

The sexual revolution promised us sexual freedom and new-style liberated relationships, but that freedom has turned out to be a false promise because of the way it is being misused by some to dominate and oppress. This new freedom has also put many under tremendous new pressure to perform.

First let us look at the abuse of sexual power. Over the last few years concern has been growing about this whole area. We might hope that wherever freedom grows, so does a sense of responsibility, but the power of uncontrolled sexuality can be terrifying.

I hardly need to describe how sex can control and drive a man or woman as powerfully as any drug. The sex act itself releases pleasure inducing chemicals in the brain. There we have the basis for a true chemical addiction.

B.F Skinner, the famous behavioural psychologist, showed how people can be conditioned just like animals to respond to pleasure and pain. If the extremes are great enough, so the theory goes, behaviour can be controlled completely. So then, the pleasure we get from sex can encourage us to behave in all kinds of ways.

Sexual arousal can be a factor in people losing control. Sex drive alters perceptions. When a man or woman are near the peak of excitement they can behave in ways they later find deeply embarrassing. For example, two colleagues getting carried away after a party at work and making love in an office where they are likely to be discovered, or a woman who cries out during orgasm somewhere where she could be overheard, or a couple taking part in a sexual act which some might consider perverted - and they might find hard to explain to themselves afterwards in the cool light of day.

Danger raises sexual tension

Danger can also heighten arousal. Dr Estela Weldon of the Portman Clinic in London pointed out recently, after the death of a British MP during an act of auto-erotic asphyxia, that for some "risk is part of the pleasure, risk is part of the excitement". This is one reason why some people enjoy having affairs, or enjoy having sex in places where they may be discovered.

Part of the challenge of maintaining a long term vibrant sexual relationship may be reintroducing a sense of danger, of the unexpected, of the outrageous or the indulgent - making love in a field, a provocative dress, a weekend of passion in a hotel, making love in the Mediterranean sea by the light of the moon, or on a deserted beach at dusk.

Any sexologist could list a hundred examples of things people do at the height of passion that they may be unable to reconcile with their own self-image.

Every week the law courts or tabloids reveal more of the double-time of sex. In the dock is a quiet man who is regarded as a loner by his friends. He has never been known to be violent, yet savagely strangled a twelve year old girl after subjecting her to terrible sexual abuse. Or another arrested after repeatedly dropping his trousers outside a nurses home.

Power games are part of many sexual relationships: a friendly struggle for dominance which is entirely verbal, or involves a playful fight which ends in laughter by both. At another level there are well known patterns of battering and being battered or worse, far worse.

Some people tend to place themselves in "classic" relationships where they are likely to slip into familiar roles of battering or being battered.

Rape and date rape - is all rape the same?

The whole debate over sexual power has soared to new heights of controversy and confusion with publicity about "Date Rape". Some streams of feminism described by Naomi Wolfe (Fighting fire with Fire), and Kate Roiphe, (The Morning After), are beginning to create a culture where normal, informal dating may soon become impossible.

First was the horrific reality of violent rape. Always there in every age but more common today. Then there was the recognition that not all rape involves violence. There can be other more subtle ways men use to get sex when they want it.

In the UK there was great debate over the Angus Diggle case in 1994: a young solicitor jailed for three years after attempting to have sex with a woman invited back to his flat for the night. He claimed he was innocent and merely misread the signs. He was convicted for attempted rape, upheld on appeal though with a reduced sentence.

Together with this there is a growing understanding that just because a woman has agreed to marriage, the ceremony itself does not give automatic consent in advance for sex whenever and wherever the husband demands it. However this area is still confused in law, with a recent British case of a man cleared of raping his wife two days after she said yes.

Then there was the case of Lorena Bobbitt in the US, who accused John her husband of marital rape after being charged herself for assaulting him with a knife, amputating his penis. She was acquitted and so was he - her acquittal was seen as just and his acquittal wrong by almost six out of ten women in a CNN/USA Today survey.

Her acquittal led to strong reactions from the 10,000 strong US National Organisation For Men and the 32,000 member Male Liberation Foundation - both seen as extreme groups by the Women's Action Alliance.

How do you prove rape - or innocence?

How does a woman prove rape if there is no evidence afterwards of violence and no other witness to the act? And how does a man prove innocence if falsely accused? To some such a suggestion arouses terrible anger, but on what basis can we safely conclude that all women are absolutely perfect and only men are evil? Some men may rape, but all human beings can sometimes be tempted to exaggerate or lie, especially if unhappy in a relationship.

Sorting out what has actually happened can be very difficult where children or teenagers are involved. In the British press there has been a great deal of publicity about teachers accused of sex crimes they have not committed, whose whole careers have been wrecked as a result of a chance remark by a pupil.

The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers says around 600 teachers a year are falsely accused - a trebling since the 1989 Children's Act.

A teacher was taken from his home in handcuffs after three girls claimed he indecently assaulted them in front of a class. The charges were dropped - there were twenty four other girls who witnessed the entire lesson - but not before he lost his job.

The Union's annual conference called on pupils to be expelled if allegations are later found to be false, urging the union to pay for defending these cases in court. But the threat of expulsion could make genuinely abused children terrified to say anything.

What do you mean by rape?

The vast majority of children, teenagers or adults who claim to be victims of rape, have indeed been raped, physically overwhelmed by a man who has sex with them by force, and rape is a terrible crime, damaging memories for life of an increasing number of women - and men too. Male rape is not unusual.

But how far do you stretch the definition of rape? The Oxford Dictionary definition is "forcible or fraudulent sexual intercourse, especially imposed on a woman", but is that enough?

The "date rape" movement has gone far further in a new definition of rape and in doing so has unleashed new forces such as the "Take Back The Night" movement which are helping kill off the sexual revolution.

Date rape became a household word in the US almost overnight after Ms magazine published the first results of a study on rape in American Universities by Dr Mary Koss, claiming one in four college women were victims of rape or attempted rape. The New York Times published an article the same month on the same theme. Date rape was now a reality, but what was her definition?

The female students were asked if they had ever gone out with a man who had put pressure on them to have sex. Pressure might have been verbal, or chemical (plying a woman with alcohol or drugs), not necessarily physical. However 73% of those labelled by Dr Koss as having been raped did not say they thought they had been, and 43% of the "date raped" went on to have sex voluntarily with the same men afterwards.

Pressure is abuse of power

Pressure means abuse of power to have sex and abuse of power means sexual abuse and sexual abuse means rape. That is the line taken by some. But how much of courtship involves subtle pressure?

At the most extreme end are a few feminists who take the line (or appear to in the media) that all sex can be rape and all men are rapists. Andrea Dworkin for example says "seduction is often difficult to distinguish from rape. In seduction, the rapist bothers to buy a bottle of wine". She is also an aggressive campaigner against pornography. Her book "Intercourse", published in 1987 suggests sex is an act of male oppression to subjugate women.

Gloria Steinem, writer of "Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions", and "Revolution from Within" (1992), says "a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle". Germaine Greer, author of "The Female Eunuch" says: "women fail to understand how much men hate them".

This strong line by very influential feminists implies to other feminists a basic hostility not only to men in general but also perhaps to heterosexual women who may have a sexual appetite for more.

Kate Roiphe describes vividly the increasing confusion in many young American single men who are now unsure how to behave. She also describes a new culture, very different from a few years ago:

"In this era of Just Say No and No Means No, we don't have many words for embracing experience. Now instead of liberation and libido, the emphasis is on trauma and disease. Now the idea of random encounters, of joyful, loveless sex, raises eyebrows. The possibility of adventure is clouded by the spectre of illness. It's a difficult backdrop for conducting one's youth....The sexual revolution hasn't been entirely erased by a new ethos of sexual conservatism... Everywhere we look there are signs of sexual puritanism, but there are also signs of sexual abandon.... the shift from free love to safe sex is part of our experience."

Katie Roiphe feels there is a danger that "bad sex" will be labelled rape. She is uneasy about statements by Catherine MacKinnon, Professor of Law at Michigan University. For example: "I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and she feels violated" In other words, if a woman and a man have sex and the woman feels negative about the experience afterwards, can she now tell everyone she has been date-raped?

Men confused and uncertain

Shere Hite in "The Hite Report on the Family", published in 1994 also describes a crisis in male identity. Writing in the Guardian she says:

"There is a giant identity crisis in the western male soul, of which the recent widespread "return to traditionalism" is only a symptom", although she believes it cannot be solved by "appealing to family values", which she sees as where "the female is kept subservient and the male emotionally impoverished". She says: "A new kind of male heroism is required, a reinvention of the male psyche, a fresh identity for contemporary culture to reflect. I can't wait to see what it will be."

In other words the pendulum is definitely swinging towards traditional values, but she hopes the end result will be something completely new.

Some would say that the New Man has already arrived: willing to spend as much time as women on household chores, washing up and laundry, changing nappies and cooking - yet still able to change a spark plug, clear a drain, put up a book shelf and carry heavy loads. But most would say such men are still rare.

A consent form as well as a condom

It has been suggested that to avoid future trouble in a new relationship, a man should ask at each stage for consent to continue. After a 1992 New Jersey Supreme Court hearing on a teenager charged with rape of a girl he asked out, the deputy Public Defender of the case, Suan Herman, said:

"You not only have to bring a condom on a date, you have to bring a consent form as well".

Here we have the makings of a radical new culture, influenced by the extremes of feminism. A culture where a man goes slowly, respects the personal space of a woman before starting to make love and is slightly uncertain and vulnerable when he begins to touch a woman he likes; where a man continues to feel under considerable tension throughout sex in a non-stable relationship.

Sounds familiar.

Sounds like a throwback to a generation or two before - or even longer. Katie Roiphe dug out a guide for young ladies from 1857 describing sensible conduct when alone with young men. A guide for students today written by some radical feminists sounds not dissimilar today. A caution regarding male advances, how to tell an amorous man politely to get lost, making sure you are not alone or somewhere you can get help if you need, keeping a modest distance.

A new puritanism powered by feminism?

You might think these ideas were part of a new Puritanism but instead you find at its heart a new movement within secular feminism. A further extension of this new thinking has been over sexual harassment. If a man compliments a woman on her new hairstyle, is that sexual harassment? What about a wolf whistle? A hand on a shoulder? A saucy joke? A rude calendar? Catherine Mackinnon was responsible for making some forms of sexual harassment

legally actionable in the America.

The case of Judge Clarence Thomas from Oklahoma, accused by Anita Hill of sexual harassment dominated American press through 1991 and 1992. Then came accusations by twenty four women against Oregon's Republican Senator Bob Packwood, the sexual abuse of a large group of women by men of the US Navy at the infamous Tailhook convention and more recently in 1994 the accusations against President Clinton by Paula Jones that he sexually harassed her at Little Rock in 1991. Never has sexual harassment been so publicly debated in America before.

Then there was the British case of Alison Halford, fighting sexual discrimination in the police force. Not only did she finally win a settlement, but her action also prompted an independent enquiry which found nine out of ten female police officers had experienced sexual harassment at work.

A recent UK survey on sexual harassment found many men are now much more sensitive to the issue than women: men and women were asked to register approval or disapproval to six male behaviours ranging from calling someone "love" or "darling" to "repeated sexual advances". In all six categories, men were more disapproving than women. For example, 27% of men thought pin-up posters of nude women on the walls were a form of sexual harassment, compared to only 16% of women.

The Los Angeles Fire Department recently made headlines after banning staff from reading Playboy, Penthouse and similar magazines as a violation of women's rights. Fireman Stephen Johnson appealed to the Federal Judge - where do you draw the line?

Sexual harassment, date rape, these things have made people supersensitive to sexual power abuse with a knock on effect when it comes to sex itself.

Power feminism struggles with Victim feminism

Two strands of feminism have split over pornography. One part of the movement sees

pornography as degrading, an insult to women who find themselves once more owned and controlled by a male dominated world. Grave concerns have been expressed that the struggles by women against sexual violence and abuse are being undermined every day by an unrelenting diet of sexual images, encouraging men to abuse women, portraying women as creatures that exist only to satisfy their lust.

Catherine Mackinnon like Andrea Dworkin has attacked all forms of pornography. In her book "Only Words", she says all pornography consists of acts of sexual discrimination or "harm", in production, publication and use - even in private.

However other feminists would say this argument is based on a "victim" psychology; women are weak; women are abused; women are suffering every day; women need protecting from male pornography. The counter argument of "power feminism" goes something like this: women are the voting majority in many nations; women spend most of the household income and have purchasing power; women live longer, have a great capacity for sex and for multiple orgasms; women don't need protecting - men better watch out.

Power feminism prefers to turn the tables to redress the balance. Power feminism might find the idea of full frontal men pin-up posters around the office rather amusing. Power feminism might prefer to organise an all female party to go and watch a male stripper at a club, rather than ban all strip artists, photos and videos.

Power feminism might want the freedom for women if they wish to call "a handsome and well-developed escort providing fun times and massage", or to join 1.6 million women across Europe, attending 250,000 sex parties a year organised by Ann Summers Ltd, a thousand of which take place in Britain every week - women meeting in the sex shop equivalent of tupperware parties in their own homes.

Power feminism might be pleased to find the drive for teenage sex may increasingly be coming from the girls rather than the boys. At a British school recently, an AIDS educator found the boys in the class acutely embarrassed at her suggestion that some girls might be putting pressure on them to have sex, when sometimes they wanted to hold back. They admitted it was true, even though it did not fit their own image. Before a boy often tried to win a girl's favour and "chased" her. Now the girl may be chasing him.

Victim feminism joins with right wing anti-porn

Katie Roiphe sees Catherine Mackinnon's anti-porn campaign as "the human bridge between the far right and the far left... the embodiment of an unholy alliance between the right wing and feminists". In Britain there have been private meetings between feminist groups and right wing campaigning groups, with both parties too embarrassed to disclose publicly that they are even talking.

They combined efforts in a British campaign in 1990 to stop High Street stores from selling pornography. As a direct result, many retailers reduced their range of magazines, banning some, restricting access to others or covering up the front pages.

Labour front bencher Clare Short campaigned against page three of the Sun newspaper (semi-nude girls) in a way which made some of her opposition colleagues very happy. In 1986 she introduced the first stage of a parliamentary bill to outlaw topless newspaper pin-ups. In 1994 after eight more years of campaigning, the Sun's owner Rupert Murdoch said of page three: "now it's getting a bit old fashioned. One day it will come out".

Old fashioned? Pornography is old fashioned?

This is no ordinary person's opinion. This is the internationally famous Australian media supremo Rupert Murdoch speaking, one of the world's most powerful figures in publishing and television.

In the UK alone he operates more channels than the whole BBC and Independent Television networks combined. This is someone with his finger constantly on the pulse of the ups and downs of popular culture. He is detecting a change and the need to be ready to run with tomorrow's fashion. "Page Three" will be out of it soon.

Clare Short was delighted: "The tide of public opinion has switched", she said, "and it has been widely seen as grotty and demeaning".

Pornography advertises sex....

So, pornography is likely to be increasingly frowned on in the new world of sexual relationships, but what is the evidence that pornography changes behaviour? Many would agree it is degrading for women to be paid to expose their bodies for men to leer at or fantasise over, but does it really encourage rape or other sex abuse? A growing body of evidence suggests that it might - as does common sense.

Dr Catherine Itzin, author of a new study on pornography said:

"While nobody in their right mind would claim that pornography is the sole cause of sexism and sexual violence, there is now enormous evidence that porn is linked to sexism and genital violence against women. If women are presented purely in terms of their genitals, how can they be seen as fully human and men's equals?"

It is obvious to most people that pornography is likely to change behaviour, because we know advertising works. A friend of mine makes television commercials. A company will invest up to ten million pounds to create the right sixty seconds of film, which it is convinced will directly boost sales.

Every time the sequence is shown they believe hundreds, maybe thousands of shoppers will go out and buy their product. Advertisers earn money by persuading companies that they can control the behaviour of millions. They can prove it with marketing surveys. Campaign starts in the North. Within a week, all outlets are reporting rising sales. Campaign moves south. Sales increase 20% in the south during the campaign - and so on. Any successful advertising agency can give you a run of such stories.

The evidence from advertising is so vast that the burden of proof should fall on the pornography industry itself to convince us it has no effect. If a repeated thirty second advert can alter behaviour of millions then what does a three hour film do? What is the effect of a hundred such films in as many days?

Many film makers have been concerned that home video allows the same five minute sequences in a three hour film to be watched a hundred times over. Thus the effect of just one scene in a whole film can be amplified beyond all recognition. Many of these films promote a fantasy of women desperate to have sex with men, of group sex and sex involving violence.

If adults are relatively resistant to the power of such repeated images, what about teenagers or young children, watching whatever brothers, sisters or parents bring home?

Research has found pornography alters the mind. Sex porn is designed to arouse, to make men excited. Arousal prepares the body for sex and therefore porn by definition is likely to make men want to have sex soon after exposure. Arousal also decreases inhibitions as we have seen, altering perceptions, awakening powerful latent feelings in both men and women.

Non-violent pornography can make men aggressive or euphoric or both, depending on what they have been watching. In 1993 Prerost at Western Illinois University studied ninety men after exposure to sexual music videos, rock videos or a travel documentary and found elation and aggression scores increased, especially in those feeling guilty.

That was the effect after one laboratory session. But what about after someone watches ten or twelve hours non-stop at home of this material? What happens to the mind, imagination and emotions then? What if the person already has very unhealthy thoughts about violent or degrading sex?

The Meese Commission Report claimed exposure to pornography could lead to sex crimes. In 1993, Nutter and Kearns interviewed sex offenders and compared them to non-offenders. They found sex offenders began masturbating at a younger age and sexually explicit materials were used by them in their first masturbatory experience by one in three compared to only one in seven of the others. However they found no difference in adult use of pornography between offenders and others.

Pornography the theory - rape the practice?

In 1991 Kutchinsky in Denmark set out to test Morgan's statement in 1980 that "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice". The original US commission on Obscenity and Pornography in 1970 found no link, but what about more recent evidence?

Kutchinsky found a number of different studies clearly showed some men became aggressive following exposure to sex scenes containing violence, but found no difference in sexual arousal in rapists, non-sexual criminals or non-criminal males after watching sex scenes.

However he then reviewed rape and reported rape figures in America, Denmark, Sweden and West Germany from 1964 to 1984, during a time when availability of pornography changed "from extreme scarcity to relative abundance".

He found rape figures increased rapidly in each country. He compared this rise to the rise in other violent crime, and found they were of the same order, leading him to conclude that it was hard to blame pornography on that evidence alone.

Another large study was to provide new disturbing evidence of a link. In 1990 Baron and Straus found huge differences in rape figures across fifty US states between 1980 and 1982. What differences in areas could possibly be responsible? Were they related to differences in crime rates generally, sexual inequality in different states, differences in consumption of pornography or differences in attitudes towards violence? Results suggested possible links with all four but local use of pornography was implicated as an important contributor to risk of rape in any area. This was measured by the volume of sales in proportion to the population.

While scientific evidence of a proven link between crime and pornography is still patchy the anecdotes continue. In March 1994 four Welsh youths were convicted of kicking a father to death after he told them to stop vandalising a traffic bollard. His injuries were so severe doctors thought he had been hit by a car.

After the attack, one youth told a friend: "When you have a fight you don't stop stamping until they are dead." When he was told the man WAS dead, the youth replied: "I hope so". Two of the accused sprayed their names in aerosol paint at the scene. One of the gang yelled

moments after the attack: "I've got the juice."

Police believe they were influenced by a cult video about gang warfare in the US which they had watched immediately before the murder. The film was called "Juice". What they yelled seemed straight out of the film or was it just a coincidence?

In the same month, another thirteen year old boy was in court after attacking a six year old girl, leading her into a field and sexually abusing her. The boy admitted it all and said he intended to have sex with her. His defence barrister said the boy felt he was abnormal without a girlfriend and had an "unhealthy" interest in pornographic magazines or computer discs brought into school by other boys.

Some computer porn is "official", marketed on CD laser discs called CD-Roms, such as the Interactive Lover's Guide with moving images so explicit that they would be illegal on video. Computer porn can also be carried on ordinary magnetic disks, made and distributed through underground networks including electronic mail boxes.

The boy thought it was normal to have sex with girls his age and younger and pornographic material was said to have "pushed him over the edge". It was pointed out that computer discs are extremely difficult to regulate.

Child psychologists vote against pornography

So then there is some research to support a link between pornography and undesirable sexual behaviour, much anecdotal evidence and indirect evidence from advertising and marketing.

Enough to make twenty six leading child psychologists change their minds in April 1994, after arguing for years no link existed; enough to send the British government into a massive about turn a week later, agreeing stronger regulation for "video nasties", with labels showing age, and degree of violence, language, sex/nudity, as well as theme.

Tough fines were introduced for renting videos to under-age children. Members of all parties had been campaigning for some time. Others said controls were useless because easily evaded and anyway they would " censor film art and ban certain classic films".

In another sign of change Mary Whitehouse, long time campaigner against media sex and violence, was recently introduced on BBC Radio 1 music station as "The lady who everyone hated in the 70s and 80s and got up everyone's nose and now many people are saying was right all along."

Regulations on films in the UK were already some of the strictest in Europe. In Spain and Portugal any censorship is illegal. Films are classified but not cut and cannot be banned. In Greece there are no classifications. In Sweden the top classification age is fifteen; in Holland and Denmark it is sixteen, while Germany and France are far more relaxed than the British.

These new controls were further evidence of a change in thinking about sexual power abuse and pressure, a new age beginning to dawn, a nation waking from slumber to reject a slide to current European values on sex in the media and say "enough is enough".

Teachers warn parents over child exposure

Despite the conservative views of many parents, a number almost seem to encourage their children to watch adult movies by allowing television in bedrooms at night or by leaving adult videos lying around.

When teachers mention to parents that their children as young as eight are watching adult material some shrug it off. One primary teacher said: "I've heard children under seven say they watch these films with their uncles and cousins who are aged eighteen to twenty five."

Sex films and ones containing extreme violence are having an increasingly obvious effect on children's minds. Teachers say adult films are destroying innocence and giving children nightmares, with sexual confusion, listlessness and hyperactivity. Others report young pupils simulating sex in the playground. When asked what her favourite film was from the Christmas

vacation, one eight year old said "Silence of the Lambs" - an extremely violent and disturbing adult film.

There is another side to the debate. For example in 1994 the Policy Studies Institute was asked by the British Board of Film Classification to compare viewing habits of persistent young offenders with non-offenders. They found very little difference. However the two groups were not strictly comparable. Many young offenders were found to have lives "that were full of change, chaos and deprivation in which the media were of less significance than was the case for non-offending peers."

Despite this, James Ferman, Director of the British Board of Film Classification said the rising tide of violent images available to children frightened him. Britain was becoming a "media saturated nation" in which it was impossible to protect vulnerable and impressionable children from the violence and pornography surrounding them.

"With video, cable and satellite, the cinema has moved to the sitting room and it is impossible to monitor the viewing of a young person." He pointed to a recent report where young children had ransacked a neighbour's house after watching similar behaviour on video :

"This demonstrates how vulnerable people are. It is astonishing to me that people are surprised. Children will imitate anything they see....I am frightened for the future. In my job I am walking a tightrope, trying to please people who want freedom of expression and people who want stricter controls". In Britain it has meant rows between different censors over such things as degree of exposure of genitalia allowed. As soon as the government crack-down videos was announced, James Ferman commented: "from now on we are going to have to cut more and classify higher".

However all classification systems collapse under the barrage of satellite transmissions which are censor free. Any child with satellite TV at home is increasingly likely to have access to a wide range of foreign channels, more so perhaps with cable. Many of these are from other European countries with relaxed rules on how much can be shown in sex scenes. The old distinction over transmission times between child and adult viewing also breaks down in any home where a child can programme the clock on a video.

Child pornography is a growth industry

If there have are concerns about adult pornography which are adding pressure for change, there is almost universal unease about the growth of children taking part in pornography, the growth of paedophilia, and sex rings. Subtle traces of paedophilia are drifting into the edge of respectability. For example sexually exciting images of adults dressed as school children became a fashion craze in the mid 1990s in some countries, causing controversy in the fashion world. "Grown women everywhere are wearing children's cutie-pie clothes that look as though they shrank in the wash."

However the real worry is sexual exploitation of children filmed in various states of undress in positions designed to be sexually exciting to paedophiles.

In America the 1984 Child Protection Act gave new federal powers to prosecute people involved in distribution, receipt and possession of child pornography. Previously the laws were the same as for adult pornography.

The new act greatly reduced availability according to Len Munsil, executive director of the National Family Legal Foundation, driving sales underground. However the big question is one of definition: is nudity necessary for conviction?

In the historic Knox case in 1991 it was said all material was illegal if it involved sexual exploitation of children. However this was contested by the Clinton Administration, paving the way for partially clothed images of children to be sold again with legal backing.

It is ironic that with more open displays of affection between adults, and a relaxed sexual code, fears of child sex abuse have begun to inhibit parents from touching or hugging their children or allowing young children to see them naked.

Can I hug my children?

Influential old Dr Spock was cautious about parental nudity in front of boys over the age of four in case it aroused feelings of anger, fear or guilt. "As a general rule, keep reasonably covered and keep children out of the bathroom". However, many households have had a far more relaxed attitude - up until now. Libby Purves wrote in the Times:

"Fewer fathers now dare pick up their daughter's small friends or help them in the swimming pool. Fathers and uncles stifle their instinct to wrestle and cuddle. The children half-choke in the dense smoke too: after a newspaper report of child molestation, one innocent young father distressed his four year old and his wife - who told me the story - by refusing to stay in bed for the regular morning cuddle. He would leap out of bed and dress, as ashamed as a modern Adam....Men teachers are warned by their Unions not to comfort a distressed child physically or talk to one in a room alone...Those with no fathers at home may never learn that a grown man can be tender, and lend the strength of his arm to their weakness. Their daily mentors have been made too afraid that a hug or a steadying hand might be "inappropriate"."

The result is "touch-starved" children: children not only experiencing loss of parental attention following separation or divorce, but also loss of open affection. This can only make more acute the great search for love we saw earlier and the pressures to find a substitute for family affection in sex. It is a strange irony that we live in an age which forbids or discourages parental affection while our culture encourages sixteen year olds to have sex with each other. Surely something has gone seriously wrong.

In conclusion, a new awareness of sexual power and how it can be abused has stuck a further spear in the sexual revolution. The sexual revolution has failed to deliver equality in sexual relationships. Instead we see soaring figures for rape and other sex crimes, which makes many wonder if all the revolution did was remove a helpful restraint on sexual power, encouraging violence and abuse.

However there is another huge area which is shaping a new sexual age: the pressure to perform - a pressure which is now backfiring.

## PRESSURE TO PERFORM

The pressure to perform sexually is enormous and destructive, but what do people mean by

performance anyway? For some it means having adequate sexual equipment to start with.

A group of teenagers were separated by their sex and asked various questions. The boys were asked what they thought girls were looking for in someone they fancied, while next door the girls were the asked the same question.

The two were rolled back into a larger group for feedback. The boys were in for a shock. Their big idea was that girls were interested in performance - the size of their erections, strength, physical prowess. The girls said they were looking for friendship, someone who would treat them with respect, listen to them and be fun to be with. Equipment size to them scored almost nothing - good looks certainly, but that's a different thing.

The opinion of the girls is identical to their parents. A 1993 Gallup poll conducted by the Daily Telegraph of 1,014 women between eighteen and sixty found what women wanted most at home was an equal relationship with a loyal, reliable husband, closely followed by a desire for understanding, someone who would share their concerns.

When they were asked what they would first look for in a male partner, 35% said sense of humour, 23% loyalty, 10% affection, 7% ability to discuss emotions, 7% good looks, only 2% charm and a mere 1% for good lover.

Once married, only 28% said sex was very important, a further 57% said quite important. As we have seen, two thirds said they would not forgive a single act of infidelity.

### Teenage insecurity about appearance and performance

Many teenage girls are unsure of their own appearance - seen at its extreme in anorexia nervosa where a girl exterminates her sexuality in steps as she starves herself sometimes to the point of death. As body weight falls, the process which triggers puberty is reversed, hormone levels fall to child levels, ovulation stops, breasts shrink, body fat disappears and menstruation becomes a memory.

But physique is different from performance. Apart from body building for men, masturbation for boys who think (erroneously) that when it comes to penis size that practice makes perfect, or diets, workouts and cosmetics for girls, there is less you can do about physique.

Performance is different. Performance can be learned, so we are told. Every woman is entitled to a multiple orgasm. Every man should be able to get an erection whenever he wants, wherever he wants and for as long as she needs. Every woman can satisfy her man and every man can satisfy his woman.

But the stakes are growing, and so are the pressures.

Can't get no satisfaction

What exactly is satisfaction and how do you measure it? Satisfaction is a comparative thing. The curse of comparison is that however rich or poor we are, whether we live in an African village or Manhattan, in a London squat or in Belgravia we compare ourselves mainly with those who have more.

The curse of comparison catapults us into consumer madness, forever leapfrogging over our neighbours because in the pecking order of our own minds we should be further on than them. The result is guaranteed dissatisfaction, guaranteed hunger for more, and guaranteed frustration.

If this is true generally in a consumerist world then it is just as true of sex. In fact you could say the entire drive for the sexual revolution has been powered by a dangled carrot of "more in store".

But there is a very big difference.

When it comes to wealth, it may be unrealistic to create demand for ever climbing a possessions ladder, but technology will continue to provide a lot of it. We can make more things to do more things with less manufacturing time and less use of scarce materials, particularly in the area of electronics, computers and telecommunications.

But when it comes to sexual consumerism we are hurtling towards a solid brick wall at a hundred miles an hour and there is no further track the other side to take us on.

There are only a limited number of ways of having sex. We have all been treated to graphic descriptions of a hundred and one better positions to try next time, but all the sex books in the world are likely to leave the person either bored or dissatisfied. Bored if they have seen it all, felt it all, done it all with them all, or dissatisfied if having seen it all, felt it all, done it all, with them all, they are still wondering whether the mega-effort was worth it?

When you've tried everything - what then? The bored are told to do better and then they will come alive in a new way. The dissatisfied are told they or their partners are failures in need of more lessons.

A mind set is being created that by definition cannot fully be satisfied. That is why the sex guides and agony columns sell and sell - also because they entertain and amuse. Chatter for the curious, text to arouse.

But will sex sell forever?

Madonna is in recession

Madonna with her raunchy images of sex has been a music industry icon of the late eighties and early nineties, ever since she began exposing her belly-button.

Madonna is now in recession.

Her album "Erotica" tumbled quickly in the charts. Two singles from "Erotica", "Rain" and "Bad Girl", peaked at only thirty and thirty six respectively. Her next film is "Snake Eyes", yet more sex after "In bed with Madonna" , but will the old formula work?

In February the Los Angeles Times surveyed leading American record company executives to find out what artists or groups they would most like to sign if they could. Madonna was rated just thirteenth, after Whitney Houston (sixth) and Janet Jackson (twelfth).

One said: "She's probably the marketing genius of all time, but I think she out-geniused herself with the book (Sex), the movie (Body of Evidence) and the album (Erotica). There's really a backlash. I feel sorry for her."

The view is that Madonna is over-exposed. As her popular appeal declines, she is being discovered by academia, perhaps the surest sign that she is passe. Sex may not guarantee twenty first century sales.

If the agony columns are anything to go by, forty years of so-called liberation has left millions feeling as frustrated, confused and curious as ever. There is no evidence that the sex revolution has made us happier or more contented.

Indeed you could argue the opposite. Dr Peter Dally, Consultant Psychiatrist at Westminster Hospital London wrote in 1990:

"Surely then, with such apparent social tolerance, with men and women sexually liberated and comparatively free to do as they choose, there should be a much wider sense of contentment and well-being. Yet the discontent and the mental and physical disorders that arise from unsatisfactory sex lives do not seem to lessen. On the contrary, from the point of view of a doctor, they seem to be on the increase. For although the extreme prudery and sexual repression associated with the Victorian era have largely vanished, the essential problems inherent in any sexual relationship are no different."

In 1971, the Samaritans in the UK had only 89,000 calls from depressed and suicidal people. Twenty years further through the sexual revolution the numbers had soared to 470,000.

Sex magazines turn to younger girls

While adults may eventually reach saturation point, there will always be a new generation reaching puberty for whom sex is a great discovery. Many sex magazines are now targeting this market.

Recently I took part in a one and a half hour radio debate on magazines for teenage girls. The other guest was editor of one magazine and agony aunt of another. The big question was this: were her magazines just "going with the flow" or were they corrupting propaganda, promoting under age sex to the young?

The editor claimed the magazines were aimed mainly at older teenagers. I knew otherwise. Just an hour before I had jumped out of a cab on the way to the studio and run into a corner shop selling a large range of them. I asked the sales assistant for a copy of whatever eleven to fifteen year olds were buying and came away with around ten different magazines.

No self respecting seventeen year old girl is going to be seen dead walking out of a shop with a magazine called "Just Seventeen". The name itself is a nonsense.

On the programme, twelve and thirteen year old girls and boys phoned in to give their own views: overwhelmingly negative. One girl said she thought it was stupid to put out sex, sex, sex, when teenage pregnancies and sex diseases were so common.

The editor replied that sex sells and magazines are "only reflecting where young people are at".

I read out a few of the headlines:

"Women only love me for my willy - one man's BIG problem" - front page.

"I charge £10,000 for sex - confessions of a gigolo" - also front page.

"Well-groomed and well horny".

"Battle of the strippers - an evening of body oil and G-strings".

"Sexy standups - and we're gagging for more - six comedians sound off on life, love and laughing women into bed."

"Real life photo story - he wanted to go all the way."

"His hand was up my blouse when my mum walked in."

"They called me out of class to tell me my baby was dying - a 14 year old mum's heartbreaking story."

"Hot lovers!"

"Photo story - he only wanted a one night stand."

"If I want sex I go out and get it - why three girls have one night stands - the feeling, the fascination, the freedom!"

Nine year olds read this stuff

Pressure to perform. We have already seen how grossly misleading all this is in the light of large surveys showing how unexpectedly little sexual activity is going on among teenagers. The fuss is because these magazines seem intent on propelling teenagers into premature sex.

The day after the programme my eleven year old son John went into my office at the top of our house and saw my case bulging open with loads of these magazines. His eyes popped out of his head.

"Dad", he yelled "what's all this stuff in your case?"

Caroline, our nine year old, rushed upstairs to inspect and said dismissively after a few seconds. "Oh that stuff - my friends all read those things in the playground."

Another magazine aimed at the thirteen to sixteen year old market had a big three page feature with photographs: "My sister and I got pregnant by the same boy - when 15 year old Kerry... found out her little sister (13) was pregnant she couldn't believe her ears..." There was just one sentence of comment at the end: "Kerry and Andrea are very lucky to have the support of their mum, but having a baby at a young age isn't easy. For confidential advice....contact address.."

For a rebellious teenager this was a powerful positive image of a girl, an anti-hero, a national celebrity, lots of attention, all the authorities up in arms yet showering attention on her for the sake of the baby.

Pregnant pupils are no role models

Attempts have been made to use fifteen year olds with babies in the classroom as part of sex

education to warn teenagers of the risks. I am concerned they may be seen as having special status, attractive as role models.

Magazines aimed at teenagers do have a key role in education, particularly for girls who are more likely to read them, but there is no need to pack so much explicit erotic material into them.

Child psychotherapist Jeanine said: "The internal pressures on young people because of these magazines are huge. When there is an emotional gap and they feel unloved, there is added pressure for early sexual experience."

As we have seen, the search for love can be directly related to teenage sex and pregnancy. Dr Peter Dally again:

"Children may feel deprived of love and become unsure of themselves, so their emotional development suffers...The child, and later adult, feels empty and is forever seeking love, for reassurance that he or she is indeed good and lovable. Such a neurotic need can rarely be satisfied, and it must be contrasted with real, adult love, in which another person is loved for his or her own sake, not just for the emotional response. A young woman had a reputation for being a nymphomaniac.... Sex for her was an endless search to prove she was lovable and wanted by others". She ended up killing herself.

It is no good just giving information on contraception if a teenage girl finds the idea of being pregnant attractive. Some friends of mine have been trying to support a troubled teenager who left home. After a few weeks in a homeless hostel she announced with pride she was pregnant. Now she had identity and importance. She would have someone to love, a family of her own.

One sixteen year old was interviewed recently and said she "just wanted a baby" and had planned it although she was not really sure why." As a commentator put it:

"This may be the really thorny problem for the government: not whether girls should be given sex education

or not, but trying to persuade them there might be something more worthwhile to do with their lives".

On BBC Panorama in 1993, a 15 year old girl created a storm of controversy by saying she had got pregnant to get away from school, and then again to get a council home. Such things may be rare but they are disturbing.

\* Rising Price of Love - book by Patrick Dixon - published 1995