

## **Redefining Sex and Marriage: the Sexual Revolution through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

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### Extended Abstract

In this paper, we argue for the existence of two separate sexual revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Both revolutions redefined the demographically important relationship between marriage and sex. As a result of these sexual revolutions, the relationship between marriage and childbearing was also altered, and measurably so. We consider the first revolution a continuation of the trend begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century redefining marital partners as sexually romantic companions rather than pragmatic partners (Frykman & Löfgren 1987). Sex within marriage was redefined as recreational rather than reproductive. With the increasing aid of contraceptive technology, childbearing within marriage was often postponed or avoided altogether.

This revolution was countered by the post-WWII baby boom. During this unique period of time, marriage and childbearing again became synonymous. However, another sexual revolution began in the 1960s. This revolution redefined sex as recreational and acceptable outside of marriage. As a result, childbearing outside of marriage also became increasingly acceptable. This resulted in the rise of alternatives to marriage.

One object of this paper is to better ground the consideration of these sexual revolutions by exploring their relationship to culture in the U.S. Our collaboration in this paper merges anthropological and sociological perspectives on culture to better meet this aim and avoid the common practice of leaving culture in the residuals of demographic models. In particular, we develop theories linking cultural change to the negotiation of social class and race in the United States. We develop hypotheses concerning these theories of cultural change and comparing them to other cultural theories, like individuation (Lesthaeghe 1988).

To test our hypotheses, we establish measurements of the two sexual revolutions. Using the historical census data collected in the IPUMS files, we construct two measurements at the metropolitan year level by race and class. We measure the rise of companionate marriage by comparing the number of women who are married without children to the total number of women married. The resulting variable, the percent of wives without children, measures the first type of sexual revolution. We measure the rise of the second sexual revolution by comparing the number of women who have never married with children to the total number of women with children. The resulting variable, the percent of mothers never married, provides an empirical measure of the second redefinition of marriage and sex.

Together, these two measurements can be used to empirically demonstrate the existence two sexual revolutions. In chart one, below, we provide historical evidence of these sexual revolutions within the black and white population of women in the United States. The measurements can also be used to compare the progress of the sexual revolution across geographic regions and between class categories. We use these measurements to further examine the causal forces behind these redefinitions of sex and

marriage, and reconsider the “counter-revolution” of the baby boom. We test our initial hypotheses using these measurements. We discuss our results, and the implications of our findings for further research on the role of culture in demographic change.

**Table 1. IPUMS Evidence for Sexual Revolutions in 20th Century U.S. for non-Institutionalized Women, Age 18-34, by Race.**

