

**Paradise at the Sandstone Retreat:
Pleasure, Perversion & the Technologies of Sexual Life
During the 1960s-1970s**

by David Rosen

*This society turns everything it touches into a potential source
of progress and of exploitation, of drudgery and satisfaction,
of freedom and of oppression.
Sexuality is no exception.*

Herbert Marcuse¹

Mr. Williamson's paradise

Secluded in the hills of Topanga Canyon, just north of Los Angeles, the Sandstone Retreat was a unique experiment in erotic exploration. Founded by John and Barbara Williamson in 1969, it drew a fairly wide and often distinguished following among "free love" advocates, those exploring the vast -- yet limitedly chartered -- territory of sexual intimacy.* Among retreat regulars were the sexologists Alex Comfort and Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen, the journalists Gay Talese and Max Learner, the artist Betty Dodson, the performer Bobby Darin, and Daniel Ellsberg, renown for leaking the Pentagon Papers. According to one estimate, its membership topped 275 couples.²



Sandstone's library and public grounds resonated with high-minded conversation among well-meaning, intelligent and mostly white, middle-class, suburban professionals. However, the legions of sexual adventurers and the curious who visited the ranch were drawn by the "free love" practiced in the basement

of the main house. Talese, a former *New York Times* reporter and a founder of literary "new journalism," chronicled the going-on at Sandstone in his 1981 "sex-posure," *They Neighbor's Wife*. "After descending the red-carpeted staircase," he reported, "the visitor entered the semidarkness of a large room where, reclining on the cushioned floor, bathed in the orange glow from the fireplace, they saw shadowed faces and interlocked limbs, rounded breasts and reaching fingers, moving buttocks, glistening backs, shoulders, nipples, navels, long blond hair spread across pillows, thick dark arms holding soft white hips, a woman's head hovering over an erect penis." His ears were as observant as his eyes: "Sighs, cries of ecstasy could be heard, the slap and suction of copulating flesh, laughter, murmuring, music from the stereo, crackling black burning wood."

Talese goes on to detail the enticing scene awaiting a visitor:

As the visitor's eyes adjusted to the light, there was a clear view of the many shapes, sizes, textures, tones: Some couples sat crossed-legged in circles, relaxing talking, as if picnicking on a beach; others embraced in many positions: women astride men, couples lying side by side, a

* John Williamson insert; Facenfacts.

woman's leg extended about her partner's shoulders, a man in missionary position with elbows pressing into madras pillows, perspiration dripping from a dripping chin. Nearby, a woman held her breath, gasping as the man inside her began to come; then another woman, responding to the sound, arched her body and moved more quickly into her own orgasm, her skin flushed, her face grimacing, her toes clenched.

There were triads, foursomes, a few bisexuals; bodies that would belong to high-fashion models, line-academicians; tattooed arms, peach beads, ankle bracelets, ankhs, thin gold chains around waists, hefty penises, noodles, curly female pubes, fine, bushy, trimmed, dark, blond, red valentines. ...

"It was," Talese chuckles, "a room with a view like none other in America, an audiovisual aphrodisiac, a *tableau vivant* by Hieronymus Bosch."³

Sandstone may have been the most well known of the intentional communities that flourished during the tumultuous 1960s-1970s period, but it was not alone. Other communes included secular groups like the Sheep Ridge Ranch (aka Wheeler's Ranch), Hog Farm, Total Loss Farm, Drop City, Black Bear Ranch, Trans-Love Energies, Morning Star Ranch, New Buffalo and Libre. They also included religious communes like the Brotherhood of the Spirit, Shiloh, Jesus People USA and Divine Light Mission. Talese sites a *New York Times* survey that claimed that there were nearly 2,000 "alternative lifestyle communities" in the U.S. during the counter-culture era. He notes that these social experiments were "... of various sizes and distinction, located in farmhouses and city lofts, hillside manors and desert adobes, geodesic domes and ghetto tenements..." Participants included "hippie horticulturists, mediating mystics, swingers, Jesus freaks, ecological evangelists, retired rock musicians, tired peace marchers, corporate dropouts, and devotees of Reich and

Maslow, B. F. Skinner, Robert Rimmer, and Winnie the Pooh."^{*}

These communes were organized to address a variety of social and spiritual concerns, but while many functioned without an explicit sexual agenda, sexual exploration and experimentation on an informal basis was not uncommon. Perhaps the most noted example of this kind of community was the Esalen Institute located in Big Sur, south of San Francisco. It served as a "living laboratory" to further the development of new psycho-therapeutic methods, including massage, body therapy, nude "encounter" groups and – as practiced by one of the psychiatrist Fritz Perls – sex between a therapist and his patient(s).⁴ These venues placed the emancipation of sexual experience at the center of the quest for new ways to live a fuller life, one outside the conventions of traditional experience.

The '60s counterculture, with its appeal of sex, drugs and rock-&-roll, provoked all kinds of sexual experimentation. Hippies and other free spirits from San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury to New York's East Village explored alternative lifestyles, including communal living, group marriages and "free love" arrangements.⁵ The experimentation within most communes appears to have adhered to fairly conventional patriarchal, heterosexual sexual

* Wilhelm Reich was a German-born psychoanalyst, author and discoverer of the "orgone" life force; he was arrested and imprisoned by the US FDA for his experimental cancer research and died in a federal penitentiary in 1957. Abraham Maslow was a psychologist and formulated theory of "hierarchy of needs." B. F. Skinner was a Harvard psychologist and author of the "utopian" study, *Walden Two*. Robert Rimmer was the author of *The Harrad Experiment* that advocated for utopian, group marriage.

practices. It appears to have been principally male directed, heterosexually oriented, with limited sex-play (e.g., fetishes, role playing) and the mixing of people of different backgrounds (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation). Nevertheless, threesomes involving one man and two women were not uncommon explorations. Still others within the counter culture were open to wider experiences. "When you start getting free in your lifestyle, it's hard to regress and go backwards," a teenage girl describes her experience with "free-love" during the '60s. "What got me into the lesbian trip is I hung out with hippie types, smoked pot, worked in the anti-war movement, rebelled in every way I could think of." She then admits, "I slept with most of the men in my group. Then there were two women in the group who had three-ways with men. I thought that sounded interesting. I was open to experience as a way of living."⁶

The sexual revolution of the 1960s-1970s was the nation's third major challenge to deeply rooted traditional Christian moral order. The earlier revolutions include the utopian movements of the 1840s-1870s and the cultural revolution of the 1910s-1920s.⁷ The '60s counterculture was a multigenerational effort, involving adults and young people, both high school and college students. It promoted a significant expansion in the forms of acceptable sexual expression and experience. The sexual revolution occurred during a period in which nearly all forms of social authority were challenged, including race relations, foreign military policy, dress codes and musical tastes. The outcome of this struggle forever changed the nature of America's its moral order, especially its sexual culture.

The '60s sexual revolution was marked by an internal schism that mirrored

the divisions that defined other progressive moments of the era, the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements. With regard to sexuality, the division was between a more mainstream, middle-class ethos promoting male-oriented notions of pleasure and those identified as more radical, if not "perverted," whether identified as homosexual, hedonistic or pan-sexual. It was a division between those enforcing reformist accommodation to existing social power and those championing a more systematic critique of patriarchy and homophobia. This struggle was played out in a variety of different sexual activities including at private parties, swap clubs, swing clubs, gay s/m clubs and a variety of anonymous sexual hook-ups. It is a struggle that continues into the 21st century.

Swap

In 1964, William and Jerrye Breedlove published *Swap Clubs: A study in Contemporary Sexual Mores*. According to the book's "bio," the couple had been married for 12 years and he was a 30-year-old engineer and she was 29-year-old librarian; they had four children and lived in Southern California. Their study is based on a series of first-person interviews and -- although unstated -- participatory observation.* If one accepts their findings, the sexual environment of the '60s was in the midst of a much more profound exploration process than is usually recognized. Extrapolating from the alleged findings of Alfred Kinsey's Institute for Sexual Research at Indiana University, the authors found "that there are approximately five million married couples in the U.S. who have exchanged partners with

* This is a non-scholarly study with no discussion of methodology; thus, it is impossible to know if this is a work of fiction or really based on primary research.

another married couple for sexual intercourse at least once during their marriage. Other authorities have estimated anywhere from a half-million to three million."⁸

Whatever the actual number, the Breedloves identify this as an important socio-sexual development. Further extrapolating from the Kinsey data, they detail the evolution of the swap club between 1953 and 1973: "The number of swap clubs in 1953 was probably less than 2 percent of the married couples between the ages of 20 and 45 years. In 1963, it was probably above 5 percent. By 1973, the total will probably reach 15 percent – maybe reaching all the way to 25 percent before leveling off."⁹ However one reads the Breedloves's findings, a distinct sexual sub-culture existed and, for those who sought it out, could be found and joined.

Swap clubs – and the people and the sexuality engaged in – had a very particular definition or boundary that set the limits to what was acceptable. The Breedloves identify a number of what they call "unusual interests" -- including homosexuality, fetishism, flagellation, transvestitism and bestiality -- that set the limits to sexual practice. Concerning homosexuality, the wife could be "bi," but the husband had to be "straight." "The second 'most unusual' interest is mild fetishism," they found. The fetichisms they ranged from a satin undergarment or bedsheet to a piece of silky cloth to "sometimes even a contraceptive device." However, they warned, "If the fetishism is not mild, if it replace the opposite sex completely (autoerotic fetishism), or if the fetish is too flagrant, the fetishist would be alien to the swap club philosophy."¹⁰ Going further, they insisted, "Sadism and masochism are not welcome in swap clubs. Transvestites, sado-masochists, zoophiles and

homosexuals each have clubs of their own, of course ... "¹¹

The study is invaluable with regard to the swap groups the Breedloves discovered operating throughout the country. Like a well-researched travel guide, they report on mate-swapping groups in such likely place as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco (90 couples participating), Boston and Miami. More revealing, they found groups operating in Baltimore (32 couples), Denver, Detroit (42 couples), Elizabeth, N.J., Kansas City, Las Vegas (10 couples), Milwaukee, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Palm Springs, Philadelphia (more than 100 couples), Phoenix, Salt Lake City (including Mormons), Seattle (34 couples), St. Louis and Washington, DC (12 couples), among other cities. The authors found that the participants in these swap clubs not only respected the boundaries of permissible sexual practice, but conformed to a general set of demographic characteristics.

"... [W]e have found that the greater number of practitioners – over 95 percent – are those of 'normal' heterosexual appetites, who more often than not are from the better-adjusted, better-educated, higher-income people in our society," they wrote.¹² Nearly all those they met were white, college-educated, physically healthy, middle-class professionals in their early- to mid-30s. (Washington appears to be the exception, with more black than white couples.) Most were in happily married couples with children who participated as part of a couple seeking to broaden the meaning of their committed relationship.

Equally revealing, the Breedloves found that most clubs sanctioned either one-to-one or group engagements (i.e., threesomes or more). Some, like members of a Philadelphia group, made mate

selection based on "keys in the hat" principal. Some, like those in Denver, had regular nude photo shoots (mostly of women). And some, like the group on Staten Island, NY, engaged in strip-tease sessions and "strip-canasta." However, the most extreme action seems to have involved southern California groups that required, as the authors' note, "that every male be sterilized."¹³

In 1971, Gilbert Bartell published a study of group sex commissioned by the Playboy Foundation. Bartell estimated that about one million people were involved in "organized" swinging. He found a particular sexual sociology operating, much of it confirming the Breedloves's findings. First, swinging took one of two forms - either "closed" (i.e., couples in private) or "open" (i.e., group play). Second, women tended to be more active than men. Women engaged in homoerotic play (with two women in a three-some); women were exhibitionists in two- or three-way sexual encounters; men enjoyed voyeurism. Third, swingers forged a community outside the confines of mate-swapping get-togethers or clubs, including subscribing to and/or placing personal ads in publication like *Select* and *Kindred Spirits* attending conventions and going on a specially-chartered cruise (often sponsored by Lifestyle Tours and Travel). As *Playboy* found, "Many had taken the magazine's philosophy to heart: They would not allow marriage to end sexual exploration."¹⁴

Another husband-and-wife research team, the anthropologists Charles and Rebecca Palson, undertook primary research to understand the phenomenon of swap club sex. Employing a first-person, participatory-observer methodology, they assessed some 136 swingers and their findings confirm those of the Breedloves and Bartell. However,

because they were apparently active participants in the scene, the authors note: "... swingers consider an ideal gathering one in which everyone can express themselves as individuals *and* appreciate others for doing the same." They warn, "If ever one person fails to have an enjoyable experience in these terms, the gathering is that much less enjoyable for everyone."¹⁵

The goal of the swing club, of engaging in sexual activity with multiple partners sharing the same values, was to give - and receive - a gift. These participants sought mutually pleasing intimacy among active and equal partners, not merely sexual conquest. Scarred as they were by their predominately heterosexual (and patriarchal) sensibility of the time, these practices nonetheless expressed an effort - however imperfect and compromised - to achieve sexual pleasure without turning either partner into a commodity.

Swing

Swing clubs represented a second -- and far more radical -- form of '60s sexual engagement. "Swing clubs had opened in nearly every state in the Union, with twenty-seven in California alone, and most of Canada," Heidenry points out. In New York, one of the earliest was Percival's, but it was short-lived. However, the club that gained the most notoriety was Plato's Retreat, located at the Hotel Ansonia, premises of the former Continental Baths.

"On an average night," Heidenry reports, "more than two hundred couples flocked to Plato's basement cave to see, to conquer, to come. Most of them were straight, aged twenty to fifty, and well educated -- but the only common denominator was lust ..." The club was opened in 1977 by two enterprising hustlers, Larry

Levenson and Mike Ross, and quickly became city hot spot. It was a cross between the Sandstone Retreat and Club 54, the popular nightspot. According to one historian, "The \$25 entry fee (a little less the price of a Broadway theater ticket) included an 'all-you-can-eat' buffet of bagels and lox, chicken salad, wine and scotch."¹⁶ Sociability was of equal value as sexual pleasure.

One Plato visitor noted, "By one a.m. the crowd had grown to five hundred and the orgy began." He details the following adventure: "By now most of the guests had shed their cloths, and group gropes were everywhere -- in the pool, whirlpool, baths, or steam room. Couples and threesomes made love in the cubicles or out in the open. Women gave random blow jobs in the hallway and lay spread-eagle on a table as two or three men worked them over."

Howard Bellin, another Plato visitor during its early days, confirms this assessment: "Plato's Retreat was unbelievable." He adds: "I had never in my life seen anything like this and probably will never again. I mean, thirty, forty couples all making love at the same time, it was amazing, you cannot believe it. Ahhh, those were the days. ..."¹⁷ During an evening of November 1979, Plato's Retreat reached its zenith. As Heindenry notes, "an occasional porn actress named Tara Alexander took on eighty-six men, four at a time, in a nonstop six-hour spectacle dubbed the Supermathon." The performance was so provocative that it was rebroadcast over a New York X-rated cable show, *Midnight Blue*.¹⁸

Three s&m clubs operated in New York during the heyday of Plato's Retreat, the Club O at Fantasy Manor and the Castle. Two women ran Club O and it "boasted an unusual mix of gay and straight clientele." The Castle was

located in mid-town and run by Jay and Diane Hartwell, publishers of the *S&M Express*. In addition to private rooms for one-on-one play (called "session rooms"), the club sported a room with a stage equipped with sawhorses, ratcheted-run pulleys and a large selection of whips. "After the lights dimmed," reports an observer, "a bare-breasted black women, wearing a bandoleer of nipple clamps, rode on stage mounted atop a nude male wearing a black leather face mask an a horse's tail attached to his scrotum. As she cantered him across the stage, he whinnied and she slapped his buttocks until they trotted off stage to moderate applause."¹⁹

Gay sex clubs were even more radical. They included, in the West Village's meat-packing district, the Cock Ring and Sewer as well as the more notorious Anvil, Hellfire and Mineshaft as well as the Catacombs in San Francisco. They appealed to those drawn to the demi-world of after-hour clubs and sought to push the limits of sexual experience, especially involving fetishism.

The Anvil was located on West 14th Street and 11th Avenue, in the heart of the West Village's meat packing district; it was a part of the city with little residential population and pretty deserted late at night. One regular visitor, Philip Gefer, described it as "Weimar culture ... on acid. It seemed more like a club with a kind of festive, ersatz honky-tonk atmosphere that the dingy, seedy dive it appeared to be from the outside." The club's "back room," located in the sub-basement, was another story: "I was in the back room having a grand old time. There was a ledge that ran the length of the back room, which I never actually saw, but people would lie on the ledge and get fucked. I remember this particular night, there I was lying on the ledge, my underpants and my jeans cradled in my armpit besides me, being fucked

randomly by several different men. I could feel them one at a time inside me, even though I never saw them." Self-reflectively, Gefer questions, "Either I was truly liberated or truly psychotic. Who knows?"²⁰ This question haunted the '60-'70s as it does the extreme sex scene today.

The Mineshaft "could be approached with a sense reverence, anxious dread (typically the first time), but usually evoked some sense of excitement, however mild," reports Joel Brodsky, a sociology professor at University of Nebraska (Lincoln). As he points out, "On weekends few arrived before 2:00 a.m. and the crowd was dense until at least 5:00 a.m...."²¹ He details the scene:

"The first room one entered after being admitted was the "front room." This was a large space, with spotlit pool tables, a long bar which was the most brightly lit area in the Mineshaft, a coat-check area, and a few benches in the shadows along the far wall. ... [T]he front room was also a favored place for initiating sexual contact. ... people would bend over a pool table, sit astride or stand at the bar, while their partners penetrate or fellate them. It was especially appropriate for those who enjoyed a sense of public spectacle, exhibition, or humiliation.

"Activities begun in the front room might also move into an adjacent area. ... It was much dimmer than the front room, contained a small bar, a table, some wooden stalls, two recesses which contained slings, and featured a spotlit wooden frame in the center with a sling about six feet off the ground. The slings were used to suspend men who wished to be fisted, and the bartender at the small bar would provide paper mayonnaise cups of Crisco and handfuls of power towels to those doing the fisting. The wooden stalls could be used by those wishing to exclude others, but also had "glory-holes" to allow both voyeurism and pseudo-anonymous fellatio."²²

According to John Preston, another regular visitor, "You were entering a

place where flesh was the common denominator."²³

Preston fully appreciated the social significance of the Mineshaft. "This was communal sex, even communistic," he proclaimed. "It was insurgent theater; it was meant to offend bourgeois sensibilities, if people who held them ever walked mistakenly through them." He then reflects, "But the real purpose of the action at The Mineshaft was determined by action that was to be witnessed within the tribe of gay men. The activities were devoted to initiating a male into the camaraderie of the group, something that has to be observed by the group."²⁴ Brodsky concludes his analysis by observing the Mineshaft "was clearly the creation of secondary labor market capitalism and maintained through traditional forms of political corruption." Furthermore, "it clearly demonstrated the power of cultural and social organization to transform sensation and physiological response into erotic experience."²⁵

The Hellfire Club was among the wildest sex clubs. It has been described as a "black-on-black basement with its own water-sport room, a dark labyrinth of doorless cubicles with an impressive array of hardware." Its most memorable feature, in its very essence was that "the Hellfire reeked of stale sex and urine." As one observer noted, it "attracted sexual adventurers of every description: straights, bisexuals, drag queens, sadists, masochists, fist fuckers, masturbators, voyeurs, and especially gay leathermen, who were then reveling in their he-man heyday."²⁶

San Francisco's Catacombs gained an international reputation as a s&m, leather club promoting fisting or "handballing." Founded by Steve McEachern, opened in May 1975 and closed in August 1981 with

McEachern's sudden death of a heart attack.* It was located in a two-flat Victorian house in the Mission District, on 21st Street between Valencia and Guerrero. As Rubin makes clear, "the Catacombs was exclusive. To be invited to the parties, you had to be on Steve's list." "The Catacombs was always primarily a place for gay male fisting parties," Rubin reports. "It was also a place for S/M, and over time, the Catacombs was shared with other groups - kinky lesbians, heterosexuals, and bisexuals. While it never lost its identity as a fister's paradise, over the years it increasingly took on a community center for the local S/M population."²⁷

The club did more than provide a space for "intimate connection, male fellowship, and having a good time," which are values in and of themselves. "It facilitated," concludes Rubin, "explorations of the body's sensate capabilities that are rarely available in modern, western societies." The space was divided between a more public, social front room and a series sex-play areas in the back rooms. As Rubin reports, "[n]udity was the norm at the Catacombs. People wore leather harnesses, arm bands, jocks, socks, cock rings, or nothing at all." The social area was styled like a leather bar, with a variety of male erotica decorating the walls, and encouraged camaraderie. The back rooms were, as she relates, "not for casual socializing. The back was for sex."²⁸

The back rooms consisted of the "Bridal Suite" and the "Dungeon," and each offered its own distinct pleasures. The centerpiece of the Bridal Suite was a four-poster waterbed; the room also included a series of foam-padded

benches and, as Rubin reports, "the top part of a hospital gurney, covered with a foam mattress." Further back was the dungeon, with mirrors on the walls and ceiling, which itself was divided into two sections. The first part included an iron cage, a large wooden bondage cross ("a favorite spot for whipping," as Rubin notes), a padded bondage table and two operating tables "perfect for medical scenes or precision torture." The second part included "two rows of commodious black leather slings. ... Each sling was fitted with the ubiquitous stirrups. To holds of Crisco, big empty coffee cans were hung by chains next to each sling."²⁹

Reflecting the influence of the '60s counter-culture, the Catacombs founder, Steve McEachern, was lovers with Cynthia Slater, who had founded the Society of Janus, a pan-sexualist organization, in 1974. According to Rubin, "Cynthia was bisexual. She introduced her female lovers into the [Catacombs] space, and they in turn brought other lovers and friends." Rubin notes, "By the summer of 1978, there were usually one to five women mingling among sixty to eighty men. As Steve had predicted ... many of [the men] came to enjoy the presence of a few women as yet another twist on an already wild situation." On March 21, 1980, Slater moved to expand the scope even further, hosting at the Catacombs what Rubin finds to be "the first time significant numbers of kinky gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals partied together in the Bay Area."³⁰ This event may well have been the zenith of the sexual revolution.

The sexual revolution may have reached its dead-end in the very different model of sexual "community" represented by the motorcycle gangs of the period. Bikers had become a very peculiar cultural phenomenon during the post-WWII period,

* After its closure, a Catacombs II opened in October 1981 and closed within three months; a third club, the Catacombs on Shotwell, opened in February 1982. [Rubin-1991/132-34]

romantically epitomized by Marlon Brando's performance in *The Wild Ones*. By the '60s, a fundamental split developed between those portrayed in *Easy Rider* and those who identified with the Hell's Angels. While the former suggested the inherent threat of a more whimsical, poly-sensuous male identity, the latter represented the residual form of masculinity that had been superseded by the post-War recovery driven by the consumer revolution. This identity laid claim to the outlaw, gunslinger, frontiersmen mythology that has long been mythologized in the U.S. This more hard-core, backward-looking male community, known among themselves as "one percenters" – at once a tiny minority and the cream-of-the-cream of the crop – was unique in the absolute commodification of sexual practice, particularly in the treatment of women.

The Hell's Angels gained nationwide notoriety in 1967 when *Newsweek* ran a story about a biker's "ol' lady [being] nailed to a tree for holding back on her man." The coverage exposed how women within "outlaw" biker gangs were treated as sexual property. By the mid-'70s, a number of gangs, including the Orlando Outlaws and Devil's Discipline, had broken up due to too aggressive treatment of women. According to James Quinn, an academic expert, "bikers ladies are shared with other club members at the discretion of their male companions." He adds:

"An ol' lady may be sold for anywhere from 50c to \$500. The lower the price asked by her 'ol man, the more abusive the buyer's intentions are likely to be. It is also a serious blow to the woman's self-esteem to be sold for much less than \$75 to \$100. Women sold at impromptu barroom auctions can expect to first be inspected and manhandled by prospective buyers and then bid on by a drunken and hostile audience. Buyers at such auctions expect to keep the woman only briefly and are

usually quite abusive after the sale is finalized."³¹

A woman reaches the nadir of her sexual being when she is reduced to the status of "sweetbutt" – no longer protected by status being an "ol' lady," she becomes community property and freely exchanged by gang members.

Private parties played an important role for diverse segments of those seeking greater sexual expression. For example, in Detroit, during the '60s "house parties still remained favorite social activities," often attracting African-American lesbians and gay men. Rochella Thorpe found, "as economic factors permitted, bars evolved from house parties to include shared gay and lesbian spaces, to bars where the clientele was mostly black lesbians."³² The anthropologist Gayle Rubin found a similar phenomenon among gay male leathermen in San Francisco. As Rubin reports:

"Sex parties had been critical to the development of leather social life at least as far back as the late forties. Before there were leather bars, there were S/M parties. These parties were usually held in private homes and apartments, hosted by one or two individuals, and populated by means of informal networks of referral. The parties in turn helped the early gay S/M networks to diversify and grow. The contacts made through these networks in the late forties and early fifties led to the establishment of the first leather bars."³³

Unfortunately, such gatherings had to remain secretive. The police regularly raided some, especially among lesbians and drag queens.³⁴

Anonymous hook-ups

Swing clubs, swap clubs, sex clubs, invitation-only gatherings and other venues provided ways by which many adults -- be they straight, gay, bisexual or into nearly any manner of fetish pleasure -- could explore the

limits of their sexuality. These venues were complemented by a host of other means by which individuals (but predominantly men, be they straight or gay) could engage in isolated, discrete sexual encounters be they commercial or noncommercial. Such encounters included visiting a bathhouse or massage parlor, meeting with a prostitute at a bordello or as a random encounter on the street or in a car, or seeking a secluded liaison at a public toilet, truck stop or park. These venues provides a quasi-private, and often illegal, space in which individuals (and occasionally groups) could engage in anonymous sexual acts which, in their own way, tested the limits of traditional sexual values.

The most notorious illegal commercial enterprises that furthered the cultivation of community were the innumerable after-hour bars and clubs. They appear to have taken place in cities throughout the country and their appeal was to the more adventurous. In Detroit, according to Thorpe, "[a]fter hours parties offered dancing, drinking, eating, and talking as their main activities. African-American lesbians and gay men could participate in both the public bar scene and the house party tradition."³⁵ As a woman who visited such clubs in Philadelphia reported, "[t]hey were a riot. That was my first immersion in just such another world, a real underworld. Boys looked liked girls and girls looked like boys." These gatherings got started after 2:00am, when commercial bars closed, and tended to serve a mixed clientele. Many were located on two to three blocks along Locus Street and were allegedly operated by the Mafia. As the historian Marc Stein found, "In mixed-bars, same-sex couples could exchange partners and form cross-sex pairs if the police appeared. In after-hour clubs, same-sex dancing was less restricted."³⁶

No commercial establishment played a more significant role in the formation of a self-identified community, the modern gay movement, than public bars. Other licensed commercial establishments -- including bathhouses, massage parlors, adult bookstores (often with backroom peepshows) and porn movie houses -- encouraged sexual encounters, most often anonymous ones. Bar facilitated social engagement. Many served either an exclusively male homosexual clientele or catered to a predominantly heterosexual clientele but were gay-friendly or gay-tolerant. Of these, the ones that catered to lesbians, fairies, leathermen or another distinct sub-groupings were especially important.

Gay bars of the late-'50s and '60s offered their patrons what Faderman calls a "clandestine" setting that "ensure[d] privacy, since exposure could be dangerous." They were most often "dark, secret, a nighttime place, located usually in dismal areas..."³⁷ Up until only the most recent period, patronage at public saloons, taverns and bars has been predominately a male affair. Such establishments were often further segregated on the basis of ethnic group, race, class and other factors. That this pattern should be mirrored within the homosexual community is no surprise. That most gay bars catered to men does not mean that they excluded women or people of color (although some did) or that there were no exclusively lesbian bars or ones that catered nearly-exclusively to people of color. Nevertheless, as the historian Martin Duberman stresses, "bars were among the few places where lesbians felt they could congregate and be themselves in relative safety."³⁸

A resourceful lesbian could patronize a discreetly operating bar in nearly every large city (as well as many smaller ones) throughout the country. While many lesbians, let alone

heterosexual women, did not drink alcohol or felt uncomfortable going to a questionable place in a seedy part of town, a remarkable number – both black and white -- appear to have done so. For example, in New York there was the Sea Colony; in Los Angeles, the Open Door, If Club and Paradise Club; in San Francisco, Kelly's Alamo Club; in Oakland, Mary's First and Last Chance; in Omaha, the Cave; in Detroit, George's Inca Room, Bingo's and Fosters during the '60s and the Palais, Barbary Coast, the Club Exclusive and the Casbah in the '70s; and in Philadelphia, the most famous lesbian bar was Rusty's.³⁹ As one of the regulars at Rusty's recalled, the sexual atmosphere was charged with the illicit: "There was a tremendous sense of sexual electricity in the air, which was the shadow side of everything I'd been brought up with. And that side is always both enticing and threatening in equal parts. So that's the way I remember Rusty's, a sense of excitement, of danger, of possibly having fallen off the edge of the known world."⁴⁰ In Detroit, and probably other cities, these bars supported some element of what Thorpe calls "sex trade;" the bars "offered a variety of sexual pleasures for those who sought them, but remained discreet enough that those who wanted to could remain only vaguely aware of them."⁴¹

As suggested, there were a far greater number of gay male-predominant and male-only bars in the '60s and '70s. Like the lesbian bars, they operated throughout the county. However, because of the significantly larger number of men who went to bars (particularly in the bigger cities), greater differentiation among clientele often took place – in effect, bars not only had their own identity or character, but were patronized by increasingly more specialized or self-identified patrons – most often along class, race and fantasy lines. Due to

simple demographics, bars in smaller cities tended to support a greater mix of orientations, whereas bars in bigger cities encouraged fragmentation along more specialized lines of self-identity. This was especially evident among the leather bars that came to populate the San Francisco scene. According to Rubin, the earliest self-identified association of leathermen appeared in San Francisco in the '50s and early-60s and tended to congregate along with other gay men and lesbians at specific bars in different parts of the city. For example, they socialized in North Beach at the Black Cat and in the Tenderloin at the Old Crow and the Caboose. In addition, such men also seem to have cruised the waterfront near the Ferry Building.

It is with the opening of, first, the Why Not and, most importantly, the Tool Box, in the early-'60s that the first exclusive leather bars were founded. The Tool Box operated between 1962 and 1971. In June 1964, *Life* magazine ran a feature spread on the Tool Box, provocatively illustrated with dimly-lit shots of men in leather outfits. As *Life* reported to a fascinated, if not shocked, middle America:

"One of the most dramatic examples [of S/M bars], the Tool Box, is in the warehouse district of San Francisco. Outside the entrance stand a few brightly polished motorcycles, including an occasional lavender model. Inside the bar, the accent is on leather and sadistic symbols. The walls are covered with murals of masculine-looking men in black leather jackets. A metal collage of motorcycle parts hangs on one wall. A cluster of tennis shoes – favorite footwear for many homosexuals with feminine traits – dangles from the ceiling. Behind it a derisive sign reads: 'Down with Sneakers!'"⁴²

As Rubin notes, "the Tool Box was a sensation – wildly popular"

Its popularity led to the opening of other bars targeted to this apparently growing (or at least more visible) segment of the gay community. Among the numerous other bars that operated from the mid-'60s into the early-'80s and that catered to a leather clientele were: the Detour (in the Western Addition) and On the Levee (on the Embarcadero), which opened in 1965; Febe's and the Stud (in SoMa), in 1966; the Ramrod and the In Between (which quickly but was followed by the No Name, the Bolt, the Brig and the Powerhouse) in 1968; the Boot Camp, in 1971; the Folsom Street Barracks, in 1972; the Red Star, the Ambush and Folsom Prison in 1973; the Balcony (favored by those into fist-fucking and located in the Castro), in 1977; the Arena and the Black & Blue, in 1978; and the Stables, the Watering Hole, the Trench (for those into water sports), the Leatherneck and the Plunge, in 1979. While bars like the Drummaster, Gold Coast, Compound, Oasis, San Francisco Eagle, Cave and Chaps continued to open (and close) during the 1980s, the onset of the AIDS crisis by 1984 led to closing of gay bathhouses and many bars.^{*43}

New York went through a similar, but quite different, sexual evolution among its gay community during this period. In distinction from San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities, sexuality took on a stronger political dimension. The activism of the civil-right movement of the '50s and '60s was taken up by radical sex activities during the late-60s and early-'70s.

* Rubin's warning as to the status of the s&m scene in San Francisco should be borne in mind: "... almost every major city has an S/M population, that San Francisco's is not particularly large, and that S/M institutions are more numerous and developed in New York, a city that has failed to pass a gay rights ordinance, than in San Francisco, one which has." [Rubin-1987/203]

But this seems to have happened quite unintentionally.

New York has a long history of bars catering to gay men.⁴⁴ And like such bars throughout the country, there were clandestine venues facilitating discreet encounters. By the '60s, the bar scene, especially in Greenwich Village, was controlled by organized crime interests. As Duberman points out in his definitive history of the Stonewall uprising: "The Washington Square [bar] was owned by the Joe Gallo family, which also controlled Tony Pastor's and the Purple Onion (whereas the Genovese family operated the Stonewall, TeleStar, the Tenth of Always, the Bon Soir on Eighth Street, and - run by Anna Genovese - the Eighty-Two Club in the East Village featured drag shows for an audience largely composed of straight tourists.)"⁴⁵ As part of the culture of illegal gathering places, repeated police harassment (with its attendant pay-offs, closures and arrests) threatened not only the Mob, but the clientele as well.

The Stonewall was a pretty seedy place. As Kaiser describes it, the bar "was not an elegant place; it did not even have running water behind the bar."⁴⁶ But it did attract a wonderfully diverse clientele. He adds, "the crowd was unusually eclectic for a gay place in this era..." In particular, it attracted a good number of under-age youths and drag queens, especially those of color. As history would have it, a "normal" occasion of police harassment on the night of June 28, 1969, exploded into a minor civil rebellion. Over the next three days, the Village would be the site of a mini-guerrilla confrontation between rock-and-bottle-throwing "faggots" and the police's elite Tactical Patrol Force.

The Stonewall uprising exploded the myth of gay passivity in a triple sense. First, "homosexuals," and in particular

stylized effeminate drag queens, were not passive – they could be tough; second, the formal, political movement of self-identified male and female “homosexuals” needed to – and could – be more militant; and, finally, individual “homosexuals” needed to – and could -- come out of the “closet” and be more one’s self, however s/he manifest it. After Stonewall, Sodom and Gomorra moved closer to mainstreet.

Police harassment of homosexuals continued after Stonewall as illustrated by the raid on a 1971 dance hosted by the lesbian organization, Daughters of Bilitis.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the gay community was emboldened. “Pre-Stonewall gay S/M was a very small community,” observes David Stein.⁴⁸ The ‘70s witnessed the politicization of gay s&m and other perverts.

Gay bathhouses have been a unique venue for illicit homoerotic encounters for most of the 20th century. Their appeal is quite simple, as the historian John Loughery has observed: “Cruising is different in a towel, which negates worry about a proper outfit, lengthy barstool conversation, vice squad entrapment, or unpleasant surprises when the clothes come off.”⁴⁹ However by 1960, there were only three bathhouses operating in New York City. According to one observer, “All three had in common an ingrained seediness that dismayed all but the hardiest. The rooms were filthy, torn sheets covered sheets, the latrines were unspeakable, and the atmosphere was bleakly degenerate.”⁵⁰

Each bathhouse appears to have appealed to a distinct clientele. For example, the Mount Morris Baths, in Harlem, catered to mostly black men who were often discriminated against in the other bathhouses. The St. Mark’s Baths, in the Lower East Side, was the most notorious. By the late-

‘60s, reports were circulating that it was pioneering a new sex practice, “fist fucking.” As a regular visitor to the Baths during this period reported, he “edged his way to [a bunk bed], joining a dozen other young men whose eyes were straining out of their sockets in total disbelief as a young blond boy lay spread-eagle on the mattress, a burly man in front of him methodically pushing his arm into the boy’s entrails.”^{*51}

During the ‘60s and into the early-‘70s, a host of bathhouses opened throughout the country. According to various reports, it appears that by 1972 over 100 were operating in the continental U.S. and Puerto Rico; by 1980, the number was between 150 and 200. In addition to the major cities, bathhouse were reported to be operating in Akron (OH), Billings (MT), Camden (NJ), Cleveland (OH), Duluth (MN), East Hartford (CT), Galveston (TX), Louisville (KY), Portsmouth (VA), Savannah (GA), Tampa (FL), Toledo (OH) and Kenosha (WI). While many gay bathhouses faced regular police harassment, enough business was generated to encourage more entrepreneurial businessmen to take advantage the emerging opportunity. Two of these efforts are of special note – The Club, a chain of independently operated bathhouses, and New York’s Continental Baths, the most celebrated facility of the era.

The Club began most inauspiciously in 1965 when Jack Campbell and two associates opened a bathhouse in downtown Cleveland. As Campbell recalls, “I specifically wanted a better, cleaner atmosphere.” And he wanted

* According to Heidenry, “The first published photo of heterosexual fist fucking – a man’s hand and wrist inserted into a vagina – appeared in *Screw* [a NY weekly] under the headline ‘Fist Fucking Femme.’” [Heidenry/162] While no publishing date is provide, it likely appeared in the late-‘60s.

it to be explicitly targeted to gay men. They modeled it not after the seedy bathhouses in New York, but the more stylish ones already operating in San Francisco, in particular the famed Sutro Baths.* Over the following few years, Campbell and his associates opened a second bathhouse in Cleveland, the Sixth Street Sauna, and expanded to Toledo and then other cities. By 1971, Club bathhouses were operating in Atlanta, Buffalo, Miami, New Orleans, Newark and St. Louis, among other cities.** Ever innovative, Club owners offered special student discounts and discounts for two or more guys coming on "Buddy Nights."⁵²

Stewart Ostrow opened the Continental Baths in New York's Hotel Ansonia in 1968. It was distinguished by offering a new, more attractive environment that included clean showers and steam rooms as well as discrete private rooms for consensual sexual encounters. And, like the Club chain, it was explicitly "gay friendly." But the Continental added respectability with the feature performance of stars like Bette Midler, Cab Calloway and the Metropolitan Opera's Eleanor Steber, among others. Not unlike the appeal of the famed drag balls of the '20s and '30s, with the Continental gay sexuality became respectable. As Loughery notes, "The unspeakable has become the fashionably to gays and straights, at least in New York."⁵³

* The Sutro Baths appears to have been in a class by itself. As David Allyn reports, "Sunday nights only women were admitted, Tuesdays only men, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays only heterosexual couples. Friday evenings, advertised as 'hot and nasty,' the club was open to everyone – gay, straight, and bisexual." [Allyn/238]

** The Club chain consisted of either 14 or 37 bathhouses; see Loughery/359 and Allyn/238, respectively.

Massage parlors were, in a number of important respects, the heterosexual equivalent to the gay bathhouse. Both operated as quasi-health establishments, offering services that skated the line between providing a beneficial physical therapy and meeting other, more genital, needs. Second, both existed in the middle-zone of commercial sex outlets, between an established brothel and a random encounter with a streetwalker. Finally, both could, over time and recurring patronage, foster a sense of "community," where individual participants – customers or professionals -- could become "regulars," establishing a unique form of friendship, if not intimacy. These establishments could, over time, function much like a sex club, where for a price -- but a fee modeled more in terms of a non-profit coop than a for-profit business – participants could share something more than a commercial exchange, something invoking the possibilities of a gift.

Massage parlors are a venue of sexual engagement unique to the sexual revolution of the '60s and '70s. Gay bathhouses were an outgrowth of the progressive social policy to provide the poor and immigrants of turn-of-the-century urban America with public hygiene. Massage seems to have emerged as a legitimate form of physical therapy during the post-WW-II era, as many men returned from the war suffering a wide variety of disabilities. During the post-War decades, massage underwent a peculiar split – dividing between those who sought to legitimize the practice through professionalization (including licensing boards, trade associations, conventions, etc.) and those, more enterprising, who saw how providing physical contact and stimulation, including genital, could be profitable.

The line between these two tendencies often blurred. The massage "parlor"

emerged as a new venue of physical, sexualized performance during the late-'50s and early-'60s in the West Coast. "Visitors were admitted by appointment only, and the masseuses, invariably refined-looking women, often wore starched nurses' uniforms that were covered with a white smock while administering a massage to a naked man on the table," Talese observed. "To be fully massaged and finally masturbated by one of these white-gowned professionals was, to many men, a highly erotic experience"⁵⁴ The split between physical therapy and genital satisfaction would continue to define the message business to this day.

No one provides a better, more accurate if not intimate, portrait of the life of massage parlors than Talese. With the same rigor and commitment to first-person, participatory-observer research that he applied to the sexual swinging practiced at the Sandstone Retreat, Talese explored the world of massage parlors in *Thy Neighbor's Wife*. As he found, "By 1970, however, things began to change in the massage world as this private service went public."⁵⁵

For Talese, this transformation was due, in significant part, to the changes in public morality that remade the sexual landscape. Nudity was increasingly more acceptable, especially as evident in magazines, movies and even Broadway plays. A shift in values by many young, college-aged women, feeling less guilt or shame about sexual promiscuity, provided, according to Talese, an ample supply of highly effective workers to "man" the parlors. There was also a growing number of entrepreneurs willing to invest the often relatively modest capital needed to open a parlor; with time, more elaborate and expensive facilities would open. There were the police and judiciary that tolerated (or could be

bribed) these fairly transparent enterprises. Finally, there was an abundant supply of men, particularly more respectable, middle-age men, eager to engage in safe sexual acts -- and had the money to do so.

Massage parlors proliferated during the '70s. One of the first to open in New York was the Pink Orchard, on East 14th Street, and its success led to opening of others. They included the Perfumed Garden, on West 23rd Street; the Secret Life Studio, on East 26th Street, described as "four dimly lit mauve rooms"; the Casbah East and Casbah West, which resembled "an ultramodern cave"; the Middle Earth Studio, on East 51st Street, which resembled "a hippie commune, having beaded curtains, madras pillows, and incense burning in the rooms"; the Stage Studio, on East 18th Street; and the Studio 34, on West 34th Street.⁵⁶ The most lavish parlor in New York was undoubtedly Caesar's Retreat, on East 46th Street, that opened in 1972.*

"Nothing in New York yet compared to Caesar's Retreat," Talese remarked. Its owner, Robert Scharaga, a Bronx-born onetime stockbroker, invested thousands of dollars in decorations for the man private rooms, the sauna, the circular baths and a fountain with plaster-cast Romanesque statuary. "The customers could drink free champagne in the reception room while waiting for a half-hour massage session done with warm herbal oil," he adds. A simple massage cost \$20, but, as Talese adds, for \$100 "a customer could have a champagne bath with three liberated ladies."⁵⁷

Massage parlors flourished in Charlotte, Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago (on South Wabash Street and decorated like the interior of a church), in suburban Washington, DC (the ten-

* John Heidenry places it on East 54th Street; Heidenry/85.

room Tiki-Tiki) and dozens in Los Angeles, especially along Sunset Strip and Santa Monica Blvd. The most lavish parlor in LA was the Circus Maximus, a three-story house off Sunset Street and founded by Mark Roy. According to Talese, the parlor's décor "sought to suggest Roman hedonism; its thirty masseuses wore mini-togas of purple, gold, or white crepe, and its advertising proclaimed: 'Men haven't had it so good since the days of Pompeii.'"⁵⁸

One of the great values of Talese's study is his description of the massage parlor's actual environment or working conditions. As he reports:

"After the customer had paid the fee to the manager, and selected the masseuse of his choice, she escorted him through a hall into one of the private rooms, carrying over her a starched sheet she had gotten from the linen closet.

"Closing the door and spread the sheet over the table, she waited until the man had completely nude before she began to remove her clothing. It was the belief of most studio managers that, if the customer happened to be a plainclothes police officer, the masseuse could not be prosecuted for immorality if the policeman had preceded her in exposing himself while this assumption had yet to be tested in court, it was nonetheless adhered to in most parlors.

"Although the majority of customers were old enough to be masseuse's father, there was a curious reversal of roles after the sexual massage had begun: It was the young women who held the authority, who had the power to give or deny pleasure, while the men lay dependently on the backs, moaning softly with their eyes closed, as their bodies were being rubbed with baby oil and talc."⁵⁹

For the services provided, the young female masseuses usually received about one-third of the fee for the session – as well as tips for additional services provided. Most often, the masseuse provided some form of a

full-body massage as well as either a "hand-job" (i.e., masturbation) or a "blow-job" (i.e., fellatio). These young women often earned between \$300 and \$500 per week for services rendered -- a relatively good salary for the period.

In 1965, Newark, NJ, police raided the dungeon of the notorious dominatrix, Monique Van Cleef, and the story captured front-page headlines in the nation's tabloids. Her dungeon was only one example of a growing assortment of discreet commercial venues where the limits of pleasure were experienced – and extended. Ever resourceful Ms. van Cleef also made house calls: "I remember one of the slaves, a nice executive who lived on East 53rd Street (NYC). He wasn't feeling well, so he asked me to go to his house with some fresh hot shit. I put it in my attache case and took it the few blocks to his house. ... When I got to his place, I spoon-fed it to him, and he felt much better, or so he said."⁶⁰

The rapid growth and acceptance of swap and swings clubs as well as massage parlors helped bring prostitution out of the proverbial closet. While more traditional brothels persisted, many prostitutes often took the form of dating or escort services, nude photographic galleries and even sex therapists or surrogates. They gained easier access to a customer base through ads placed in weekly newspapers and other outlets. However, prostitution remained illegal in nearly every state of the nation, and local police often harassed or arrested "hookers."

Prostitution was, however, not illegal in Nevada. The Moonlight Bunny Ranch was founded in 1956 and, as reported by J. R. Schwartz in *The Travelers Guide to Best Cat Houses in Nevada*, is considered "the grand old lady of the cathouses in Lyon

County."⁶¹ However, the state's most famous brothel was the Mustang Bridge Ranch, located outside of Reno. According to Heidenry, "prostitutes averaged ten to fifteen tricks in a twelve-hour tour; some boasted 'personal bests' of up to forty a day. Though the prostitutes earned less at Mustang, they enjoyed more security, as well as a weekly medical checkup."⁶²

Almost any venue where two or more people, mostly men, either straight or gay, found still other venues to engage in anonymous sexual encounters. These social spaces ranged from public restrooms or toilets (or "tearooms"), deserted doorways, alleyways, truck stops and public parks to the back rooms of bars, after-hour clubs or porn-bookshops. The sexual engagements that took place were anonymous and rarely if even involved a financial exchange. While semen and other body fluids often passed between the participants, little cash seems to have changed hands between those hurriedly seeking to consummate their illicit sexual liaison.

Sex toys

The 1970 U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, popularly known as the Nixon Commission, issued a nine-volume supplement or *Technical Report*, that took a critical look at sex paraphernalia. "Sexual devices can be divided into three categories: artificial male genital devices (usually rubber or plastic reproductions of a penis), artificial vaginas, and vibrators for genital stimulation," it reported. Assessing some of the leading commercially-available "sexual devices and pseudomedical products," it added: "The devices are advertised under such names as 'coital training devices,' 'duo-stimulator,' 'artificial vibrator,' 'coitus splint,' 'Vib-E-Rect,' and so on. The widely advertised 'artificial

vibrator' is a derivative of an artificial bovine receptacle used in the dairy and cattle industry."

The report also identified what it called "miscellaneous materials" or what would be considered fetish objects, including "'love dice,' strip-poker cards, high-heel shoes, corsets, lingerie, microphones and telescopes for voyeurism, rubber and leather wearing apparel, wigs, whips, clubs and chains." The report also assessed explicit, "hard core" pornography and found that "the most graphic sexual stimuli available in the marketplace are photographic depictions of actual sexual intercourse of all types."⁶³

The Commissioners consisted of academics, psychologists, clergymen and other public officials and found no scientific correlation between pornography and violence, especially sexual violence toward women and children. Going further, it advised removal of all currently-existing obscenity laws, finding that these laws served only to criminalize sexual practices better left to an adult's private life. Pres. Richard Nixon repudiated the Commission's findings.*

Some of the most advanced technologies of the post-WW-II period were recruited to develop a new generation of prosthetic devices, specifically designed to improve sexual performance. Many of the same issues that preoccupied sexual concerns in the previous decades, notably male impotence and female breast size, persisted, but did so under the dictates of a new scientific authority -- one appropriate to the expanding consumerism of the '50s and '60s. Continuing a long-standing

* They are the all-inclusive [Frederick] Comstock anti-obscenity laws first enacted by Congress in 1873 and still remained in force although slowly being challenged and reversed by key Supreme Court decisions.

practice common to the "underground" sex economy, there were repeated attempts to blur the difference between sexual prosthetic devices to meet medical purposes and sex toys or fetishes intended to enhance sexual pleasure.

Among some of the products that attempted to blur this distinction were devices designed to address problems of male impotence, including penile implants and penile "pacemakers", and others targeted at the Hollywood-Madison Ave. fiction that women need to increase their breast size (e.g., the electric nipple-stimulator bra). In addition, there were numerous devices introduced as semi-legitimate "marital aids" between a prosthetic device and fetish. Among such devices introduced during the '60s period were the "sex harness," "sex handles" for better gripping and the "Coital Couch." In addition, a number of machines were offered to increase male and female sexual potency, including numerous "orgasm machines" and, of these, that most misunderstood (thus, notorious), was Wilhelm Reich's "orgone box."⁶⁴

These devices were part of a still limited selection of commercially available sex products that had grown modestly over the preceding decades. In the early '60s, as Heidenry observed, "the sex-toy market was virtually nonexistent, and many people desperate for a little sexual variety still made their own dildos, fashioning crude devices from broom handles and foam."⁶⁵ There was, however, a small commercial market for sex toys and fetishes, often sold as medical aids. John Francis, of Los Angeles, supported himself by producing hand-made prosthetic phalluses for the Gem Company, a surgical supply firm. While Francis produced devices for white people, one of his friends, Ted Marche, who would later be called the "father of the modern dildo," began by producing dildos for African-

Americans. As Francis observed, "A lot of people in the black community are impotent, too." Quickly, Marche became the sole supplier of Gem's "ebony division."

Being more entrepreneurial, Marche diversified his sales efforts, placing mail-order ads for both black and white dildos in true detective, "girlie" and other magazines. By the mid-'60s, demand had expanded to such a level that he opened a small dildo factory in North Hollywood. Continuously seeking to improve the quality of his products, Marche took advantage of new manufacturing techniques and materials, particular plastics and rubber. He introduced more lifelike dildos that were pliable and had wrinkles. He is also credited with introducing the first primitive vibrator and the first artificial vagina. His most expensive product was the Accu-Jac, a masturbation machine, selling for \$200 -- an unheard of price for the time! Diversifying his product line, Marche sold nonphallic vibrators, a vibrating prostate massager, a massage stimulation mitt for men and women, and "soft, pliable, lifelike dolls." By 1976, Marche was selling 350 different products and generating annual revenues of \$250,000. "In the vibrator market, Marche found himself competing with such giants as Hitachi and General Electric," Heidenry reported.⁶⁶

A unique barometer of the changing character of social sexuality involves the increasing availability of explicit sexual materials. By the mid-'80s, such materials took an increasing number of formats, including printed material (e.g., still images, magazines and books) and filmed material (e.g., 8mm and 16mm film and homevideo). They were being sold at general or convenience stores, newsstands, vending machines and local prerecorded videocassette (PRC) outlets as well as a growing nationwide

network of small retail outlets often referred to as "adult book stores." The rapid growth of dedicated "adult" retail outlets is most evident in Los Angeles where, according to Federal statistics, during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s the total number of "pornographic" retailers exploded from a mere five in 1950, to 18 in 1965 to 400 in 1970.⁶⁷

"The inside of a 'adults' only pornographic outlet can be divided into distinct display and sales areas," the Attorney General report noted. "They display areas include selections devoted to sexual devices and paraphernalia, reading materials and peep show booths. In the typical pornographic outlet it is not uncommon to see anywhere between from 1,000 and 2,000 different items for sale." Among the paraphernalia -- or "novelty" items -- available were "dildos, rubber vaginas, tools used to simulate sodomy, medical appliances to spread anal and vaginal orifices, 'love' creams, blow-up dolls with orifices, stimulants, inhalants, whips, leather harnesses, edible panties and rubber clothing articles."⁶⁸

By the 1980s, interested consumers could also acquire a host of additional devices whether through such retail outlets or by direct mail. The Attorney General's commission identified these devices as "... dildos, penis rings, stimulators, french ticklers, aphrodisiacs, inhalants, inflatable dolls with orifices and police and detective equipment. Some are purchased for internal use while others are bought for external stimulation." In addition, "There are also devices and sexual paraphernalia designed for specific types of sexual activity. For example, there are products specifically designed for sadomasochistic sexual activity. Such products include masks, whips, chains, manacles, clamps and paddles." The Commission's report noted, "The largest supplier of sexual

devices in [the] country is alleged to be [Reuben Sturman] through his 'Doc Johnson' line of products." This retailer was estimated to control between 70 and 75 percent of the U.S. sexual devices and paraphernalia market.⁶⁹

Practitioners of s&m and other perversions in New York joined together to form the Eulenspiegel Society In 1971. Originally intended exclusively for masochists, the group quickly expanded its mission to all engaged in consensual s&m, including sadists, bottoms and tops, gays, lesbians and bisexuals as well as straight women and men. The Gay Male S/M Activists (GMSMA) and the Lesbian Sex Mafia (LSM) were formed in 1980, adding to the visibility of gay and lesbian s&m presence in New York. In San Francisco, the Society of Janus was formed in 1974 and, in 1978, SAMOIS, a lesbian-feminist S/M organization, was formed; it broke up in 1980 and was supplanted by Outcasts⁷⁰. [see SAMOIS; Heidenry/154; Rubin-1991/120; D. Stein/146]

In time, gay s&m communities in other cities across the country formed organizations to serve educational, political and social purposes. Among predominately women's groups were the Outcasts [San Francisco], Bound & Determined [western Massachusetts] and Leather & Lace [Los Angeles]. Among the predominately men's groups were the Gay Men's S/M Cooperative (GMSMC) [Philadelphia], Avatar [Los Angeles], Vancouver Activities in S/M (VASM), SigMa [Washington, DC], Dreizehn [Boston] [D. Stein/155] and the Pocono Warriors Club [Pennsylvania] [D. Stein/152].

Communes, swap clubs, swing clubs, gay bars and s&m groups suggests an underground sex culture in gestation. The Supreme Court's 1973 decision,

Roe v. Wade, shifted the social terrain of sexuality by giving women more formal – medical, legal – control over their bodies. Whereas the 19th Amendment formally gave each woman citizenship, *Roe* formally gave her both privacy and control over her body. This decision followed a series of earlier decision that slowly overturned the century-long tyranny of the Comstock law. First enacted in 1873 through the efforts of the nation's foremost moralist, Anthony Comstock, it was finally dismantled in 196x/?

Obscene illuminations

Innovations in the technology of representation during the 20th century fostered increasingly more vivid, graphic depictions of the body (mostly female) and sexual practices. These innovations confronted repeated campaigns to suppress such display, but these efforts ultimately failed. Porn is protected by the First Amendment protects porn and has become a \$10-plus billion industry.

The precise date of the first "porn" movie remains unclear but some historians identify *Le Bain*, a silent, black-and-white moving-picture version of a French postcard released in 1896, as the first porn film.⁷¹ The "vitascope" was a late-19th century advanced technology, one of the earliest moving-image projection systems. William Heise's classic vitascope film, *The Kiss*, which runs 16 to 51 seconds (depending on version), depicts a close-up of John Rice and May Irwin passionately kissing.⁷² It was first shown, projected onto a large screen, at the Koster & Bials Music Hall in New York in 1896 and the performance excited many. The display of a larger-than-life sexual intimacy must have been thrilling, even overwhelming. Early movies must have felt like a cascade of

images reinforcing the complexity, confusion and rawness of modern urban life. A newspaper critic of the day exclaimed: "Magnified to gargantuan proportions, it is absolutely disgusting.

One of the earliest picture shows at a Chicago penny arcade was *How Girls Undress*; it was displayed on a "mutascope" system and attracted many young boys.⁷³ Movie theatres at that time were one of the few acceptable social spaces in which white men and women, often unchaperoned strangers, could share an intimate proximity and an exciting visual experience; African-Americans were barred from early New York movie houses. Other than the saloon, the dance hall or church-sanctioned gathering, young men and women (excluding prostitutes) had few public venues in which to socialize let alone flirt, touch or kiss. "The very darkness of the room," warned the social reformer Jane Addams in 1909, "is an added attraction to many young people, for whom the space is filled with the glamour of love making."⁷⁴

For most of the 20th century, the widely circulating yet illegal stag film provided the principal means by which heterosexual men (and sometimes women) could, according to film historian Linda Williams, view "genital sexuality never before glimpsed in any other form of visual representation." Nevertheless, by the 1910s and 1920s this distinct cinematic sub-genre was, according to Williams, in its "heyday."⁷⁵ By then, its basic structure of aesthetic expression and mode of viewer experience were established. These features -- in effect, what made the stag film "pornographic" -- would remain essentially unchanged until the 1970s when the feature-length "porno" film and, subsequently, homevideo were introduced.

The stag film is a product not only of 20th century imagination, but technology as well. It emerged during the early years of the century with the introduction of the comparatively lower-cost 16mm film equipment. And, in the face of the Comstock laws, took advantage of non-commercial, semi-private venues for principal display -- venues appropriate for 16mm equipment. Most often in the US, stag films were shown as part of evening "smokers" or, as Williams calls them, "primitive genital shows."⁷⁶ (In Europe, stag films were shown in bordellos to help arouse male customers prior to sexual engagements.) She points out that these smokers were "hosted by some exclusive male club (the Elks or college fraternity, for example), and attended by invited female 'guests'" She identifies its appeal to both male bonding and a distinct kind of sexual foreplay: "The stag film does not seem to want to 'satisfy'." Rather, she adds, "its role seems rather to arose and then precisely *not* to satisfy a spectator, who must subsequently seek satisfaction outside the purely visual terms of the film -- whether in masturbation, in actual sexual relations, or by channeling sexual arousal into communal wisecracking or verbal ejaculation of the "homosocial" variety. Williams further clarifies her insight: "In the primitive stag film, the primary pleasure seems to involve forming a gender-based bond with other male spectators."⁷⁷ And this "bond" appears to conceal a latent homoeroticism -- by which the heterosexual male viewer's identification with the surrogate phallus depicted on the screen allows him to voyeuristically experience a secret pleasure in another man's erect penis and, thus, a new dimension of male camaraderie.

Chicago enacted the first film censorship law in 1907. Faced with a rising wave of religious and civil

concern over apparent obscene material during the 1910s and '20s, Hollywood producers setup a watchdog group, the Production Code Administration (popularly known as the Hayes Office) in 1927 to monitor the voluntary enforcement of safeguards against the depiction of "licentious or suggestive nudity, sex perversions, white slavery, and miscegenation." Nevertheless, in the eyes of some concerned citizens (particularly the Catholic Church), these efforts were a failure and called for greater vigilance to keep "immoral" materials out of movies. Under pressure from a Church front-group, the Legion of Decency, Hollywood adopted a tougher production code in 1934, the Code and Rating Office. It oversaw "banning among other things the portrayal of adultery, lustful embraces, undressing scenes, and dances suggestive of 'indecent passion'."⁷⁸ The legal scholar, Richard Randall observed: "This triad of control -- industry self-regulation, organized religious pressure, and government censor boards -- affected a censorial stability that lasted nearly a generation." He adds, "The industry discovered it could live quite easily with these burdens because of the extraordinary profits from the 'family' film, the chief product of a censored medium addressing itself to an almost undifferentiated mass audience in the 1930s and 1940s."⁷⁹

While the Code remained officially in place until the early '60s, it lost much of its muscle in the face three particularly critical Supreme Court decisions. The Court's 1948 *Paramount* decree (temporarily) broke the back of the Hollywood studios distribution monopoly.⁸⁰ In 1952, the Court reversed the 1915 *Mutual Film Corporation* decision, extending First Amendment protections to Roberto Rossellini's film, *The Miracle*. As Randall noted, "The *Miracle* decision did not outlaw government censor

boards per se, but it did provide a constitutional basis for challenging their rulings. ...⁸¹ Finally, the 1957 *Roth* (combined with *Alberts*) decision established two of the major benchmarks in the determination of post-WW-II obscenity determinations. In the words of the five majority jurists, the Court found, first, that "to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominate theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interests" and, second, that the work is "utterly without redeeming social importance."⁸²

During the period of the 1950s thru '70s, a number of other Court decisions helped to greatly expand the boundaries of what was acceptable speech in the print and film media. Randall identifies the defining issues for film in the '50s as adultery and for the '60s as "limited erotic nudity" and "particular words in the sound track like *shit*, as slang for heroin in *The Connection*, or *rape* and *contraceptive* in *Anatomy of a Murder*" By the early-'70s, the line between "soft" and "hard" core content was eroded. In print, *Penthouse* was the first soft-core publication to show a woman's public hair and depict fetish devices (e.g., whips, chains, leather costumes). In film, *Man & Wife* (1969) was the first to depict heterosexual intercourse and *The Animal Lover* (1971) was the first to depict a woman having intercourse with a dog.⁸³

It was, however, the opening of *Deep Throat* in June 1972 at the New World Theater in Times Square that launched a new era of sexual representation. The film displayed "fifteen nonsimulated sexual acts, including seven of fellatio, four of cunnilingus ... and others requiring more imagination."⁸⁴ More importantly, as the film historian Linda Williams observes, it signified "the translation from illicit stag film to the legal,

fictional narratives that burst on the public consciousness" It was a feature film that had, as Williams notes, "a plot ..., and a coherent one to boot, with the actions of characters more or less plausibly motivated." Going further, she argues: "For the first time in hard-core cinematic pornography a feature-length film -- not a documentary or a pseudodocumentary, not a single-reel, silent stag film or the genital show of the beaver shot -- managed to integrate a variety of sexual numbers ... into a narrative that was shown in a legitimate theater."⁸⁵ And audiences came out in record numbers to see it, especially after repeated police attempts to close it down. Reports claim the film was seen by a quarter-million viewers and grossed a million dollars.⁸⁶

Traditional obscene images, especially those representing s&m and other fetish practices, were gaining greater popular during the '60s-'70s period, especially exposure through fashion, advertising, tabloid images and other mass-media depictions. As could be expected, legal reaction mounted. "As the prosecution of pornography proceeded inexorably, the inventory of forbidden practices increased exponentially," Heidenry reports. "Bestiality had always been proscribed, but now the censors began to ban scenes depicting golden showers, defecation, pain, and SM. At the same time, it became acceptable to show formerly taboo acts like anal sex, double insertion, orgies, and group sex -- a reflection of society's increasing sanction of such acts in private, but also a reflection of the arbitrary and subjective criteria of obscenity of the part of federal prosecutors."⁸⁷

More cutting-edge stag films were pushing the limits of social acceptability -- and being seized by local police moral squads across the country. In the early '60s, a Cleveland

moving-picture theatre owner, Nino Jacobellis, attempted to advertise and show a French film *Les Amants (The Lovers)* (1958), directed by Louis Malle. As one commentator of the time notes, "It is a tale of a married woman, her paramour, and her most recent lover."⁸⁸ It was advertised as depicting "[t]he frankest love scenes to be seen in the country" and it was closed down by local authorities. A similar fate befell the Swedish import, *491* (1964), which crossed many traditional lines of perversity, heterosexual, homosexual and bestiality. The film deeply offended Richard Kuh, a former New York County Assistant D.A. "The Inspector is shown with his hands between the thighs of the boy," he railed. "The movie stops just short of showing the culmination of the homosexual act. ... [In another scene a] naked prostitute is the subject of the sex orgy. She is shown leaning over the rail in a naked condition with her The boys got angry at her and vented their anger by holding her and forcing a large dog they picked up into position to have sexual relations with her."⁸⁹ Finally, in 1964, the pioneering independent "art" filmmaker, Jonas Mekas, was arrested in New York for sponsoring the showing of *Flaming Creatures*. The film, which Susan Sontag has described as "remarkable and beautiful," shows masturbation and oral-genital stimulation.⁹⁰

One of the most revealing examples of the sustained effort to suppress porn film must surely have taken place in 1960-61 when the New York City police broke up a notorious stag porn ring. Based on a tip, the police initially seized a collection of stag films that included *Ironing Broad* and *Strip Poker*. Kuh observed, "stag films [are] the most intimate 'home movies,' that [show] men and woman in sexual acts, including (but only including) intercourse."⁹¹ He reports that 59 reels were seized in the possession of

one George Collins; some included the performance of what Kuh calls "a prematurely bedraggled unwed mother, not yet eighteen years of age" that which provided the basis for more severe criminal prosecution. The initial arrest led to Fred Barrett, a photographer living in "a quiet suburban community" of Hewlett, Long Island, who ran the duplication facility out of his garage. "His garage contained a massive film printer," Kuh notes. "Using the negatives that he had photographed and processed, and other similar films that he had procured, Barrett turned out reels of film to meet the market demand." The police seized 100 film masters and hundreds of copies ready for sale. Melvin Dutchkin distributed these stag films through his Brooklyn TV repair shop. Kuh laments that Dutchkin "catered to a handful of uncomfortable little men who make or supplemented their livelihoods by selling hard-core films to local marginal book, photo, and novelty shops or to anyone who would buy or rent them."⁹²

Technological innovations during '60 and '70s significantly expanded the availability of "hard core" visual materials of sexual representation. These technologies involved not simply new media formats (e.g., 8mm and 1/2-inch video), but also new modes of presentations or display, especially the semi-public peep-show booth and the private in-home display through homevideo and satellite and cable receptions. The introduction of the "loop," a 10-minute long film reel, often in color and with sound, was quickly seized upon for the display of explicit sex performances. Porn producers and distributors took advantage of a new film format, Super-8mm, which was not only cheaper than traditional 16mm, but encouraged sale of projectors for in-home use. The Super-8 loop found its true "home" as part of the coin-operated peep-show booth.

Sometimes called "masturbation booths," they were the brainchild of Reuben Sturman, the notorious mid-West "King of Porn," and were installed in sex clubs, adult arcades and adult book stores. "Peep shows had become a coast-to-coast craze, like pinball machines in the fifties," reports Heidenry. They attracted "everyone from Wall Street pinstripes to Oregon lumbermen popping into an arcade at noon hour or after hours to drop a few quarters while they dropped their pants."⁹³

Attorney General commission's report on obscenity describes a standard peep-show booth as follows:

"The average peep show booth has dimensions of about three by five feet. The booths are partitioned four-sided cubicles generally made of wood or plastic. Often, a bench is built into one of the walls. On the wall next to the bench is the coin or token-operated box. A customer places coins or tokens into the box and the movie inside the booth is activated. ...

"Inside the booths the viewer may see approximately two minutes of the movie for twenty-five cents. As the number of sexually explicit scenes or diversity of sexual acts increase, the viewing time decreases. ...

"In addition to movie viewing, the booths also provide places for anonymous sexual relations. Many booths are equipped with a hole in the side wall between the booths to allow patrons to engage in anonymous sex. The holes are used for oral and anal sexual acts. Sexual activity in the booths involves mostly males participating in sexual activities with one another. However, both heterosexual and homosexual men engage in these activities. The anonymity provided by the "glory holes" allows the participants to fantasize about the gender and other characteristics of their partners. ...

"Inside the booths, the floors and walls are often wet and sticky with liquid or viscous substances, including semen, urine, feces, used prophylactics, gels, saliva or alcoholic beverages. The soles of a patron's shoes

may stick to certain areas of the floor. The booths are also often littered with cigarette butts and tobacco. The trash and sewage and the application of disinfectants or ammonia on occasion create a particularly nauseating smell in the peep booths."

"It has been estimated that peep shows are the biggest moneymaking portion of the [adult pornography] industry," the report found.⁹⁴

The video "revolution" of the mid-'70s began with Sony's introduction of the half-inch videocassette and HBO's satellite delivery of programming. These developments, quite independent of each other, provided the necessary technological preconditions for a new era in-home (and, over time, public) sexual representation. Quite serendipitously, a Supreme Court decision in 1973 (the same year in which the pronounced its monumental *Roe* decision) contributed, indirectly, to the rise of the video revolution. In this case, the Court found that the Atlanta's Paris Adult Theater violated a local decency ordinance by showing *Magic Mirror* and *It All Comes Out in the End*, two "hard-core pornographic films." As Randall notes, a "majority of the Court maintained that the right to have access to pornography was limited to the privacy of one's home and did not extend to commercial movie houses."⁹⁵

Like all "revolutions," this one has its own prehistory. The cassette emerged out of a nearly two-decade technical effort to make television production more economically efficient. Ampex introduced the first videotape recorder (VTR) in 1956. Up to that time, there were three means by which television images could be presented -- live, preshot on film or prerecorded on kinescope. Unfortunately, each was plagued by its own limiting performance capabilities. "Using tape, editing could be performed far more rapidly, since tape did not require

processing," Bruce A. Austin reports. "Special effects could be easily accomplished with the push of a button and for considerably less cost than with film. The fidelity of tapes images was superior to that of film or kinescopes," he adds. "Mistakes in an actor's performance could be easily removed using the erase/rerecord mode of VTRs." He further notes: "The producer's and [TV network's] program standards department's fear of unanticipated on-air obscenity or libel occurring on audience participation programs was removed by virtue of the new medium."⁹⁶

The first explicit sexual video seems to have been released in 1977 and, very rapidly, "X-" and "XXX-"rated videos came to dominate this fledging new medium of representation. By the late-'70s, X-rated videos were selling for about \$100 each and accounted for half of the PRC market; however, according to the Software Dealer's Association, by 1984 "adult" titles had slipped to 13 percent of total sales. This market segment accounted for a wide assortment of titles. By 1985, when approximately one hundred sexually explicit full-length films were released, an estimated 1,700 new sexually-explicit videos were released. So popular were "adult" videos that by '85, when approximately 28 percent of US households had a VCR, three-fifths of the nation's 20,000 retail outlets were selling and/or renting such titles.⁹⁷

Homevideo encouraged the "mainstreaming" of explicit sexual representation, but the Supreme Court's 1984 famous *Sony* decree had two significant consequences that transformed the porn industry. First, it legitimized a viewer's right to freely record copy-righted material off-the-air for non-commercial display in the privacy of their home. Second, it legitimized the "First Sale" doctrine under which a merchant could acquire

an original video work and rent or resell it to a customer. [Austin/326-29] As Heiderny states unequivocally: "Video freed porn from its bondage to adult bookstores and the raincoat crowd"⁹⁸ In his history of homevideo, *Fast Forward*, James Lardner notes that "[p]ornography accounted for a large share of the business to begin with, in part because the producers of 'adult' movies -- unhindered by any prejudice against the new medium -- had been its first suppliers."⁹⁹ However, Austin raises a cautionary note, observing: "The popularity of X-rated sexually explicit video, long suspected of particular success in the home market, is difficult to track with any precision, since industry reports of such titles are either nonexistent or notoriously unreliable."¹⁰⁰

The adoption of video as, increasingly, the principal technology for both the production and distribution of sexual representations is important for at least three reasons. First, it undercut the hegemony of broadcasters particularly network television. Because of limitations in channel capacity inherent to the analog NTSC spectrum, TV fosters the consolidation of a homogenized national market. Like radio, analog TV is a one-way and a point-to-multipoint distribution medium. This federally licensed distribution model facilitates "gatekeeper" control over the creation and dissemination of programming by centralized networks. Video, however, is more like photography and -- when driven by improvements in portability and picture quality as well as cost reductions -- "democratizes" reception and, in time, production. This helps foster both viable niche-market "professional" productions appealing to nearly every taste as well as personal or "amateur" productions expressing nearly every imagery perversion.

Second, video furthers the market-driven "democratization" of sexual representation by shifting the venue of sexual performance from the porn theatre, "masturbation booth" or bookstore to the privacy of the viewer's (i.e., performer's) home or bedroom. The shift from the arcade to the bedroom helped transform the distribution model from that of the radio/TV media to a more "multipoint-to-multipoint" model. This encouraged the emergence of new class of commercial mediating institutions like retail outlets and catalog fulfillment companies that uses public/private mail delivery (often in the proverbial "plain-paper wrapping") to consumers. Even a Supreme Court judge can watch "porn" in the privacy of his home. Nevertheless, this shift in venue has an often-unrecognized consequence. "The [pornographic] tape slips onto a shelf, is rented or not, and its possible sociological or historical impact recedes into the background," Williams acknowledges. "This apparent timelessness, though, is only the illusion of a group of texts [i.e., works] that the parent culture would prefer to disown; part of the challenge of reading them is to put them back into time, to note the historical demarcations in the seeming monolith, the way they are as much about change as about repetition."¹⁰¹

Finally and perhaps most important, the restructuring of production and distribution resulting from the economies of scale/scope of popular video adoption, significantly contributes to the fostering of a new pornographic aesthetic. The privacy of the home venue of display, while undercutting the viability of porn theatre catering to the "raincoat crowd," encourages viewing by couples and single women. This, in tern, helped to undercut the historic misogyny of traditional pornography. In addition, it contributed to the emergence of a new aesthetic that not

only admits to, but encourages, the pleasures -- and "perversions"! -- of women. That this new aesthetic emerged concomitantly with the rise of the women's movement was quite accidental.

The satellite has an even longer -- and more colorful -- "prehistory" than video. Arthur C. Clarke is credited with envisioning the first geosynchronous orbiting satellite in 1945, but it would take the Soviet Union to launch *Sputnik*, the first communications satellite, in 1957. In the U.S., the first commercial domestic communications satellite, the *Westar I*, was launched in 1974. The following year, HBO, the premium pay cable service, began to distribute its programs to its regional system operators via satellite feeds and helped remake the cable-television industry. By 1979, the FCC deregulated receive-only (TVRO) satellites -- the bulky backyard earth-station dishes -- that opened up direct access to programming by the average TV viewer.¹⁰²

Because cable and satellite programming distribution does not employ terrestrial electromagnetic radio spectrum, such services do not require traditional FCC TV broadcasting licenses to operate. In addition, because cable and satellite services are "fee" based, offer more programming channels and (since 1997 with DigiCipher encryption techniques) can scramble the video signal, they provided the necessary preconditions for the in-home reception and display of sexually-explicit video. As the 1986 US Attorney General's commission on pornography noted, "cable and satellite programs often contain more sexually explicit scenes than those shown over broadcast television."¹⁰³ The primary vehicle for both suggestive "R" and illicit "X" and "XXX" rated materials was "premium" services like HBO or Showtime, "pay-

per-view" services like Spice and Playboy, and locally originated, noncommercial public access channels. Together, these technologies of delivery have opened a virtual floodgate of programming to an enormously expanded audience of receptive viewers.

A peculiar contradiction distinguished the most "public" of the technologies of representation, radio and television. These media have at once reached the largest audiences while delivering the most prescribed, "censored" programming. While the guarantee of "freedom of speech" is one the cornerstone principals on which each medium is built, a review of their respective histories reveals how a policy of "censorship" has been strictly maintained. Broadcasting embodies the legacy of the Comstock laws that had originally been passed by Congress in the post-Civil War period. Their power resides in three important factors -- (1) the requirement to secure a federal license to operate, (2) media technology based on "air wave" scarcity and (3) a corporate-defined, network-structured, advertising-based business model.

Rethinking the '60s

"The decade of the '60s had ushered in an unprecedented sexual permissiveness, characterized by mini skirts, the pill, group sex, mate swapping, a skyrocketing divorce rate, and acceptance of premarital sex," observed the historian Lillian Faderman. "The rigidities of the '50s was turned on its head. Heterosexuality began to look somewhat like homosexuality, as nonproductive sex and cohabitation without marriage came to be commonplace." [Faderman/201; see also Heidenry and Allyn]

The cauldron of simmering social fervor that defined the 1960s

counterculture politicized sexuality as never before in U.S. history. Yes, the mid-19th century utopians and turn-of-the-20th century hedonists challenged traditional moral order. But the '60s sexual revolution represented a new order of magnitude of social struggle. The civil-rights and anti-war movements of the '60s challenged, each in its own and complementary way, the then-dominant structure of social and political power as well as the system of moral authority. And the movement for sexual liberation was infused a similar rebellious spirit.

Like the other movements, the sexual liberation movement consisted of a complex mix of people, social settings and experiences. It included females and males, heterosexuals and homosexual, adults -- and young people -- of all races, class and regions of the country. They were people into all and every form of consensual, non-exploitative -- and, too often, nonconsensual and exploitive -- practices that promised sexual pleasure. In effect, this movement encompassed all those who acted out their sexual intentions in a way that risked possible arrest or other forms of social stigmatization and harassment -- even if performed in the privacy of one's own home. This sexual movement was incubating by the anti-subversives hysteria of the post-WW-II period.¹⁰⁴ By the '60s, the outlines of a self-identified community of people pushing the boundaries of acceptable sexual experience were in place.

The '60s movement for sexual liberation, like the other major social movements of the period, was split between a more mainstream liberal approach and a more radical strain. Not unlike those fighting for civil rights, against the Vietnam War and to limit consumerism, the fight for greater pleasure shared a split between those championing "liberalization" and those

"liberation."¹⁰⁵ Liberalization encouraged a greater exploration of pleasure but (for the most part) did so within terms of a conventional, patriarchal heterosexuality; liberation also encouraged pushing the boundaries of sexual expression, but did so challenging both patriarchy and heterosexuality and, thus, the power relations between the participants. Whether involved in sexual liberalization or liberation, participants confronted issues relating to age, class, race and gender role and erotic proclivities. All engaged in the dialectic of sexual power, of equal consent expressed in terms of masculine/feminine, top/bottom, butch/femme or the terms.

The U.S. has had a long history of illicit adult consensual sex. However, much of this practice has been -- and for some continues to be -- defined as "sinful," "abnormal," "illegal" or "perverse" or all four. Those who engage in activities socially labeled as immoral have often faced a variety of forms of harassment and outright repression, including moral crusades,

prohibitive legislation, arrests, press scandals, lose of employment, trial and imprisonment, and even institutionalization in psychiatric asylums. For much of the 20th century, few, including civil libertarians and other progressives, protested or challenged this repression. Unfortunately, this was especially true for those labeled perverts.

The Stonewall uprising in 1969 and the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision of 1973 were two of the most pivotal moments in the politics of sexuality during the '60s-'70s period. Symbolically, they were not unlike the Montgomery Bus Boycott and *Brown v Board of Education* decision that framed the civil-rights movement. Stonewall and *Roe* framed the subsequent quarter-century with regard to sexual identity. For sexual identity, control over one's own body - - and the experience of pleasure - was not only merely a personal or even social issue; it was a political engagement.

Notes

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⁸ William and Jerrye Breedlove. *Swap Clubs: A Study in Contemporary Mores* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1964), p. 35.

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³⁰ Ibid., p. 130, 131.

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³⁴ Faderman, op. cit., p. 166; Duberman/170ff] –

³⁵ Thorpe, op. cit., p. 60.

³⁶ Stein, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

³⁷ Faderman, op. cit., p. 161

³⁸ [Duberman/118]

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- ⁴¹ Thorpe, op. cit., p. 59
- ⁴² q/Fritscher/109]
- ⁴³ [Rubin-2001/20-22]
- ⁴⁴ Geroge Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 337-59.
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- ⁴⁶ Kaiser, op. cit., p. 197.
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- ⁴⁸ Stein, op. cit., p. 147.
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- ⁵⁴ Talese, op. cit., p. 303.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 305.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 307-8, 311-14.
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- ⁶⁴ Hoag Levins, *Amerian Sex Machines: The Hidden History of Sex at the U.S. Patent Office* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corp., 1996), pp. 225, 227, 219; see also Janice M. Irvine, *Disorders of Desire: Sex and Gender in Modern American Sexology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 107-14.
- ⁶⁵ Heidenry, op. cit., p. 75.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 75-77.
- ⁶⁷ U.S., *Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986), pp. 342-45.
- ⁶⁸ US Attorney General, p. 378.
- ⁶⁹ US Attorney General, p. 370.
- ⁷⁰ SAMOIS, *Coming to Power: Writing and Graphics of Lesbian S/M* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987); see also Heidenry, op. cit., p. 154; Rubin, op. cit., p. 120; David Stein, "S/M's Copernican Revolution: From a closed world to the infinite Universe," in Mark Thompson, ed. *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics and Practice* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), p. 146.
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- ⁷² William Heise, *The Kiss* (1896)]
- ⁷³ David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 154.
- ⁷⁴ Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: McMillian, 1909), p. 86.
- ⁷⁵ Williams, op. cit., p. 85.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 76.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 74, 73.

⁷⁸ D’Emilio and Freedman, op. cit., pp. 281-82.

⁷⁹ Richard S. Randall, “Censorship: From *The Miracle* to *Deep Throat*,” in Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 511.

⁸⁰ Ernest Borneman, Ernest, “United States versus Hollywood: The Case of an Antitrust Suit,” in Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry*, p. 459.

⁸¹ Randall, op. cit.

⁸² Richard H. Kuh, *Foolish Figleaves?: Pornography in -- and out of -- Court* (New York: MacMillian Company, 1967), p. 24; U.S., *1970 Commission*, pp. 307-08.

⁸³ Heidenry, op. cit., pp. 87, 85; Randall, op. cit., p. 522.

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⁸⁵ Williams, op. cit., pp. 99, 98.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 100; Heidery, op. cit., pp. 149-53.

⁸⁷ Heidenry, Ibid., p. 322.

⁸⁸ Kuh, op. cit., p. 60.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 307.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 40, 96, 305.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 92.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 93-94.

⁹³ Heidenry, op. cit., pp. 55, 73; Willams, op. cit., p. 75.

⁹⁴ US Attorney General, op. cit., pp. 376-77.

⁹⁵ Randall, op. cit., p. 519.

⁹⁶ Bruce A. Austin/323]

⁹⁷ US Attorney General, op. cit., pp. 352-53.

⁹⁸ Heidenry, op. cit., p. 213.

⁹⁹ James Lardner, *Fast Forward: Hollywood, the Japanese and the VCR Wars* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), pp. 183-84.

¹⁰⁰ Austin/338].

¹⁰¹ Williams, op. cit., pp. 268-69.

¹⁰² Andrew F. Inglis, *Behind the Tube: A History of Broadcasting Technology and Business* (Boston: Focal Press, 1990), pp. 392-412.

¹⁰³ US Attorney General, op. cit., p. 362.

¹⁰⁴ David Rosen, /book]

¹⁰⁵ Faderman, op. cit., p. 189; D’Emilio and Freedman, op. cit., p. 306.