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Sex and Society: A Research Note from Social History and Anthropology[1]

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"The personal is political" was a central insight of the wave of feminism which gathered momentum in the 1960s. Within that phrase is condensed the understanding that the seemingly most intimate details of private existence are actually structured by larger social relations. Attention to the personal politics of intimate life soon focused on sexuality, and many canons of sexual meaning were challenged. The discovery of erotic art and symbols as male-centered, the redefinition of lesbian sexuality as positive and life-affirming, and the dismantling of the two-orgasm theory as a transparently male perception of the female body were among the products of this critique. Such reinterpretations suggest that social definitions of sex may change rapidly and in the process transform the very experience of sex itself.[2]

Sexuality's biological base is always experienced culturally, through a translation. The bare biological facts of sexuality do not speak for themselves; they must be expressed socially. Sex feels individual, or at least private, but those feelings always incorporate the roles, definitions, symbols and meanings of the worlds in which they are constructed. "The mind can be said to be our most erogenous zone,"[3] as one commentator has phrased it, and breakthroughs in sexual counseling have revealed that sexual dysfunction is best cured by teaching people to fantasize, a social response rather than a biological

[1] This paper was originally written for an innovative conference, "Writing the History of Sexuality and Power," New York University, March, 1978. We thank the conference's organizers for their work in stimulating discussion of this neglected topic. We also want to thank those who participated in our workshop there, as well as those who heard later versions, presented at the Mid-Atlantic Radical Historians' Organization Forum, New York, February, 1979, and at the Council of European Studies Conference, Washington, D.C., March, 1979. Many friends read and criticized earlier drafts of this paper. We especially want to thank Shirley Lindenbaum, Harriet Rosenberg, Gayle Rubin, Sara Ruddick, Judith Walkowitz and Eric Wolf.

[2] The definition of what constitutes sexuality is currently under debate. Some analysts stress the biological basis of the experience, focusing on organic and neurological response; others, more committed to a psychoanalytic perspective, stress the role of fantasy—originating in childhood—in eliciting these responses. As the recent work of Michel Foucault suggests, however, both positions presuppose that "sex" as a category of human experience can be isolated and is uniform throughout history. We agree with Foucault's contention that the concept of what activities and sensations are "sexual" is historically determined and hence part of a changing discourse. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: *An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[3] John Gagnon and Bruce Henderson, "The Social Psychology of Sexual Development," in *Family in Transition*, ed. Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, 2d ed. (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), pp. 116–22, 118.

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repair.[4] Conversely, without a social context to define them as legitimate, the sexual experiences of generations of American women were confused and distorted; properly brought-up Victorian women were taught that they need never be "bothered" by sexual passions, while their more "liberated" daughters learned that orgasms were their anatomical destiny.[5]

But if the biological facts do not speak for themselves, neither do the social ones. While it has become a standard tenet of sociology and social psychology that all human behavior, including sexual behavior, is shaped by social contexts, those contexts remain cloudy. The classics of the social science of sex divide either into mere catalogues of sexual variation (replete with initiation rites, puberty ceremonies, coital positions, *ad infinitum* among exotic peoples)[6] or vague assertions that sexual behavior is taught and learned in social groups.[7] As recent innovative essays by Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks point out, scholars are just beginning to investigate the plasticity of sexuality in Western European history and its embeddedness in other social arenas.[8]

But *how* society specifically shapes sexuality still remains abstract. How are we to weigh and evaluate the claims of the different domains of society on the prescription and behavior surrounding sex? How, for example, do family contexts, religious ideologies, community norms, and political policies interact in the formation of sexual experience? While many scholars might agree that these questions are both important and obvious, we were surprised to discover how little attention has been devoted to their analysis. In this paper we intend to bring the theories and methods of anthropology and social history to bear on the problem of structuring social contexts. Our goal is to suggest guideposts in this relative *terra incognita*.

We realize that the most popular perspective on the social shaping of

[4] The classic works are William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966); and *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970).

[5] A summary of this transformation is found in Michael Gordon, "From an Unfortunate Necessity to a Cult of Mutual Orgasm: Sex in American Marital Education Literature, 1830–1940," in *Studies in the Sociology of Sex*, ed. James Henslin (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1971), pp. 53–77.

[6] For example: Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1937–1942); Fernando Henriques, *Love in Action. The Sociology of Sex* (New York: Dutton, 1960).

[7] James M. Henslin, "The Sociological Point of View," in *Studies in the Sociology of Sex*, pp. 1-6; Gagnon and Henderson, "The Social Psychology of Sexual Development"; Clellan S. Ford and Frank A. Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), chapter 13.

[8] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality;* Jeffrey Weeks, "Discourses, Desire, and Sexual Deviance: Problems in a 'History' of Homosexuality," unpublished paper, Sociology Department, University of Essex (England), 1979; and "Movements of Affirmation: Sexual Meanings and Homosexual Identities," *Radical History Review* no. 20 (Spring/Summer, 1979): 164–80; Robert Padgug, "Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History," *ibid.*, pp. 3–24.

sexuality focuses on individuals in family contexts, almost to the detriment of larger social connections. This is most powerfully exemplified by psychoanalytic theory, which attempts to bridge the seeming gap between the social and biological worlds by describing the development of human personality as a product of the social experiences of love, hate, power and conflict generated in families. Such experiences are presumed to leave important residues in the unconscious. Adult sexuality is thus a central aspect of personality, which takes form in earliest childhood. Experiences of dependency, merging, and separating, initially focused on the mothering figure, resonate deeply throughout adult sexual life.

Recent feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theory have focused on the social construction of motherhood under conditions of male dominance. They reveal the centrality of female parenting in the psychic structuring of gender identity. Scholars such as Gayle Rubin, Nancy Chorodow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Juliet Mitchell and Jane Flax have demonstrated how complex and deeply "unnatural" the social process of creating gendered and heterosexual beings is.[9] This process has implications not only for social relations within families, but between genders in the wider world as well. Such theories must be taken very seriously, for they underline the tenacity with which sexuality is intertwined with unconscious relations of dominance not easily or automatically affected by social reforms. The changes in education or law which feminists initially believed could transform gender relations now seem necessary but insufficient.

A focus on the psychoanalytic, however, holds the social world at bay, awarding it only minimal importance in the shaping of consciousness and sexuality. The examples cited below suggest that the social contexts in which sexual experience occurs are continually changing. While a truly social and historical theory of sexuality requires an explicit link between society and enduring psychic structure, such links are as yet theoretically far from clear.

The solution to the problem of connecting the individual unconscious and the wider society is not, as psychohistorians do, to read directly from a supposed universal psychosexual conflict between parents and children to general, society-wide antagonisms. Lasch, for example, posits a direct connection between the alleged decrease of paternal authority within families and the crisis of contemporary American capitalism.[10] In the hands of such scholars,

[9] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Jane Flax, "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 (June, 1978): 171-89; Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

[10] Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

the study of society thus becomes a mere meditation on psychosexual development and social history becomes superfluous.

The analysis of psychosexual development is a complement to the study of society, not its ahistorical replacement. Sexuality both generates wider social relations and is refracted through the prism of society. As such, sexual feelings and activities express all the contradictions of power relations—of gender, class and race. We can never assume, for example, that the sexual experiences of black slave women and white plantation women—though sometimes involving the same class of men—were the same. To examine these sexual experiences we do not intend to focus on "disembodied" sex acts, enticing as these may be to antiquarians and voyeurs. Rather, we will sketch out the series of contexts which condition, constrain and socially define these acts.

Attempting to describe the link between society and individual sexuality, we initially saw these contexts spiraling outward from the individual toward the larger world. Social relations which appear peripheral to individual sexual practices (labor migration, for example) may in fact influence them profoundly through intervening social forms (e.g., by limiting available sexual partners and influencing the age of marriage). If the image of a spiral suggests continuous connection, we still do not know the relative weighting of all the forces impinging on sexuality. Gayle Rubin suggests that intermeshed gears provide a better image; in the ratio of the gears would be found the narrower and broader determinants of sexual experience.[11] But we cannot measure such ratios, and this metaphor is too mechanical to describe relationships in constant flux. More satisfactory is Clifford Geertz's image of an onion, which he used in describing the permeation of culture in the human experience.[12] In sexuality as in culture, as we peel off each layer (economics, politics, families, etc.), we may think that we are approaching the kernel, but we eventually discover that the whole is the only "essence" there is. Sexuality cannot be abstracted from its surrounding social layers.

Whatever metaphor best represents the social embeddedness of sexuality, it must be able to contain at least the following contexts: (1) kinship and family systems, (2) sexual regulations and definitions of communities, and (3) national and "world systems." We do not claim that any one of these contexts is causal, or that our list is complete. But we will claim that each and all of them simultaneously set up the external limits on sexual experiences and give shape to individual and group behavior. As social contexts, they both mirror and are lived through the salient power divisions in any society: class, caste, race,

[11] Personal communication, June, 1979.

[12] Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in *New Views of the Nature of Man*, ed. J. Platt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 93-118; reprinted in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

gender, and heterosexual dominance. Such divisions are more than "sociological." They are also internalized at the most intimate level of sexual fantasies and feelings and become part of human personality itself. We will discuss each of the spiraling three contexts to illustrate our conviction that sexuality is shaped by complex, changing social relations and thus has a history. Like all histories, it is capable of further transformation through the struggles of "sexual politics."

(1) FAMILY FORMS AND KINSHIP SYSTEMS

It is an axiom of cultural anthropology that family forms, embedded in kinship systems, vary cross-culturally and often over time within a single culture. Kinship systems encompass such basic relations as marriage patterns, the tracing of descent, and inheritance not only of specific offices or possessions, but of more abstract rights and obligations that related people hold with respect to one another. All these aspects of kinship systems have potential impact on sexuality: kin terminologies, inheritance practices, and marriage patterns are significant in sexual socialization.

Kinship terminologies, for example, may carry crucial information on degrees of incest; acceptable marriage partners; and even the "gray area" within which some kinsfolk may be available for sexual relations but not for marriage. The fourteen kin categories which are named in Dravidian terminologies (found in parts of South Asia, Australia, and the Pacific) orient children not only to naming their parents, or siblings, but to knowing their potential mothers- and fathers-in-law, and their potential spouses as well.[13] In such kinship systems, major messages mapping permissible and outlawed sexual partners are transmitted in language itself. While most Western languages designate many fewer kin classifications than this, the power to name—and thus legitimate or abolish—a sexual relation within the family may occur locally and informally. In the villages of southeastern France, for example, many young brides are referred to as "little mother" from the day they enter their new husband's family. Such a kin term conveys not only the centrality of producing future heirs for the stem family, but the desexualization of the conjugal dyad as well.[14]

In delineating permissible or necessary marriage partners, kinship systems usually specify sexual objects as well. Among the Banaro of northern New Guinea,

> When a woman is married, she is initiated into intercourse by the sib-friend of her groom's father. After bearing a child by this man, she begins to have intercourse with her husband. She also has an institutionalized partnership with the sib-friend of her

[13] Roger M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), chapter 7.

[14] Rayna Rapp, unpublished field notes, Provence (France), 1969, 1970, 1971-72.

husband. A man's partners include his wife, the wife of his sib-friend, and the wife of his sib-friend's son.[15]

In such a system, as Rubin points out, there are multiple triangulated heterosexual bonds set up in both the sib-friend and marriage systems. The point is not only that people are socially constructed as "heterosexual," but as specifically sib-friend and cross-cousin sexual as well. Sexual socialization is no less specific to each culture than is socialization to ritual, dress, or cuisine.

Permissible objects of sexual passion may be redefined as official definitions of family boundaries change. In an extremely thoughtful comparison of Catholic and Protestant family strategies, histories, and affective relations in early modern France, Natalie Davis points out that

> Back in the thirteenth century, people remembered the days when one could not marry within the seventh degree, that is, any of the descendants of one's great-great-great-great-great grandparents. Then, at the Lateran Council of 1215, it became and remained within the fourth degree: one was forbidden to marry any one of the descendants of one's sixteen great-great grandparents.[16]

The contraction of the field in which incestuous unions were defined affected what were "natural" or permissible sexual experiences among kinsfolk, godparents, and their offspring. Medieval and Renaissance theologians debated the relative merits of directing passion inside and outside of nuclear families: the sixteenth-century Jesuit Emond Auger reasoned that " 'Our carnal desires' are by nature strongest toward those closest to us and would be boundless if we married them."[17] Such theological speculation parallels modern anthropology's romance with the relation between incest prohibitions and the creation of marriage alliances.[18]

Incest prohibitions are not the only boundaries to sex and marriage which family systems set up. As many demographic and family historians remind us, European marriage patterns from at least as far back as the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century were based on a late age of marriage and a high proportion of persons who remained permanently celibate, i.e., unmar-

[15] Richard Thurnwald, "Banaro Society," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* 3, no. 4 (1916): 251-391; summarized and cited in Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," p. 166.

[16] Natalie Zemon Davis, "Ghosts, Kin and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France," *Daedalus* 106, no. 2 (Spring, 1977): 87-114, 101. See also Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality*, tr. Richard Southern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 19-23.

[17] Davis, "Ghosts," pp. 102-03.

[18] Classic essays on incest prohibitions are found in Nelson Graburn, ed., *Readings in Kinship and Social Structure* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), chapter 14; Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1967), chapter 2. Levi-Strauss' most famous work, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trs. James H. Bell, John R. von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) is founded on this question.

ried.[19] Such people might be domestic servants, prostitutes, or members of religious orders or armies. But often their celibacy was generated by the inheritance system into which they were born. Examining family practices among the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century squirearchy of England, a group which favored impartibility, Lawrence Stone found a celibacy rate of about twenty-five percent among daughters and younger sons, a rate more than twice as high as that of the sixteenth century. These low rates of nuptiality he attributes to primogeniture.[20] It is not only the sexual experiences of the young which are structured by inheritance systems, but also those of adults, especially widows. For though the English countryside in many regions had a substantial "female presence" of inheriting daughters or widows, their remarriage was always problematic for the children of the first marriage.[21] In the Cumbrian parish of Kirkby Lonsdale, widows lost their "free bench" if they either remarried or had sexual intercourse.[22] In such an example, the property and sexual relations of widows become fused.

The sexual life of "celibates" was probably quite different from that of the married population. As eighteenth-century observers noted, "The unmarried Ladies and Gentlemen . . . of moderate fortunes . . . are unable to support the Expence of Family . . . they therefore acquiesce in Celibacy; Each Sex compensating itself, as it can, by other Diversions."[23] Such diversions might include ". . . a variety of alternatives (which) are and probably were available, notably, lonely or mutual masturbation, oral or anal sex, homosexuality, bestiality, adultery with married women whose offspring are attributed to their husbands and resort to prostitutes."[24] While this list was compiled by Stone in discussing alternatives to heterosexual premarital intercourse, it would equally apply to permanent "celibates." We wonder what effects the status of noninheriting, and hence nonmarrying, offspring had on the sexual orientation and experiences of the men and women whose lives it shaped. As Jack Goody points out, even when more than one son married, the opportunities for love

[19] Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), p. 26; Lutz K. Berkner, "Recent Research on the History of the Family in Western Europe," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (August, 1973): 395-405; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), chapter 2.

[20] Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 44, 46-48.

[21] E. P. Thompson, "The Grid of Inheritance: a Comment," in *Family and Inheritance*, ed. Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk, and E. P. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 349.

[22] Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 82.

[23] Corbyn Morris, "Observations on the Past Growth and Present State of the City of London" (1751), cited in J. Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," in *Population in History*, ed. D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 101-43.

[24] Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 615-616.

and romance might vary with inheritance practice. In traditional France, a common cultural perception was that first sons married as their families dictated, while second sons married "for love."[25]

While we have discussed inheritance as if it were generated out of family relations, it is important to note that inheritance patterns actually integrate family members (and their sexuality) into national and even international movements in law and in class formation. As E. P. Thompson notes, "the grid of inheritance" in any locality reflects the efforts of geographically wider social classes to secure the property, offices and training of their offspring in a world which is continuously changing.[26] Inheritance laws legislated by a central state implicate family formation and sexual patterns at the local level. The Code Napoleon, for example, which declared equal partible inheritance throughout France (and was used as a model in many other European countries) swept through a complex of earlier, regionally differentiated inheritance customs, and was resisted in many areas. What appear as local patterns organized around kinship are often products of much wider social relations.

(2) COMMUNITIES AS LOCI OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

Families and kin groups cannot organize sexuality for themselves; the partners and patterns they require are usually rooted in wider communities, where lively traditions of sexual prescription—courting behavior, ritual prohibitions, sexual socialization and the like—are played out. Communities represent localized, face-to-face sociability; they are the material arenas in which groups of people larger than individual families live out their lives. The varied use of charivari rituals illustrates how local sexual norms are intricately intertwined with other values. Not only were charivaris directed against henpecked husbands, adulterers, notorious seducers, and homosexuals, but also against merchants who cheated customers, talebearers, habitual drunks, strikebreakers, those who worked during festival times, and magistrates issuing unpopular decisions.[27] The "Rebecca Riots" in southern Wales in the 1840s used the charivari form in both the "public" and "private" domains: against newly built toll roads and farm dispossessions, but also against the bastardy clauses of the 1834 Poor Law.[28]

But the community practices surrounding sexuality represent more than local traditions, for communities are also spatial precipitates of yet larger social relations, termini of worldwide economic, social, political, and cultural patterns within which localities are embedded. They simultaneously exhibit

[25] Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 63.

[26] Thompson, "Grid of Inheritance," p. 360.

[27] E. P. Thompson, "'Rough Music': Le charivari anglais," *Annales E.S.C.* 27 (March-April, 1972): 285-312, 293, 305.

[28] U. R. Q. Henriques, "Bastardy and the New Poor Law," *Past and Present* 37 (July, 1967): 103-29, 118.

patterns which are regionally rooted and also reflect the larger world. The introduction of rural industry into some English and Welsh farming communities in the early modern period, for example, changed courtship and marriage to reflect the new value that children's, and especially daughters', labor represented to the family economy as a whole. Earlier patterns in which parents arranged children's marriages through precontracts or spousals gave way in many areas to more clandestine courtship arranged by the young people themselves. Night-courting was one such method. The use of intermediaries in bargaining between parents and children suggests the tensions involved in young peoples' marital decisions. Bridal pregnancy may have been a trump card in children's hands as they asserted autonomy from the family economy via their own sexuality.[29]

Many of the aspects of community sociability—peer groups, the transmission of sexual knowledge, ritual boundaries to permissible or impermissible sexual relations, the involvement of Church regulations on sex—which we discuss in this section, reflect both the autonomy of community groups and the presence of a larger social world. Peer groups exhibit this ambiguity especially clearly, for while at the village level it may appear that the young men, for example, have complete control over the regulation of courtship, the ages at which the young may marry or the degree to which bastards may be supported are established by social forces, or laws, originating outside of local communities.

Peer groups are found in many cultures and they serve a variety of functions. Perhaps most important, they organize intergenerational relationships outside the family itself. Links between generations are especially significant in systems which depend on family economies, where relations of production cannot be separated from those of kinship, marriage, and reproduction. In such systems, peer regulation of sex and marriage is crucial to the politics and economics of both family and community life. Peer groups are often age-based, but because they encompass cultural experience beyond simple shared chronology, they are not reducible to demographic age-cohorts. In the French language, generational age and marriage status are conflated: *vieille fille/vieux garçon* translates as spinster/bachelor, but its literal meaning is aged girl/aged boy. In traditional Irish villages, unmarried men are boys, no matter what their chronological age.[30]

Given a marriage pattern in town and country in which there is a long period between the age of sexual maturity and the age of marriage, highly

[29] Interesting speculations on generational power relations in handicraft families appear in Hans Medick, "The Proto-Industrial Family Economy," *Social History* 1, no. 3 (October, 1976): 291-315; and John Gillis, "Resort to Common-Law Marriage in England and Wales, 1700-1850," unpublished manuscript.

[30] Rayna Rapp, unpublished field notes; Conrad Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968, 2d ed., p. 55.

ritualized management of celibacy and courtship is a common early modern European finding. In describing the history of youth groups in eighteenth-century England and Germany, John Gillis notes,

> Horizontal bonding of young single persons was a feature not only of the schools and universities, but also of many of the professions, the army, the bureaucracy, and the clergy as well. The clergy was the only one in which celibacy was an essential aspect of the brotherhood; but as a requirement of apprenticeship and as a kind of extended rite of passage, it was a feature of all trades and professions. In the crafts, journeymen's associations upheld the ideal of continence and the delay of marriage, relying on an elaborate imagery and ritual of "brotherhood" to solidify the social and moral bonds within their group... [for example] perhaps a primary function of the *Wanderjahr* was to take young men out of the marriage market during those years when such a step would have had disastrous results for the entire community, and thus prolong the state of semidependence until a place for them opened up in the normal course of the generational cycle.[31]

As the massive processes of proletarianization and urbanization broke down the productive and reproductive patterns of traditional Europe, "traditions of youth were redrawn along class lines."[32] Working-class youth, by the later nineteenth century, were more economically and sexually autonomous at younger ages than were middle-class youngsters. Their peer groups were often labeled "promiscuous" and "delinquent" by middle-class observers, whose own children were sequestered in single-sexed schools, universities, social clubs, and fraternal orders. "Adolescence" was increasingly used to describe the period of prolonged professional training to which middle-class offspring were subjected, during which time they were considered to be asexual.[33]

For Western Europe, evidence of ritualized structuring of courting dates back a considerable time. In French peasant villages from medieval almost through modern times, groups of unmarried men, the "abbeyes" Natalie Davis describes, restricted the pool of marriageable young people and maintained village endogamy by fighting or fining strangers who came to court local girls.[34] Adolescent peer groups in traditional European villages might even more directly supervise sexual activity. Recently, historians have drawn attention to "night-courting" in Northern France, the Vendée, Alsace, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia.[35] As practiced in many parts of Scan-

[31] John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1974), pp. 22-23.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[33] *Ibid.*, chapters 2, 3, and 4.

[34] Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 97-123, 104-05; Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Les amours paysannes (xvie-xixe siècle)* (Paris: Editions Gallimard/Julliard, 1975), pp. 142-43; and *Families in Former Times*, pp. 34-35.

[35] Pierre Caspard, "Conceptions pré-nuptiales et développement du capitalisme dans la Principauté de Neuchâtel (1678-1820)," *Annales E.S.C.* 29, no. 4 (July-August, 1974): 989-1008, 993-96; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975),

dinavia and summarized by Shorter, young unmarried men gathered at a central place on Saturday nights and set off on a round of visits to the houses of the village's unmarried women, hoping to leave one of their number with each woman. Couples spent the rest of the night in the women's beds, and courted according to detailed rules which outlined what clothing needed to be left on, what body parts might touch, and so on. At the end of the night, the group of men reformed, and public mockery was the fate of couples found violating these rules.[36] And "accidents are rare," according to a 1795 report on the practice in Neuchâtel.[37] Church spokesmen, especially in Catholic regions, attacked these practices as immoral from as early as the seventeenth century. But they survived in some places to the end of the nineteenth century only to be deplored as primitive and immoral by middle-class lay observers. Yet the loss of such peer regulation, either through its actual suppression or through the breakup of communities, seems to be one of the cluster of forces that led to increased illegitimacy rates. Flandrin is even convinced that French regions where night-courting practices survived into the nineteenth century had noticeably lower illegitimacy rates than other areas.[38]

Sexuality is a notorious source of tension between adolescent peer groups and adults. The teenaged girls studied by Molly Dougherty in a rural black town in the southern United States play their peers against their adult kinswomen as they enter into heterosexual relationships. Attitudes toward sexual experimentation and courting are relaxed and positive among peers; adult women may castigate the teenagers for early pregnancy, but they also supervise the transition to elevated status which motherhood provides for the young girls. Teenaged sex and its consequences are negotiated between the peer and parenting generations, allowing young women to test bonds in both directions as they court.[39]

Peer groups formed in adolescence may have an impact on the affective and sexual lives of their members throughout adulthood. Among the best studied adult peers are the all-female networks which nineteenth-century middle-class American women formed. Girlhood friendships, often begun at boarding schools, deepened as the women began to share a common domestic fate and religious culture in which they were defined as the more sensitive and spiritual of the sexes. These homoerotic friendships as discussed in Carroll Smith-

pp. 102-05; Michael Drake, *Population and Society in Norway, 1735-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 138-45.

[36] Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family,* pp. 102-03. The sources on which his account is based are listed in notes 53-59, p. 298.

[37] Caspard, "Conceptions pré-nuptiales," p. 995.

[38] Jean-Louis Flandrin, "Repression and Change in the Sexual Life of Young People in Medieval and Early Modern Times," *Journal of Family History* 2, no. 3 (September, 1977): 196-210, 200-03, 205.

[39] Molly Dougherty, *Becoming a Woman in Rural Black Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), part 3, pp. 71-107.

Rosenberg's now classic essay were nurtured in the informal but enduring bonds between women whose context is erased if sexuality is investigated only within the heterosexual marital dyad.[40]

Communities are the locus not only of the regulation of sexual partner and practices, but for the transmission of sexual knowledge as well. Indeed, before the proliferation of "how-to" books, communities were the only source of knowledge about sex and reproduction. Formulas for contraceptive substances and abortifacients, and access to midwives or abortionists were in the hands of village women in traditional Europe, as were concepts of when it was acceptable to use them.[41] Urban females' networks also were sources of information, and pre-World War I British evidence suggests that abortion was more common in urban areas at least in part because such information networks could operate there.[42] In Sheffield in the 1890s, lead contamination of the water supply suggested to some women that a lead powder commonly used around the house might also bring miscarriages. From there the word spread to Leicester, Nottingham, Birmingham, and other towns, all by word of mouth. As a 1906 *Lancet* article observed,

> Hence its slow progress, for the women of this class do not travel farther than to and from their nearest market town or center. The direction or the spread along the northern part of thickly populated manufacturing populations subject to bad trade or overcrowding . . . can be readily understood.[43]

Loss of contact through migration could mean the absence of vital knowledge about sexuality and procreation. The early twentieth-century letters collected by the Women's Cooperative Guild on maternity in Britain eloquently speak of such losses. Many women knew close to nothing about sex or reproduction, even at their first pregnancy.[44] The especially high rates of illegitimacy and infanticide among French and English nineteenth-century servants suggests not only their isolation from country or town working-class communities, but their ignorance about contraception, abortifacients, and abortionists.[45]

[40] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 2 (Autumn, 1975): 1-29. See also Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

[41] Jacques Gélis, "Sages-femmes et accoucheurs: l'obstétrique populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Annales E.S.C.* 32 (September-October 1977): 927-57; Mireille Laget, "La naissance aux siècles classiques. Pratique des accouchements et attitudes collectives en France XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *ibid.*, pp. 958-92.

[42] Patricia Knight, "Women and Abortion in Victorian and Edwardian England," *History Workshop* 4 (Autumn, 1977): 57-69, 58-59.

[43] Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 242; Knight, "Women and Abortion," p. 60.

[44] See Margaret L. Davies, ed., *Maternity, Letters from Working Women*, reprint ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), p. 56.

[45] John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 142-73; Theresa M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1976), chapter 6.

Some contemporary non-Western cultures have well-organized procedures for the transmission of sexual knowledge. Verrier Elwin investigated child and adolescent dormitories among the Muria of Bastar, a central Indian tribe, where children from the age of six or seven spend increasing amounts of time living with their peers. Young members are taught by slightly older ones, and a range of sexual skills is transmitted. Techniques of massage, foreplay, and mutual satisfaction are learned in the group. Young girls are taught to think of their bodies as ''ripening fruit''; they are taught, too, that ''. . . when the clitoris sees the penis coming, she smiles.'' Intense dyads are broken up by enforcement of shifting partners; it is only among the older adolescents that ''serious'' courting leading to marriage is permitted.[46]

The amount of autonomy from wider institutions which community practices express varies widely. Charivaris, night-courting, and gossip enforcing sexual norms seem to genuinely express at least a part of community opinion. Priests and parsons, while important members of the community and influenced by its values, are also representatives of powerful national or international organizations. Their presence has of course tremendous power to shape sexual attitudes and experiences.

Flandrin's suggestive studies of French clerical policies toward lay sexuality begins to give precision to our commonsense assumption that the Church has effectively and dramatically molded sexual experiences. But that molding has not always represented official theological positions. Although canon law, judicial procedure, and confessional practice all condemned ''sins against nature,'' by medieval times contraception was viewed as more heinous when practiced inside of marriage than when used in illicit sex. In the hierarchy of sins, an adulterous union that was sterile was less sinful in the clergy's eyes than one which produced offspring. In examining community confessional records, Flandrin suggests that ''the Malthusian revolution'' spread, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century village France, via illicit relationships. But by the latter half of the eighteenth century, husbands and wives had performed a cultural innovation: they had moved contraception out of the adulterous affair and into the marriage bed. Thus the Church's teachings distinguishing levels of sin prepared the way for marital experimentation.[47] Flandrin also feels that the eighteenth-century clergy's increasing emphasis on duty and obligation to offspring encouraged family limitation as well. It made responsibilities to the already born more salient, allowing parents to consider contraception ''for the sake of'' their children.[48] Thus, official Church dis-

[46] Verrier Elwin, *Kingdom of the Young* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

[47] Jean-Louis Flandrin, ''Contraception, Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Christian West,'' in *Biology of Man in History*, eds. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, trs. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 23-47.

[48] Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, pp. 211-12.

course on sexual practices was transformed as it was appropriated at the community level.

(3) SEX AND "WORLD SYSTEMS"

Large-scale social institutions and forces may appear distant and abstract, but they actually influence the intimate experiences people have, defining the circumstances under which shifting sexual mores are played out. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, is organized to operate simultaneously at the international, national, local, and intimate levels. Other institutions may exhibit a sexual regulatory aspect, as national laws frequently do. The discussion which follows focuses first on the power of such large-scale institutions to shape sexuality. It then suggests an examination of less formalized, but perhaps more pervasive forces—economic or demographic change, shifting town/country relations—which affect sexual transformations, as they affect all of social life.

All of the world's major religions serve as arbiters of moral systems, an important aspect of which is usually sexuality, as amply demonstrated in the history of Roman Catholicism in the West. Even before the Protestant Reformation, Catholic doctrine had begun to tighten the connections between sexuality, marriage, and procreation. It increasingly campaigned against all nonmarital and nonprocreative forms of sexuality. The Church's definition of marriage, for example, became more rigorous, sharply differentiating the married from the unmarried and making the difference between licit and illicit sex more important. Medieval practice came close to assuming that couples who had intercourse were indeed married, for at that point the promise to marry carried more weight than any public ceremony that might take place, and it was widely believed that cohabitation was what made marriage official. Gradually, witnesses to the marriage were required; then a priest's presence, to administer a sacrament previously offered by the couple themselves; and finally the betrothal promise lost its binding character.[49]

The same rigidifying of Church definitions occurred on the subject of concubinage, the open acknowledgment of illicit sexual relations and paternity, with support for mother and child. The Counter-Reformation campaign against clerical concubinage was accompanied by an effective one against lay concubinage as well. By the mid-seventeenth century, it was successful and the practice was rare in France; only kings and the greatest lords openly acknowledged their bastards. The campaign against concubinage may account for the steady decline in illegitimacy figures in seventeenth-century France and in England. But it meant particular victimization for unmarried mothers,

[49] Sir Frederick Pollock and Frederick William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols., 2d ed. reissue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968): 2, chapter 6; Willystine Goodsell, *A History of Marriage and the Family*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934); O. R. McGregor, *Divorce in England. A Centenary Study* (London: Heinemann, 1957).

now stigmatized and far more likely to flee their communities. The abolition of concubinage also spelled disaster for the children, as bastards in disproportionate numbers ended up as foundlings and almost certainly faced early death.[50]

Legal systems provide a material background against which sexual relations are played out, whether they affect sexuality directly (e.g., legitimacy clauses, the outlawing of abortion, and sex codes defining prostitution) or at a distance (e.g., welfare and the responsibilities of fathers). Laws defining paternity, for example, are important in setting up the context in which sexuality occurs. Their effect does not necessarily result from forcing fathers to support their illegitimate children. Few women in England, either before or after the 1834 Bastardy Clauses undermined putative fathers' legal obligations, seem to have applied for child support, and we know too well how few divorced fathers in contemporary America pay child support consistently over the years. Rather, as such laws become known, they help to establish an atmosphere which changes the sexual balance of power. The commissioners investigating the causes of the "Rebecca Riots" in 1844 were convinced that this is what had happened in southern Wales since 1834. Traditional marriage and courtship patterns in England had condoned premarital pregnancies, and eighteenth-century legislation made it relatively easy for mothers of bastards to collect regular support payments. The Bastardy Clauses to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act assigned financial responsibility solely to the mothers (or their parishes).[51] Now, courting men seemed to feel a new license to avoid marriage. "It is a bad time for the girls, Sir," a woman reported to a Haverfordwest Poor Law Guardian who testified before the commission; "The boys have their own way."[52] The Bastardy Clauses were probably among the factors which influenced a shift in popular sexual culture: an earlier tradition of lively female sexual assertiveness as traced in folk ballads and tales gave way to a more prudish, cautious image of womanhood by the 1860s. Such a transformation appears quite rational in light of the shifting legal environment.[53] What Flandrin calls "the legal disarming of women vis-à-vis their seducers" took place earlier and more thoroughly in France. In the seventeenth century it was legally possible for a seducer, unless he married the woman, to be charged with rape if the woman was under twenty-five. As the penalty for rape was death, many seducers charged in court no doubt preferred marriage. The Civil Code of 1804, however, forbade searching for putative fathers and made unmarried women solely responsible for their children.[54]

Throughout Europe and in America, the mid- to late-nineteenth century

[50] Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, pp. 180–84.

[51] Henriques, "Bastardy and the New Poor Law," pp. 118–19.

[52] Quoted *ibid.*, p. 119.

[53] Gillis, "Domestic Service and Sexual Relations in Nineteenth Century London," paper presented at International Conference in Women's History, University of Maryland, November, 1977.

[54] Flandrin, "Repression and Change," p. 204.

witnessed a hardening of legal definitions of sexual outcasts, as sexual behavior came under increasing state and cultural surveillance. It is from this period that many of the sex and vice codes still prevalent in Western societies can be dated. In England, a series of Contagious Disease Acts passed from 1864 on to control venereal disease in the army and navy by registering prostitutes had the effect of stigmatizing the women and isolating them from the working-class neighborhoods in which they lived and worked. Although a campaign to repeal the acts was ultimately successful, its social purity orientation led to still further sexually restrictive legislation. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, an omnibus crime bill passed in 1885, raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen in response to a movement to "save" working-class girls from the perceived evils of "white slavery" and aristocratic male lust. The newly increased powers of the police were turned not on the wealthy buyers of sex, but on its poorer sellers. Lodging-house keepers were commonly prosecuted as brothel keepers, and prostitutes were often uprooted and cast out from their neighborhoods. Forced to find new lodging in areas of cities more specialized in vice, they became increasingly dependent on male pimps once community support, or at least toleration, of their occupation was shattered by legal prosecution.[55]

In the Labouchere Amendment to the same 1885 Act, all forms of sexual activity between men (with consent, in private as well as in public) were subject to prosecution. This represents a dramatic extension of the definition of male homosexuality (and its condemnation) beyond the "abominations of buggery" clauses promulgated under Henry VIII and remaining in force in the centuries that followed.[56] The Labouchere Amendment was followed in 1898 by the Vagrancy Act, which turned police attention to homosexual solicitation. Anti-homosexual legislation was passed in an atmosphere of a purity campaign that viewed homosexuality as a vice of the rich visited upon the poor. But the effects of the legislation were turned against the perceived victims of aristocratic lust. It was working-class homosexuals who were most likely to be tried while wealthier men were often able to buy their way out of

[55] Judith R. Walkowitz and Daniel J. Walkowitz, " 'We Are Not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts," *Feminist Studies* 1, nos. 3-4 (Winter-Spring 1973); 73-106; Judith Walkowitz, "The Making of an Outcast Group," in *A Widening Sphere*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): 72-93, 85-87; and *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[56] Guido Ruggiero, "Sexual Criminality in the Early Renaissance: Venice 1338-1358," *Journal of Social History* 8 (Summer, 1975): 18-37; Randolph Trumbach, "London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Social History* 11 (Fall, 1977): 1-33; Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1977), pp. 1-44; Louis Crompton, Review of *Coming Out* by Weeks; *Socialism and the New Life* by Jeffrey Weeks and Sheila Rowbotham; and *Homosexuality and Literature*, by Jeffrey Meyers, in *Victorian Studies* 22, no. 2 (Winter, 1979): 211-13.

public notice and prosecution. As Jeffrey Weeks points out, the sex codes and their effects must be viewed in relation to evolving notions of respectability in both working-class and lower middle-class culture. One aspect of that respectability was sexual; another was the growing belief in the purity and innocence of childhood. Both converged in support for the sex codes, which raised the age of consent and identified and outlawed a range of male homosexual activities.[57] It is within this cultural milieu that sexually specialized neighborhoods, cultures, and commodities were probably given impetus to evolve.[58]

Less obvious to the eye than Church policies or legal systems, but still more central in structuring sexual experience, are social and economic forces which, for example, determine the availability of resources for marriage, or the possibility of finding in expanding urban areas a setting for homosexual contacts. To analyze for Western society this widest level of determinants of sexuality would be tantamount to writing the first volume of a sexual *Capital*. Here we want merely to suggest that the intimate experience of sexuality is intertwined with the most global of social forces. The complex of transformations which accompanied the development of industrial capitalism in Western Europe—including increased wage-labor dependency and massive urban migration—generated statistical clues to changing sexual patterns.

The availability of wage labor in general made it possible for larger proportions of people to marry (especially by the nineteenth century) and for marriage to take place at earlier ages as couples could support themselves without waiting for sizable dowries or inheritances. David Levine's comparative study of four English towns from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries shows the impact of wage labor on marriage and fertility. For the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Leicestershire village of Shepshed, for example, knitters working for wages in domestic industry had different demographic patterns than did artisans or the farming population. The knitters' wage dependency allowed them earlier marriage and encouraged more children, who were also employable.[59] In nineteenth-century industrial cities, too, waged workers tended to marry at greater rates than did the populations of towns with large artisanal or commercial sectors.[60]

Migration from country to city left profound, though complex demographic

[57] Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 19-20.

[58] This view is implicit in Weeks, *Coming Out;* it is the hypothesis which Gayle Rubin is currently investigating in her research on the evolution to homosexual communities in twentieth-century Europe and America (personal communication, December, 1979).

[59] David Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

[60] Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, pp. 93-96. See also: Lynn H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin. Irish Migration in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979) for a discussion of changes in ages of marriage of rural Irish who migrated to London at the time of the famine; and Louise A. Tilly, "The Family Wage Economy of a French Textile City: Roubaix, 1872-1906," *Journal of Family History* 4, no. 4 (Winter, 1979): 381-94.

traces, creating new situations in which migrants experienced courtship, sex, marriage and childbearing. Different kinds of towns—commercial, industrial, or mining, as Louise Tilly and Joan Scott have shown—provided migrants with different demographic and economic situations. In textile cities like Preston or Mulhouse, where the demand for both female and child labor was high, women outnumbered men and marriages were late (in Mulhouse in the early 1830s, one estimate was that brides were 26, grooms 28). Where the labor force was chiefly male and jobs for women few, as in mining and metalworking centers like Carmaux and Anzin, women were scarce, and marriage ages tended to be lower.[61]

While urban life seemed to promote illegitimacy in France, massive proletarianization in the English countryside is linked to higher rates of illegitimacy there.[62] Rising rates of illegitimacy may appear to be a new development, but recent work suggests that behind the figures lie traditional courtship and sexual patterns, reproduced under new and difficult circumstances. Young women, away from their families and communities to work as servants or in manufacturing jobs, courted and had sexual relations with traditional expectations that marriage would take place should a pregnancy result. But in the new situations of commercial and industrial towns, employment for many men was too unstable to permit marriage, and community pressure on them to support their bastards was weak.[63] Under new conditions of urbanization, old sexual patterns led to new social consequences.

From as early as the twelfth century, towns had provided foci for the formation of male homosexual subcultures. There is evidence of distinct homosexual communities in Italian towns in the fourteenth century, French from the fifteenth, and British by the seventeenth. In the relative anonymity of eighteenth-century London, a network of cafes, bars, meeting places, and brothels thrived, serving a wide clientele that represented most of the city's

[61] Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family,* p. 96.

[62] Edward Shorter, "Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution and Social Change in Modern Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1 (Autumn, 1971): 231-72.

[63] Shorter's "Female Emancipation, Birth Control and Fertility in European History" [*American Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (June, 1973): 605-40], opened a debate on the sources of Europe's high birth- and illegitimacy-rates in the era of early industrialization. On illegitimacy, the weight of scholarship supports the view that the urban migration of young women made them especially vulnerable to illegitimate pregnancies. See Louise A. Tilly, Joan W. Scott, and Miriam Cohen, "Women's Work and European Fertility Patterns," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, no. 3 (Winter, 1976): 447-76; Jacques De Pauw, "Amour illégitime et société à Nantes au XVIIIe siècle," *Annales E.S.C.*, 27 (1972): 1155-82; Alain Lottin, "Naissances illégitimes et filles-mères à Lille au XVIIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 17 (April-June 1970): 278-322; Cissie Fairchilds, "Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, no. 4 (Spring, 1978): 627-67. Michel Frey suggests that Paris women in the mid-nineteenth century living as "concubines" wanted to change their relationships into legitimate marriages, and that marriages were least likely to take place between couples with the lowest paying employment. See "Du mariage et du concubinage dans les classes populaires à Paris 1846-1847," *Annales, E.S.C.* 33, no. 4 (July-August 1978): 803-25.

major occupations.[64] As the labeling of homosexuals as deviants became sharper toward the end of the nineteenth century, this subculture tightened, subdivided, and generated a political arm which was predominantly upper and upper middle class.[65] The lesser visibility of lesbian subgroups in history probably reflects not only the lower level of legal persecution to which they were apparently subjected, but more important, lesbians (like heterosexual women) have had far less independence than men and fewer resources on which to base their subcultures.[66]

Behind the dramatic economic and demographic changes of the era of industrialization in Europe lie cultural and ideological changes far harder to penetrate. The transformation of social relations of labor provides a general context for shifting symbolic relations, including the symbolism of sex and gender.

Domestic service, for example, was the most common waged occupation for women in England and France well into the twentieth century. It carried with it a specific demographic pattern, conditions of labor, and conditions of culture as well. Stringent codes of class and gender marked the relation between master and servant as one of personal dominance and subordination. Female servants lived as dependents, tied to their masters' households. One aspect of their subordination was expressed in exaggerated codes of meekness and cleanliness. Another was asexuality, transgression of which could lead to serious consequences, such as being "... 'placed' in institutional substitutes for homes: Homes for Orphans, Charity Homes, Homes for Fallen Women.'"[67] "No followers" rules imposed secrecy upon courting and sexual behavior.

In an analysis of illegitimacy among London domestics in the nineteenth century, John Gillis traces out the subtle and contradictory circumstances which led some upper servants to unwed pregnancy and abandonment of children. "Better" servants and their suitors, usually skilled or semi-skilled workers, shared their masters' sense of respectability. They aimed to acquire some economic security as a basis for marriage. The men were quite geographically mobile, unlike the women, who were tied to bourgeois households. A too-early pregnancy might lead men to abandon women who lacked the savings and employment skills on which to found a new household.[68]

The strange romance of two Victorians illustrates the complicated intersection between erotic experience and wider social forces, such as the in-

[64] Trumbach, "London's Sodomites"; Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 35-42; Mary Mackintosh, "The Homosexual Role," in *Family in Transition*, eds. Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome I. Skolnick, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), pp. 231-42, 236-38.

[65] Weeks, *Coming Out*, part 4.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[67] Leonore Davidoff, "Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England," *Journal of Social History* 8 (Summer, 1974): 404-28, 413-14.

[68] Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy," p. 167.

stitutionalized patterns of dominance and subordination that prevailed between servant-keeping bourgeois families and their female servants.[69] Hannah Cullwick was a twenty-one-year-old kitchen servant when she met twenty-five-year-old Arthur J. Munby in London in 1854. Eldest son of a notable Yorkshire family, Munby was in London studying to become a barrister, but his real passion was the working woman—pit brow women, crossings-sweepers, milk carriers, farm laborers, and lower servants all fascinated him.

By the time they met, both Hannah and Arthur had already focused their sexual and romantic fantasies not only on the opposite sex, but also on the opposite class. Munby's passion for working women was paralleled by Hannah's decision that any sweetheart she was to have "shall be someone much above me; and I will be his slave."[70]

Class polarities structured their relationship. Munby's sensual appreciation of Hannah Cullwick focused both on her large size (which he exaggerated), sturdiness, large red hands and arms, and the frequently dirty face and arms her work produced. Munby loved to watch Cullwick scrubbing her master's front steps, and he found it natural that she should wash his feet and polish his boots. Hannah in her turn cherished her servitude and passed up many chances for high-paying and comfortable upper servants' jobs because she could not give up her "lowliness."

A troubled secret marriage took place in 1872. It was followed by a few years of domestic life, Hannah posing as her husband's servant and both partners enjoying the game while Munby continued his regular round of bachelor activities. Marriage exacerbated their class differences. Their erotic life remained frustrating: rare kissing, cuddling, and Munby's sitting on his wife's large lap seem to have comprised the more directly "sexual" parts of their relationship. This was difficult for Hannah, whose status floundered between that of a wife (and therefore lady) and a servant. Hannah felt forced to leave, but the couple remained in close contact for the rest of their lives.

As Lenore Davidoff suggests in her sensitive study of this relationship, the contradictions in Munby's emotional life may well be traced to the common upper-middle-class practice of hiring country women as the nearly full-time caretakers of children. His erotic biography comes into classic Freudian focus when we learn that another woman named Hannah served as a nurse in the Munby household throughout his childhood.[71] Hannah Cullwick's fixation on gentlemen and her association between romantic love and servitude are less classically oedipal: their analysis opens up the connection between patriarchy and class oppression.

[69] The discussion that follows is based on Derek Hudson, *Munby, Man of Two Worlds. The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby 1828-1910* (Boston: Gambit, Inc., 1972); and on Leonore Davidoff's interpretative study, "Class and Gender in Victorian England: the Diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 87-142.

[70] Hudson, *Munby*, p. 69.

[71] Davidoff, "Class and Gender," pp. 87-100.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that understanding sexuality requires critical attention to the idea that sex is a social experience, a lived and changing relationship, and not an "essence" whose content is fixed. Sex cannot be studied as a series of "acts," nor should the sexual component in all social relations be ignored.

It is no accident, however, that contemporary culture tempts us to reify sex as a thing-in-itself. The modern perception of sex is an ideological reflection of real changes which have occurred in the contexts of daily life within which sexuality is embedded. The separation, with industrial capitalism, of family life from work, of consumption from production, of leisure from labor, of personal life from political life, has completely reorganized the context in which we experience sexuality. These polarities are grossly distorted and miscast as antinomies in modern ideological formulations, but their seeming separation creates an ideological space called "personal life," one defining characteristic of which is sexual identity.[72] Modern consciousness permits, as earlier systems of thought did not, the positing of "sex" for perhaps the first time as having an "independent" existence. While we have discussed family and kinship systems, communities, and large-scale institutional and informal forces as though they were separate contexts for shaping sexuality, they are, of course, interdependent. The power of each in relation to all others to provide the meaning and control of sexuality shifts with historical time. Recently, for example, a common American complaint is that families are losing control over their children's sexual education and behavior, challenged by public schools, the mass media, and state policies (which grant sex education and abortions to teenagers, even without parental consent). The power of families and communities to determine sexual experience has indeed sharply diminished in the past two centuries, allegedly allowing for individual sexual "liberation."

Although the movement toward self-conscious sexuality has been hailed by modernists as liberatory, it is important to remember that sexuality in contemporary times is not simply released or free-floating. It continues to be socially structured, but we would argue that the dominant power to define and regulate sexuality has been shifting toward the group of what we have labeled large-

[72] Although they have very different theoretical perspectives, both Eli Zaretsky and Christopher Lasch believe that sexual identity takes shape in "personal" space. Eli Zaretsky, "Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life, Part I," *Socialist Revolution* 3, nos. 1-2 (January-April 1973): 69-126; and Christopher Lasch, "The Family as a Haven in a Heartless World," *Salmagundi* 34 (Fall, 1976): 42-55; and "The Waning of Private Life," *Salmagundi* 36 (Winter, 1977): 3-15. Feminists have defined the issue differently, insisting on the patriarchal nature of the interconnections between the "personal" and the "political." See Joan Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory: A Postscript to the 'Women and Power' Conference," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 216-27; and Rosalind Petchesky, "Dissolving the Hyphen," in Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), pp. 373-89.

scale social and economic forces, the most salient of which is perhaps the state. States now organize many of the reproductive relations that were once embedded in smaller-scale contexts. They have assumed increasing control of education, health, and social welfare in general, and sexuality is an aspect of all of these domains. Sexuality thus enters the "social contract" connecting the individual citizen and the state. In the process, an ideological space is created which allows us to "see" sex as a defining characteristic of the individual person, "released" from the traditional restraints of family and community. The rise of the two great ethnosciences of sexual and personal liberation—sexology and psychoanalysis—have accompanied this transformation, attempting to explain and justify it.[73]

But the ideology of sexual freedom and the right to individual self-expression have come increasingly into conflict with both state hegemony and the residual powers of more traditional contexts such as family and community control. Today, abortion, sterilization abuse, sex education, homosexual rights, and welfare and family policies are explosive political issues in the United States and much of Western Europe. For as states claim a greater and greater interest in the structuring of sexuality, sexual struggles increasingly become part of public, consciously-defined politics. All the salient power divisions in any society—class, race, gender, and heterosexual dominance—structure the consciousness, demands, and resources different groups bring to these, as to any other, political issues. Politicians attentive to the sexualization of policy and the politicization of sexuality now know what scholars ignore at their peril: such issues have never been simply "private" or "personal," but are eminently part of the public domain.

[73] The labeling of sexology and psychoanalysis as "ethnoscience," suggesting a folk system of understanding which is quite logical, but based on "wrong" assumptions linked to turn-of-the-century social perceptions, is Gayle Rubin's. Seeing the context in which these models of personal relationships developed as a part of changes in wider social power arrangements is the contribution of Foucault and of Donzelot. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* and Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families,* tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).