

EXAMINING CONTEMPORARY HETEROSEXUAL CASUAL SEX

FULL PAPER BASED ON THE LECTURE HELD AT THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND MEDIA STUDIES, UMEA UNIVERSITY, UMEA, SWEDEN.



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Farvid, P. (2012). Examining contemporary heterosexual casual sex (full paper). In R. Scherman, C. Krägeloh & S. Nayar (Eds.), *Walking the talk: The 2012 collection of oral presentations from the AUT School of Public Health and Psychosocial Studies* (pp. 190-224). Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University of Technology.

Abstract

Heterosexual casual sex has become a visible cultural practice within contemporary western culture. Discourses of casual sex construct it in contradictory and conflicting ways, as either liberatory and pleasurable or as risky and damaging to those who engage in it. Although previous research has attempted to map the nature and experience of casual sex, very little has been published with regards to its history in modernity. This review article traces possible key moments in the historical emergence of contemporary casual sex as a legitimate and socially acceptable heterosexual pursuit. It argues that although fleeting and/or one-off sexual encounters have ostensibly been part of modern western sexualities (as far back as the 1900s), it was not until the late 1960s that the contemporary version of casual sex as a discursive construct and a form of sexual practice emerged as a

legitimated avenue for sexual relating amongst heterosexuals. The article concludes by inviting historians to take up empirical investigation examining the historical emergence of casual sex in more depth.

Key words: casual sex, heterosexuality, history, gender, twentieth century.

'Casual sex' is a relatively new addition to the spectrum of heterosexuality. Currently the phrase 'casual sex' refers to an array of on-off or brief sexual encounters between recently met strangers, friends or acquaintances. Such encounters (also referred to as 'hookups', one-night stands, booty calls, friends with benefits, see (Farvid, 2011; Farvid & Braun, 2013a, 2013b) may only take place once between the individuals or span a number of days, weeks and, at times, months. What makes these sexual scenarios 'casual' is that the sexual exchange ostensibly does not involve an emotional or romantic commitment between the sexual practitioners. Whilst previous research has examined the myriad of complex and contradictory facets related to the experience of casual sex (e.g., Beres & Farvid, 2010; Herold, Maticka-Tyndale, & Mewhinney, 1998; Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1995; Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Young, Penhollow, & Bailey, 2008), there has been no examination of the possible historical emergence of contemporary casual sex. It has often been assumed that casual sex is another facet of the supposed sexual 'liberation' within the permissive era. In this paper, I conduct an extensive literature review pertaining to the history of (hetero)sexualities within the West, to ascertain where (and how) heterosexual 'casual sex' could be historically located.

No doubt, one-off sexual encounters, or fleeting sexual relationships, are part of the entire history of heterosexuality. However, the current and culturally pervasive construction of a visible type of sexual practice called 'casual sex' is relatively new. This paper explores how the category (heterosexual) 'casual sex' has been socially and culturally produced in the twentieth century within the West. It traces

the emergence of the dominant cultural category and term 'casual sex' rather than identifying sexual 'practices' in history that may be, from a contemporary perspective, considered or called casual sex. I will argue that casual sex became a culturally visible category during the 'permissive era' (1960s–1970s) and explore the precursors to this. I do not claim this discussion as the 'truth' about the historical emergence of casual sex, rather, as one social constructionist reading of how the discursive category of casual sex might be historically located, based on a review of previous historical literature pertaining to the history of modern heterosexuality. I specifically focus on how the notion of 'casual sex' as a sexual/relational category became prevalent and where such constructions are discursively situated, with the aim of destabilising these as the 'truths' of casual sex.

Casual sex is not part of a linear progression in the 'liberation' of heterosex; rather, it is a discursive category that is contextually and historically bound. As a discursive category, and in its practice, casual sex is very much a product of decades of contradictory (re) constructions of sex and sexuality, influenced by many social forces and institutions in the evolution of twentieth century heterosexuality. I trace social developments and shifts in constructions of sex/sexuality in some western countries which are known for their cultural overlaps (e.g., Griffiths, 2008) that (inadvertently) allowed for the possible cultivation of contemporary heterosexual casual sex. I draw on some historical as well as contemporary texts to illustrate this emergence.

Taking a constructionist perspective means the past must be seen as encompassing multiple truths, as fragmentary, and as indeed contradictory. This perspective also recognises that social divisions such as race, class and gender undoubtedly shape sexuality differently for various groups in society. So when referring to constructions of sexuality in the past, I do not mean to suggest that this was the only manifestation of sexuality. Rather, I am drawing on other historical research in this area that suggest there were prominent cultural constructions of sexuality, as well as tensions created by groups who did not conform to the dominant sexual order.

During the permissive era, constructions of ‘casual sex’ and the practices associated with it currently became increasingly visible. The social acceptability of ‘casual sex’ is contingent on ‘permissive discourses’ (Hollway, 1989) in relation to sex. As such, an inquiry into the social construction of casual sex is also an inquiry into the development and cultivation of permissive discourses. I outline, in detail, the possible precursors to the permissive turn and discuss the changes that took place socially and culturally in the West that may have allowed for the emergence of ‘casual sex’.

Historical moments of particular significance to the emergence of heterosexual casual sex identified in this literature review include: the breakdown of Victorian sexual conventions at the turn of the twentieth century; the supposed ambivalence and disruption to sexual arrangements during the early decades of the twentieth century; and the ‘sexualisation of love’ in early to mid-twentieth century (including the role of marriage advice manuals). Such writing set out to ‘sexualise love’ (Seidman, 1991) and, ironically, contributed to the legitimisation of the ‘erotic’ for its own sake (as detached from love). This legitimisation of the erotic is perhaps one of the key turning points in western constructions of sexuality on which the emergence of heterosexual casual sex might be contingent. Aided by new sexological research, by the late 1960s, the uncoupling of sex and love, along with discourses of permissiveness and emphasis on consumerism, positioned ‘sex’ as an avenue for self-fulfilment and self-expression, outside the context of marriage (or longer-term romantic relationship). This legitimisation appears to be central to the discursive formation of contemporary heterosexual ‘casual sex’.

Non-sexual Victorians?

Many historians regarded sexuality as ‘repressed’ and restrained during the Victorian era (1837-1901) – a construction that French philosopher Michel Foucault criticised (Foucault, 1978). His work demonstrated that sexuality was not a repressed sexual ‘instinct’ (a conceptualisation that Freud had popularised in the early twentieth century), but was fluid and culturally bound (Foucault, 1978). From

this perspective, it has become commonplace to position sexuality as not having a fixed 'essence' but as shaped by the many institutions (and knowledge networks) that seek to procure information about its 'nature', at any given moment. Thus, in Victorian times, sexuality was not 'repressed' (prior to twentieth century 'liberation'); rather, 'restrained' was the shape that sexuality took in that period. What we consider sexuality is very much linked to the greater social order and at that time it hinged on the Victorian middle-class who sought to create a sexual body in its own restrained/controlled image (Dean, 1996). During that period, the governing institutions viewed sexuality as needing to be contained, the proper place of sex was deemed to be within marriage, and it was to culminate in reproduction (Dean, 1996; McLaren, 1999; Weeks, 1989). Sex was seen as an important part of the marriage union, but its expression was to be restrained and controlled rather than 'lustful'. Men were typically seen as having a potentially uncontrollable 'primitive' desire for sex, but middle-class men were encouraged to control their urges and practice 'continence' (White, 1993). If they were to engage in sex for non-procreative purposes, it was not to be with their wives, but with lower-class prostitutes. Middle-class women were paradoxically seen as 'passionless', lacking sexual desire (their sexuality was mainly tied to reproduction), as well as needing to be 'protected' from becoming lustful 'fallen' women if their sexuality was 'unleashed' (Gordon, 2002). They were positioned as engaging in "sexual intercourse in order to please their husbands and to conceive children" (Gordon, 2002, p. 58). There was an inherent double standard at the heart of Victorian sexuality: men could 'relieve their primitive desires' by having sex (before and during marriage) with prostitutes (K. White, 1993; Reiss, 1960) and still retain a respectable moral character; women's sexuality was either 'virtuous' or 'depraved', depending on their perceived sexual conduct.

This era is said to have been characterised by a desexualisation of love and sex (Lewis, 1990; Seidman, 1991). Unlike 'modern' marriages, the goal of which is ostensibly to secure personal happiness, sexual fulfilment and companionship (McLaren, 1999), Victorian marriages were arrangements typically aimed at social and economic security,

dictated by religious ideology around reproduction (Dean, 1996; Weeks, 1989). More casual forms of sex in this period potentially include men's sex with prostitutes or married individuals (usually men) who had a 'lover' outside of the marriage relationship. However, these activities do not carry the modern flavour of casual sex. The former is an economic exchange for sex to supposedly satiate men's 'primitive' sexual desire, the latter could include 'affection' as the basis for the sexual relationship, and may have been long-term. Contemporary constructions of casual sex advocate sex for 'pleasure' that is supposedly mutually desired, is not a financial exchange, and is outside the context of a relationship that includes love, romance or an emotional bond.

Becoming 'sexual'

From the Enlightenment period (spanning late seventeenth century to most of the eighteenth century), 'science' had slowly started replacing 'religion' as the legitimate authority on matters related to many aspects of life (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Sex and sexuality were part of this shift. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the first wave of 'sexologists' started writing about the 'nature' and supposed variations in human sexuality. For example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) published *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886/1965) in which he categorised 'pathologies' and 'abnormalities' in human sexuality. Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), a central figure in modern sexology, wrote a seven-volume text, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928), within which he proclaimed the sexual behaviour of men and women as a 'normal' aspect of human development and function, and discussed understanding the 'sexual impulse'. Similarly, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) wrote in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/2000) about sex as a central part of human development (i.e., as present at birth and infancy), defined sexuality as pleasure-focused, connected sexual repression with illness, and encouraged sexual 'release'. This interest in, and categorisation of, sexual acts (including what was deemed sexually 'normal' and sexually 'deviant') itself started to construct a different model of sexuality than that of the

Victorian ideal. Indeed, what we consider 'modern sexuality' is said to date from this period (Dean, 1996). Such works were eventually harnessed to refute a Victorian model of sexuality, which often associated sex with "shame, guilt and sinfulness" (Haste, 1992, p. 61). These works included a critique of sexual suppression and were part of a growing attack on "hierarchy, authoritarianism, and all forms of social repression" (Gordon, 2002, p. 126). In relation to casual sex, Freud's contention that human sexuality was 'pleasure-focused' has seemingly permeated deeply within contemporary constructions of sexuality, as well as casual sex – I return to this point later.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, not only was sexology solidified as a discipline, becoming the authority on sexual matters (Featherstone, 2005) but there was an increase in discussions of sex and sexuality outside professional 'expert' and religious 'moral' discourses (Seidman, 1991). Sex, sexuality, and relationships between men and women became increasingly discussed in the public realm (Seidman, 1991). Such dialogues took place across many media (e.g., newspapers, books, magazines, movies, art), were about a range of topics (e.g., love, marriage, prostitution, venereal disease, homosexuality) and included many different voices (e.g., the clergy, writers, scholars) (Seidman, 1991). By the 1920s, the boundaries for discussions about sex and sexuality had thus shifted significantly (Irvine, 2005; Weeks, 1989). For example, there was an increase in mass-market erotica (White, 1993) and sex was increasingly on display (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997) in print, advertising and movies.

Modernisation (i.e., industrialisation; urbanisation) also influenced shifts in sexual conventions, as a mass production economy, focused on consumption, replaced small businesses and farmers with a 'new middle-class' of 'bureaucrats and managers' (White, 1993). There is documentation of a steady increase in women's participation in paid labour from the 1890s onwards, which meant that the visibility of women in the public realm of 'work' increased (Baxandall & Gordon, 1995). The increased participation in the 'public' sphere also meant that families were no longer as contained within the home as in the past, and young men and women had greater freedoms and independence, particularly in relation to courtship practices.

Urbanisation resulted in new forms of public leisure activities such as going to the cinema, dance halls and cabarets for entertainment. The advent of cinema and advertising saw women's bodies increasingly depicted in mass culture (including in writing) as idealised and alluring (Lake, 1995). These changes produced a 'new woman' and potentially a 'new man' (White, 1993) who broke away from Victorian ideals of womanhood and manhood.

The 'new woman'

The 1920s has been identified as a period of great flux in relation to gender roles (Irvine, 2005). With women relocating to urban centres, taking up employment in the public sphere and living on their own, "women were less content with the exclusivity of wife/mother roles" (Irvine, 2005, p. 15; Filene, 1974). The public visibility of a 'new woman'¹ in this period has been documented by many (e.g., Dean, 1996; Hall, 2000; Haste, 1992; McLaren, 1999; Weeks, 1989) who depict her as typically white, middle-class and heterosexual. She took part in the public sphere by working and engaging in public leisure activities. Although she was seen as 'emancipated' (from chaperonage and heavy Victorian garments), she was not a feminist (unlike the suffragettes of the 1880s). Carolyn Dean (1996) argues that the 'new woman' is often depicted as looking for sexual fulfilment, engaging in sex that was more fleeting (i.e., not aimed at procreation), and was deemed 'promiscuous' by the governing authorities. She was seen as acting (sexually and otherwise) very similar to a man and symbolised a threat to the conventional gender order: a source of anxiety for those wanting to maintain traditional gender/class divisions (Dean, 1996).

Another manifestation of this 'new woman' is what has been referred to as 'charity girls' in the United States (Clement, 2006; Peiss, 1983, 1986, 1989). As far back as the 1890s, there are accounts of young working-class women engaging in 'new' sexual practices called 'treating'. Treating was characterised by exchanging sexual activities

¹ Also referred to as the 'flapper'.

(sometimes sexual intercourse) “for entertainment expenses” such as late night dinners and dance hall admissions (Clement, 2006, p. 1). These encounters were casual in nature and the parameters were typically controlled by the woman (Peiss, 1986, 1989).

Although charity girls worked for a wage, they often lived in crowded conditions or in poverty. They had little money, but wanted the opportunity to participate in the vibrant nightlife of dance halls, movie palaces, and theatres (Clement, 2006). To gain access to these, sex was used in a ‘transactional’ (Dunkle et al., 2007) manner where “women exchanged sexual favours in the form of kissing, fondling, and, at times, intercourse for dinner and the night’s expenses” (Clement, 2006, p. 45). This behaviour was deemed objectionable by the middle-class and governing institutions (e.g., Clement documents how some women were placed in delinquency shelters for ‘treating’). Clement maintains that treating “emerged from the tension between girls desire to participate in commercial amusements and the working-class condemnation of prostitution” (2006, p. 45). She argues that treating, existing on a continuum between courtship and prostitution, changed the nature of courtship and influenced contemporary constructions of ‘dating’.

Others have documented similar histories of a group of women referred to as ‘amateur prostitutes’ in the British context (Haste, 1992; Weeks, 1989). From the onset of World War II (WWII) this term was used to refer to working-class women who engaged in activities that were deemed morally ‘loose’ by wider society (Haste, 1992). Like charity girls, these women used sex (or sexual acts) as a ‘commodity’ of value that was exchanged, but not strictly in monetary terms. Haste cites a 1933 study that defined these ‘amateur prostitutes’ as girls that a man knows or meets and:

Although he usually pays for his satisfaction, the payment takes the form of a gift, or a dinner, or a motor run; the episode appears less commercial and suggests more of passion and spontaneity than a similar episode with a professional prostitute... In addition... there may well be no payment whatever, and the whole episode may be mutually desired and

mutually satisfactory (Hall, 1933, as cited in Haste, 1992, pp. 134-135).

Such practices not only echo many aspects of modern forms of dating, but resemble modern casual sexual encounters, particularly as it was typical for the encounters to be 'one-off'. 'Charity girls' and 'amateur prostitutes' are argued to signal a shift in the sexual mores of the working-class in the early decades of the twentieth century, in The United States and Britain. By distinguishing themselves from 'real' prostitutes who exchanged money for sex, these women used treating instrumentally to gain access to the entertainment offered in cities: "profoundly shaped by women's economic inequality... courtship, treating, and prostitution – reflected the negotiations in which women and men engaged over the economic and social value of sex" (Clement, 2006, p.4). Treating (exchanging sexual activities for gifts or entertainment expenses) can be seen – within a contemporary analysis – as not all that different to prostitution in the form of 'escort' services (providing company/sex for cash payment), but was socially constituted quite differently at the time. Treating appears to be more fluid in its definition and practice, involved a less formal system of sexual exchange for individual social gain, and seemingly allowed economically challenged women to have access to increased social opportunities by somewhat more acceptable means.

Treating had a profound influence on courtship practices, leading to a dating culture in the 1920s as well as a decline in prostitution (Clement, 2006). During the 1920s–1940s, pre-marital 'sex' became more visibly practiced. Although the middle-class still expected virginity until marriage, it became more acceptable for working-class women to have intercourse with their fiancé, while engaged.

The 'new man'

The emergence of a 'new woman' was accompanied by the emergence of a 'new man' in the early twentieth century, although much less academic attention has been paid to him. Kevin White (1993) discusses this emergence around male heterosexuality in the United States. He argues that Victorian masculinity stressed the cultivation of

moral 'character', which prioritised masculine 'achievement' (an independent righteous man), Christian gentlemanliness (a generous and empathic man), and emphasised "honour, reputation and integrity" (White, 1993, p. 3). The social and economic shifts in early twentieth century assisted in producing a different masculine ideology. There was a new found emphasis on masculine 'sex appeal' and men's youth and good looks (e.g., in advertising). Discussions of "improving men's sexual technique" grew, and by the 1920s prominence started to be placed on male sexual potency (White, 1993, p. 3). 'Primitiveness' was emphasised over 'gentlemanliness' and sexual expression over sexual containment (White, 1993). Despite women's shifting positions, men were still seen as, and expected to be, more sexual and sexually dominant than women, and expected to take the lead in dating practices. These modern forms of manliness were characterised by the shift from 'character' to 'personality', sex appeal and the "performing self" (White, 1993, p. 180), a representation that is still prevalent in dominant ideologies of masculinity.

Another manifestation of this 'new man' has been documented by Barry Reay in the history of the 'male hustler' in New York. Similar to charity girls and amateur prostitutes, hustlers were working-class men who traded sex for money (or food/shelter). They were usually young men, with muscular physique, who "paraded their masculinity", and "were paid for sex with (nearly always) men" (Reay, 2010, p. 4). Some worked in brothels or "peg houses" (Reay, 2010, p. 6) but most worked in bars and on the streets. Although hustling was widespread, it was different to professional prostitution. Driven by poverty, hustling was a means by which some young men made money in times of need, or to supplement their other earnings; it was not their main source of income. Hustling was dissimilar to courting, but the money earned was often put towards entertainment expenses or dates with women. What is particularly interesting about hustlers is that although they were engaged in sex acts with other (often homosexual) men, hustlers themselves were identified as heterosexuals (and many were married to, or went on to marry, women). In more contemporary times, sex acts have often defined one's sexual 'identity' in an uncomplicated way. Through his exploration of the New York hustler,

Reay demonstrates how sex acts have not always been linked to rigid categories of sexual identity:

The hustler – who was part of the sexual regime known as ‘trade’ – sexually traversed homosexuality and heterosexuality, continually negotiating the boundaries of pleasure and self through acts that refuse easy attributions of identity. (Reay, 2010, p. 22).

In this period there was, in a sense, a form of acceptable sexual fluidity (Diamond, 2008) where sexual acts had transactional and not sexual identity functions in relation to masculinity for some working-class (often non-white) men. Like treating, although hustling can certainly fall into the category of more causal forms of sex, its process seems dissimilar to contemporary constructions of casual sex, where the supposed goal is a (mutually desired) sexual exchange and no one is positioned as providing a sexual ‘service’ in exchange for money or upkeep.

Shifting standards

Historical analysis indicates there were considerable changes in the western sexual landscape during the early decades of the twentieth century. The visibility of the new woman and the new man were indicative of some rearrangements within heterosexual sexuality and heterosexual sociality and sexual relating. However, although there were some shifts in what was considered sexually ‘acceptable’ or sexually ‘promiscuous’, traditional sexual morality was still increasingly at odds with what people were seemingly doing sexually (Irvine, 2005). For example, more casual forms of sex were still censured (Clement, 2006) and charity girls, amateur prostitutes as well as the ‘new women’ were generally seen as a social problem. Sexuality (particularly young women’s) continued to trigger societal anxiety in this period (Daley, 1999; Dewson, 2004). This fear of ‘falling standards’ of sexual behaviour was evident in New Zealand, as well as in Britain and the United States. The ‘new woman’ “was demonized as a threat to the established order” (Griffiths, 2008, p. 620), both in New Zealand and abroad.

Whilst the 'roaring twenties' are famous for their liberalising attitudes towards sexuality (including female sexuality) and some historians refer to this period as revolutionary in relation to sex (e.g., Dean, 1996), many taboos on sex, particularly in relation to women, still remained (Hall, 2000). For example, almost all social policy during the interwar period, in Britain and the United States was an effort to reverse the perceived decline in heterosexual and family responsibility and "both men's and women's inability to be monogamous, their desire to remain childless, and their glorification of personal freedom" (Dean, 1996, p. 47).

Sexualising 'married love'

Such societal anxiety culminated in a backlash against these shifts in courtship and dating practices. Significant institutional emphasis was put on channelling heterosexuality (and male and female sexual desire) back into monogamy, marriage and ultimately the 'nuclear' family. American sociologist Steven Seidman (1992) notes that part of this backlash saw the eroticisation of sex in marriage. He argues that the marriage advice manuals of that time tried to reinstate marriage as the appropriate setting for having sex. For example, Mary Stopes (a British paleobotanist), published the hugely successful book *Married Love* in 1920 in which there was an assertion of women's sexuality and the eroticisation of marriage (Haste, 1992). The burgeoning number of marriage manuals published from the 1920s-1940s all echoed the same rhetoric. For example, Edward Griffith (a British medical doctor) who wrote *Modern Marriage* (1934), proclaimed sex as central to marriage and other 'distractions' (e.g., masturbation, pre-marital sex) as nothing compared to sex in the monogamous union (Haste, 1992). In *Ideal Marriage* (1928), Theodor Van de Velde, (a Dutch physician and gynaecologist) gave detailed advice on "techniques of arousal" (Haste, 1992, p. 79), before concluding that sex was the 'foundation' of marriage. Eustace Chesser, (a British physician) stated in *Love without Fear*, that sex was both the "foundation and motive power of marriage" (Chesser, 1947, p. 20) and Kenneth Walker (a British physician who wrote numerous sex/

marriage manuals, Lewis, 1990), asserted that “troubled marriages” overwhelmingly cited problems with sex (Walker, 1940, p. 82).

These sex manuals gave much explicit information on the techniques of ‘married love’ (Lewis, 1990). Not only was information provided about birth control, but great emphasis was placed on the development of erotic technique and sexual fulfilment within marriage, including women’s pleasure (Connell & Hunt, 2006). Sexual attraction started to become the basis for selecting a marriage partner and sensuality became “legitimated as a vehicle of love” (Seidman, 1991, p. 8). As well as emphasising the importance of sexual fulfilment for both husband and wife for a ‘good’ marriage, there was a tacit acceptance in these works that both men and women had a ‘desire’ for sex (something quite different to the Victorian view of women’s ‘passionless’ sexuality) and that the appropriate site for its ‘expression’ was within marriage.

This emphasis on love and sex (in marriage) allowed ‘love’ to be used in itself as a rationale for sex. For example, an early manifestation of this ‘sexualisation of love’ that was not contingent on marriage can be seen in the work of Ettie Rout (1922), who was a campaigner for sexual safety and sexual health information during and after WWI. In her book *Safe Marriage*, Rout defines chastity as “happy healthy sexual intercourse between a man and a women who love one another: and unchastity is sexual intercourse between a man and a women who do not love one another” (p. 30). Rout’s work also promoted the sexualisation of love: sex and love were intimately linked but did not necessitate marriage. The severing of marriage from sex/love could be seen as what arguably lead to erotic pursuits alone becoming justifiable under the guise of self-expression and pleasure, outside the context of marriage or love.

Anxieties about the potential changing gender order resulted in political and professional attempts to channel sexual desire into marriage and promote ‘the family’ and monogamous heterosexual love as an “emotional fortress” (Dean, 1996, p. 50), resulting in the sexualisation of love and the legitimation of eroticism that “did not [yet] challenge a heterosexual, marital and romantic norm” (Seidman, 1991, p. 90).

'Casualties' of war

The social disruption caused by WWI and WWII created opportunities for more casual sexual encounters, both for soldiers involved in combat and the women left behind in western countries that were at war. Although men had always had more freedom to engage in casual forms of sex (e.g. in the form of frequenting prostitutes) prior to WWI, during the wars (particularly WWII), and in the interwar period, casual liaisons between men and women who were not prostitutes increased, as did their public visibility (Clement, 2006). For example, Clement (2006) provides historical documentation from 1917 of soldiers hugging and kissing charity girls in public as well as charity girls who were caught having intercourse in public places. Pick-ups were increasingly seen as problematic by governing institutions. This is evidenced by social hygiene campaigns during both wars, which sought to curb the spread of venereal disease (Clement, 2006; Weeks, 1989). The focus of such campaigns not only included cautioning soldiers against sex with prostitutes but, by WWII, also made explicit reference to avoiding 'pick-ups' and sex with charity girls.

WWII is argued to have accelerated the flux in gender relations already in place during the early decades of the twentieth century by propelling women even more dramatically out of traditional roles (Haste, 1992; Irvine, 2005). Women continued to gain increased financial and familial independence through their participation in paid work (in taking 'the place' of men who were at war) as well as their participation in caring for the injured. However, whilst WWII created more opportunities for women to participate in the public domain, it did not seem to dramatically change women's social positioning and the expectations of women generally stayed the same (Summerfield & Crockett, 1992). Women's greater independence and (any) visible sexuality continued to produce institutional anxieties about the gender order and the survival of the nuclear family (Dean, 1996; Irvine, 2005).

Perhaps not surprisingly then, once WWII ended, there was a call for the restoration of traditional family life and women were encouraged to return to the domestic sphere (Weeks, 1989). Idealised images,

which Janice Irvine (2005) aptly calls heterosexual 'propaganda', attempted to construct domesticity and care for home and children as women's first and foremost priority. The subsequent post-WWII 'baby boom' in many western countries has been attributed to such ideological constructions. For example, the birth rate rose sharply between 1941–1961 in New Zealand (Khawaja & Dunstan, 2000), and 1941–1964 in the United States (Irvine, 2005), and most mothers generally stayed at home to look after their families. Thus efforts to reinstate the traditional heterosexual domestic condition were in some ways successful. The proper place of sex remained morally aligned with marriage and pre-marital sex was still unacceptable, particularly for middle-class women (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997), demonstrating a swing against 'casual' forms of sex. If non-marital sex did occur, it was supposed to be with the person that one was going to marry. However, the gap between public standards and private practice continued to increase (Haste, 1992). A gendered double standard became pronounced, taking the shape of young men being encouraged to 'hunger for sex' and women being held to a high moral code and urged to refuse sex and "demand a ring" (Allyn, 2000, p. 14). Women were vehemently gossiped about if thought to be having sex outside of marriage or with someone to whom they were not engaged (Allyn, 2000). Meanwhile, men were not scrutinised to nearly the same degree for their casual or promiscuous behaviour. It was still not socially acceptable for a 'good' woman to be openly sexual, outside of marriage. Amidst this cultural backdrop Alfred Kinsey published his first study of human sexuality.

Legitimising sex/ology

Alfred Kinsey's interest in studying sexuality began in the mid-1930s. While teaching a marriage course at the University of Indiana, he noticed his students' ignorance in relation to sex and the scarcity of 'sound' scientific literature on the subject. He soon assembled a team of researchers and started to collect his own data, which resulted in interviews with 8,603 men and 7,789 women. Others had undertaken sex research before him, but none reached the magnitude or visibility

of his project (Irvine, 2005). Kinsey's findings indicated that there was much more 'sex' going on than was perceived morally permissible in the United States (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). About 80% of men reported 'casual' forms of sexual intercourse before and outside marriage and Kinsey et al. (1948) reported there were "quite a few individuals... who find more interest in the pursuit and conquest [of sex], and in a variety of partners, than they do in developing long-time relations with a single girl" (p. 557). In addition, roughly 50% of the women also reported engaging in sex before marriage. Although "a considerable portion... [was] in the year or two immediately preceding marriage with the women's fiancés" (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 286), about 40% of this pre-marital sex was not confined to the person the woman intended to marry. Hence, more casual forms of sex, or at least sex outside of relationships that were to culminate in wedlock, were far more common than was expected.

Apart from his empirical orientation, what set Kinsey apart from the marriage guidance writers and previous sexologists was that he did not see any sexual act as inherently immoral or pathological. He stated that no sex act in itself was 'wrong' and that sexual behaviour is 'restricted' by the moral codes of society. This contention is at the heart of permissive discourses about sex and sexuality, which became prevalent in the late 1960s. It subtly promotes the idea that sex needs to be 'liberated' from the shackles of morality and society (and according to Kinsey, preferably through objective non-moralising 'scientific' research).

This post-war period was marked by contradictory discourses and practices in relation to sex and sexuality. On the one hand, it was ostensibly grounded in a return to conservatism, traditional gender roles and family-orientated values. On the other, men and women were visibly despondent with their prescribed gender roles and increasingly interested in exploring a wider range of sexual practices (Irvine, 2005). Although the moral prescriptions of the time called for chastity, at least for women, this was not necessarily mirrored in people's actual lives. Helen Gurley Brown argued in *Sex and The Single Girl* (1962) that (white, middle-class) American women in the

1940s/1950s who were publically chaste and moral were actually engaging in non-marital sex privately. As Irvine (2005) noted, “sexuality and gender mores of the period... reveal disparities between ideology and behaviour, public discourse and private expression” (p. 24). This was something of a precursor to changes that occurred during the ‘permissive turn’ of the 1960s.

Sex for sale

Immense economic prosperity followed WWII in many western countries, meaning that people, including adolescents, had (more) money at their disposal. There was an increased emphasis on ‘consumerism’, an ideology and practice that had been growing since the early decades of the twentieth century. This included the proliferation of advertising ‘selling’ products to the masses as well as ‘creating’ desire for a myriad of mass-produced goods (Crisp, 1987; Pollay, 1986). At this post-WWII juncture, there was an increase in sexual imagery (e.g., in movies and advertising), and society started to become more visibly ‘sexualised’, particularly in the portrayal of women. Origins of this increase in sexual imagery can be traced to a “cultural rebellion against Victorianism” (Seidman, 1991, p. 124) and the consumerism of early twentieth century (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Weeks, 1985). However, in this post-WWII period, multiple new discourses of ‘sex’ also became prevalent in mainstream western culture (e.g., sex for procreation, sex as part of love, and sex for pleasure) and the decoupling of sex from love and romance gained greater momentum. Sex started to become even more strongly linked to personal fulfilment and happiness and as detached from reproduction (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997). Conduct related to sex and sexuality were increasingly ‘individualised’ and ‘choice’ emerged as framework in relation to sex.

There was a commercialisation of (individual) sexuality, and ‘sex’ not only started being used more intentionally and explicitly to sell products, but itself became a big seller:

Spurred by capitalism’s search for an expanded domestic market, and legitimated by hedonistic and expressive ideologies, sex was

not only routinely used to sell commodities... but it created a new market: the sex industry. (Seidman, pp. 123-124).

Ironically, as D'emilio and Freedman (1997) argue, the first 'liberalist' challenge to the marriage-orientated ethic did not come from political or cultural radicals, "but from entrepreneurs who extended the logic of consumer capitalism to the realm of sex" (p. 302). Sex was not only used to sell products, but itself became a product that could be sold. For example, young entrepreneurs, such as Hugh Hefner, saw an opportunity for selling sex in the 1950s and went on to publish the hugely popular *Playboy* magazine in 1953². Publications such as this brought sex into the public domain as worthwhile commercial ventures and had a huge impact on the construction of sexuality within the West. These changes to the landscape of sexuality ultimately influenced the 'legitimate' avenues that men and women could pursue and engage in sex.

The culmination of many social forces from the early twentieth century increased visibility and discussion of sex and sexuality: the work of modern sexologists; the upheaval of two world wars; the loosening of gender roles; and the work of marriage and sex manual writers. Although casual or one-off forms of sex have been documented in this era, they were not necessarily socially accepted as legitimate heterosexual pursuits. It was not until the permissive turn in the 1960s that these changes, combined with market forces and a greater emphasis on consumerism, produced a cultural climate that was ripe for the cultivation of permissive ideals, and ultimately the ideological justification for contemporary casual sex.

The 'permissive' turn

The liberalist ideology that took root (sexually and otherwise) in the 1920s and 1930s culminated in widespread 'permissiveness' by the 1960s (Collins, 2007). This shift towards liberalisation is documented

² Although it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that pornography went mass market (Herzog, 2006).

as being influenced by the marketing of sex, new demographic patterns, and the political mobilisation of women and lesbian/gay individuals for equality (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997). The “long post-war boom and the generalisation of economic affluence” was also a key factor in this liberalising trend (Weeks, 1989, p. 249). The discourse of sexual liberation in the permissive era advocated sexual pluralism, sexual freedom, dissolving sexual and emotional inhibitions, discarding traditional and moralistic ‘hang-ups’ related to sex, and replacing it all with a *raison d'être* of sex based on the pursuit of pleasure, self-realisation and personal fulfilment (Haste, 1992). For example, in 1967 Tom McGarth (the Editor of *IT*, an underground British newspaper) defined permissiveness as a condition where “the individual should be free from hindrances by external law or internal guilt in his [sic] pursuit of pleasure so long as he [sic] does not impinge on others” (Collins, 2007, p. 2). Such a contention could be theorised as central to the discursive legitimisation for contemporary casual sex and forms of sex detached from a longer-term relationship.

During the ‘swinging sixties’ casual forms of sex started to become more culturally visible and socially acceptable. For example, the emergence of a ‘single’s culture’ in this period saw the arrival of singles bars where patrons could meet and ‘pick-up’ a sex partner on any given evening. This cultural practice seemed different to the treating and hustling of earlier decades: women and men were not exchanging sexual activities for access to leisure venues, dinners or other gifts, but seemingly for sex *alone*. It also appeared to be different to ‘dating’ practices as the goal was not (always) to find a long-term romantic partner, but the pursuit of (immediate/short-term) sexual pleasure. This ‘singles culture’ was also differently classed and raced to the casual sexual practices in previous decades. Treating involved working-class women (Clement, 2006) and hustling often involved non-white men who were also working-class or financially needy (Reay, 2010). During the permissive era, engaging in casual forms of sex started to include practitioners who were white and middle-class, shifting the parameters of practice when it came to casual sex.

Other social changes taking place in western countries in the 1960s and 1970s influenced permissiveness: high employment rates (with

more women in paid labour and more jobs available); an increase in cohabitation (albeit at different rates throughout western countries); and a rejection of marriage as the *only* way to have a sex/love relationship (Hawkes, 2004). For example, research comparing United States university samples in 1958 and 1968 supported the idea that being 'engaged' had become a less vital condition in (at least the reporting of) pre-marital coitus, and that coitus in a 'dating' relationship was increasing (Bell & Chaskes, 1970). There was also a decline in marriage, delaying of marriage, decline in marital fertility, a normalisation of sexual 'experimentation' and a diversification of sexual repertoires within relationships (Hall, 2000; Hawkes, 2004).

Other cultural movements could also be seen as part of the shift in sexual mores. For example, hippies, cultural radicals and anti-capitalists were all part of the 1960s cultural upheaval. The 'free love' ideology of hippies proposed that people *should* have sex whenever they want, if it feels good³. Youth who became adults in the late 1950s tended to be financially better off than their parents had been at the same age, and sought self-fulfilment beyond the roles of their parents (Seidman, 1991). Sex slowly started to mean an expression of personal autonomy and freedom and was used as a vehicle for young people to claim liberation from parental and societal constraints (Hawkes, 2004). Many western countries made legislative changes that mirrored these shifting social mores (e.g., legalisation allowing abortion⁴, decriminalising of homosexuality⁵, amendments to divorce laws making divorce easier) and made family planning services more widely available (Hawkes, 2004; Weeks, 1989). These sexual shifts were also aided by pharmaceutical developments in efficient contraception (Gavey, 2005). 'The pill' (which was first released in the United States in 1960, and in New Zealand in 1961)

³ This rhetoric ignores that 'free love' and sex was riskier for women because of difficulties in obtaining birth control for single women (Hawkes, 2004).

⁴ This was 1967 in the United Kingdom (with the exception of Northern Ireland); 1973 in the United States; 1977 in New Zealand; and between the late 1960s and early 1970s in the various states of Australia.

⁵ Not until mid-1980s in New Zealand.

allowed women autonomy when it came to controlling their fertility and, in principle, offered them the “freedom to fuck” like a man (Hawkes, 2004, p. 162). However, Claims about the pill need to be contextualised: its use was initially intended for ‘family planning’ purposes (containing family size) and for use by married (or at least engaged) women. Hence, the pill did not necessarily ‘release women from the tyranny of boundless fertility’ (Weeks, 1989, p. 260).

It was not until 1967, that the pill was legally available to single women in Britain and this was later in the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Hawkes, 2004). Even after this access, single women who wanted the pill were still at risk of moral judgement or refusal by doctors (Hawkes, 2004; Weeks, 1989).

The pill itself did not transform women into unconstrained ‘sexual agents’ overnight and came with a daily regime and burden of other side effects (Cook, 2005). Unwanted pregnancies remained a source of concern and potential shame for women (Hawkes, 2004). However, notably it was in this period that women slowly started to be able to avoid the stigma of acting sexually autonomously; avoiding pregnancy was part of this. The publication of books such as *Sex and The Single Girl* (1962) by Helen Gurley Brown (who went on to edit U.S. *Cosmopolitan* magazine) openly and positively represented sex outside of marriage (and sex for ‘pleasure’). Gender expectations also shifted somewhat. For example, being a good woman started to include being a ‘skilful lover’ (Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, & Rotkirch, 2002) who could give pleasure to men.

The work of sexologists of the time can also be seen to aid sexual permissiveness. Masters and Johnson’s popular book *Human Sexual Response* (1966) emphasised women’s capacity for sexual pleasure and positioned women’s sexual ‘desire’ as the equivalent of men’s. While they still privileged coitus, Masters and Johnson placed the site of pleasure for women as (back) on the clitoris. Unlike Kinsey, Masters and Johnson were deeply conservative, with their work and writing geared towards the married couple (Robinson, 1976). However, their work “represented a quantum leap in the public dissemination of knowledge about the human body and the physiological facts of sexual

functioning” (Irvine, 2005, p. 46). Even if their work was critiqued for its strictly biomedical orientation and for approaching sex in a dry empirical manner, it undoubtedly had a huge influence in the (shifting) constructions of male and female sexuality in the permissive era (Irvine, 2005).

By the late 1960s a humanistic branch of sexology had developed that radically departed from the scientific approach of Masters and Johnson (Irvine, 2005). The humanist model focused on promoting the enhancement of sexual fulfilment and of sexual desire. With a slogan “we believe that it is time to say “yes” to sex” (McGrady, 1972, p. 344), this group was strongly liberal and individualistic, “espousing a do-your-own-thing sexuality” (Irvine, 2005, p. 76). They were part of the National Sex Forum (NSF)⁶, whose statement below not only draws on permissive discourses in describing humanist sexology, but is a good example of the individualisation of choices around sex/sexuality that became prevalent in that period:

Sexuality is the most individualistic part of a person's life. It is up to each individual to determine and then to assume responsibility for her or his own sexuality. All the varying modes of expression are available to everyone. As long as people know what they are doing, feel good about it, and don't harm others, anything goes. (cited in Irvine 2005, p. 76).

This permissive approach and individualising ethic can be seen as fundamental to the development of contemporary forms of casual sex and casual pursuits being positioned as an *individual's* choice.

Social scientists exploring the prevalence and incidence of pre-marital sexual behaviour and attitudes reported a marked increase in pre-marital sex during the 1960s and 1970s (Clayton & Bokemeier, 1980). For example, research involving university students in the United States in 1965 and 1970, reported that 65% of men had pre-marital intercourse; by 1975 this had increased to 74%. Women's reported rates rose more dramatically: 29% in 1965; 37% in 1970;

⁶ The National Sex Forum was established in San Francisco in 1967 as a sex research institution (it later became the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality).

and 57% in 1975 (King, Balswick, & Robinson, 1977). Researchers also looked specifically at 'permissiveness' in relation to pre-marital sex (Mirande & Hammer, 1974) and casual sex (Chess, Thomas, & Cameron, 1976). For instance, Lucky and Nass (1969) collected survey data on attitudes and behaviour related to (one-off) non-dating coital encounters from 2,230 university students in five western countries (United States, Canada, England, Germany, and Norway).

They reported that 'one-night' affairs involving coitus ranged between 17%–43% for men and 4%–34% for women. A large gender gap was typical in such research, indicating that men's reported participation in casual sex was higher than women's. There were also cultural variations with more 'casual sex' reported in England (Luckey & Nass, 1969). In general, researchers from that period reported an increase in non-married sexual behaviour such as coitus (that was not with one's fiancé), an increase in number of partners, a decrease in the average age of coitus, and a trend towards more liberal attitudes towards sex before marriage (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Hopkins, 1977; King et al., 1977; Wilson, 1975).

Representations and talk around sexuality in wider western culture were also refashioned during the permissive era in ways that were dramatically different than that of previous years. Sex became increasingly linked to humour and recreation in movies and television programmes; erotic pleasure was represented and validated (e.g., the production 'Hair') (Hawkes, 2004). Increasingly, eroticism was depicted as a vehicle for self-expression and pleasure (Seidman, 1992). Advertising became more sexually explicit, and sex was increasingly tied to consumption (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997). There was a steady rise in pornographic production and consumption (both print and film) along with the relaxing of censorship laws (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Weeks, 1989). Representations of women became increasingly reductive and women were explicitly depicted in a sexually objectified manner during the 1970s.

Freud's (1905/2000) contention that human sexuality is pleasure-focused seemingly permeated deeply during this period, as sex became about 'sexual pleasure'. This 'pleasure imperative' is evident

in one of the archetypal 1970s sex manuals, *The Joy of Sex*, written by self-proclaimed sexual 'liberationist' Alex Comfort (Haste, 1992; Irvine, 2005). This book, while geared to the couple, "represented sex as... recreation[al], pleasurable and playful, and almost completely dissociated from reproduction" (Hall, 2000, p. 184). Along with this focus on pleasure, there was great emphasis placed on sexual technique that required practice, experience and 'training' (Connell & Hunt, 2006). There was an ideological shift in sex manuals of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Comfort, 1970, 1977; J, 1969; Reuben, 1969) from a 'moral' one to a 'contextual' one (Seidman, 1989). They affirmed sex as having multiple meanings and no sexual 'act' was deemed as inherently wrong, as long as the sexual exchange involved mutual consent and negotiation⁷. The emphasis on sexual pluralism, under the guise of sexual expression and fulfilment, meant anything could go, as long no one was harmed. Not only were these manuals sexual 'liberationist' in their ethic, they started to bolster sex as the *primary* domain for seeking personal pleasure (Seidman, 1989).

For the first time, sex manuals aimed at single women appeared (e.g., *The Sensuous Woman*, 1969; *The Single Woman's Sex Book*, 1976), giving advice on how to 'discover' one's sexuality and give and get 'good sex'. Similarly, women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* not only provided 'tips' on great sex, but also started to teach women how to transform themselves into objects of (sexual) desire for men (McMahon, 1990). The content shifted to include an emphasis on women's sexual technique. For example, in *Cosmopolitan* articles included titles such as: 'are you a good lover?' (February 1970); 'be the best lover in your block' (February 1979); 'finding out his turn-ons and make sure he knows yours' (July 1979). These magazines and sex manuals (mostly from the United States) assumed that single women were engaging in non-marital sex and taught them how to achieve orgasmic pleasure in that context. Unlike preceding decades, this advice was free from any moralising about disease or promiscuity, and contributed to the emergence of a 'leisure sex' discourse (Hawkes,

⁷ Whilst ignoring broader gender/power inequalities (let alone class, race and ethnic ones) between men and women that limit such an egalitarian approach.

1996). 'Leisure sex' is intimately tied to, and often referenced in relation to, casual sex and these texts were part of the emergence and solidification of casual sex as a more socially acceptable pursuit for women.

The 'permissive turn' of the 1960s "has undoubtedly had an enormous influence on heterosexual practice" (Gavey, 2005, p. 162). The shift towards permissiveness and the idea that sex was not a matter of strict public or moral regulation, but a right of individual choice, allowed such sexualised depictions and 'permissive' discussions to occur, as well as more socially visible casual sex. Heterosexuals were expected to be 'sexual' and could 'choose' what form this sexuality took. However, although the sixties and seventies have been referred to as the 'permissive era', I do not want to suggest a (linear) progression from 'restricted' sexuality to 'liberal' sexuality. Rather we can see the evolution of permissiveness as a proliferation of discourses about sex where sex took on multiple meanings. Foucault (1978) identified a similar process in the nineteenth century. Although in that period there had been a proliferation of discourses regarding the 'dangers' of sex, in the 1960s and 1970s (and beyond) there was much talk about sex as recreational, and as an indulgent pleasure (Hawkes, 2004). People often assume a huge tidal wave of change in the 1960s rocked social mores regarding sex (and gender) forever. However, concurrent with the permissive turn, traditional sexual and gendered ideals were, and still *are*, prevalent (Herzog, 2006).

Critique of the permissive turn

[S]exual revolution became a licence for male promiscuity and female accessibility. (Snitow, Stansell, & Thompson, 1983, p. 20)

The notion of 'sexual liberation', which sought to challenge the institution of marriage and shift the function of sex away from being solely about procreation, potentially offered women more autonomy and control when it came to sex (Gavey, 2005). However, the permissive turn had complex implications. Feminists have argued that the supposed 'sexual revolution' was a 'let down', the sexuality that

was 'liberated' was 'male', and the sex was coital, and phallogentric (Hawkes, 2004; Jeffreys, 1990). The second-wave feminist movement engaged critically with the male-defined notion of 'sexual liberation', the objectification of women and the type of sex that was occurring (Koedt, 1972). It was argued that permissive discourses ultimately allowed men greater access to women's bodies and compromised women's ability to say 'no' to sex (e.g., Jeffreys, 1990; Snitow et al., 1983). This ability to say 'no', something that had been gained for women by the suffragettes of first-wave feminism (Hall, 2000) was in jeopardy, as woman who refused sex in the permissive era risked being deemed 'unliberated' or prudish (Jackson & Scott, 1996). Hence, the risks of sex for women shifted from 'physical' (e.g., pregnancy) or 'moral' ones, to include the realm of *identity*.

Although it was more acceptable for women to have greater sexual 'freedom' during the permissive era, these freedoms were within a limited framework (Gavey, 2005). As Gavey (2005) notes, the "libertarian ethic of sex in the new permissive era relied on the assumption of autonomous rational actors unconstrained by power differences when making choices about their sexual arrangements" (p. 108). Angus McLaren (1999) has also aptly questioned "[h]ow could it be asserted that women, who were still lacking power outside the bedroom, had suddenly become the equals of men once within it?" (p. 223). The supposed gender-neutrality of permissiveness was undermined by continued gender inequality and a persistent sexual double standard (Gavey, 2005). For example, Beatrix Campbell (1980) argued that although permissiveness 'permitted sex for women too', it did not "defend women against the differential effects of permissiveness on men and women" (p. 1-2). Pregnancy was still a risk that mainly effected women, and societal standards judged women's sexuality differently to that of men's. She argues that:

[Permissiveness] was primarily a revolt of young men. It was about the affirmation of young men's sexuality and promiscuity; it was indiscriminate, and their sexual object was indeterminate (so long as she was a woman). (Campbell, 1980, pp. 1-2).

Permissiveness and sexual liberation did not occur outside patriarchal power relations, hence its shape and effects were increasingly part of a feminist critique (Campbell, 1980). As Gavey (2005) has argued, within a broader cultural context of systemic inequality “women were still objectified second-class citizens within the new liberatory rhetoric” (p. 106). Rather than a huge disruption to sexual relating, post-‘sexual revolution’, normative and gendered patterns of sexuality have certainly continued.

Legitimizing casual sex

The permissive era saw the birth of ‘casual sex’ as a more acceptable cultural category; it gave it a ‘name’, visibility and legitimacy. Although casual forms of sex may have happened before, they did not occur under the guise of a permissive sexual manifesto of sex-for-pleasure and the consumerist ideology of having-what-you-want, when-you-want-it that allowed for the emergence of this particular type of sex. To take print news media as an example, the term ‘casual sex’ was in circulation as early as 1934 (e.g., Anonymous, 1934), although ‘casual sex’ was scarcely cited before the 1950s. References to this phrase slowly increased until the 1960s where its citation became greatly accelerated (e.g., Armstrong, 1966; Quillen, 1940; Russin, 1963; Stinson, 1961; Wall, 1966; Webb, 1958). From the mid-1960s onwards, discussion about casual sex increased greatly, particularly in relation to the depiction of casual sex within literature (Display advert., 1962; Vaughan, 1979; Wall, 1966), films (Anhalt, 1967; Davies, 1978) and reports of its ‘prevalence’ (Anonymous, 1969; Leo, 1968; Maison, 1969). Casual sex was represented as occurring between single (Anonymous, 1977; Display advert., 1962) or divorced people (Fulham, 1979). It was deemed acceptable by some (Anonymous, 1977; Garter, 1972; Hamilton, 1974), but not others (Anonymous, 1966; Armstrong, 1966; Browne, 1973; Stott, 1973)⁸. Even if some narratives were ‘cautionary tales’ (Anonymous, 1975; Keenan, 1971; Stott, 1973), by the 1970s casual sex was solidified as

⁸ Casual sex was not only discussed more in the 1970s, but also depicted in a more acceptable or at least neutral fashion.

part of the popular cultural landscape within the West (Anonymous, 1970; Brothers, 1975; Social Services Correspondent, 1978). As social science literature also started to document and explore shifts towards permissiveness as well as 'casual sex', casual sex became 'established' and visible in a way it not before in the twentieth century West. It was now a legitimate part of the spectrum of western heterosexuality, and individuals could ostensibly 'choose' to engage in it.

Conclusion

'Casual sex' as a (now) dominant cultural construct, and the practices broadly associated with it, can be theorised as a product of a long history of sexual, social and moral shifts throughout twentieth century western heterosexuality. Based on this extensive literature review I have argued that casual sex potentially started to evolve from the breakdown of Victorian sexual conventions, and was possibly further shaped by the flux created by war and economic and social upheaval during the early decades of the twentieth century. The eroticisation of 'love' by marriage manual writers in the 1920s-1940s also became part of the legitimisation of the 'erotic' for its own sake. Once sexologists started to provide 'scientific' validation of sex (and pleasure) in the 1950s and 1960s, alongside the post-war boom and entrepreneurial interests in 'sex' as a new consumer market, this potentially led to an increased pursuit of sex for sexual pleasure, and a reshaping of sex as a medium for self-expression. However, it was not until the permissive turn that sex outside the contexts of a monogamous, 'loving' or committed relationship seems to become a more socially acceptable option for a variety of heterosexuals. When such forms of sex occurred before the 1960s they were not morally permissible, or constructed under the same permissive ideological rationale. It was from the late 1960s onwards that permissiveness in the form of 'casual sex' permeated heterosexual sex for some. This visibility of casual sex continued, morphing and shifting in the decades to come. What I have argued in this review essay is that casual sex was not the love-child of the permissive era (as often assumed), and most likely has a rich history dating much further back within twentieth century heterosexualities. This current review thus invites further

research to investigate the emergence of contemporary heterosexual casual sex in the twentieth century from an empirical and historical perspective.

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Final peer-reviewed version accepted

19 June 2013

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