Introduction

In communist Czechoslovakia, there were two distinct approaches to sexuality and gender. The first one went like this: Sex should occur between equals, and men and women should be equal and free of the bourgeois shackles of property. Indeed, before entering into marriage, people were expected to get to know each other, whether in the workplace or at collective volunteer work units. The other approach to sexuality claimed the following: Men and women are fundamentally different, and marriage only works if men are superior to women. That is, if gender arrangements are not ordered this way, women will suffer in a way similar to sexual dissatisfaction. In this approach, it is one’s nuclear family and spouse that are the only safe social bonds. These types of statements capture the attitudes towards sex, gender and family as they changed throughout the years in Czechoslovakia. The first approach to sexuality and gender is characteristic of the long 1950s, i.e., the period since the communists took power in 1948 until the early 1960s when discourses began to shift. The second approach, from the 1970s, sums up the attitude of the period called Normalization which followed the failed attempts of the Prague Spring of 1968. This book tracks what it took to get from one approach to the other.

Commonly held beliefs about the history of sexuality all too often adhere to a linear narrative of emancipation marked by the consequent rise of consumerism, the invention of the birth control pill and various social movement struggles. In other words, they follow a Western narrative. However, as historian Dagmar Herzog asserts, “[i]liberalization is not a straightforward or unambiguous process. The paradigm needs to be challenged on multiple levels.” A lesson from an Eastern European country might provide one such corrective.

Readers might be surprised to think about Eastern Europe as pioneering sexual liberation. So much of post-Cold War scholarship, produced in both the West as well as the East, has painted socialist countries as backwards in many regards, oftentimes citing the supposed prudishness of communism. Scholars who have published fascinating and in many cases foundational research, all too often fall back on the seemingly common knowledge that communists were asexual prudes who suppressed the natural flourishing and variation of human sexuality. Thus, the oft-cited collection on women under state socialism holds: “Puritanism that placed a taboo on discussion or even recognition of sexuality was a striking trademark of state socialism, although there are differences between the East Central states.” Elsewhere we can read: “[S]tate-socialist morals celebrated a specifically asexual state-socialist reproduction i.e., the party-statebuilding capacities of labour-force reproduction and not pleasure. […] As state-socialist morals celebrated a specifically asexual socialist reproduction, sexuality was delegated to social invisibility and surrounded by hypocrisy.” Or, in yet another rendition, “interwar communist discussions of sexual liberation and the search for pleasure by women were replaced by a communist Puritanism that focused on reproductive sexuality.” While it is certainly true that during the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union the state reversed many of the progressive policies of the early revolutionary years, generalizations about sexuality cannot be made about all socialist countries in all historical eras.

Our collective scholarly judgment might be clouded by our preconceived notions about the nature of liberation since liberation is often conflated with agency “coming from below,” typically in the form of social movements within parliamentary democracies. For a mind shaped by the narratives of Western-style political liberalism, if people are given (let alone decreed) something “from above,” it cannot be liberation. Yet, I would argue that people did feel liberated by policies affecting gender and sexuality in various countries across the communist East. Certainly there is some recent scholarship which points in that direction. Historians exploring East Germany assert that there was a surprising degree of autonomy in private life with “changes in East German sexual behavior

more radical than those that took place in West Germany.” 
Indeed, “[t]he premium was put on intimacy” and among the GDR bestsellers was “a sex self help guide, [sexologist] Siegried Schnabl’s *Mann und Frau Intim.*” All and all, socialism “woo[ed] its citizenry and solicit[ed] not only its compliance but also its love” with discussions of sex that constituted “a means for orienting people toward the future.” Yet, these scholars locate this heyday of changes in understanding sexuality as beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, based on archival materials from Czechoslovakia, I argue that important – and in the West unprecedented – liberalizing changes in understanding sexuality were already occurring in the 1950s.

Recent forays into Czechoslovak gender politics under state socialism indicate that a women’s agenda was “expropriated” by the state powers who were “convinced that they would manage it better through central planning and with the aid of science.” Hana Havelková, Barbara Havelková and Věra Sokolová argued persuasively for the importance of expert culture in modernizing the status of women. These studies continue to be highly valuable, however, their format does not allow for the systematic examination of the ways in which sexual politics was systematically reworked over the decades of state socialism.

My account traces sexual liberation (and the inevitable setbacks it faced) as it came “from above,” or rather, as it was fashioned by feedback loops between the state and the experts, and further analyzes how it was experienced and used by the people “below.” I will follow two distinct threads. Firstly, I will focus on expert analyses and recommendations, state-issued legislations and policies, and most importantly, the intersection of the two: expertise produced for the state. Sexologists and other medical doctors, demographers and lawyers were (later) joined by psychologists and marriage counselors to advise the state on the issues of

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population development, marriage and the family, and women and their reproductive options. From their positions in advisory bodies as well as in the ministries of health and social affairs, these experts forged and debated measures that shaped people’s lives in their most intimate domains. The internal discussions held within the expert community are an indispensable element in delineating this first thread. Secondly, I will follow some of the ways in which people made sense of, and deployed, the policies and recommendations in reality. To this end, I will analyze the advice people were given by sexologists (in marriage manuals, popular magazines, radio broadcasts) and the arguments people put forward in front of divorce courts.

In order to understand sexuality in any period of human history, we first need to understand how it was thought, because – as preeminent historians remind us – nature has little to do with it. That said, it is clear that people’s lives do not provide a perfect copy of expert ideas and recommendations. There are always fissures between normative discourses and lived practices. Yet, normative discourses tend to be potent, particularly when they are backed by the power of the state that translates them into laws and policies. Thus, the relationship between norms and people’s lives is never symmetrical, the former influencing the latter with much stronger force than the other way around. While I am well aware of (and rooting for!) people’s agency and striving for change, I cannot deny the performative power of norms stemming from expert discourses and state-sanctioned institutions. Understanding how these were formed and how they shifted is a primary concern of this book.

**Political Shifts and Sexual Scripts**

With the communist ascent to power, Eastern bloc countries uniformly focused on women’s equality. It is well known that the status of women was boosted when they received more access to education and employment. Women participated in the workforce in ever-growing numbers which allowed them to gain financial independence. Public services such as kindergartens and laundries were designed to make their daily lives easier. What is lesser known is the fact that communist family codes succeeded in what their interwar predecessors had failed to accomplish: legal equity between husbands and wives. Women, in their new position, enjoyed the same rights as men in marriage, owned half of the joint assets.

and decided with their partners about the fate of their children. All in all, communists declared the same rights for both sexes in all spheres of society. As a result, equality became the new norm. However, the reality of patriarchy colored everyday lives. This was the reality that, in the late stages of socialism, prevailed also in the normative accounts of gender as these accounts were crafted by sexologists and other experts. But let’s start at the beginning.

The world changed profoundly after the war. A sentiment prevailed in many countries, including Czechoslovakia, that the order of things needed to be altered in a major way: “the thinking spread: those who were on top should be on the bottom, those who were on the bottom needed to rise to the top.”12 Already in the 1945 Košice government program, a new basis for citizenship in Czechoslovakia was codified which envisioned equality for women and social benefits for all citizens.13 Although communists won the democratic election in 1946 with an overwhelming majority, they were not ruling the country by themselves. Other parties, including the Christian Popular Party, formed the first postwar government which attempted to set the new tone for family life. Whereas the communists presented rather modernist policies, such as the simplification of divorce procedures or equalizing the status of children born out of wedlock, other parties objected and suggested keeping the interwar laws favoring the traditional family. Conservative ministers, under the advice of population experts, proposed bills introducing mandatory eugenic screening before marriage.

Public discourse shifted after the communist takeover. Between 1948 and 1950, government swiftly reshaped the Family Code, devised loans for newlyweds that were intended to do away with dowry and class endogamy, supported women’s inclusion in the labor force, simplified divorce, tried to collectivize housework, built nurseries and kindergartens, and banned the Eugenics Society. During the 1950s, sexologists published marriage manuals in which they extolled the virtues of love as the sole basis for the union between a man and a woman, and advocated for a new arrangement where husband and wife were equal to each other in each and every aspect of life. This romantic love was predicated on a deep connection between partners who were friends as well as comrades and lovers. Equality was seen as indispensable for a happy marriage. The thing that was going to distinguish a new socialist society from its bourgeois predecessor was a better lot for women. Concern over women’s

12 Jan Křen, Dvě století střední Evropy (Praha: Argo, 2005), 548.
health and decisions about the correct timing to begin motherhood drove medical doctors to argue for the legalization of abortion, which was eventually achieved in 1957 (see Chapter 2). Sexologists were also concerned with women’s sexual satisfaction; already in 1952 they carried out the first nationwide research into the female orgasm (see Chapter 3). Also, sexologists were instrumental in the decriminalization of homosexuality which was codified in 1961\textsuperscript{14} (more in Chapter 5).

The mid-1960s was a time of revising utopia. The Czechoslovak people, including medical experts, were disillusioned with what nearly two decades of communism had brought about. Economic reforms were drafted to dilute the nationalized command economy with market elements, while New Wave movies were shot to contemplate and ridicule depersonified command society. In the words of the writer Ludvík Vaculík who presented at the Writers’ Congress in June 1967 (the event that launched what became known as the Prague Spring): “[W]e haven’t built socialism according to our ideas. […] We, and the entire human-kind, gained yet another experience of how not to arrive at a happy future.” Vaculík and other reformers did not want to do away with socialism. They lambasted the regime’s failures at “solving human issues” (\textit{lidšká otázka}) and called for improvements: “socialism with a human face.”

In August 1968, all these hopes were quashed by the Soviet-led invasion. During the following months, communist party hardliners regained power and steered the country into a rigid pro-Soviet direction.\textsuperscript{15} The period following the defeat of the Prague Spring, known as Normalization, was marked by the reestablishment of communist power when a reconstructed political cadre came to power with the new slogan – “the normalization of conditions.”\textsuperscript{16} The aim was to eradicate any opposition and extinguish any spark of revolt. The new regime required conformity and political obedience from all of its citizens.

The Normalization period produced an ideological manifesto titled \textit{A Lesson from the Crisis Development} (\textit{Poučení z krizového vývoje}). This was a document drawn up by the Central Committee of the Communist Party that interpreted the Prague Spring as a crisis and called intervention by the Warsaw Pact armies an act of “brotherly help.” This document, accepted by the Communist Party in December 1970, remained the only official position on the events of 1968 for the entire period of

\textsuperscript{14} Jan Seidl, \textit{Od žaláře k oltáří: emancipace homosexuality v českých zemích od roku 1867 do současnosti} (Host, 2012), 265–95.
\textsuperscript{15} Joseph Rothschild, \textit{Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Křen, \textit{Dvě století střední Evropy}.
\textsuperscript{16} Křen, \textit{Dvě století střední Evropy}.
Normalization, up until the end of the socialist order in 1989. The manifesto strives to use objective language with the obvious aim of achieving universality. One way it establishes this “objectivity” is by deploying clinical and medical terminology. As Kamil Činátl shows, Poučení relies heavily on the language of clinical psychology, using terms such as hysteria, mass psychosis, illusion, myth, panic, fever, spasm, organism, intracardiac injection, hysteria, paralysis, anesthesia, infection and putrefaction.\(^{17}\) The metaphors of illness and recovery, I argue, were not limited to the pages of formal documents, but rather spread throughout society and – to come full circle – also inspired medical intervention.

The social ailments manifested in individual pathology were what needed to be cured. Compared to the utopian thinking that structured the long 1950s, Normalization was a time of great complacency vis-à-vis the state of things – people abandoned hope that society could be changed. The writer Patrik Ouředník would later describe life during the late stages of state socialism as “the Eastern iceberg, because life in those countries was ossified and motionless and as if frozen.”\(^{18}\) Therefore, if society was not going to change, people needed to adjust. This widespread social sentiment came to inform sexology as well. At a time when the regime strove to contain “subversive elements” (podvratný živel) and discipline the misfits, sexologists were finally granted the long-demanded institutionalization they needed. In 1974, the first sexological ward opened within a psychiatric hospital to keep “sexual delinquents,” typically heterosexual men who had committed an act of sexual aggression towards a woman, away from “normal” society while teaching them “normal” ways of courting and sexual conduct.

Normalcy and family became the operative words of Normalization. Sexologists published new marriage manuals that became instant hits; some editions vanished from bookstores within weeks. While the sexuality (of some) was praised, the era of gender Thermidor set in. The ideal marriage now looked markedly different compared to that of the long 1950s. Books published in the 1970s insisted on the necessity of gender hierarchy for a successful marriage (and even for a satisfying sexual life), and defended privatized families isolated from larger society. If women observed the proper (read: traditional) gender order, and together with their husbands practiced the elaborate techniques described in the manuals, all could enjoy a happy and fulfilling sex life. Satisfying (hetero) sexuality was promoted and celebrated (see Chapter 3), uncoupled male


\(^{18}\) Patrik Ouředník, Europeana: A Brief History of the Twentieth Century (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 68.
heterosexuality controlled and rectified (see Chapter 5), and these changes were underpinned by a rigid hierarchical gender order. These shifts are connected to the changing character of the Czechoslovak political regime that moved from accentuating work, equality and the public sphere in the 1950s to emphasizing family, authority and the private realm in the 1970s. Make no mistake: Marriage and family were supposed to be the anchors of sexual life at any given point in communist times. Nonetheless, in the early days of the regime, one could still hear echoes of the sexual radicalism of the socialist avant-garde. But this discourse was all but abandoned when Normalization began in the 1970s. Connecting intimacy with the public realm brings about a radically different gender order, as exemplified by Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. Conversely, intimacy that is framed exclusively as a private enterprise coincides with rigid and binary gender arrangements. The retreat into the private sphere that followed the defeat of the Prague Spring undid much of the gender progress had been foreseen by the first generation of communists and also primed Czechoslovak society for gender divisions in the decades to come.

It is certainly true that the post-1968 situation provided ideal conditions for Czechoslovak sexologists to do clinical work, but it also tied them closer to the state and its priorities. While the Normalization era clearly made the sexologist into “more of a public official,” as one complacently observed, it would be inaccurate to imagine an untainted past (or future) in which the tenets of sexology would roam freely, unencumbered by social arrangements. It would be naïve to presuppose a clear-cut divide between science and politics where the former epitomizes value neutrality while the latter is laden with values. In reality, the two are blurred and historians of science studying Western scholarly production have called for an acknowledgment of this fact.

However, the view still prevails that Eastern science was enslaved to the “totalitarian” state which compromised its findings. Just as with the perception of sexuality in the communist East, “Eastern” science too is seen as somewhere between dull and nonexistent. The images from high Stalinism in the Soviet Union have come to represent the entirety of science east of the Iron Curtain; a science often referred to as “ideologically correct.”

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These scientists were said to accommodate a regime they lived under while simultaneously giving up efforts to transform it. They were often charged outright as “primitive zealots [who] razed the walls of academic autonomy” in order to compete with Western scientific approaches while being “instructed to ‘overtake and surpass’ Western science” à la Lenin and his “‘quote-and-club’ method of polemic against bourgeois and reactionary science.” More nuance is certainly needed if we are to understand the dynamics between a socialist state and science.

This book, I hope, presents a more complex reality, joining recent scholarship in refuting the simplistic idea that medical approaches “across the Eastern bloc originated in Moscow and spread outwards.” Sexologists in socialist Czechoslovakia gathered data in labs, surveys and by examining individual patients (hundreds of papers published in scholarly journals both at home and abroad attest to this). Indeed, they discussed and disputed their approaches with colleagues across disciplines and borders between East and West: Ties with the Kinsey Institute were especially strong, and international cooperation was showcased during the 1968 Symposium Sexuologicum Pragense where doctors from the Sexological Institute hosted over 300 expert guests from four continents. Sexologists further provided forensic and advisory expertise and popularized their findings in books for wide audiences and through mass media (although, providing expertise for the state did not at all mean forging knowledge on the state’s demand). All in all, Czechoslovak sexologists performed expertise that was by no means a hostage of the state, but was coconstitutive of the tenor of the times.

In the same vein, sexological expertise in Czechoslovakia constructed people as sexed subjects. Truly, the discipline of sexology is what Foucault called \textit{scientia sexualis}. In his famous argument, Foucault identified a form of expert knowledge that shapes, investigates and controls human sexuality. In the process, individuals are conditioned to understand themselves as sexual subjects and incorporate sexual identity into the core of the self. Contemporary societies are thus governed through subtle and omnipresent technologies of self; it is only via such self-disciplining technologies
that people become modern subjects. Science and expertise, i.e. sexology as scientia sexualis, play an indispensable role in modern governmentality. Nikolas Rose attributes "psy-ences" – the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, etc. – as points of intersection for the social organization of modern societies. Psy-ences play a constitutive role in how we understand ourselves, and at the same time, imbue power with an ethical edge. Governing is thus not merely a technical exercise of power but an ethical demonstration of truth, "one essential to each individual person over whom [power] is exercised." Rose, however, connected psy-ences exclusively with the liberal West. On the contrary, I will show that the psy-ence of sexology was present and indispensable for the Czechoslovak regime to navigate the people's selves according to its own changing priorities.

Sexperts: On the Sexological Institute and Related Expertise

Sexology, the branch of medicine concerned with diagnosing and curing ailments related to desire, has been an important psy-ence since its inception in the late nineteenth century. Its beginnings have received well-deserved attention from historians of science. Most scholars writing on sexology have focused primarily on the great extent to which sexuality is a product of sexualogical discourse. Cultural historians have demonstrated that sexology did not form in social isolation, but arose in connection with forensic medicine as well as liberatory social movements such as feminism. Recent studies have explored the development of

29 Ibid., 92.
32 Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires.