttlers,” the Australian larrikin belonged to a distinct subculture.<sup>58</sup> He marked this belonging sartorially, sometimes with “a grey tweed sac suit, larrikin style,” patterned scarf or striped shirt.<sup>59</sup> The New Zealand newspapers told of the larrikin’s “bell bottom pants, high heeled boots [and] slouch





**Figure 2.** William Wright, larrikin. Aged 14 and with fair hair and grey eyes, Wright was arrested early in 1889 and charged with larceny. Later the same year, an unspecified bout of rowdiness gave rise to a charge of breaching the peace—and a sentence of one month in prison. Before fingerprinting became common early in the twentieth century, prisoners displayed their hands in order to reveal scarring or any other notable characteristics. New Zealand Police Museum.

hat.”<sup>60</sup> Unlike Bellanta’s Australian larrikins, the New Zealand equivalents included lower middle class youths as well as those of the working class. The theatre larrikin, usually an office boy rather than a street urchin, occupied the pit of Christchurch establishments, “hurling insults and ridicule at ladies and gentlemen in the stalls.”<sup>61</sup>

Many commentators thought city spaces were the most morally corrupting. In the new world as well as the old, juvenile delinquency “was associated with the growth of industrial cities.”<sup>62</sup> One writer, with the unlikely name of Reverend Vicesimus Lush, regarded New Zealand’s factories as crucibles of corruption. Lush reported that “foul stories and jokes circulate” among both boys and girls in their workrooms, and insisted that young people are “morally corrupted at an alarming rate.”<sup>63</sup> Most of New Zealand’s larrikins lived in the larger cities and towns, but not all did. Any smaller settlement with a street corner might provide a larrikin’s

necessary infrastructure. Lepperton was a hamlet of a few hundred folk. Its police investigated a disturbance one winter's evening in 1883, when several boys shouted and jumped up and down outside the district schoolroom while a music practice took place inside. They hurled bad language—"you bloody rotten whore, you stinking bugger"—and one of them accused the music teacher's wife of "sleeping with nearly all the larrikins in the town."<sup>64</sup> After some deliberation the police decided not to take action, and, unlike William Wright, the boys got away without penalty.<sup>65</sup>

Larrikins and their cousins—"hoodlums," "roughs," "hobble-de-hoys," and "youthful ruffians," as the newspapers also referred to them—personified untamed sensation, both on the streets and in the spaces of leisure and consumer culture.<sup>66</sup> "It is by his pleasures that the larrikin is diagnosed," declared the *Grey River Argus*; "he lives for enjoyment." In the larrikin's case, these pleasures were usually antisocial. As a young lad, the *Argus* insisted, the larrikin enjoys "heckling Chinamen at all hours, or hustling Europeans at night."<sup>67</sup> As the larrikin gets older and "the 'teens are drawing to an end," he liked to interrupt public meetings and frequent the pubs, where he rolled drunks.<sup>68</sup> Some, it was said, liked to set fire to young women's dresses as they passed down the streets.<sup>69</sup>

Some larrikins were committed to the care of the state. While William Wright found himself in prison, in 1910 nineteen-year-old Oscar Fry was sent to a school for "feeble-minded" boys. In Fry's file, headmaster George Benstead wrote: "Lazy, indolent boy much given to loafing, cigarette smoking, hanging round street corners, an admirer of the music halls. Not feeble minded but merely a larrikin who would probably have developed into a complete street hooligan at home [in Wellington]."<sup>70</sup> Fry's disposition to pleasure and lassitude (music halls, smoking and loitering) were probably infectious. Benstead considered him "likely to have a very bad influence on other boys," and the headmaster had the lad shifted to Burnham Industrial School, a reformatory institution with a reputation for roughness.<sup>71</sup>

Smoking was a worrisome distraction from a life of application, and it seemed as though the larrikin indulged more than others. In 1889, the *Wairarapa Daily* complained about young men in Masterton who spent their evenings "lounging about Queen Street, indulging in tobacco and conversation."<sup>72</sup> During a parliamentary debate in 1903, one Member of Parliament complained that "boys, when they were of the age to enter into the serious work of the world, found themselves discounted in their energies" by the lure of tobacco.<sup>73</sup> For his part, the Attorney General claimed that many youths, "wishing to indulge in what to them was the pleasure of smoking," resorted to picking up the cigarette butts lying about the streets.<sup>74</sup>

Alcohol was considered at least as dangerous as tobacco.<sup>75</sup> "Under the influence of *coculus indicus*"—beer, possibly adulterated to increase its strength—Tauranga's youths hung out under verandahs, talking about racing sweeps and using filthy language.<sup>76</sup> The newspapers were not the only ones to express such concerns. Members of the Gore Young Men's Literary Society complained that "there are many young men who have as much backbone as a jelly-fish, and their chief aim is to see who can drink the most whisky without getting drunk."<sup>77</sup> For some young people, as well as adult newspaper writers, true character had its basis in sobriety and self-control. Gore's literary youths followed the prescription for the transition from boyhood to manhood: in E. Anthony

Rotundo's words, a "sense of carefully guided passion" and a move away from "frivolous behavior."<sup>78</sup>

A figure of excess, the larrikin crossed the line between acceptable enjoyments and troublesome transgressions. While his pleasures could be criminal—rolling a drunk for a thrill, for instance—they could also be embodied or erotic. At Te Aroha's mineral springs, where the private bath house had no ceiling, patrons worried about "larrikins' admiring women bathers from over the cubicle walls."<sup>79</sup> At other times youths made an exhibition of themselves. In Christchurch, naked larrikins cavorted near the Heathcote River and sat around camp fires, "singing songs and making filthy remarks to one another."<sup>80</sup> Sometimes larrikins embraced sexual excess more overtly. *The Press* newspaper reported that up to twenty Christchurch larrikins frequently visited a house where young women had been living off the income from prostitution. Fights broke out and arrests were made.<sup>81</sup>

There was a profoundly gendered dimension to this reporting of larrikin sexuality. While the newspapers occasionally reported that male larrikins resorted to sexual escapades, journalists tended to define the larrikiness, his female counterpart, by her sexual interest.<sup>82</sup> No passive observer of male sexuality, the larrikiness was a participant in her own right.<sup>83</sup> According to the *Observer*, a magazine filled with gossip, larrikinesses came out at a Sunday night dance in the spa town of Te Aroha:

The female larrikin element was well represented, under their well-known leader. No doubt they thought their conduct excited admiration in the breasts of the gentlemen present but had they only known the disgust which was felt at their immodest whispers and bold glances, they would perhaps have conducted themselves better.<sup>84</sup>

The young Te Aroha women might have disturbed the local "gentlemen"—or so the *Observer* claimed—but others found their attentions welcome. In 1883, the same magazine told of two larrikinesses and a young man on a train, in a (mild) "orgy" of kissing:

The orgies of this interesting trio are so unseemly as to disgust and annoy the more respectable travellers. A gentleman, who travelled in the same carriage on a recent occasion, says he was much struck with the hushed appearance of the girl's face when the train emerged from the tunnel, and he fancies that she and the male larrikin had been engaged in oscillatory pastimes under cover of the darkness. Now that public attention has been directed to this unseemly behaviour, perhaps the frolicsome trio will see the propriety of subduing their too boisterous feelings.<sup>85</sup>

Nearly ten years later, in 1892, the *Otago Witness* decried the larrikiness in stronger terms. Typically aged between twelve and sixteen, "with blasphemy on her lips and depravity stamped on her brow," she strolled through the streets at night giggling, jeering and "sneering at respectability." The larrikiness "emerge[d] into the streets decked in gaudy finery to parade about with [her] 'boy,'" all the while "speed[ing] along the road to Destruction in short frocks and frizzled hair." Her public and private personae were equally problematic. At home, wrote the *Witness*, she "lounges about" and reads novels. "Versed in all that a modest

maiden should *not* know,” outside the domestic setting she “is eager to practise her arts on every representative of the male sex she may chance to meet.” The larrikiness has a great “capability for sensual pleasures”; “self indulgence is natural to [her], self-restraint well nigh impossible.”<sup>86</sup>

If the male larrikin was mostly a loiterer and a petty criminal, the larrikiness transgressed notions of female modesty and decorum. This active desire defined the larrikiness in the public mind, a definition that spoke of both adult anxieties and young people’s gendered behavior. In the period before the First World War, Robertson writes, boys were considered most at risk from those who would teach them a life of crime, girls from sexual corruption.<sup>87</sup> Conversely, DuBois and Gordon have noted that some young nineteenth-century women took “pleasure and pride in their rebellion.”<sup>88</sup> So too did some of those who spent time in New Zealand’s public spaces—the wharves as well as the streets. In 1885, the night watchman on Wellington’s waterfront complained that “young girls are constantly attracted for immoral purposes on board of vessels lying alongside the wharf.”<sup>89</sup> Periodization is significant here, as we will see: as the nineteenth century wore on, young women came to spend increasing amounts of time in public spaces.

If larrikins were susceptible to criminality, smoking, drinking and “penny dreadfuls,” and larrikinesses enjoyed public display and sexual assertiveness—sex with sailors included—then gendered pleasures played out somewhat differently in the case of the “masher” and the “dude.” Unlike most among the larrikin culture, the “masher” and the “dude” tended to be middle class. Young mashers and dudes showed little interest in rowdiness, but embodied the larrikin’s embrace of pleasure and sensation in other ways.

Like the larrikin and the larrikiness, the dude and the masher attracted a lot of media attention. Both were usually imagined as young men: of the dude, the *Observer* wrote, “the silken down of adolescence peeps faintly above his tender mouth.”<sup>90</sup> The dude and the masher were more-or-less interchangeable, both made an appearance in the New Zealand news media, but they had different national origins. The dude was an American creation while the masher was English, an import from the bars and dance halls of Soho.<sup>91</sup> In Victorian London, Forth writes, young clerks and shop workers “compensated for their gray working lives with flamboyant displays of color in their clothing,” and “manifested an effete sartorial style as fashionable ‘gents’ or ‘mashers’.”<sup>92</sup>

New Zealand’s dudes and mashers, the newspapers suggested, were fond of their appearance; they placed “an extravagantly undue stress on dress.”<sup>93</sup> With his “bright locks of hair dipped in cologne,” the dude paraded through the streets, theatres and drawing rooms of the colony.<sup>94</sup> While the larrikin nudged the boundaries of masculine boisterousness, the dude did the opposite. In articles with such titles as “A cured darling: the effect of maternal coddling on the boy of the period,” the newspapers described him as an “effeminate specimen of masculinity,” cosseted by his mother and indulging “in caramels, cigarettes and late hours.”<sup>95</sup> The *North Otago Times* and the *Observer* both poked fun at him:

Pick it up tenderly!  
Touch it with care!  
Fashioned so slenderly!  
Give it some air!

Let not the wind brush it  
 With touch that is rude.  
 There, soft! You may crush it,  
 For it is a dude!<sup>96</sup>

His bang-tail coat, cigaw,  
 His cane of pattern snobbery  
 His style of saying "Aw,"  
 And all that sort of bobbery

He minces on the herb,  
 Like frying bacon-rasher,  
 Oh! he is most superb,  
 This dude, this lady masher.<sup>97</sup>

With his "pretty" looks, his cane, coat-tails and "toothpick shoes"—and his "worship of beauty, grace and delicacy"—the masher "lives a life of effeminate self-indulgence."<sup>98</sup> Artistic and a little conceited, he wore sensation on his sleeve. "His intellectual power, such as it is, goes into music and house decoration. . . [s]ometimes he adds a little erratic poetry, sometimes a little luscious fiction."<sup>99</sup> In this sense, he was perhaps not so different from the larrikiness, with her "capability for sensual pleasures."<sup>100</sup>

In the years before Oscar Wilde's trial, after which time the media often associated effeminacy with homoeroticism, the effeminate dude or masher sought female companionship—not other men.<sup>101</sup> The term "mash" was a synonym for "flirt"; the masher was a young man prone to flirting with young women (a "lady masher," in the poem reprinted above).<sup>102</sup> During the 1890s, the *Observer's* gossip columns taunted mashers and their admirers across the country. Whangarei's "Mairtown Masher" was "doing the heavy with two young ladies."<sup>103</sup> Conversely, some lasses tried to snare a masher for their very own.<sup>104</sup> In New Plymouth, "A.N. and J.C. are doing the esplanade a great deal lately. Are you trying to get a masher girls?"<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, in Thames, "the Hape sisters are still seeking for mashers. Will no one have pity on them, as Ma is their only escort."<sup>106</sup>

The handsome masher could be the envy of other young men, as the *Wairarapa Daily* newspaper revealed in January 1889, not without a whimsy of its own:

A report has reached us of a misadventure which befell a certain Adonis living in Masterton, through the jealousy of others of the 'masher' tribe, who find themselves totally eclipsed in the feminine circle whenever this handsome youth appears to view. Burning with revenge and wounded self-esteem a party of them awaited his approach just as the shades of eve came slowly down, and the more-pork awakened from her dell. They waited and stood on a bridge and as the innocent favourite of the fair sex essayed to cross the structure he was ruthlessly seized by his less fortunate rivals and remorselessly plumped into the cress grown creek beneath.<sup>107</sup>

In parading their love of sensation—and their weakness for romance—mashers and dudes were seen often as foolish. Loose with money and fond of

horse-racing, gambling and night-time entertainments, they “dissolved what original power [they] may have had in strong waters, excitement, and late hours.”<sup>108</sup>

As Forth suggests in the English context, the masher was not entirely a media creation, even though the newspapers no doubt helped to propel the phenomenon. Mashers made their appearance in young people’s own writing too. Early in 1893, law student Charles Knight made his way home to New Zealand from a holiday in Sydney, Australia. In August, he wrote in his diary: “Ethel had just returned from Sydney [and] she has been stopping with us. She was full of news about the kids. Alias seems to have blossomed out as the masher of Neutral Bay & fallen a victim to Carmel and Norma.”<sup>109</sup> Like their contemporary larrikinesses, Carmel and Norma appear as dominant figures in Alias’s scene, taking control of young men’s intimate interests. Self-styled mashers lived in New Zealand cities too. Frederick Gibbs, a nineteen-year-old scholar, lived in the provincial city of Nelson and regarded the masher with distain. Gibbs’ 1885 diary includes the following entry: “Melville making short stay with Hudsons 2 doors off. Has come out awful masher with stick etc! Of course I take no notice but am rather disgusted. Elder brother’s influence I sup[pose].”<sup>110</sup> In both Knight’s and Gibbs’ accounts, a young man “blossomed out” or “came out” as a masher, sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly, occasionally under the influence of others. Frederick Gibbs’s comments aside, the masher was not always negatively thought of. Charles Knight regarded his masher friend with obvious affection: Alias was one of the “kids.” Other youths fashioned themselves in masher garb. Figure 3 shows a Masterton lad of about fourteen, the local magistrate’s son Jack von Sturmer. With his cane, tailored jacket, tight leggings and pointy shoes, our masher subject stands proudly before the camera.

What of young women? While some looked out for mashers on the esplanades and in the suburbs, other adolescent girls inverted the gender order on their own account. Just as the male masher repudiated the codes of robust, sensible, colonial masculinity in search of effete sensations, his female equivalents rejected softness and feminine charm. The “girl masher,” complained the *Otago Witness*, was an “angular, bony, hard-mouthed girl, whose sole delights are in masculine pursuits and masculine imitation, and has nothing of her sex but its desire of domination, and its sense of irresponsibility.”<sup>111</sup> The “girl masher” emerges from the record as a youthful “New Woman,” the seeker of physical independence and freedom.<sup>112</sup>

Media responses to this new figure ranged from the neutral to the hostile. The *Observer* wrote: “[t]he dudine, or female masher, has been for some time a recognized feature in English cities, and she would seem to be coming to the front in Auckland also.”<sup>113</sup> Like the male masher, her sartorial qualities defined her to some extent. The “dudine” could be spotted wearing a “high collar and flying tie”; she carried “a sharp-pointed parasol in lieu of the dude cane, and is often accompanied by an English pug terrier.”<sup>114</sup> The dudine or “female masher” dabbled in men’s dress: “her hat is made at a man’s shop, so is her trim little jacket, so are her innumerable waistcoats.”<sup>115</sup> “The girl dude is absurd,” concluded *The Press*, “for she never succeeds in looking either ladylike or gentlemanly.”<sup>116</sup> As McNeil writes in his analysis of “macaroni masculinity”—a European precursor to the masher’s cultural peregrinations—clothing spoke of “the power of fashion as a modern commodity” to provoke social anxieties.<sup>117</sup> It represented both gendered display and embodied pleasure: the cut and look of fabric, and the way it felt on a body moving through a range of social and geographical spaces.



**Figure 3.** Jack von Sturmer, masher, 1888. Note the cane and pointy shoes. PA1-q-962-18-3, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Dress was one thing, behavior another. While the male masher was considered effeminate, the “female masher” claimed men’s social prerogative as well as their clothing. She “is the woman who laughs loudly, talks at the top of her voice, takes the pavement and elbows the crowd to the right and the left . . . there is no slang or popular vulgarity with which she is not acquainted.” At the seaside, her favorite habitat, “she hitches up her clothes as if she were a sailor.” There was even a suggestion of romantic transgression. At a dance, claimed the *Observer*, “she evidently finds the opposite sex so insipid that she seizes upon the first girl she comes across, and whirls her round the room.”<sup>118</sup> Clothing was the first in a chain of challenges to gender boundaries. The wearing of men’s waistcoats gave way to the sailor hitch and then to forsaking men for women at a dance. In this whirlwind of pleasure—from the snug fit of a tailored jacket to the crisp air and foam of the seaside and the whirl of the dance floor—the female masher (or “girl dude”) shied away from convention. At the same time, by pointing up the transgressions, her newspaper presence reinforced definitions of acceptable femininity.

In this respect, there is a degree of continuity between the “female masher,” the “larrikiness” and, on the international stage, Eliza Lynn Linton’s “girl of the period.” Linton, an English novelist, complained in 1868 about young women’s pursuit of pleasure and unseemly self-assertion, a move away from innocence, self-sacrifice and aspirations to motherhood.<sup>119</sup> Such threads connected time, theme and place.

### Adolescent Sensations in Time and Space

Sensation was evoked in multiple ways in nineteenth-century New Zealand, and each time it worked to define adolescence and adulthood, normality and transgression. The masher and the girl masher, the dude and the dudine, along with their antagonistic cousins the larrikin and the larrikiness, exemplified these shifts. All these young people wanted different kinds of sensations than those regarded as legitimate, whether they involved “luscious fiction,” canes and toothpick shoes, or the thrill of making a noise and rolling drunks. Sometimes we hear snippets of adolescents’ language. One court file recalls Lepperton’s larrikins shouting about “rotten whores” and “stinking buggers.” Another file tells of Michael McKay, a drunken Dunedin twenty-year-old sentenced to three months’ imprisonment in 1908. McKay passed a group of men and women on their way to church and yelled: “Look at that pack of Roman Catholic bastards standing there. They are a lot of fucking cunts. They are all con[vict]s and prick suckers.”<sup>120</sup>

Many adolescent pleasures were enabled by elements of the consumer cultures of their time: the sensation novels, penny dreadfuls, theatrical performances, waistcoats, perfume, cigarettes and beer (both straight and adulterated).<sup>121</sup> The impact of these items varied: if the thrill-fuelling penny papers encouraged the wayward into criminal activity, the masher’s cologne and caramels were the accessories of a heterosexually-oriented effeminacy. Our cast of youthful characters adopted different kinds of consumer objects as their own. As Tosh suggests in the English context, a growing consumer culture also fostered an increase in young people’s expectations.<sup>122</sup> New Zealand’s young women were thought to be particularly susceptible. In 1895 the *Otago Daily Times* suggested that young men had become so frightened at the prospect of providing the comforts young women demanded—nice clothes, a piano, violin and a high standard of home décor, among other things—that they would quite likely “give up the idea of marriage and resolve to live a single life.”<sup>123</sup> The *Wairarapa Daily* went even further. That paper published a column pondering “the influence exercised by some of the niceties of modern life upon the physical condition of young women at the present day.” The writer decried “excessive tea drinking, sipping eau-de-cologne, and addiction to sensational novel reading as examples of the prevailing spirit of self indulgence.” Such things “are part of a general tendency to luxurious living . . . to which we as a prosperous commercial nation, have too readily become subject . . . indulging the petty cravings of selfish desire.”<sup>124</sup>

Such anxieties—along with the Victorian ankle fetish that so enchanted student Charles Knight—echoed through “The Female Dude: A Portrait,” a poem printed in the *Waikato Times*:

Here hangs my bangs o’er eyes that dream. And nose and rosebud lips for  
cream . . . This is my dress. Its cost I guess, did my poor papa much distress . . .



It's trimmed with lace just in this place, 'neath which two ankles show with grace, in silken hose to catch the beaus who think they're lovely.<sup>125</sup>

In these kinds of texts, the pleasures of expensive clothing gave rise to romantic sensations.

As New Zealand's towns and cities grew, so did opportunities for youth cultures. This followed a prevailing global pattern; industrialization gave rise to youth gangs and new cultures of consumption.<sup>126</sup> Daly suggests that sensation was itself constructed along urban lines, in worlds transformed by industrial technologies and purchasable pleasures.<sup>127</sup> Cities could be spaces of "hyperstimulus," Singer adds, with their traffic, noise, crowds, window displays and advertisements.<sup>128</sup> There were local specificities too. During the middle of the century, propagandists Charles Hursthouse and Arthur Bathgate wrote pamphlets advocating emigration from Britain to the South Pacific. They considered New Zealand a land of frontiersmen, no place for clerks and city men. Cities here were far from large: in 1891 Auckland, the largest urban center, was home to only 51,000 people and Dunedin, the second largest, to 48,500.<sup>129</sup> By the 1880s, however, the male office worker had made his home in New Zealand's urban centers.<sup>130</sup> In 1883 the *Observer* reported that Wellington's civil service provided a congenial habitat for mashers.<sup>131</sup> There remained cause for complaint. The type, fretted the journalist, "has none of the moral or physical backbone we've come to expect in honest representations of English youth."<sup>132</sup>

Even in the small New Zealand cities, new, youthful, decidedly urban pleasures taxed those who had built their pioneer identities on physical labor, mud and self-denial. The images of the masher, the dudine and the larrikin cut across the self-assessments of an earlier generation of New Zealanders. The first European settlers had arrived as recently as the 1840s, and the myth of the pioneer—the stoic man or woman who endured the long sea journey from England, transformed forest into farmland and had little time for a life of ease, pleasure or mucking about—did not sit neatly alongside the rapidly-expanding "cities of dreadful delight," to borrow Walkowitz's phrase, with their street-corner loiterers and dandyish mashers.<sup>133</sup> To some extent, the anxieties mirrored those overseas. In North America, Srebnick suggests, the "flight from rural to urban life" and "the encounter with the urban crowd" provided new opportunities for the inhabitants of the towns and cities and worried the traditionalists.<sup>134</sup> The city, Srebnick notes, released men and women from traditional associations with the family, and introduced street life, "the interplay of the workplace, and the new freedoms of public places of entertainment."<sup>135</sup> New Zealand's girl masher followed in the steps of New York's "Bowery Gal" of the 1860s, with her independent income, defiant walk and well turned out clothes.<sup>136</sup>

By the 1890s, adolescent street life exercised the pens of New Zealand's commentators. Diarists and newspaper readers noticed the shift. In 1878, Ruth Harding, a Whanganui photographer's daughter, documented the social opprobrium directed against her friend Katie Marshall whose evening walks with a male admirer landed her in the local newspaper's gossip column. For her part, Ruth never left the house at night without her father or a brother to fulfill the role of escort.<sup>137</sup> As the century drew to a close however, local media told of adolescent boys and girls freely mingling in the streets. In 1892, Auckland's *Star* newspaper proclaimed:

Karangahape Road is becoming a regular beauty parade in the evenings. Shortly after seven o'clock girls of all ages, sizes and descriptions begin to wander up and down the footpath for the benefit of the boys, who line the kerbstone.<sup>138</sup>

"Some apparently respectable girls," added the *Star*, "make as much noise as the larrikins of the sterner sex."<sup>139</sup> The churches came in for a share of criticism for tempting youths out of their homes at night. Reverend Lush wrote that boys and girls may well start off their evenings at a church group, but the (unstated) "temptations" of city nightlife ultimately provided a greater lure to both genders.<sup>140</sup> Sexually active young people made an appearance too. In 1892, the *Observer* complained about "the number of very young girls who collect at the corners of by-streets, and wander up dark places, in company with hoodlums of the other sex. The former [are] precocious in their wills and ways."<sup>141</sup> *The White Ribbon*, the newspaper of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, told of the late-night antics of Wellington girls who risked "seduction" by youths.<sup>142</sup> That newspaper expressed its concern at "these giddy, light-mannered boys and girls who patrol arm-in-arm, giggling and shrieking, and pass on, going down to the side-streets." It was even suggested the giddy ones might be "juvenile prostitutes."<sup>143</sup> As in London, New York and elsewhere, an evening "cityscape of strangers and secrets" was regarded as no place for a respectable woman.<sup>144</sup> Still, some adolescent girls expressed an interest in occupying public space at all times of day or night, and took in the sensations to be had there.

As these examples demonstrate, New Zealand's debates drew upon international precedents. Tosh notes the blossoming consumer culture—and its growing expectations—in the British context, while, in broad terms, Srebnick's and Walkowitz's discussions on the perils of the city resonate with life in colonial New Zealand, despite their focus on the much larger cities of New York and London during the same period. Discussions transcended national borders. The "penny dreadfuls" so enjoyed among the larrikins were all imported into New Zealand, having circulated in similar subcultures internationally.<sup>145</sup> Local newspapers included articles reprinted from overseas sources. The *Wairarapa Daily's* jeremiad against the "petty cravings of selfish desire," for instance, was originally published in well-known international medical journal *The Lancet*. Such ideas had a resonance in New Zealand, where the street corners and theatres were home to colorful adolescents who challenged aspects of their parents' worlds.

The masher and the dude were also direct imports from overseas.<sup>146</sup> In 1913, Wellington's *Dominion* newspaper traced a genealogy from the eighteenth-century European "buck" and "macaroni," through the "dandy," the "swell" to the masher and the dude. The dandy and the swell only appeared very occasionally in New Zealand's newspapers during the 1860s and '70s, but the (girl) masher and the dud(in)e rose in prominence during the century's final decade. There were reasons for that: the cities grew in size and complexity during the 1880s, a clerical middle class had begun to appear during the same decade, and these children of the European settlers were one generation removed from the rough huts, muddy fields and rudimentary towns of their parents. These young men and women were the beneficiaries of an increasingly cosmopolitan—and pleasurable—urban life, with its theatres and shops, offices and oyster saloons.<sup>147</sup> In New Zealand's urban spaces, international imports took on localized significance.

### Conclusion: Adolescence and the Changing Social Order

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the intersection of adolescence and sensation constituted an intricate terrain of concern. It exercised the minds of doctors, religious leaders, newspaper writers and young people themselves. French novels, penny dreadfuls, street corners, swimming holes and showy clothes all afforded opportunities for pleasure, social interaction and the clash of old and new cultural forms. The sensations to be widely found—shouting, drinking, nude bathing, posing, slouching and wandering—helped to crystallize an emerging adolescent culture. Sensation was one field in which adolescence was made and re-made, in conjunction with a series of other changes concerning work, gender and urban life.

As Bellanta suggests in the Australian context, adolescence could be seen as both a “cipher for public anxieties” and a category lived by those who came to inhabit it.<sup>148</sup> While the newspapers overwhelmingly reflected adult anxieties—noisy menaces on the street corners and all the rest—other sources hint at young people’s own dispositions to pleasure: Jessie Hetherington’s “luscious diet” of boarding school stories, Percy Ottywell’s pamphlets on sodomy and masturbation, Charles Knight’s feelings about “neat” ankles and Feydeau’s *Fanny*, and Gore young men’s complaints about their youthful countrymen’s whisky-loving ways.

This is a story of modernity, that slippery concept that bundles together industrialization, new technology and enhanced lines of circulation (migration, mass communication, and public interaction).<sup>149</sup> The cities were strongly associated with sensation, and our personifications of pleasurable feeling—larrikinesses, mashers and the rest—were the products of the factories, street corners and offices they inhabited. It is hard (if not impossible) to quantify how prevalent these sensations and personality types might have been at the time, but ideological and material changes, in both local and global contexts, set the scene for these new permutations of youth, place and pleasure. However common the larrikin and the masher may have been—and they did inhabit towns and cities of a range of sizes, after all—these figures represented New Zealand youth to adults in authority and to one another as well.

As time marched on, sensation and pleasure continued to be seen as both problematic and a particular characteristic of youth. In 1891, one correspondent wrote to parliamentarian George Grey to complain that “the young people of the Colony show so much apathy on public affairs, such apathy only exceeded by their conceit and vulgarity.”<sup>150</sup> When physician Herbert Barraclough spoke to a conference in 1905, he opined that girls and young women had developed a “hatred of domesticity,” a “desire for independence” and a “love of ease and pleasure.”<sup>151</sup> In 1909, the *White Ribbon*’s writers worried about the moral influence of dancing:

As her hand is placed in his, his arm about her waist, his breath upon her cheek—under the influence of music, laughter, softened lights, can she be a girl and not feel her pulse bound within her? . . . In the majority of our high schools the dance has entered . . . it must get the cream of our young men and women, and endeavour to drag them down into its clutches of impurity.<sup>152</sup>

This was a slippery slope indeed. The *White Ribbon* went on to suggest that male youths would likely leave a dance, their passions aroused, and head straight for “some ill-famed resort.”<sup>153</sup>

New forms of pleasure-loving youth appeared too. The “flapper” made an early appearance in 1905, in an article in Christchurch’s *Star* newspaper. She was a “young girl who delays putting up her hair and wearing long skirts. She is so-called because her hair hangs down her back and ‘flaps’ in the gentle breeze. She may be of any age from 16 to 28, and she is to be seen at her best at the seaside in summer time” (Figure 4).<sup>154</sup> The flapper went for fashionable clothes, pushed older city-dwellers out of the way on trams and “ran about offices at the most critical time of her life.”<sup>155</sup> In 1913, one writer told of “the giggling girl at the awkward age, often affected with a loud voice and slang.”<sup>156</sup> Freedom was the flapper’s passion. “The rising generation are drunk with the new wine of liberty,” suggested the *Grey River Argus*. “Indeed, the younger she is the more intractable



**Figure 4.** Grace and Nola, flappers at the seaside, c.1914. PA1-o-883-25-2, Alexander Turnbull Library. Nola Pratt, later Nola Luxford, went on to have a career as a US-based silent movie actress.

and untamable she is apt to be.”<sup>157</sup> The flapper followed in the footsteps of both the larrikiness and the “girl masher”: she who refused to obey notions of male-defined respectability.<sup>158</sup>

If the larrikin was a personification of industrialization, and the masher a figure of the rising clerical class, the flapper embodied the dramatic rise in office jobs for young women. The overall proportion of New Zealand women in office work “rose from less than 1 per cent in 1881 to 24 per cent in 1911.”<sup>159</sup> Was Ruby Abdallah a flapper in the making? A pupil in the commercial course at Seddon Memorial Technical College in 1914, Ruby’s school report card included a note by her business methods teacher: “too much concerned about her personal appearance.”<sup>160</sup>

The masher evolved too. He became the “nut,” the “jazz boy” and the “boy flapper.” Like the masher, these new types were defined primarily by their fondness for fashion. The “nut” was a “callow young man” with long fringe, low cut waistcoat, cane, cigarette, black silk tie and “passionate socks.”<sup>161</sup> Under the heading “The modern boy,” *New Zealand Truth* described the jazz boy, a “the modern, gay young rooster” who sported a “skirted coat with a split up the back, four inch shirt collar, huge necktie, gaudy socks [and] green or pink handkerchief.”<sup>162</sup> The jazz boy was obsessed with horse racing and the sports pages of the newspapers, while the “boy flapper”—once again “decently dressed”—went in for five-hundred, bridge and euchre.<sup>163</sup>

Newspaper headlines constituted adolescents as distinct subjects of inquiry and bearers of modernity: “The modern boy,” “Jazz boy versus flapper,” “The female dude: a portrait,” “Natural history of the larrikin.” As we have seen, these headings introduced lists of definitions, delineations, clothing styles, youth behaviors and adult judgments. Adolescents were on display, as much among the pages of the papers and magazines as they were in the streets, in the factories and on the beaches.

An earlier period’s concerns continued to echo through the twentieth century. K.A. Cuordileone suggests that the Cold War saw reinvigorated anxieties about urbanization, technological transformation, women’s inroads into public life and men’s “emasculatation”.<sup>164</sup> But there was nothing especially new about these complaints; the seeds had been sown decades earlier. It should come as no surprise that young people were so central to the debates. In New Zealand, the adolescent boy or girl of the 1880s represented a new generation, the increasingly urbanized children of the early European pioneers who had found conditions rather less amenable to a life of ease. More generally, youth lay on the leading edge of social change; they would be the harbingers of new trends and they elicited the reaction—whether positive, bemused or hostile—of an older generation.<sup>165</sup>

Historical changes and continuities give way to one another. Some of the popular concerns remain strikingly familiar to us today. Adults complained about the softening and immoral effects on young people of modernity in general and cities in particular; they worried about lives of ease and lives of crime. Our own contemporaries point to the sedentary technologies of the internet, fast car racing and alcohol abuse; nineteenth century New Zealanders worried about the weakening of pioneer discipline in the face of the “penny dreadful,” racy French literature and the temptations of the street corner. Then, as now, young people represented modernity and its social changes. Hard work, good sense and

respectability were the markers of adulthood. These tropes distinguished the child from the adult; the adolescent was in transition, if not always in a socially approved way.

### Endnotes

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1. See, for instance, Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *Teenage Confidential: An Illustrated History of the American Teen* (San Francisco, 1998); Redmer Yska, *All Shook Up: The Flash Bodge and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties* (Auckland, 1993).

2. Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875–1945* (London, 2007), xiv–xv.

3. Such terms as “sensation” and “pleasure” tend not to be structuring concepts in discussions of adolescence for this period. These terms are absent from the indexes of key recent works such as Savage, *Teenage*; Melissa Bellanta, *Larrikins: A History* (Brisbane, 2012); Simon Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870–1914* (Farnham, 2013).

4. Janice Irvine, “Cultural Differences and Adolescent Sexualities,” in Janice Irvine (ed), *Sexual Cultures and the Construction of Adolescent Identities* (Philadelphia, 1994), 3–29; Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (New York, 2001); John Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain: Images of Adolescent Conflict* (London, 1990). Philippe Aries offered the classic account of the historical emergence of childhood and adolescence: Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York, 1965).

5. John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770–Present* (New York, 1974), 100–101; John Demos and Virginia Demos, “Adolescence in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 31:4 (1969): 632–638; Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture, 1920–1945* (New York, 2004), 11.

6. Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, 11.

7. Bellanta, *Larrikins*, xx.

8. For a useful discussion of the “non-representational,” see Hayden Lorimer, “Cultural Geography: Non-representational Conditions and Concerns,” *Progress in Human Geography* 32:4 (2008): 551–559.

9. John Jones, Jones Family Letterbook, 1860–1, MSY 3936, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).

10. W.G., “Vain, Then Vile,” *The Evangelist*, June 1, 1869, 8.

11. W.G., “Vain, Then Vile,” 9.

12. It would be a mistake to cleanly divide religious from non-religious perspectives, as religious beliefs and themes informed many aspects of public culture. See John Stenhouse, “Religion and Society,” in Giselle Byrnes (ed), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (Melbourne, 2009), 323–356.

13. *Evening Post*, November 18, 1870, 2.

14. J.G.S. Grant, *The Censor*, Dunedin, 1875, 6.

15. Grant, *The Censor*, 6.

16. *The White Ribbon*, June 15, 1896, 7.

17. Jessie Hetherington, *Numbering My Days*, unpublished autobiography, MS-Papers-0644-2, ATL, 11.
18. Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Houndmills, 2001), 10. On the sensation novel see also Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, 1992); Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge, 2009).
19. W.G., "Vain, Then Vile," 8.
20. Lydia Wevers, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World* (Wellington, 2010), 22-23.
21. See the advertisements for H.I. Jones and Sons in the *Wanganui Herald* during the late 1880s, also *Evening Post*, April 20, 1874, 2; November 16, 1874, 2; April 30, 1873, 2; *Wairarapa Daily*, January 20, 1887, 2.
22. On the historically continuous concerns over young people's reading matter see John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta Rap, 1830-1996* (Houndmills, 1998). For a New Zealand discussion, see Yska, *All Shook Up*, ch.4.
23. Charles Knight, Diary, February 2, 1892, 90-362, ATL, 41.
24. For a discussion see Masha Belenky, "Feydeau's *Fanny* and the Critics: Jealousy, Marriage, and the Bourgeois Culture of Possession," *Romance Studies*, 25:3 (2007): 189-198. Sexual jealousy was the key theme in this hugely popular novel. Unusually for the time, it focussed not on the jealousy of the woman's husband, but on the younger lover's jealousy of the marriage. The critics were outraged: jealousy was a husband's prerogative, Belenky suggests, not the pretender's.
25. Ernest Feydeau, *Fanny* (London, 1888 [1858]).
26. Charles Knight, Diary, February 2, 1892, 90-362, ATL.
27. Knight, Diary, February 4, 1892.
28. Knight, Diary, January 17, 1892. A fairly pale New Zealand equivalent was Gilbert Rock's *By Passion Driven: A Story of a Wasted Life* (Dunedin, 1888).
29. *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, November 3, 1860, 3. On the French literature of the time, see Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Education of the Senses* (Oxford, 1984), 330.
30. A.G. Bagnall, *Masterton's First Hundred Years* (Masterton, 1954), 59.
31. *North Otago Times*, January 27, 1890, 3; *Evening Post*, January 9, 1891, 4.
32. Cited in Chris Brickell, "Same-sex Desire and the Asylum: A Colonial Experience," *New Zealand Journal of History* 39:2 (2005): 158-178.
33. Truby King, "Medical Remarks by Superintendent," DAHI D264 86 2714, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), Dunedin, 1.
34. King, "Medical Remarks," 1.
35. Gay, *Education of the Senses*, 329; on "licentious" and pornographic books, see 363-377.
36. Truby King, "A Plea for Stringent Legislation in the Matter of Corrupt and Immoral Publications," *New Zealand Medical Journal* January (1891): 150. This article was published in two parts, one in 1890 and one in 1891, both with the same title.

37. Truby King, "A Plea for Stringent Legislation in the Matter of Corrupt and Immoral Publications," *New Zealand Medical Journal* October (1890): 16–25, esp. 18.
38. King, "A Plea for Stringent Legislation," 1890, 21–25.
39. King, "A Plea for Stringent Legislation," 1891, 152.
40. Curt Herr, "Introduction", in James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; Or, the Feast of Blood*, (Crestline, 2008), 10.
41. *Observer*, October 4, 1901, 2.
42. *Taranaki Herald*, November 23, 1908, 7.
43. *Observer*, August 12, 1893, 3.
44. *Evening Post*, November 23, 1901, 3.
45. *Tuapeka Times*, September 12, 1896, 2.
46. On the relationship between hard work, physical labour and masculinity, see Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country?: The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History* (Auckland, 1997 [1987]), 15–16, and Erik Olssen, "Working Gender, Gendering Work," in Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law (eds.) *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890–1939* (Auckland, 2003), 53.
47. Gore Young Men's Literary Society, Journal #1, April 30, 1895, 10–11, GO 78/159, Hokonui Heritage Centre, Gore.
48. Gore Young Men's Literary Society, Journal #1, April 30, 1895, 12.
49. Gore Young Men's Literary Society, First Journal Session 1898, 2.
50. *Star*, December 12, 1904, 2; *Observer*, October 4, 1901, 2; *Star*, December 1, 1896, 2; *Inangahua Times*, May 7, 1897, 2.
51. During the late nineteenth century, Truby King and others suggested the term "adolescence" applied to those aged between 13 and 25: King, "A Plea for Stringent Legislation," 1890, 19. See also Herbert Barraclough, "The Causation of Insanity," *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 3:2 (1904), 335–6.
52. According to the *Manawatu Standard*, the larrikin was invented in 1870 when, in court, a Melbourne constable mispronounced the word "larking" (as in "larking about"). The newspapers picked up his mistake and began to circulate it: *Manawatu Standard*, May 27, 1884, 2. Bellanta suggests the word was in actual fact older, being of English origin (Bellanta, *Larrikins*, xix). See also the discussion in Penelope Gregory, "Saving the Children of New Zealand: A Study of Social Attitudes Towards Larrikinism in the Later Nineteenth Century," BA(Hons) dissertation, Massey University, 1975.
53. Cited in Gregory, "Saving the Children," 6.
54. *Evening Post*, February 28, 1880, 1.
55. On the larrikin's age see Bellanta, *Larrikins*, 4; on "mafficking" see *Clansman*, 1:3, May 7, 1907, Box 7, Folder 38, Item 414, Canterbury Museum. See also Gillingham, "Sexual Pleasures and Dangers," 134.
56. *Evening Post*, August 12, 1889, 3.
57. Bellanta, *Larrikins*, xviii; 10. See also Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space*, ch.4.
58. *Otago Witness*, August 13, 1870, 19; Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 44; Andrew Davies, *The Gangs of Manchester* (Preston, 2008).



59. Bellanta, *Larrikins*, 110.
60. *Wairarapa Daily Times*, January 12, 1895, 2.
61. Gregory, "Saving the Children," 19.
62. Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 54.
63. *New Zealand Herald*, May 25, 1897, 6.
64. "Larrikinism at Manutahi North", AANN W4250 1 38, Archives New Zealand.
65. Parliament attempted to clamp down on larrikinism. The *Better Protection of Children and Young Persons Bill* of 1896 would have made it a punishable offence for a young people to wander the streets at night. The *Juvenile Depravity Suppression Bill*, introduced the same year would have empowered police to arrest anyone under 16 loitering in the streets after 10pm. Like its predecessor, this attempt to "suppress larrikinism among both sexes" did not progress through all law-making stages: Gregory, "Saving the Children," 55–56.
66. *NZ Free Lance*, February 23, 1901, 8; May 21, 1904, 6; *Evening Post*, February 22, 1887, 2; *Wairarapa Daily*, April 13, 1888, 2.
67. *Grey River Argus*, October 13, 1892, 4.
68. *Grey River Argus*, October 13, 1892, 4.
69. *Wanganui Chronicle*, July 20, 1892, 2.
70. Register—Principal's Case Book, 1908–1916, CAJG D16 129, ANZ, Dunedin, 61.
71. Register—Principal's Case Book, 61. For further discussion of Otekaieke, youth and notions of maturity, see Author, 2013.
72. *Wairarapa Daily*, July 16, 1889, 2.
73. *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, November 11, 1903, 490.
74. *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, November 11, 1903, 665.
75. See, for example, *White Ribbon*, October 16, 1909, 6.
76. *Bay of Plenty Times*, March 2, 1880, 3. *Cocculus indicus* is a stimulant derived from the fruit of the *Anamirta Cocculus* plant, sometimes used to adulterate beer during the nineteenth century.
77. Gore Young Men's Literary Society, First Journal Session 1898, 2.
78. E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993), 20–21.
79. Ian Rockel, *Taking the Waters: Early Spas in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1985), 55.
80. *Press*, January 12, 1894, 2; see also *Press*, November 19, 1874, 3; February 17, 1880, 3.
81. *Taranaki Herald*, April 16, 1881, 2.
82. *Observer*, November 9, 1889, 17.
83. Bellanta makes a similar point in the Australian context: "The Larrikin Girl," *Journal of Australian Studies* 34:4 (2010): 499–512.
84. *Observer*, August 15, 1891, 17.
85. *Observer*, December 1, 1883, 3.
86. *Otago Witness*, November 24, 1892, 43.

87. Stephen Robertson, "'Boys, of Course, Cannot be Raped': Age, Homosexuality and the Redefinition of Sexual Violence in New York City, 1880–1955," *Gender and History* 18:2 (2006): 357–379.
88. Ellen DuBois and Linda Gordon, "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth-Century Feminist Thought," *Feminist Studies*, 9:1 (1983): 7–25, esp. 12.
89. "What Shall We Do With Our Girls?," *Manawatu Standard*, April 17, 1885, 2.
90. *Observer*, February 7, 1885, 4.
91. For a discussion in the English context, see Christopher Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West* (New York, 2008), 157.
92. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 157.
93. *Observer*, December 22, 1883, 3. According to the *Observer*, both the dude and the dandy were named after "duds," the informal term for clothes: *Observer*, October 6, 1883, 2.
94. *Observer*, July 25, 1885, 6.
95. *Observer*, July 25, 1885, 6; "A Cured Darling: The Effect of Maternal Coddling on the Boy of the Period," *Te Aroha News*, November 26, 1887, 2.
96. *Observer*, July 25, 1885, 6.
97. *Observer*, August 18, 1883, 16.
98. *Marlborough Express*, May 26, 1894, 4; *Otago Witness*, June 13, 1889, 32; *Observer*, August 11, 1883, 10.
99. *Otago Witness*, June 13, 1889, 32.
100. *Otago Witness*, November 24, 1892, 43.
101. On Wilde and effeminacy see Morris Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca, 2005), ch. 4.
102. Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space*, 125.
103. *Observer*, November 15, 1890, 18.
104. *Marlborough Express*, May 26, 1894, 4.
105. *Observer*, August 25, 1890, 26.
106. *Observer*, February 24, 1894, 19.
107. *Wairarapa Daily*, January 9, 1889, 2.
108. *Otago Witness*, June 13, 1889, 32.
109. Knight, *Diary*, August 4, 1893.
110. F.G. Gibbs, *Diary*, June 24, 1885, Nelson Provincial Museum.
111. *Otago Witness*, June 13, 1889, 32.
112. Brookes, Olssen and Beer, "Spare Time?: Leisure, Gender and Modernity," in Brookes, Cooper and Law (eds.) *Sites of Gender*, 166; *Tuapeka Times*, July 3, 1895, 4.
113. *Observer*, January 9, 1892, 12.
114. *New Zealand Herald*, July 21, 1883, 3.
115. *Observer*, October 27, 1883, 11; January 9, 1892, 12.

116. *Press*, May 12, 1894, 10.
117. Peter McNeil, "Macaroni Masculinities," *Fashion Theory*, 4:4 (2000): 373–403.
118. *Observer*, October 27, 1883, 11.
119. E. Lynne Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London, 1888), 1–10. See the discussion in Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: 2002), 36.
120. Trial File, Michael McKay, May 1908, DAAC D256 318, ANZ.
121. Davis offers an account of youth and consumer culture in his *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 45.
122. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999), 173.
123. *Otago Daily Times*, January 4, 1895, 3.
124. *Wairarapa Daily*, February 4, 1888, 3.
125. *Waikato Times*, February 2, 1884, 2.
126. Bellanta, *Larrikins*, passim; Davies, *Gangs of Manchester*, passim.
127. Daly, *Sensation and Modernity*, 9.
128. Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* (New York, 2001), 35; 65.
129. "Census of New Zealand," *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, H-17, 4.
130. Phillips, *A Man's Country*, 4–6; 17.
131. *Observer*, August 11, 1883, 10.
132. *Observer*, August 11, 1883, 10.
133. On pioneer myths and representations, see Phillips, *A Man's Country*, ch.1; for a discussion of these themes in Australia and Canada, see Robert Hogg, *Men and Manliness on the Frontier: Queensland and British Columbia in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Houndmills, 2012).
134. Amy Gilman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth Century New York* (New York, 1995), 34.
135. Srebnick, *Mary Rogers*, 45.
136. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana, 1987), 93.
137. Ruth Crawford, *Diary, 1861–1881*, qMS-0581, ATL, 65. Conversely, in 1881 the *Observer's* gossip column berated young Thames men who neglected to provide chaperones for young women after a dance; the newspaper accused the youths of "a flagrant breach of etiquette": *Observer*, December 24, 1881, 237.
138. Gregory, "Saving the Children," 8.
139. Gregory, "Saving the Children," 8.
140. *New Zealand Herald*, May 12, 1896, 6.
141. *Observer*, September 17, 1892, 20.
142. Gregory, "Saving the Children," 13.

143. *The White Ribbon*, June 15, 1896, 7.
144. Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London, 1992), 46.
145. Davies, *Gangs of Manchester*, 17.
146. On the antecedents, see Gillis, *Youth and History*, 91–93.
147. On theatres, see Peter Downes, *Shadows on the Stage: Theatre in New Zealand: The First 70 Years* (Dunedin: J McIndoe, 1975); “oyster saloons” and other restaurants are discussed in Perrin Rowland, *Dining Out: A History of the Restaurant in New Zealand* (Auckland, 2010).
148. Bellanta, *Larrikins*, 29.
149. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, ch. 1.
150. GNZ 995.03, S97, Auckland City Library.
151. Herbert Barraclough, “Human Instincts, Normal and Pathological,” 205–6.
152. *White Ribbon*, August 16, 1909, 11.
153. *White Ribbon*, August 16, 1909, 11.
154. *Star*, April 22, 1905, 3. The *Star* survives as a bi-weekly giveaway.
155. *Evening Post*, February 13, 1914, 9.
156. *Evening Post*, January 10, 1913, 6.
157. *Grey River Argus*, May 8, 1914, p.8.
158. On these continuities in the Australian context see Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space*, 161.
159. Nolan, *Breadwinning*, 220; the statistics are from Shannon Brown, “Female Office Workers in Auckland, 1891–36,” MA thesis, Auckland University, 1993, 24.
160. Seddon Memorial Technical College school reports, NZMS 823, Auckland Libraries, 1914–16.
161. *Dominion*, January 29, 1913, 9.
162. “The Modern Boy”, *New Zealand Truth*, November 3, 1927, 4; “Jazz Boy Versus Flapper”, *New Zealand Truth*, August 29, 1925, 19.
163. “Jazz Boy Versus Flapper”, 19; “Ain’t it Sickening? Boy Flappers Coming Home by Train”, *New Zealand Truth*, May 6, 1922, 5.
164. K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York, 2005), 9–10.
165. On youth as harbingers of social change see Stuart Hall *et al*, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London, 1978), 159; 234.