

4. Science, Liberation, and Romance – the *Language of Love* Films between the 1960s and 1970s

After having analyzed how the discussion surrounding the *Language of Love* films revolved around the issue of pornography, it may seem obvious to note that there are great differences between these films and the sex education films made in the 1940s and 1950s. The most obvious contrast is that the *Language of Love* films contained scenes with explicit sexual acts, something that, as has been shown, came to predominate the discussion about the films to a great extent. Another striking difference is that the focus of sex education had shifted completely. If the films of the 1940s and 1950s mainly can be said to have dealt with the negative consequences of sexual life (the risks of venereal disease or unwanted pregnancy), the main issue in the films of the 1960s and 1970s was the search for a better sex life. The films in the *Language of Love* series encompass a large number of topics related to sexuality, but studied as a whole we see a predominant theme concerned with helping people solve problems in their sexual lives so that they can achieve pleasure and orgasm, which is a completely different perspective on sex education than that found in earlier films of the genre.

As a whole, the *Language of Love* films take up numerous aspects of sexuality. The first film, *Language of Love*, deals to a great extent with sexual problems between men and women, as well as with different taboos and prejudices surrounding sexuality. It also provides information about the anatomy of the sexual organs, and different contraceptive techniques. Central to the film are the demonstrations of different sexual acts, mainly a scene showing female masturbation and one showing heterosexual intercourse. The second film, *More About the Language of Love*, deals among other things with homosexuality, venereal disease, people with disabilities,

transvestites, pornography, and the sexuality of children and older people. *XYZ of Love* centers on the role of society in sexual issues, for example through discussions about the legal framework surrounding marriage, sex crimes, abortion, prostitution, and so on. Large parts of the film are also dedicated to a demonstration of the sexual therapy techniques practiced at the Swedish Institute for Sex Research. The fourth and last film in the original series, *Love-Play – That's How We Do It*, visits Inge and Sten Hegeler at their summer cottage in Sweden. In this film, a number of letters sent to the Hegelers from people who have found happiness in their sex lives have been dramatized and are shown to the viewers. All of the films contain several explicit sex scenes.

In relation to earlier sex education films, conveying knowledge about things such as reproduction and venereal disease is thus not the primary concern here. These issues are certainly dealt with in the series, but are not the main issue or the primary reason for making the films. Perhaps the most obvious demonstration of this is how the series is organized. The first film begins with a discussion of the taboos surrounding sexuality in the Western world, and then goes on to present a number of different scenes of couples with problems in the bedroom. Contraceptives are dealt with quite late in the film, in two different sequences. The first is of Maj-Briht Bergström-Walan informing a school class about different contraceptive techniques, and the second is of gynecologist Sture Cullhed meeting a number of women at his practice, trying out a diaphragm on one woman and inserting an intrauterine device on another. There are no scenes in the films demonstrating the menstrual cycle, fertilization, the development of the fetus during pregnancy, or childbirth. Thus, reproductive aspects of sexuality are almost totally absent from the films, in stark contrast to sex education films from earlier time periods or, as will be shown in the next chapter, school films made during the same period. Venereal diseases are dealt with in *More About the Language of Love*, the second film in the series, and are thus clearly not a primary concern of the films. And abortion, which was a major topic of concern in the 1940s and 1950s – and which, when the *Language of Love* films were made, still was not free in the sense that a woman could decide herself whether she wanted to terminate her pregnancy – is only briefly discussed in *XYZ of Love*, in a scene where

different persons express their views on this ethical issue, and family counselor Birgitta Linnér shortly informs about counseling agencies.

The sex education films shown in theaters in the 1940s and 1950s were all narrative fiction films, and their educational goal was thus carried out indirectly through different strategies. Often, the education of the fictional characters in the films was supposed to mirror the education of the viewer. The films in the *Language of Love* series, on the other hand, are all narrated according to traditional documentary strategies, although dramatized sequences are sometimes also used as examples. If fiction was allowed to dominate in earlier films, and documentary scenes were sometimes inserted, the opposite is true of the *Language of Love* films. *Language of Love*, *More About the Language of Love*, and *XYZ of Love* are constructed using more or less the same rhetorical structure. At the center of the films is a group of experts who discuss different sexual issues, and between these scenes are sequences with, for example, illustrative fictional situations, different types of documentary footage, or demonstrations of different sexual acts and techniques. The films can thus be said to follow a cyclic structure, as their narration regularly returns to the discussions of the experts who introduce and tie the different topics of the films together.

In the first film, the expert group consists of sexologist Maj-Briht Bergström-Walan, the Danish sex educators Inge and Sten Hegeler, and Sture Cullhed. Although he has a prominent role in the first film, Cullhed does not reappear in any of the sequels. Instead, Inge and Sten Hegeler take on the most central role, as the scenes with discussion in *More About the Language of Love* and *XYZ of Love* are shot in their apartment in Copenhagen. In these two films, numerous other experts and persons with special knowledge in different areas are also invited to participate, and the role of the Hegelers becomes more that of host and hostess than that of experts themselves. In *More About the Language of Love*, for example, we see journalist Ove Ahlström of the RFSL (Riksförbundet för sexuell likabehandling, “the Swedish Association for Sexual Equality”, today called the RFSL – Riksförbundet för homosexuella, bisexuella och transpersoners rättigheter, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights),⁶¹⁸ doctors Bertil Hansson, Johan Wallin, and Bruno Kaplan, porn publisher Curth Hson, and child psychiatrist Mirjam Israel.



In *XYZ of Love*, we see the famous lawyer Leif Silbersky, sociologist Joachim Israel, politician and future Prime Minister Ola Ullsten (of the Liberal Party), family counselor Birgitta Linnér, among others.⁶¹⁹ Bergström-Walan also continues to play an important role in the second and third film, but the fourth film, *Love-Play – That's How We Do It*, focuses exclusively on the Hegelers. None of the experts who had participated in the sex education films in the 1940s and 1950s are present, and there has occurred a clear generational shift since the 1950s.

The focus on a discussion group in most of the *Language of Love* films, with different participants in the different films, instead of on a single authority figure talking directly or indirectly to the viewer, makes the films' mode of address less authoritative than that of earlier films. The format of discussion also allows the experts to express their thoughts, ask each other questions, and make more hypothetical or hesitant statements, which further downplays an authoritative structure. Because of this, one could argue that the films give expression to multiple viewpoints. The different experts, however, seldom have different opinions from each other, giving the overall impression that there is still quite a unified rhetorical "voice" or argument throughout the film series.⁶²⁰ In some cases, some of the experts are also allowed to be more or less dominating. In *XYZ of Love*, for example, lawyer Leif Silbersky has a leading role, as much of the film deals with the Swedish sex laws and the legal rules for living together.⁶²¹ In these sequences, Silbersky is quite critical of the Swedish legal system in regard to these matters, arguing, among other things, that there is no need for separate sex crime legislation. Instead, he contends, crimes such as rape could go under the legislation against assault and battery.⁶²² He also argues that the law against procuring should be abolished so that prostitution can be brought out into the open and taxed. Silbersky's opinions might not have been shared by all of the experts taking part in the film, but because he is allowed to dominate the film to such an extent as well as to function as a voice-over in many sequences, and because he is not contradicted by

Figure 30 and 31. In the upper picture Maj-Briht Bergström-Walan and Sten Hegeler, in the lower picture Inge Hegeler and Sture Cullhed. From *Language of Love* (Torgny Wickman, 1969). © Klubb Super 8.

the other experts, his opinions become, in a sense, part of the argument of the whole film. Hence, despite the presence of a diverse group of discussants, and even though there are examples of the participants diverging in their opinions, I would argue that, in general, a cohesive argument is presented throughout the series.

When the *Language of Love* films were made, the sex debate of the 1960s had receded, but had resulted in a number of official inquiries into different sexual matters whose results began being presented by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Apart from the public inquiries about film censorship and pornography discussed in the previous chapter, there was, for example, a report on Swedish sex habits published in 1969, a public inquiry on abortion published in 1971, and an inquiry into school sex education published in 1974.⁶²³ Thus by the turn of the decade, the changed attitudes toward sexuality had made a clear impression on a political level. At the same time, attitudes toward sexual liberalism were starting to change in the 1970s. In this chapter, I will consider the *Language of Love* series in its entirety, and discuss the principal views on sexuality that the films convey, however concentrating on the four first and original films in the series. I argue that the films express a liberal view on sexuality that is in many ways in line with the sexual liberalism that developed in the 1960s. The films advocate an idea about sexuality according to which science leads to liberation, and liberation is necessary for the happiness of the individual. At the same time, I will also demonstrate that the *Language of Love* films differed from the views of many liberal debaters, as they also display a clear focus on romantic long-term relationships, which was in line with the official view. I have organized the analysis in the following way: First, I will present the sex research that the films relied on and that formed their theoretical background, and explain how this is referred to and made use of in the series. Second, I will demonstrate first the norms for sexual behavior that are established in the films, and then how the films construct an ideal vision of a perfect sex act. After this, I will analyze how homosexuality and other types of sexual variation are represented and discussed in the films, and what strategies are used when arguing for greater tolerance of them. Finally, I will try to challenge the idea that these films were only aligned with a scientific discourse by examining their relationship to religion, testing the

hypothesis that the liberation they preached also had ties to the Christian notion of salvation. A general emphasis throughout the chapter will be on how the films related to the changing discourse on sexuality during the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s.

Decreasing Anxiety through Knowledge and Sexual Science

The explicit aim of the films in the *Language of Love* series is to break down existing taboos and misconceptions concerning sexuality, and to decrease the anxiety that prevents people from having a satisfying sexual life. For this purpose, the films rely on modern scientific research on sexuality.

This aim is clearly discernible in the introductory sequences of the first film. The film begins by showing a series of Japanese erotic pictures (allegedly from the twelfth century) accompanied by the voice of a man singing a Swedish song about love from the seventeenth century.⁶²⁴ In the introductory discussion with the four experts, Inge Hegeler begins by stating that at the same time as the Japanese erotic art was made and given to brides, people in Medieval Europe were using small containers of pigeon blood to give the impression that the bride had been a virgin on her wedding night. The experts then begin to discuss the restrictions on sexuality – both real laws and unwritten ones – that have existed in Europe up until the present day. Bergström-Walan expresses it as a “wave of taboo”, while Inge Hegeler notes “a whole complex of taboos” or biased ideas about sex.⁶²⁵ The film then cuts to showing a number of stylized and humorous scenes of different couples with various sexual problems, such as “communication difficulties”, “intolerance of the partner”, “male vanity”, and “oppression of potency”.⁶²⁶ Thus, at the very outset of the first film, it is made clear that sexuality has long been repressed in the Western world, and that people are still suffering from this repression in various ways. The need for a film that offers knowledge about sexuality is thus clearly supported, though it is also acknowledged that there are couples whose sex life works well.

A few scenes later in the film, Sture Cullhed talks about how little knowledge there has been historically about sexuality, and mentions that

although there were single researchers who addressed the topic – like Robert Dickinson, LeMon Clark and Theodor Van de Velde – it was not until Alfred Kinsey conducted his famous studies that the barrier was finally broken. Still, Kinsey did not explain what happened during a sexual act, Cullhed continues, and then – while turning to the camera and thus underlining the significance of what he is about to say – Cullhed goes on to present the work of American sex researchers William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson to the audience.

Already at this early point in the film, some of the chief ideas of the entire series become clear. The view on the history of sexuality that is presented is that sexuality has been taboo in the Western world ever since the Middle Ages and that it is only recently that we have started to liberate ourselves from this repression, largely thanks to the development of sexual sciences in the twentieth century. This view is clearly an expression of what Foucault famously described as the “repressive hypothesis”.⁶²⁷ Cullhed’s short history at the beginning of *Language of Love* functions to position the film within a larger tradition of sexual research, where Alfred C. Kinsey holds a central role, as the one who first “broke through the barrier” with his studies of sexual behavior in the human male and female.⁶²⁸ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kinsey’s studies were extremely influential, and meant a shift in the scientific study of sexuality. If psychoanalytical or psychiatric views on sexuality had formerly predominated, Kinsey’s report meant a breakthrough for studies of sexuality that focused on the scientifically observable behavior of humans, and the physiological aspects of sexuality – the outside rather than the inside.⁶²⁹ The most important reference throughout the whole *Language of Love* series is, however, the studies conducted by American sex researchers William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson.

Masters and Johnson were an American research team working at the Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis Missouri, who in the 1950s started a research project looking at the physiological and anatomical aspects of women’s and men’s responses to sexual stimuli. In 1966, the results of their project were presented in their book *Human Sexual Response*. The book was given out in Swedish translation in 1967, and a popularized edition of it was also published the same year.⁶³⁰ The theory

of Masters and Johnson was that the male and female reactions to sexual stimulation were constituted as a sexual response cycle that could be divided into four phases: the excitement phase, the plateau phase, the orgasmic phase and the resolution phase.⁶³¹ The method they had used was to collect a group of test subjects, both men and women, and ask them to masturbate and have sex with each other in a laboratory, while various physiological measurements were taken throughout the four phases of their response cycle.⁶³² Masters and Johnson's studies were partly made possible through the advancement of new technology. For example, the development of smaller cameras allowed the research team to construct a plastic dildo with a camera inside it – the coloscope – for recordings made inside the vagina.⁶³³

Masters and Johnson followed in the footsteps of Kinsey by aiming at a strictly scientific and objective view on sexuality, though their aim was different from Kinsey's. For Masters and Johnson, the primary purpose of their research was to obtain results that could be applied in sexual therapy. Their belief was that people with sexual problems could be better helped if proper knowledge existed about what happens in the body during sexual stimulation.⁶³⁴ In 1970, Masters and Johnson also published a follow-up study, *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, which dealt with sexual dysfunctions.⁶³⁵ The studies by Kinsey and Masters and Johnson were sensational and in many respects entailed a paradigm shift in the field of sexual science, and the establishment of sexology as a discipline in its own right. Masters and Johnson's work also laid the foundation for the development of a new profession – the sex therapist.⁶³⁶ Moreover, these studies meant a great deal for the changing ideas about sex in the 1960s and 1970s. As already discussed, Kinsey's perspective on sexuality was widely adopted in the Swedish sex debates. Furthermore, the work of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson also became important for the emerging second wave of feminism, as they demonstrated the importance of the clitoris for female orgasm.⁶³⁷

Perhaps needless to say, the medical and scientific view on sexuality represented by the work of Masters and Johnson had a primarily biological focus on sexuality. Masters and Johnson aimed to say something about the sexual response of *all* human beings, thus trying to peel off different psychological, social and cultural factors in order to find the "true", universal,