

# Towards an integration of Lust and Love? Eroticisation and Sexualisation since the 1880s <sup>[1]</sup> [#N1]

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Volume 5, Issue 1, March 2016

Permalink: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.105> [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.105>]

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**Abstract:** *In this paper I seek to understand recent changes in romantic and sexual relations of young people from an historical perspective. It focuses on the emancipation of women and young people since the 1880s, a moment when social codes dominating the relations between women and men, girls and boys, parents and children, changed towards greater leniency, conceptualised as informalisation. From this perspective, the paper sketches how the success of young people and women in escaping from under the wings of respectively parents, men and husbands, has coincided with an emancipation of their sexuality. As individuals and collectively, women and young people increasingly became sexual objects as well as sexual subjects: in processes of trial and error they increasingly learned to cope with sexual longings, both with those of others directed at themselves and with their own sexual longings. In these processes, they directed themselves both to the established codes and to their internalised codes about how to connect and integrate sex and love – that is, to connect sexual and relational intimacy. These codes were changing as women and young people became emancipated, thus propelling subsequent attempts at finding a more gratifying and enduring lust-balance between sexual pleasure and relational fulfilment. These changes manifested themselves in subsequent spurts of sexualisation and eroticisation. The paper sketches significant moments in these processes and ultimately raises the question ‘Where are we now?’ A tentative answer to this question is unfolded as a theory about why love has become more difficult, lasting love in particular.*

**Keywords:** *Eroticisation and sexualisation; developments since the 1880s in the balance of power between women and men, parents and children, and in the lust-balance of sexual and relational intimacy. Informalisation. Civilising of emotion regulation.*

## Formalisation and informalisation

What we people know about life and how to live it – that is, our knowledge and our codes of behaviour and feeling – is taught and appropriated in ‘love-and-learn relationships’ and in ‘love-and-learn’ processes. These concepts, coined by Norbert Elias (2009[1987]), implicitly recognise that for understanding the history of humanity at large as well as the history of any particular society and every individual human being, the history of love is as important as the history of learning. The two are closely connected, ever since the advent of *Homo sapiens*, when social codes came to dominate genetic codes as steering mechanisms for survival. Since then, human offspring have needed to be adjusted to the prevalent social codes and initiated into the reservoir of social knowledge. Both individual learning and transmitting collective knowledge over subsequent generations depend upon the cohesive strength and warmth of their bonds, particularly those involving children. The fundamental importance of human love-and-learn relations and processes is mirrored in their fears and anxieties:

Genetically, the whole family tree of fears and anxieties seems to have a twofold root: the fear of physical extinction and the fear of loss of love. Threats to one's life and one's love in a very elementary form seem to be the original danger situations (Elias 2009: 140).

In turn, the structure of people's fears and anxieties as well as the qualities of their bonds of love depend upon the levels of social organisation, pacification and civilisation in and between their societies: 'they are always determined, finally, by the history and the actual structure of his or her relations to other people, by the structure of society; and they change with it' (Elias 2012: 485).

In expanding networks of human interdependence, from the 'fire regime' – the social organisation of controlling fire – to the agrarian regime and the industrial regime, the levels of differentiation, integration and complexity have risen together with rising social controls of people over each other and themselves (Goudsblom 1992). As human groups expanded, differentiated, and became increasingly complex, the same happened with their codes of behaviour and their collective stock of knowledge: both also expanded and differentiated, becoming more detailed and complex, thus demanding higher levels of self-regulation for keeping people from transgressing the prevailing steering codes. On the whole, this trend towards higher levels of 'social constraints toward self-constraint' was documented for the sixteenth to the nineteenth century in Elias's book *On the Civilising Process* (Elias 2012[1939]). It was a long-term process of *formalisation* of social codes.

Around the 1880s, unplanned social processes of differentiation, integration and growing complexity, together with their inherent social constraints toward self-constraint, had apparently reached a critical level that allowed for – and soon also demanded – a partial breakthrough in the formalisation process. Fixed rules of behaviour and their demand for unthinking obedience to social superiors lost some of their function in maintaining social organisations and even tended to become counter-productive. Increasingly, as old rigid social controls loosened up, formalisation lost its dominance to a process of *informalisation* (Wouters 2007, 2015). A rapidly increasing variety of relations and situations in complex networks of interdependency came to demand larger degrees of fine-tuning and this implied manoeuvring in increasingly flexible and sensitive ways according to more flexible guidelines, thus opening up a wider range of acceptable behavioural options.

The choice among options, however, did not make behaviour easier, because making the right choices among a complex multitude of options came to depend on social skills that could no longer be learned on the basis of simply being obedient to authorities and fixed rules. It demanded the capacity to attune oneself to (changes in) the specific parameters of each particular relation and situation. These demands coincided with rising empathy, together with openness, 'ease' and reflexive caution. People were increasingly drawn into the social competition of learning these necessary social skills and performing them with 'ease'. This competition intensified in the course of following decades and spread from circles of calculating politicians and commercial entrepreneurs to the much wider circles of calculating citizens. In this competition, the 'personality capital' of a habitus that allows for more sensitive and flexible, subtler behaviour turned into a national habitus, and more or less simultaneously, into the international habitus of the wealthy West.

As a whole, the transition in dominance from formalisation to informalisation also involved growing demands upon the more intimate and private relations such as between children and parents, and the romantic, erotic and sexual relations between women and men.

# Informalisation in relations between parents and children

Continued informalisation processes involved a growing dependence of children upon the ability and necessity of learning the related skills of reflexivity and flexibility. It implied growing demands on love-and-learn relations and therefore growing interdependence of parents and children through which their relationships have gained intensity as well as intimacy over a longer period of time: both parenthood and childhood were prolonged (see Røling 2006: 24,26). These transformations were captured in the expression 'century of the child' (Key 1905 [1900]). Particularly in that century, the emancipation of children and teenagers in relation to parents and their representatives – and of women in relation to men – clearly implied rising levels of equality as well as of intimacy.

Since about the 1880s, the traditional emphasis in child rearing, which emphasised subservience to institutional and adult authority sanctioned by corporal and other punishments, shifted to an emphasis on qualities linked to the self-regulation of children, sanctioned by reasoning and differentiations in affective warmth and permissiveness. Relations between children and parents gained intimacy and warmth as well as sensitivity and reflexive thoughtfulness. After the Second World War, the level of parental investment in their children was again rapidly rising, a process that coincided with widening circles of identification, ranging from children and women to such groups as Indians, blacks formally known as 'negroes', and animals. Emotional investment in love-and-learn relations accelerated particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, when this trend was backed up by rising levels of material security and physical safety, allowing for the spread of a warmer and more intimate, flexible and cautious form of parental control on the self-control of children. Thus, more and more children in warmer and more intimate family relations have experienced a type of discipline or social control that is less directed at obedience than towards self-control and self-steering – that is, towards learning to think and decide for themselves (cf. Alwin 1988).

Simultaneously, having and raising children became increasingly important for providing an unthinking sense of belonging and a source of motivation in life, whereas religion and political ideology, even social class, gender, and nationality lost much of that capacity. For increasing numbers of people, the love-and-learn relations with their children became a major provider of meaning in their life and their strongest motivating power. In raising children, a warmer and more intimate, flexible and cautious parental control over the self-control of children spread and became known as 'love-oriented discipline' (Bronfenbrenner 1958).

## Gender and Sex: the lust-balance

The general trend towards rising empathy, openness and reflexive caution in relations pertains particularly to relations involving sexuality. The emancipation of women and young people went hand in hand with an emancipation of their sexuality; and, at the same time, parents – of different social classes to varying degrees – came to take more account of the interests and feelings of their children, and also more account of the sexuality of their teenagers. However, it has only been since the Sexual Revolution that women, including young women, have themselves actively taken part in public discussions about their carnal desires and how to achieve a more satisfactory lust-balance – the balance between longings for sexual gratification and for enduring relational intimacy. From then on, more and more people have been experimenting in their relationships between the extremes of desexualised love (sexual longing subordinated to the continuation of a relationship) and depersonalised sexual contact, and the extremes of being a sexual object and a sexual subject. This experimentation process provoked many new and more varied answers to what might be called

the lust-balance question: when and within what kinds of relationship(s) are (what kinds of) eroticism and sexuality allowed *and* desired? From the 1960s onwards, topics and practices such as premarital sex, sexual variations beyond the missionary position, unmarried cohabitation, adultery, fornication, extramarital affairs, jealousy, homosexuality, pornography, teenage sex, abortion, exchange of partners, paedophilia, incest and so on – all part of a wider process of sexualisation – implied repeated uprooting confrontations with the traditional lust-balance. People were confronted with the lust-balance question more frequently and intensely than ever before.

This question is first raised in puberty or adolescence, when bodily and erotic impulses and emotions that were forbidden from early childhood onwards (except in cases of incest and paedophilia) are again explored and experimented with. The original need of small children for bodily contact and their subsequent frank and spontaneous explorations remain, without being reciprocated (Fonagy 2008), and they are restricted and stopped when adults begin to experience them as sexual. Sexuality *and* corporality are thus set apart from other forms of contact, and compartmentalised. In puberty and adolescence, when teenagers' longings and demands for intimacy and confidentiality are already quite developed, the taboo on touching and bodily contact has to be gradually dismantled. More or less overcome by their new longing for sexual pleasure and gratification, young people have to integrate this longing into both their personality and their relations. They have to learn how to become a sexual subject *and* a sexual object and to find a balance between the two. For most, this is a process of trial and error. In the process of sexualisation and eroticisation, especially since the Sexual Revolution, women collectively have come into a position similar to that of young people when becoming sexually mature: both entered the trial and error process of becoming more of a sexual subject.

## Trial and error as collective processes: sexualisation and eroticisation

In the twentieth century, especially since the 1960s, this process of trial and error has been going on collectively. Allowing for differences in nationality and social class, the subsequent moments of collective learning processes determined to a large extent the range of available options with which individuals living in each moment saw themselves confronted. Since the 1880s, over decades in which women became emancipated, men adjusted to that, and young people continued to escape from under their parents' wings, this range has widened considerably. Until the 1960s, however, a highly uneven balance of power between men and women, together with a highly compartmentalised sexuality, ensured that a woman's carnal desires and experiences remained unmentionable. It made for sexual relations that were not necessarily confidential, even between husband and wife. Sexual intimacy did not demand much relational or personal intimacy. This is typical of a lust-balance in which the longing for sex and the longing for enduring relational intimacy are not strongly integrated, and can even be highly segregated.

This view of widening options and a collective process of trial and error seems in conflict with the fact that, in most Western countries, the old rule of sexual abstinence before marriage was formally maintained up to the 1960s. However, this impression of conflict is wrong, because increasingly people just paid lip-service – they did not live up to this rule and practised the policy of 'don't ask, don't tell'. Dutch research shows that young people of the generation born at the beginning of the twentieth century postponed their first coitus on average until ten years after becoming sexually mature. The generation of about 1935 waited seven years, an average decline of ten months per ten years. This downward trend continued, for the generation of 1970 waited five years, which was a decline of seven months per ten years. Apparently, this decline was at a slower pace than that of the generations before the Second World War (Vliet 1990: 56). And although 'the pill' did of course

allow for more, and more varied, sexuality and for greater emotional tranquillity in seeking sexual pleasure, these findings nevertheless seem to allow the conclusion that the Sexual Revolution was not as revolutionary in terms of such crucial aspects of sexual behaviour as the age of first sexual intercourse as it was in terms of opening the public debate on sexuality and of ending the hypocrisy of formally upholding the ban on premarital sexuality.

However, as the balance of power between women and men as well as between parents and children became less uneven, possibilities for more frank and warm intimate relations increased – as did the necessity of developing such relations. For men, the change was mainly towards an ‘eroticisation or sensualisation of sex’. Male sexual pleasure came to depend more strongly upon the sensual or erotic bond with the sex partner, that is, upon relational intimacy. They also came to experience women not mainly as sexual objects but also more as sexual subjects. For women, the change was towards a ‘sexualisation of love’ and becoming a sexual subject as well as a sexual object. Together, these changes made for a single integrated process of sexualisation and eroticisation that permeated across the board of social life, private as well as public. As the part-process of sexualisation attracts much more attention, and because it also repeatedly provokes moral indignation, the significance of the part-process of eroticisation is often only partly acknowledged.

## Trial and error before the 1960s: two social class trajectories

Until the 1960s, the trial-and-error process towards easier and more comradely relations between women and men had many trajectories, but at least two that are differentiated by social class. One trajectory involves ‘good society’ [gute Gesellschaft] and groups of families for whom it largely served as a model. In the 1880s, young people from these social classes had limited opportunities to select a marriage partner – courtship activities being strictly controlled by parents. An example is dancing, which was held in high esteem as a courting arena. Only at a private ball or dinner-dance could a young man dance with a girl of his social class. But first he had to ask her parents for permission, and when he was listed in her dancing programme he might opt for a second dance with the same girl – but opting for a third dance would create expectations and obligations, directly connected to getting engaged and then married. This scene changed as young women went out to work in such places as offices, libraries, hospitals and schools, and aimed at financial independence. In addition, sports and bicycles and the dance craze of the 1920s opened up less cramped opportunities for meeting. Young people were allowed increasingly to visit public dancing places and to organise private dance parties only for themselves.

In the Netherlands, the informalisation of courtship activities and engagements in good society also entailed an erosion of this public pledge to marry and a trend towards young people more easily breaking off their engagements. From the 1920s onward, this more easy-going attitude is documented in Dutch manners books by increasing complaints about young people more casually breaking off their engagements, as well as by advice, based on this change, that the announcement of an engagement be scaled down to a relatively small gathering, rather than being the big ceremonious occasion with a formal and public pledge to marry that an engagement used to be.

In the social classes where young daughters would usually work as domestic servants, salesgirls or in workshops, the codes of ‘good society’ hardly functioned as a model, and parents traditionally allowed their offspring to attend meeting (and mating) occasions like fairgrounds or to stroll along promenades. Couples would form, and many a marriage was arranged after a young woman got pregnant (van Hessen 1964). In their marriages, most husbands and wives followed traditional patterns of married life: strongly embedded in

larger we-groups of families and characterised by a division of tasks and worlds between husbands and wives that in effect largely excluded confidentiality and relational intimacy (Straver et al. 1994). These traditions ruled in most villages and working-class neighbourhoods.

## New practices and new concepts

The trend in the direction of young people escaping from under their parental wings and experimenting with erotic relations on their own can be presented by focusing on new words and practices.

An important new practice is indicated by the rise in the 1920s of the word *verkering*; it was derived from the verb *verkeren*, which means ‘to be or move in [this or that] company’. In the 1880s, the word acquired a romantic connotation, particularly when it was transformed into the noun *verkering*. As such, some people of the middle-classes understood it as a romantic relation preceding a formal engagement, while others saw it as ‘trying out’ a relationship that could develop into *vaste verkering*, a more fixed (=vast) commitment, similar to what became known as ‘going steady’ in English. In Dutch good society, however, people looked down on *verkering*, both the word and the practice. In their view it was a disgustingly bad habit among the middle and lower classes, and they continued to perceive an engagement as the only proper arrangement that builds up to marriage. Thus, they tried to ban the practice by banning the word, and would always call their ‘try-out’ an ‘engagement’, even when the couple had never been through a formal engagement ceremony (more details in Wouters 2004, 2014). A demonstration of the long-lasting power of this ‘good society’ habitus is presented by a psychologist and journalist in her review of my 2012 book:

Throughout the twentieth century there was no [Dutch] word for a romantic relationship with sexual implications. A couple could be married or engaged, but there was no name for the preceding phase, at least not in manners books giving advice on these thorny problems. The word *verkering* was used only in the vernacular and just did not apply to people in higher or bourgeois circles. *Verkering* or *vaste verkering* was something the kitchen maid had with her soldier. Wouters repeatedly uses the term in his book, perhaps also in an attempt to get it accepted as neutrally descriptive, but for me it is saturated with insufferably petty and chiefly vulgar associations (Ritsema 2012).

Another new practice and neologism of the 1920s is *scharrelen* (literally: searching or groping movements, like chicken scratching, rummaging), a word used to indicate a relation with a girl for flirting and for fooling about in an affair that was not intended to become a serious love relationship. Girls who indulged in the practice could be called a *scharrel* and were in danger of being seen as a ‘town bike’ (the literal translation from the Dutch is ‘licked-off sandwich’).

A similar negative word was the *amatrice* (female amateur). From the 1920s to the 1950s, it expressed the moral concern of Dutch upper and middle classes about the morality of girls in the younger generation. The *amatrice* was defined as ‘the girl who gives herself to a friend in a loosely-fixed relationship for which she is rewarded by being taken out often – to be distinguished from the professional prostitute’ (Saal 1950: 62). These girls had sex, which should not happen, and if it did, it should be kept secret or denied – for even the suspicion of indulging in having sex could damage their reputation and respectability and, therefore, their future chances of a good marriage. But when denial became impossible, for example because more and more girls came to visit physicians and clinics with venereal diseases, the word *amatrice* was invented:

The appearance on the scene of the *amatrice* as a *dramatis personae*[...] is connected to the appearance of a premarital female sexuality that could no longer as a matter of course be localised only within the lower classes nor be lumped automatically under the heading of prostitution (Mooij 1993: 136).

This figure of the *amatrice* evaporated completely in the Sexual Revolution. With the moral stigma removed, the *amatrice* became a girl with a steady relationship, a 'normal' girl who had *verkering* or *vaste verkering*. She was, in fact, 'going steady'.

In the second half of the 1930s, parental control over the younger generation had softened to the point that 'wise parents' would not think of asking a young man for his 'intentions' when he paid a little extra attention to their daughter, 'not even if he were to take her out frequently' (quoted in Wouters 2004: 72–3). Parents were advised to give freer rein to their adolescent children by *gedogen*, conditionally allowing of such a practice, usually combined with a policy of cautious deterrence. In this way they tried to 'hang on' by discreet yet distinct attempts at staying 'in the scene' with their children, thus maintaining both an intimate bond and a guiding eye. It seems obvious, however, that particularly from the 1920s onward, the try-out relations of young people, whether called an 'engagement' or a *verkering*, were becoming increasingly 'sexual' (details in Wouters 2004, 2012, 2014).

## Process continuities in class differences before and after the 1960s

The sexualisation of 'try-out' relationships was observed in all social classes, it was part of a general trend, and yet some differences between the social classes continued from before the 1960s into later decades; these differences can be conceptualised as *process continuities*. A significant one is that, in comparison with girls and boys from the middle and upper classes, their young counterparts from lower social classes generally got married at an earlier age. It is one of the traces of a traditional pattern that persisted among them. Another one is that social control over the young is less directed towards teaching them to steer themselves and more towards demanding their obedience in combination with a rather partial supervision and a tacit policy of 'don't ask, don't tell'. This policy is directly related to an understanding of the budding sexuality of boys and girls as a natural force that will out, and that among them acquiring sexual experience is highly regarded and status enhancing. Belonging to the same traditional pattern are the findings that these youngsters usually start tentative sexual relations at an earlier age than their contemporaries of higher social classes and that they proceed more quickly from first contact to full intercourse. These and other examples of greater sexual directness are reported in sociological and sexology studies and they are discussed in Wouters (2012).

Young people from higher social classes report more reserve in developing relational and sexual trajectories. Among them, masturbation is reported more often. On average they are later in starting an intimate ('try-out') relationship and also take more time than their counterparts from lower social classes before they get to experience full sex. They are more reticent in getting there because they want to develop a mutual consent that includes 'being ready' for the experience. This reticence is most probably related to an upbringing that focuses less on obedience to parents and other authorities and more on learning to decide for oneself. At the same time, increasing parental trust in the self-steering abilities of children has reduced the old fear among parents that their offspring would lack self-control and let themselves go sexually when social control was absent. It seems obvious that these differences between the classes concur with differences in the development of self-steering.

## Connecting sexual and relational intimacy: trial and error since the 1960s

Despite many fluctuations, accelerations and counter-currents at many levels of complexity, on the whole, trial and error processes went in the direction of a 'sexualisation of love' (involving mainly women) and an 'eroticisation or sensualisation of sex' (mainly men). Particularly in the collective quest of how to connect sexual with relational intimacy, prominent moments can be distinguished. Five such moments will now follow. [3][#N3]

The *first* moment is the *Sexual Revolution*. At that time, young people were breaking the taboos of previous generations to such a degree that there was an acceleration in the emancipation of sexual emotions and impulses – allowing them into consciousness and public debate. Women rejected their traditional submissiveness towards male superiority to the extent that it became socially accepted for them to participate in public discussions on sexuality and a more gratifying lust-balance. They subjugated their traditional shame and shame-triggered counter-impulses involving lustful and sexual feelings; they stopped answering questions regarding sexuality in a more traditionally conservative way than men; and in the early 1970s, they silenced men who were still complaining about their wife getting an orgasm too slowly by venting complaints about husbands having their orgasm too fast. In a short period of time, the relatively autonomous strength of carnal desire came to be acknowledged and respected. For both genders, sex for the sake of sex changed from a degrading spectre into a tolerable and thus acceptable alternative, allowing more women and men to experiment with sex cheerfully and outside the boundaries of love. At the time, the spirit of liberation from the straitjacket of older generations prevailed, and did not allow much attention to be given to the *demands* of liberation.

From the late 1960s onward, as living together without being married became socially accepted and marriage receded as the only acceptable aim in initiating a trial relationship, the number of people getting formally engaged declined markedly and the word *verkering* lost much of its function and tended to become obsolete. This trend accelerated in the next decades with the spread of the term '*having a relationship (with someone)*' to indicate a sexual and romantic relation (for the sake of such a relationship). In one respect, the word 'relationship' went through the same development as the word *verkeren*: it acquired a sexual and romantic connotation – in the 1950s (see the Dutch dictionary WNT) – and over the next decades, this connotation gained strength.

The period between 1968 and 1974 was one of rapid major transitions. An indication is that the reported sexual experience of young people in the Netherlands doubled while their attitudes in matters of sexuality became twice to three times more permissive. More important is that in these years a trend in teenage sexuality appeared that would continue during subsequent decades until today: the principal conditions for parental consent to their teenagers having sex and also for a romantic and sexual sleepover had become: 'feeling strongly for each other' and mutual consent about 'being ready for it', that is, ready for sex as an exploration of physical, personal and relational feelings (Wouters 2012).

A *second* remarkable moment in the collective trial and error process is in the second half of the 1970s, when women brought about a shift in emphasis from 'sexual liberation' (from parental sexual codes) to 'sexual oppression' (by men): now, opposition turned against the codes and morals of the dominant sex, against sexual violence, and pornography came to be seen as triggering sexual violence. Around 1980, massive anti-pornography demonstrations were held by women, thus clinging to their romantic relational ideal of love. At the same time, however, there were discussions about women who enjoyed only one-night stands, thus excluding sexual intimacy from other forms of intimacy; their longing for relational intimacy had come to be



experienced as an obstacle to sexual pleasure. They avoided any emotional commitment in having sex. According to tradition, a woman should have sexual desires and fantasies only *within* a romantic relationship that was meant to last a lifetime. In a lust-balance that is tipped the other way, a woman's sexuality could be aroused only *outside* such a relationship, in almost anonymous, instant sex. This compartmentalisation of sexuality or 'sexual separatism' (Lasch 1979: 338) clearly showed women to be moving in between the extremes of 'love without the ballast or duty of sex' and 'sex without the ballast of love'.

As an undercurrent, this lust-balance formed the negative of that propagated by the anti-pornography movement. To a large extent that movement was an 'emancipation cramp', expressing problems connected with the emancipation of sexuality, for the attack on male pornography concealed as well as it expressed a 'fear of freedom' (in Erich Fromm's famous phrase), a fear of experiencing and presenting oneself as a sexual subject. This fear of an old danger was expressed in the anti-porn movement as well as in sexual separatism, and either way, the opposite sex was seen as the origin as well as the solution of all difficulties. No woman will have been able completely to withdraw from this development and its inherent ambivalence, if only because, before the sexual revolution the social code allowed women to express only one side of the lust-balance.

In some respects, men appeared to be in a similar transition. Sexology studies from the early 1970s indicate, for example, that many married men still reported a preference for keeping an emotional distance from their wife when having sex; this preference for sexual separatism was probably connected with an experience similar to that of women who separated sexual intimacy from other forms of intimacy, because of the experience that emotional intimacy disturbs their sexual appetite. By 1981, however, a sexology study showed that the number of men reporting a preference for an emotional distance when having sex with their wife had strongly declined. Apparently, they no longer wanted her mainly as a sexual object, but also as a sexual subject. In the same period, this shift can also be deduced from a decline in the percentage of men who expressed a strong aversion to giving oral sex ('eating pussy'). It had dropped from 50 percent in 1971 to 20 percent in 1981 (Vennix 1989).

A *third* prominent moment in the collective trial and error process consisted of a *lust revival*. From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the 'emancipation cramp' was overcome: a more relational outlook and a (female) 'lust revival' surfaced, together with public discussions on such topics as 'men as sexual objects', women's adultery, masturbation; and, with the success of groups of male strippers like Chippendales and the launch of 'female pornography', the emancipation of female sexuality and the sexualisation of love accelerated again, both among a new generation of young women and among feminists, a leading older one of whom looked back at the anti-pornography movement as a 'kind of puritanism' (Meulenbelt 1988).

The change among men was again in the direction of experiencing women less as sexual objects, and more also as sexual subjects. In 1989, half of the men reported the practice of giving oral sex as a regular one (Vennix 1989).

A comparison of teenagers of the 1980s generation (born in between 1968 and 1972) with what their parents of the 1950s generation (born between 1938 and 1945) reported on their youth (Ravesloot 1997) shows huge changes: teenagers of the 1950s generation were living in strict hierarchical relations in which much was obligatory, little allowed, sex a taboo, and many reported surreptitious attempts to escape this rigid regime, whereas in the 1980s, parents had changed to giving their teenage children the possibility of growing into a sexual human being by allowing them to experiment with 'try-out' relationships until one of these proved to be intimate, warm and open enough for the young couple to decide they were 'ready for it'.

The *fourth* moment in the process of sexualisation and eroticisation was from the late 1980s into the 2000s, when both longings of the lust-balance were becoming integrated on a higher level, allowing more sex and expecting more love, which implied that female emancipation was not only expressed in acknowledgement of

the principle of mutual consent but that of mutual attraction as well. The traditional observation that girls love boys more than sex and boys love sex more than girls was eroding quickly. During these years there was a *love and lust revival*. Sexology research of 1990 finds that, particularly after having acquired sexual experience, ‘most young people think of love and sexual pleasure as two sides of the same coin, and that this goes for both boys and girls’ (Vliet 1990: 70–1). Sexologists also report young people in 1990 beginning sexual relations at an earlier age while also postponing marriage and/or having children at a later age, and in this longer in-between period they report a trend towards having more subsequent monogamous ‘try-out’ relationships, characterised as ‘serial monogamy’ and ‘short fidelity’ (Vliet 1990: 65; Vogels and Vliet 1990).

The emancipation of female sexuality, and its counterpart the eroticisation and bonding of male sexuality, were expressed and propelled by literature (such as feminist publications), by protest activities (like those against sexual violence and harassment) and by changes in the law such as making rape in marriage liable to punishment. They were also driven by welfare arrangements providing the material basis for many women to develop an ‘equanimity of the welfare state’ (Stolk and Wouters 1987a). In addition, they were spurred on through men’s being caught in a pincer movement. They were squeezed between, on the one hand, their longing for an enduring intimacy becoming subject earlier and more strongly to more or less rigorous limitations such as the likelihood or threat of desertion and divorce; and, on the other hand, their longing to satisfy their own sexuality becoming increasingly dependent upon their talent for arousing and stimulating a woman’s sexual desires.

A *fifth* striking moment in the collective trial and error process towards a further integration of love and lust was in the first decade of *the twenty-first century* with the international outbreak of an attack on ‘sexualisation’ and ‘pornification’. At first sight, this attack may give a different impression from that of a continued integration of ‘love and lust’, because both these concepts, pornification in particular, do carry strong negatively loaded moral connotations. On closer inspection, however, these protests predominantly symbolise a new emphasis on the love side of the lust-balance, for in comparison with love, sex had become relatively easy. If the old anti-porn movement symbolised an attempt at blending more sex with love, the new one symbolised an attempt at combining more love with sex. The long-term process of sexualisation and eroticisation clearly continued as before in the direction of emancipation of sexuality and certainly not in the direction of the preceding long-term process of desexualisation, in which taboos on sexuality had gained strength.

In the Netherlands, the clearest manifestation of the quest for combining more relational intimacy with sexual intimacy was the ‘slow sex’ movement. The people involved in this ‘slow sex’ movement attacked the sex of pornography, seen mainly as mechanical, vulgar and loveless, but their attack was not so much directed against pornography as it was more an outcry for a higher quality of sex—sex as ‘haute cuisine’—and that quality was sought in the further integration of relational intimacy with sexual intimacy. The most successful outcry was a book entitled in German *McSex: Die Pornofizierung unserer Gesellschaft* (Hilkes 2010 [original 2008]). Its author lived a life of chasing sexual gratification until she experienced it as empty; her attack on pornification is predominantly in favour of eroticising sex and, therefore, in favour of a lust-balance that further integrates relational and sexual intimacy.

The development of young people’s attempts at integrating sexual longings into a personally gratifying and socially acceptable lust-balance, however, is still very much in full swing. Continued tensions and shifts in the social definition of what constitutes an ideal lust-balance also allow the conclusion that the Sexual Revolution has not ended. Individuals as well as societies still struggle with its ‘aftermath’, as has recently been demonstrated by the confusion, moral fervour and moral indignation of attacks on ‘sexualisation’ and on paedophiles.

In 2015, research by HBSC (Health Behaviour in School Children), collecting data in 44 western countries, showed that Dutch children rank highest in having good communications with their parents and in feeling that talking with their parents about their problems is possible (Kuntsche et al. 2015). It seems likely, however, that many parents as well as adolescents would like to talk more openly with each other about sex, but they don't know how, as they are again and again overcome by some kind of confusion, indicating that discussing problems of the lust-balance is still quite difficult. They are surrounded by relatively high levels of shame and embarrassment, particularly if discussing *personal* sexual problems, fears and desires. Even with their peers, most teenagers find it difficult to talk about their own sexual experiences and longings, but between them and their parents a specific obstacle has developed. That is because (except in cases of incest) it was in this parent-child relationship that parents did not reciprocate or, if they had, eventually stopped reciprocating intimate touching and other physical contact. Instead they came to reject and ignore such contact until even the thought of its possibility had been banned from relation and conversation. At the same time, however, as children grew up, emotional intimacy in this relationship rose to a level at which other relations would have become sexual. This creates a tension that may explain the confusion about paedophiles.

This explanation is based upon relationships between parents and children becoming increasingly intimate and erotic. As levels of their intimacy were rising, their erotic components tended toward comprising emotions and impulses that were warded off immediately for having an alarming sexual nature. Experienced as extremely 'dangerous', they tended to be restrained immediately and almost automatically, thus excluded from consciousness and perceived as 'not mine'. To the extent that these emotions remained repressed and unacknowledged, they became the kind of 'blind spots' of consciousness which, when touched upon – for example when discussing paedophiles and sexual child abuse – give rise to vehement opposition to such emotions and to the people who experience them (see Waldhoff 1995; Wouters 1998).

## Avoiding old practices and a quest for new words

In 2005, 'having strong feelings for each other' sufficed for 80 per cent of the Dutch school population (aged twelve years and older) as a precondition for having sex (Graaf et al. 2005). (The corresponding figure in 1995 was 75 per cent.) As both mutual and parental consent became more dependent upon the strength of feelings for each other and the depth of the relationship rather than upon age or anything else, teenagers could feel relatively free to grow into 'being ready' for having sex together.

In this process, the word 'love' took on old-fashioned romantic connotations, and in reaction, many shunned it or overused it, thus eroding old pretensions that now demand more caution. Particularly in the early phases of experimental 'trying-out' relationships, the word 'love' became too strong to use – but at the same time, virtually *all* old words for a love-relation came to be stigmatised for smelling of old-fashioned inequality, of 'horse and carriage and children in marriage'. Expressions such as 'going steady', *verkering*, 'being engaged', and *vaste verkering*, 'a steady relationship' are dropped or postponed as long as possible. They tend to reappear, however, in the language of parents and teachers at nursery and primary schools when talking about the intimate peer relationships of young children, from the ages of three and four upward. One may hear, for example, that Olivia is Sam's fiancée, that Oskar and Julia have *verkering* and that these 'couples' are 'in love' – an example of 'overusing' the word 'love'. The word 'puppy love', however, is carefully avoided. It has disappeared like most expressions of ridicule.

In some of their 'try-out' relationships, teenagers and adolescents even avoid the word 'relationship' because it would suggest that one's choice of partner has been made, lock, stock and barrel, and 'independence' has been renounced. They use euphemisms such as 'having something [a thingy] with someone', they 'are seeing

someone' or refer to 'my friend' with many variations in emphasis on the first or the second word, but without further specification. There is great ingenuity in avoiding traditional connotations. Young Dutch people (in their late teens and twenties) have introduced the words *prela* and *rela* (Julen 2015); the latter consists of the first letters of the word *relation*, thus indicating only half the commitment and obligations of a full relationship [4],[#N4] – which is more publicly known and acknowledged by at least parents and friends. A *prela* refers to a phase before a *rela*. The *prela* may or may not be monogamous, but the *rela* and the relationship are supposed to be. Before the *prela*, there may be a phase of *dingesen*, a neologism ('thinging'), or of *scharrelen*, an old word that today has lost its negative connotation. This fading provides a clear example of the connections between the emancipation of women, young people, and their sexuality. Today, *scharrelen* means having an affair with someone just for the pleasure of it – for the sake of the affair, that is, without serious intentions or commitments or claims about the future. And the practice of *scharrelen* is placed early in serial 'try-out' relationships as an early phase in learning about love and lust. In a personal communication, a female journalist in her early twenties wrote to me:

Girls often use the word when talking as women amongst each other. 'We *scharrel* a bit'. That even sounds tough: 'Oh indeed, a man, but ah, you know, just for the fun of it'. Many people of my generation think it is quite normal to first have a period of *scharrelen* before getting a bit more serious; they don't want to get into a *prela* or *rela* straight away. (van Sadelhoff 2015)

Another expression of recent use in the Netherlands, is 'flow'; young people speak about 'my flow' and of 'being in a flow with' someone. This expression is probably taken from the concept of 'flow' as developed by the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, basically meaning 'complete absorption in what one does', and spread when people started using it for a 'try-out' relationship involving sex.

These new concepts and expressions, *dingesen*, *scharrelen*, having a *prela* or a *rela* and *being in a flow* are all vague, and they breathe embarrassment and the fear of getting into a more serious full relationship too soon. Some interpret this vagueness as stemming from young people's reluctance to enter into a commitment, enjoying their freedom and a varied sexual menu. Indeed, these people do exist, but they characteristically fail to feel and show the embarrassment that is characteristic of the whole quest for concepts and expressions that can possibly convey the various phases in the development of love and sex, of lust-balance relations and experiences. The most important condition for entering into a commitment is in the feeling for someone, and it seems that as long as one does not get at the root of that feeling, the commitment is postponed. Instead, there is a *prela*, a *rela* or a *flow* or 'something'.

## Where are we now? Paradoxes and interpretations

The quest for new concepts can be taken as another signal that to 'feel strongly for each other', to love and to make love are increasingly perceived as learning processes with various stages or phases. From this perspective, it is obvious that all phases of this trial and error process of learning to develop a gratifying lust-balance are taken increasingly seriously. Many young people today start earlier with having a 'try-out' relationship and they 'settle down' – marry – later. For them, the duration of this quest for a gratifying lust-balance, with its various phases and variety of 'try-out' relationships, takes longer and also takes more consecutive partners than they and/or their parents might wish, but – paradoxical as it may seem – both are much more likely to have originated from a rise rather than a decline in their longings and demands for intimacy, openness and warmth.

The main drivers of the emancipation of sexuality are not related only to rising levels of equality and intimacy between women and men, but also to rising expectations about what constitutes a gratifying lust-balance. Emancipation processes and decreasing inequality in gender relations implied that both women and men developed *higher expectations* of their love life, and as parents they also developed *higher expectations* of their family life – and that they accordingly make higher demands on each other. Another paradox is in the connection between these rising expectations and demands on the one hand, and fidelity in relationships lasting for shorter and shorter periods on the other: increasing numbers of young people live an increasing number of consecutive relatively short ‘try-out’ relationships, and adults also tend increasingly to live in relationships of serial monogamy. Rising expectations of love and rising demands on each other did not prevent divorce rates rising, quite the contrary; but this rise, too, is much more likely to have originated from a rise rather than from a decline in demands for intimacy. These rising demands and expectations largely explain the new emphasis, in this century, on the love side of the lust-balance, and also why love has become more difficult, lasting love in particular.

Another paradox is that protests against pornification and sexualisation, even those against paedophiles, are at least to some extent counterproductive because they tend to keep lust-balance questions topical, thus raising the level of consciousness of the erotic and sexual and the level of sensitivity to erotic and sexual aspects of relationships. They are, therefore, instrumental in propelling further sexualisation and eroticisation in the direction of further integration. Accordingly, sexualisation and eroticisation processes have neither stalled nor changed direction, quite the contrary: it seems more likely that they are accelerating (Wouters 2010). It seems likely, for example, that women will advance their tradition of accentuating sexual attractiveness as they continue to ‘come into their own’ as sexual subjects, and that further eroticisation of sex can be expected from men as they continue to be under the influence of what has been described here as a pincer movement.

Moreover, there is reason to expect that established levels of equality, openness and intimacy will be maintained and transmitted to the next generation. This reason lies in the likelihood that children and teenagers who are raised and grow up on a certain level of intimacy, openness and equality will expect and try to develop a similar or, if possible, even higher level in relations of love and friendship with people of their own generation. It becomes their ‘figurational ideal’ (Stolk and Wouters 1987b). From a very early age onwards, these ideals and expectations become deeply ingrained at the habitus level of their personality as a relational code and a figurational ideal, providing significant sources of meaning and value in life. Therefore, as they grow up, young people will long to attain at least similar levels of intimacy, warmth and openness in their own intimate relationships that they experienced in their youth. Usually, they want to improve on this level and set their standard higher.

Surveying the trends sketched in this paper, I think there is enough solid ground for the conclusion that, since the 1880s, love and lust have been involved in a process of integration, and also for the hypothesis that the quest for a more gratifying lust-balance between sexual and relational intimacy will continue to drive the processes of sexualisation and eroticisation in the direction of their integration. [5],[#N5]

## Endnotes:

1. This article is based upon previous research published in English (2004, 2007 and 2010) and in Dutch (2012). The latter is a monograph largely based upon Dutch sexology studies, which implies an emphasis on processes in the Netherlands, but I think and hope the sequence and details are useful for

- international comparisons and the general line of these developments is recognisable all over the wealthy West. ♣.[#N1-pt1]
2. This article has been ‘Mennellised’ – its English corrected by Stephen Mennell according to his high standard of written English. He has done this with most of my English publications and thus put me on the English map, so to speak. I feel deeply grateful. ♣.[#N2-pt1]
  3. Four are more elaborately backed up with data and described in greater detail in Wouters 2004, the fifth one in Wouters 2010. ♣.[#N3-pt1]
  4. Searching in Dutch etymological dictionaries for the word *relatie* – the Dutch translation of the English word relationship – suggests that when it appeared in the domain of intimacy (in the first half of the twentieth century), its main connotation was sexual, as in ‘an extra-marital relation’, that it acquired erotic/romantic connotations only later, and that, subsequently, the latter connotation gained strength, probably hand in hand with the emancipation of sexuality. ♣.[#N4-pt1]
  5. It seems wise, however, to point again to the wider condition of hypotheses involving future developments, namely that the structure of people’s fears and anxieties as well as the qualities of their bonds of love depend upon the structure and levels of social organisation, pacification and civilisation in and between their societies, and that they change with them. ♣.[#N5-pt1]

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Cas Wouters (Utrecht University) has been developing the theory of informalising processes since the early 1970s. Through extensive research on changing manners and emotions in Germany, the Netherlands, Britain and the USA since the 1880s, his theory has become an extension of Elias's theory of civilising processes. His most recent major books in English are *Sex and Manners: Female Emancipation in the West, 1890–2000* (2004) and *Informalization: Manners and Emotions since 1890* (2007).

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Online ISSN: 2166-6644