

Attitudes Towards Sexual Permissiveness:
Trends, Correlates, and Behavioral Connections

Tom W. Smith

National Opinion Research Center
University of Chicago

June, 1992

Publication Notes: A revised version of this paper was published in *Sexuality Across the Life Course*, edited by Alice S. Rossi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Introduction

According to the conventional wisdom, trends in sexual attitudes and behaviors over the last three decades are captured by a pair of metaphors: America underwent a sexual revolution in the 1960s which prevailed until the counter-revolution of the 1980s.

For example, Time, which had heralded the eruption of the sexual revolution on a cover in 1964, proclaimed on another cover in 1984, "The revolution is over" (Smith, 1990c).

This paper examines 1) recent trends in sexual attitudes towards three types of sexual activity- premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations; 2) how age, cohort, and period effects have shaped trends; 3) what variables influence attitudes on sexual permissiveness in general and permissive towards premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations in particular; 4) how attitudes about sexual behaviors relate to actual sexual behaviors; and 5) when there is conflict between attitudes and behaviors, what is the impact on psychological well-being.

Trends in Attitudes towards Sexual Permissiveness

Trends in Attitudes towards Premarital Sexual Relations

Before the 1970s evidence on trends in attitudes towards premarital sexual relations is quite limited. There are few strictly comparable and representative survey observations, but two broad generalizations seem possible. First, the three short and/or sparse times series prior to 1960 show no evidence of any increase in approval of premarital sexual relations (Table 1A). Second, approval began to rise in the 1960s. While the lack of comparable data makes the timing and magnitude of the upswing uncertain, it appears to have been underway by the middle of the decade and from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s approval increased by about 20-30 percentage points. Evidence of an upswing is also provided by diverse college surveys (usually representing either single schools or just particular classes at one or more schools) which consistently show increased approval of premarital sexual relations during these years (Cannon and Long, 1971; DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Robinson, et al., 1981).

 Table 1 about here

Since 1970 evidence on trends is more abundant (Table 1B). The increase in approval of premarital sexual relations that started in the 1960s continued until the early 1980s, but at a slower rate. The General Social Survey (GSS) time series indicates that the percent saying premarital sexual relations were "not wrong at all" had a significant linear component of 1.0 percentage points per annum from 1972 to 1982. Since 1982 approval of premarital sexual relations has been stable.

This stability in the 1980s is also shown on trends among women 18 to 65 years old from 1982 to 1987 and in Los Angeles Times polls in 1989 and 1990. Similarly on the GSS from 1986 to 1991 approval of sexual relations between teenagers 14-16 years old did not change.

A similar Gallup series shows a 30-33 percentage points gain in approval of premarital sexual relations during the 1969-1985 period. Between 1969 and 1985 there is a significant linear component with approval increasing by 1.6 percentage points per annum. The Gallup item shows no trend between 1985 and 1990, but does show increased disapproval in 1987 which is inconsistent with the GSS series and the other data.

Also of note, opinion on premarital sexual permissiveness tends to be bimodal. On the GSS item responses tend to cluster in the two extreme categories, "always wrong" and "not wrong at all" (Table 1B). The main shift in approval over time is a decline in "always wrong" and an increase in "not wrong at all" with the middle two categories showing little overall change. However, the Los Angeles Times question does not show this pattern. Responses are spread fairly evenly across the first three categories with "sometimes right" the modal category. The two modes shown on the GSS item thus are not polar opposite camps that view premarital sexual relations as always wrong/evil vs. always right/good, but those who think of it as inherently morally wrong vs. those who see it as morally neutral. That is, while about 40% say it is "not wrong at all", only about a quarter of them (9-10% of all adults) believe it is "always right". The other three quarters probably feel that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with premarital sexual relations, but that only in particular circumstances are they right and advisable. The situational nature of approval is also shown by the much lower approval of teenage premarital sex (Table 1B) (See also Reiss, 1967 and Klassen, Williams, and Levitt, 1989).

Trends in Approval of Extramarital Sexual Relations

No trend data are available on approval of extramarital sexual relations prior to the 1973 GSS (Table 2). From 1973 to 1987 there was no change in approval with 72.6% saying that extramarital sexual relations were "always wrong." Then in the late 1980s disapproval increased slightly, averaging a constant 78.9% in 1988-1991. The increase mostly occurred between 1987 and 1988. It is likely that this modest increase in disapproval was in reaction to the AIDS epidemic. Across all years (1973-1991) disapproval

increased at 0.47 percentage points per annum.

 Table 2 about here

Trends in Approval of Homosexual Relations

Since 1973 attitudes regarding homosexual relations also show great stability with a small shift towards disapproval (Table 3). From 1973 to 1985 the percent saying homosexual relations were "always wrong" averaged a constant 73.6%; while in 1987-1991 it was 76.7%. As with the increased disapproval of extra-marital sex, this probably results from the outbreak of AIDS.

While attitudes are heavily concentrated in the extreme "always wrong" category, the overall distribution is bimodal with the other extreme "not wrong at all" forming a secondary peak of 12-15% and usually 10% or less in the two middle categories, "almost always wrong" and "wrong only sometimes".

 Table 3 about here

While attitudes are heavily concentrated in the extreme "always wrong" category, the overall distribution is bimodal with the other extreme "not wrong at all" forming a secondary peak of 12-15% and usually 10% or less in the two middle categories, "almost always wrong" and "wrong only sometimes".

A Gallup series on legalizing homosexual relations between consenting adults shows a more dramatic shift against homosexuality. There was a significant linear component increase in percent opposing the legalization of homosexuality of 1.1 percent points per annum from 1977 to 1991. From 1977 to 1985 about 44% favored legalizing homosexual relations. Approval then dropped sharply in 1986 and averaged 34% from then to 1991. (We ignore the 1989 observation as either an error or outlier.)

The sharper Gallup decline in approval might not show up in the GSS series if the shift occurred mostly among those who thought homosexual relations were always wrong. (Since these questions were not asked together, we can not confirm this.) It might represent a decrease in tolerance of homosexuality; that people who never approved of homosexuality became less willing to allow it to be legal. However, this interpretation is challenged by the fact that a GSS scale on civil liberties for homosexuals actually shows decreasing opposition to civil liberties for homosexuals in 1980s (Table 4). Over the entire period intolerance decreased by -0.43

points and most of the decline happened in 1987-88 (-.06) and 1988-89 (-.20). Moreover, the decline in intolerance was even greater among those who thought that homosexuality was always wrong than among the general population (Table 4). The opposite direction of the Gallup legalization and GSS civil liberties trends may reflect an increased public desire to regulate homosexuality without restricting the non-sexual rights of homosexuals.

 Table 4 about here

Age-Cohort Changes in Attitudes towards Sexual Permissiveness

One of the main mechanisms of social change is cohort turnover, the replacement of earlier birth cohorts by later cohorts that hold different views. Table 5 shows how attitudes toward premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations changed over time within age groups and birth cohorts. For premarital sexual relations the first, third, and last columns show the percent saying premarital sexual relations are "always wrong." By comparing each row of age-groups one can see how attitudes within age-groups changed over time. The second and fourth columns show changes across time within birth cohorts. To compare how attitudes have changed within birth cohorts one compares along the diagonals. For example, among those who were 18-25 in 1974-75 (born between 1949 and 1957) and 26-33 in 1982-83 disapproval increased by 5.2 percentage points.

 Table 5 about here

Although the confounding of age, cohort, and period makes it impossible to definitively untangle the combination of effects that are going on, certain patterns are clear. First, for all three measures the difference between the youngest and oldest age groups are diminishing over time, as seen by the decline in the age group differences in Table 5. For premarital sexual relations it reduces from 51 percentage points to 35 percentage points, for extramarital from 35 to 10, and for homosexual from 35 to 17. For premarital sexual relations the decline comes from an increase in disapproval among the youngest age group (+6.1 percentage points from the 1970s to the 1990s) and a decrease in disapproval among the oldest age group (-9.6 from the 1970s to the 1990s). For extramarital and homosexual relations the reduced difference across age groups comes almost entirely from rising disapproval among the youngest age

groups (+21 percentage points for extramarital and +17 for homosexual).

We believe this represents a narrowing of a generational gap that had been opening up prior to the 1970s. While alternative explanations such as a decreasing age effect due to either changes in biological or life cycle factors would also fit the data, we believe a cohort difference followed by an anti-permissive period shift is the most plausible. First, evidence from Klassen and his colleagues (Klassen, Williams, and Levitt, 1989 and Klassen, Williams, Levitt, Rudkin-Miniot, Miller, and Gunjal, 1989) shows an increase in premarital sexual activity across recent cohorts. Second, a study of aging and cohort effects over the last twenty years by Davis (1991) found this same model to apply to many non-sexual trends. For 40 some items ranging from civil liberties to race relations Davis found evidence of a conservative period effect in the 1980s off-setting a liberal cohort effect. Finally, Cutler (1985) adopted a similar perspective to explain trends in sexual permissiveness up to the early 1980s.

On all three sexual attitude items the entering or new birth cohorts (those 18-25 in the early 1980s or late 1980s/early 1990s) are less approving than their counterparts in the 1970s. We believe that the entering cohort shifts and the within cohort increases that show up within earlier cohorts reflect the impact of a disapproving period effect.

For premarital sexual relations the generational gap was especially large in the early 1970s (presumably a result of the large growth in approval during the "sexual revolution" among entering cohorts) and the within cohort, period shift was weak. This permitted attitudes to continue moving in an approving direction (but at a slowing rate) until the early 1980s. One way to show this is to look at what attitudes would have been in the early 1980s and 1990s if there had been no cohort turnover. The observed percent saying premarital sex was always wrong was 32.0% in the 1970s, 28.1% in the early 1980s, and 26.2% in the early 1990s, or a decline in disapproval of 5.8 percentage points. Fixing the birth cohort structure in those latter years to match what it was in the 1970s, changes the percentages to 33.6% in the 1980s and 34.0% in the early 1990s, or an increase in disapproval of 2.0 percentage points. Thus, because of cohort turnover, disapproval of premarital sexual relations from the 1970s to the 1990s decreased rather than increased.

For extramarital and homosexual relations the generational gap was smaller (although still substantial) and the within cohort, period effect was larger and more consistent both in the seventies

and the eighties. In each case cohort turnover dampened what would have been a more pronounced shift towards disapproval. For extramarital relations disapproval from the 1970s to the 1990s grew by 6.3 percentage points, while without cohort turnover it would have grown by 9.6 percentage points; for homosexual relations it rose by 3.5 percentage points and would have risen by 8.5 percentage points.

In brief, we interpret the age-cohort-period interaction on sexual permissiveness as showing a large cohort difference in the 1970s with more recent cohorts being more permissive than earlier cohorts. This generation gap diminished over the next 20 years due to a period shift against permissiveness which meant that new or entering cohorts were less permissive than their earlier counterparts. For approval of premarital sexual relations the cohort turnover's push towards permissiveness prevailed until the early 1980s and since then the two have roughly balanced out. For extramarital and homosexual relations the cohort turnover and period shift initially balanced out, but by the mid-1980s as the impact of cohort declined, there was a net swing toward less permissive attitudes.

Sexual Permissiveness Scale

Approval of premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations form a general scale of approval of sexual permissiveness. They have moderately high inter-item correlations (Pearson r : premarital * extramarital=.37; premarital * homosexual=.38; extramarital * homosexual=.37) and a Cronbach's alpha of .62. In addition, they are generally associated with the same variables in the same way. The only exception is race. Blacks are significantly more permissive than non-Blacks on premarital and extramarital relations, but less permissive than non-Blacks towards homosexual relations.

This scale shows no statistically significant change from 1974 to 1991 (Table 6). This stability comes from the off-setting shifts towards approval of premarital sexual relations and towards disapproval of extramarital and homosexual relations.

 Table 6 about here

Most associates of permissiveness have also been stable across the last three decades. The overall stability of sexual permissiveness is reflected in a lack of change within most sub-groups. The main exception is the age-cohort changes described

above. Among those 18-29 sexual permissiveness fell by 1.33 points from 1974 to 1991, while for age groups from 30-39 to 70+ sexual permissiveness rose between .20 and .50. No other notable interactions occurred across time although the edge in the permissiveness of metropolitan localities (central cities and suburbs) over small towns and rural areas and of the Northeast and West over the Midwest and South diminished somewhat over the period.

Correlates of Sexual Permissiveness

Since there is little interaction across time (with the exception of age/cohort), we pooled all surveys to examine the correlates of sexual permissiveness (Table 7). The existing literature has examined how various factors relate to approval of sexual permissiveness (Alston, 1974; Alston and Tucker, 1977; Anderson and Crane, 1979; Bock, Beeghley, and Mixon, 1983; Cutler, 1985; DeLamater, 1981; Harding, 1988; Irwin and Thompson, 1977; Klassen, Williams, and Levitt, 1989; Mahoney, 1978; Nyberg and Alston, 1976; Reiss, 1967; Reiss, Anderson, and Sponaugle, 1980; Saunders and Edwards, 1984; Schneider and Lewis, 1984; Singh, 1980; Singh, Adams, and Jorgenson, 1981; Singh, Walton, and Williams, 1976; Snyder and Spreitzer, 1976; Stephan and McMillin, 1982; Thornton, 1989; Weis and Jurich, 1985; and Wilson, 1986). This research finds that sexual permissiveness is greater among the following groups and for the following reasons:

1. More recent birth cohorts are more sexually permissive because society has moved away from a restrictive, Puritanical sexual standard to a more open, modern standard.
2. The better educated are more permissive because education promotes liberality, progressive thinking, and a cosmopolitan world view.
3. Those with a less religious upbringing and those currently less religious (in terms of affiliation, church attendance, beliefs, and theological orientation) are more permissive because Christian religions in general and conservative denominations in particular preach sexual regulation in general and the immorality of these behaviors in particular.
4. Men are more permissive than women because they have more of a biological and social imperative for maximizing their sexual

relations while minimizing their responsibility for off-spring and because the perception of less sexual need among women lowers this natural justification for sexual permissiveness and therefore makes female violation of traditional, sexual norms less acceptable.

5. Blacks are more permissive because their family and social structures have contributed to early sexual initiation and a high rate of non-marital births which have since become established features of black society and perhaps because blacks never accepted as fully as whites Victorian and Puritanical sexual norms.

6. The middle and upper classes are more permissive since they are more modern, cosmopolitan, and forward-looking. However, a counter-hypothesis argues that the lower class will be more permissive because it is less responsible, less likely to delay gratification, and less constrained by social conventions.

7. Current residents outside the South and those raised outside the South are more permissive because the South is more traditional in its social customs and more influenced by fundamentalism.

8. Residents of large metropolitan areas and those raised in such communities are more permissive since non-metropolitan areas are more traditionally oriented.

9. a) The never married are more permissive because they have a self-interest in approving of premarital sexual relations and perhaps less personal commitment to the convention of marital fidelity. In addition, because of the prohibition on same gender marriages, homosexuals are overrepresented in the never married category (Smith, 1991).

b) The divorced and separated are more permissive because they too have a self-interest in non-marital sexual relations and perhaps may be disillusioned about the norm of marital fidelity as a result of their own or their ex-spouse's sexual behaviors.

10. Those without teenagers in the household are more permissive because the presence of teenagers might lead people to think about approval of teenage sexual behavior rather than adult sexual behavior. This would presumably apply mostly to premarital sexual permissiveness.

11. Liberals are more permissive than non-liberals because

sexual permissiveness represents a modern/emergent orientation as opposed to traditional norms.

12. Those in unhappy marriages are more permissive because extramarital sexual relations might seem more justified. This would presumably apply only to extramarital sexual permissiveness.

Table 7 shows that these hypotheses are in general well supported. In each case there are statistically significant and often substantial differences across sub-groups in the anticipated direction. Sexual permissiveness is higher among those from more recent cohorts, the better educated, the less religious (those without a religious affiliation, with more theologically liberal affiliations, and attending church less frequently), men, Blacks, higher income earners, non-Southerners (currently and when growing up), metropolitan dwellers (currently and when growing up), the never married and currently divorced/separated, those without teenagers in their families, political liberals, and those unhappy with life in general and with their marriages in particular.

Table 7 about here

The multiple regression analyses in Table 8 show that most of these are independent predictors. Sub-cultural orientation (e.g. ethnicity, race, region) in general and religion in particular has a pronounced impact on attitudes toward sexual permissiveness. Low church attendance and a liberal theological orientation (currently and to a modest extent when growing up) are associated with approval.

Table 8 about here

Similarly, those raised in and currently living outside traditional regions (the South) and community types (non-metropolitan areas) are more approving.

The impact of sub-culture is also shown by the greater approval of sexual permissiveness among Blacks.

In the culture as a whole, the impact of changing sexual norms is indicated by the higher permissiveness among those raised in more recent cohorts.

Higher SES is also related to more permissiveness. Both more education and higher family income are associated with more approval. Education, however, plays a much stronger role than income. This suggests that it is values assimilated via schooling

(e.g. open-mindedness, cultural pluralism, etc.) rather than material conditions that promote permissiveness.

Family status variables have modest relationships in the predicted direction. Those who are divorced/separated or who have never married are more permissive than the currently married and widowed. The difference among the never married is small and statistically marginal however. Those having teens in the household are less permissive.

Political ideology is strongly associated with sexual permissiveness. This may indicate that those adopting a general liberal philosophy apply broad principles such as tolerance and individual choice to the sexual arena and/or that support for sexual freedom is directly seen as a liberal tenant. (In this latter case the causal ordering between liberalism/conservatism and sexual permissiveness becomes unclear, since one might define oneself as a liberal or conservative because of one's stance on sexual permissiveness.)

We also find that gender has no association with overall sexual permissiveness. This results from two factors. First, the bivariate association between gender and permissiveness is accounted for by the fact that more women tend to survive from older cohorts and that women are more religious in general and in particular attend church more frequently than men do. Second, as indicated below, while men are more permissive toward premarital and extramarital sexual relations than women are, they are less approving than women of homosexual relations.

Finally, after allowing the above variables to enter the regression equation, we looked at whether marital happiness or general happiness were related to sexual permissiveness. Among the married, having an unhappy marriage was modestly, but significantly, associated with more approval of sexual permissiveness (.045/prob.=.000). Among everyone however, general happiness was not related to permissiveness (.02/prob.=.117).

Table 9 shows how the independent variables displayed in Table 8 are related to each of the three separate components. Premarital sexual relations are explained to a greater extent by the independent variables than are attitudes towards homosexual and extramarital sexual relations as indicated by the R²s in the three equations. Most associations are in the same direction, although their magnitude often varies. For three variables, however, there are statistically significant relations with opposite signs. First, men are more permissive than women (controlling for other variables) about the premarital and extramarital relations, but less permissive about homosexual relations. We speculate that

homosexuality might be viewed either by people in general or men in particular as referring to man-with-man sex to a greater extent than woman-with-woman sex. Heterosexual men who are concerned about their sexual identity or who wish to signal that they are "straight" may therefore be more inclined to disapprove of homosexual relations.

 Table 9 about here

Second, counter to our hypothesis, the never married are marginally less approving than those with other marital statuses of premarital sexual relations, while they are more approving of extramarital and homosexual relations. While there is a significant bivariate association between never having been married and approval of premarital sexual relations ($r = -.16$ /prob.=.000), this is explained by cohort. The partial r between being never married and approval of premarital sexual relations controlling for cohort falls to $-.01$ and is not statistically significant (prob.=.126). The other control variables in Table 9 further tip this weak relationship in the opposite direction. Extramarital and homosexual relations are not so reversed in large part because their association with cohort is weaker.

It is possible that the never married are less marginally less permissive (with controls) because this group includes a number of people with low sexual interest and those who are sexually repressed. These groups might select to remain unmarried and would off-set the self interest that most never married adults would have in approving of premarital sex.

Third, those with no religious affiliation are, counter to the hypothesis, marginally less permissive than those with a religious affiliation towards premarital sexual relations, but, as predicted, the unaffiliated are more permissive towards extramarital and homosexual relations. The reversal of the hypothesized, bivariate relationship is accounted for by a combination of other religion variables (attendance and theology) and age.

Besides variables involving reversals, there are several instances in which relationships are not statistically significant for all three types of sexual permissiveness. As noted earlier, the cohort effect is much stronger for premarital sexual relations than for extramarital or homosexual relations. This probably reflects a much larger permissive period effect in the 1960s for premarital sexual relations than for extramarital and homosexual relations.

Similarly, as was also noted in the bivariate relationships, Blacks are more permissive towards premarital and extramarital

sexual relations, but less approving of homosexual relations. Racial differences in sexual behaviors (e.g. lower age of first intercourse, greater teenage sexual activity, higher proportion of unmarried births, and more marital instability among Blacks than among Whites) are consistent with the greater permissiveness of Blacks on premarital and extra-marital sex. This pattern may also in part result from an imbalance in the effective Black sex ratio. A shortfall of suitable Black male partners might encourage permissiveness since Black males would have to expand their mean number of partners to compensate for their lower numbers. For women it would increase the need of having to "share" a male partner with other women (Posner, 1992; Bowser, THIS VOLUME). We do not know why Blacks are less approving of homosexual relations.

In addition, while having teenagers in the household is associated with less sexual permissiveness (Table 8), this comes largely from the reduced approval of premarital sexual relations (Table 9). Controlling for marital status, gender, and age, we find that in 25 of the 31 comparisons between households with and without teenagers approval is lower when a teenager is present (data not shown). It is likely that concern about the sexual activity of their own teenage children reduces support for premarital sexual relations either by a) making parents of teenagers think more about teenage sexual activity and less about adult sexual activity and/or b) by personalizing concerns about teenage sexual activity. Some support for the latter idea comes from examining the related question on sexual relations between 14-16 year olds (Table 1B). Since this item refers to teenagers 14-16 years of age, attitudes towards adult premarital sexual permissiveness are not relevant. Controlling for marital status, gender, and age, households with teenagers are about 10 percentage points more likely to say that teenage sexual relations are always wrong than households without teenagers present (Table 10).

 Table 10 about here

Likewise, greater extramarital sexual permissiveness occurs among those in less happy marriages (regression coefficient=.093/prob. =.000) and among those less happy with their lives in general (.061/.000), but neither marital nor general happiness are associated with permissiveness towards premarital or homosexual relations.

Finally, we examine one aspect of the role of marital status that was not covered in the initial hypotheses. Since the divorced and separated are more approving of both premarital and

extramarital sexual relations as hypothesized, we wondered how the other post-married group, the widowed, stood on sexual permissiveness. Traditionally the widowed are seen as asexual and/or prudish, while divorced men and women are seen as sexually active and even morally loose. Clearly most of these differences in images comes from the fact that the widowed are typically thought of as old and female, while the divorced are pictured as middle-aged and include both men and women. Controlling for both gender and age, we find that widows are in fact less approving of both premarital and extramarital relations (Table 11). There are too few widowers to speak about with much confidence, but at least on premarital sexual relations they also appear less permissive. It may be that their state of bereavement or status as a bereaved survivor lowers their interest in sexual relations and leads to less permissive attitudes. Similarly, idealization of their lost spouse or of that marriage may increase support for marital fidelity among the widowed (Green, THIS VOLUME).

 Table 11 about here

Sexual Attitudes and Sexual Behaviors

There is a great deal of consistency between sexual attitudes and sexual behaviors (Table 12). Those with more permissive attitudes towards premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations are more likely to have engaged in the related behavior. For example, among those saying that extramarital relations are "always wrong" 9.7% report ever having had a sexual partner other than their spouse while married, while among those saying extramarital relations are "not wrong at all" 75.8% report infidelity. This same pattern occurs for both men and women. (Data not shown.)

 Table 12 about here

The general agreement between sexual attitudes and behaviors may mean that people regulate their sexual behaviors to conform to their personal norms or that people adopt norms that match their behaviors. Probably both processes are at work.

Attitudinal/Behavioral Conflict and Psychological Well-Being

While there is general consistency between sexual attitudes

and behaviors, an appreciable number of people report sexual behaviors that are at odds with their expressed values. For example, although premarital sexual activity is lowest among those saying such activity is "always wrong," 31.5% of those who disapprove of premarital sexual activity still report having had a sexual partner within the last year (Table 12).

Table 13 examines how dissonance between attitudes towards premarital and extramarital sexual relations and corresponding behaviors relates to psychological well-being. (There are insufficient homosexual cases for a similar analysis.) Among the never married, those saying that premarital sexual relations are "always wrong" and reporting having a sex partner are less happy than those with similar attitudes and no sex partner. Among those saying that premarital sexual relations are not "always wrong" (i.e. almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, and not wrong at all), there is no statistically significant relationship between having a sex partner and personal happiness, but those with a sex partner tend to be happier. It thus appears that among the unmarried the conflict between non-permissive attitudes and sexual activity is associated with a lower level of psychological well-being, presumably because of the conflict created by disparate attitudes and behaviors.

 Table 13 about here

No similar pattern emerges for extramarital sexual attitudes and behaviors. Those reporting a sex partner besides their spouse are less happy (both in general and in terms of their marriages) than those with no other partners. However, this pattern occurs regardless of whether one says extramarital relations are "always wrong" or not "always wrong."

The difference between these two cases may result from a different causal relation of happiness to sexual attitudes and behaviors. In the case of premarital sexual relations the conflict of attitudes and behaviors may be causing the unhappiness, but in the extramarital case, unhappiness may lead to changes in sexual attitudes and/or behaviors.

Summary

The kernel of truth in the sexual revolution/counter revolution metaphor is that approval of premarital sexual relations increased substantially from the 1960s to the early 1980s and then levelled off. But the counter revolution did not reverse the

earlier gains in premarital sexual permissiveness. This trend fits a more general pattern that saw a number of liberal trends in such areas as civil liberties and abortion reach a "liberal plateau" in the later 1970s and 1980s (Smith, 1990b; Smith, 1990c; Davis, 1991). This ending of liberal advance might reflect a homeostatic, cycle of reform or a reaction to problems created by liberalism in general or sexual permissiveness in particular (e.g. increases in sexually transmitted diseases and non-marital births, possibly a desire for commitment rather than casual, recreational sex, etc.)

Moreover the revolutionary imagery is misleading since it does not clearly apply to sexual attitudes in general. At least since the early 1970s there has been no sign of a permissive twinge, must less a sexual revolution, in regards to extramarital and homosexual relations.

Nor are people particularly happy with the growth in permissiveness that has occurred. In 1974 and 1985 few men and women thought that increased acceptance of premarital sexual relations was a change for the better and from 1978 to 1991 the percent saying that they welcomed "more acceptance of sexual freedom" varied between 22-29% (Table 14).

 Table 14 about here

For most people attitudes towards sexual permissiveness come from moral standards that are notably shaped by religious practice and orientation and by other sub-cultural influences such as community standards and racial norms. The religious/moral dimension is evident in a follow-up to the 1991 Gallup item on approval of premarital sexual relations. When those saying that it was wrong (40%) were asked why they felt this way, 77% mentioned moral and religious grounds, 4% that women should be virgins before marriage, 25% risk of pregnancy, 14% risk of disease, and 1% something else. In 1987 on a similar follow-up question the moral/religious dimension was even more pronounced: 83% moral/religious, 9% virgins, 13% pregnancy, 20% diseases, and 5% other. (Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.) Similarly, a random probe study on the 1984 GSS found religious mentions followed by references to immortality/sin were the most common factors cited when asked to elaborate on their attitudes towards extramarital sexual relations (Smith, 1989a).

At least in regards to premarital sexual relations these moral strictures were changing across generations which increased approval of sexual permissiveness among more recent cohorts. The permissive period and cohort effects began to reverse by the 1980s

however. While the threat of AIDS might be offered as an explanation for this reversal, this connection is questionable. There appears to have been a period effect against approval of homosexual relations in the 1970s and this effect did not increase in the mid-1980s after knowledge of AIDS became widespread.

SES variables play a secondary role with more income and especially more education leading to increased sexual permissiveness.

Family and gender variables have less impact than often supposed. Divorced or separated adults are more permissive than the currently married or widowed, but being never married is associated only with permissiveness toward extramarital and homosexual relations and not towards premarital sexual relations. Similarly, gender itself has no simple, overall association with sexual permissiveness. Women are less approving of premarital and extramarital relations, but more approving of homosexual relations. Finally, having a teenager in the household reduces approval of sexual permissiveness but this mostly applies to less approval of premarital sexual relations.

Finally, a liberal political orientation is associated with more permissiveness.

Moreover, sexual attitudes are not only important in their own right, but are closely related to sexual behaviors. More permissive attitudes are associated with more permissive behaviors. This relationship is probably reciprocal, with permissive attitudes leading to permissive behaviors and permissive behaviors often leading to permissive attitudes.

When premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors are in conflict, psychological well-being is affected. Among the never married with non-permissive attitudes, those who are sexually active are less happy than those who are sexually inactive. But among the never married with more permissive attitudes, sexual activity is unrelated to happiness. This relationship does not occur for extramarital sexual attitudes and behaviors however.

Sexual attitudes are strongly influenced by sub-cultural norms in general and religion in particular, by socio-political ideology, SES, and, to a lesser extent, gender, and family structure. These attitudes in turn are closely (but not perfectly) related to sexual behaviors. When the two are in conflict, they create a dissonance which at least in the case of premarital sexual relations is associated with and probably leads to lower levels of psychological well-being.

Endnotes

Table 1

Premarital Sexual Relations

A. Prior to 1960

ROPER: Do you think it is all right for either or both parties to a marriage to have had previous sexual experience?

	1937	1959
All right	22%	22%
All right for men only	7	8
Not all right	55	54
Don't know	14	10
Refused	2	6

ROPER: Do you consider it all right, unfortunate, or wicked when young men have sex relations before marriage?

	Women	
	1939	1943
All right	9.7%	5.3%
Unfortunate	35.4	43.2
Wicked	47.3	45.9
Don't know	7.6	5.6
		(2632)

NORC: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement. No decent man can respect a woman who has had sexual relations before marriage.

	1950	1953
Agree	29.4%	33.0%
	(1135)	(1291)

Table 1 (Continued)

B. Since 1969

GALLUP: There's a lot of discussion about the way morals and sex are changing in this country, here is a question that is often discussed in women's magazines. What is your view on this -- do you think it is wrong for a man and woman to have sex relations before marriage, or not?

	1969	1973
Wrong	68.8%	47%
Not wrong	21.4	43
No opinion	9.7	9
	(1489)	(1544)

GALLUP: There's a lot of discussion about the way morals and sexual attitudes are changing in this country. What is your opinion about this: do you think it is wrong for a man and woman to have sex relations before marriage, or not?

	1985	1985	1987	1990
Wrong	39%	36%	46%	40%
Not wrong	52	61	48	54
No opinion	9	3	6	6
	(1525)	(1003)	(1607)	(1216)

Table 1 (Continued)

VIRGINIA SLIMS: Now, turning to another subject, let me read you some statements. For each, please tell me whether you tend to agree or disagree.

Pre-marital sex is immoral.

	1970	1985
Agree	59.5%	45.0%
	(3984)	(4000)

NORC-GSS: There's been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex are changing in this country. If a man and a woman have sex relations before marriage, do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

	1972	1974	1975	1977	1978	1982	1983	1985	1986	1987	1988	1988	1989	1990
1991														
Always Wrong	35.7	33.4	30.6	30.8	29.2	28.2	28.1	28.1	28.2	29	26.2	35	27.7	24.7
27.2														
Almost Always Wrong	11.4	12.9	12.4	9.9	12.3	8.9	10.7	9.0	8.8	9	10.2	13	8.8	11.3
10.3														
Wrong Only Sometimes	25.2	23.9	25.2	23.0	20.3	21.8	24.6	20.0	22.8	21	22.2	28	23.1	24.5
19.6														
Not Wrong at All	27.7	29.8	31.7	36.3	38.2	41.1	36.6	43.0	40.2	41	41.4	24	40.4	39.5
42.4														
	1534	1430	1428	1479	1496	1457	1558	1485	1425	2095	952	2556	982	
905 981														

NORC-GSS: What if they are in their early teens, say 14 to 16 years old? In that case, do you think sex relations before marriage are always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

	1986	1988	1989	1990	1991
Always Wrong	67.1	68.5	70.2	69.0	68.0
Almost Always Wrong	18.9	16.4	16.5	16.8	19.1
Wrong Only Sometimes	10.9	11.6	9.2	10.9	8.9
Not Wrong at All	3.1	3.5	4.1	3.3	4.0
	1443	972	1001	911	983

MARK CLEMENTS RESEARCH: I am going to read some statements to you. Please indicate if you strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, or strongly disagree...

Sex before marriage is acceptable.

Women, 18-65

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Strongly Agree	20%	22%	18%	21%	23%	21%

Slightly Agree	27	28	31	31	32	29
Slightly Disagree	14	12	13	12	12	15
Strongly Disagree	36	34	34	33	29	32
Don't Know	2	5	4	3	4	4

(1000) (1000) (1000) (800) (800) (800)

Table 1 (Continued)

LOS ANGELES TIMES (LAT): If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, do you think that is always wrong, or sometimes wrong, or sometimes right, or always right?

	1989	1990
Always Wrong	25%	24%
Sometimes Wrong	24	24
Sometimes Right	35	37
Always Right	9	9
Not Sure	7	6

(2095) (2205)

Table 2

Extramarital Sexual Relations

NORC-GSS: What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner-- is it always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

	1973	1974	1976	1977	1980	1982	1984	1985	1985	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Always Wrong	69.8	73.2	68.7	73.9	71.0	74.2	71.5	72	75.4	74.3	80.7	78.5	79.0	77.2
Almost Always Wrong	14.8	12.5	16.5	13.5	16.4	13.7	18.0	16	13.3	16.2	12.3	12.3	12.5	13.5
Wrong Only Sometimes	11.7	11.8	10.7	9.9	9.6	9.7	8.7	10	8.4	7.4	5.1	7.5	6.7	6.2
Not Wrong at All	3.8	2.5	4.0	2.8	3.0	2.3	1.8	2	3.0	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.8	3.0
	1491	1463	1479	1508	1446	1482	1450	1003	1513	1446	966	1026	891	965

Table 3

Homosexual Sexual Relations

NORC-GSS: What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex-- do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

	1973	1974	1976	1977	1980	1982	1984	1985	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Always Wrong	72.5	69.4	70.3	72.9	73.8	74.3	75.1	75.7	77.5	77.4	74.4	76.5	77.4
Almost Always Wrong	6.7	5.6	6.3	5.8	6.1	5.0	4.5	4.2	4.2	4.4	4.0	5.0	3.8
Wrong Only Sometimes	7.7	8.5	7.9	7.5	5.9	6.5	7.0	7.0	6.3	5.5	6.3	5.8	4.0
Not Wrong at All	11.2	12.9	15.5	13.7	14.2	14.1	13.3	13.1	12.0	12.7	15.3	12.8	14.9
Other	2.0	3.5	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	1446	1413	1432	1457	1404	1438	1415	1487	1418	945	986	867	925

GALLUP: Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?

	1977	1981	1982	1985	1986	1986	1987	1988	1989	1991
Legal	43%	39%	45%	44%	32%	33%	33%	35%	47%	36%
Not legal	43	50	39	47	57	54	55	56	36	54
No opinion	14	11	16	9	11	13	11	9	17	10
	(1513)	(1533)	(1531)	(1008)	(1539)	(978)	(1015)	(1000)	(1227)	(1216)

Table 4

Trends in Attitudes towards Civil Liberties for Homosexuals

Relations	Intolerance Scalea		Intolerance * Approval of Homosexual (Pearson r)
	All	People Saying Homosexual Relations Always Wrong	

1973	4.3 (1398)	4.7 (966)	-.46
1974	4.2 (1361)	4.6 (896)	-.45
1976	4.2 (1402)	4.6 (931)	-.44
1977	4.3 (1430)	4.7 (989)	-.46
1980	4.1 (1393)	4.5 (979)	-.42
1982	4.2 (1411)	4.5 (995)	-.43
1984	4.1 (1369)	4.4 (989)	-.40
1985	4.1 (1372)	4.5 (1060)	-.41
1987	4.1 (1450)	4.4 (1016)	-.40
1988	4.1 (901)	4.3 (669)	-.37
1989	3.9 (961)	4.1 (676)	-.29
1990	3.9 (851)	4.1 (622)	-.34
1991	3.9 (932)	4.1 (671)	-.34
Trendb	.0000	.0000	

a A three-item additive scale of the questions listed below.
3=tolerant of all three activities and 6=intolerance of
all three activities.

b Probability that scores differ from constant value.

NORC-GSS: And what about a man who admits that he is a homosexual?

A. Suppose this admitted homosexual wanted to make a speech in
your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not?

B. Should a such a person be allowed to teach in a college or
university, or not?

C, If some people in your community suggested that a book he
wrote in favor of homosexuality should be taken out of your
public library, would you favor removing thus book, or not?

An additive scale was created from these items such that a score
of "3" meant allowing all three activities and a score of "6"
meant opposing all three actions.

Table 5

Disapproval of Premarital, Extramarital, and Homosexual Sexual Relations
by Age Groups and Year

A. Premarital Sexual Relations (Percent Always Wrong)

Age Groups	Intra-		Intra-		Years
	Years	Cohort Change	Years	Cohort Change	
	1974-75		1982-83		1990-91
18-25	12.0		14.0		18.1
		+5.2		+7.5	
26-33	17.1		17.2		21.5
		+6.3		+1.1	
34-41	35.2		23.4		18.3
		-5.0		+2.1	
42-49	33.9		30.2		25.5
		+1.0		-2.0	
50-57	40.0		34.9		28.2
		+3.3		-5.1	
58-65	44.5		43.3		29.8
		+1.5		+0.1	
66-73	54.2		46.0		43.4
		-0.9		+7.5	
74+	62.9		53.1		53.5
Total	32.0		28.1		26.2
Age Group Difference	50.9		39.1		35.4
	(2850)		(3004)		(1885)

B. Extramarital Sexual Relations (Percentage Always Wrong)

Age Groups	Intra-		Intra-		Years
	Years	Cohort Change	Years	Cohort Change	
	1973-74		1980-82		1987-90
18-25	56.0		67.7		77.4
		+6.7		+4.3	
26-33	63.3		62.7		72.0

	+5.5	+8.2	
34-41	70.3	68.8	70.9
	-1.7	+6.4	
42-49	73.7	68.6	75.2
	+3.5	+13.1	
50-57	80.1	77.2	81.7
	+0.9	+8.8	
58-65	78.2	82.0	86.0
	+8.6	+4.3	
66-73	85.2	86.8	86.3
	-4.2	+0.2	
74+	90.8	89.4	87.0
Total	71.4	72.6	77.7
Age Group Difference	34.8	21.7	9.6
	(2947)	(2912)	(4319)

Table 5 (Continued)

C. Homosexual Sexual Relations (Percentage Always Wrong)

Age Groups	Intra- Years Cohort Change		Intra- Years Cohort Change		Years
	1973-74		1980-82		
18-25	56.0		65.2		73.3
	+8.5		+4.3		
26-33	61.7		64.5		69.5
	+8.7		+6.4		
34-41	76.9		69.4		70.9
	-2.5		+4.0		
42-49	70.3		74.4		73.4
	+9.5		+9.6		
50-57	82.4		79.8		84.0
	+2.0		+4.5		
58-65	85.0		84.4		84.3
	+3.2		+0.7		
66-73	89.8		88.2		85.1

	+1.9	+2.1	
74+	91.5	91.7	90.3
Total	71.0	72.6	76.5
Age Group Difference	34.6	26.5	17.0
	(2775)	(2827)	(4206)

Source: NORC-GSS

Table 6
Trends in Sexual Permissiveness^a

Year	Mean
1974	5.6 (1320)
1977	5.7 (1425)
1982	5.8 (1388)
1985	5.7 (1446)
1988	5.6 (459)
1989	5.6 (485)
1990	5.5 (439)
1991	5.5 (442)

prob.=.077

Source: NORC-GSS

a Additive scale of approval of premarital, extramarital, and homosexual sexual relations. Ranges from low of "3" if all three are "always wrong" to "12" if all three are "not wrong at all."

Table 7
Factors Associated with Approval of Sexual Permissiveness

Groups	Mean Score	r/prob.a
Cohort		

Born before 1910	4.21	
1910-1919	4.63	
1920-1929	5.07	
1930-1939	5.38	.29***
1940-1949	6.16	
1950-1959	6.50	
1960+	6.05	

(7382)

Current Religion

None	7.76	-.24***
Some Affiliation	5.49	

(7404)

Religion when Growing Up

None	6.11	-.04**
Some Affiliation	5.63	

(7391)

Current Religious Orientation

Fundamentalist	4.85	
Moderate	5.66	.29***
Liberal	6.75	

(7255)

Religious Orientation When Growing Up

Fundamentalist	5.02	
Moderate	5.84	.18***
Liberal	6.17	

Church Attendance

Twice a Year or Less	6.63	
Almost Weekly-Several Times Per Year	5.75	-.39***

Weekly	4.41	
	(7364)	
Education		
Less than High School	5.02	
High School Graduate	5.50	.25***
Some College	6.17	
College Graduate	6.82	
	(7386)	
Gender		
Men	5.84	-.08***
Women	5.47	
	(7404)	

Table 7 (Continued)

Groups	Mean Score	r/Prob.a
Race		
Non-Blacks	5.62	.03**
Blacks	5.84	
	(7404)	
Household Income (1986 dollars)		
\$0-9999	5.28	
\$10,000-19,999	5.48	
\$20,000-29,999	5.64	
\$30,000-39,999	5.71	.13***
\$40,000-49,999	5.86	
\$50,000-74,999	6.08	
\$75,000+	6.37	
	(6744)	

Current Region

Northeast	6.34	
Midwest	5.56	.18***
South	5.06	
West	6.06	
	(7404)	
Region Age 16		
Foreign	5.62	
Northeast	6.43	
Midwest	5.62	.19***
South	5.00	
West	6.03	
	(7404)	
Current Residence		
Central City	6.12	
Suburb	5.68	-.20***
Town	5.31	
Rural	4.88	
	(7404)	
Residence Age 16		
Central City/Suburb	6.32	
Town	5.78	-.20***
Rural	4.92	
	(7384)	
Marital Status		
First Marriage	5.33	
Remarried	5.76	
Widowed	4.48	-.18***(Never married)
Divorced	6.53	-.11***(Divorced/Separated)
Separated	6.34	
Never Married	6.54	

(7403)

Table 7 (Continued)

Groups	Mean Score	r/Prob.a
Teenagers		
None	5.71	
1	5.45	
2	5.35	-.05***
3	5.30	
4	5.01	

(7375)

Liberal Self-Identification

Extremely Liberal	7.41	
Liberal	6.86	
Slightly Liberal	6.38	
Moderate/Middle-of-the-Road	5.54	-.28***
Slightly Conservative	5.33	
Conservative	4.74	
Extremely Conservative	4.64	
Not Rated	4.65	

(7386)

General Happiness

Very Happy	5.34	
Pretty Happy	5.81	.08***
Not Too Happy	5.74	

(7391)

Marital Happiness

Very Happy	5.26	
Pretty Happy	5.61	.08***
Not Too Happy	5.90	

(4867)

Source: NORC/GSS, combined years, 1977,77,82,85,88-91

*= $p < .05$ **= $p < .01$ ***= $p < .001$

a Pearson's rs are based on uncollapsed variables where appropriate (e.g. years of education and age). For nominal variables the following categorizations were used: Marital Status - Never married vs. Other and Divorced/Separated vs. Other; Region- South vs. Non-South.

Table 8

Multiple Regression Analysis of Sexual Permissiveness

Variables (High Category)	Standardized Coefficient
Religion	
Church Attendance (Weekly)	-.30***
Current Religious Orientation (Liberal)	.10***
Current Religion (Some)	.03**
Religious Orientation Raised in (Liberal)	.05***
Religion Raised In (Some)	.04***
Place	
Current Region (Non-South)	.05**
Current Residence (Large Central City)	.07***
Region Raised in (Non-South)	.04*
Residence When 16 (Large Central City)	.05***
Socio-Economic Status	
Education (20+ Years)	.12***
Family Income in Constant Dollars (High)	.05***
Family	

Never Married vs. Other (Other) .03*
 Divorced/Single vs. Other (Other) -.07***
 Teens in Household (4+) -.04***

Other

Race (Black) .07***
 Birth Cohort (More Recent Years) .15***
 Political Ideology (Extremely Conservative) -.17***
 Sex (Female) -.01

R2= .351

Sample N (6475)

Source: NORC/GSS, combined years, 1974,77,82,85,88-91

*=p<.05

**=p<.01

***=p<.001

Table 9

Multiple Regression Analysis of Attitudes towards
 Premarital, Extramarital, and Homosexual Relations

(High=Permissive)

Variables (High Category)	Standardized		
	Premarital	Extramarital	Homosexual
Religion			
Church Attendance (Weekly)	-.32***	-.17***	-.16***
Current Religious Orientation (Liberal)	.11***	.05**	.06***
Current Religion (Some)	.03*	-.09***	-.07***
Past Religious Orientation (Liberal)	.03*	.02	.05**
Religion Raised In (Some)	.04***	.01	.01

Place

Current Region (Non-South)	.05**	-.00	.04*
Current Residence (Large Central City)	.05***	.05***	.06***
Region Raised in (Non-South)	.05**	.01	.02
Residence When 16 (Large Central City)	.02	.04**	.05***
Socio-Economic Status			
Education (20+ Years)	.04***	.09***	.15***
Family Income in Constant Dollars (High)	.03**	.04**	.05***
Family			
Never Married vs. Other (Other)	-.03*	-.07***	-.05***
Divorced/Separated vs. Other (Other)	-.05***	-.10***	-.04**
Teens in Household (4+)	-.06***	.02	-.03**
Other			
Race (Black)	.10***	.09***	-.02
Birth Cohort (More Recent Years)	.26***	-.02	.04**
Political Ideology (Conservative)	-.14***	-.09***	-.16***
Sex (Female)	-.07***	-.05***	.08***
R2=	.324	.137	.201
Sample N	(6475)	(6475)	(6475)

Source: NORC/GSS, combined years, 1974,77,82,85,88-91

*=p<.05

**=p<.01

***=p<.001

Table 10

Disapproval of Teenage Sexual Relations by Marital Status
Controlling for Teenagers in the Household, Age, and Gender

(% Always Wrong)

Men

Agea	Married First Time		Divorced/Separated Remarried			
	No Teen	1+ Teens	No Teens	1+ Teens	No Teens	1+ Teens
34-41	60.4 (177)	71.4 (65)	56.0 (64)	56.0 (27)	47.9 (50)	--- (7)
42-49	73.3 (100)	77.6 (102)	62.4 (39)	79.3 (30)	55.3 (40)	--- (4)
50-57	78.5 (104)	73.5 (39)	62.7 (32)	--- (15)	53.4 (29)	--- (1)

Women

34-41	66.2 (154)	76.8 (103)	58.5 (71)	69.7 (43)	65.0 (55)	74.8 (39)
42-49	81.6 (127)	87.4 (98)	68.5 (41)	--- (19)	63.5 (59)	77.9 (43)
50-57	86.5 (120)	97.9 (25)	81.0 (46)	--- (4)	82.1 (37)	--- (5)

a Other ages and marital statuses are excluded because there are too few cases for comparisons.

Source: NORC/GSS; 1986, 1988-91

Table 11

Disapproval of Premarital and Extramarital Sexual Relations by Post-Marital Status
Controlling for Gender and Age

A. Premarital Sexual Relations (% Always-Sometimes Wrong)

Agea	Men		Women	
	Widowed	Divorced/Separated	Widowed	Divorced/Separated

42-49	---	31.0	63.0	51.5
	(7)	(97)	(48)	(198)
50-57	---	44.1	70.3	69.3
	(16)	(73)	(99)	(118)
58-65	81.5	57.0	79.4	76.2
	(25)	(45)	(178)	(90)
66-73	66.8	57.0	85.8	70.0
	(53)	(26)	(235)	(51)
74+	72.0	---	90.0	---
	(69)	(8)	(350)	(19)

B. Extramarital Sexual Relations (% Always Wrong)

34-41	---	50.0	69.0	58.1
	(5)	(118)	(21)	(221)
42-49	---	58.1	80.1	65.9
	(7)	(96)	(45)	(204)
50-57	---	59.2	86.4	72.3
	(17)	(73)	(94)	(113)
58-65	65.0	63.4	86.3	68.1
	(33)	(51)	(165)	(87)
66-73	70.5	78.6	88.4	93.5
	(56)	(28)	(256)	(54)
74+	83.4	---	88.8	80.4
	(77)	(13)	(379)	(21)

Source: NORC/GSS

a Other age groups not presented because of too few cases for comparisons.

Table 12

Consistency Between Attitudes Towards Sexual Permissiveness and Sexual Behaviors

A. Premarital Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Attitudes Towards Premarital Sexual Relations	% Having Sexual Partner Among the Never Married	
	During Last Year	During Last 5 Years
Always Wrong	31.5	38.6
Almost Always Wrong	68.2	61.1
Wrong only Sometimes	74.1	82.8
Not Wrong at All	85.5	95.2
	(729)	(173)

B. Extramarital Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Attitudes Towards Extra. Sexual Relations	% Having Sexual Partner Other than Spouse During Last Year (Currently Married)	% Ever Having Sexual Partner Other than Spouse While Married (Ever Married)
	Always Wrong	2.4
Almost Always Wrong	8.5	30.7
Wrong Only Sometimes	12.4	37.9
Not Wrong at All	18.3	75.8
	(2076)	(631)

C. Homosexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Attitudes Towards Homosexual Relations	% Having Same Gender Sexual Partner During Last Year
Always Wrong	0.9
Almost Always Wrong	0.0
Wrong Only Sometimes	1.1
Not Wrong at All	14.9

(2566)

Source: GSS, 1988-1991

Table 13

Psychological Well-Being by Consistency
Between Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

A. Premarital Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors (Never Married)

	% Very Happy
Premarital Sexual Relations are Always Wrong	
No Sexual Partner in Last Year	38.9 (73)**
Sexual Partner in Last Year	8.3 (36)
No Sexual Partner in Last 5 Years	54.3 (19)*
Sexual Partner in last 5 Years	8.3 (12)
Premarital Sexual Relations are Not Always Wrong	
No Sexual Partner in Last Year	21.6 (119)
Sexual Partner in Last Year	28.3 (504)
No Sexual Partner in Last 5 Years	18.5 (14)
Sexual Partner in last 5 Years	28.9 (128)

B. Extramarital Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Extramarital Sexual Relations are Always Wrong	
No Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Last Year	42.1(1638)*
Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Last Year	22.8 (39)
No Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Ever	34.5 (443)
Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Ever	23.1 (48)
Extramarital Sexual Relations are Not Always Wrong	
No Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Last Year	34.6 (333)***
Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Last Year	15.4 (37)

No Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Ever	14.3 (52)*
Sexual Partner Other than Spouse, Ever	35.8 (84)

Table 14

Attitudes Towards Increased Acceptance of Sexual Permissiveness

Roper: All things considered, do you think society's more widespread acceptance of sexual freedom for people before marriage is a change for the better, or a change for the worse, or do you have mixed feelings about it?

	1974		1985	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Change for the Better	19%	12%	19%	15%
Change for the Worse	40	46	37	41
Mixed Feelings	38	39	43	32
Don't Know	3	3	2	2
	(958)	(2922)	(1000)	(3000)

Gallup: I'd like to ask about some changes that took place in the 60s and 70s. Please tell me whether you feel each was a good thing or a bad thing for our society...

More Acceptance of Premarital Sex

	1991
Good Thing	38%
Bad Thing	56
Don't Know	6
	(1216)

Gallup: Here are some social changes which might occur in coming years. Would you welcome these or not welcome them?

More acceptance of sexual freedom.

	1978	1981	1988	1991
Welcome	29%	25%	22%	29%
Not Welcome	62	67	68	66
Don't Know	9	8	10	5
	(1523)	(1483)	(2556)	(1216)

References

- Alston, J. P. (1974). Attitudes toward extramarital and homosexual relations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 13, 479-481.
- Alston, J. P. and Tucker, F. (1975). The myth of sexual permissiveness. In J. R. DeLora and J. S. DeLora, (Eds.). *Intimate life styles: Marriage and its alternatives*. Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing.
- Anderson, J. E., Kann, L., Holtzman, Arday, S., Truman, B. and Kolbe, L. (1990). HIV/AIDS knowledge and sexual behavior among high school students. *Family Planning Perspective*, 22, 252-255.
- Anderson, M. T. and Crane, J. L. (1979). Adult homosexuality: A case of American tolerance. Paper presented to the Southwestern Sociological Association, Forth Worth, TX.
- Bock, E. W., Beeghley, L., and Mixon, A. J. (1983). Religion, socioeconomic status, and sexual morality: An application of reference group theory. *Sociological Quarterly*, 24, 545-559.
- Bachrach, C. A. and Horn. M. C. (1987). Married and unmarried couples. *Vital & Health Statistics, Series 23, No. 15*, 1-52.
- Bumpass, L. L. and Sweet, J. A. (1989). National estimates of cohabitation. *Demography*, 26, 615-626.
- Cannon, K. L. and Long, R. (1971). Premarital sexual behavior in the sixties. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 33, 36-49.
- Catania, J. A., Gibson, D. R., Chitwood, D. D., and Coates, T. J. (1990). *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 339-362.
- Clayton, R. R. and Bokemeier, J. L. (1980). Premarital sex in the

seventies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 42, 759-775.

Cloutier, E., Nadeau, R. and Guay, J. (1989). Bandwagoning and underdogging on North-American free trade: A quasi-experimental panel study of opinion movement. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 1, 206-220.

Cuber, J. (1975). How new ideas about sex are changing our lives. In J. R. DeLore and J. S. DeLora, (Eds.). *Intimate life styles: Marriage and its alternatives*. Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing.

Cutler, S. J. (1985). Ageing and attitudes about sexual morality. *Ageing and Society*, 5, 161-173.

Davis, J. A. (1991). Changeable weather in a cooling climate atop the liberal plateau: Conversion and replacement in 42 GSS items. Paper presented to the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Phoenix.

DeBouno, B. A., Zinnerm S. H., Daamen, M., and McCormack, W. M. (1990). Sexual behavior of college women in 1975, 1986, and 1989. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 322, 821-825.

DeLamater, J. (1981). The social control of sexuality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 7, 263-290.

DeLamater, J. and MacCorquodale, P. (1979). *Premarital sexuality: Attitudes, relationships, behavior*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

DeLora, J. S. and Warren, C. A. B. (1977). *Understanding sexual interaction*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Division of Reproductive Health and Division of Adolescent and School Health (1992). *Sexual behavior among high school students - United States, 1990*. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 40, 885-887.

Edwards, J. N. and Booth, A. (1976). The cessation of marital intercourse, 133, 1333-1336.

Ehrhardt, A. A. and Wasserheit, J. N. (1991). Age, gender, and sexual risk behaviors for sexually transmitted diseases in the

United States. In J. N. Wasserheit, S. O. Aral, K. K. Holmes, and P. J. Hitchcock (Eds.). Research issues in human behavior and sexual transmitted diseases in the AIDS era. Washington, DC: American Society for Microbiology.

Ehrmann, W. (1961). Changing sexual mores. In E. Ginzberg, (Ed.). Values and ideals of American youth. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.

Family Growth Survey Bureau. (1991). Premarital sexual experience among adolescent women - United States, 1970-1988. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 39, 929-932.

Fay, R. E., Turner, C. F., Klassen, A. D., and Gagnon, J. H. (1989). Prevalence and patterns of same-gender sexual contact among men. Science, 243, 338-348.

Fisher, H. E. (1987). The four-year itch. Natural History, 22, 1-4, 6.

Forrest, J. D. and Singh, S. (1990). The sexual and reproductive behavior of American Women, 1982-1988. Family Planning perspective, 22, 206-214.

Gagnon, J. H. (1989). Sexuality across the life course. In C.F. Turner, H. G. Miller, & L. E. Moses (Eds.). AIDS: Sexual behavior and intravenous drug use (pp.500-536). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Glick, P. C. and Spanier, G. B. (1980). Married and unmarried cohabitation in the United States. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 42, 19-30.

Greeley, A. M. (1991). Faithful attraction: Discovering intimacy, love, and fidelity in American marriage. New York: Tor.

Greeley, A. M., Michael, R. T., and Smith, T. W., Americans and their sexual partners. (1990). Society, 27, 36-42.

Greenblat, C. S. (1983). The salience of sexuality in the early years of marriage. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45, 289-299.

Harding, S. (1988). Trends in permissiveness. In R. Jowell, S.

Witherspoon, and L. Brook (Eds.). British social attitudes:
The 5th report. Hants: Gower.

Hofferth, S. L., Kahn, J. L. and Baldwin, W., (1987). Premarital sexual activity among U.S. teenage women over the past three decades. *Family Planning Perspective*, 19, 46-53.

Irwin, P. and Thompson, N. L. (1977), Acceptance of the rights of homosexuals: A social profile. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 3, 107-121.

James, W. H. (1983). Decline in coital rates with spouses' ages and duration of marriage. *Journal of Biosociological Science*, 15, 83-87.

Jasso, G. (1985). Marital coital frequency and the passage of time: Estimating the separate effects of spouses' ages and marital duration, birth and marriage cohorts, and period influences. *American Sociological Review*, 50, 224-241.

Jasso, G. (1986). Is it outliers deletion or is it sample truncation? Notes on science and sexuality. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 738-742.

Kahn, J. R., Kalsbeek, W. D., and Hofferth, S. L. (1988). National estimates of teenage sexual activity: Evaluating the comparability of three national estimates. *Demography*, 25, 189-204.

Kahn, J. R. and Udry, J. R. (1986). Marital coital frequency: unnoticed outliers and unspecified interactions. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 734-737.

Klassen, A. D., Williams, C. J., and Levitt, E. E. (1989). Sex and morality in the U.S.: An empirical enquiry under the auspices of The Kinsey Institute. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Klassen, A. D., Williams, C. J., Levitt, E. E., Rudkin-Miniot, Laura, Miller, H. G., and Gunjal, S. (1989). Trends in premarital sexual behavior. In C.F. Turner, H. G. Miller, & L. E. Moses (Eds.). *AIDS: Sexual behavior and intravenous drug use* (pp.500-536). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Leiblum, S. R. (1990). Sexuality and the midlife woman. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 14, 495-508.

- Leo, J. (1984). The revolution is over. *Time*, April, 9, 74-83.
- Levinger, G. (1966). Systematic distortion in spouses' reports of preferred and actual sexual behavior. *Sociometry*, 29, 291-299.
- Lieverman, B. (1988). Extrapremarital intercourse: Attitudes towards a neglected sexual behavior. *Journal of Sex Research*, 24, 291-299.
- London, K. A. (1991). Cohabitation, marriage, marital dissolution, and remarriage: United States, 1988. *Advanced Data from Vital and Health Statistics*, No. 194, 1-8.
- Mahoney, E. R. (1978). Age differences in attitude change toward premarital coitus. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 7, 493-501.
- Marsh, C. (1984). Back on the Bandwagon. *British Journal of Political Science*, 15, 51-74.
- Morokoff, P. J. (1988). Sexuality in perimenopausal and postmenopausal women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 12, 489-511.
- Murstein, B. I., Chalpin, M. J., Heard, K. V., and Vyse, S. A. (1989). Sexual behavior, drugs, and relationship patterns on a college campus over thirteen years. *Adolescence*, 24, 125-139.
- Newcomer, Susan and Udry, J. Richard, "Adolescents' Honesty in a Survey of Sexual Behavior," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 3 (1988), 419-423.
- Nyberg, K. L. and Alston, J. P. (1976-77). Analysis of public attitudes toward homosexual behavior. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 2, 99-107.
- Posner, Richard, *Sex and Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Potterat, J. J., Woodhouse, D. E., Muth, J. B., and Muth, S. Q. (1990). Estimating the prevalence and career longevity of prostitute women. *Journal of Sex Research*, 27, 233-243.
- Reinisch, J. M., Sanders, S. A., Ziemba-Davis, M. (1988). The study

of sexual behavior in relation to the transmission of human immunodeficiency virus. *American Psychologist*, 43, 921-927.

Reiss, I. L. (1967). The social context of premarital sexual permissiveness. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Reiss, I. L. (1975). How & why America's sex standards are changing. In J. R. DeLore and J. S. DeLora, (Eds.). *Intimate life styles: Marriage and its alternatives*. Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing.

Reiss, I. L. (1980). Some observations on ideology and sexuality in America. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 43, 271-283.

Reiss, I. L., Anderson, R. E., and Sponaugle, G. C., (1980). A multivariate model of the determinants of extramarital sexual permissiveness. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 42, 395-411.

Robinson, I., Ziss, K., Ganza, B., Katz, S., and Robinson, E., (1991). Twenty years of the sexual revolution, 1965-1985: An update. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 216-220.

Rogers, S. M. and Turner, C. F. (1991). Male-male sexual contact in the U.S.A.: Findings from five sample surveys of American men, 1970-1990. *Journal of Sex Research*, 28, 491-519.

Ryder, N. B. and Westoff, C. F. (1971). *Reproduction in the United States, 1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Saunders, J. M. and Edwards, J. N. (1984). Extramarital sexuality: A predictive model of permissive attitudes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46, 825-835.

Schiavi, R. C., "Sexuality and Aging in Men," *Society for the Scientific Study of Sex*, 1 (1990), 227-249.

Schneider, W. and Lewis, I. A. (1984). The straight story on homosexuality and gay rights. *Public Opinion*, 7, 16-20,60.

Singh, B. K. (1980). Trends in attitudes towards premarital sexual relations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 36, 387-393.

Singh, B. K., Adams, L. D., and Jorgenson, D. E. (1981). Factors

associated with general sexual permissiveness. *Sociological Spectrum*, 1, 145-157.

- Singh, B. K., Walton, B. L., and Williams, J. S. (1976). Extramarital sexual permissiveness: Conditions and contingencies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 38, 701-712.
- Smith, T. W. (1981a). Situational qualifications to generalized absolutes: An analysis of approval of hitting questions on the General Social Surveys. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45, 224-230.
- Smith, T. W. (1981b). Contradictions on the abortion scale. GSS Methodological Report No. 19. Chicago: NORC.
- Smith, T. W. (1989a). Random probes of GSS questions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 1, 305-325.
- Smith, T. W. (1989b). Some thoughts on the nature of context effects. Paper presented to the First Nags Head Conference on Cognition and Survey Methodology, Nags Head, North Carolina.
- Smith, T. W. (1990a). Adult sexual behavior in 1989: Number of partners, frequency, and risk. Paper presented to the American Academy of the Advancement of Science, New Orleans.
- Smith, T. W. (1990b). Liberal and conservative trends in the United States since World War II. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 54 479-507.
- Smith, T. W. (1990c). The sexual revolution? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 54, 415-435.
- Smith, T. W. (1991a). Adult sexual behavior in 1989: Number of partners, frequency of intercourse, and risk of AIDS. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 23, 102-107.
- Smith, T. W. (1991b). A comment on "Twenty years of the sexual revolution." Unpublished NORC Report.
- Smith, T. W. (1991c). A methodological review of the sexual behavior questions on the General Social Survey (GSS). 1991 Annual Research Conference Proceedings. Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census.
- Smith, T. W. (1992). Attitudes towards sexual permissiveness:

Trends and correlates. GSS Social Change Report No. 35.
Chicago: NORC.

Snyder, E. E. and Spreitzer, E. (1976). Attitudes of the aged toward nontraditional sexual behavior. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 5, 249-254.

Sonenstein, F. L., Pleck, J. H., and Ku, L. C. (1989). Sexual activity, condom use, and AIDS awareness among adolescent males. *Family Planning Perspective*, 21, 152-158.

Sonenstein, F. L., Pleck, J. H., and Ku, L. C. (1991). Levels of sexual activity among adolescent males in the United States. *Family Planning Perspective*, 23, 162-167.

Stephan, G. E. and McMullin, D. R. (1982). Tolerance of sexual nonconformity: City size as a situational and early learning determinant. *American Sociological Review*, 47, 411-415.

Spanier, G. B. (1983). Married and unmarried cohabitation in the United States, 1980. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 45, 277-288.

Taylor, D. G. (1980). Procedures for evaluating trends in public opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 44, 86-100.

Taylor, H. Kagay, M. and Leichenko, S. (1986). *American teens speak: Sex, myths, TV, and birth control*. New York: Louis Harris and Associates, 1986.

Thornton, A. (1988). Cohabitation and marriage in the 1980s. *Demography*, 25, 497-508.

Thornton, A. (1989). Changing attitudes toward family issues in the United States. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 873-893.

Thornton, A. and Camburn, D. (1989). Religious participation and adolescent sexual behavior and attitudes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 641-653.

Trussell, J. and Westoff, C. F. (1980). Contraceptive Practice and trends in coital frequency. *Family Planning Perspective*, 12, 246-249.

Turner, C. F., Miller, H. G., and Moses L. E. (Eds.) (1989). AIDS: Sexual behavior and intravenous drug use. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Udry, J. R., (1980). Changes in the frequency of marital intercourse from panel data. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 9, 319-325.

Udry, J. R., Bauman, K. E., and Morris, N. M. (1975). Changes in the premarital coital experience of recent decade-of-birth cohorts of urban American women. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37, 783-787.

Udry, J. R., Deven, F. R., and Coleman, S. J. (1982). A cross-national comparison of the relative influence of male and female age on the frequency of marital intercourse. Journal of Biosociological Science, 14, 1-6.

Udry, J. R. and Morris, N, M. (1978). Relative contribution of male and female age to the frequency of marital intercourse. Social Biology, 25, 128-134.

Ventura, S. J. (1987). Trends in marital status of mothers at conception and birth of first child: United States, 1964-66,1972, 80. Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 36, 1-16.

Weis, D. L. and Jurich, J. (1985). Size of community of residence as a predictor of attitudes toward extramarital sexual relations. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47, 173-177.

Wells, J. A. and Sell, R. L. (1990). Project HOPE's international survey of AIDS educational messages and behavior change: France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Chevy Chase, MD: Project HOPE.

Westoff, C. F. (1974). Coital frequency and contraception. Family Planning Perspective, 6, 136-141.

Westoff, L. A. and Westoff, C. F. (1968). From now to zero: Fertility, contraception, and abortion in America. Boston: Little, Brown.

Wilson, T. C. (1986). Community population size and social heterogeneity: An empirical test. American Journal of

Sociology, 91, 1154-1169.

Wyatt, G. E. (1989). Reexamining factors predicting Afro-American and White American women's age at first coitus. Archives of sexual behavior, 18, 271-298.

Wyatt, G. E., Peters, S. D., and Guthrie, D. (1988). Kinsey revisited, part 1: Comparisons of the sexual socialization and sexual behavior of white women over 33 years. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 17, 201-239.