

MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION:
AN UNFETTERED HISTORY

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FOR JENNIFER

INTRODUCTION

WHAT WAS THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION? That's the question this book tries to answer. It is a question that I've wondered about since an early age. Born in 1969, I missed the sixties and, for the most part, the seventies. But I have always been fascinated by stories of the days of sexual liberation. I don't remember when I first learned about the sexual revolution or even when I first heard the term, but I do remember growing up with the vague sense of having missed something magical and mysterious. I remember the adolescent's agony of realizing that my parents and teachers had witnessed extraordinary social transformations, the likes of which we might never see again.

This book, in other words, grew out of my own personal desire to understand how the world as we know it today came to be. Who were the people who rebelled against sexual mores in the sixties and seventies? What sort of personal risks did they take? Why did they challenge the authorities? What forms of resistance did they meet? How did they succeed? How did they fail? What was life like before the sexual revolution and to what extent was it really changed?

This book has two important features. First, it endeavors to combine a traditional narrative with original analysis; my hope is that it will have something to offer to both the reader who knows little about the period and the one who knows a great deal. Second, it is based on written documents from the era as well as interviews with people who lived through it. The documents ensure historical accuracy, while the interviews provide perspective and context. The result, I hope, is a book that

allows the reader to understand why and how the sexual revolution took place, why it ended when it did, the many ways it contributed to the overall improvement of American life, and, at the same time, the many ways it left us all less at peace with ourselves.



Where did we get the idea of a "sexual revolution"? The phrase was coined in Germany in the 1920s by Wilhelm Reich, an eccentric Austrian psychoanalyst who hoped to liberate Europeans from centuries of social, political, and psychological enslavement. His book, *The Sexual Struggle of Youth*, helped to disseminate his ideas in the German-speaking world. As one of the leading figures of the sex reform movement that swept Germany in the 1920s, Reich founded several clinics throughout Central Europe for the distribution of information about birth control and abortion, but his campaign was cut short by the political turmoil of the 1930s. In 1945, *The Sexual Struggle of Youth* was reprinted in the United States under the title *The Sexual Revolution*.¹

Though Reich's dream of a sexually liberated society did not come to fruition, the first half of the twentieth century did see rapid changes in mores in both Europe and the United States. Advertising became more suggestive, avant-garde writers eschewed Victorian proprieties in describing their sexual experiences, magazine publishers began printing sexually titillating images to appeal to their male readers, and young women started to flaunt their "sex appeal." To many, these changes were deeply disturbing. In 1954 Harvard sociologist Pitirim Sorokin decried the "sex revolution" he saw taking place in American society and bemoaned the rising divorce rate, the shrinking family size, the growing popularity of jazz, the spread of ever more "expressive gyrations and contortions called dancing," and the new phenomenon he labeled "sex addiction." These developments, he declared, were evidence that American culture was on the verge of collapse. "We are," he wrote, "completely surrounded by the rising tide of sex, which is flooding every compartment of our culture, every section of our social life." This was a serious matter: "Unless we develop an inner immunity against these libidinal forces, we are bound to be conquered by the continuous presence of a gigantic array of omni-present sex stimuli."²

In the early sixties, the "sexual revolution" was used to describe the suspected impact of the newly invented birth control pill on the behavior of white, middle-class, female college students. A few years later, the term was employed to describe the sweeping repudiation of literary censorship by the U.S. Supreme Court. It was borrowed to characterize developments in the scientific study of sexual behavior, most notably by

Masters and Johnson. In the late sixties, the "sexual revolution" was invoked to refer to the new candor in American culture, especially the sudden acceptance of nudity in film and on the stage.

By the early seventies, the "sexual revolution" was taking on new meanings with each passing year. It was adopted to describe the showing of hard-core sex films in first-run theaters, not to mention the opening of private clubs for group sex. It was used to capture the new spirit of the swinging singles life, as well as the popularization of open marriage. For those in the counterculture, the "sexual revolution" meant the freedom to have sex where and when one wished.

In the highly politicized climate of the late sixties and early seventies, the "sexual revolution" was given a range of meanings. Some student radicals used the term specifically to refer to the end of the "tyranny of the genital" and the arrival of an eagerly awaited age of polymorphous pansexuality. Young feminists equated the "sexual revolution" with the oppression and "objectification" of women and saw it, therefore, as something to stop at all costs. Gay men considered the "sexual revolution" to mean a whole new era of freedom to identify oneself publicly as gay, to go to gay bars and discotheques, to have sex in clubs and bathhouses.

Events and developments shaped popular perception of the "sexual revolution." Sex-education courses in schools and colleges were radically redesigned to replace euphemism and scare tactics with explicit visual aids and practical information. New books suggested that women were as eager for one-night stands and other sexual thrills as were men. Many states repealed their sodomy laws and introduced "no-fault" divorce. And in 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ended a century of criminalized abortion. Once again the "sexual revolution" was reinterpreted and redefined.

To this day, the "sexual revolution" remains a resonant and provocative expression, but it evokes different events and eras to different people: It may bring to mind college coeds in tight sweaters learning about the pill, or naked hippie couples frolicking in a park, or men and women waiting in line to see a hard-core porn film as a first date. Each of these images is accurate, but no one alone can tell the whole story.

This book is not about the "sexual revolution" described by Reich or Sorokin but about the social and cultural transformations of the 1960s and '70s. The narrative begins in the early sixties because this was when white middle-class Americans first really began to accept the idea of young women having premarital sex. It ends in the late seventies, when opponents on both ends of the political spectrum waged a largely successful campaign against sexual permissiveness. In the intervening years, the nation went through a period of rapid change that affected nearly everyone in some way or another. Dozens of developments reshaped the American social and cultural landscape. Depending on

one's perspective, these developments could be seen as either steps toward social progress or symptoms of social decline. But every one of them has had an impact on how we as a nation have come to think of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.



One cannot write a serious book today on sex without addressing the theories of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. The first volume of his *History of Sexuality* sent shock waves through the academy when it was published in English in 1978 because it challenged the validity of one of the most talked-about ideas of the 1960s and '70s: the idea of sexual "repression."

Ever since American cultural critics discovered Foucault, "repression" has been a dirty word in intellectual circles. It is not my aim to challenge Foucault or to critique his philosophical system, but I do believe it is necessary to appreciate that real sexual repression was always a threat in the 1940s and '50s. That is to say, the state reserved the right to repress sexual deviance and dissent. One could go to jail for publishing the "wrong" book or distributing contraceptive devices to the "wrong" person, or saying the "wrong" word aloud in a public place. Although few people actually served time for such activities, the threat of punishment was always there. In a more subtle yet even more powerful way, the threat of "social death" loomed on the horizon for anyone who broke with convention. There were likely to be severe consequences if one admitted to having had premarital sex, or confessed to a physical attraction for a person of another race, or acknowledged publicly one's homosexual inclinations. No one looked kindly on a "slut" or a "pervert."

Far more people worried about the threat of legal trouble and social ostracism than ever actually experienced either of the two, so it is hard to document the extent of sexual repression in the forties and fifties. If one were to conduct a study that focused on actual police prosecutions for distributing obscenity in the 1950s, for instance, the results would probably be inconclusive. Moreover, people most likely did many things in private that would have cost them dearly if discovered. Professed sexual morality and actual sexual behavior do not always correlate.

But statistics alone do not encompass the vastness of culture, and it was America's culture of repression that had a chilling effect on the arts, publishing, science, and everyday interactions. People were afraid that what they said about sex might come back to haunt them, so they often chose silence and self-restraint. But as I hope this book makes clear, many Americans in the second half of the twentieth century desperately craved freedom from the fear of retribution for sexual misconduct. To that end

they wrote books, staged rallies, formed organizations, broke the law, and flouted convention. For them, sexual repression was something very real and very disturbing. They made it their goal to liberate humanity from what they felt were intolerably repressive laws and beliefs.

It takes an unusual person to devote his or her life to challenging society's views about sex. The people who did so in the sixties and seventies certainly formed an eclectic group. They believed passionately in what they were doing, and sometimes they let their passions get the better of their reason. They were not, with a few exceptions, great thinkers; nor were they great artists or activists or writers. Most did not have children; those that did would probably have been judged by their families as mediocre parents. Though they condemned others for hypocrisy, they were often blatantly hypocritical themselves. Often they were motivated less by high-minded ideals than by lust and greed.

But for all their faults, the sexual revolutionaries of the sixties and seventies were individualists in the truest sense of the term. They refused to bow to convention, to dress "appropriately," to act "normally," to "go with the crowd." They were rarely embarrassed by their own peculiarities, and they almost never let the smirks and sneers of others stop them from expressing themselves.

And unlike the great majority of history's revolutionaries, they eschewed violence. Or, rather, to be more accurate, the thought of violence never even occurred to them. Violence was the very opposite of all they stood for. They believed in making love, not war.

If leadership is defined as the ability to enroll others in new possibilities and new futures, then no matter how strange or anti-intellectual or, at times, deeply selfish they may have been, the sexual revolutionaries of the sixties and seventies were the truest of leaders. They made people realize that the future does not have to look like the past.



Part of the reason that there is still so much confusion surrounding the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies is that the term "revolution" has two meanings: It can denote a calculated contest against the status quo (as in the "French Revolution"); or a sudden, unexpected period of social transformation (as in the "Industrial Revolution"). The sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies involved both elements. There were direct attempts to topple the legal and political pillars of the existing moral regime. There was also an unplanned reconfiguration of American culture, a result of demographic, economic, and technological changes that took many Americans by surprise. Sometimes these two aspects of the sexual revolution operated in tandem, forcefully

pushing the nation along one path; sometimes they operated in opposition to each other, pulling the nation in two different directions at once.

Many of the social and cultural changes of the era were not revolutionary at all but evolutionary. Gender roles began to change dramatically in the 1910s and '20s and continued to evolve over time. The birth control movement also got its start in the first decades of the century, and by the 1960s "family planning" was already an acceptable practice for married middle-class couples. Erotic pinup pictures date from the 1940s and only slowly developed into the magazine centerfolds in *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*. Gay bars and bathhouses existed long before they became visible to the straight world in the late sixties and seventies.

As the following pages reveal, the so-called "permissiveness" of the sixties and seventies was a far more complicated cultural phenomenon than popular memory allows. It was a response to the sense of fatalism created by the military draft and the moral questions raised by the war in Vietnam. It was encouraged by many religious leaders, who came to the conclusion that "traditional" morality was based on a misreading of scripture. The trend was endorsed by judges who could not bring themselves to support censorship or laws regulating private behavior. It was fueled by the hunger for truth.

In some respects, the permissiveness of the era was just the logical extension of the commercial free market to include sexual goods and commodities. In other respects, it marked a literal *revolution*: a return to the secular values and bawdier spirit of the eighteenth century, when the Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It was during the Age of Enlightenment, after all, that the pornographic classic *Fanny Hill* was published in England, that Benjamin Franklin and other champions of liberty penned countless erotic poems, and that most educated people believed science and reason were about to eradicate religious superstition once and for all.

I am suggesting, in other words, that the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies was a deeply American revolution, filled with the contradictions of American life. It was spiritual yet secular, idealistic yet commercial, driven by science yet colored by a romantic view of nature.



This book was far harder to write than I ever expected it would be. Naively — and arrogantly — I thought I could simply interview a few people and read some out-of-print books and thereby master a topic as sweeping and complicated as the sexual revolution. But more than that, I assumed at the start that my own views on the subject were crisp and consistent. Over time I realized the opposite was true. In fact, there were

many moments while writing this book that I wished I had a clear political agenda to organize my thoughts: a marxist framework, a feminist perspective, or even a coherent, moralistic stance. Other times I wished at least that I could write history objectively and impartially without any of the hindrances of hindsight.

Unfortunately, I must beg the reader's forgiveness in advance: I have not found any escape from my own highly idiosyncratic, personal concerns, which shape my perception of both the present and the past. When I read a story in the morning paper about a case of contemporary censorship, I fear for the First Amendment and fire off letters to the editor. But when I see a report on television about pre-teens practicing unsafe sex, I fret about the messages being sent in the mass media. When I hear about government discrimination against gays and lesbians, or attacks on abortion providers, or opposition to sex education in schools, I am overcome with anger. And when I hear about sexual violence against women, sexual cruelty among teenagers, or the sexual exploitation of children, I wonder if my own civil libertarian leanings aren't misguided. I cannot claim, in other words, to possess a consistent socio-sexual ideology. When I began working on this project I was young and single and brashly confident about my own commitment to the cause of sexual freedom. Now that the book is done I am married and a father and just a little bit mortified that one day my daughter will no doubt find this book on a shelf and flip through its pictures and pages.

I suspect that my ambivalence about sexual expression is shared by most Americans. Perhaps, ultimately, this book examines how difficult it is to sustain a consistent political point of view regarding sex. In the 1960s and '70s many tried, but most failed. Sex is far too messy and complex to conform to tidy political postulates.

As recent scandals and controversies suggest, however, the problem of sexuality remains critical for the nation. The meaning of marriage, the psychological significance of gender differences, the relationship between private life and public life, the dynamics of sexual power, the nature of consent, the stigma of sexually transmitted disease, the concept of age appropriateness, the virtue of honesty, the obligation of parent to child, the role of sex education, the causes of unwanted pregnancy, the definition of infidelity (non to mention the definition of sex itself) are all, no matter how hard we may pretend otherwise, unresolved issues in American society. To really understand our relationship to these issues, one must go back to the 1960s and '70s, back to a time when utopianism and hedonism, idealism and opportunism were dramatically transforming the landscape of sexual morality.

SINGLE GIRLS,
DOUBLE STANDARD

WHEN HELEN GURLEY BROWN'S *Sex and the Single Girl* hit bookstores in 1962, the sexual revolution was launched and there was no turning back. Brown did something few other American women had dared to do: She gleefully admitted, in print, that she had lost her virginity before getting married. It was a wild confession, the kind of revelation that could destroy a woman's reputation, cost her her closest friends, wreck her marriage. But Brown did more than admit to a single indiscretion, she hinted at a long history of casual contacts, and she extolled unmarried sex as a positive virtue. "Not having slept with the man you're going to marry I consider lunacy," she wrote. Unrepentant and unashamed, Brown gently urged other women to follow her example. As she told those who might feel guilty about their erotic impulses, "[S]ex was here a long time before marriage. You inherited your proclivity for it. It isn't some random piece of mischief you dreamed up because you're a bad, wicked girl."¹

As Brown and her publisher hoped, *Sex and the Single Girl* proved just controversial enough to become a sensation. One reviewer called it "as tasteless a book as I have read" and warned that it showed "a thorough contempt for men," who become "the marionettes" in an artful and immoral "manipulation."² From a literary standpoint, the book was simply atrocious. Tossing exclamation points right and left, Brown could barely write a single sentence that didn't include a shriek of delight over rich men or expensive eyeliner. Most of the book's advice to women — from makeup tips to cooking lessons — was numbingly

conventional. But the public adored its breezy style, forthright manner, and pragmatic attitude about premarital romance. The book was an instant best-seller: 150,000 hardcover copies were sold the first year alone. Brown got \$200,000 for the movie rights to the book — the second-highest figure that had ever been paid for a nonfiction book.

Helen Gurley Brown was an unlikely revolutionary. Born in Green Forest, Arkansas, in 1922, she was bred to be a proper Southern lady. Raised by her mother (her father died when Helen was only four), Helen Gurley prided herself on being a good daughter, always obeying the rules — or at least telling the truth when she didn't. She was more bony than beautiful, suffered from severe acne as a teenager, and spent most of her youth caring for her older sister, who had polio. Helen performed well in school, but like most women in the forties and fifties, the only job she could find after graduation from college was secretarial. A firm believer in the American Dream, the young Gurley felt confident that if she were persistent enough, her literary talents would eventually be recognized. In the meantime, she took advantage of everything that working for wealthy, attractive men had to offer. Even though a company might frown on "intramural dating," Gurley would later write in her book, she believed in workplace romance if there were "good material at hand." If her boss was less than handsome, Gurley simply found a new one: "As long as we're in more or less of a boom economy, it's possible to change jobs easily."³ After she'd held eighteen different secretarial jobs, Gurley's talent for perky prose landed her a position as a copywriter for an advertising firm.

Gurley had discovered sex at an early age. When she was only eleven, she and a relative, four years older, tried to have intercourse and failed only because her vagina was too tight.

That was some hot and heavy summer, as you can imagine. I was eleven and he was 15. There's nothing like a country boy who is 15 and horny. Yet I too felt — what would you call it — feelings, cravings, longings. And we once even tried it. But I, of course, was hermetically sealed, a tiny little person, I'd never been touched before, and his heart wasn't in it.

At sixteen, she kissed a boy in the back of a car and had her first orgasm. Four years later she lost her virginity. "Everything was sealed over. I think I bled a little. But I did have an orgasm. I knew then that sex is a wonderful, delicious, exquisite thing . . . after that nothing ever got in the way of my thinking sex was fabulous." The following day "the darling man went to a store and bought me earrings. He wanted me to marry him, but I said no. My mother was devastated."⁴

At thirty-three, Gurley obtained a diaphragm and discovered the joys of sexual independence. After a string of affairs, she finally did marry in

1959. She was already thirty-seven, an old maid by the standards of the day. David Brown, her movie-producer husband, was the one who suggested she write an advice book for young women. He knew a financial opportunity when he saw one, and she knew that there was a large gap between what women did in private and what was said in public. She was appalled by a 1961 article in the *Ladies' Home Journal* warning single women that they had two choices: to marry or remain absolutely chaste. Brown knew from her own experience that many single women were flouting public morals in their private lives. "Theoretically a 'nice' single woman has no sex life. What nonsense! She has a better sex life than most of her married friends. She need never be bored with one man per lifetime. Her choice of partners is endless and they seek *her*."⁵ All a woman needed to fully enjoy single life was a little of Brown's advice on fashion, decorating, and sex.

Bubbling with optimism, *Sex and the Single Girl* reflected the spirit of middle-class America during the heyday of Camelot. The economy booming, the misery of the Depression and World War II all but forgotten, America in the early sixties was a vibrant, energetic nation. Brown's combination of coy femininity and pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps ambition was practically a guaranteed success. In the early sixties, anything seemed possible — even the abolition of the age-old double standard.



The sexual double standard is as old as civilization itself. Among the Hebrews of the Middle East, monogamy was strictly enforced for women, while men often took concubines or multiple wives. When Sarah could not bear children for Abraham, he — with God's blessing — simply took a maidservant as his mistress. According to Jewish lore, King Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Jewish women were required to shave their heads so that they would not prove tempting to other men. According to the Old Testament, women who committed adultery were to be summarily stoned to death. In ancient Athens, men were free to have multiple partners (male or female), while women who were not professional prostitutes lived in virtual slavery. A married woman was not only the property of her husband, she was confined to the upper floors of her home and forbidden to appear in public without a veil. In Greek mythology, the most powerful and revered goddesses remained lifelong virgins. In Imperial Rome, the law was less harsh: A woman who committed adultery was banished from her home and never allowed to marry again. Although early Christians tried to introduce a single standard of sexual restraint for both men and

women, they ended up — by glorifying Mary's virginity and demonizing Eve's eroticism — merely reinforcing the double standard and providing a new justification for the punishment of sexually active women.

Despite the fact that gender roles fluctuated throughout the Middle Ages, promiscuous women were consistently attacked and denounced by Church authorities. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many were burned at the stake as witches. Chastity belts and other devices served where the fear of punishment did not. Despite the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution, the double standard persisted into the modern era. While aristocratic women could afford to play by their own rules, Rousseau and other "modern" thinkers tended to be vocal opponents of female sexual freedom. After the bloodbath of the French Revolution, many observers in England and America blamed the loose morals of French women for the political mess in Paris.

In the nineteenth century, bourgeois notions of propriety and cleanliness lent new import to the notion of female purity. Victorian sensibilities required women to profess a total lack of sexual feeling. A middle-class woman was expected to tolerate her husband's advances only for the sake of having children. Women were simply not supposed to enjoy sex. Since men were known to need sexual release, moralists urged them to visit brothels rather than defile their own wives. As a result, red-light districts flourished in nineteenth-century cities.⁶ As in ancient Athens, a woman who appeared on the street alone in the Victorian era was assumed to be a prostitute.

The double standard had several cruel implications for women. Not only did it mean an unmarried woman was supposed to be absolutely chaste, it meant a woman who had been raped was deemed unsuitable for marriage. Not infrequently, a girl who was raped would be pressured by her parents to marry the rapist. Women were often blamed for the assaults.⁷ The double standard also led to laws against birth control and abortion, on the grounds that they would encourage female promiscuity. In 1873, the U.S. government made it a crime to send birth control devices — or even information about such devices — through the mail.

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth, a few scattered social reformers tried to dismantle the double standard. But they were almost always dismissed as strange bohemians or dangerous radicals and their writings were often banned. Slowly, however, the double standard began to wane. Anthropologists showed that premarital promiscuity was happily encouraged in some primitive societies without any adverse effects. The vulcanization of rubber led to the invention of modern contraceptives. Marriage manuals encouraged husbands to attend to their wife's sexual pleasure. In the 1910s and '20s, working-class women discovered that money brought freedom. The economic

vitality of the era encouraged a relaxed view of sex outside of marriage.⁸ But the double standard did not disappear. At the insistence of Catholic authorities, Hollywood drove home the moral that wanton women would ultimately be punished for their sins. In films like *East Lynne* (1931), *Waterloo Bridge* (1931), *Grand Hotel* (1932), *Anna Karenina* (1935), *Jezebel* (1938), and countless others, women were put in their place for expressing their sexual desires. When Mae West insisted on flaunting her sexuality onscreen and refused to abide by the dictates of censors, Paramount Pictures failed to renew her studio contract. As Sylvia Weil, who was born in 1910, remembers, "if it got around that a girl slept with a man before she was married, she was ruined. She would never find a good husband." Women continued to face retribution for "unladylike" behavior, while society generally winked at the sexual antics of young men.⁹

Each new generation of young girls was indoctrinated with the same message: A woman's virginity is her most precious commodity. As actress Dyan Cannon, born in 1937, recalls, "My dad used to tell me that if I let anyone touch me, anyone, they wouldn't respect me and I would be considered a tramp."¹⁰ In the 1950s, as Americans reveled in the "return to normalcy" after years of depression and war, the double standard was reaffirmed in books, movies, television shows, and popular magazines. American males were told that if they were healthy they should hunger for sex, while young women were advised to resist forcefully and demand a ring.¹¹

"You have no idea how bad it was," recalls Gloria Steinem, who grew up near Toledo, Ohio, in the thirties and forties. "There was always the fear that you might be punished for being sexual." One author catalogued the rules that the mass media conveyed to young women:

The young miss, for example, must never take any real initiative in courtship . . . must not show any interest in one male when she is out with another . . . must never try to date a fellow who is going steady with another girl . . . must never go home with a man whom she has just met at a dance, lest he consider her "just a pickup" . . . must not act too intelligent when she's with a boy because "boys don't like you to be smart" . . . must never phone a fellow unless she is going steady with him or has some other legitimate excuse . . . must never be so forward with boys as to "cheapen her in a man's eyes."¹²

Failure to abide by these rules could lead to gossip, insult, and public humiliation.

With the emergence of professional psychoanalysis in the postwar period, the double standard acquired "scientific" legitimacy. Psychologists and psychiatrists claimed that women were not only less sexual than men, they were naturally masochistic. Helene Deutsch claimed

that women were inevitably masochistic because they could experience full sexual arousal only by being dominated. Marie Bonaparte argued that women were masochistic because during conception the ovum must be "wounded" by the sperm.¹³ Meanwhile, other psychoanalysts insisted that women who experienced only clitoral orgasm were immature and unwell; mature women supposedly transferred their orgasmic sensations from the clitoris to the vagina. The vaginal orgasm, psychoanalysts maintained, was the only true orgasm. Such ideas caused many women to feel inadequate and inferior.

Most teenage girls in the fifties did not even know orgasms existed. "I didn't know anything about orgasms," one woman recalls.

The first time [we had sex] we were in his dorm room. It was fast — he came in and came out. It was a sharp, poignant pleasure that had no resolution . . . He would come in and then pull out and come into a handkerchief. I was always left hanging. I used to come back to my dorm and lie down on the floor and howl and pound the floor. But I didn't really know why I was so frustrated. It felt so lonely.¹⁴

So long as the double standard was dominant, men and women were caught in a war of the sexes. Boys lusted after girls and tried to seduce them without getting trapped into marriage, while girls distrusted boys — often with good reason. "When I was a kid," *Penthouse* publisher Bob Guccione remembers,

finding a girl who screwed was like finding gold. It was a great piece of news if you heard about a girl who screwed, because it was extraordinarily unusual for a girl to screw without a lot of problems — having to take her out, court her, spend money on her. When you did hear about one, she was inevitably the object of many a gang bang. I remember going to see a girl in Teaneck, New Jersey, and there were four or five carloads of guys, and we picked this dame up, drove her to the schoolyard, and one by one, twenty guys screwed her on the grass.

Ronald Jones, who was a student at Ohio State during the fifties, remembers one weekend at his fraternity house when "over a hundred guys had sex with the same woman."¹⁵ Under the double standard, a woman who publicly expressed the slightest interest in sex effectively forfeited her right to say no. As these examples show, the reward could be gang rape.

As Helen Gurley Brown revealed, women in the 1940s and '50s publicly claimed to observe official morality but often followed their own rules privately. There is no reliable data on sexual behavior from the period, but in 1957 alone, 200,000 babies were born out of wedlock in the United States. In 1953, Alfred Kinsey, a zoologist turned sex

researcher at Indiana University, reported in his book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* ("the Kinsey Report") that roughly 50 percent of the 5,940 white American women he surveyed admitted to having had sex before marriage. He also noted that approximately 25 percent admitted to having had an extramarital encounter. Since Kinsey's sample was not random, his findings cannot be treated as nationally representative, but they do suggest a discrepancy between official morality and private behavior.¹⁶

As a result of the double standard, girls who acquired a reputation for being "fast" or "easy" were both scorned and envied by other girls. Worse, sexually active girls tended to feel terrible guilt about their own behavior. Eunice Lake (a pseudonym), who was born in 1930 and grew up in a working-class family in rural Indiana, was, in her words, "very promiscuous" between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two. During that period, she had intercourse with twenty-three boys, six of whom she felt "in love with." Later, she wrote in a diary, it was a time of "mental grief." "*Promiscuous, whore, prostitute, slut, and nymphomaniac* were some of the words I chose to call myself, I suppose, as some sort of mental punishment for not being a 'nice girl.'"¹⁷

No matter what was really going on behind closed doors, those who publicly criticized the double standard could suffer severe consequences. As long as one championed sexual restraint for both sexes, there was no need to fear. But as soon as one advocated sexual freedom for women as well as men, the public responded with outrage. When, for instance, Ben Lindsay, a judge in charge of the juvenile court in Denver, began advocating "trial marriage" for young men and women in the 1920s, he was summarily removed from office.¹⁸ In 1940, New York City authorities prevented faculty members at City College from hiring the famed mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell because he had defended sex outside of marriage in his book *Marriage and Morals* (1929). As soon as Russell's proposed appointment was announced, he was branded a "professor of paganism" and a "desiccated, divorced, and decadent advocate of sexual promiscuity." The Registrar of New York County said that Russell should be "tarred and feathered and driven from the country." The New York state legislature ruled that "an advocate of barnyard morality is an unfit person to hold an important post in the educational system of our state at the expense of taxpayers." Eventually the matter went to court, and a judge ruled that if City College granted Bertrand Russell a position on the faculty, it would be tantamount to creating "a chair of indecency." In observance of the court order, the New York City Board of Higher Education rescinded Russell's appointment.¹⁹

Alfred Kinsey suffered a similar fate. Because his study of female sexual behavior implied that many women were likely to have sex before marriage and that traditional morality should therefore be scrapped, his book was viciously attacked. Though Kinsey was highly respected by fellow scholars and maintained a scrupulous public persona (his taste for crew cuts, bow ties, and classical music was well known), *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* earned him a reputation as a public menace. Republican Congressman B. Carroll Reece branded Kinsey a Communist and demanded a federal investigation of the Rockefeller Foundation, Kinsey's major source of financial support. The foundation eventually cut off Kinsey's funding. Even Margaret Mead, who had made her name in the twenties as one of the first anthropologists to study the sexual behavior of other cultures, criticized Kinsey's "amoral" approach. At a 1954 conference, the American Medical Association charged Kinsey with creating a "wave of sex hysteria."²⁰ In 1956 Kinsey died a defeated man.

Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy died the year after Kinsey, and as the anti-Communist hysteria of the '50s waned, Kinsey's posthumous prestige grew. His statistics slowly gained the weight of scientific orthodoxy. Though Kinsey did not live to see the long-term impact of his work, by the late 1950s his numbers were beginning to make the double standard suspect. Other developments played a role in its decline. The backlash against McCarthyism, and the realization that ultraconservatives were apt to be as authoritarian and intolerant as their Communist enemies, led to a general disgust with moral hypocrisy. The discovery of penicillin as a cure for syphilis took much of the danger out of sex. Meanwhile, middle-class white women were increasingly entering the paid workforce, and as a result they had less patience with restrictions on their personal behavior. The huge number of teenagers (there were some 13 million in 1956) led to general friction as they rejected the moral assumptions of their parents. Because the economy was so strong, these teens had money to spend and could spend it as they pleased. Corporate America quickly learned to cater to their tastes and values — including their contempt for "preachy" sexual moralism.

These teenagers tore through copies of *Peyton Place*, the 1956 novel by Grace Metalious about sexual secrets in a small New England town. *Peyton Place* offered the same indictment of American hypocrisy as Kinsey's report on female sexual behavior. In one typical episode, Metalious describes the plight of a young woman raped by her stepfather. When she realizes she is pregnant, the girl must plead with a local doctor to perform an abortion. He agrees but, afraid of public censure, pretends that it is an appendectomy. Not just victims, Metalious's female

characters were sexually assertive, independent, and determined to satisfy their desires, regardless of morality. In one scene, Betty Anderson, "an over-developed seventh grade girl," demands rough sex from her boyfriend, Rodney:

"Come on, honey," she whimpered. "Come on, honey," and his mouth and hands covered her. "Hard," she whispered. "Do it hard, honey. Bite me a little. Hurt me a little."

"Please," murmured Rodney against her skin. "Please. Please."

His hand found the V of her crotch and pressed against it.

"Please," he said, "please."

It was at this point that Betty usually stopped him. She would put both her hands in his hair and yank him away from her, but she did not stop him now. Her tight shorts slipped off as easily as if they had been several sizes too large, and her body did not stop its wild twisting while Rodney took off his trousers.

"Hurry," she moaned. "Hurry. Hurry."

Metalious walked a fine line between the bold and the conventional. On the very same page that Betty has her torrid affair, she learns that she is pregnant, suggesting that she must be punished for her actions.

Born into a lower-middle-class French Canadian family, Metalious always felt alienated from the puritanical morality of her New Hampshire neighbors. Pregnant at eighteen, she had a shotgun wedding and began the life of a fifties housewife. After writing several novels without success, she was inspired by a string of tragic events in her hometown. A young woman, the victim of her father's sexual advances, killed him in a combination of revenge and self-defense. Metalious realized that incest was the perfect centerpiece for a novel exposing the sadness and hypocrisy of small-town life. A New York publisher fell in love with Metalious's novel, and *Peyton Place* soon became a best-seller.²¹

The eager consumption of Grace Metalious's fictional exposé and the eventual public acceptance of Kinsey's report on female sexual behavior paved the way for Albert Ellis's sustained assault on the double standard. An irreverent, iconoclastic psychologist with a doctorate from Columbia University, Ellis first made a name for himself as a marriage counselor and therapist. Like Metalious, Ellis came from a working-class background and found himself at odds with middle-class definitions of morality. He began to rail against bourgeois niceties and made a habit of using four-letter words in his public lectures. Although he was reviled by many of his colleagues, Ellis attracted many New York clients, who liked his iconoclasm and rationalist — though sometimes flippant — approach to sexual attitudes. In a series of books in the 1950s and '60s, including *The Folklore of Sex*, *The American Sexual Tragedy*, *Sex Without*

Guilt, and *The Art and Science of Love*, Ellis attacked the double standard as a barbaric remnant of primitive societies in which men owned women as property. Some critics blasted Ellis as they had Russell and Kinsey, but Ellis couched his critique of the double standard in terms midcentury Americans could not afford to ignore.²² According to Ellis (and contrary to Kinsey and Brown), women were reluctant to have premarital sex with men, and this was driving men to seek satisfaction through homosexual relationships. If women didn't abandon the double standard soon, the nation would be swarming with homosexual men. Marriage and the family might disappear and the nation would suffer the consequences. Lawmakers, sociologists, and psychologists concerned about "rising" rates of homosexuality took note of Ellis's predictions and began to slowly accept the necessity of sexual freedom for women.

As the fifties came to a close, various forces were conspiring against the double standard. But moralists made a last-ditch effort to prevent the spread of sexual liberalism. In 1960, administrators at the University of Illinois fired professor Leo Koch simply because he criticized the double standard and defended premarital sex in a letter to the student newspaper, while FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover launched a nationwide crusade against "pornography," a term he used to describe everything from titillating comic books to avant-garde literature. A 1961 issue of *Reader's Digest* offered "The Case for Chastity." That same year, in *Better Homes and Gardens*, another writer offered advice on "How to Tell Your Daughter Why She Must Keep Her Self-Respect." The president of Vassar College told female undergraduates in 1962 that premarital sexual activity was cause for expulsion. But women were beginning to repudiate the double standard. As one Vassar student told a reporter, albeit under the cover of anonymity, "If Vassar is to become the Poughkeepsie Seminary for Young Virgins, then the change of policy had better be made explicit in admissions catalogs."²³ This was just the kind of sentiment Helen Gurley Brown knew would guarantee sales of her book.



If *Sex and the Single Girl* hadn't come along, those American women who disregarded public morality in their private lives would have continued to do so, and a few might even have risked social ostracism by openly challenging the double standard on philosophical grounds. But Helen Gurley Brown, who had read Albert Ellis with relish, packaged sexual liberalism for early-sixties America as only an advertising copywriter could. Brown combined just the right amount of iconoclasm, individualism, consumerism, and conservatism to appeal to a mass

market. *Sex and the Single Girl* was designed to reach sexually active single women and Madison Avenue executives alike.

True to America's Enlightenment tradition, Brown believed human beings were born without shame or sin. In the book's most provocative passages, Brown criticized American child-rearing practices for making girls ashamed of their bodies.

Well, the truth is everybody starts out sexy . . . or with terrific potential. A sixteen-month-old baby is the prototype of sexiness. . . . She will be sexy all her life if nobody interferes. Unfortunately in our society somebody nearly always interferes! When she touches herself with pleasure and curiosity, her mother will take her hand away and say, "Naughty!" When she expels squashy brown cones not unlike the modeling clay she likes to play with, her mother will put over the idea they are icky, dirty . . . to be flushed away quickly. If the child isn't dim-witted, she figures out that where these cones came from is dirty too.

Brown presented a radical redefinition of sex appeal. "Being sexy means that you accept all the parts of you body as worthy and lovable . . . your reproductive organs, your breasts, your alimentary tract. You even welcome menstruation as the abiding proof of your fertility."

But Brown's enthusiasm for expensive cosmetics and plastic surgery undercut her social critique. "You probably wear lipstick, powder base and a little eye make-up every day. But have you considered drawing in completely new eyebrows, wearing false eyelashes, putting hollows in your cheeks with darker foundation, a cleft in your chin with brown eyebrow pencil or enlarging your mouth by a third?" Brown herself confessed to having had a "nose job" and being "delighted" with the results. She even called herself a "cheerleader" for plastic surgery. "Plastic surgery is admittedly expensive, not covered by Blue Cross, horribly uncomfortable for a few days — but oh my foes and oh my friends — the results! The lovely cataclysmic results are the kind you can't get any other way." She warned overweight women that they were doomed if they didn't diet. "You must *Do Something* or you can't hope to be blissfully single." (As for men who claimed to find fat women attractive, Brown insisted that they were unsure of their masculinity.) A far cry from a serious intellectual, Brown was quick to ignore the wisdom of her own insights into child-rearing practices.

The suggestions about makeup and fashion were relentless, interrupted by only occasional pop psychological insights. She warned that nymphomaniacs were really "frigid" women desperately trying to overcome their sexual anxieties. (This theme was also the centerpiece of Irving Wallace's 1960 novel *The Chapman Report*, inspired by the Kinsey

Report.) She cautioned her readers to be wary of homosexuals. Homosexuals, she wrote, "are little boys, or girls, in an arrested state of sexual development" with "tremendous emotional problems."²⁴ These asides lent a conservative, contradictory element to Brown's sexual liberalism.

But Brown never claimed to be a radical. In interviews, she disavowed any attempt to encourage premarital sex. "I didn't suggest anybody do anything," she declared, rather disingenuously. "I'm always careful to say that I'm not for promiscuity." After the book was published, Brown told reporters that it was meant only for women over twenty. But if her publisher hadn't feared censorship, *Sex and the Single Girl* would have been even more revolutionary than it was. The original manuscript contained a large section on birth control and abortion that the publisher deleted. "I fought for it, but it came out anyway," Brown said.²⁵

Though one might think that men would have been delighted by Brown's message — she was, after all, telling women to say yes to premarital sex — men raised to expect modest, demure, diffident female companions were in fact taken aback by Brown's vision of sexual equality. In a roundtable discussion published in *Playboy* in 1962 as "The Womanization of America," Alexander King, an editor at *Life* magazine, said he feared Brown's type of feminism enormously. "The assumption that a woman is supposed to get something out of her sexual contact, something joyful and satisfactory, is a very recent idea. But this idea has been carried too far, too. It's become so that women are sitting like district attorneys, to see what the man can or cannot perform and this has put men tremendously on the defensive." King was unabashedly sexist: "I haven't the slightest doubt that this absolute, unquestioned equality is a great mistake and in violation of all natural laws. It is a mistake because democracy is all right politically, but it's no good in the home." King also believed that women longed to be like men — that they suffered from Freudian "penis envy."

Penis envy does exist, it's true — I think that perhaps it's not conscious, but it exists. I have no doubt about it. I have known a great deal of women in my life and they've all been enormously competitive on all levels, you see, particularly in the last few years. I think they do deeply and instinctively resent these outward manifestations of masculinity, of which they have none.

According to King, the fact that women were becoming so "dominant" was an important factor in the rise of "pansies."

In the same *Playboy* article, Mort Sahl, a comedian and political satirist, appeared equally angry that women were becoming "cold" and "predatory"; the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik expressed suspicion of

all sexually assertive women. "What is astonishing to me is that women, more and more, are taking over the active roles in sex, which was not so before. The men finally will resent it. They should." Reik believed that sexually assertive women would emasculate their male partners. "I would say there is a law — a law as binding as the laws of chemistry or of physics — namely, that a masculinization of women goes with the womanization of man, hand in hand."²⁶

Philip Wylie, a popular social critic of the day, warned in a 1963 *Playboy* article that sexually aggressive "career women" were modern versions of Delilah and Salome, "girl-guillotiners" who "used their sex appeal . . . at considerable cost to those males who would impede them." Desperately worried about the fate of the male sex, Wylie warned that

a man must instantly be on the alert, for most dedicated career women will unhesitatingly use their sexuality in the manner of the Sirens, whose allure had a single professional intent: luring sailors off course and causing ships to be wrecked. The latter-day career woman has much the same obscene compulsion: She must compete with and, if necessary, cripple manhood and masculinity on earth.²⁷

Sex and the Single Girl marked both the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Despite the fact that some men clearly felt threatened by her, Helen Gurley Brown was a hot commodity. She was invited to take over the failing *Cosmopolitan* magazine and transform it into a self-help manual for sexually active women, which she did with great success. But Helen Gurley Brown was significantly older than the unmarried women and teenagers who were the prime consumers of premarital advice. It remained to be seen how these young women would view the battle of the sexes as they matured into adulthood. Would they be satisfied with Brown's hedonistic philosophy laced with tips on plastic surgery? Or would they demand a far more thorough response to society's sexual ills? Their parents eagerly, yet nervously, awaited the answer.

BEATNIKS AND BATHING SUITS

TWO YEARS AFTER Helen Gurley Brown bared her soul in *Sex and the Single Girl*, a forty-two-year-old fashion designer, Rudi Gernreich, decided it was time for women to bare even more. In June 1964, Gernreich introduced the "monokini," the perfect synthesis of Southern California hedonism, socio-sexual politics, and ready-to-wear wit. Quickly renamed the "topless swimsuit," Gernreich's creation was a standard one-piece suit on the bottom with two delicate straps rising archly between the wearer's breasts. His favorite model, Peggy Moffit, explained to one reporter: "He was trying to take away the prurience, the whole perverse side of sex."¹ It was his personal contribution to the cause of physical freedom.

It was also a brilliant publicity stunt. Only a few thousand suits sold, but the novelty was just the kind of thing that newspaper editors loved. In fact, the *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a photo of a woman in a monokini — her exposed breasts clearly visible — on its front page.²

Gernreich's creation caused international consternation. The Soviet government denounced the topless bathing suit as a sign of "barbarism" and social "decay." The pope called it immoral. In New York, police were given strict instructions by the Commissioner of Parks to arrest any woman wearing one of the scandalous suits. Forty evangelicals protested at a department store in Dallas where the monokini was on display. In Chicago, a nineteen-year-old woman wearing the suit on a public beach was fined \$100 for indecent exposure. Even in the South of France — what would eventually become the world's epicenter of topless bathing — the suit was banned. The mayor of St. Tropez instructed officers to keep order via helicopter.³

English designers quickly copied Gernreich's idea and created topless evening dresses. Not many women actually dared to go out in public in such

COUNTERREVOLUTION
AND CRISIS

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION was so sweeping, and it touched the lives of so many in countless ways, it seemed as if the clock could never be turned back on the social and cultural changes of the era. But for various reasons — many of which had nothing to do with the sexual revolution itself — the mood of the nation was slowly changing. The “live-and-let live” attitude of the late sixties and early seventies was about to disappear.

Several developments inspired anxiety about “permissiveness” and “excessive liberalism.” First, the student movement was becoming increasingly violent. The bombing of a laboratory at the University of Wisconsin, the terrorist attacks of the Weatherman, the Charles Manson murders: all of these events called into question the virtue of laissez-faire social policies. When radicals announced that they were going to “bring the war home,” many Americans became scared. Politicians and judges began to reconsider the merits of liberalism and began instead to support the principle of strong government.

If left-wing violence was not enough to scare policy-makers, drug abuse was becoming epidemic and crime was starting to plague the nation’s inner cities. Gender roles were changing faster than ever before. Racial tensions were high. Reports of environmental degradation cast doubt on the virtues of scientific and technological “progress.” Revelations of corruption in the Nixon administration, followed by Nixon’s own resignation, led to cynicism and frustration. Then — the very same year as *Roe v. Wade* — an economic slump triggered a profound crisis of

faith in the ability of modern institutions and secular values to continue to improve the quality of human life.



By the midseventies, the sexual revolution was at its peak. Every month brought a host of new Off Broadway plays with full-frontal nudity, magazines catering to every sexual desire, hard-core sex films in first run theaters, provocative books with sexual themes, new sex education texts and marriage manuals with photographs of the male and female sex organs. Birth control and abortion were more easily accessible than ever before in history. The singles scene was booming, with pick-up bars and discotheques packed from coast to coast. The fashions of the era — including tight jeans and skimpy shorts — fostered a continuously flirtatious environment. Swing clubs were busy on both coasts. Sexually transmitted diseases, though common, were nothing more than a nuisance. As Bob Greene described the situation in *Newsweek*:

Male prostitutes are now convivial guests on the daytime talk shows. Paperback copies of the *Joy of Sex* are tossed into the grocery shopping bag with the asparagus. Wife-swapping and group sex are such old topics of suburban patio conversation that they are now considered somewhat dreary.¹

The revolt against the stifling world of the fifties was complete.

The world of continuous consumerism and twenty-four-hour-a-day adult amusement was symbolized by the rise to international prominence of Hugh Hefner, the ruler of a sprawling empire of hotels, clubs, and casinos, who traveled everywhere in his famous Playboy jet, a black DC-9 with the bunny logo emblazoned on the side, which cost \$16,000 a day to operate. He was living proof that a man, at least, could avoid domestic responsibilities forever.

In every corner of American society, sexual desire was being discussed, portrayed, and celebrated. For gays in particular, it was a heady time. With the proliferation of bars, discos, and sex clubs, gay life became increasingly open and visible in the nation’s major cities. As journalist Andrew Kopkind wrote in 1979:

In New York now, gays may live in [supportive environments], in heavily gay districts, within a social and economic infrastructure shot through with aspects of gay culture. Gays may work in gay run businesses catering to a gay clientele, or they can get jobs through the gay network in larger establishments, such as department stores, where gays occupy top managerial positions. They eat in gay restaurants, shop on gay avenues in gay boutiques, listen to gay-oriented music, share gay living quarters, dance

in gay discos, vacation in gay garden spots, worship in gay churches, read gay magazines and gay novels, snack on gay pizza and gay hamburgers, see movies by gay directors featuring gay actors and actresses, play softball in gay leagues and hope for victory in the Gay World Series, sail on gay cruises, get high on gay drugs pushed by gay dealers, and spend all their social hours with gay friends.²

According to Kopkind, the immense opportunities for gay sex created a new "cock culture." The streets of Greenwich Village, the Castro, West Hollywood, Provincetown, Fire Island, Key West, and other gay enclaves were crowded with throngs of men "cruising" for sex.

Just as gay bars and bathhouses were filled to capacity, lesbian collectives were thriving. It was a time of enormous interest in both sexual liberty and sexual equality. New attention was being paid to the sexual needs of the elderly, as well as those of the mentally and physically disabled. For decades, the sexual needs of these three groups had been all but ignored. When confined in nursing homes or hospitals, the aged and the disabled were almost always denied opportunities for sexual relationships. Social reformers were beginning to realize the peculiar disadvantages of the elderly and the infirm.

The economic downturn that began in 1973 came as a terrible shock to the nation and would have significant consequences for the sexual revolution. Inflation had already begun to rise in 1971, and productivity rates had started to fall, but it was not until the oil crisis of '73 that inflation soared and Americans began to lose confidence in the nation's financial stability. Corporate profits plummeted, declining from 13.7 percent in 1965 to 8 percent in the early seventies. Competition from Japanese car manufacturers did not help. Domestic productivity rates dropped precipitously from an average annual rate of 3.2 percent in the midsixties to a mere 1 percent in the midseventies. To top it off, unemployment began to rise. By 1975, 9 percent of the population was out of work. With OPEC controlling the price of oil exports, America was thrown into an unprecedented period of "stagflation." It was the worst recession since the Great Depression of the thirties. From 1973 on, the mood of the nation was understandably grim.³

The fall of the financial markets did not stop Americans from enjoying themselves at discos or from consuming high-priced drugs. But the nation's economic malaise did have an impact on erotic consumerism and the interest in the new sexual utopia. "These are depressed and unsettled times," the author of a book on group sex told *Time* magazine in 1974. "There's a more somber feeling among people, a retreat from sexual frivolity." *Time* reported that sales of sexually explicit materials were down. (Reflecting the sudden turn from sexual liberalism, *Time*

now referred to adult bookstores as "dirty-book shops.")⁴ The new mood was symbolized by the virtual collapse of Hugh Hefner's publishing empire. In November 1974, Bobbie Arnstein, one of Hefner's most trusted employees, was convicted of selling cocaine and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. In January 1975, she committed suicide. *Playboy* was already feeling the effects of competition from *Penthouse*. *Playboy* stock plummeted from a 1971 high of \$23.50 a share to a mere \$2.25. Hefner was forced to sell most of the hotels and clubs he owned, in addition to his famous black jet. Once internationally known for his wealth and lavish lifestyle, Hefner was now famous for his financial calamities.⁵

Sideswiped by the 1973 economic crisis, Americans could no longer devote significant energy or time to sexual liberation. Meeting rent or mortgage payments, holding on to a good job or simply finding a decent one took obvious priority. More and more people were forced to work in the low-paying service sector as major industries practically disappeared overnight. The combination of a depressed economy and desiccated dreams lent a melancholy mood to the midseventies. This despondency could be seen in the cultural products of the period, like the 1974 film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and the hit song "Rhinestone Cowboy" from the same year. Movies, music, and television of the seventies emphasized the gritty reality of everyday life. *Taxi Driver*, *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*, and *Dog Day Afternoon* portrayed the bleak underside of urban existence. The new attitude was summed up by the title of the popular 1970s television show about a single mother and her two daughters, *One Day at a Time*.

The nation's economic and spiritual woes were complex and difficult to resolve. Neither the left nor the right knew quite how to handle the energy crisis or the decline in the value of the dollar. It was far easier to blame movies, television, pornography, homosexuals, and feminists for America's problems than it was to restore the nation's economic vitality. As a result, the midseventies witnessed a massive assault on secular humanism and, by association, the sexual revolution.

In the new economic climate, many Americans returned to organized religion and biblical revelation for meaning, comfort, and assurance. Evangelicalism boomed. Liberal experts and academics were taken by surprise by the religious resurgence. Believing the common wisdom of the sixties that modernization inevitably fostered secularization, liberal intellectuals had never suspected that fundamentalism would once again sweep the country.⁶ But sweep the country it did. Each of the evangelical sects grew in size over the course of the seventies, while the mainline Protestant denominations rapidly shrank. Jehovah's Witnesses increased by 36 percent between 1970 and 1980, the Pentecostal Church of God by 32 percent. Evangelical Christianity was

so strong that *Time* labeled 1976 "The Year of the Evangelical."⁷ That, of course, was the year the first evangelical Protestant was elected president of the United States. Although Jimmy Carter turned out to be tolerant of gay rights and a supporter of abortion rights, his election gave a new sense of political strength to the evangelical community.

Evangelicalism had a major impact on American life because evangelicals shrewdly consolidated political power. In the sixties, evangelical clergy had been much less outspoken on public policy matters than their liberal brethren. But in the seventies, evangelicals exploited the bully pulpit. Traditionally, evangelicals had been poorer than other Americans, but by the seventies, they had achieved significant levels of affluence. This meant funds were available for political campaigns and contributions, and for starting evangelical radio and television stations.⁸ Seeing the possibility of a new political base, leaders of the national Republican Party began targeting Southern evangelicals for support.

The rise of evangelicalism undercut support for a movement to add the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. The ERA, designed to prevent discrimination on the basis of sex, had been passed by Congress in 1972 and then ratified by twenty-two state legislatures. Since only sixteen more states were needed to pass the amendment, its success had been almost guaranteed. But in the midseventies, the conservative evangelical activist Phyllis Schlafly organized a national effort to stop the ERA, claiming that it would destroy the family, foster homosexuality, and hurt women. Almost single-handedly, Schlafly galvanized enough support to defeat the amendment when it was only three states shy of victory.

With the ERA out of the way, evangelicals could focus on the sexual revolution. Numerous social problems looked like solid evidence that the sexual revolution was a destructive force. Gonorrhea, syphilis, and nonspecific urethritis had reached epidemic proportions by the midseventies. The number of reported rapes jumped higher and higher each year: in 1958, there were 3,680 arrests for forcible rape; by 1968, there were 12,659 arrests; by 1975, this figure had reached 17,524.⁹ All the while, news reports highlighted the persistent problem of teenage pregnancy. Disease, rape, and teen pregnancy were proof enough to many that the sexual revolution was causing the downfall of Western civilization.

Social scientists knew that the matter was more complicated. There was, for instance, no way to pinpoint the real reason for the rise in rates of sexually transmitted disease in the heterosexual community. While moralists assumed that increased promiscuity was to blame, the decreased use of condoms and spermicides as women began taking the pill might have been the cause. As far as rape is concerned, no one knows for sure if rape itself was on the rise or if more victims were

simply reporting the crime. Finally, much confusion surrounded the issue of teenage pregnancy. In fact, teenage pregnancy rates had actually peaked in 1957, when almost 10 percent of all girls ages fifteen to nineteen became pregnant. But most of these girls were married.¹⁰ By the 1970s, the teen pregnancy rate was down, but so was the teen marriage rate, meaning that more teen mothers were unmarried than before.

But with evangelicals taking center stage and blaming secular humanism (the view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil affairs) for society's woes, the public discourse about sexuality was certain to change. In 1973, in response to *Roe v. Wade*, Catholics and evangelical Protestants launched a massive anti-abortion crusade. Activists began demonstrating in front of clinics, "right to life" organizations were formed, and bills were introduced in state legislatures to curb *Roe's* effects and recriminalize abortion. Fundamentalists also squared off against sex education. Although an overwhelming majority of Americans supported sex education, believing that informative courses would prevent unwanted pregnancy and reduce the transmission of venereal disease, evangelicals and Catholics saw sex education as a threat to their way of life.¹¹ Accordingly, they flexed their political muscle to keep sex education out of public schools. In one case, the wife of a fundamentalist minister in a Virginia coal-mining town attacked textbooks used in her child's public school on the grounds they were pornographic. The controversy resulted in the resignation of the school superintendent, and a new policy was adopted by the school system making it easier for parents to ban books. The case led to other textbook challenges throughout the nation.¹² In Texas, evangelical Christians Mel and Norma Gabler, with funding from Joseph Coors of the Coors Brewing Company, created the Educational Research Analysis organization to ferret out textbooks with "anti-Christian" and "anti-family" themes. In Philadelphia, the Roman Catholic Church withdrew its financial support for the city's eight thousand Girl Scouts because Scout leaders had planned sex education workshops intended to teach Scouts about birth control and abortion.¹³ In the meantime, evangelicals began a crusade against homosexuality, drawing on frightening stereotypes and spurious psychiatric theories. An early-seventies Christian cartoon booklet, "The Gay Blade," showed the marriage ceremony of two wrinkled, sad-looking men accompanied by the caption,

Out of Satan's shadowy world of homosexuality, in a display of defiance against society, they come forth — those who suffer the agony of rejection, the despair of unsatisfied longing — desiring — endless lusting and remorse crying that gay is good — their tragic lives prove that there isn't anything gay about being gay.¹⁴

What, exactly, evangelicals hoped to accomplish with this sort of derision is unclear, but they probably did manage to make many gays (especially youngsters) afraid of coming out.



The evangelical assault on secular humanism and the sexual revolution coincided with a surge of popular sentiment against commercial sex. Across the country, groups like the Concerned Community Citizens of Mason City, Iowa, mobilized to pass zoning regulations and state laws that would once again limit the availability of sexual material.¹⁵ President Nixon's appointment of the conservative Warren Burger to the Supreme Court in 1969 created the conditions for a new era in censorship. Burger's 1973 decision in *Miller v. California*, a case involving a California man convicted of mailing obscene materials, paved the way for the prosecution of the nation's most famous producers of sexual material. Burger inserted into the law the notion that obscenity could be defined by "local community standards." Such a provision meant that federal authorities could take advantage of small-town juries to bust big-city publishers. *Miller v. California* promised to revive the censorship tactics of the 1950s.*

Exploiting the community standards provision of the Miller case, postal inspectors (using assumed names) in small Kansas towns ordered copies of Al Goldstein's weekly tabloid *Screw*. Federal authorities then indicted Goldstein in Wichita, where he faced a possible sixty-year prison sentence. After a dramatic four-week trial and four hours of jury deliberations, Goldstein was convicted. But he was acquitted at a new trial that was granted because the original prosecutor's final summation was deemed inflammatory.¹⁶ Federal prosecutors also pursued Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler* magazine. In a widely publicized obscenity trial in Cincinnati in 1977, Flynt was found guilty of "pandering obscenity" and sentenced to seven to twenty-five years in jail. A few celebrities came to Flynt's defense, as they had in other censorship cases, though this time there was greater reluctance. When Gay Talese took out an advertisement in the *New York Times* describing Flynt as an "American Dissident," many writers and editors refused to sign their names.¹⁷ Says Talese, "Suddenly I was a pariah. The literary elite thought Flynt's constitutional rights weren't worth defending."¹⁸ In 1978, Flynt was shot

* The *Miller* ruling might have ushered in an even more dramatic era of legal repression, but in 1974, in *Jenkins v. Georgia*, a case involving censorship of the Hollywood film *Carnal Knowledge*, the Burger court decided to take a more moderate approach to restricting speech and thus asserted that only "hard-core" material could be declared illegal (Edward De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 571).

during the course of another obscenity trial. The bullet cut his spinal cord and left him paralyzed from the waist down.

In the crusade to ban pornography, government agents used ever more militant tactics. In July 1974, federal prosecutor and Bible school teacher Larry Parish ordered the arrest of actor Harry Reems, costar of *Deep Throat*, on obscenity charges. Federal agents awakened Reems in his New York City apartment in the middle of the night, arrested him, and extradited him to Tennessee, on the grounds that *Deep Throat* was obscene by Tennessee standards. It was the first time in American history that an actor had ever been charged under the hundred-year-old federal obscenity statute. Many other actors and filmmakers rushed to Reems's defense, establishing a fund to pay his legal expenses, but on April 30, 1976, a Memphis jury found Reems and eleven other defendants guilty.¹⁹ During the trial, Parish described the film in detail and read from published reviews. As the *New York Times Magazine* noted, Parish's language was so saturated with vulgarity that "the trial could have been said to appeal to the prurient interests of the jurors, and to fall under the very definition of obscenity which was being used to condemn Harry Reems."²⁰

In 1974, the same year the Reems case began, the Supreme Court upheld the conviction and prison sentence of San Diego publisher William Hamling for his illustrated version of the report of the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. Hamling's edition, issued in November 1970, included hard-core photographs, exactly the kind of photographs the text of the report said were harmless and ought to be decriminalized. Hamling's major mistake may have been his advertising brochure criticizing President Nixon for rejecting the report's conclusions. In any event, the FBI arrested him and in 1972 a federal court sentenced him to four years in jail. He appealed, but the Burger court upheld Hamling's conviction, underlining the authority of the judiciary to ban books.

Pornography had become a symbol for everything that was wrong with America. This view gripped the left as well as the right. Liberals, despite their traditional opposition to censorship, had always flinched from anything that might be deemed "pornography." As liberals struggled to cope with the collapsing economy and the failures of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, they too attacked the sexual revolution. "The 'sexual revolution' seems to bring few of the boons promised by the early pioneers who fought for progress in the darkest fifties by adopting gutter

*I would argue that liberals dislike pornography because it undercuts the Enlightenment notion of the *tabula rasa* by emphasizing the extent to which human beings are controlled by their sexual impulses.

language in their classrooms," one liberal critic wrote. "Dedicated pioneers at Berkeley or at Grove Press may assume that more of the same will produce something different, but their assurances grow daily less convincing."²¹ Retiring Chief Justice Earl Warren declared in 1969 that he had never meant to decriminalize hard-core pornography, and that the Post Office had both a duty and a right to stop much of the sexually oriented material sent through the mail.²² Even ACLU attorney Morris Ernst joined the growing chorus of disenchanted liberals. Ernst, who had defended *Ulysses*, the lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness*, and Marie Stopes's *Married Love* in major obscenity trials in the 1920s and '30s, surprised liberals and conservatives alike in 1970 by publicly denouncing the "display of sex and sadism" that he felt was on the rise.

This display was perhaps most prominent in the nation's newspapers. From 1969 on, the entertainment section of the typical urban newspaper was packed with advertisements for hard-core sex films. In the early seventies, newspapers began restricting and regulating the use of suggestive illustrations in ads for films. By the end of 1973, thirty-five daily newspapers had instituted some policy regulating movie ads.²³ Often newspapers took advantage of the ratings system, introduced in 1968, which classified movies as either G (general audiences), M (mature young people), R (restricted to those accompanied by an adult over sixteen), and X (no one under sixteen admitted). At first, the X rating was given to any film with "adult" content (*A Clockwork Orange*, *Midnight Cowboy*, and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Decameron* all received X ratings), so it did not necessarily indicate a hard-core pornographic film, but newspapers nonetheless began banning ads for all X-rated pictures.²⁴ (Such actions were not always popular with readers. Jim Copley, the publisher of the *San Diego Union and Tribune*, banned all X-rated film advertisements in August 1969; a poll taken in 1975 found that 68 percent of San Diego residents thought the ban was a form of improper censorship.)²⁵ Over time, as theaters specializing in sex films continued to proliferate, more and more newspapers implemented regulatory policies.

Segregating ads for sex films presented practical and theoretical difficulties. At first, the *New York Times* was reluctant to restrict advertising and chastised other newspapers for doing so. The publisher of the *Times* felt banning ads for all X-rated movies was a blunt method of censorship: Some X-rated films were rated X for heavy violent content rather than sexual content (interestingly enough, the *Times* saw no reason to ban ads for violent films), while some films with sex were worthy of patronage by *Times* readers because they were works of art.²⁶ To avoid these dilemmas, the *Times* decided to distinguish "true" pornographic films from other X-rated and nonrated films. Advertisements

for films deemed pornographic would be restricted to a one-inch box and would not be allowed to contain any information other than the name of the film, the address of the theater, and the hours of performance. The policy banned all illustrations.

The newspaper's assistant general attorney, Katherine Darrow, opposed the new policy because it treated advertisements for films differently from advertisements for either books or plays. Darrow was concerned that the policy would establish a "flagrant double-standard." The policy was also opposed by John D. Pomfret, senior vice president of the newspaper, who argued it would so restrict information that it would do the reader a disservice. Gays might end up going to movies for straights and straights going to movies for gays. Pomfret believed that censorship ought to be "repugnant" to everyone at the *Times* and warned the adoption of the new policy would damage the paper's reputation.²⁷

Senior executives at the *Times* were unmoved; they decided to go ahead with the new policy, which was announced on June 21, 1977. (Enraged, pornographic theater owners retaliated by boycotting the paper entirely and running their ads in the *New York Post* and the *New York Daily News*. But eventually these newspapers established their own censorship policies.) Broadway theater owners supported the *Times* because they too resented the presence of X-rated theaters in Times Square.²⁸ In fact, the 42nd Street Theater Row, which included the Black Theater Alliance, Actors and Directors Lab, Playwrights Horizons, Harlem Children's Theater, Lion Theater Company, and the South Street Theater Company, organized their own campaign to fight porn and prostitution in the neighborhood.²⁹ Meanwhile, the Motion Picture Association of America narrowed the scope of its X rating. Originally meant to include any film containing significant discussion of sexual topics, eroticism, or violence, the X was redefined to designate only those films with hard-core sex. The new, sex-specific category made it easier for police, local zoning boards, and movie theater owners to segregate sexuality.

The new sense of panic surrounding sexuality affected the music industry as well. In 1975 controversy erupted over country singer Loretta Lynn's song "The Pill," an ode to the oral contraceptive's liberating qualities. Though the song was certainly tame by the standards of the day, and the pill had been celebrated in the media for over a decade, Lynn's song came at the wrong time: women's sexual freedom was now seen as threatening to the social order. Conservatives denounced "The Pill" and radio stations refused to play it.



On the far left of the political spectrum, feminists were beginning to attack the iconography of sex in mass culture. In March 1971, two female students at Princeton University entered a male undergraduate's room and slashed his nude pinups.³⁰ The two women, Chris Stansell and Susan Petty, both lived in the dorm, which was predominantly male. Stansell recalls, "The guy upstairs in a single was known for papering his room wall to wall with *Playboy* pinup foldouts. It was spring, we were full of piss and vinegar and energy and ire . . . [there was a] lack of space — physical, mental, emotional — for women (this was the second year of coeducation). The idea that everywhere on the campus women were objectified as sex objects, rather than taken as people, was very much in the air and this guy's room seemed to embody that problem." Stansell and Petty took some sculpting tools and "headed up the stairs to do in his pinups."³¹ The two were eventually brought before the university disciplinary committee and were given minor reprimands.

Feminists' reaction in the early seventies against the machismo of male sexuality went beyond college vandalism. Two members of NOW declared in 1973, "Feminism is humanism and sex today can be de-humanizing: feminists disagree with competition between women for men, and with treating sex as an indoor sport, with scores tallied in numbers and types of orgasms."³² With men using sex and sexual vulgarity to remind women of their second-class status in society, it was easy to become disgusted with male behavior. Men in the sex industry were especially notorious for being hostile to women. "When I worked for [publisher] Ed Mishkin writing [sex] novels, there was a rule in the company," says Jason Glick (a pseudonym), now a graduate student in history. "The woman was always supposed to get punished in the end. The more she was humiliated the better."³³ Seeing the entire sex industry as a bastion of misogyny, feminists began fighting commercial pornography in the 1970s. Some photographed men as they entered porn theaters and then posted the photographs throughout the community. In Seattle, feminists attacked adult bookstores with stink bombs. In New York, three pornographic theaters were firebombed.³⁴

Feminists were particularly concerned about the popularization of sadomasochistic imagery. Anal rape was an increasingly familiar theme in literature and film, with the scene of forced sodomy and humiliation in 1973's *Last Tango in Paris* one of the most celebrated cinematic moments of the era. In 1974, the fashion industry introduced "s/m chic." In the window displays of Madison Avenue, mannequins were posed in brutal scenes suggesting sexual assault. Women knelt at the feet of their abusers. Men held their fists clenched. Similarly ugly scenarios decorated department store catalogs. A particularly notorious billboard for a record album pictured a bruised woman declaring, "I'm black and blue from the Rolling Stones."³⁵

In response, a group of feminists created the Women's Anti-Defamation League.

For the vast majority of men and women who engaged in s/m, it was simply a form of pleasure, indeed of "sexual play," having nothing to do with domestic abuse. The explicit theatricality, costumes, and role-playing of s/m offered the spice of variety. But feminists were appalled and outraged by the rise of s/m, believing it to be the reflex of a repressed culture. At its best, they reasoned s/m was merely a symptom of self-hatred, at its worst, it was the first step toward sexual fascism.

The triumph of sexual liberalism raised new, difficult questions. What sort of community would be built by men and women for whom sexual pleasure was their first priority? Would they remember to value the beautiful, the just, and the common good? Or would they sink into solipsism and selfishness? Could education truly conquer irrational impulses and sexual exploitation? Or would the darker, violent side of human sexuality eventually triumph over reason and rationality?

In October 1975, the *New York Post* carried an article about the alleged production of pornographic movies in South America in which actresses were actually murdered during filming. These so-called snuff films were supposedly being shipped to the United States to be viewed by men sexually aroused by the thought of rape and murder. Whether or not such films were actually made remains uncertain, but rumors about snuff films spread like wildfire.³⁶ Four months after the *Post* article, *Snuff*, a fiction film about pornographic murder, opened in New York.³⁷ Soon thereafter, feminism became almost exclusively focused on stopping the sale of pornography.*

If snuff films were not enough to worry about, Hugh Hefner, one of the self-proclaimed leaders of the sexual revolution, was out to destroy feminism himself. A memo he wrote that was leaked to the press by a *Playboy* secretary revealed his antipathy toward the women's movement. Hefner had been planning to run a piece on the women's movement by feminist writer Susan Braudy, but then changed his mind. "What I want," he wrote in the now infamous memo,

is a devastating piece that takes militants apart. . . . What I'm interested in is the highly irrational, emotional, kookie trend that feminism has taken. These chicks are our natural enemy. It is time to do battle with

*A movement to fight images of violence against women was spearheaded in California, where feminists organized Women Against Violence Against Women, but the group did not last long, falling apart in 1978. The San Francisco group Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media was more successful. This second group organized the first "Take Back the Night" march in 1979 (Susan Brownmiller to Barbara Demming, 4 March 1979, WAP Collection, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University). Speculation about the possible existence of snuff films was revived by the 1999 film *8mm*.

them and I think we can do it in a devastating way. . . . The only subject related to feminism that is worth doing is on this new militant phenomena [sic] and the only proper *Playboy* approach to it is one that devastates it. If you analyze all of the most basic premises of the extreme form of new feminism, you will find them unalterably opposed to the romantic boy-girl society that *Playboy* promotes. It is up to us to do a really expert, personal demolition job on the subject.³⁸

After the memo was made public, Hefner appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show* in an attempt to repair the damage. But his opponent, Susan Brownmiller, author of *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, won the day. Asked to define the meaning of sexual equality, Brownmiller responded, "When Hugh Hefner comes out here with a cotton tail attached to his rear end, then we'll have equality."

The memo incident gave feminists a new opportunity to critique the images of women in conventional pornography. Susan Braudy published her original article in *Glamour* magazine under the title "The Article I Wrote on Women That Playboy Would Not Publish." In it she asked,

Why can't a magazine written to titillate men present a full picture of the real woman to those big, brave men? Why must she be a fantasy figure so de-humanized as to be really de-sexed — hairs plucked, smells replaced, pores filled with make-up, smoothed to unthreatening blandness? Is the *Playboy* male so weak, so ultimately unable to cope with reality and real women that the fantasy creature of his glossy *Playboy*-inspired reveries must be mechanized, passive, manipulable and controllable?³⁹

In the meantime, many feminists had begun to take sexual freedom for granted. Susan Brownmiller, for instance, had joined the feminist movement already confident that she was sexually liberated. Born in 1935, sexually active from the time she was nineteen, and, by her own testimony, "multiply orgasmic," she did not see eroticism as an important political aim.⁴⁰ Increasingly, she and other feminists saw sexual danger as the most pressing issue of the day. They weren't neo-puritans, espousing "sexual repression"; rather, they felt that the battle for female sexual pleasure had largely been won, while the war against sexual violence had yet to begin.

*The adversarial legal system made prosecuting rapists difficult if not impossible. Rapists left little evidence of their crimes (before DNA testing made it possible to identify a rapist by his semen) and juries, reverting to the double standard, were inclined to discount the testimony of women who were sexually active before an alleged rape. From the start, sexual coercion was a feminist issue, but early feminists, coming out of the civil rights movement, were wary of discussing rape because Southern whites had a long history of lynching any black man so much as accused of rape. In 1975, Susan Brownmiller addressed the issue directly in *Against*

Increasingly concerned about regulating sexual expression rather than liberating it, radical feminists organized to combat pornography, operating on the premise that pornography demeaned women and inspired men to rape. Most feminists still believed in the distinction between "healthy" and "unhealthy" representations of sexuality. Gloria Steinem claimed that one could distinguish between "pornography" and "erotica," much as the Kronhausens had in the late fifties and early sixties suggested that the law could distinguish between "pornography" and "erotic realism." The problem with Steinem's logic was that she seemed to think that only a woman could properly be trusted to make the distinction.

It was not long before some feminists hit upon the idea of working with the religious right to form a coalition against pornographers. In 1977, Lois Gould, a member of the fledgling Women's Anti-Defamation League, wrote about her epiphany in the "Hers" column of the *New York Times*. She described how after watching one of the *Godfather* films, she realized that men get "where they want to go by doing business with their sworn enemies." It might be necessary, she argued, to align with the religious right in the fight over pornography, even with conservatives who used the label "feminist" as a curse word. "Feminists are hardly god-fathers (or mothers) in training; nor do we want to be. But we do want power, and we do want to win. And we do need to be aware of what it takes."⁴¹ In other words, Gould argued, feminists would have to join forces with traditional anti-pornography crusaders in order to put pornographers out of business.

At first, many radical feminists expressed horror at Gould's realpolitik. Andrea Dworkin wrote in a letter to the editor:

To me, the values in Lois Gould's article on . . . pornography/feminism are repugnant . . . The fight against those who deny others freedom and dignity is not divisible. Compromise with totalitarian ideology does not facilitate communication. It only encourages the atrophy of a vision of authentic justice which is the feminist contribution to history.

Dworkin said she found the idea of forging a coalition with the religious right "pernicious." Noting that all the radical feminists at the initial meeting of the Women's Anti-Defamation League supported gay and lesbian rights, Leah Fritz wrote: "It is inconceivable that we could in any way join our cause with those who would deny us, our sisters, or our brothers, our human rights."⁴²

Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape, a book inspired by a consciousness-raising session dealing with sexuality during which Brownmiller listened to women discuss how they had been raped. Brownmiller herself had never been raped, but she was moved to begin writing about sexual violence from a feminist perspective.

Gould's public suggestion to align with the religious right was so startling and contrary to feminist principles that the Women's Anti-Defamation League quickly collapsed. In the meantime, evangelicals were increasing in strength. With liberals and leftists helping out with the campaign against pornography, evangelicals began targeting another aspect of the sexual revolution: gay rights.

In 1977, the singer and actress Anita Bryant initiated a campaign to repeal legislation that banned discrimination against homosexuals in Dade County, Florida. Accusing homosexuals of abusing and recruiting children, Bryant developed rhetorical strategies designed to incite fear and hatred. The Reverend Jerry Falwell (who claimed that "so-called gay folks would just as soon kill you as look at you") and other evangelical leaders came to her aid. Within six months, Bryant was victorious: The law was overturned. Support for gay rights came from unlikely sources, such as *Hustler*, which printed an editorial in defense of gay rights in July 1977, but it was too little, too late. The success of Bryant's Save Our Children campaign, as she ingeniously called it, inspired similar legislative battles throughout the country, and anti-discrimination bills were repealed or blocked in every case. That same year, a Tacoma, Washington, school district fired an openly gay school teacher; the move was approved by the state supreme court.⁴³ In California, state senator John Briggs attempted to prohibit homosexuals from working as public-school teachers. This time, gays found enough support, from both Democrats and Republicans, to block the effort. But social conservatives responded quickly by forming a new political organization, Christian Voice. In 1977, the 12.7-million-member Southern Baptist Convention declared at their annual meeting that "homosexuality is a sin" and vowed to keep homosexuals out of the clergy and other church staff positions.⁴⁴ In Boise, Idaho, the police department fired six women for alleged lesbian activity, and in Tucson, four teenagers who selected a man outside a gay bar and beat him to death were granted probation.⁴⁵ It was clear that evangelicals could rely on popular homophobia to support their cause.

In the late seventies, gay men and women had few straight allies they could turn to for support. Though many expressed a benevolent tolerance for those burdened with homosexual desires, the notion always hovered in the background of the straight sexual revolution that true emancipation would mean freedom *from* homosexuality, not freedom to be homosexual; at the very least, homosexuals would discover their capacity for heterosexual feelings. Discussions about homosexuality often took an ugly tone. The neoconservative intellectual Normal Podhoretz, for instance, accused homosexuals in 1977 of weakening the nation.⁴⁶ Such remarks fueled anti-gay violence. In San Francisco in

1978, openly gay official Harvey Milk was gunned down by a conservative politician.

Gay liberation itself was running out of steam. Like many feminists, gay men now tended to take sexual freedom for granted. With new gay clubs and bookstores springing up every day, the sexual revolution seemed like a fait accompli. Interest in the politics of sexual freedom dwindled. By the late seventies, gay liberation leaders were doubtful about the prospects of organized social change. Activist Dennis Altman wrote in 1977, "Now for the first time, I find myself totally pessimistic about the American future." To Altman, gay America had become "decadent," suffering "a decline in moral and spiritual vigor." Altman saw the rise of an openly gay culture as the paradoxical cause of the movement's decline:

Comparative relaxation of the taboos against homosexuality has led to a blossoming of bars, saunas, restaurants and theaters which hold out the promise of endless gang-bangs available across the length and breadth of the country... what [this] represents however is the emergence of a luxury-oriented, commercial gay world where instant sex is provided in surroundings of some opulence... [This] has had the effect of giving many male homosexuals the illusion that oppression is a thing of the past.⁴⁷

With Fire Island, Key West, and San Francisco thriving as gay meccas and other cities home to dozens of gay bars, the whole point of gay liberation seemed moot. The gay liberation movement revived briefly in 1977 when Anita Bryant launched her Dade County crusade (one gay activist threw a pie in Bryant's face at a press conference), but the movement was gasping for breath.



Even if evangelicals had never targeted secular humanism, the persistence of exploitative sexual attitudes, magnified by the mass marketing of sexual stimulation, made many disillusioned about the virtues of sexual liberalism. In the midseventies, *Hustler* magazine ran photos of females without pubic hair under the title "Adolescent Fantasy." The magazine was deluged with enthusiastic responses. Thomas E. Hoeflinger of Dayton, Ohio, wrote to request "more of this age group." W. N. Webb of San Francisco wrote, "Being a dirty old man I definitely appreciated the February pubescent pictorial." One writer wrongly assumed that the illustrations had to be drawings. "Even though they were only drawings, that young supple body was a turn-on for me. As a school teacher there has been more than one young teenager I have wanted to spread buttocks on, and lick clean." To those who doubted whether the models really

were prepubescent, the editors insisted they were. "The 'Adolescent Fantasy' was for real!" they wrote. With a regular comic strip titled "Chester the Molester," *Hustler* sneered at those with ethical concerns about the exploitation of children.

Those concerns, however, were well merited. In 1973, in Houston, Texas, Dean Coril, age thirty-three, sexually assaulted and murdered twenty-seven boys before one shot and killed Coril in self-defense. Around this time, the FBI arrested nineteen men, three of them millionaire businessmen, who had established a Boy Scout troop in the South for the express purpose of sexually exploiting young males.

Child pornography was now being mass produced by men like Washington, D.C., pornographer Lynn Womack, who was arrested in 1969 for selling a magazine titled *Phallic Development in the Pre-Adolescent*.⁴⁸ Womack's Aquarius Press catalog announced, "Our slidesets cover the age range from six to sixteen . . . and many different racial types, nationalities, body types, builds, ages, hair and eye colors."⁴⁹ Several magazines devoted to adult-child sex were started in the seventies.⁵⁰ Police discovered that two sex films featuring young children, *Lolliots* and *Lollipop*, were being widely circulated. In March 1973, police raided the Texas home of suspected child-pornographer John D. Norman, who had first been arrested in 1954 on sodomy charges and thirteen times after that, and allegedly found thirty thousand index cards marked with the names of potential customers.* Teenage prostitution was rising so fast, Los Angeles police were forced to organize a Sexually Exploited Child Unit in 1976.⁵¹

By 1977, authorities suspected that a national child-pornography and pedophile ring was based in Chicago. John Norman, who at the time was serving four years at the Illinois state prison for having had sex with ten-year-old boys, had begun publishing a newsletter from prison to tell others about his "Delta" project. The goal of the project was to create a system of "Delta" houses across the country in which adult male "dons" would preside over young male "cadets." The cadets Norman intended to recruit were prostitutes and foster home runaways. Norman's co-founders of the Delta project were Philip R. Paske, a convicted murderer; David Berta, a child-pornographer; and two other men with arrest records. They sent their newsletter, *Hermes*, to seven thousand

*According to press reports, some of the names were those of prominent federal employees. Police said they shipped the cards to the State Department, but that State Department officials destroyed them. The State Department action made many suspicious of a governmental cover-up because the officials could provide no clear justification for it. Apparently, the officials said they checked the names to see if there were any problems with passport authorization and, finding none, destroyed the cards. (See "Chicago Is Center of National Child Porno Ring," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 May 1977, front page.)

men across the country. In May, Chicago police arrested David Welch on the grounds that he had made child pornography featuring his own foster son.⁵²

The *Chicago Tribune* featured stories about the child-pornography and pedophilia cases on its front page for several days in a row. "A nationwide homosexual ring with headquarters in Chicago has been trafficking in young boys, sending them across the nation to serve clients willing to pay hundreds of dollars for their services," the *Tribune* declared. Needless to say, panic about child pornography spread quickly.



The following year, anti-pornography feminism exploded onto the national scene when a new East Coast group, Women Against Pornography, was born. WAP members declared that pornography had "nothing to do with sex and everything to do with degradation of women, subjugation of women, and violence against women." East Coast WAP members held a major demonstration in Times Square in New York on Saturday, October 20, 1979.⁵³ Feminists around the nation organized "Take Back the Night" rallies to protest rape and sexual harassment.

With the sluggish economy, secular humanism under assault, and exploitative attitudes everywhere in evidence, few had the time, the resources, or the motivation to champion the First Amendment. To many, the doctrine of free speech seemed like a failure. From evangelical churches to the Supreme Court, anti-pornography sentiment was growing. Feminists, once attacked for being anti-sex, were now applauded for their anti-pornography views. Suddenly, more and more women were attracted to the anti-pornography position. Even Andrea Dworkin, who had once championed incest and graphic representations of sex, became a fervent anti-porn activist. Then, in 1980, the movement was invigorated by a surprise event. Linda Lovelace, the internationally known star of the film *Deep Throat*, published *Ordeal*, an account of her experiences during the making of the film. Lovelace said she had been forced to perform the sex scenes in *Deep Throat* by her husband, Chuck Traynor, who had beaten her and threatened her with a gun if she refused to comply. People across the nation were horrified. Here was a woman famous as an uninhibited sex artist who was now saying she had been systematically raped and tortured before their very eyes.

The so-called sexual revolution had gone too far, anti-pornography activists asserted. The only problem was that the anti-pornography movement itself was still haunted by the puritanical attitudes of the pre-sexual revolution period. The symbol selected by WAP members was a giant, and realistic, human eye. The eye suggested that feminists

were staring back at the men who gazed at women as if they were "sex objects," and that anti-porn feminism would keep male sexual practices under surveillance. WAP members apparently missed the ironic resemblance of the symbol to the infamous posters declaring "Big Brother Is Watching" in George Orwell's novel of totalitarian dystopia, 1984.

In September 1979, WAP held its first East Coast conference on feminism and pornography. Workshops included "Porn and Me," "Porn, Me and Men," and slide shows of pornography. Men were banned from the conference. Organizers stated explicitly that speeches were to be geared toward the theme "Why I'm Against Pornography." A flier for the conference suggests the tension that existed between the desire for serious analysis of the issue of pornography and a more absolutist, activist approach. Inviting potential participants, the flier stated: "We will explore the complexities of the issue, discuss our questions and feelings and develop analysis and strategy." But it also declared: "PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT HARMLESS ENTERTAINMENT. PORNOGRAPHY IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN."

WAP took liberties with the truth in a way that other groups did not. For example, WAP asserted: "The pornography industry makes \$4 billion a year by producing, distributing and selling images of women being bound, raped, tortured, mutilated and murdered for sexual stimulation and pleasure." As s/m images constituted only a fraction of the pornographic market in the late seventies, such a statement was simply untrue. But the anti-pornography movement tapped in to national nostalgia for "the good old days." One woman at a "Take Back the Night" steering committee meeting expressed her longing for the 1940s, when "the streets were safe any time of the day."⁵⁴ The pain and difficulty of life under the double standard was already disappearing from memory.

Some of the letters sent to Women Against Pornography confirmed the group's suspicions about male attitudes toward women. One writer who claimed to be a brothel owner wrote, "Dear Girlies, We men make very good money from you little ladies. You can't stop us. Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha. . . . You dumb cunts." Accompanying the letter were hard-core pornographic clippings and two articles on brothels in Las Vegas. On the other hand, Women Against Pornography members had a tendency to classify any and all critical correspondence as "hate mail." One letter filed under the heading "Hate Mail" was from a self-proclaimed male feminist who wrote, "Never did I dream that feminists would embrace censorship! I suggest you direct your efforts toward the real pornography against women: the Bible and religion in general. What are you trying to do anyway? Appeal to the right-wing Christians you've had so

much trouble with?" The letter was signed, "With great sadness."⁵⁵ By putting such letters into the "hate mail" pile, WAP members showed themselves to be unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between obvious opponents and concerned allies.

Anti-pornography feminists used a variety of tactics. One of the most successful was to publicize a June 1978 *Hustler* magazine cover showing a nude woman being ground into meat. The illustration bore out all the arguments made by WAP: that pornography treated women like "meat," that pornography was a form of misogyny, that violence and pornography were linked. WAP overlooked the fact that *Hustler* often contained cartoons showing men in similarly degrading and vile situations. One 1977 cartoon, in fact, depicted an imbecilic "organ grinder" grinding his own penis. There were other problems with the WAP tactic. By copying and enlarging the *Hustler* image and displaying it in public places, WAP members were "assaulting" women and children with the very images they claimed were so degrading and harmful.

Most significant was that WAP, led by Andrea Dworkin and legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon, forged a close alliance with the religious right. Dworkin, who had once spoken out against such a hypothetical alliance as a "compromise with totalitarian ideology," now adopted a more pragmatic political style. WAP members borrowed many tactics from the right, including the use of a slide show (a favorite technique of anti-abortion activists) to demonstrate that pornography was degrading to women. Sexual liberals were now truly on the defensive.



Despite the growing shadow of sexual exploitation, a significant number of Americans continued to support the essential elements of the sexual revolution. By 1977, polls found that 50 percent of Americans surveyed opposed laws preventing theaters from showing X-rated films. Seventy-seven percent said they believed public schools should provide sex education. Even more significant was the fact that almost 70 percent said they would approve schools teaching methods of birth control. Over 90 percent of Americans surveyed said they believed birth control information should be freely available. Over 80 percent said birth control information should be available to teenagers. Almost half of all college students said they believed a man and woman should live together before deciding whether or not to marry.⁵⁶ Several polls found that a majority of Americans supported legislation that would protect gays and lesbians from employment discrimination.⁵⁷

But beneath the surface of American optimism, confusion and frustration still existed. One night in February 1975 in Peru, Indiana, after Eunice Lake's husband had had sex with another woman as part of their open arrangement, Eunice was overcome with anger and frustration. Lying beside her husband Trevor, she began to masturbate, knowing that the sight of a woman masturbating revolted him. As Trevor "turned his head with a look of disgust," Eunice had "a momentary urge to smash him over the head with the vibrator." Instead, she hurled it against the wall. It cracked into pieces.⁵⁸

By the midseventies, faith in sexual liberation was cracking. Early proponents of the sexual revolution had believed that by treating sex as a "private" matter instead of one subject to government regulations, society would benefit. Now, however, sex was spilling into the public sphere in ever new and more complicated ways. In Virginia Beach, Virginia, two girls, ages eleven and thirteen, brought photographs of their mother naked with another man (who was not their father and who happened to be black) to school and showed them to friends. When school authorities learned of the photographs, they contacted the police. Police officers then raided the girls' home and found numerous pornographic magazines and multiple photographs of the girls' parents, Aldo and Margaret Lovisi, having sex with Earl Romeo Dunn, whom the Lovisis had met through an ad in the magazine *Swinger's Life*. Pictures showed Margaret Lovisi performing fellatio on her husband and on Dunn. The police arrested the Lovisis and charged them with committing sodomy and crimes against nature.⁵⁹ The couple were convicted in a Virginia Beach court (Aldo was sentenced to two years in prison, Margaret got five years); the convictions were upheld in a 1976 federal appeals decision and then reaffirmed by the Supreme Court. If sexual impulses could not be kept in check by citizens themselves, those impulses would be contained by the steel bars of a jail cell.

While both the right and the left poured fire on the sexual revolution, there was not, as this book has tried to make clear, any united coalition of "sexual revolutionaries" to fight back. Faint praise for First Amendment rights and sex education were no match for the systematic efforts of passionate social conservatives and anti-pornography feminists indifferent to rational argument. Part of the problem was that many different definitions of "sexual liberation" were being propounded. Sexual revolutionaries, if we may call them that, shared only a few vague principles in common. They agreed on the evils of hypocrisy, ignorance, superstition, shame, and fear. They opposed sexual "repression" and "exploitation." But what constituted repression and exploitation remained open to debate. Was anonymous sex liberated or repressed?

Was sadomasochism playful or exploitative? Was monogamy the answer or the problem?*

With many social and economic problems plaguing the nation but no one clearly at fault, sexual liberalism served as a practical scapegoat for society's ills. The 1975 film *Shampoo* emphasized the pathos of casual sex. In the 1977 movie *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, Diane Keaton's patronage of a singles bar ends in her brutal murder by a pickup. The movie's message was clear: Promiscuity was inherently dangerous. A year later, the feature film *Hardcore* warned parents that their daughters might run away to act in porn films and never be heard from again. Some films of the early eighties, such as *American Gigolo* and *Cruising*, were virulently homophobic.⁶⁰

By the early eighties, social conservatives were on the warpath, intent on destroying the last vestiges of secular humanism. The sudden rise of evangelical activism caught the attention of Howard Phillips of the Conservative Caucus, John Dolan of the National Conservative Political Action Committee, Paul Weyrich of the National Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, and the conservative political fund-raiser Richard Viguerie, who decided to harness evangelical enthusiasm for the Republican Party. They helped organize a group called the Moral Majority in 1979 and chose Jerry Falwell, the minister of the independent Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, to be its figurehead. The Moral Majority — though it did not in fact represent majority opinion in the United States — pushed for government by theocracy. The organization blasted secular humanism as the work of the devil and denounced all forms of knowledge that contradicted fundamentalist readings of the Bible.

Despite rapidly escalating rates of sexually transmitted disease, Republicans in Congress killed what was to be the first national study of sexual practices. In April 1981, a Republican senator introduced a "chastity bill," intended "to promote self-discipline and chastity, and

*One might argue that sexual utopianism died simply because it produced the very forms of sexual expression its proponents said it would stamp out. Didn't the sexual revolution lead to more rape, more child abuse, more jealousy, more unhappiness, more divorce? The truth is, we will never know. There is no way to test whether the sexual revolution was responsible for such social problems. It is possible, after all, that if the major events of the sexual revolution had not occurred — that is to say, if censorship laws had never been overturned, if the double standard had never been challenged, if gay liberation had never begun — there might be more rape, more child abuse, more jealousy, more unhappiness, more divorce than there is today. As dissatisfying as it may be, we simply have no way of knowing how history would have turned out had it followed a different course. All efforts purporting to demonstrate which social problems the sexual revolution caused and which it solved must be regarded with suspicion.

other positive family centered approaches to the problems of adolescent promiscuity and adolescent pregnancy."⁶¹ Though the bill failed in Congress, liberals and radicals issued only quiet protests and also abandoned efforts to pass federal gay rights legislation.

Social conservatives may have regarded themselves as morally superior, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Many of those who led the war against the sexual revolution in the late seventies and eighties were later accused of unethical or criminal acts themselves. In 1987, televangelist Jim Bakker was forced to admit to an extramarital affair with his secretary Jessica Hahn. Bakker had tried to keep Hahn silent with hush money, but she talked anyway. There were also claims that Bakker had experimented with bisexuality. Meanwhile, Bakker, who lived in extravagant luxury, was convicted of fraud and sentenced to eight years in prison. The following year, fellow televangelist Jimmy Swaggart publicly confessed to paying prostitutes for sex. Robert Tilton, a Texas televangelist, was barraged with lawsuits for fraud and tax evasion. It is possible that the sexual revolution was a convenient target for those who wanted to deflect investigations into white-collar crime and corruption.



About to give a speech in Texas, Gloria Steinem was delighted to see dozens of people carrying signs saying "GLORIA STEINEM IS A HUMANIST." She assumed they were supporters, sympathetic to the goals of the women's movement. "But as I got closer and saw the hatred in their faces," she recalls, "I realized they were right-wing pickets to whom *humanist* — or any other word that means a belief in people instead of an authoritarian god — is the worst thing you can be."⁶²

Under attack from all sides and forced to retreat, sexual liberals were utterly unprepared to deal with the discovery of a new, incurable, sexually transmitted disease in 1979. Herpes Simplex II, or genital herpes, was viral rather than bacterial, so it could not be stopped with penicillin or other antibiotics. Its symptoms included painful, itchy blisters, and the disease could be dormant for long periods of time and then suddenly flare up. The media, hungry for the kind of attention-grabbing stories about sex that had become so hard to find as liberation made sex ho-hum, turned herpes into a national crisis. In one article, *Time* magazine called herpes "the new sexual leprosy"; in another, "today's scarlet letter." Herpes was touted as evidence that promiscuity was a violation of the "natural order." Those with herpes were treated — and they treated themselves — as social outcasts, punished by God for having illicit sex. The cover of a popular book on the disease featured the word

herpes emblazoned in red capital letters. An article in the *Soho Weekly News* in 1981 typified the media's response to the virus. "Like many women who grew up during the sexual revolution, Susan was determined to take control over her life — to be free, whatever that meant. But now she is out of control in the worst way possible — out of control of her own body." As historian Allan Brandt noted in 1985,

From a strictly scientific standpoint genital herpes is more of an annoyance than a danger; but for many who become infected it is a serious problem . . . Guilt, anger and remorse are all widely reported among herpes sufferers . . . Stress builds for herpes victims with the possibility of each new relationship or potential sexual encounter . . . Clearly, for many individuals who become infected, herpes is a tragedy. It is a tragedy, however, not because of its physiological implications, but because of the stigma and psychological ramifications the disease carries with it.

Not only did journalists stigmatize those with herpes (often referring to them condescendingly as "herpetics"), they exploited the disease in the search for bold headlines about the end of the sexual revolution. *Time* magazine enthusiastically declared, "Perhaps not so unhappily, [herpes] may be a prime mover in helping to bring to a close an era of mindless promiscuity."⁶³ *Time*, apparently, was more interested in ending the sexual revolution than in finding a cure for herpes.

The manner in which the media responded to herpes foreshadowed the way the nation would respond to AIDS. Identified in the mid-1980s, acquired immune deficiency syndrome was a fatal disease, not a minor annoyance like herpes, but its link to gay male sex practices, not its gravity alone, shaped public discourse about it. Had the sexual revolution continued to run its course, the nation's response to the AIDS epidemic might have been entirely different. The federal government might have taken immediate steps to promote the use of condoms, extensive funds might have been allocated for AIDS research, and schools might have actively encouraged masturbation, sensual massage, and other safe-sex practices. Instead, of course, the nation was alternately swept up in panic and denial. Masters and Johnson put their imprimatur on the myth that one could get AIDS from a toilet seat.⁶⁴ Then-President Ronald Reagan did not mention the word *AIDS* in a speech until seven years into the epidemic, when 25,000 lives had already been lost. Conservatives fought efforts to distribute condoms in schools. Reason gave way to emotion, empathy to fear.

By the early eighties, the sexual revolution was out of steam. People did not suddenly stop having sex outside of marriage, or having same-sex relationships, or consuming pornography. But Americans became more pessimistic about human sexuality. The quest to abolish hypocrisy,

ignorance, shame, self-loathing, and the fear of sexual expression had run its course. Americans had become resigned to their own moral contradictions and intellectual inconsistencies. Many had accepted the power of the state and the authority of religious spokesmen to dictate sexual morality. Intellectuals who had once looked to Marcuse and Brown as prophets of sexual freedom now turned to French philosopher Michel Foucault, who insisted that sexual liberation was all but impossible. The more people tried to free themselves from sexual repression, Foucault argued, the more entangled in prescriptive norms they would end up.

For all its faults and limitations, the sexual revolution had contributed to an era of openness, self-examination, and questioning of the status quo. It was a time of popular inquiry into important philosophical questions. For twenty-some years, a significant segment of the population had publicly explored the possibility of a rational approach to personal behavior and social organization. That exploration had led to many ideas and recommendations that were less than logically sound themselves. But it had been an era of commitment to the principle of consistent thought and action. It had been an era of devotion to the idea of freedom in all its forms. It had been an era of erotic possibility. Now that era was over.

EPILOGUE

IN 1994, SURGEON GENERAL JOYCELYN ELDERS, RESPONDING TO the AIDS crisis, recommended that schools discuss the safety benefits of masturbation over intercourse. She was summarily fired. Virtually no one in the nation rallied to her side.

There are several ironies to the Elders incident. Two decades earlier, Elders would have had numerous defenders. Her suggestion would have been interpreted in light of the ongoing sexual revolution. Her ideas might still have seemed provocative to some, but many educated adults would have recognized the obvious importance of teaching children a pragmatic approach to avoiding an incurable, life-threatening disease over maintaining reticence about a practice as timeless and widespread as masturbation.

The man who fired Elders was none other than President Clinton. As the Monica Lewinsky affair later revealed, Clinton is no exemplar of traditional morality. Or, rather, Clinton is just that: a man who practices the traditional rites of hypocrisy. When it came to the health of the nation's children, Clinton was unwilling to speak up for a secular, rational approach to sexuality because it might cost him public approval. When it came to his own personal pleasure, Clinton was quick to act on his desires and lie as necessary.

The point is not to blame the president for his all too human failings. The real point is to recognize how deeply ambivalent most of us remain about human sexuality. We remain ashamed of our own desires, alienated from our own bodies, fearful of the judgment of our neighbors, calmly hypocritical and deceitful.

Fortunately, the sexual revolution did accomplish many positive things. Even though various religions still disapprove of contraception, there is no longer any real social stigma attached to using birth control. The double standard is less pervasive than it once was. Premarital sex is acknowledged as a reality by the mass media. Abortion is still legally available. Censorship is much rarer than it used to be. There are nude beaches in a number of states. Gays and lesbians enjoy unprecedented visibility and freedom. Interracial marriages are legal and interracial romances are represented in film and on television. College parietal rules are, for all intents and purposes, but a distant memory. Sexually explicit films are readily available at video stores throughout the nation.

But overall, the sexual revolutionaries of the sixties and seventies did not accomplish nearly as much as they had hoped they would. First, as the Elders incident reveals, many of the backward attitudes that existed prior to the sexual revolution have persisted despite the best efforts of sexual liberals to stamp them out. Adolescents of both sexes still look down on girls who are too "easy." Birth control remains expensive, and it is often not covered by medical insurance. Abortion providers must fear for their own lives. Politicians still say one thing about sex and do another. The religious right still tries to appeal to "decency" in order to censor provocative art. Gay unions are not legally recognized, while homophobia and gay bashing are still rampant in some areas and may even be on the rise. Gang bangs still occur at college fraternities. Many young men still possess callous attitudes toward women. Nonsexual nakedness remains almost entirely taboo in family films and television and even in news magazines. Depictions of violence and simulated violence remain staples of popular entertainment while the portrayal of sex and simulated sex continue to provoke controversy. The result is a world in which professional wrestling, designed to trick the naive into believing that grown men in tight underwear are really trying to hurt one another, is good clean fun, but television shows that deal sensitively with homosexuality are denounced from the pulpits of the nation.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that the sexual revolution has had some untoward results of its own. Many of the rights and privileges won by the sexual revolutionaries of yesterday are now frequently abused. There are mobsters who use the First Amendment to fight the closing of their strip clubs, phone-sex companies that litter the streets with their advertisements, parents who exploit their own children for sex. And sometimes our consumer culture seems caught in a spiral of ever-increasing vulgarity.¹



For those of us who were children during the late sixties and early seventies, the sexual revolution was a mixed blessing. Looking back, it is hard not to wonder what role children were supposed to play in the sexually liberated utopia that many hoped was on the horizon. While the sexual revolution was in full swing, America was a paradise for adults but something of a purgatory for children. The entire culture catered to adult needs, providing endless entertainment and opportunities for self-expression. There were pickup bars, swing clubs, and vacation resorts designed to facilitate sexual encounters. There were group sex retreats and plenty of private orgies to attend. There were porn theaters, sex shops, and strip clubs galore. It was a world in which children did not quite belong, in which it was easy for them to feel "in the way."

When parents were devoted to their own sexual pleasure, children could become a mere distraction. On one occasion, Eunice Lake was forced to miss her daughter's school program because she had an appointment with her sex therapist.² Glen Murphy (a pseudonym), another swinger, recalls that he once left their young son, Tom, at home with his wife, Susan, while he was out of town. Tom caught his mother in the shower with another man. "When I arrived at the airport, Susan and Tom were there to greet me. Tom was about eight years old. In a really loud voice he yells, 'Daddy! Daddy! Mommy took a shower with Mr. Gage.' The airport was one of those domed kinds, so his voice echoed throughout the entire place. I was mortified and I had to explain to him why it was okay for Mommy to be in the shower with another man but not okay to talk about it in the airport."³

I don't want to suggest that children were necessarily "damaged" by their parents' sexual lifestyles. Contrary to popular wisdom, there is no scientific evidence to support the premise that children can only thrive in heterosexual, monogamous unions. Tom Murphy, for one, believes his parents' open marriage provided him with valuable male role models. "I actually considered [my mother's lover] a kind of uncle, he was kind of a surrogate father at times. . . . If my father was unable to deal with a situation — for example, teaching me to drive made him really uptight — this guy was able to help. He was a bus driver, so he was cool with it."⁴

The problem with the sexual liberalism of the early seventies was not that adult behavior had a direct, negative impact on children (though sometimes it did, as in all historical eras and human societies). The real problem was that children's emotional needs were often overlooked because the focus of the culture was so geared to adults and their desires. On stage and screen young children were virtually absent, or else they appeared as preadolescent prostitutes or sexually curious saplings.⁵

Indeed, when the culture's focus was on children, it often put them in a sexual light. There was, for instance, a small movement to promote pedophilia, a practice that was glamorized in the 1962 Hollywood version of *Lolita*. In Los Angeles in the early seventies, members of the Guyon Society proclaimed, "Sex before eight, or else it's too late." Farther north along the coast, several members of the Sexual Freedom League formed a "Childhood Sensuality Circle" in January 1971. Though the circle members disavowed the "exploitation of children for any purpose," they denied the notion that sex between an adult and a child was automatically exploitative.⁶ In the late seventies, the National Association for Man Boy Love began insisting that children could benefit from sexual relationships with adults.

Although pro-pedophilia organizations had few members, the adult-centered attitudes were widespread. The children of mate-swapping swingers and sexually liberated couples often felt alienated and out of place in the world of erotic exuberance. Wisconsin businesswoman Valerie Goldberg, who grew up in a Manhattan apartment where the walls were covered with photographs of nude women, including some of her mother, felt uncomfortable in her own home. "The tenor of the house was extremely sexualized. My father had all of his pictures of his girlfriends, but my mother liked a very sexualized environment as well. . . . She was having an affair with the husband of one of her best friends. My mother was always looking in my drawers and invading my privacy. . . . She used to have naked photographs of herself hanging in the apartment, and I thought, 'What kind of a woman would do that for the delivery men to see?' It was like growing up in the *Playboy* mansion."⁷

It is understandable that men and women who were raised in the repressive forties and fifties would want to provide a more open, more honest world for their own children. Sometimes, however, the good intentions of sexually liberated parents had the opposite effect of what was intended. Jody West (a pseudonym), who works in Washington, D.C., for a nonprofit firm, often wished her parents would talk to her about sex *less*, rather than more. They not only discussed in great detail their own bedroom experiences with Jody, but often expressed astonishment that she wasn't yet sexually active herself. "I really appreciated that my parents were so open about sex, but, at the same time, I felt more pressure to lose my virginity from my father and stepmother than from anyone else. When I had my very first date with a boy — I'd never even been kissed — I brought him over for a soda or something. My father found out he was coming and put condoms on every bed in the house. I was so embarrassed I wanted to cry." When Jody was eleven, her father and stepmother invited her to watch them have sex — not once,

but twice. "I said no, of course, but that only reinforced my image as the family prude. What can I say? Most of my childhood, I was angry and depressed."⁸

As these examples illustrate, the noble effort to eliminate sexual guilt and shame sometimes resulted in adults having little respect for the privacy of children. Most parental attempts to educate children, and be honest with them, were certainly well meaning, but they sometimes failed to take into account the complex relationship between parent and child. I won't ever forget the time my own father and stepmother recommended that I lose my virginity with a prostitute rather than a girlfriend. "It's very dangerous to confuse sex and love," my stepmother told me when I was twelve. "That's why it's much better for a man to do it the first time with a hooker."⁹ I certainly wasn't "harmed" by her words, but I was confused by them. And I was left with the feeling that we would never be able to understand one another; that if I were going to talk to someone about my sexual feelings and experiences, it would never be with her.

Those of us who were born in the late sixties and early seventies tend to have a certain ambivalence about the sexual revolution. In part, it is hard for us to appreciate how stifling life was before the social and cultural changes of the era. But we also know that "more talk" about sex does not necessarily mean more understanding. Listening is just as important for a relationship as talking — perhaps even more important. Missing from the sexual revolution was an appreciation of the value of listening.



In the aftermath of the sexual revolution, we are confronted with new, ever more complicated dilemmas: How do we acknowledge the sexual desires of children and teach them about their choices without invading their privacy or making them feel pressured to have sex? How do we craft laws and workplace policies that prevent sexual harassment but do not encourage witch hunts or further alienate us from our own bodies? How do we weigh the benefits of easy access to abortion against the need for limits on fetal experimentation and genetic engineering? How do we protect free speech but maintain aesthetic standards for our communities, our literature, our art?

The sexual revolution was neither all good nor all bad, neither all successful nor all for naught. We should be wary of those who blame the sexual revolution for all of society's ills and equally wary of those who refuse to recognize the value of some regulation of public sexual expression. Now that the sexual revolution is long over, the New Right has

begun to lose its sway over the public, and new medicines mean AIDS is no longer a death sentence, we can perhaps begin to reflect critically on our own beliefs and behavior.

Our attitudes about sex are important because they shape both our private and public lives. They tell us about our assumptions and our priorities. The ways we reconcile in the sexual arena our wants and our responsibilities, our personal beliefs and our commitment to liberty, equality and justice for all, reflect on the ways we reconcile such tensions in other arenas as well. Sexual desire is part of the human condition. Our willingness to examine our sexual attitudes — or our determined refusal to do so — will always remain a useful measure of our commitment to a truly enlightened society.

Much, if not most, of the pleasure associated with sex comes not from *having* sex but from talking about having it. Stimulation and orgasm are certainly enjoyable, but it is the meaning we attach to sex through conversation that gives such physical sensations their true potency. Whether it be in the locker room, the bedroom, or the boardroom — before, during, or after — our conversations about sex (even our inner conversations with ourselves) shape our experience of it. For all its faults, the sexual revolution taught us how to speak about sex more directly, more clearly, and, most important, more authentically than we ever knew how to before. We may not always take advantage of all the sexual revolution has made available to us in this regard, but the possibility of doing so is now ours so long as we hold on to it.

There are many gaps left to fill in the historical picture of the sexual revolution. There are countless stories to tell. In years to come, new collections of manuscripts and personal papers will become available, yet people who lived through the period will pass away. These developments will make research on the period both more and less challenging. For now, the sexual revolution is part of our national mythology, secured there by both the left and the right. If a new sexual revolution should once again shake up our values and beliefs, as one no doubt will, then the meaning and mythology of the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies will change once again. At the moment we can only wait and see what moral questions, erotic preferences, and public pleasures the next century will bring.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ In addition to promoting birth control and abortion, Reich had a very specific definition of sexual liberation, which he equated with perfection of the orgasm. Interestingly, Reich believed that heterosexual intercourse was the only form of sexual contact that would allow one to experience maximum pleasure and, thereby, liberation. Reich first used the phrase “sexual revolution” to refer to the developments then taking place in the Soviet Union, where birth control and abortion were briefly championed by the state. Such liberal policies were quickly reversed by Stalin. See Wilhelm Reich, *Der Sexuelle Kampf der Jugend* (reprint ed., Graz: Verag O, n.d., [1932]); Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, trans. Thomas P. Wolfe (Orgone, Maine: The Orgone Institute Press, 1945; reprint ed., New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1960). For the most recent scholarly account of Reich’s role in the German sex movement, see Atina Grossman, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 124–27. Grossman argues that Reich’s role in the movement has been overstated.

² Pitirim Sorokin, *The American Sex Revolution* (Boston: F. Porter Sargent, 1956), 54; originally published as a magazine article and reproduced as a pamphlet.

CHAPTER 1

¹ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: B. Geis, 1962), 257.

² Quoted in Shana Alexander, “Singular Girl’s Success,” *Life*, 1 March 1963, 60–62.

³ Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, 35; 15.