



MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION:
AN UNFETTERED HISTORY

DAVID ALLYN

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2000 by Little, Brown and Company.

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

First issued in hardback 2015

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Allyn, David (David Smith)

Make love, not war: the sexual revolution, an unfettered history / by David Allyn.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-415-92942-4 (pbk)

1. Sex customs--United States--History--20th century. 2. Sexual ethics--United States--History--20th century. 3. Sex in popular culture--United States--History--20th century. 4. United States--Social life and customs--20th century. 5. United States--Moral conditions--History--20th century. 6. Nineteen sixties. I. Title.

HQ18.U5 A38 2001
306.7'0973'0904--dc21

2001018063

ISBN-13: 978-1-138-13509-3 (hbk)

FOR JENNIFER

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface to the Paperback Edition</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Single Girls, Double Standard	10
2. Beatniks and Bathing Suits	23
3. The Pill: A Prescription for Equality	30
4. Love the One You're With	41
5. Obscenity on Trial	54
6. Strangers in a Strange Land: <i>The Harrad Experiment</i> and Group Marriage	71
7. The Right to Marry: <i>Loving v. Virginia</i>	85
8. In Loco Parentis	93

9. Strange Bedfellows: Christian Clergy and the Sexual Revolution	108
10. Performing the Revolution	119
11. Sticky Fingers	135
12. Gay Liberation	145
13. The Golden Age of Sexual Science	166
14. Medicine and Morality	175
15. Why Do These Words Sound So Nasty?	184
16. (Id)eology: Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and Fritz Perls	196
17. No Privacy Please: Group Sex in the Seventies	206
18. The Joy of Sales: The Commercialization of Sexual Freedom	228
19. Lesbian Liberation: Equal But Separate	246
20. Sexual Freedom on Demand	256
21. Counterrevolution and Crisis	270
<i>Epilogue</i>	295
<i>Notes</i>	301
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	345
<i>Index</i>	367

PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

Since the publication of *Make Love, Not War*, many people have asked me: In the final analysis, was the sexual revolution a positive social development or a negative one? Did it result in progress or decay? Should we welcome another era of sexual liberation or should we do everything we can to avoid one?

Needless to say, such questions cannot be answered scientifically. “Progress” and “decay” are statements of opinion, not fact. No amount of archival research will turn up proof of what is “good” and what is “bad.” Despite the fact that scholars sometimes enter political and cultural debates, the scholar’s first obligation to society is to sift fact from opinion, to distinguish between what is and what we want, feel, or believe about what is.

But, as a citizen, am I glad that birth control is legal, that censorship is no longer commonplace, that college students can have sex without worrying about getting expelled, that homosexuality is no longer considered shameful and abhorrent? Certainly. In my mind there can be no doubt that, on the whole, the sexual revolution of the 60’s and 70’s improved the quality of life for most Americans.

Obviously, the sexual revolution had its share of ill effects. Most notably, the acceptance of casual sex helped facilitate the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Some argue that the sexual revolution (especially the pill) also deprived women of the ability to say “no” to sex. Personally, however, I think the ability to say “no”—like the ability to say “yes”—is a function of one’s own self-awareness and ability to communicate openly with others, not a function of available birth control or social pressure.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with my own personal evaluation of the sexual revolution, there can be no denying that it dramatically transformed American society and culture. But how? How did it have such a sweeping and powerful effect on our nation in so short a time?

The answer is surprisingly simple: during the sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's people told the truth. They told the truth about their sexual histories. About their secret desires. About the ways they had been pretending to conform to societal norms. Not everyone told the truth all at once, of course. But when a few key people became authentic about their sexuality, others were inspired to follow suit. Eventually, more and more people told the truth about themselves, until there was a critical mass or "tipping point." It turned out that "nice girls" were having sex before marriage, that teenagers were yearning to have homosexual relationships, that some married couples were interested in more than just monogamy. When enough people told the truth, the life of the nation was transformed.

Many cultural critics have denounced the rise of confessionism in our society. They say that the confessional spirit encouraged by television talk shows and pop psychological movements is really self-aggrandizement in disguise. Of course, most of the confessions on daytime television are actually staged. And even when they are not staged, they are usually done in a spirit of self-justification and bravado.

The real practice of telling the truth is not easy. It is often embarrassing, even humiliating. It forces one to be vulnerable. And it can have enormous consequences for one's family, relationships, and career. That is why the sexual revolutionaries of the 60's and 70's — for all their faults and foibles — remain profoundly inspiring. That is what continues to make reading and writing about the sexual revolution such a rewarding — and sometimes emotionally confronting — experience.

I believe that studying history ought to make one uncomfortable. It should force a person to question his or her assumptions and beliefs. Ultimately, it should lead to the unsettling realization that present-day attitudes and ideas may someday be considered strange and illogical.

My hope is that this book makes readers as uncomfortable and unsettled as any book of history they are likely to find.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO ALL THE INDIVIDUALS WHO TOOK the time to assist or encourage me on this project. First, I would like to thank those who granted me personal interviews, including: Ti-Grace Atkinson, Susan Baerwald, Bill Baird, Lee Baxandall, Howard Bellin, Michael Bronski, Helen Gurley Brown, Rita Mae Brown, Susan Brown-miller, Betty Dodson, Hal Call, Sydney Dickstein, Andrea Dworkin, Edward Eichel, Albert Ellis, Sarah Evans, Candace Falk, Roger Fisher, Stanley Fleishman, Larry Flynt, Marsha Gillespie, Barbara Gittings, Bob Guccione, Hugh Hefner, Sarah Holland, Jim Kepner, Anne Koedt, Larry Kramer, Tuli Kupferberg, Jacques Levy, John Lobel, Mimi Lobel, Bob McGinley, Ted McIlvenna, George Mansour, Peter Marcuse, Howard Moody, Osha Neuman, Camille Paglia, Nell Painter, Kenneth Pitchford, John Rechy, Charles Renslow, Margo Rila, Robert Rimmer, Barney Rosset, Maggie Rubenstein, Steven Saylor, Vicki Scharfman, Barbara Seaman, Myron Sharaf, Charlie Shively, Earle Silber, Ronald Smith, Gloria Steinem, Gay Talese, Lynn Tylman, Randy Wicker, Sylvia Weil, Sean Wilentz, Ellen Willis, the Reverend Robert Wood, the staff of Elysium Fields, and all those who shall remain anonymous. They answered my questions—which were often intensely personal—with good humor and grace. Many of these individuals not only agreed to be interviewed, they also welcomed me into their homes or took the time to share a meal with a young writer.

A very special thanks to my advisor, Donald Fleming, and the members of my dissertation committee at Harvard University, Stephan Thernstrom and Allan Brandt. In Washington, D.C., my fellow mem-

bers of the informal Gender and History Study Group — Anne Little, Kathleen Trainor, and Michael Coventry — and the members of the History Department at American University provided a much needed sense of community. For start to finish, Lauren Asher gave me intellectual and emotional guidance.

Many historians, as well as scholars from other fields, offered their thoughts on the project and the period. Their insights and encouragement were invaluable. I would especially like to thank Henry Abelove, Beth Bailey, Allan Berubé, Paul Boyer, Winnie Brienens, Elizabeth Chabert, Nicole Dombrowski, John D'Emilio, Alice Echols, Paula Fass, Estelle Freedman, David Garrow, James Gilbert, Todd Gitlin, Ellen Herman, John Howard, Drew Isenberg, Michael Kazin, Peter Kuznick, Liz Lunbeck, D. A. Miller, Jeffrey Moran, Susan Moeller, Paul Robinson, Marc Stein, Randy Trumbach, Carole Vance, Elizabeth Watkins, Brad Verter, and Ron Yanovsky.

I would like to thank Toby Simon and Lynn Gorchov for inviting me to speak at Brown University and Johns Hopkins University, respectively. These talks gave me a welcome opportunity to clarify my thoughts on the sexual revolution. Thanks also go to the members of Cheiron, SUNY Binghamton's Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, AHA — Committee on Gay and Lesbian Studies, and the American Studies Association.

Special thanks go to the Rockefeller Archives, Harvard Law School, the Charles Warren Center, Radcliffe College, and the Princeton University Committee on the Faculty for providing funds to support my research. This project would not have been possible without the patience and assistance of many research librarians, including Jennifer Lee, the John Hay Library; Dan Linke, Mudd Library, Princeton University; Deborah Kelley-Milburn, Widener Library; Charles Niles, Boston University Special Collections; Brenda Marston, Curator of the Human Sexuality Collection, Cornell University; and Kathleen Manwaring, Syracuse University Special Collections. Patricia Gossel and Faith Davis Ruffins at the Smithsonian Institution were generous with their knowledge and materials. The staff at the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco gave me free reign of the institute's vast library. Mary McCarthy at the *New York Times* Archives and Cleo Wilson and Carilyn Engel at the Playboy Foundation provided me with useful documents. The staff of the Bancroft Library, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Rockefeller Archives, the University of Illinois at Chicago Center Special Collections, Countway Medical Library, Catholic University Special Collections, Barnard College Archives, New York Public Library, Harvard Law School Special Collections, and University College, London University made my research

productive. The staff at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction were helpful and welcoming. The institute's collections are in disarray, but Kath Pennavaria and Margaret Harter did their best to find the materials I needed. Ian Moritch and Todd Smith made my visits to Bloomington truly worthwhile. Wendy Thomas and the staff at the Schlesinger Library deserve a special word of thanks for helping me to find materials day after day for almost a year.

I am indebted to all who provided me with somewhere to stay in cities across the country: Nick Breyfogle and Jillian Gustin, Adrian Davis, Jacqueline Edelberg and Andrew Slobodian, John Howard, Roberta and Lloyd Hill, Colby Devitt, Zach Karabel, Adam Leffert, Melanie Thernstrom, Mark Molesky, Brian Domitrovic, Meredith Radmondo, Paul Brennan and Paolo Pacheco, Toby and Peter Simon.

Sonja Herbert, Bill Farley of *Playboy*, Michael Bronski, and Jackie Markham, helped me to arrange interviews. John Mitzel, Sol Gordon, Jens Rydstrom, Jefferson Poland, and Suzanne Nichols all sent me materials I would not have been able to obtain otherwise. Betty Dodson and Albert Ellis allowed me to consult their personal collections of manuscripts. Thanks to all those who helped me obtain photographs for the book and especially those who sent me their own personal photos.

From start to finish, I received constant support from John and Pat Wilcha, Christopher Wilcha, my brother, Michael Wallach, and my parents, John and Janet Wallach. A tremendous thanks to David Wrisley for his coaching and insights, and to the seminar leaders and center staff at Landmark Education Corporation.

Thanks to Sarah Saffian for being a true friend; Michael Kaye, Anne Montague, Bob Castillo, and Lauren Acampora at Little, Brown; Svetlana Katz at Janklow and Nesbit; my research assistants, Julia Ott and Katie Farrell; Matthew Snyder at CAA; Kary Antholis and Susan Baerwald at HBO.

To my extraordinary agent and friend, Tina Bennett, who made my dream a reality, and, of course, to Michael Pietsch, my editor, whose patience, insight, and faith made this book possible.

And finally, thanks to my wife, Jennifer, who listened to me talk about this project every day for seven years, shared my sense of excitement, soothed my frustration, and read countless, countless drafts. For these reasons and so many more, this book is dedicated to her.

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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.

CHAPTER 1

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

a dress, but one woman who did made headlines in Europe and the United States. After arriving at a fashionable restaurant, she removed her fur stole and revealed that she was wearing one of the new dresses. As the patrons stared at her bare breasts, the manager of the restaurant asked the woman to leave.⁴

Gernreich himself loved all the controversy, even if he affected a cool ennui about the whole business. Wearing a snakeskin jacket and gesturing with his favorite prop, a long black cigarillo, Gernreich held a press-conference-cum-fashion-show for the media at a ritzy New York hotel. Barbra Streisand was there, with the editors of the nation's important fashion magazines. The public response to his swimsuit, he explained, was "either funny or horrible, according to how you feel when you get up in the morning." As he told a reporter, the suit expressed "an anti-attitude." Young Americans were bored: "bored by being told what to do, bored by the hopelessness of the atom bomb and by the abstractions of government, bored by sexual discovery in high school."⁵

The abstractions of government had been all too real for the young Rudolf Gernreich, who fled from Nazi-controlled Austria to Los Angeles with his mother in 1938 when he was sixteen. From an early age he knew he was gay and never worked to hide it. For a while he tried dancing, but found he was far more talented as a costume designer. In 1950, Gernreich met Harry Hay, a musician and member of the Communist Party, at a rehearsal for a local dance company. At the time, Hay was toying with the idea of creating a group to champion homosexual rights. When Hay told Gernreich about the idea, the designer was enthusiastic and agreed to help rally support. His childhood in Austria had taught him the importance of organized resistance. Together with three other men they formed the Mattachine Society, named after a troupe of medieval Italian performers who wore masks to disguise their identities, which would become the first successful gay rights organization in the country.⁶

Gernreich was not only openly gay, he was a nudist. He believed that American taboos against public nakedness were unhealthy and puritanical. At the same time that he was organizing for gay rights, he was trying to drum up support for nudism. Gernreich's interest in nudism, like his belief in fighting discrimination against homosexuality, was nurtured during his childhood in Austria, which had been a hotbed of nudist sentiment from the end of the nineteenth century. Many German-speaking Austrians, worried that modern men and women were being corrupted and softened by urban life, espoused a "back-to-nature" philosophy and urged fellow Germans to practice rigorous calisthenics. Nudity, they said, was necessary to strip away the false pretensions of civilized society and inspire communion with nature in all its invigorating glory. Nude gymnastics became the norm in schools throughout the German-speaking world during the Weimar era.⁷ But when Adolf Hitler came to power in

1933, he banned all nudism in Germany. For leftists, nudism immediately assumed intellectual significance. If nudism and fascism were incompatible, then freeing people from bodily shame might be an important first step in preventing political repression. In other words, if Hitler saw nudism as a threat, then nudism might be an effective tool in the cause of personal freedom. Gernreich embodied this idea. Every day he swam nude in his Hollywood Hills pool, a fact that was a matter of both pleasure and pride.

Whether Gernreich knew it or not, American nudists had long been fighting their own battles against persecution. For decades, American nudists had attempted to create camps where they could be free from societal regulations regarding dress, but they were inevitably hounded by unsympathetic authorities. When nudists tried to promote their cause through photographic magazines, they met the fierce resistance of the Post Office. Throughout the forties and fifties, the Postmaster General banned nudist publications from the mails. Not until 1958 did the Supreme Court declare that the naked body in and of itself could not be deemed obscene.⁸

A few weeks after Gernreich's topless bathing suit appeared in stores, Davey Rosenberg, the 300-and-some-pound promoter of a failing go-go bar in San Francisco's North Beach district, hit upon the idea of having the go-go dancers wear the monokini to add spice to the club's nightly entertainment. Rosenberg told the owner of the Condor Club his idea and the owner readily agreed to try it. On June 22, 1964, the topless bar was born. The press had a field day and the Condor Club became an instant sensation.

Carol Doda, from Napa Valley and the lead dancer at the club, had the dubious distinction of being the nation's first topless dancer. Doda was also one of the first women in America to use silicone injections to augment the size of her breasts, going from a size 34B to a reputed 44D. With mounds of blond hair, false eyelashes, and little else, Doda danced atop a Baldwin piano, attracting plenty of male customers every night, many of them tourists who'd read about her in the pages of *Playboy*.⁹

At first, the San Francisco police department decided not to press charges against the Condor Club. Their indifference encouraged the rest of North Beach's go-go clubs to follow the Condor's lead. Before long, there were hundreds of topless bars on the West Coast, though San Francisco remained the symbolic home of the topless phenomenon. Tourists poured into San Francisco to visit the "sexually liberated" city and see Carol Doda in person.

Long before the topless dancing craze of the midsixties, San Francisco was known for its relaxed view of vice. From the city's founding in the 1770s, its thriving ports created a large, transitory community of sailors and workingmen seeking adventure. The city exploded during the 1849 Gold Rush, a time when men quickly began to outnumber women. The

Barbary Coast neighborhood near the docks was home to a bustling red-light district, where liquor and sex were always for sale. One newspaper described the Barbary Coast as a “sink of moral pollution” and the center of a “wild sirocco of sin.” In 1870, it was estimated that some three thousand prostitutes worked in the neighborhood. According to legend, patrons at the Boar’s Head saloon could watch a woman having intercourse with a pig. Many of the women who sold their bodies in the brothels of the Barbary Coast were Chinese and Japanese immigrants, and their ethnicity added an exotic dimension to San Francisco’s culture of commercial sex. The Great Earthquake of 1906 and the progressive reform movement in the early 1900s managed to shut down most of the city’s brothels, but neither succeeded in curbing the city’s permissive reputation, especially since some of the city’s streets even bore the name of famous madams.¹⁰

The North Beach neighborhood where the Condor Club was located had already become a bohemian enclave by the 1950s. Not a beach at all, but a sloping residential area overlooking the city’s financial center, it was cheap enough in the fifties to attract a collection of writers, artists, gays, and other bohemians, who made their home amid the working-class Italian families that formed the backbone of the community. In the heart of North Beach stood City Lights, the nation’s first all-paperback bookshop. Founded in 1953 by the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights soon became home to a coterie of avant-garde writers. Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Michael McClure, Kenneth Rexroth, and other writers who felt disaffected from society and disillusioned with mainstream culture gathered there for readings, dramatic presentations, and late-night philosophical arguments. These “Beats,” as they called themselves, pursued sexual experimentation as fervently as they pursued literary experimentation. (The connotations of the term “beat” evolved over time. It was originally black slang for “exhausted” but was later considered short for “beatific” and “beatitude.”) Casual sex, open homosexuality, and occasional orgies were essential to the Beat protest against the authoritarianism of American society. By the early sixties, hordes of black-turtlenecked would-be writers, dubbed “beatniks” by the media, were swarming upon San Francisco. These beatniks tended to be sexual exiles in their own country: young men and women who felt constrained by middle-class morality and all its expectations and demands.¹¹



Before Carol Doda donned Rudi Gernreich’s monokini and danced atop the piano in the Condor Club, the most risqué nightclubs in America were the creation of the man whose name has become synonymous with sex itself, Hugh M. Hefner.