

Introduction.



Introduction. It has taken many years for demographers and sociologists to agree that there was a sexual revolution and that it started in the 60s. Some scholars think that the early years of the 20th century, was the real upheaval in our sexual history and that everything else after that, including the 60s was a mere aftershock. On the other hand, some scholars and observers think that not only was there a sexual revolution in the 60s but that it set in motion new and ferocious ‘ culture wars’. To hear this side of the debate about it, it is no doubt that the sexual revolution is one of the unacknowledged forces shaping much of the contemporary social, political and religious life; as I will explain in this paper. According to Timm and Sanborn (2007), the sexual revolution began long before the communards in Berlin decided to pose naked, and long before European teenagers discovered the Rolling Stones. As soon as the biological mechanisms of reproduction began to be understood, the question of how to control them and who should decide how became burning political issues. Upheavals began primarily all over Europe and the United states with many different groups demanding their rights and liberation from what they viewed as a long life of bondage in a society that demands the repression of many aspects of life including sexual orientation, sexual expression and even gender issues. This is when gay and lesbian liberation movements sprung up all over, demanding their rights and expression of their sexuality, women liberation movements came up because they felt they were being undermined in many aspects especially in reference to provision or availability of contraceptive methods which would have given them freedom in many ways. When most of us read about the sexual revolution we tend to associate it with only what we deem as negative developments in the social

and sometimes the political life of today. For example, prior to the sexual revolution, sexual matters were confined to the bedroom and the expression of it openly and freely was regarded as almost criminal. Today, we see sex everywhere, and for most commodities to sell, they have to have a sexual allure to them, pornography is easily accessible from the newspaper to the internet and even on the phone, prostitution has been legalised in many parts of the world and therefore sex has been commodified and can now be consumed like any other commodity. In addition to this, the controversial matter of homosexuality is becoming popular all over the world with the gay and lesbian community demanding equal rights to the heterosexual community. Also, there was an increase of sexually transmitted diseases and the introduction of many new ones never seen before. Therefore, if one should attribute the above factors in today's life to the sexual revolution, one could ask then, why sexual revolution is depicted as a history of liberation from the shackles of tradition, patriarchy and repressive morality. It is heralded as a time of revolutionary ferment which ushered in much needed social change, ushering in the civil rights movements, decolonisation, women's liberation, gay and lesbian liberation, green and peace movements. This exactly is the focus of my paper. An important force which played a role in the sexual revolution was techno science: the introduction of the contraceptive pill as well as the birth of sexual health expertise. According to Reiss (1990), women throughout the nineteenth century were subjected to a restrictive sexual upbringing. Accordingly, they had been programmed by society to start premarital sexuality, if at all, cautiously and only in the justification of serious emotional commitment. This upbringing and not the fear of pregnancy is the basic cause of female sexual resistance. However,

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the biggest single event to liberate women from their designated roles as housewife and mother was the contraceptive pill. This along with the popularization of other forms of birth control, like the IUD and spermicidal creams, allowed women to have sex, without concern about unintended consequences. But when the drug was introduced in 1960, prescriptions were reserved for married women only. Even in 1967, with the free-love movement in full swing, single women had a hard time getting the pill because they had to prove that they were married. Firstly, contraception meant women could embrace their sexuality like never before. Without fear of pregnancy, women had more latitude to choose partners and determine the timing and frequency of sex. People were willing to think outside the norm as it opened the door to a psychological mind-set of a life beyond having sex just for procreation. It gave women a freedom they did not have before. Secondly, no longer forced into motherhood by their biology, women could choose how they wanted to shape their lives, planning when to have children and how many to have as opposed to having the risk of getting pregnant whenever one engaged in sexual intercourse (of course with the right timing in place). Meanwhile, women could also pursue higher education and careers due to the fact that now they were able to plan when to have children, how to space their births and therefore be able to make time for themselves to do other things other than being just a housewife and mother all their lives. In the forty something years since the pill was introduced, women have entered educational, professional and political arenas en masse. Furthermore, it decoupled sexual intercourse and procreation more than any other form of birth control. Now that it was not inevitable that a woman would have children every time she had sex, she could reconstruct

what it meant to be a woman. It also had a profound impact on how we think about sex, that the value of pleasure, intimacy and bonding can be separate from childbearing and therefore, seriously changed relations in the bedroom: Consequently, with the introduction of the pill, many countries experienced a decline in abortion rates and consequently deaths related to abortions. As Timm and Sanborn (2007) wrote, where birth control is hard to get or culturally spurned, abortion rates remain high. Between the 1950s and 1990s western European countries and West Germany liberalized their abortion laws while also providing easier access to birth control. Where birth control and abortion are both accessible, abortion rates tend to be low. Subsequently, sex therapy was introduced in 1970 by Virginia Johnson and William Masters after their observation of sexual behaviour in a clinical setting, the landscape for medical, psychological and sociological research into sexual behaviour was transformed. They also started a clinic where they worked with clients who had sexual dysfunction and other related issues. Along with their work with sexual dysfunction, Masters and Johnson worked with couples in their ability to fully experience the pleasure of sexual activity. Because of the clinical research they had done, there was much more information available to help people with their issues (Discovery Health, 2002). These researchers spoke candidly about topics related to sexuality and human physiology that had been taboo subjects up to that point. Through their work in the research labs, they discovered techniques to help men who suffered from premature ejaculation. They discovered, through dilators, what happens in a woman's vagina when she is sexually stimulated. They broached the subject of homosexuality and gender identity issues and explored the possibility of changing one's sexual preference from

homosexual to heterosexual, although they did discount the previously supported theory that homosexuality was a mental illness. They also talked about emotional issues around sexuality that had not been discussed prior to this time. Basically, what Masters and Johnson did was bring the topic of sexuality out of the gutter and into the mainstream, where people could be better educated (Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny, 1982). Psychoanalysis also became a lucrative business as it turned from theory into practice with the view that every human being was born with a "sexual instinct" which had to be tamed before he could become a fit member of society and that in fact this is what, from the psychological point of view, growing up and becoming socialized meant. Social desires, as argued by Freud, were fundamental to human behaviour and their healthy socialization is a necessary precondition for civilization. This is the reason why psycho analysis flourished as the society wanted members who were 'fit'. The Industrial Revolution instigated the rise of capitalism and the development of mass market economies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As labour moved from the land to urban factories, men's power became tied up in the wages they were able to earn as workers away from the home. The strength of the home and church became weakened, as institutions such as industry, science, schools, and government became loci of power in society and bolstered male dominance. Capitalism is another force that played a role in the sexual revolution and it can go hand in hand with sexual repression. Reich (1936) delved extensively into sexual repression. In his view, the restrictions on sexual activity imposed through the father-dominated family structure produced people dependent on authority and incapable of independent thought and action. It plays a role in making people the kind of accepting, non-

complaining, pliable workers and citizens that capitalism needs. This term covers any means of devaluing sexuality, whether it be brutal (for example the threat addressed to the little child surprised while masturbating: " if you do it again I will cut it from you!") or more subtle, " modest" or decent forms. It can be exerted by simply maintaining the mystery around the sexual activities (topic either taboo or restrained to the adults, stories of child born in cabbages or brought by storks, allusive language...) as well as by denying the existence of infantile sexuality. This repression can also take the form of a more general devaluing of the body, considered dirty, impure, coarse, by opposition to a spirit, a soul considered to be of higher value. Sexuality is then lowered to the satisfaction of instincts or coarse material needs.

According to Foucault (1976), the supposed prudery of the Victorian period was a myth that obscured the fact that there was actually an expansion of the discussion of subjects related to sex in the nineteenth century. This concern for sex was deeply connected with changes in the larger structures of power in society, but the ultimate result was not simply sexual repression. What previous historians viewed as examples of social control (prohibitions on masturbation and calls for female chastity, for example) Foucault saw as indications that talk about sex so pervaded political culture that it took on unprecedented importance, becoming a key conduit for relationships of power. When popularizing their own sexual norms and translating them into social policy, European property owners were less interested in controlling their inferiors than in solidifying their own growing political power. The middle classes, Foucault insisted, first examined their own sexual practices and made a science out of sexuality in the hopes of redefining their roles in society, setting themselves apart from previous ruling classes. In the

process, a science of sexuality was created, a complex multifaceted scientific exploration of sex that unlike the erotic arts of other cultures was less a search for the truth in sexual pleasure than it was a quest for personal confessions about sexual experiences. Foucault argued that these confessions created complex machinery for producing true discourses on sex. In the process of producing new forms of knowledge, a new reciprocal relationship of power was formed between confessing individuals and the state. While search for the truth led to obsessions with masturbation, childhood sexuality, concerns about homosexuality and sexual perversion, the mysteries of women's bodies and the need to control reproductive behaviour, Foucault also believed that it created new forms of sexual pleasures and new identities. First in under the auspices of Christianity and then in the doctor's office or on the psychiatrist's couch, teasing out sexual truth through confession incited desires. Though this quest involved a relationship of power, this power did not quash sexual identities, it created them. As individuals therefore confessed their sexual desires, medical experts categorized modes of sexual being, implicitly and explicitly labelling some 'normal' and some perverse, and these expressions of sexual desires came to be taken as a sign of someone's place on an evolutionary scale. Gilman (1985) But capitalism represses inner desires more than other systems through asymmetrical power relationships (dominant and subordinate) and limitations faced by individuals in a social system dominated by exchange values. Changes in economy, technology, and culture have escalated repression, resulting in manipulation or destruction of the subject or the self. The result is an authority bound, easily manipulable modern subject who is subject to decomposition and fragmentation (Elliot 2000), so the person

becomes merely a component of the system of domination. The family is replaced by mass media and public education as the means of socialization of individuals. The experts of the mass media transmit the required values; they offer the perfect training in efficiency, toughness, personality, dream, and romance and with this education, the family can no longer compete. (Kellner 1989) Another force that played a role in the sexual revolution is governance which was widely patriarchal. Patriarchal societies began to emerge approximately nine thousand years ago with the development of agriculture. Besides learning how to grow crops, people came to realize how reproduction occurred, not only in plants, but also in animals and humans. This led to a move from nomadic lives in small groups to larger, permanent farming settlements, and introduced the idea of private property, which then led to the creation of social classes and inter-class exploitation. These factors led to a worldview that ordered the world into unequal binaries, with men holding positions of power over women. Patriarchal society is male-dominated, male-centred, and male-identified. Besides variables such as race, age, and social class, the control model also hierarchically organizes gender and sexuality. Regardless of the form a patriarchal society takes, control-oriented culture valorizes and normalizes the heterosexual male, who is viewed as the human standard against which all else (that is, non-humans such as women and homosexuals) is measured. This normative system of sexuality is enforced by conceptualizing men as either "real" or deviant. "Real men" are sexually attracted to "real women," who are expected to bear and raise children and take care of the home, hence the sanctity (and legal binding) of marriage. Reluctance to have uncommitted premarital intercourse was instilled in women by their parents and their patriarchal

traditions. In a formal sense, both men and women were supposed to be abstinent before marriage, but in reality the harsher restraints and punishments were imposed upon women. Limiting the sexual experience of women gave husbands more confidence that their wives and girlfriends would be loyal and faithful to them. In effect, this was an expression of the power of men over women. Of course, wives in the male dominated society would not have the power to insist on equivalent behaviour from their husbands. But insisting that women be chaste did not stop men from having sex. Men would simply persuade some women to violate their standards and then blame the women for the transgression. Men dominated in every major institution like holding top political offices, they were the religious leaders, leaders in economy and were even expected to lead their marriages. Women were raised knowing they had less power than men with whom they will eventually mate. Men were initiators of sex just as they were in every area. When there is inequality of power, men can pressure women into sexual encounters and sex can easily be used by women as a lure and a means of trying to balance power differences that exist, hence commodification of sex. With the rise of the sexual revolution women began demanding their rights through civil rights movements and feminist groups. For example, despite its obvious benefits, feminists argued, the pill shifted responsibility for birth control exclusively to women while also forcing them to carry any of the associated with hormonal intake, in addition they complained that men were using the theory of sexual liberation along with the existence of the pill and penicillin to coerce women into bed. (Dagmar 1998). In the West, European women's movements gradually expanded their demands to include abortion rights, pay equity, equal access to education and training and expanded day

care services. Today, most of these demands have been met so some degree as women have successfully asserted their right to take a place in the public sphere, we have recently seen a large number of women contesting political offices, taking up leadership positions in many big and successful multinationals, over men, and they have access to equal education and training to men, at least in most parts of the world. Even though entering the workforce and the political world means taking on the ‘double burden’ of paid work outside the home and the continuing to do much of the unpaid work within it, it is better than not having a choice at all, as it was prior to the sexual revolution. Trying to balance career and work is a precarious act, and this struggle has rapidly come to occupy a central role in discussions of what earlier commentators would have called the European ‘woman question’. However, there is evidence that men are now joining in shouldering the ‘double burden’ as most European men are now taking it personal, even as a masculine, duty to play a role in household affairs. This fact is a great milestone because in patriarchal societies, males generally dominate all spheres of life except in taking care of the children and the home. However, the fact that now males do not view the household environment as being solely the woman’s workplace, has proved that indeed the sexual revolution brought forth an admirable development as now the women can work and still take care of the household with the help of the men, but at the end of the day, patriarchy has not been weakened in any way. In conclusion, the 60s began long before the decade did, reached its peak in many ways in the 1970s and continues to exert its influence today. Though the rebels of the 60s failed to attain their goals in many respects, they can rightly claim their victory in terms of sexual liberation. This victory

of sexual revolutionaries was of course not complete. Social norms, which are in any case almost always stronger than legal ones, continue to limit sexual liberty in many areas of the world. Homosexual practices in particular are still viewed with suspicion and denounced in many places although homophobia seems to be in steep decline across Europe. Sex was not transformed overnight by a group of longhaired, freedom-seeking rebels. The sexual revolution had a much longer history going all the way back to the sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who insisted that sexual practices had political implications. As sexologists realized decades ago, this change in sexual tolerance and sexual practices has political consequences. In particular, male dominance in its patriarchal and fraternal forms has been based upon sexual control of women. And as Timm and Sanborn (2007) put it, today's, European feminists are now trying to see whether the significant gains that women have made in the realms of equality and liberty might be extended by undercutting the fraternity once and for all. That is a social transformation that will occur, if it does, as much in the bedroom as in the boardroom. References Discovery Health (2002). Masters and Johnson. Retrieved February 20, 2008 from http://health.discovery.com/centers/sex/sexpedia/mandj_print.html Elliott, A. (2000). Psychoanalysis and Social Theory. In Bryan S. Turner, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, " second edition. Blackwell Publishers; Massachusetts. Geoff, E. (2002) *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe*. In Timm. A & Sanborn. J (2007) *Gender, Sex and the Shaping of Modern Europe*. Oxford, New York. Gilman. S (1985). *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*. In Timm. A & Sanborn. J (2007) *Gender, Sex and the Shaping of Modern Europe*. Oxford, <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-70/>

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