

Chapter Four:
Sex Education, the Sexual Revolution, and the Sixties

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Almost everyone in this book takes for granted that a cultural watershed known as the sixties happened, and that a (or as they typically call it *the*) sexual revolution was what made it a watershed rather than just another decade. Over and over again, people would bring up “the sixties” as a time when the world changed forever. One mother in Billingsley, a community where a fight over sex education was slowly inching towards an uneasy truce, put it in ways that everyone in this book would understand, if not necessarily agree with:

I mean, you know, I get shocked every year. I got shocked when we had a sixth grader sitting there pregnant. I got shocked when my daughter had two pregnant girls in her class this year. I got even more shocked when we were at a basketball game and this little girl had this little girl and, I made the presumption that it was her sister and I was saying, "Honey, you have a cute little sister," and she's going, "This is my baby." It scares you to death. Especially when you have a daughter. It really scares you. And, see, kids are not like they were when we were coming up, anyway. ... we came through, or I'll say I came through the "love child" and "flower power" and your parents threatened your life because they wanted you not to be a part of that. Everybody was going crazy, kids were growing hair down to their ankles, you know, these were weird people, they need to be locked up, you know (laugh). Women were out burning their bras in public, you know, and so it was like taboo for these people. But nowadays, it's like, the kids know more than I knew when I was twenty years old. (mother, Billingsley)

This mother and other people confronting painful fights over sex education are clear that there was a sexual revolution in this country, and that “the sixties”, at least when they talk to me, is a shorthand way of talking about it. They would be surprised, I suspect, to know that it has taken many years for sociologists and demographers to agree with them on both of these points: that

there was a sexual revolution and that it started in the 1960s. Over the years since “the sixties” happened, there has been a lively debate among academics as to whether or not there ever was such a thing as a “sexual revolution” in this country, and if there was, when it happened. Some scholars think that the period described in the last chapter, the early years of the 20th century, was the real upheaval in our sexual history, and that everything after that—including the sixties--- were mere aftershocks.¹ On the exact opposite side of the debate are the scholars and other observers who think not only was there a sexual revolution in the 1960s, but that it set in motion new and ferocious “culture wars.” To hear this side talk about it, the sexual revolution and its aftermath have come to pit religious fundamentalists and middle Americans against sophisticated urbanites across a whole range of issues, not just sex.²

Interviewing people across the country and examining as many sex education curricula as I could find for the period from the early 1900s to the present, it’s easy to make the case that at a minimum people *thought* there was a sexual revolution in the 1960s, and sex education accordingly changed both its

¹ Albert D. Klassen, Colin J. Williams, Eugene E. Levitt, Hubert J. O’Gorman, and Alfred C. Kinsey Institute for Sex Research. *Sex and Morality in the U.S. : An Empirical Enquiry under the Auspices of the Kinsey Institute*. 1st ed. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989. Scott Stoessel, “The Sexual Counter-Revolution”, *The American Prospect*, Phillips Cutright. "The Teenage Sexual Revolution and the Myth of an Abstinent Past." *Family Planning Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (January) (1972): 25-29.

² James Davison Hunter. *Culture Wars : The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books, 1991. Christopher Eillison and Mark Musick, “Southern Intolerance: A Fundamentalist Effect.” *Social Forces*, 72: 379-98. James Davison Hunter. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books, 1991. For an overview and a rebuttal (but one congruent with the argument being made here) see Paul DiMaggio, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson. "Have Americans' Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" *American Sociological Review* 102, no. 3 (1996): 690-755.

goals and focus. But my interviews with people about sex education convince me of something more, that there really was a sexual revolution in this country, and that it's one of the great unacknowledged forces shaping much of contemporary social and political life.

Just as the turn of the twentieth century saw profound changes in how Americans thought about sex and family, a first sexual revolution so to speak, the 1960s too, were a time of such unsettling change that they comprised a second revolution.³ The sexual revolution of the 1960s was part of larger changes in American society, as the mother in Billingsley points out. A great many things from hairstyles, to clothing, to when and how people had babies changed in the wake of it. Those people who argue that the sixties set in motion a “culture war” are on to something, but as so often happens in America, the sex part seems to have gotten lost in all the excitement. Talking to people in their communities around the nation about the sex education of their children leads me to believe that most of the culture war is about sex, and that all these other issues—clothing, “teenage pregnancy,” “family values,” “special rights” for gay people—are different ways of talking about the same thing.

³ James Davison Hunter. *Culture Wars : The Struggle to Define America*. New York: BasicBooks, 1991.

³ . Arlene S. Skolnick compares these changes to an earthquake. *Embattled Paradise : The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Basic Books, 1991. I particularly like Skolnick's point that while earthquakes are unpredictable, they happen across pre-existing faultlines.

Scholars disagree about whether or not there was a sexual revolution in the 1960s because they use different meanings of the word “revolution”. The word comes to us with a number of different meanings, and it depends on which one is in play when people decide that there was or wasn’t a sexual revolution in this country, and, if there was, when it happened.

In earlier times the word revolution simply meant change and flux, a sense of things coming and going, as when we speak of the earth making “revolutions” around the sun. Because it’s the most archaic sense of the word, it’s not used very often to talk about the history of sex in America at least directly, but it shows up with reasonable frequency as a background assumption about what isn’t happening. That is, some observers seem to think that either sex has to stay exactly the same over time, or change in some predictable and linear way.

But sex, like every other part of American life, seems to have its fashions, going through periods of both stability and flux. Although the data are scanty enough to make full conclusions impossible, all of things we look at as measures of changes in sex---marriage rates, divorce rates, out-of-wedlock rates, reported rates of premarital sex and homosexual sex, attitudes towards

sexual matters, all seem to move in different directions at different times in American history.⁴

Exactly what these movements mean is not entirely clear, at least to me. It could mean that Americans move somewhat randomly through periods of sexual conservatism and sexual liberalism; it could mean that the data are just too scanty to draw conclusions, or it could mean that there are slow-moving changes in the meaning of sex that reflect changes in the powerful and interconnected “big ticket” forces of social life—the economy, technology, the changing relationship between men and women and the like.⁵ These changes, though profound, are too subtle and too on-going to warrant any notion of “revolution” in the more common senses of the word. Clearly, sex being the private matter it is, it pays to be cautious, and the further back in history we go, the more cautious it pays to be

That said, as we look over the long sweep of the admittedly limited scanty data we have about sexual behaviors and attitudes, it’s also the case that

⁴ Daniel Scott Smith and Michael S. Hindus, “Premarital Pregnancy in America, 1640-1971: An Overview and Interpretation”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* v. 4 (Spring, 1975): 537-570; of course, these data may simply reflect the changing abilities of families to force erring couples to marry, but in terms of the argument I am making here, that still reflects changes in “constraints on sex”

⁵ I hope I have made clear that I think that the relationship of these “big ticket” items and sexuality and the relationships between men and women are best thought of as a spider web, where each strand affects the others when jostled. I simply don’t think that cultural changes drive “material” ones or vice versa in any kind of a simple way, as I hope this book makes abundantly clear. New external environments create new challenges for both individuals and for societies, both individuals and societies come up with new systems of meaning (“culture”) to engage with these changes, and having created a system of meaning, use that system of meaning as a template to make sense of and change the world around them. Even this overview somehow suggests that changes in the environment are fundamentally “prior”, but I don’t believe that. Again as I hope this book shows, it’s an ongoing dance with many moves and counter-moves. Still, analytically, one has to start somewhere...

these periods of random or slow-moving change are also interspersed with periods of rapid change so dramatic that the people living through them experience them as sharp breaks with what went before.

Which brings us to the second meaning of revolution, the one that came into vogue in the years after the French Revolution of 1789. This one means a radical restructuring of the status quo, and this sense of the word there have been at least two sexual revolutions, the one that gave birth to sex education, and the sixties, which began a fight over the meaning of it.

In both periods sexual behavior and sexual attitudes changed quite rapidly, and everyday people confronted visible evidence everywhere they looked. My grandmother wore floor length skirts and a flowing “Gibson Girl” pompadour; by the time she was forty, young women around her were wearing rolled stockings, shockingly short skirts and bobbed, “mannish” hair. Most alarmingly, these young women, many of them from her same social class and background, were kissing boys (in public!), permitting even more personal intimacies in private, smoking, drinking, and were dancing in ways that seemed the essence of abandon.

Changes were just as radical in the 1960s. Going into the decade, a sexual regime based on the fruitful and multiplying married couple was the order of the day. Contraception was illegal and so was abortion. Contraceptive clinics existed, but a combination of local mores and Federal (as well as some

state) laws meant that they were typically low-key and served only married couples, and at least two states had no contraceptive clinics whatsoever.⁶ The most common contraceptive (marital, course) was the condom, followed by withdrawal and douching. While upper income families were using the diaphragm, most Americans were using virtually the same kinds of contraception as a century earlier.⁷ Even more telling, although subsequent studies made clear that even in 1961 forty percent of women were sexually active before marriage, no one knew, because asking *unmarried* women about their sexual practices was deemed unthinkable.⁸

Other, more subtle measures also made clear that the United States on the eve of the 1960s was an almost unrecognizably different country from the one that we now take for granted because of the primacy granted to both marriage and procreation. Masturbation was still known as self-abuse in many circles, and homosexuality was so distant from public acknowledgement that

6 David J. Garrow. *Liberty and Sexuality : The Right to Privacy and the Making of RoeV. Wade*. New YorkToronto: Macmillan Pub. Co. ;

7 Charles Goodyear vulcanized (added sulphur to and heated) rubber in 1839, but obtained a patent for the process in 1841. Vulcanized rubber is stronger and more durable, and relatively impervious to heat and cold. Within a decade, this new material was being used for contraceptive devices in the form of inexpensive condoms, diaphragms, and bulb syringes used for douching. In addition, Americans used withdrawal and the rhythm method (periodic abstinence), this latter method hampered by the fact that it took until the 1930s for science to ascertain that the fertile period in women was in the middle of the cycle rather than during the menses, as is the case with other mammals.

⁸ In all fairness, researchers began asking unmarried women in select subpopulations what contraceptives they were using in the mid 1970s. But except for women who had already borne a child out of wedlock, the only national survey of the era (the National Survey of Family Growth) did not ask unmarried women about their sexuality until 1982. Data on premarital sex are from Singh, S. and J. E. Darroch (1999). "Trends in Sexual Activity Among Adolescent American Women: 1982-1995." *Family Planning Perspectives* 31(5): 212-219.

the idea that it was a “lifestyle” that one could choose, as opposed to a disease that one tried to cure, would have been unimaginable to all concerned.⁹ Even the founding mothers and fathers of what were then called “homophile” organizations wanted only an end to discrimination, not affirmative acceptance of their orientation.¹⁰

Getting pregnant outside of marriage was so shameful that women who did so (at least *white* women who did so) were sent out of sight, counseled to give their babies up for adoption and told to resume “normal” life as quickly as possible.¹¹ (In 1970, an unwed mother in liberal Cambridge, Massachusetts decided to flout convention and keep her baby; she was fired from her job and found that diaper services refused to deliver to her house when they learned she was unmarried.) Even men could feel the pressure: pharmacists reported that it was customary in an earlier era not to sell condoms to young men whom they knew to be unmarried.¹²

9 To get a sense of this other world, one need only to read any of the gay coming of age novels that have appeared in the last few years, e.g. Edmund White. *A Boy's Own Story*. 1st ed. New York: Dutton, 1982. and Edmund White, *Farewell Symphony*

10 John D'Emilio. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities : The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

11 Kunzel, R. G. (1993). *Fallen women, problem girls : unmarried mothers and the professionalization of social work, 1890-1945*. New Haven, Yale University Press.; Solinger, R. (1992). Wake up little Susie : single pregnancy and race in the pre-Roe v. Wade era. New York, Routledge.

12 Anonymous, “In Trouble: The Story of an Unwed Woman’s Decision to Keep Her Child” *Atlantic*, March, 1970. Along the same lines, see “Single Motherhood”, *Time*, September 6, 1971 and “Unmarried Parent: Is Martha Doing Right?” *Senior Scholastic*, October, 1972, p. 101. Interview with pharmacist activist, 1984. Because unmarried motherhood had taken on distinctly racial tones by the 1980s and became linked to the new social problem of “the underclass”, the social meaning of unmarried mothers positions became, I believe, more controversial as the decade wore on. (I have made this argument specifically with respect to Black unmarried mothers in *Dubious Conceptions*, pp. **, but for relevant material see: ***) And of course, by 1979, Dan Quayle, in his famous “family values” speech, castigated

By 1975, just a few short years later, that world had ended almost completely. Contraception was legal for the unwed and even for teenagers; it was even over the counter, and regularly advertised in mass-circulation women's magazines. Condoms, contraceptive jellies, foams, and sponges were openly for sale on grocery store shelves. Abortion was legal as a right accorded to women based on a constitutional theory of privacy, and daring movie stars were proudly flaunting their unwed motherhood.

Which brings us to the third meaning of revolution, also from the French Revolution. With its radical new notions of the rights of man, the French Revolution came to stand for the redistribution of power, and the replacing of one (implicitly unjust) regime with another, (implicitly more equitable) one.¹³ Like the meaning of the word revolution just above, this meaning, too, implies a total restructuring of everyday life. But what distinguishes it from the previous meaning is the idea that life has changed so dramatically because *the revolution has called into question the fundamental power relations on which everyday life is built*. Thus how people addressed one another in the French Revolution, or how months came to be named or years counted,

Murphy Brown for having had a child out of wedlock. In this context, see Charles Murray, "The Coming White Underclass", *The Wall Street Journal*.

¹³ Raymond Williams, *Keyword: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Rev. Edition). 1983, New York: Oxford University Press. See also Norberto Bobbio, and Allan Cameron. *Left and Right : The Significance of a Political Distinction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

stood in for a set of *political* claims about the nature of society and how it should be organized.¹⁴

It is in this sense of the word that the sexual revolution of the 1960s was so revolutionary, because it called into question a set of taken-for-granted ideas in the realm of gender and in sexuality, and in so doing, it also called into question power relations between men and women. Whether or not the sexual revolution *intended* to challenge the power relations between the sexes, and whether or not it actually did, are still open questions. For my own part, let me just say that I think that much of the sexual revolution was accidental, (which is probably true of the French Revolution as well), and that it certainly did not create equality—no matter how that term is defined—between men and women.

But it did *equalize* men and women in at least one significant respect. By 1975 that most cherished ideal of the first generation of sex educators had begun to come true: men and women had started to share a single standard of sex behavior.¹⁵ Alas for the social hygienists like Anna Garlin Spencer, it wasn't the one they had in mind. In fact, the standard that emerged was the very one that she had so confidently predicted would *never* happen; women began to

14 Lynn Avery Hunt. *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, *Studies on the History of Society and Culture* ; [1]. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

¹⁵ This is not to say that the double standard has entirely disappeared, of course, because there is a considerable amount of evidence to the contrary. What has changed, however, are the sharp edges of the

conduct their sex lives in much the same way that men did. And both law and social policy seemed bent on helping them do so.

It's this part of the revolution that the mother in Billingsley is referring to and that all of the people in this book are fighting over in one way or another. The debate over sex education is as passionate as it is because it is a fight over whether men and women can (and should) treat sex the same way.¹⁶

On the purely practical level, between 1964 and 1975 sex became possible for millions of women in the ways it always had been for many men, something you did when you wanted to, because you wanted to, and for its own sake. With contraception legal, readily available, Federally-subsidized, and highly effective, and with abortion available as a back-up should pregnancy occur anyway, sex for pure pleasure became possible as a cultural ideal for women, as it had been for men.

And keep in mind that sex without the consequences of pregnancy (optional motherhood being one huge step closer to reproductive equality than an earlier generation's "voluntary motherhood"), occurred just as a new wave of feminism was taking place. Not only had the link between sex and

double standard. in terms of the argument I will be making below, both the gradual decline of the (heterosexual) double standard and the rise of more open homosexuality were both products of

16 Incidentally, whether or not the first sexual revolution, the one considered in the previous chapter, was this third kind of a revolution is much debated by scholars. There is a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that it was, but the kinds of data I would need to make a convincing claim just aren't available to me. What I do have are data about the sexual revolution of the 1960s, especially as it reverberates through the lives of the people in the four communities studied in this book. So although I am pretty confident that

reproduction been broken technologically, the women's movement made the *political* claim that this was just as it should be. After all, hadn't parenthood always been optional in some sense for men, and especially for unmarried men?

All of the indicators suggested that along several different measures, men and women were now more alike than different in terms of their sexual practices

As men and women became reproductively and then sexually more similarly situated, so to speak, in an odd sort of way it created at least the space for women to become what liberalism had always claimed that they were, namely free and equal individuals, different in no essential way from the men around them. Heretofore, in different ways and in varying degrees, biology (or at least biology as it had been politically and socially structured) meant that women were always, as Susan Moeller Okin so persuasively points out, mothers or potential mothers.

Thus the watershed of the sexual revolution. Women, whose ties to motherhood were loosened by it, started to become *individuals*.¹⁷ And public opinion seemed to be largely accepting of the changes. Not only did American

the early years of the 20th century represented this kind of revolution, I will restrict myself to the more recent revolution of the 1960s

¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir; *The Second Sex*, ; Mary Ryan in Craig J. Calhoun. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.

attitudes towards many sexual matters change as behavior was changing, these changes in attitude diffused quite rapidly among different sectors of society..¹⁸

As the pollster Daniel Yankelovitch put it:

Those first few years of the decade of the 1970s point to vast changes in the complexion and outlook of an entire generation of young people. Indeed, so startling are the shifts in values and beliefs between the late 1960s, when our youth studies were first launched, and the present time that social historians of the future should have little difficulty in identifying the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. Rarely has a transition between one decade and the next seemed so abrupt and so full of discontinuities.¹⁹

The key discontinuity brought into being by “the sixties” was the gradual displacement of marriage as the only legitimate place to have sex. Public opinion polls show quite convincingly that as of 1967, a set of rules about proper sexual conduct that would have seemed both comforting and familiar to people in the early 1900s were still widely accepted by just about everyone, but that the majority of the public had changed its mind on these rules *before* Roe v. Wade. Whatever people *did* in their private lives, these polls show that as of the late 1960s, they pretty much agreed about what people *should* do. Moral people, in this view, and specifically moral *women* did not have sex before

¹⁸ Again, I won't take on task of dating the exact beginning and end, if there was one, of the sexual revolution. Sufficient to my purposes is to argue that there was one.

¹⁹ Daniel Yankelovitch, *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the 1970s*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974, p. Edward Leroy Long, Jr., “The History and Literature of “The New Morality,”” in *The Situation Ethics Debate*, ed. Harvey Cox, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968. Arnold Lunn and Garth Lean, *The New Morality*, London: Blandford Press, 1964. See Chapter 7 for “The Surrender on Sex.” For empirical evidence of the spread of changing sexual standards as the core of the “new morality”, see

marriage, did not have sex with anyone other than their legal spouses, and did not have sex just for the sheer fun of it.

What is remarkable in retrospect is how quickly that world was overturned. In 1969, almost seven of ten Americans were opposed to premarital sex; by 1973, just four years later, that number had dropped to only forty-eight percent of those surveyed, a drop of twenty percentage points. The number who found nude photos in magazines offensive dropped a similar twenty points, from seventy-five percent to fifty-five percent, and the number of people who found topless waitresses offensive dropped seventeen points.²⁰ Between 1965 and 1974, the number of people who thought birth control information should be available to anyone who wanted it increased ten percentage points, from eighty-one percent to ninety one percent.²¹ Even attitudes towards abortion became substantially more liberal, with virtually of the change occurring *before* the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.²²

Changes of this magnitude are extremely rare in public opinion surveying, a process which has now been taking place for approximately sixty years. The sheer size of the shift in opinion and the very short time frame in

20 . For both questions, see Gallup Polls numbers 780, 874. For an overview see Benjamin I. Page, and Robert Y. Shapiro. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

21 Ibid

22 In the ten years between 1962 and 1972 there was a change of thirty percentage points in the numbers of Americans who thought that poverty was a legitimate reason for having an abortion; between 1965 and 1972 there was a twenty-point percentage change in people who thought that a potentially serious birth defect was. For an overview, see Page and Shapiro, pp. 104-108 [Page, 1992 #2]

which it took place makes clear that the people in this book are on to something when they see “the sixties” as a watershed.

Equally interesting is what did *not* change. Attitudes towards extramarital sex wobbled a bit during the period, but most of the fluctuation was occasioned by the fact that opinions towards extramarital sex became more conservative rather than more liberal during the 1980s. Although some of the variation comes about from the different wording of the questions asked, still, during most of the 1970s and 1980s 70% of those surveyed thought that extramarital relations were always wrong.²³

By the same token, pollsters seem not to have asked many questions about homosexuality before the early 1970s, but attitudes towards it were quite stable through the 1970s and 1980s as well with a similar seventy to seventy-five percent of those surveyed agreeing that same-sex relations were “always wrong”, counterbalanced by some shift in sentiments that while “wrong”, homosexuality should not be criminal.²⁴

Although the contradictory direction of public opinion on adultery and gay sex would seem to challenge the idea that the 1960s represented a true sexual revolution, if we go back to the third meaning of revolution, these

²³ For ease of citation, rather than listing the individual polls, I have listed where they can most conveniently be compared. See Page and Shapiro, *op. cit.* and Richard G. Niemi,

findings make perfect sense. What was being redistributed in the sexual revolution was the right for women to have heterosexual sex and not be married. Thus marriage became one way that heterosexuals could be sexual, but not the only one. When marriage was finally entered into, however, both men and women expected that the boundaries of that sexual choice would be respected.

Another way of thinking of it is the first sexual revolution dethroned reproduction from its pre-eminent role in human sexuality, and put it on an equal footing with sexual pleasure. But as the social hygienists so presciently understood, valuing sexual pleasure per se raised troubling questions of whether or not sexual pleasure was going to go its own way. If sex and reproduction could be severed from each other *within* marriage, what was to stop people from simply having sex without bothering to get married?

Happily for the worries of the social hygienists, a variety of social forces kept sex within marriage—more or less---for much of the 20th century. But for whatever reasons—and the exact reasons are still debated--sometime in the middle of the 20th century, sex and marriage parted ways, just as sex and procreation within marriage had in an earlier revolution..

Mueller, and Tom W. Smith. *Trends in Public Opinion: A Compendium of Survey Data*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.

²⁴ . Again, see Niemi et al., pp. 193-195

This second revolution was at first hidden because the categories of thinking inherited from the first sexual revolution hid its emergence. The first sexual revolution gave us the terms “premarital” sex and “out of wedlock” births, and well into the 1980s, most people--including most social scientists--continued to take those categories for granted. In an earlier era, this made sense: for many of the people involved (particularly among the well-educated and affluent), “pre-marital” was exactly that: if the Kinsey studies are any indication, most women prior to the 1950s had “premarital” sex only with their fiancées and only for a period of time leading up to the wedding. “Premarital” sex was engagement sex, starting the sexual part of the marriage before the legal part, a pattern that probably has deep roots in American history.²⁵

But a new cultural ideal emerged in the 1960s: Men and women came to believe that (heterosexual) sex outside of marriage was morally acceptable as long as people cared for each other, even if they were not engaged to each other.²⁶

When pioneering feminist doctor Rachel Yarros wrote in 1933 that:

Many young people believe in pre-marital sex experience. Even those who do not accept the free love doctrine, and who protest that they

²⁵ As late as 1964 in the conservative Midwest, a fraternity pin (the pre-engagement symbol) and the engagement ring alike were referred to by men as “crotch keys”, suggesting the wide acceptance of this model of “premarital” sex.

²⁶ Donald Porter Geddes, and Alfred C. Kinsey. *Seeds of the American Sexual Revolution : Discussions of the Studies of Alfred Kinsey*. s.l.: s.n., 1975.; Ira L. Reiss. *Premarital Sexual Standards in America; a Sociological Investigation of the Relative Social and Cultural Integration of American Sexual Standards*. Glencoe, Ill.,: Free Press, 1960.

believe in marriage and expect to marry, argue that meanwhile they have a right to occasional indulgences. They do not see why society should object to this degree of freedom, provided there are not children. The demand for contraceptive information on the part of college student, male and female, and even of high- school pupils, is extraordinary, and would appall the complacent, conservative parents of those emancipated insurgents.²⁷

she was chronicling the first sexual revolution.

When sex educators bewailed the idea that students thought that they had nothing to learn from sex educators, they were chronicling the second.

Thus the seeming inconsistencies in the public opinion data. Starting sometime in the 1960s, young people (and subsequently older ones) began to think of heterosexual marriage as just one among many possible heterosexual lifestyles. Thus the “single woman” and the “man about town” both became culturally-accepted ways of being both single and sexually active. The continuing resistance to adultery and homosexuality, however, suggests that individuals may think that once one chooses a [heterosexual] lifestyle such as marriage, one should honor the commitment

This change was so dramatically different from earlier forms of morality that it was in fact called “The New Morality”.²⁸

²⁷ Rachel Yarros, M.D. pp. 11-12

²⁸ Robert Campbell, ed. *New Morality or No Morality*. New York City: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1969., Robert L. Cunningham, ed. *Situationism and the New Morality*, Contemporary Problems in Philosophy. New York City: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970., Charles V. Dorothy. *God Speaks out on the New Morality*. Pasadena, Calif.: Ambassador College Press, 1964., Lawrence Lipton. *The Erotic Revolution An Affirmative View of the New Morality*. 1st ed. Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1965. , Arnold Henry Moore Lunn, and Garth Lean. *The New Morality*. London,: Blandford, 1964.

Although the first public response to the “sexual revolution” and the “new morality” was largely one of alarm, Americans became accustomed to the new sexual lifestyles in remarkably quick order. (Many of the people you will meet in the next chapter would say that Americans became “numbed” rather than accustomed, but still the changes in attitudes were remarkable.)

What was once the terrain of a small, sophisticated minority of Americans (the heirs of the Greenwich Village “Bohemians” whose radical attitudes on sex were so roundly ignored by the social hygienists) became mainstream. Starting out as values among youth and the highly educated, more “permissive” values vis a vis sexual behavior spread within a remarkably short period of time to the less well-educated and to older people.²⁹

Already by 1969, for example, the college campus had become accepting of what had earlier been called “casual” sex—two out of three students surveyed found nothing morally troubling about it. Despite the fact that young people who are not college-bound tend to be more socially conservative, by just four years later, disapproval among this group dropped from almost 60% of those polled to numbers much like those seen among college students. By

, Douglas A. Rhymes. *No New Morality: Christian Personal Values and Sexual Morality*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964., Ernest Parkinson Smith, and A. Graham Ikin. *Morality -- Old and New*. Derby: Peter Smith Ltd., 1964., Daniel Yankelovich. *The New Morality; a Profile of American Youth in the 70's*. New York,; McGraw-Hill, 1974.

²⁹ For the diffusion of these values from a small group of highly educated youth to a wider population, see Yankelovitch, D. (1974). *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the 1970's*. New York, McGraw Hill. For changes within the larger population, see Page and Shapiro, op. cit, pp.104-110 and Niemi et al. op. cit. pp. 187-214

1973, substantial majorities of young people, whether in college or not, agreed that they wanted more sexual freedom, that abortions were morally acceptable, and so was gay sex was morally acceptable.³⁰

Although less visible at the time, essentially the same thing began to happen to childbearing. While the 1970s saw a national crisis over “teenage pregnancy”, the behavior that was driving that crisis was not pregnancy but birth, and not births to young people, but births to young *unmarried* people.³¹ By 1979, when Vice President Dan Quayle made his famous “family values” speech denouncing the fictional Murphy Brown for having had a child out of wedlock, non-marital childbearing had become even more a significant part of all American births. By the year after his speech, Americans non-marital birth rates had increased by almost 30% from 1960, just two decades earlier, and non-marital births now accounted for almost one out of every four births. As a point of comparison, out of wedlock rates have by now gone up one hundred percent since 1980, and almost one baby out of three is born to unmarried parents.

These figures, stark as they are, understate the changes just as the rates on “premarital” sex did. Where in an earlier era, out of wedlock births

³⁰ Yankelovitch, *The New Morality*, p024-24.

³¹ National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 50, (10), June 6, 2002

represented miscalculations and accidents, in this new era they represent reasonably conscious choices.³²

What seems to be happening is that Americans (including those who are having both sex and children “out of wedlock”) agree that marriage as a location for sex and childbearing is valuable. Where they differ from earlier generations is their belief that marriage is no longer the *only* choice for both sex and parenthood. Thus many women and men feel comfortable with the idea that they may well get married someday, when they meet Mr. or Ms. Right, but in the meantime are willing to have sex and in many cases children while they await that day.

As a key government document examining the shift to out of wedlock childbearing primly notes, “ Two key factors contributing to the rising numbers of out-of-wedlock births through 1990 were the increased birth rates for unmarried women and the steep increases in the number of unmarried women in the childbearing ages...In other words, the combination of more unmarried women in the population and higher propensities for unmarried women to give birth produced substantial increases in the number of out-of-wedlock births.”³³

³² I use that awkward terminology to capture a complex reality: in earlier research I asked teen mothers about events leading up to their pregnancies, and virtually all of them described the pregnancy as having happened “accidentally.” Yet for most of them, the pregnancy happened after having had sex without using contraception, and having actively chosen to not to have had an abortion, thus suggesting that while there are cultural forces shaping how young, poor women describe their pregnancies, their actions tell another story.

³³ , Stephanie J Ventura, and Christine Bachrach. "Non-Marital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99." National Vital Statistics Reports 48, no. 16 (2000).p. 3

There you have it, hidden in the language of demographers. People are substantially less willing to get married, are more willing to have sex when they are not married, and are more willing to have children resulting from that sex. This is the revolution: marriage has been dethroned.

Whatever the forces dethroning marriage, they are clearly happening throughout all of the industrialized world, with the partial exception of Japan. The Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, and France all have higher rates of non-marital childbearing than we do; two out of three children in Iceland are born to unmarried parents, half of all births in Sweden, Norway and Denmark are non-marital, and approximately four out of ten births in France, Great Britain, and Finland are unmarried.³⁴

Sex education, which had come into being as a way of managing the first sexual revolution, the one that separated sex from procreation *within marriage* was now called on in a new incarnation as a way to manage this second one, which had for the first time separated both sex *and* reproduction from marriage. From a rather benign and diffuse set of programs scattered over biology, English, home economics, and physical education, sex education was now increasingly remade into exactly what the early founders had dismissed as “emergency” sex education—sex education taught alone, designed to warn

³⁴ Council of Europe, *Recent Demographic Developments in Europe*, 199, Council of Europe Pres, 1999.

young people about the dangers of sex outside of marriage, or, in the new incarnation, how to manage those dangers more effectively.

Implicit in the sexual revolution, and the changing standards of especially female behavior, was the threatening idea that women and men—and particularly women, the traditional guardians of the home—were having sex and children for their own reasons. Sex was no longer part of a courtship process that would lead to a spiritualized eroticism that was designed to neatly confine more entertaining, more satisfying sex within the bonds of marriage, as social hygienists had hoped. Now sex was just another pleasure to be indulged in whenever the two parties agreed.

Worse yet, although sex educators only recognized this in the context of “teenage pregnancy”, these people who were having sex just for fun were increasingly moving on to the next stage, building families without bothering to go through the step of getting married.

Alert to the threat, a new generation of sex educators moved, once again, to make sure that sex was safely tethered, if not in marriages, at least in heterosexual, committed relationships that were part of the prelude to marriage. And the language that sex educators used was one of “risk reduction.” Rather than following in the footsteps of their predecessors, who urged young people to abstain from non-marital sex entirely, the new generation of sex educators—themselves the products of the sexual revolution—decided that both

normatively and statistically, most young people would be having sex outside of marriage. In other words, they took for granted the core assumption of the sexual revolution—that marriage was just one sexual lifestyle among many.

When Mary Calderone, M.D., founder of the Sex Information and Education Council of the US (SIECUS) said, “One of the great issues of this era is the question of how to reframe our moral values in terms relevant to the needs and conditions of a world that grows more complex and demanding every day” she could well have been writing in 1915. But her next sentences makes clear she is speaking of the second rather than the first sexual revolution: “[M]any of the moral dilemmas relate in one way or another to sexual behavior, *within, as well as outside* marriage” (emphasis added.)³⁵

The new sex educators gave less ground on childbearing, preferring to see it as one of the “risks” of sex to be managed, rather than a conscious (albeit often second-best) decision. Throughout this period, sex educators assumed that teenage pregnancy was the same thing as unwed pregnancy, and true to an earlier era, they assumed that it must be unwanted.

The “dangers” of sexuality therefore were no longer the syphilis and “commercialized vice,” that worried the social hygienists (and even the family life educators) but the “risks” inherent in this new cultural form of sex — unwanted (although unwanted by whom was never clearly specified) pregnancy,

abortion, and what were thought to be the relatively more benign diseases of the 1970s—gonorrhea, herpes, and the less well-known sexually transmitted diseases.

The task of sex education became one of reducing the risks of sexuality outside of marriage among young people, and two things were thought critical for such reduction. On the one hand, information was key: young people could not manage risks without being aware both of the risks and the means to reduce those risks. On the other hand, young people needed motivation to manage such risks, and thus the emphasis on being in a “caring” relationship. This gave rise to a new marker of when young people were “ready” to have sex. In an earlier era, of course, they were “ready” to have sex when they had married or, although few sex educators directly addressed it, when they were engaged to be married and had publicly announced themselves to be so. Now, they were “ready” when they were prepared to actively manage risks on their own behalf and for their partners. A young person who did not protect his or her partner from both pregnancy and disease was a person, by definition, “not ready” to have sex. Finally, sex education de facto tried—as had the social hygienists—to uphold an new ideal from further “slippage” into exactly what happened—sex and parenthood largely outside the confines of marriage.

³⁵ Mary S. Calderone, M.D. “Time: The Present”, SIECUS Newsletter, Vol. 3, Number 5, June, 1968, p.2

In the management rather than the deterrence of risk, sex educators were in tune with a range of other cultural and social processes. Increasingly, from crime to nuclear energy, the task of a more complex and heterogeneous society was not the preaching of a moral vision as both the social hygienists and the family life educators assumed, but the provision of information to morally diverse actors who would “clarify” their own values, and act prudently.³⁶

The arrival of the Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV) and its consequence, AIDS in the early 1980s put these assumptions into high relief.³⁷ Although Americans had undergone a *heterosexual* sexual revolution, they—like the social hygienists before them—had not anticipated the logical flow of events.

By the time of the discovery of the AIDS virus, gay activists had taken the logic of sexual rights one step further. If heterosexuals were no longer obligated to confine themselves sexually and reproductively to the nuclear family, why should they? The expansion of the gay rights movement from an anti-discrimination position to a gay pride position called the status of the nuclear heterosexual family even more into question.

³⁶ Ulrich Beck. *Risk Society : Towards a New Modernity*. London ; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992.

³⁷ Centers for Disease Control, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 30, 250-252; Centers for Disease Control, Recommendations of the USPH Task Force on the Use of Viudine to Reduce Perinatal

AIDS education heightened the contradiction. While conservative critics were using it to urge that heterosexual sex return to marriage, and that homosexual sex be banned in order to protect gays from themselves, gay activist groups produced “safe sex” educational materials that frankly combined pleasure with risk reduction. While Federally-funded publications urged (presumably heterosexual) teenagers to practice “safer” and “caring” sex, other Federally-funded publications urged gay men to have “hot and healthy” sex.³⁸

Like their forebears, who assumed that everyone – working-class and affluent; male and female; white, “Negro,” “Hebrew,” and “Slav” – could be taught to follow the single standard of sex behavior, the new sex educators had a new ideal. It was still the single standard, but this time it was the standard of “intimacy”, of “caring” and “non-exploitative” sex that was the common goal for all groups. By the time that AIDS educators were preaching “safe sex” transmuted into “mutually monogamous sex” as the preferred ideal, it was simply a more clinical rendering of the sex educators’ desideratum.³⁶

But this new wave of sex education reform brought its own backlash in its wake. In the course of trying to convince young people that the best kind of sex was intimate, committed, and mutually caring sex, sex that took the other

Transmission of Human Immuno Deficiency Virus , Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reprot, 1994,43, RR-11

38 Yankelovich, op. cit; I base this claim on the analysis of curricula examined from the 1930s to the present. Cf that “safe sex” is the logical reduction of the “caring” relationship to its essential element: that one cares enough to protect the other person from risk, even if the relationship is a transitory one.

person into account, sex educators had effectively conceded that marriage was just one of several sexual options.

This fact was not lost on opponents, who saw in this concession the coming end of civilization. Starting in the 1960s the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society as well as other conservatives began to take on sex education programs. In 1964, the Anaheim John Birch society, ardent conservatives who looked on Barry Goldwater as too liberal, found the local sex education program deeply offensive.³⁹

Ironically, a program designed by its founders to counter tendencies towards what they saw as “promiscuity” was accused by its opponents of fomenting it. As a John Birch publication of 1968 notes, sex education programs

...make sexual promiscuousness fashionable, marriage a temporary convenience, divorce commonplace, chastity a joke, and fidelity a symbol of backwardness. Encourage premarital sexual experiments and relations, the unlimited use of contraceptives, and a widespread resort to abortion. Make the abandonment of newborn babies to welfare agencies a customary procedure. *Convert the sexual act from its natural reproductive function to solely a source of pleasure, without corresponding responsibility.* (emphasis added)⁴⁰

With these words, the Birch Society acknowledged that a new era in sex education had begun.

39 There is a journalistic but closely observed account of this controversy in Mary Breasted’s book: Mary Breasted. *Oh! Sex Education!* New York,: Praeger Publishers, 1970.

40 John Birch Society Newsletter, p. 5

In 1968 the John Birch Society and the Christian Crusade, whatever their relationships to sex education, were decidedly on the fringes (some would argue the “lunatic” fringes) of American political debate. Yet opposition to sex education, once the purview of what was called the “radical right,” moved in just a little over a decade to very much the center of the Republican Party, . traditionally the more aristocratic party complete with a forgiving eye towards sexual foibles, at least those committed in private?

The short answer is that just as was the case in the first sexual revolution, changes in sexual practices got mapped over changes in gender as well. What was a tiny minority of women in 1880-1920, became a groundswell by the end of the century. [RM: education, work force etc.] Increasingly women were—in terms of their daily life activities—more and more like their brothers and husbands. What had once been a doctrine of separate spheres, where women stayed home and tended to the family while men went out to challenge the market and wring a living from it, quietly came to an end. Although the data are murky, it seems clear that many Americans appreciated at some level that a new cultural ideal of marriage (and with it new cultural ideals of masculine and feminine) had emerged, and that these new ideals enjoyed widespread approval.

Despite the popularity of these new ideals, ideals that came to seem “natural” to many Americans, in fact, the ideals served to polarize people.

Whether the frame of contention was the family, feminism, proper roles and activities for men and women, abortion or sex education, there were a significant minority of people who clung to the ideals of an earlier era. In fact, ironically, the ideals they clung to were in large part the ideals of the early social hygienists—that men and women were equal but different, that parenthood and particularly motherhood redeemed sexuality from mere carnality and transformed it into a source of intimacy and commitment.

A variety of public issues, from the ill-fated Carter-era White House Conference on Families, to abortion, to the ERA served to politically mobilize those who supported an earlier model of families and sex. And, once mobilized, they were eager to make their voices heard in the public arena. In short, the sexual revolution of the 1960s, like the French Revolution some two hundred years earlier, had given rise to a new form of conservative and liberal in the political arena.

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