**Sexual Revolutions**

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# 1

# Sexual Revolutions: An Introduction

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## Preamble

The 1960s saw a series of events in Western countries that created new perspectives and practices regarding sexuality and brought a flood of eroticised texts and images into the public realm. This was the sexual revolution. Beginning early in the decade, Sweden saw debates on abortion, the Netherlands witnessed *Provos* that advocated general amoral promiscuity in 1965, England was host to a *summer of love* in 1967,[1] Paris provided the setting for the May 1968 uprising and demonstrations which produced a pivotal image of the 1960s,[2] and in 1969 New York's Stonewall Inn became the symbol for gay liberation. The decade saw the ascendancy of the pill, pop music and festivals like Woodstock, feminism, homosexual emancipation and gay liberation, student revolts, sex shops and shows, girls without bras and with miniskirts, sexualised media and the TV that broadcast it all. Marriage and the nuclear family came under attack and people developed alternative relational models such as communal living and group sex. Nudity infiltrated theatre and ballet stages, cinemas showed Italian and German films containing sexual content, and the streets became the site for 'streakers'. Pornography was liberalised in Denmark and later on in other European countries. Hippies were busy changing the cityscapes by sleeping in parks and public squares and shopping for food, clothing and drugs in countercultural circuits of squatted buildings such as in Copenhagen's Christiana. The political landscape was transformed through organised social movements and demonstrations including Black Power and protests against Vietnam, colonial wars, and nuclear technology. Sexuality became politicised and society eroticised. Western countries made gigantic steps forward in the 1960s with an aperture, upsurge and liberation of sexualities.





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The sexual revolution was about movements that politicised private and everyday life, subjectivity, the arts and culture as well as other terrains such as prisons, conceptions of justice, army and conscription, asylums, medicine, education, religion. In the 1960s, social movements were created alongside the sexual revolution that sparked a cultural revolution in the sense that many domains of existence were transformed. Some people applauded the sexual openness, the freedom of speech or the emancipation of female and gay sexuality; others decried the loss of traditional values, continuing sexism, growing consumerism, extreme individualism or unabated Puritanism. The authors of this book discuss the events and evaluations of the sexual revolution that go in their various trajectories.

Although many of these events and debates occurred throughout Western society, some remained more local. The sexual revolution was a patchwork of ideas, events, controversies and (broken) dreams, which makes it difficult to give a singular definition or to identify its main characteristics.[3] Here we use the term to indicate important changes in sexual behaviours and beliefs that led to greater freedom and extended agency for individuals. As will be seen in this book, these terms guarantee complications. What promises more self-determination for one group may mean less for another. The new demand for sexual equality is beneficial for women and gay/lesbian couples, less so for heterosexual pairs who face gender inequality, and unfavourable for child or animal lovers whose relations are seen as inherently unequal. And one could question how much agency people who believe in innate drives and orientations actually allow themselves.

When it comes to time periods, many authors of this book see the revolution as a long-term development that started with the modernisation of sexuality at the end of the 19th century,[4] or with the sexual reconstruction in post-war Western societies after 1945. There are also good arguments for seeing it as a short, radical phase in the late 1960s when a real sexual explosion took place, or for combining both periodisations. Regarding utopia and revolution, the former is more a question of imagining how things could be, and the latter how erotic ambitions are put into practice. This book is about both sexual realities and erotic dreams as the two are difficult to separate. Most authors agree that in the late 1960s something really changed both in sexual lives and values and we will give many examples in this collection.

There have been many books that touch upon issues of the sexual revolution, but remarkably few which have it as a main topic. Some concentrate on a single country or city, others on very relevant sub-topics



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such as abortion or the gay movement, but very few take a more encompassing perspective.[5] In this introduction, we first discuss the history of utopian and radical thought on sexuality, secondly the changes that the sexual revolution created, and thirdly the political and theoretical critiques it received.

## Sexual revolutions and utopias from the 18th to the 20th century

### The early radicals: Sade and Fourier

There is a long series of authors who wrote about utopias, but they rarely addressed sexual issues or, like Thomas More and Francis Bacon, were harsh on sexual variation.[6] It was only during the 18th-century Enlightenment that some authors broke the repressive hold that church and state had on sexual pleasure and developed more radical ideas, especially in France, the Dutch Republic and England. Starting in the 17th century, the work of Descartes and Spinoza and of the first pornographers suggested a break with a religious past.[7] In England, authors such as Thomas Hobbes, Bernard Mandeville and Jeremy Bentham wrote in defence of sexual freedoms. According to Faramerz Dabhoiwala, together with poets, novelists and early feminists, they initiated a first sexual revolution mostly for well-to-do men and less for the poor, women or pederasts.[8] In 1789, a radical change was taking place in France where the politically subversive work of pornographers, libertines and other authors such as Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Nicolas Edme Restif de la Bretonne and the *philosophes* laid the groundwork for the French Revolution.

The most important sex radical was Donatien A.F. de Sade (1750–1814), whose work was published after 1789. He denounced both the sexual morals of the Ancient Régime and Catholic church and of the enlightened *philosophes*, claiming that they did not go far enough. He strongly disliked the sexuality that most people practised, coital sex, and endorsed its opposite, sodomy (non-reproductive, particularly anal sex). At the time, sodomy was demonised by state and church alike while enlightened thinkers rather sought to prevent it.[9] For Sade, sodomy was the most pleasurable of all practices and exemplary for all sexual variations – anal sex, shit, whipping and cruelty being prominent in his work. His rejection of church, state and family was materialised in an erotic interest in blasphemy, sodomy and incest. All sexual variations belonged to human nature so there was no reason to persecute them; he in fact suggested teaching these practices to adolescents. Sade's work



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inspired many philosophers and artists in the twentieth century, including groups like the Surrealists, Situationists and Dutch Provos, and it has been read by many since the 1960s as pornography.[10]

In legal terms, the great revolution of the 18th century came as a result of the judicial philosophy of the Enlightenment: the change of criminal law. Instead of forbidding all 'unnatural' sexual acts under broad categories such as sodomy, the French Penal Codes of 1791 and 1810 strongly limited the number of 'crimes against morals' to rape, public indecency, the habitual debauchery of minors under 21 years (generally meaning bringing them into prostitution) and adultery by the female spouse.[11] The enduring sexual legacy of the Enlightenment includes new ideas about nature, gender, privacy, identity and writing (novels, pornography). Sexuality became a natural drive (mostly in men while women should be chaste wives and mothers); citizens acquired freedom in private space, and sexuality developed into the deepest secret and truth of individual identity. While pornography mainly served subversive aims before the French Revolution, afterwards it was divided between high and low culture: at one end literature, and at the other end illicit erotica. The 18th century marked a first sexual revolution for straight men of fortune.[12]

After Sade, the next sex radical who inspired the youth of 1968 was Charles Fourier (1772–1837), whose *Le nouveau monde amoureux* was only published in 1967. For him, sex was an essential passion and he suggested a 'rallying love' that would not be monogamous and instead would build bridges between more people, thereby promoting social cohesion. Monogamy (egoism for two) and the nuclear family were selfish institutions that contravened social needs and sexual passions. He defended all erotic variations – in particular lesbianism – and gender equality. He suggested communal arrangements in 'phalanstères' where hundreds of people should live and work together and persons with special tastes fulfil their desires. Erotic passions should be experienced on a daily basis, possibly in bacchanals. Ugly and older people should also be entitled to sexual opportunities: social equality for the marginalised.[13] Fourier has been cast aside by Marxists as a utopian socialist, but they should have taken sexual politics much more seriously. Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) supported bourgeois sexual morality with the exception of gender inequality: women should be equal to men in socialism and men should become monogamous as women already were. Divorce would be allowed as an escape mechanism from unhappy marriages. These themes would be followed by most socialist sex radicals, some of whom might add, like Fourier, communal housing solutions.[14]



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Beginning in the late 19th century, many authors started to write about and many people began to live 'free loves'. This frequently meant that couples were not married, strived for equality and opposed traditional marriage and gender inequality. These open relationships often failed due to ingrained gender norms and external social pressure, but remained steadfast elements of anarchist-socialist utopias, as seen in the work of the French writer Ernest Armand (1872–1962) who not only wrote in favour of free love and open relations, but also created an organisation for travellers who could visit other members of his club and engage in sexual relations with them. He defended ideas of 'sexual comradeship', homosexual and inter-generational sex.[15]

**Sexual reformism: science serving sexual justice**

With the rise of sexology in the late 19th century, medical authors started to discuss sexuality and to voice liberal and reformist ideas on sexuality. Their assumedly objective, scientific approach made them propose humane ideas on sexuality; for example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Albert Moll, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud and others. Society should accept sexual abnormalities, more as ways of being rather than of doing, and in case prevention and therapy did not work. Their approach stood in contrast to anarchist and socialist approaches that demanded social change in terms of a critique of capitalism rather than asking pity for 'stepchildren of nature' such as perverts and prostitutes. However, results might not be so different as most socialists saw sex work and perversion as decadent, capitalist ills.

The short-lived *World League for Sexual Reform* (1928–1935) is a typical example of the reformist approach. Led by leading sexologists Havelock Ellis, Auguste Forel and Magnus Hirschfeld, the League endorsed gender equality, legality of divorce, supported freedom of sexual relations between mutually consenting adults, and was in favour of preventing venereal diseases and prostitution. It proposed rational attitudes towards sexually abnormal persons (probably homosexuals) in spite of the leadership of the famous homosexual rights activist Hirschfeld.[16]

The nearly completely forgotten Frenchman René Guyon (1876–1963) took the opposite position and defended prostitution. This lawyer published six of the 11 volumes he had planned and wrote on topics like *Sex Life and Sex Ethics* and *Sexual Freedom*.[17] Writing from a pragmatic rationalist perspective, sexuality consisted of mechanical acts that we should enjoy; abstinence or platonic (chaste) love was abnormal. Guyon strongly objected to Christian tenets that made sexuality problematic. He endorsed most sexual variations, including masturbation



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and homosexuality, with the only exception being the violent variants of sadism and masochism. As women have greater physiological capacities for sex, and are inferior, he views them as courtesans and slaves to man. For him, marriage and prostitution are similar: men pay women for sex. In his view, a desire for variation drives sexuality and therefore he does not believe in eternal love or monogamy. He combines a low regard for women with a strong defence of sexual pleasure. Guyon lived in Thailand for most of his life and contributed to the country's law-making processes. He criticised both the League of Nations and the United Nations because their declarations on human rights left out sexual freedom, or only negated this, for example, with treatises on 'white slavery'.[18]

The major author on issues of sexuality in the immediate post-war period was Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956). With his collaborators, he did the great sociological surveys of the white US population in which he strived for objectivity, but there remains a strong political connotation in his two books on male and female sexuality (1948, 1953); namely that the US criminalises many sex acts – such as adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, extra-marital sex, bestiality – that are in fact widely practised throughout the population. The underlying critique in these books pertains to American sexual morality and the discrepancy between laws and behaviour by revealing that most men committed legally forbidden acts. In terms of sexual legislation, Kinsey acknowledges three types of crimes: an age of consent to protect children, when force is used and when compulsive sexual behaviour becomes a public nuisance as in the case of exhibitionists.[19] As will become clear in the following articles, Kinsey has become a central figure in the sexual revolution and surveying sex became commonplace in the late 1960s and after the onset of the HIV-AIDS epidemics, also as a way to discuss sexual morality.

## The politicisation of the sexual question in the early 20th century: socialism and sex

Since the early 1900s, the sexual question became part of political struggles and the concept of sexual revolution was used for the first time by the psychoanalyst Otto Gross just before the First World War.[20] Wilhelm Reich became its main theoretician. He combined theories of Marx and Freud and opined that sexual liberation should go together with social liberation or at least be a part of it. In his view, the sexual emancipation of young people would be an integral ingredient of political struggles for a just society. Questions of sexual emancipation and free love were central to the work of the Russian Alexandra Kollontai



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who faced disgrace from the Bolshevik Party because of her ideas.[21] Daniel Guérin, post-war socialist and anarchist, used Reich and Kinsey to promote revolutionary sexual politics in France (see Chaperon and Mesli in this volume). Herbert Marcuse was the final great name in this lineage before the 1960s.

Reich was a Berlin-based doctor and psychoanalyst with an interest in social prevention of neuroses and a member of the German Communist Party. He saw a connection between sexual misery and the organisation of society, and analysed its meanings in political terms. He considered sexual repression, especially of young people inside the family, as the main vehicle for transmission of authoritarian ideologies that could maintain and strengthen social domination. He denounced the abjection that masturbation and sexual relations between young people were held in, producing an interiorised sexual guilt and shame. Reich criticised the material and social obstacles that hindered the free access to contraception, abortion and treatment of venereal diseases. The sexual repression of youngsters was, according to Reich, part and parcel of capitalist oppression and could only be combatted in the context of a social revolution. Their political engagement was weakened because of sexual misery related to the separation of the sexes. They often left workers' political parties as they looked elsewhere for lovers. This made political inclusion of the sexual struggle of young people a priority for Reich.[22] His support for adolescent sexual life was extraordinary, but other elements in his theorising remained too bound to oppressing sexual variation. He held capitalism responsible for perversions as being decadent and against nature; homosexuality, obscenity, prostitution and pornography would no longer exist under socialism. His main works from the 1930s became very influential with the sexual revolution.[23] Reich had to quit the psychoanalytic movement and was forced to escape Nazi Germany, first to Northern Europe and then to the United States where he abandoned both Marxist and psychoanalytic perspectives in favour of a more biological approach of orgasm.

In 1955, Marcuse published *Eros and Civilisation,* a philosophical work. Although he was not politically active at that time, his work nonetheless had an enormous political influence in the Western world. He saw sexual misery as restricting libidinal energy and as a consequence of the profit principle that subjected individuals to alienated labour and exploitation. Sexual liberation was not seen as a lever for the social revolution but as its result. This desirable consequence would put an end to alienation from work and mean an eroticisation of social relations with stronger links to nature that would be simplified by an



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extension of free time – partly due to technological innovations. Sexual liberation would mean a transformation of sexuality into Eros and an abdication of genital primacy. In contradistinction, sexual liberation following the principle of profit as in capitalism would only be a *repressive desublimation* that would weaken sexual drives and strengthen aggressive ones. Although certain readings of Marcuse view him as the herald of the sexual revolution within a larger social revolution, it is important to insist that he only saw sexual liberation as a result of radical social changes in existing life and labour conditions. His view of sexuality was benign and he strongly defended the social incorporation of what were seen as perversions. He viewed the homosexual as the pivotal outsider and critic of the existing social and sexual system, but positioned sadomasochism as the result of aggressive drives and of a repressive sexual system that people had internalised.[24] Marcuse's idea was to promote self-consciousness and open discussions to break through social blockades. In the 1960s, leftists and students saw themselves as the harbingers of this liberation but would soon realise, from a more Marxist angle, how sexuality was used in capitalist, consumerist society to pacify the working class. Marcuse himself retracted from his more positive appraisal of perversity to a more sceptical attitude.[25]

## The actual sexual revolution

### A sudden upsurge of erotic cultures

Although the sexual revolution may have been a sudden irruption in society, it was not without its historic lineage. It certainly involved intellectual, political and artistic authors as those mentioned above, but also scholars like Margaret Mead and Simone de Beauvoir. The Beat Generation of poets and writers and the Situationist movement had made their contribution. In France, there was a warm reception for the work of Sade (by Bataille, Beauvoir, Barthes and many others) and an important libertine literary tradition (Jean Genet, Pauline Réage). The Italian movie industry of the 1960s and the New York art world culminating with Andy Warhol's Factory also provided radical representations of wider societal changes. After May 1968, postmodernists took over radical thinking and Gilles Deleuze co-authored with Felix Guattari *Anti-Oedipe. Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (1972), a robust theoretical foundation for freedom of sexual desires. Feminists joined ranks with these men and gave the debates a more gendered focus and discussed sexuality in different degrees (Betty Friedan, Valerie Solanas, Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Erica Young, Shere Hite,



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Germaine Greer, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Alice Schwarzer, Xavière Gauthier, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig). Gay liberation was put on the agenda, most famously in France by the *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* (see Sibalis). Authors such as Dennis Altman with *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1971), Guy Hocquenghem with *Homosexual Desire* (French 1972, English 1978) and Mario Mieli with *Homosexuality and Liberation* (Italian 1977, English 1980) offered a gay angle on theories of liberation.

In the end, the main influence was the mass of people that wanted to be free from restrictions of the past, whether they were religious, legal, medical, familial or political. Women demanded access to abortions, contraceptives in order to enjoy a free sexual life outside marriage and an end to sexual abuses and patriarchy, gay men came out of the closet, sex laws were changed, and the authority of clergy and psychiatry was questioned. The holy triangle of marriage, reproduction and heterosexuality as foundations for sex was broken, and love and pleasure became its essential reference points. Marriage was harshly criticised by feminists for its sexism and by gays and lesbians for its homophobia.[26] Young and old were eager for sexual self-determination, including 'minors'. Traditional institutions such as the church, army, school, asylum, prison, and political parties started to be heavily criticised and challenged. People wanted to decide for themselves, and depend less on larger units like families.

So, when did the sexual revolution start? From the foregoing it is clear that there are several backgrounds. Already in the post-war period attitudinal shifts were occurring, as we can see through the work of Kinsey and Beauvoir. People had been changing their sexual behaviour (Escoffier in this volume) and were now going to adapt their morality to match their practice. They were helped by family planning and neo-Malthusian organisations that had existed since the late 19th century. A homosexual rights movement had been started in 1897 in Germany. However, the 1930s, the Second World War and the immediate post-war period also were a time of sexual regression; first with the rise of Fascism and Stalinism all over Europe and afterwards with the social and moral reconstruction of European countries from the disasters of war.[27] Such reconstruction also concerned norms of gender and sexual relations that were tightened once the War was over and certain liberties that wartime had made possible were terminated. Male soldiers and men held captive returned and took their civilian clothing and traditional place in the home and factory while their wives returned from workplaces to kitchens and caring for children. McCarthyism was not



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only a persecution of communists, but also of *queers*, and was part and parcel of the gender and sexual reconstruction of the US.[28]

With the rebuilding in the 1950s, resistance grew and young people started to reject or protest traditional morality – *rebels without a cause*. In the 1960s, Western European countries began to witness economic prosperity and saw developments of individualisation, democratisation and secularisation. Young people now became radicals with many causes: from political opposition to the war in Vietnam and the nuclear industry to colonialism, race, gender and sex. It is difficult to isolate the causes, but from the 1960s on most Western European countries suddenly became more liberal with regard to sexuality: more could be written and shown, fewer people were involved in religious practice, new technologies created new possibilities as with the pill, television opened new worlds as did mass tourism. The spirit of the sexual revolution moved from the northern, Scandinavian countries (mainly Sweden and Denmark) to the north-western parts of Europe (Netherlands, England, German-speaking countries) and then to the southern ones. In Sweden, the revolution was already over when it started elsewhere (see Lennerhed). Spain, Portugal, Greece and the Eastern European countries where 'real socialism' governed had to wait until the end of dictatorship before a sexual revolution could begin (but see Healey for the Soviet Union). Generally speaking there was a contrast between the major changes that were already occurring in sexual life and the rigidity of traditional social norms and laws.

## Changes brought by the sexual revolution

The 1960s witnessed a sudden explosion when young people, women, gays and lesbians, students and all kinds of marginal people took to the streets and revolted. The new generation distanced themselves from traditional institutions such as family and church, and undermined schools and universities from within, sometimes with the help of teachers and professors. They demanded co-education and cohabitation. They used the increased access to education, consumption and free time and sought to organise their own lives instead of being guided by institutions of the past. Students, hippies, activists and squatters mingled and politicised sexual life. A counterculture developed with its own economy, music, communal living style and clothing fashions. Although many feminists kept a distance from the sexual revolution, and some decried it (but see Perinelli), the changes in female sexuality were momentous including the pill, greater equality and self-determination.[29] The expectation of remaining a virgin until marriage ended and young women who got



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pregnant were no longer required to marry a partner they did not like, have an illegal abortion, or to give up their child for adoption and remain forever stigmatised as unmarried mothers. They became sexually independent and acted on this independence if we are to believe sex surveys. The sexual revolution put an end to ideas of homosexuality as a sin, crime or disease. Many *faggots* and *dykes* came out of their closets and joined a sexual culture and a gay movement that replaced an older world of tearooms and dangers. Masturbation transformed from a taboo practice and medical problem into a normal habit that was discussed in some small circles and was advocated as a sexual learning practice.[30] After the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Catholic church tried to become more in touch with its believers by, for example, conducting masses in the local language. Many church leaders proposed a more social policy including changing family planning from a sin to a question of personal conscience and proposing more positive attitudes towards extramarital relations (see Dupont). Nonetheless, many faithful left the church or visited it less. Similar developments could be seen in Protestant churches.

Also very remarkable was the opening of the media regarding sexuality, and the creation of new means of communication. Newspapers, radio and in particular the new television broadcast images, events and new erotic ideals to millions of people. A clandestine world of pornography and prostitution became visible in society. What was considered obscene became acceptable. Eroticism, pornography and nudity blossomed in an alternative scene before becoming commercial activities of a new sex industry (see Escoffier and Chaperon). A sexualisation of Western societies took place that influenced politics, the arts, various institutions and even everyday life. The new visual eroticism remained, however, largely female and heterosexual.

Important for the sexual revolution were all kinds of experiments with communal living, orgiastic and promiscuous initiatives, nude shows, and erotic festivals. The cultural and political field saw the introduction of body art (Mühl and the Vienna actionists), feminist art (Niki de St Phalle, Valie Export, Marina Abramović),[31] San Francisco's Sexual Freedom League,[32] the Gay Liberation Front[33] and other radical gay movements such as the French FHAR that stated 'we want all' (see Sibalis), and debates on child sexuality and pedophilia (see Edelberg and Paternotte). Other sexual variations also came into the open such as BDSM, trans-sexuality, and exhibitionism. The Dutch Society for Sexual Reform proposed transgressing gender and sexual dichotomies (see Hekma). Things could be said that would soon again become



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unthinkable. The sexual revolution is best known for this short radical phase, a highly interesting explosion of erotic liberties, but soon most people went back to a new normalcy.

Popular music strongly promoted a sexualisation of society through its lyrics and images. The erotic dancing style of Elvis Presley and the songs of Bob Dylan ('Times They Are A-changin'), The Beatles ('I Want to Hold Your Hand', 'Why Don't We Do It in the Road?') The Rolling Stones ('Cocksucker Blues', '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction'), Frank Zappa ('Freak Out'), James Brown ('Sex Machine'), Jimi Hendrix ('Power to Love'), Janis Joplin, David Bowie, Lou Reed ('Walk on the Wild Side'), Queen ('I Want to Break Free'), and German *schlager* and French *chanson* singers like Serge Gainsbourg ('Je t'aime … moi non plus', '69 Année érotique') brought sex into the open and made it a central issue in youth culture and pop festivals. This tradition was continued with Michael Jackson, Prince, Madonna and Lady Gaga. Cinema contributed to the mainstreaming of sexuality from Sweden with Bergman, from Italy with Fellini, Visconti, Pasolini, Bertolucci, from Germany with Fassbinder and sexually informative movies from his compatriot Kolle and others (see Eder), and from the legendary American and French porn movies *Deep Throat* and *Emmanuelle*. Super 8 films and later video made the private production and projection of pornography much easier.

In fashion, women were no longer forbidden to wear trousers and they took to mini-skirts and shorts. Blue jeans became the sexy clothing for girls and boys. For men, there was a short period when they dressed themselves in androgynous and colourful fashions and wore long hair. Soft and also hard drugs were part of the culture of sex and pop, as a counterculture of squatting, festivals, sleeping in parks, love summers and summer camps was created. Hippies fled in masses to pop festivals such as Woodstock and to renowned cities: San Francisco as a city of freedom, London for music and fashion, Amsterdam with its tolerance for sex and drugs, Paris as a city of love, and New York for its art scene and discos. Discussions on sexuality penetrated families, schools, prisons and asylums. The sexual revolution was a vital symbolic moment and a step towards a libertine utopia, but many dreams were never realised or were broken, and much was left to be desired.

The sexual revolution was very broad, layered, and impacted upon various groups differently. A new heterosexual generation distanced themselves from their parents and dissociated reproduction, sexuality and marriage. They could do so thanks to better contraceptive methods and the legalisation of abortion that prevented miseries of (unwanted) pregnancies. Love instead of marriage became central to their relations.



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Feminism changed heterosexual relations. The new women's and gay/lesbian movements impacted upon the sexual revolution, and vice versa. The exclusion of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association classification of mental diseases in 1973[34] represented an important step in the demedicalisation of sexual variation, but other 'paraphilias' (the new name for 'perversions') were not depathologised. The development of sex education for teenagers meant a medicalisation and an increase in social control of youth sexuality through arguments of health and nature, not an acknowledgement of ideas of sexual pleasure or intimate citizenship.[35]

These topics of the sexual revolution ran parallel in time, but didn't always stand in close harmony. People who otherwise endorsed some aspects of the sexual revolution may have objected to the legalisation of abortion or free distribution of the pill to young people. Christian churches used some of the tenets of the sexual revolution to promote sexual happiness in, but not outside, marriage.[36] Ages of sexual consent moved up and down and ideas on what sexual freedom or comprehensive sex education in schools should mean[37] varied widely. Some saw sadomasochism as (internalised) sexual abuse and many disliked the public sex and promiscuity that gay men saw as a human right. Prostitution was seen as liberating and abusive for women – and may indeed be both. People disagreed, but were often unaware of other points of view because sexual politics remained a taboo topic that was mainly debated only when 'problems' were perceived.

**Sexual surveying: measuring changes in behaviour**

Since sex surveys were a new feature of the 1960s, it is possible to examine what changed in sexual life and sexual activity.[38] Starting with Kinsey, and then during the sexual revolution and even more intensely after the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, national and cross-cultural sexual surveys have been carried out in the major industrial western countries.[39] Data on homo- and heterosexual practices, oral and anal sex, masturbation, porn use, sex work, the beginning and ending of sexual life, the number of partners over the life course, sexual dysfunction and other relevant data can be compared in historical and national perspectives.

A general trend in these surveys is that the discrepancy between men and women is decreasing when it comes to the intensity and variation of sexual practices. While male sexuality has stabilised over the last decades, female sexuality has intensified in numbers of partners and variety of sexual practices. Differences related to gender continue to exist and while many people like to attribute this to biological sex differences,



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it rather seems a consequence of social differences in how female and male sexuality are constructed.[40] Representations of sexually autonomous women as being 'sluts' and 'whores' continue to restrict female subjectivity, and perpetuate the straight male subject status. Other main changes have been the contents, availability and use of pornography that have become generally available in greater variation. Pornography is being used by both men and women, but still more by men than by women and youngsters who prefer to access it via the Internet in the privacy of the home without the need to visit sex shops. Use of sex toys has become more common with dildos and vibrators gaining popularity among women and becoming available as 'sexual health devices' in local supermarkets, exactly as are soft-porn DVDs. Homosexuality is now rather an identity than a practice, and those who engage in same-sex relations have intensified their sexual activity and more strongly identify as gays and lesbians. In particular, lesbianism and bisexuality among women seem to be on the rise, while continuing male homophobia restrains sexual border traffic for straight men: they keep their distance from homosexual options.

Main changes since the sexual revolution have been more sexual possibilities for women, greater freedoms for gays and lesbians and an increased availability of erotic imagery. These positive trends have been accompanied by increased concerns about children and their sexuality, incest, rape and harassment, many new legal restrictions (for example, on pornography), and insecurity with sexual politics as many people have little knowledge about sexuality or see it as a private and natural practice that needs no discussion.

**Equality**

New creeds also replaced old ones. In the past, social inequality and distance were seen as the driving force of desire and people believed only opposite poles created arousal such as male and female, masculine and feminine (also in gay and lesbian relations), active and passive, subject and object, client and sex worker, adult and youngster, and different classes and ethnicities. However, with the onset of the sexual revolution, social equality became the new unofficial rule for sex and love.[41] All sexual relations that digressed from this norm ran the danger of being tabooed, or worse, made criminal. Ideas of sexual equality worked out nicely for gays and lesbians, whose relations were more equal than those of heterosexuals where a gender difference continued to exist. This idea of equal relationships also helped pave the way to homosexual marriage. Unequal relations as seen in pedophilia, bestiality,



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prostitution and traditional straight affairs became negatively regarded, while the BDSM community tried to safeguard their interests by defining them as sane, safe and consensual (SSC).[42] Notwithstanding a norm of equality, sexual relations remain riddled by differences of gender, race, age, money, class, education, beauty and other factors.[43]

**Legal changes and their consequences**

A major issue was to create new legislation to match these changing sexual practices. In England, the Wolfenden Committee had already begun discussing the decriminalisation of homosexuality and prostitution in 1957. Publication of the resulting report was followed by serious debates, a crackdown on street prostitution, the founding of the English gay movement, and in 1967 the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in private for consenting adults aged 21 or older (see Cook). Soon, other countries followed in changing laws and regulations, while elsewhere the interpretation of laws by the courts was revised or authorities simply stopped prosecution, as in the case of blasphemy laws. These modifications pertained to ages of consent, homosexual acts, contraception, abortion, pornography and obscenity, sex work, adultery for men and women, divorce, public 'indecencies', street walking for sexual purposes, dress laws (trousers forbidden for women and drag for men), and so forth. As stated, these changes took place at various times and speeds in different countries. Legal changes often take longer, so they sometimes came long after the sexual revolution had ended. While most EU countries completely legalised homosexual acts, few did so for sex work. No country got rid of laws regarding public indecencies, although the Netherlands decided to hesitantly tolerate sex in public for gay cruising.

Obscenity laws were relaxed and many books, films and other materials that were forbidden became permitted. Between 1934 and 1968, Hollywood submitted to the Hays Code that outlawed explicit mentioning of (homo)sexuality, abortion, drugs and extreme violence in films. Many books banned in England and the US, such as works by Radclyffe Hall, Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell, Vladimir Nabokov, William Burroughs, Samuel Becket, Anaïs Nin, Sade and Bataille, were published by the Obelisk and Olympia Press in Paris for foreign consumption. At the same time, France itself forbade certain materials being freely distributed in bookshops and kiosks.[44] Escoffier describes in his article how different forms of nudity and sex entered journals, stages and films, moving from innocent to hard-core imagery. It was a rather quick process that ended in the early 1970s when explicit imagery became generally available.



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With the diminishing value attributed to marriage, fewer people married, and divorce was made easier, while same-sex couples have been allowed to have legal partnerships in Denmark since 1989 and, since 2001, have officially married in the Netherlands. Since marriage had become more about love than about reproduction, same-sex couples could no longer be excluded from weddings. Nonetheless, monogamy remained the generally accepted norm for unmarried couples. 'Children born out of wedlock' ceased being a social concern and nowadays form the majority in some countries like Sweden.

Decriminalisation, seen as typical for the sexual revolution, went together with recriminalisation. On some issues, criminal laws were soon extended due to the anti-sexist tenets of the revolution. Rape laws were broadened to include sexual harassment and penalties often became harsher – also as a result of feminist calls to take sexist offences more seriously. Rape in marriage had not been a crime because sex was a marital right, but now it became a legal offence. The idea that women could have incited sexual violence against their person, and sometimes even have agreed beforehand to sexual acts that were regarded as unwanted afterwards, became contested leading to another broadening of legal options.[45]

Recriminalisation happened with certain kinds of pornography and sex acts, often in relation to a presumed necessity to protect young people or victims of sexual violence – with definitions being broadly drawn – or to desexualise the public realm. With a growing 'sexualisation' of media, protective measures were installed to limit sexual imagery on television to late evenings and nights or, more recently, to block internet sex sites for minors. New concerns arose regarding pedophilia, sexuality among youngsters below the age of consent, child and bestial pornography and 'extremely violent' material – also including BDSM imagery. 'Pedophile priests', not simply a remnant of past times, became a major issue in many countries.[46] Another moral panic concerned the abundance of pornography on the Internet and the sexist/sexualised images of pop videos. Some worried it might set unrealistic examples for sexual life, lead to a rise in sexual violence or make sex asocial because men would prefer to connect with the computer and use digital material for masturbation rather than seek sex with living persons, even their wives. Legal changes often had ambivalent results. In England, the change of law in 1967 had a beneficial effect for the gay scene, although many homosexual acts remained illegal and the number of prosecutions for gay public sex increased afterwards.[47] This abolishing, changing, and creating of laws and rules had very different contents and temporalities in the various countries.



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## Resistance, debate, critique

### The controversial nature of the 1960s

As with all revolutions, this one's main characters have extensively written about it to defend their endeavours or to distance themselves from their efforts.[48] From the beginning, opponents had their criticisms. With the neo-liberal turn, the focus was on the market and not on eroticism. Rather to the contrary: the idea of sexual self-determination may have been liberal, but was not neo-liberal. These reactions contributed to a reappraisal of the results of the sexual revolution. Some topics became unspeakable, such as pedophilia, and others threw a shadow across the 1960s. Some feminists discovered incest and sexual harassment as a result of the freedoms of the revolution, while public health professionals objected to the general negligence of venereal risks and proposed to limit erotic freedoms with the arrival of the AIDS epidemic. An ideology of erotic self-determination was replaced by another of risk and protection. Some decried that medicine and psychology gained a stronger hold on sexual terrains, for example in the aftermath of AIDS and with sexual – health – education and sometimes in cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry.[49] Sexual pleasures the 1960s promised were reduced to sexual health as a new form of social and moral control over sexuality.[50]

The revolution raised strong opposition, in the first place from an older more conservative generation, but also later from others who would contest some or all of its results. Leftists criticised the capitalist and consumerist turn of sexual liberation, making economic profits from sex, and women opposed it as a male trick to get easier sex. Most famous were the 'Sex Wars' in the 1980s of feminists in the US and elsewhere. They were divided on many issues, the main being pornography, prostitution, sadomasochism and trans-sexuality, with many supporting such interests.[51] So-called radical feminists opposed these themes as being sexist and promoting abuse of women, cleverly summarised in Robin Morgan's slogan 'pornography is the theory, rape the practice' and further developed by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon.[52]

Conservative forces decried the fall of traditions and moral values. Some feared that civilisation would decay as social controls might break down allowing primal drives to take over. Sexuality was seen as a dark force that needed to be channelled by age-old institutions such as church, law or marriage. The erotic flood would destroy society, and when citizens would know no limits, they themselves would be endangered.[53] Due to the extent that these institutions and ideologies



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were deeply ingrained in culture, this black scenario was premature. The sexual revolution also ran aground as few had realised how deeply traditions were entrenched in society and individuals.

The existence of this sexual revolution has been doubted by certain authors, who are eager to deny that such a thing even took place. Other authors – who can be called 'revisionists'[54] – opined that the events of the sexual revolution promoted an excessive individualism and only worsened the existing situation, in particular that of women. Instead, the components of the sexual revolution would only serve to strengthen 'masculine domination', facilitate the availability of women for male satisfaction and create new anxieties by the normalisation of male sexual pleasure.[55] Leftists complained that sexual freedoms only contributed to consumerism with sex itself and all products linked to it – prostitution, porn, sex toys, erotic and fetish clothing or advertising. Although many intellectuals continue to throw doubt on the importance of the transformations that have taken place during that period, the majority of them recognise the major changes that have taken place; in particular, in systems of meanings of gender and sexuality, female sexual behaviour, the acceptance of certain variations especially homosexuality, and laws and regulations.[56]

**Foucault: no sexual repression?**

Michel Foucault's *La volonté de savoir* of 1976, best known in English as the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, has provoked a strong debate in the intellectual field that was previously dominated by modernist ideas of liberation and the struggle against sexual repression.[57] The work of Foucault has often been seen as challenging ideas of freedom, emancipation and liberation,[58] while he rather saw a production of sexual knowledge in terms of the exercise of power to constitute and discipline sexuality. His new insights regarded the politics of the body and biopower, or as he formulated it in his later work, the extent to which sexual subjectivity was a result of power/knowledge production.[59] He reversed the idea of sexuality being silenced and repressed and discerned the opposite, namely that intensive discourses produced and governed sexuality in its individual and social forms.[60] In the past, sexual 'doing' – like practising sodomy – may have been a sin and a crime, but with the rise of modern sexual knowledge on masturbation and perversion, the new homosexuality became a disease[61] and an identity, the subject's deepest secret, and an object of control. And it still remained a crime until the 1970s in the Western world. Foucault unveiled, apart from age-old controls of family and reproduction, new



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regimes of disciplining masturbating children, non-reproductive couples, hysterical women and perverts since the 18th and 19th centuries. Sexual liberation may have suggested hope and freedom, but he rather saw a process of confession and introspection that made individuals transparent to powers that be: state, psychiatry, justice, religion, education or family. The production of sexual truth had as by-products both repression of and resistance by the subjected.

Seeing his critique of the ideals of the sexual revolution, many historians and social scientists evaded the topic as if it had become dangerous terrain to tread. In this book, we want to break this silence and the negative views on European sexual modernism as largely repressive and to stress the complicated mix of results that have come from the sexual revolution. Foucault questioned biological ideas of a sexual instinct and the concept of a positive nature of sexuality repressed by society as in Reichian models. He underlined how social constructions of sexuality targeted production and reproduction of societies and subjectivities. In his work, the production of sexualities went along with repression, resistance, and also with a longing for new experiences and ethics. It is difficult to consider Foucault the gravedigger of ideas of sexual revolution when he in fact wanted to get away from disciplining imperatives. He himself eagerly sought for practices and places of freedom in wastelands of discipline and subjugation, such as mental hospitals and prisons, and turned to social spaces like 'care of the self', friendship, dandyism, or to the kinky scene to find new ways to invent oneself and create novel forms of social, ethic and aesthetic existence. The sexual revolution has not brought freedom and self-determination for everyone and sometimes it even went the opposite way. Foucault introduced concepts and examples that made it possible to better analyse 'dispositifs' of knowledge and power as well as various forms of sexual repression and resistance. He saw his work as toolbox that we can use to better understand the contradictory results of the 1960s and 1970s.

## Conclusion

The sexual revolution may have produced ambiguous results, but its importance for the emancipation of women, gays and lesbians and for the unmarried, the young and elderly is evident and goes largely unrecognised in many academic texts. Apart from such gains there remain many questions to be settled. The focus has become on sexual nature and biology rather than sexual culture and citizenship, on sexual *being* more than on *doing* sex. Sexuality should not be left to schemes of



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biological drives; pleasure needs cultivation. Based on ideas of the presumed different nature of men and women, sexual subjectivity often remains denied to the latter. Homosexual emancipation may have made major progress, but gays and lesbians remain second-class citizens. The assumption has become that love and sex belong together and should not be separated, although they are quite different emotions and undoubtedly difficult to merge in a single relation. They go in different directions: love is about the long term and trust, lust about moments and situations. Another continuing idea concerns sexuality as a private affair notwithstanding its many public ramifications in terms of seduction, education, politics, media attention and advertising, health care or policing. This has a very counter-productive effect on politicising sexuality – making it a public affair. Many people continue to believe sexuality is based in stable identities notwithstanding curiosity across borders: bisexuals, straight men having sex with transgenders, heterosexuals who become homosexual and the reverse, group sex where limits are sometimes temporarily broken, polyamorous individuals who reject strict identification. The sexual revolution may have challenged many dogmas and boundaries, but new and old ones continue uninterrupted. Sexual liberation remains an ideal which is worth fighting for.

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