

# PREMARITAL SEX AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE

## NUCLEAR FAMILY

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In the last four decades, the norms of our society have undergone vast changes in the area of premarital sexual permissiveness. Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, society has become more permissive towards premarital sexual intercourse. Whereas the percentage of men engaging in premarital sex has remained stable throughout most of the last century, the percentage of women has increased tremendously, from 1 in 10 to 7 out of every 10 (Macionis 1987:543), bringing them at nearly the same percent as men.

The purpose of this chapter will be to theoretically and empirically examine the relationship between the attitude towards premarital sex (independent variable) and divorce (dependant variable).

The purpose of this research is to isolate and explain the “proximate cause” of the high divorce rate, which was observed in the decades after the 1960s. I argue that this “proximate cause” is the acceptance attitude towards premarital sex. It is like an “Irreducibly complex” system, similar to many biological systems. The blood clotting system in the human body works when a stimulus starts a chain [path] reaction of many enzymes and catalysts turning on and off in synchrony, automated to precision, leading to a common end. The isolated effect of the stimulus on a *particular* enzyme might not be very strong but the “contextual” effect is a necessary precondition. Therefore the stimulus can be termed as a direct cause of not only the intermediate mechanisms but also the final end. The Koran centuries back, described non-marital sex as a harmful “path” [*sabeel* in Arabic], leading to societal problems [Koran 17:9].

*Theoretic Explanation:*

The theoretical explanation of this analysis is found in several paradigms that operate at different levels of analysis. *Structural-Functionalism* regards regulation of sexual activity as one of the primary “functions” of the family. If you take this function away from the family, by liberalizing attitudes towards premarital sex (since nuclear families are formed via marriage), theory would predict a weaker family. Weaker families are more susceptible to divorce and being broken up.

If sex is legitimized outside of a marriage bond then one of the major reasons for getting married is taken away. The functions of a family complement the structure. The structure of a family is destabilized if the functions are taken away.

Structural Functionalism would predict dysfunctionality among broken families, due to a reduction in the “socialization pool” available to kids from such families. Lack of supervision among children of single-parent families and lack of a male role model makes them more susceptible to delinquency, normlessness and suicide (Hewlett 1991:104). Lack of adequate “learning” from a male model makes children relatively inadequately socialized in market activity (Biblarz & Raftery 1999). The Nuclear family performs certain functions in society which alternate family forms by “theoretic definition” would not be able to perform as effectively.

***Axiom 1(a) As the attitude towards premarital sex becomes (more) (+) permissive, the value of marriage as an institution weakens (-).***

**Empirical Evidence:** During the 1960s, society's strict disapproval of premarital sexual intercourse weakened under the so-called sexual revolution. Surveys carried out in the 1950s suggested that less than 25% of Americans endorsed premarital sex (ed. Edwards, Demo 1991). It should be mentioned that the attitude change concerning premarital sex precedes in time the attitude towards divorce. Premarital sex by definition takes place *before* marriage; divorce takes place *after* marriage. The attitude change towards premarital sex precedes in time the increase in the divorce rate that was observed in the United States in the 1970s. To establish causation, apart from correlation, the cause must precede the effect (Babbie 1992).

The changing norms were revealed by a 1979 college survey of 1300 students, 90% of those surveyed believed that it was acceptable to have sex with someone they loved regardless of marriage or legal commitment. In the sample, 77% of the men and 66% of the women had engaged in sexual intercourse premaritally (Derelga 1980).

As a result of this change in attitude, by the end of the 1980s, a U.S. Congress Report (1989) stated that most 19 year olds, 88% of men and 81% of women reported having premarital sex. Of those 15-19 (the 1965-1970 birth cohort), the incidence of premarital sex for men was 60% and that for women was 51.5% (Macionis 1987).

The increase in the number of people cohabiting and the attitude towards cohabitation:

With the increasing permissiveness towards premarital sex, and the resulting rise in the number of people engaging in premarital sex, delaying of marriage and lower age of premarital sexual experience, came a big increase in cohabitation, i.e. couples living together without a marriage bond and engaging in sexual activity. Since the 1970s, the number of cohabiting families increased 600% or six fold (Kornblum 1997). Data shows that a very large number of U.S. adults have cohabited at some point in their life since the attitude towards premarital sex changed. One third of adults in their mid-twenties and mid-thirties in the U.S. have cohabited before their first marriage, and over half of this age group has cohabited at "some point" in their lives (Smith 1999; Schaefer 2000; Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega 1999).

It is evident that society's increased acceptance towards premarital sex and the resulting increase in premarital sexual activity, especially among women, led to a breakdown of restricting norms associated with cohabitation. A study found that three-fourths of Americans over 65 oppose the practice of cohabitation (birth cohort of the pre 60s) while the numbers are reversed for those that are under thirty (Birth cohort of the 60s and 70s), i.e. three-fourth find nothing wrong with it (Ed. Edwards, Demo 1991).

Using the 1998 General Social Survey, a cross-tabulation between the questions, I) is premarital sex wrong? (*PremarsI*) and II) Living together (cohabitation) as an acceptable option

(*cohabok*)? [Both re-coded into dummy variables non-permissive [0]/permissive [1]], reveals in table 1, that of all those who are "non-permissive" regarding premarital sex, 83% are non-permissive towards cohabitation, compared to 16% of those that consider premarital sex "permissive". Only 17% of those that consider premarital sex "non-permissive" consider cohabitation "permissive" compared to 85% of those that consider premarital sex "permissive".

<b>TABLE 1</b> The Relationship Between Cohabitation Permissiveness by Premarital Sexual Permissiveness	Respondent considers Premarital Sex  Non- Permissive	Respondent Considers Premarital Sex  Permissive
COHABITATION... Non-Permissive	331  83.4%	84  15.5%
COHABITATION... Permissive	66  16.6%	459  84.5%
TOTAL	397  100%	543  100%

*Pearson chi-square 428.9, p < 0.001.*

A rise in the number of sexual partners: Before the breakdown of norms concerning premarital sex, marriage was more of an "only option" regarding sexual intercourse. Therefore, since sex partners were restricted to those maritally bonded, the number of sexual partners per person was lower than it is today. This delaying of marriage and increases in the number of years of exposure to premarital sex, led to the increase in the number of lifetime sexual partners that a person had. The number of women aged 15-19 in metropolitan areas, having two or more sexual partners increased from 38% in 1971 to 61% in 1988 (Smith 1998).

According to the 1993-1994 GSS, the married, averaged 0.97 partners. Those cohabiting had 1.38 partners and those who had never married had 1.63 (Smith 1998:4).

Using the data from the 1998 GSS (General Social Survey-University of Chicago), a cross-tabulation between the survey question, I) Is Premarital Sex Wrong? (Premars1) [Re-coded into non-permissive/permissive] and II) how many sex partners did you have last year? [Re-coded into 1 partner and 2 or more], confirms my conclusion in table 2. Of those who say that premarital sex is “non-permissive” only 6% have had two or more partners. However, among those who say that it is “permissive,” 13% (double) have had two or more partners.

<b><u>TABLE 2</u></b>		Premarital Sex	Premarital Sex
The Relationship Between Number of Sex Partners by Premarital Sexual Permissiveness		Non-Permissive	Permissive
SEX PARTNERS... One only		450 94.1%	564 86.9%
SEX PARTNERS... Two or more		46 5.9%	147 13.1%
TOTAL		496 100%	711 100%
<i>Pearson chi-square 28.27, p &lt; 0.001.</i>			

A rise in the number of the “Never-Married”: A lowering of the importance of marriage in society was shown by a rising number of the never married. According to the *Information Please Almanac* (based on the US Census Bureau statistics), the never married are the fastest growing segment of adult population today in the U.S, and account for 23% of all adults (*Family Trends* 1997: 434). In 1970, 75% of adults were married; in the mid-1990s only 57% were married. From 1972 to 1996 those who had never been married rose from 15% to 22% (Smith 1998). In 1995, 67% of all women 20-24 years of age had never married compared to 36% in 1970 (Schaefer & Lamm 1998:401). Not only is marriage delayed, it is put off for good for a growing segment of the population.

A combination of this marital status variable that includes currently divorced and separated respondents and the variable "Ever been divorced or separated"; a dummy variable for divorce "DI" was constructed. The variable gives a score of 1 to those who are divorced or have ever been divorced and a score of 0 to all other categories. A cross tabulation between "DI" by premarital sexual permissiveness shows that of those that consider premarital sex "non-permissive" 27.4% have been divorced or are divorced (and separated) while 35% of those that consider it permissive have been or are divorced or separated. A difference of 8%

<b><u>Table 3a</u></b>		Premarital Sex	Premarital Sex
The Relationship Between Divorce by Premarital Sexual Permissiveness		Non-Permissive	Permissive
Not Divorced		360	464
		72.6%	65.3%
Divorced		136	247
		27.4%	34.7%
<i>Pearson chi-square 7.228, p &lt; 0.01.</i>		496	711
<i>Total</i>		100%	100%

Decline in the marriage rate: The marriage rate is based on the number of marriages per 1000 people. It has declined steadily in the United States since 1970. The 1990 rate of 9.8 marriages per thousand appears to be higher than the 8.5 recorded in 1960, however the figure includes remarriages which dramatically increased over the last few decades and now account for 40% of the marriage rate (Thompson & Hickey 1994). According to the 1998 GSS, out of all respondents who considered premarital sex "non-permissive", 54% were married while only 43% of those that considered premarital sex "permissive" were married (see Table 3 above).

According to Percell:

*When sex becomes more acceptable outside the bonds of marriage, one of the major reasons for getting married is undermined, helping to contribute to a lower marriage rate (1990: 310).*

Decrease in *post-partum* marriages: In the 1950s before the wide scale acceptance of premarital sex, most pregnancies that preceded marriage resulted in the man who had impregnated the woman marrying her (over 51%). This has changed since the acceptance of premarital sex and cohabitation (Wilson 1996). By the 1990s less than 25% of women who conceived a child before marriage got married before the child's birth (Smith 1998:5).

According to the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs), a survey of 3432 adults in 1992, conducted among those born from 1933-1942, 94% of women married their first sexual partner compared to only 35% of women born from 1963-1970 (Schaefer & Lamm 1998:56).

According to Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago (1998):

*With the link between sexual activity and marriage breaking down, the connection between marriage and procreation has also lessened...(1998:5)*

Increase in childbearing outside of wedlock: The weakness of marriage as an institution also shows up with an increasing number of women "choosing" to have kids outside of marriage. Before the breakdown of norms regarding premarital sex, marriage was the only option to have kids, now it is just "one" of the options. Overall the percentage of childbearing outside of wedlock has increased from 5% in 1960 to 33% of all births, in 1994 (Smith 1998). A similar trend showed up in Great Britain, where births outside of marriage increased from 5% in 1960 to 34% in 1995, from 4% to 26% in Canada, from 6% to 37% in France (Smith 1998:5). Whites account for most of the new rate increase in births outside of wedlock, at present. From 1980 to 1992 births out of wedlock grew 54% nationally, 94% for whites and 9% for blacks (Wilson 1996).

Extramarital sex goes up: As the attitude towards premarital sex became more permissive, we observed that marriage was delayed, and premarital sexual activity increased, together with the number of lifetime sexual partners. The lesser value placed on marriage showed up in an increasing rate of “marital infidelity” or extramarital sex. People, more than before the shift in these norms, were having a harder time adjusting from a premarital pattern of multiple sexual partners to a monogamous pattern of marriage. Those aged 40-49 (the birth cohort of 1960) show an extramarital sex incidence of 21%, while those 50 and older (the birth cohort of pre 1960) shows a significant drop, which reaches 7% for those 70 or older (the pre 1940 birth cohort) (Smith 1998:7). Recent studies suggest that as many as 50% to 65% of both men and women have had an extramarital sexual relationship in the United States by age 40 (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega 1999:263; ed Edwards, Demo 1991). It should be noted that independent (not related to this paper) empirical studies on extramarital sex carried out by many researchers and narrated in *The Journal of Sex Research* published by the Society for the Scientific study of Sex 19 (1983): 1-22 stated (cited in ed. Edwards, Demo 1991):

*“.... Attitudinal research strongly supports premarital sexual permissiveness as the most significant correlate of Extramarital sexual permissiveness (EMSP).”  
Evidence in support of other predictors is tenuous.”*

Using the 1998 General Social Survey, a cross-tabulation between the question, I) Is Premarital Sex Wrong?[re-coded into non-permissive/permissive]; and II) Have you had sex other than your spouse when married?, confirms the relationship in table 4. Out of all those who responded that they had had sex with another even when married [*evstray*], reveals that 12.7% of those that considered premarital sex “non-permissive” had had sex with another while married, compared to 24.6% of those that considered premarital sex "permissive". Thus, the more permissive a person is regarding premarital sex, the more likely that he/she will cheat on their spouse.

<b><u>TABLE 4</u></b>		
The Relationship Between Having Sex While Married (Extramarital Sex) By Premarital Sexual Permissiveness	Premarital Sex  Non- Permissive	Premarital Sex  Permissive
<b>HAD SEX WHILE MARRIED?</b>	49	112
YES	12.7%	24.6%
NO	338	343
	87.3%	75.4%
<i>Pearson chi-square 62.94, p&lt;0.001.</i>	387	455
<b>TOTAL</b>	100%	100%

Among European countries, a similar trend as the United States is witnessed. There is however a difference in degree or intensity. In Sweden where the norms regarding premarital sex are most permissive [extremely liberal], families are the weakest, and the marriage institution has almost become obsolete, as premarital sex became institutionalized (Macionis 1995:463).

The empirical evidence above is clear, in support of axiom 1(a): *As attitudes towards premarital sex became more permissive (+), the value of marriage as an institution weakened (-).*

Axiom1 (b): *As the value of marriage as an institution weakens (-), the attitude towards divorce, becomes (more) permissive (+).*

**Empirical Evidence:** As the attitude towards premarital sex became more permissive, it was observed that the median marriage age for men and women rose, the number of people engaging in premarital sex rose, the average number of sex partners per person rose, the number of cohabiting couples rose and the number of people who put off marriage for good rose, while the number of “post-partum” marriages fell. Thus the value of marriage as an institution weakened.

Therefore, as marriage became weak, the value placed on the permanence of marriage became weak as well. As a result the attitude towards divorce became more permissive. This permissiveness regarding the attitude towards divorce showed up in the pressure put on the legislature to enact “no-contest” divorce laws, thus making divorce easier. As a result in 1969 (concurrent with when societal attitudes towards premarital sexual intercourse became more permissive), California became the first state to begin “no-fault” divorce, and most other states followed suit (Hewlett 1991).

The fact that the legislature was under pressure to enact easier divorce laws is revealed by the fact that divorce was already on the rise before this law was enacted (Schaefer & Lamm 1998:400). Thus, there was great demand for making divorce easier.

As we observed above, cohabitation can be inferred as the weakening of the importance of marriage as an institution. Therefore we should see, according to axiom 1(b) that those that cohabit, do not consider marriage as important as those who do not cohabit. Therefore they should have a more permissive attitude towards divorce, compared to groups that do not cohabit. Empirical evidence confirms this conclusion. Divorce rate for those who have cohabited before marriage is higher than those who haven't cohabited before marriage by over 10% (Kornblum 1997). The good "trial marriages," preceding marriage that Bertrand Russell was advocating based on his philosophy have today been proved wrong and unstable. Cohabitation preceding marriage results in a weaker marriage and not a stronger marriage as divorce rates clearly show. As is observed above, the lesser the value of marriage, the greater is the permissive attitude towards divorce.

**Proposition deduced from Axioms 1(a) and 1 (b):**

The permissive attitude towards premarital sex led to a weakening of the marriage institution (Axiom 1(a)) which led to a permissive attitude towards divorce (Axiom 1(b)).

**Concluding Deduction:**

*As the attitude towards divorce becomes (more) permissive (+), the number of couples divorcing (# of divorces) goes up (+).*

As the attitude towards divorce became more permissive, there was pressure on the legislature to enact divorce laws that made divorce easier. Once divorce was made “legally” easier by the enacting of “no-contest” divorce laws, the numbers of marriages ending in divorce multiplied enormously, increasing unabated until recently. The large increase in the divorce rate since the 1960s is attributed by most modern sociologists to the permissive attitude towards divorce (Schaefer 2000, Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega 1999, Smith 1998, Kornblum 1997, Newman 1998). The divorce rate more than doubled from 1960 to 1980, increasing from 9.2 divorces per year per thousand marriages to 22.6, a 246% increase (Smith 1998). The divorce rate in the United States increased over ten-fold since 1890. For every hundred new marriages, fifty-two marriages (existing) will end in divorce (Schaefer 2000, Hewlett 1991). Within three years 20% of all new marriages either end in annulment or divorce (Kornblum 1997). Experts estimate that the lifetime divorce probability, for any marriage initiated in the last decade is 50% (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega 1999). Half of all marriages initiated in the last decade will inevitably end in divorce (Kornblum 1997). Another similar trend has been the rise in two-parent (step) families. In 1980, 9% of all family households with children included a stepparent, by 1990 this figure tripled to 24% (Schaefer & Lamm 1998: 399).

### **The Cycle of Poverty:**

It can be argued that the permissive attitude towards premarital sex (+) led to an increase in teen pregnancy (+), which then led to an increase in single female-headed parenthood (+), which led to the “feminization of poverty”(+). Poverty [and the psychological effects of divorce and “fatherlessness”] led to lower education and economic attainment in children (-), which led to a greater predisposition to premarital sex (+), which led to further teen pregnancy (+) in a “cycle of poverty”.

### **Empirical Evidence:**

*Young girls growing up in broken homes become single parents themselves (53% more likely than those in intact homes do) due to early sexual activity outside of marriage. They are 164% more likely to have a premarital birth and 111% more likely to have a child as a teenager. Studies find that they have a higher incidence of divorce, and a 92% greater chance of dissolving their own marriage and lack of sexual confidence and orgasmic satisfaction. Even when income is removed as a dependant variable, the same results show disruption of family by divorce, and "fatherlessness" producing these traits (Blackenhorn 1996).*

The 1997 Information Please Almanac states [based on US Census Bureau data]:

*The girls born to adolescent moms are up to 83% more likely to become teenage moms themselves, 50% more likely to repeat a grade at school and 50% more likely to be born at a low birth weight. Teenage moms are twice as likely to be on welfare and over 70% drop out of high school (Family Trends 1997:435).*

One of the nation's leading family scholars, Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, concludes:

*Controlling for associated factors such as low income, children growing up in such [female-headed] households are at a greater risk for experiencing a variety of behavioral and educational problems, including extremes of hyperactivity or withdrawal, lack of attentiveness in the classroom, difficulty in deferring gratification, impaired academic achievement, school misbehavior, absenteeism, dropping out, involvement in socially alienated peer groups, and especially the so called 'teenage syndrome' of behaviors that tend to hang together- smoking, drinking, early and frequent sexual experience, and in more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence and criminal acts (as cited in Blackenhorn 1996:249).*

**Logical Deduction:**

- 1.** The permissive attitude towards premarital sex (+) led to a larger number of teenagers engaging in premarital sex (+). Axiom 3 (a)

**Empirical Evidence:**

In 1970, 5% of women who were age 15 and 32% of age 17 were sexually experienced. By 1988 this had grown to 26% at age 15 and 51% at 17. These numbers show that the average age for the first premarital encounter has been falling as more women engage in premarital sex, with changing attitudes towards it (Smith 1998).

In 1989, out of wedlock births accounted for 93% of all births to females below the age of 15, 77% of all births for those 15-17. (Karger, Sotez 1994).

- 2.** With more teenagers engaging in premarital sex (+), teenage pregnancy went up (+) [engaging in sex is a necessary pre-condition for pregnancy]. Axiom 3(b)

**Empirical Evidence:** In 1989, out of wedlock births accounted for 93% of all births to females below the age of 15, 77% of all births for those 15-17. In the age group 20-24, 35% of all births were to unmarried couples. Overall 25% of all white births were to unmarried couples and 70% of all African American births. (Karger, Sotez 1994).

**Therefore:**

- 3.** Thus [proposition 3(a) and 3(b)] the permissive attitude towards premarital sex (+) led to an increase in teenage pregnancy (+) &
- 4.** An increase in teenage pregnancy (+) led to an increase in teenage single moms (+)-
- 5.** An increase in teenage single moms (+) led to “feminization of poverty” (deduced above)(+).

**REPETITION OF THE CYCLE:**

- 6.** Poverty (+) led to lower education attainment in children of single female parents (+)
- 7.** Lower education (-), [coupled with the psychological effects of divorce and “fatherlessness”] leads to higher incidence of premarital sex (+)

What is ironic in the practice of premarital sex related to attitude today is that most of the post 1960 birth cohort, consider premarital sex “revolutionary,” “cool,” and “good.” What they don’t realize is that there is an almost universal acceptance of premarital sex among primitive people (Kinsey 1948 et.all).

Therefore there is nothing “advanced” about premarital sex. Data in 1998 suggests that extramarital relations are more likely to occur among the less educated also (Smith 1998). Support for easy divorce is also highest among those that are less educated (34 % according to the 1997 GSS) and low among those with high degrees (19%) (Smith 1997: 11).

**8.** Higher incidence of premarital sex (+) leads to higher teenage pregnancy (+)

**9.** Higher teenage pregnancy (+) repeats the “cycle of poverty” discussed above.

*Application:*

The conclusions of this research can be extremely helpful in formulating social policy to deal with the “feminization of poverty” and its various effects. The solution is simple: We need to address the cause of the problem and seek prevention rather than trying to cure the effects. Since informal controls against premarital sex have greatly passed away with the changing norms regarding premarital sex, some formal laws need to be enacted as social policy to discourage premarital sex and to seek social change.

As society is educated and norms change again, formal laws will help society deal with the problem during the transitory period by controlling the wide scale practice of premarital sex. Results are definitely possible. A voluntary reduction in the incidence of premarital sex was witnessed after AIDS was publicized as a threat:

*“Of people reporting a change in sexual behavior, about 45% to 50% mentioned reducing their number of sexual partners, including having only one partner... (Smith 1998:13)*

Another good example would be the reduction in smoking and a change of norms concerning cigarette smoking in the United States. Jean Kilbourne (1999) writes:

*“Since Massachusetts increased taxes on cigarettes and launched a massive aggressive anti-tobacco campaign in 1993, consumption of cigarettes has dropped 31%, the steepest decline in smoking rates in the nation. In Florida, smoking by middle school students dropped 19% since the state launched an aggressive anti-tobacco campaign. Several studies have documented that in California, which has the oldest such program nationwide, in the 1990s smoking has declined twice as fast...and the norms for cigarette smoking have changed dramatically in the past 20 years (Kilbourne 1999:300)”*

*Violence and Crimes against Women:*

***Theory:***

*As premarital sex became more permissive, more women engaged in premarital sex [and the sex industry was born] leading to an objectification of the image of women and changing roles, resulting in a greater incidence of crimes against women.*

*1. As premarital sex became more permissive (+) more women engaged in premarital sex (+). Axiom 4(a).*

*As more women engaged in premarital sex, the sex industry and media was born which led to a new image of a woman,, the woman as an “object.”*

*2. As the image of women in society as “objects” grew and different roles evolved (i.e. women were viewed more as “sex objects” rather than “homemakers”) crimes against women (domestic violence and rape) increased (+). Axiom 4(b)*

*1. Thus, as premarital sex became more permissive (+), crimes against women became more common (+). Proposition 4 logically deduced from axiom 4(a) and 4(b).*

**Empirical Evidence:**

Since society became more permissive towards premarital sex, the number of women engaging in premarital sex went up by a large number (as we saw above). A culture of sex

developed in the United States, with a new kind of industry taking birth, the growing “sex industry.” Now, more than ever, women were being viewed as objects, “play things” and “toys” in the hands of men. The advertising industry was fast to catch on. By presenting women’s nudeness to sell everything from ballpoint pens to automobiles, they desensitized the public to viewing women as sex objects.

Women’s status and respect in society plummeted, compared to the 1950s, and crimes against women and domestic violence went up. According to psychologists, once a group is dehumanized and “objectified” as a thing, it becomes very easy to use violence against it (Kilbourne 1999 ). Women were being dehumanized and “objectified,” and being programmed to hate everything about themselves, by the media. Commercials and advertisements showed that every part of the female anatomy had to be given a new look in order to make it socially acceptable according to the “Barbie” image. What was truly amazing was the deceit by which women were programmed to believe that this was something that built status and that they were being “liberated.” Women thus turned against themselves following the permissiveness of premarital sex. It is also interesting to note that most businesses displaying the “sexuality” of women, through the popular media and through their “respectable” trades, the “entertainment industry”, are owned by men.

According to the conflict school [and now the feminist school], men control society and seek means to keep women in their subordinate position. It appears true in this case, where by clever tactics, society has convinced women that hating every part of their body, gives them “status”, that changing everything that is their true self is “liberating.” Once the image of women as “object”, whole or dismembered (as displayed in advertisements) was established, it became very easy for society to become violent against them. As expected, we saw a big escalation in rape and domestic violence. Studies find that over 60% of college women have been sexually assaulted after the age of 14. The rates of “reported rape” are at least five times lower than the real number of rapes in America according to a study funded by the United States Department of

Health and Human Services (Newman 1998). One woman in three in the U.S will face an “attempted or completed” rape in her lifetime (Hayden 1984:216).

From 1976 to 1980, reported rape, which is 5 times lower than actual rape, according to some estimates, went up by 38% (Derelga 1980). The National Victim Center reports (as cited by the Information Please Almanac 1997) that over 700,000 women are raped annually in the U.S. Given that most rapes go unreported, the actual number is much higher. The fear of rape among women has taken the public domain away from them. Women in the United States live under informal controls on what time and which areas in this country they have access too. Those who are not prudent to take note of these controls, make it on the evening news or the newspaper as another statistic on the ever-increasing number of women that are assaulted and molested on our streets every minute of every day.

Society is so permissive of rape, due to the desensitization resulting from the media portrayal of women that rape has the lowest conviction rate of any violent crime. Only one out of one hundred and fifty suspected rapists are ever found guilty. Rape has been termed an “All American Crime,” as surveys show that it embodies traditional male characteristics of power, domination and control that are highly valued in society (Newman 1998:454). It is little wonder that Sociologists today, talk about a “rape culture [Hayden 1984].”

Cultural belief in society about rape is that over 50% of both males and females blame the woman as being responsible for the rape (Newman 1998:456). This would be a classic example of “false consciousness” in women according to conflict theory. Women have been so programmed by the controllers of society, men that they blame themselves for the crime against them, which is actually being caused by society’s “objectification” of women *contextually* caused by the greater acceptance attitude towards premarital sex.

It would not be wrong to theorize that this permissive attitude, according to the conflict school of thought, was: (i) introduced by men, who (ii) were always engaging in premarital sex, even before the sexual revolution, (iii) to increase the number of women engaging in premarital

sex, (iv) desensitizing and perpetuating it through the media, owned by men, (v) so that they could be made objects of pleasure for men and kept subordinate through the “feminization of poverty.”

Data in the United States shows that 25 to 35 percent of girls are sexually abused, usually by men well known to them and a third of all the women who are killed, die at the hands of husbands or boyfriends (Kilbourne 1999:253).

A high percentage of women assaulted suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (the same disorder that a large number of Vietnam veterans suffer from), which leads to addiction and substance abuse and eventually to poverty and homelessness. Thus women live in a "war zone" in their own homes. If they survive childhood, their boyfriends or husbands eventually get them! Thus in this “new “ society, “liberation” of women has been reduced [effectively institutionalized] to a slogan to sell products. Such sellers of "liberation", mostly men, offer women "liberation" via smoking, alcohol, food and their natural longing for stable relationships [which have dwindled as we saw above]. This commercial "liberation" comes at a great cost to women and serves to isolate them through addiction. As addicts make great consumers, the sellers of such "liberation" want to keep it that way (Kilbourne 1999).

*Shallower Relationships:*

1. *The permissiveness of premarital sex (+) led to greater individualism (via the breakup of the family as we saw earlier) (axiom 5(a)).*
2. *Individualism going up (+) led to shallower husband/wife & parent/child relationship (-) (axiom 5(b)).*
3. *Thus, the greater permissiveness of premarital sex (through a contextual effect) led to shallower relationships in society (Proposition 5 logically deduced from axiom 5(a) and 5(b)).*

**Empirical Evidence:**

As society became more permissive towards premarital sex and as more couples started cohabiting, the attitude towards divorce became more permissive and no fault divorce laws were enacted. As a result of this the divorce rate jumped as we saw earlier. The epidemic of divorce that hit American society showed us that even the most intimate husband/wife and parent/child relationship has become weak in this society. No longer was marriage viewed as a relatively permanent bond as people rushed to divorce.

Cohabiting which became a relatively new "intimacy" fad (as revealed by the high numbers), gave us even more alarming numbers of "shallow" intimacy. Of all the cohabiting couples, most part ways within a year or marry (Smith 1998). Of those that marry, the percentage of divorce is over 10% higher than the extremely high national rate of divorce among non-cohabiting couples (Kornblum 1997).

Recent studies suggest that as many as 50% to 65% of both men and women have had an extramarital sexual relationship in the United States by age 40 (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega 1999:263; ed Edwards, Demo 1991). Considering that most people in America claim that "love" is the basis of courtship (Schaefer 2000:298), the numbers show that "claimed love" has become selfish and self centered due to this changing attitude towards premarital sex (through a contextual effect- the contextual cause).

As we saw earlier, premarital sex breaks up marriages by making the institution of marriage weak. When families break up, most fathers do not meet their children. Most men have started regarding marriage as a package deal. Once the marriage is broken, contact with children is severed also. Three out of four children feel rejected by their father after divorce (Hewlett 1991). This shows that even the close parent/child relationship has become weak in this society as a result of the permissiveness towards premarital sex.

Over 60% of children in single parent families didn't receive any support from their absent father in 1989. Single mothers and their children received only \$11 billion in child support

from the missing fathers, instead of their entitlement of \$30 billion (Karger, Stoez 1994:107). Does this not show a shallow and irresponsible parent-child relationship?

According to the *interactionist* school, the most expressive symptom of loss of long-term commitment is the huge number of women raising children by themselves (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega 1999). As we saw earlier, the permissive attitude towards premarital sex led through 'intervening variables' to the huge jump in single parenthood, as the marriage institution became weak and marriage got separated from reproduction. Research data shows that the amount of "total contact time" between parent and child in the United States has fallen 40% in the last twenty-five years (Hewlett 1991:91).

*Premarital sex and sexual happiness:*

Marriage is seen as something that restricts freedom. However sociological research finds that:

- i) Married couples have a greater incidence of sexual activity, than the never married or divorced. Activity and sexual pleasure is 25% to 300% greater among married couples compared to non-married people at various age levels (Smith 1998).
- ii) Married people are "happier" in their sexual life than non-married people (the total "amount" of sex among married couples is greater also than non married couples) according to the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs) (Schaeffer 2000: 29).
- iii) Marriage reduces crime and juvenile delinquency according to crime analysts (Siegel 1994:69).
- iv) Marriage reduces the incidence of domestic violence (Blackenhorn 1996).
- v) Married couples with children have higher household wealth and income than divorced or single parents.

As society became more permissive towards premarital sex, we saw the number of women engaging in premarital sex increase by leaps and bounds. As a result, sexual dysfunction, described as a lack of interest in the enjoyment of sex, performance anxiety or inability to have an orgasm, increased. Therefore we saw that sex in a marriage results in greater happiness than

“single sex.” (According to NHSLH narrated above). A 1999 study narrated in the Journal of American Medical Association, considered the most comprehensive look at American sexual behavior since the Kinsey Report, stated that sexual dysfunction affects 43% of women and 31% of men. What was surprising was that this was not correlated with age and that the birth cohort of the pre 1960 period were less likely to report dissatisfaction or lack of interest than the post 1960 birth cohort (Kilbourne 1999:266).

### **Summary and Conclusion:**

We observed that as the attitude towards premarital sex became more permissive, the value of marriage as an institution weakened and a culture of divorce developed in the US. This was inferred by:

- ◆ The increase in the number of people cohabiting and the permissive attitude towards cohabitation. Those who are permissive towards premarital sex are 67.9% more likely to be permissive towards cohabitation than those that are non-permissive towards premarital sex (See Table 1)
- ◆ The rise in the number of sexual partners, following the delaying of marriage and the increase in the number of years of "exposure" to premarital sex. Those who are permissive towards premarital sex are twice as likely to have two or more sex partners than those that consider premarital sex non-permissive.
- ◆ Increase in extramarital sex through its link to the attitude towards premarital sex, showing a weaker marriage bond (See Table 4). Those who consider premarital sex permissive were twice as likely to have had sex with another while married than those who did not.
- ◆ As the value of marriage fell, we saw that the attitude towards divorce became more permissive and the divorce rate went up. Those who consider premarital sex permissive

were 7.3% more likely to be divorced than those that considered premarital sex non-permissive (see Table 3a).

- ◆ Those who are permissive towards cohabitation, which is caused by permissiveness towards premarital sex, were almost 10% more likely to be divorced than those who considered cohabitation non-permissive.

<b><u>TABLE 9</u></b>		
The Relationship Between Divorce By Cohabitation Permissiveness	Cohabitation Non- Permissive	Cohabitation n Permissive
Not Divorced	310 75.6%	527 64.6%
Divorced	100 24.4%	289 35.4%
TOTAL	410 100%	816 100%
<i>Pearson chi-square 15.316, p &lt; 0.001</i>		

Regression analysis (see appendix) confirmed the above conclusions.

- ◆ The results showed that as a person who is permissive towards premarital sex has a 7% greater chance of being divorced than one who is non-permissive ( $b=0.06549$ ). The results were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

- ◆ Adjusting for minority status and cohort (pre-1960 and post-1960), the relationship between premarital sexual permissiveness and divorce became even stronger. It showed that those who were permissive towards premarital sexual permissiveness were 11.2% more likely to be divorced than those who were non-permissive. The results were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).
- ◆ When providing a link for cohabitation permissiveness, to the adjustment, premarital sex became non-significant and the results showed that cohabitation permissiveness was strongly related to divorce. Those who consider cohabitation permissive were 16% more likely to be divorced than those that consider it non-permissive.
- ◆ When cohabitation permissiveness was regressed on premarital sexual permissiveness it showed that those who are permissive regarding premarital sex have a 56.9% greater chance of being permissive towards cohabitation. Thus the conclusion being that premarital sexual permissiveness results in cohabitation permissiveness which results in a greater incidence of divorce. Almost 12% of the variation in divorce was explained by the model containing cohabitation permissiveness (Step 3 in table in appendix).

It was confirmed that premarital sexual permissiveness is a "cause" of divorce through cohabitation permissiveness. Literature review and existing data research showed that by affecting other variable, premarital sexual permissiveness weakens the marriage institution and affects divorce through multiple paths.

**Appendix:**

- i) *Incidence of premarital sex:* The percentage of people who respond that they have engaged in premarital sex.
- ii) *Incidence of Divorce:* The number of reported divorces per year per thousand individuals. It can also be measured as a percentage (ratio) of all marriages in a period (usually a year).

- iii) Cohabitation: couples living together, as a household, without a blood or marriage relationship. Cohabitation is measured as a percentage of all households in a society.
- iv) Median Marriage age: The median age of first marriage for men and women.
- v) Feminization of poverty: Poverty concentration based on sex. Concentration of poverty exclusively in a segment of the female population.
- vi) Female-headed household: Contrary to the traditional nuclear family, this family form is headed by a woman [the mother] with her children. The father is absent in most cases. This type gets formed when couples divorce or when women choose to have children outside of marriage. It is measured as a percentage of total number of households.
- vii) The nuclear family: A two-parent [male-female] household, related by marriage, plus their children. The percentage of nuclear families is measured as a percentage of total number of households in a society.

Marriage Rate: The number of reported marriages per year per thousand individuals.

### **Regression Analysis:**

In progressive adjustment, *Step 1* (refer to table), gives the total association between premarital sexual permissiveness and divorce. *Step 2*, adjusts for confounders, *cohort* and *minority* status and gives the total effect (direct plus indirect) of premarital sexual permissiveness on income. *Step 3* adjusts for the link, cohabitation permissiveness and gives the direct effect of premarital sexual permissiveness on divorce. The indirect effect being explained by cohabitation permissiveness.

### **Divorce regressed on premarital sexual permissiveness with adjustment for cohort, minority and cohabitation permissiveness.**

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	Metric	Metric	Metric

	Standard	Standard	Standard
Premarital Sexual Permissiveness N= 1160	0.06549* 0.069 (0.028)→ <b>Std.Error</b>	0.112*** 0.119 (0.027)	0.02372 0.025 (0.033)
Cohort N= 1160		-0.293*** - 0.311 (0.027)	-0.309*** - 0.329 (0.027)
Minority N=1160		-.01796 - 0.015 (0.033)	0.177 0.233 (0.031)
Cohabitation Permissiveness N=1600			0.158*** 0.162 (0.034)
Intercept	0.276	0.376	0.332
R (squared)	0.005	0.101	0.118

Divorce (dependant) N=1160

\*\*\* p<0.001

\*\* p<0.01 **One Tailed Test**

\* p<0.05

The table shows that in *Step 1*, the total association between premarital sexual permissiveness and divorce is positive. The results are statistically significant (p<0.05). It shows that if a person is permissive regarding premarital sex he/she has a 7% greater chance of getting divorced than one that is non-permissive (b=0.0655 on a 0 to 1 scale). See Figure 1 at end.

Adjusting for cohort and minority status, *Step 2* shows that the total effect of premarital sexual permissiveness on divorce is a stronger positive than the earlier association. The results are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). They show that if a person is permissive regarding premarital sex, he/she has an 11.2% greater chance of getting divorced ( $b = 0.112$  on a 0 to 1 scale) than one who is non-permissive.

In *Step 3*, when I adjusted for cohabitation permissiveness, the effect of premarital sexual permissiveness became statistically insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) but it showed that cohabitation permissiveness affected divorce in a strong positive manner. The results were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). They show that if a person is permissive regarding cohabitation, he/she has a 15.8% greater chance ( $b = 0.158$  on a 0 to 1 scale) of getting divorced than one who is non-permissive, controlling for cohort, minority status and premarital sexual permissiveness. The effect of cohort was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). It shows that the post 1960 cohorts have a lesser chance of being divorced than the pre 1960 cohort. A reason for this might be that when the divorce rate shot up initially, the post 1960 cohort was still too young to be married. The effect of minority status was statistically insignificant.

The conclusions are completely in line with my theoretical model. The model suggested an "irreducibly complex" causation. In the model premarital sexual permissiveness causes attitudes towards cohabitation to become permissive. In such a model premarital sexual permissiveness has a causal effect on cohabitation permissiveness.

#### Model

Premarital Sexual Permissiveness  $\rightarrow$  Cohabitation Permissiveness  $\rightarrow$  Value of marriage goes

down



Divorce

In order to demonstrate this empirically, I regressed cohabitation permissiveness on premarital sexual permissiveness. Since cohabitation permissiveness was a dichotomous dummy variable, I checked the probability to make sure that OLS could be efficiently run. The probability of cohabitation permissiveness was 0.67 (816/1226). Since  $0.2 < \text{probability of dependant} < 0.8$ , OLS would give the same result as a logistic regression. The results show that 34.8% of the variation in cohabitation permissiveness is explained by premarital sexual permissiveness. There is a strong positive relationship between premarital sexual permissiveness and cohabitation permissiveness. Those who are permissive regarding premarital sex have a 56.9% greater chance of being permissive towards cohabitation than those that are non-permissive towards premarital sex ( $b=0.569$  on a 0 to 1 scale). The results are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

### **Cohabitation Permissiveness Regressed on Premarital Sexual Permissiveness**

Step 1		
	Metric	Standard
<b>Premarital Sexual Permissiveness</b>	0.569***	0.590
<b>N= 1160</b>	(0.023)→Std.Error	
<b>Intercept</b>		0.324
<b>R-squared</b>		0.348

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