

Kinsey, Controversy, and College: A Look at the Covert Revolution of Attitudes Toward Sex in 1950s America

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The publication of Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey's research book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (the Kinsey report)² in January 1948 drastically altered the way that Americans viewed the subject of sex. Prior to the Kinsey report, the American public considered the subject of sex to be taboo.³ In 1948 and again when *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (the female Kinsey report) was published in 1953, the Kinsey reports received an onslaught of "unprecedented popular acclaim".⁴ The controversial subject of sexual behaviour incited a debate among the American public. The controversy concerning the Kinsey report that raged within American scholarly magazines, journals, and newspapers from the late 1940s until the mid-1950s was led by critics who denounced Kinsey's findings for their "immoral" implications and their opponents who celebrated his scientific discoveries concerning human behaviour. As a result of the controversy, professors and researchers at the universities of Princeton, Indiana, Georgia, Minnesota, California Los Angeles and Pennsylvania State College began to study the effect of the Kinsey report on the sexual behaviour and attitudes of college students. These studies concluded that there were measured changes in the attitudes of college students regarding the acceptance of certain sexual practices after the report's publication in January of 1948. They also found that contrary to what many critics believed, actual sexual behaviour did not markedly increase in young adults following the publication of the Kinsey report. The sexual revolution of the 1960s, commonly thought to be as a result of the legalization of the birth control pill for women, was in fact not a revolution in behaviour, but a revolution in acceptability. Historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman suggest that the decade of the 1960s is recognized as being

overtly sexual because “aided by the values of a consumer culture and encouraged by the growing visibility of sex in the public realm, many Americans came to accept sexual pleasure as a legitimate, necessary component of their lives, unbounded by older ideals of marital fidelity and permanence.”⁵

Between 1939 and 1956, Dr. Kinsey, accompanied by a small research team, embarked on a comprehensive study on sexuality and the American people. Kinsey and his team primarily focused on the prevalence of sexual behaviour, sexual physiology, and the techniques of sexual activities. As a professor of zoology at Indiana University, Kinsey was revolutionary in his subject matter for both the world of science and the American public. In 1947 Kinsey founded the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University, where he stored his interview material as well as his personal collection of sex-related documents. After its publication in 1948, the Kinsey report quickly became an American best-seller, despite the fact that it was eight hundred and four pages long. According to critic Albert Deutsch, by 1955 the Yale University faculty had already “included the Kinsey report among the 191 world classics of all time and one of the 15 most important books written by an American.”⁶ One unique aspect of the Kinsey report was his method of obtaining data. Kinsey or his colleagues privately interviewed individuals concerning their sexual histories, which in turn created a personal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. In a *Scientific Monthly* article from 1948, columnist C.T. Morgan noted that “Kinsey’s interviewing method must be considered fairly complete and the best and most reliable that has ever been used in this field.”⁷ Kinsey and his team were able to accrue tens of thousands of sex related interviews before his death in 1956. The information that these interviews provided allowed Kinsey to compile a wealth of statistical information on American sexual behaviour. Kinsey’s findings included statistics such as: sixty-four percent of

people had experienced pre-marital intercourse; thirty-three percent of males had at least one homosexual experience; ninety-four percent of the male population had masturbated at least once; and twenty-eight percent of males had had at least one sexual experience with a prostitute.⁸

Until the 1920s, books and public advertisements were censored under United States laws for overtly sexual items.⁹ In the late nineteenth century, “middle-class reformers agreed on vice fighting as a collective project, crucial to establishing a shared national culture.”¹⁰ The citizens of America were concerned that vices such as gambling, smoking, pornography, and prostitution were demoralizing the country’s youth.¹¹ In 1873, a series of federal laws called the Comstock Laws were passed; the laws “vastly accelerated censorship by enlarging the category of ‘obscene literature’ to include all printed matter, and, for the first time, made it a crime to circulate information about contraception or abortion.”¹² Feminist Molly McGarry argues that these laws were established in part to defray the large new subculture of single ex-soldiers who, following the Civil War, “had developed a taste for prostitution and pornography.”¹³

Following World War I, America witnessed the advent of sexualised consumerism: “radios, telephones, automobiles, home appliances, ready-made clothing, and processed foods”¹⁴ became readily available to the public. In order to promote these items, companies turned to advertisements with underlying sexual themes. By the 1920s, marketers had discovered that making sex “popular” in advertisements appealed to society’s “continuing fascination with one of the more engaging aspects of life.”¹⁵ Oftentimes, these advertisements were geared toward women and their desire for men to be sexually attracted to them. Items such as cosmetics, Listerine, and clothing became desirable and alluring commodities in the 1920s.¹⁶

After the Second World War, the pornography industry once again boomed, much to the chagrin of 1950s America. Historians D’Emilio and Freedman comment that during the 1950s,

“through literature, movies, magazines, popular fiction, and pornography, sex unconstrained by marriage was put on display.”¹⁷ This display of illegitimate sex was considered to be “abnormal.”¹⁸ Historian Winifred Breines writes that throughout the 1950s, “more sexual intercourse was happening than most social scientists, other than Kinsey, acknowledged... everybody was doing it...but it was the Big Lie that nobody was.”¹⁹ Because private sexual behaviour was a new and potentially embarrassing discussion, people in America were unable to understand that what they viewed as “abnormal” or “vulgar” was actually quite normal and common. D’Emilio and Freedman argue that “white middle-class America struggled to maintain sexual boundaries”²⁰ in the midst of the influx of sexual material in society.

The new sexually explicit material that was slowly infiltrating the nation encountered strong opposition from “churches, citizen groups, and investigators [who] joined forces to uphold the collapsing barriers to sex in print and film.”²¹ The people who opposed open sexual behaviour were successful in broadcasting their puritanical message to the nation. As a result, feelings of guilt corroded the consciences of individuals who participated in tabooed sexual activity. In her 1992 book *Young, White, and Miserable*, Breines writes, “the culture was preoccupied with the ‘legitimate,’ meaning marital sex, while other forms of sexuality were a source of shame, met by ignorance, fear, and punishment.”²² Americans were obsessed with the ideal “good girl” image, where women were expected to be virgins at marriage.²³ According to Breines, Kinsey’s study, which revealed the prevalence of shocking sexual behaviours such as premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation and oral sex, “helped to set new boundaries between normality and abnormality.”²⁴ These actual behaviours directly contradicted America’s beloved “good girl” image. Historian William Chafe remarks of the 1950s that “the effort to reinforce traditional norms seemed almost frantic, as though in reality something different was

taking place.”²⁵ A sense of cultural anxiety settled into American society amidst the struggle to maintain a “normal” identity.

In addition to the societal anxiety about sex, Americans were also terrified of the threat that communism posed to national security.²⁶ Together, these threats “caused much of the emotionalism that depressed national morale in the early ‘50s.”²⁷ These emotional fears endangered the sense of community in suburban culture: Americans were “interested in [the] security and stability”²⁸ of the nation; they conformed to norms and traditional values to alleviate their fears. For example, people turned to religion in order to provide an outlet for their fears. Religion also contributed to the “typical suburb, where everyone looked alike and cooperated in numerous matters of joint concern.”²⁹ As the historian William L. O’Neill points out, “religion did have a social meaning,” as it defined and united Americans against communism.³⁰ During this time of strain, the American press often accused Kinsey, who was a living symbol representing the American fear of the “abnormal,” of communist acts. For example, historian Regina Markell Morantz comments that critics suggested that Kinsey “failed to place sexual activity within the larger context of human values.”³¹ Morantz also cites an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, which regarded Kinsey as a “menace to society.”³² Furthermore, John B. Chapple, the editor of the Ashland, Wisconsin newspaper the *Ashland Daily Press*, “accused Kinsey of aiding communism. Shortly thereafter the Rockefeller Foundation informed Kinsey that his grant would not be renewed.”³³ The desperation of the American people to be normal, anti-Communist, and religiously moral created a fundamental distrust of Kinsey and what he stood for: freedom, illegitimate sex, and an acceptance of all sexual orientations. This stark, pervasive image of Kinsey undermined a world in which Americans felt safe and stable, if not guilt-ridden over their sexual proclivities.

In his article “Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexual Revolution,” social theorist Alan Petigny illustrates the research of several scholars and scientists in the field of sexual behaviour. He writes that “Kinsey believed the big jump in female premarital intercourse took place between 1916 and 1930. Any increases after 1930, he reported, had been ‘only minor.’”³⁴ Petigny also discusses the study of premarital sex following Kinsey: “the question of whether female premarital sex was rising or falling in the fifteen years after World War II would be left to a later generation of researchers who would draw upon the methodology pioneered by Alfred Kinsey. Overwhelmingly, these researchers would conclude that female premarital intercourse remained fairly stable during the forties and fifties, and only began its sharp rise sometime during the late sixties or early seventies.”³⁵

The evidence that sexual behaviour remained relatively constant between the 1940s and the 1960s calls the famous “sexual revolution” of the 1960s into question. Instead, it appears that the revolution was not an epidemic of sexual activity, nor was it an abrupt change of attitudes. Instead, it was the attitudinal result of an influx of statistical information about the most private activities of Americans. Breines quotes the feminist author and critic Molly Haskell as saying, “it was as if the whole period of the fifties was a front, the topsoil that protected the seed of rebellion that was germinating below. The cultural disorientation had begun, but it had yet to be acknowledged.”³⁶ Haskell’s assertion demonstrates the delicacy of the 1950s perspective on the subject of sex. Because of the popular American ideals of chastity and legitimacy, the refusal to accommodate the subject of sex created an environment conducive to the revolution remaining undercover. John Gagnon and William Simon, both former colleagues of Kinsey’s, discussed the social climate of the 1950s in Elizabeth Watkins’s book, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970*. Gagnon and Simon “attributed the

professional and public furor over sex to the novelty of sexuality as a topic for public consumption. People were thrust into a 'new confrontation' with sex, manifest by extensive discussion about sex.... They claimed that the perception of an epidemic of sexual activity had developed, when in fact the only epidemic was one of talk and conjecture."³⁷ Gagnon's and Simon's comments illustrate that the subject of sex entering into common discussion, whether accepted or not, was the real social change in America during this time. They argue that the controversy concerning the Kinsey report and the subject of sex was what truly perpetuated the "furor over sex." Therefore, Kinsey's research was essentially a challenge to both the sexual and social standards of his contemporaries. The Judeo-Christian American nation was confronted with statistics that compromised its fundamental belief systems, such as the integrity of the family and the American image of accomplishment.

The frequency of tabooed sexual activity illustrated by Kinsey's research suggests that there was a distinct divide between the actions and attitudes of people during the 1940s and 1950s. Kinsey's own research suggested that fifty percent of women engaged in pre-marital coitus, and a large percentage beyond this had flirted with oral sex.³⁸ Homosexuality, which Kinsey argued was practiced at least once by one-third of the American male population, was considered to be a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association.³⁹ Historian Beth Bailey considers the sexual behaviour in the 1950s to be both a "social change and a cultural change."⁴⁰ The 1950s "was not a world in which the young were chaste until marriage, despite public insistence that they be so."⁴¹ In short, "what people did in private was quite often radically different than what they admitted to in public."⁴² These behaviours paved the way for a revolution in attitudes, which then led to a wider acceptance of sex in the culture of the 1960s.

Places such as universities, with their large young adult populations, were ideal venues for further studies of sexual behaviour. University students were well-educated and literate, and their cultural knowledge of the Kinsey report proved to be enormously important in their participation in these studies. As the studies have proven, the Kinsey report did not ignite a revolution in sexual behaviours. The acceptability of sexual activity among young adults had been increasing quietly for decades, yet nothing about sex was explicitly permissible. Studies of the sexual behaviour of university students undertaken subsequent to the publication of the Kinsey report proved that while the prevalence of sexual behaviour had remained the same since before the publication of the Kinsey report, the acceptance of these behaviours was increasing. Historians such as John D’Emilio, Estelle Freedman and Beth Bailey often consider the sexual revolution to have ignited in the 1960s, largely because it was the decade following approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the use of oral contraceptives.⁴³ Following this approval, America’s sexual culture became overt and explicit. For example, in contrast to the Comstock laws of the late nineteenth century, in 1966 censorship laws relating to sex were lifted from the cinemas.⁴⁴ Furthermore, clothing styles became provocative: Mary Quant designed the miniskirt, which revolutionized women’s fashion.⁴⁵ On university campuses, “female students defied rules that prohibited them from living off-campus with their boyfriends.”⁴⁶ In the midst of the rebelliousness of the 1960s, the birth control pill exploded onto the market, making it clear to society that unmarried women were preventing pregnancies- thus, they were engaging in sexual behaviour. In contrast to the rebellious sexual nature of the 1960s, the prevalent sexual behaviour in the 1950s was much less visible.

The use of oral contraception during the 1940s and 1950s was uncommon, though the prevalence of contraceptive use in general is uncertain.⁴⁷ In the 1950s, the number of working

women in America increased. Women began to work in order to alleviate the “financial, emotional, or physical strain of having babies every year or two,”⁴⁸ a phenomenon known as the “pink-collar economy.”⁴⁹ These women began to use the birth control pill in order to stagger the births of their children or reduce their overall number. However, American society was not wholly receptive to oral contraception. General contraceptive use violated the social standard of American morality in the 1950s, which was structured around Judeo-Christian ethics— although that did not deter the sale of condoms. In 1957, a study of medical attitudes toward contraception noted that “83% of the Catholic [physicians] thought that family planning should be a supplementary medical service at the request of the patient, as opposed to a regular procedure offered by a physician.”⁵⁰ These physicians, in accordance with their Judeo-Christian beliefs, were not comfortable initiating discussions of family planning with their patients. Therefore many American women rejected the notion of taking the birth control pill. They “used denial to deal with the contemporary taboo against premarital sex; if she did not plan to have sex, then she certainly did not plan to get pregnant, so she did not need to consider, much less use, contraception.”⁵¹

By 1962, 1.2 million American women were taking the birth control pill.⁵² Although the use of the pill was booming, the Food and Drug Administration’s approval of it in 1960 did not make it legal. In 1965, the Supreme Court case *Griswold v. Connecticut* legalized the birth control pill for married women. Seven years later, in 1972, the Supreme Court case *Eisenstadt v. Baird* finally legalized the pill for all American women.⁵³ By 1968, “Americans were twice as likely to use the pill as they were condoms.”⁵⁴ Despite the time it took to become legal, FDA approval of the drug was sufficient “permission” for most American women to take it. Many doctors prescribed the birth control pill under the aegis of “gynecological disorders”⁵⁵ in order to

actually provide birth control. After an organization as socially prominent as the FDA granted permission for women to use oral contraceptives, acceptance by millions of Americans gradually followed. Though evidence suggests that the rates of premarital intercourse remained constant, the acceptance of such a sexually charged item was one more step in the revolution of attitudes in America.

Despite Kinsey's evidence that sexual behaviour among university students had not altered in prevalence since the early 1940s, his critics still feared that sexual permissiveness was being granted to them. Although contemporary studies indicated that throughout the 1950s and beyond the prevalence of sexual behaviour remained mostly constant,⁵⁶ an attitude of acceptance toward these behaviours had become more common among the university population after the release of the Kinsey report. Perhaps the controversy itself served to create a public forum in which sexual behaviour could be discussed— quite against the hopes of anti-Kinsey critics. On the other hand, proponents of Kinsey's work, such as C.T. Morgan, occasionally expressed strong approval of the Kinsey report. Morgan deemed it an “outstanding achievement... trustworthy results...gives us the truest, most accurate picture that we have to date of sex behaviour in the American male.”⁵⁷

In the book *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters, and Virginia Johnson*, sexual theorist Paul Robinson suggests that liberal mentions of human sexuality, such as those in the Kinsey report, established a certain challenge to the Judeo-Christian ethics that defined the integrity of the aforementioned American dream. He argues that regardless of one's opinion, Kinsey's works “brought the most tabooed activities under the same conceptual roof as marital relations and in the process rendered them innocuous.”⁵⁸

As Robinson suggests, the public's sexual mores became a common subject for discussion in the American home. In her article "The Scientist as Sex Crusader: Alfred C. Kinsey and American Culture" historian Regina Markell Morantz writes, "overnight, 'Kinsey' became a household word, his name forever embedded in popular culture...No one would now dispute that a generation of Americans...had begun to lift the mantle of fear and shame from their sexual activities."⁵⁹ She argues that Kinsey "managed where others had failed to discuss sexual matters before a public still ignorant and uncomfortable with the subject."⁶⁰

Additionally, George Gallup, of the American Institute of Public Opinion, suggested that the most significant reason why people approved of the Kinsey study was due to its educational value. A major opinion expressed by people with a university education was that "people should be informed about sex...lack of information leads to unhappiness and poor adjustment...education on this subject is badly needed."⁶¹ This may suggest why university students were willing participants in the studies. Gallup provided evidence for his assessment in a number of surveys conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion. He found that people under the age of thirty had a more approving perception of the Kinsey report than people over the age of thirty did. He also found that "both Protestants and Catholics in the population express approval of the Kinsey study."⁶² These findings directly contradicted a statement made by Reverend Henry Van Dusen, the president of Union Theological Seminary at the time of the release of the Kinsey report, who deemed Kinsey's work "a prevailing degradation of American morality approximating the worst decadence of the Roman era."⁶³

Many of Kinsey's critics considered the Kinsey report to be a prime instigator of an outbreak of immorality within young communities. In his 1954 article "The Kinsey Report: Manifest and Latent Implications," Francis E. Merrill indicated that American "institutions, values, and

norms...are all undergoing the transition from the sacred to the secular.”⁶⁴ Merrill asserted that Kinsey’s written claim that he wrote about human behaviour to further scientific knowledge was false.⁶⁵ Another critic, Dorothy S. Brady, noted that sexually active citizens were the ones that were religiously destitute.⁶⁶ She also questioned the accuracy of Kinsey’s statistics.⁶⁷ Yet another critic, Harriet R. Mowrer, stated that Kinsey had overstepped his boundaries as a scientist and instead called him “bold, overly confident, often naïve...sometimes with harmful results to society.”⁶⁸ These “harmful results to society,” or the public knowledge of the prevalence of sexually tabooed behaviour, embodied the true fears of critics such as Merrill and Brady. However, the studies on sexual behaviour and attitudes among university students demonstrate that those students studied were relieved to possess “the educational value of sex information in the Kinsey report.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, the university studies managed to further dispel the fears of these critics as they concluded that the Kinsey report had a minimal effect on the actual behaviour of college-aged students.⁷⁰

Upon the release of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Princeton University president Harold W. Dodds commented on the Kinsey report: “perhaps the undergraduate newspaper that likened the reports to the work of small boys writing dirty words on fences touched a more profound scientific truth than is revealed in the surfeit of rather trivial graphs with which the reports are loaded.”⁷¹ Despite the president’s negative opinion of the report, Professor Leo P. Crespi and Edmund A. Stanley, a professor-student team from the psychology department at Princeton, still embarked on a sexual research study at the university. Crespi and Stanley circulated a questionnaire among 475 Princeton men in May of 1948. The questionnaire assessed both their sexual attitudes and behaviour; it was “designed to obtain information regarding the impact of the Kinsey report.”⁷² In their subsequent article, Crespi and Stanley discussed the raging

controversy concerning the Kinsey report a mere five months after its release. The professor-student team sought the student population's opinions on the Kinsey report; they were curious as to whether college youth were influenced by either the negative or the positive criticism. Their study found that "a majority of the college students surveyed believed that the ultimate effects of the study would be beneficial, and they were familiar with the criticisms made by both scientists and moralists."⁷³

Crespi and Stanley concluded that "the Kinsey report has definite and varied impacts upon its readers."⁷⁴ Despite the overwhelmingly negative image of Kinsey in the media, a mere "five percent took the stand that reading Kinsey has had a bad effect."⁷⁵ They concluded that the predominately favorable opinions of Kinsey came from "the educational value of sex information in the Kinsey report; secondly upon reduction of guilt feelings; and thirdly upon encouragement to constructive action in regard to sex problems."⁷⁶ Crespi and Stanley determined that the students at Princeton University in May of 1948 regarded the Kinsey report as beneficial. In a society where sex was taboo, yet the participation in sexual activity was widespread, the Kinsey report finally gave young adults in America the chance to understand themselves within a sexual context. Through the Kinsey report, the students were educated on the prevalence of these activities in American society. Sexual activities, such as pre-marital coitus and oral sex, were finally being portrayed as activities that were not associated with shame. And, finally, those who suffered from either personal or relational sexual problems gained perspective, through the Kinsey report, as to how to solve their respective problems. The behaviours that students engaged in, both before and after the publication of the Kinsey report were quietly becoming acceptable. These developing attitudes of tolerance were key influences in spurring on a revolution of thought in the 1950s.

Furthermore, the students' responses in Crespi's and Stanley's study provided new insights into the controversy concerning the Kinsey report. More than eighty percent of students reported that the Kinsey report did not "create desire for experimentation."⁷⁷ When asked their opinion on whether the report should not be available to the public, as some critics proposed, most of the students disagreed. Crespi and Stanley wrote that "a full ninety-four percent of the students...[felt] that the work was a straightforward presentation by conscientious scientists." The students did not think that the report was sensational; most of them thought that the Kinsey report was only "moderately surprising."⁷⁸ Most of their surprise was regarding the prevalence of sexual behaviours that they considered taboo. Crespi and Stanley noted that "a large majority of the students feel that knowledge of the prevalence will tend to increase the moral acceptability."⁷⁹ In their article, Crespi and Stanley stated that the students who had actually read the Kinsey report "felt that its effects would be more on attitudes than on practices."⁸⁰

As the earliest study on sexual behaviour on young adults after the publication of the Kinsey report in 1948, Crespi's and Stanley's study illustrates the attitudes and behaviours of 475 students at the prestigious Princeton University. The students reported "mental liberation: an elimination of guilt feelings; realization that certain practices are not abnormal; better sexual adjustment; less frustration," as well as "educational stimulation: impetus to serious thought and discussion;" "awareness of sexual realities;" and "a stimulus for constructive action."⁸¹ The Kinsey report served to change the students' perceptions of their attitudes concerning sex. The conclusions of this initial post-Kinsey study demonstrated that many of the fears of critics were in vain.

Another researcher, Jessie Bernard, discussed her October 1948 study of 466 students at Pennsylvania State College in her article, "A Note on Sociological Research as a Factor in Social

Change: The Reception of the Kinsey Report.” The purpose of Bernard’s study “was simply to see what the students thought the influence had been on their ideas and conduct.”⁸² In Bernard’s study, which she conducted ten months after the publication of the Kinsey report, students received a questionnaire within which they evaluated the influence that the Kinsey report had on their attitudes and practices, similar to the Crespi and Stanley study at Princeton. Out of the 466 students, only ten of them—less than four percent— had absolutely no idea as to what the Kinsey report was. Regarding student attitudes, Bernard reported that “most of both the men (78.6 percent) and women (73.8 percent) felt that the report had not affected their ideas and attitudes at all.”⁸³

Bernard’s major contribution to the study of sexual behaviour lay in her statistical analysis of her findings. She found that while between twenty to twenty-five percent of the students surveyed felt that their attitudes had been affected by the Kinsey report, only 3.3% of the women and 6.2% of the men “felt that their conduct and behaviour had been affected by the report”⁸⁴ in that they participated more often in sexual activity.

It is difficult to evaluate studies where the participants act as the main judges of their own attitudes and behaviour. The possibility of misinterpreting one’s own opinions on sexual matters, or even purposely lying to oneself about one’s true sexual attitudes and activity is quite high. Both studies have also been critiqued for not including a control group as a basis for comparison in their studies.⁸⁵ However, it is important to recognize that within ten months of the release of the Kinsey report, two major university studies on the sexual behaviour and activities of young adults had already been conducted by social scientists. Never before had students filled out questionnaires to evaluate their own sexual thoughts, ideas, and behaviour; though, of course, never before had a book on sexual behaviour been published that elicited such

reactions from the American public. Despite both the lack of a control group as well as the fact that their studies were opinion-based, both the study at Princeton and that at Pennsylvania State College lend credibility to the notion that sexual behaviour was not changing; it was merely a subject that was rapidly becoming talked about, studied and accepted. Instead of spurring on radical new sexual behaviour in the 1950s, Kinsey's research served as a catalyst for *studies* on sexual behaviour. This notion validates the argument that pleasurable sex was commonplace in America far before the 1960s; the "seeds" of the revolution were planted far before it was accepted. Since the prevalence of sexual behaviour remained constant, it was the public discussion of attitudes that began to confront the ideals of America in the late 1940s and 1950s.

While the next study recognized the error of not providing a control group as a basis for comparison, it did continue to use the questionnaire method. F. Harold Giedt, in his 1951 article "Changes in Sexual Behavior and Attitudes Following Class Study of the Kinsey Report," presented his conclusions from a post-Kinsey study at the University of California at Los Angeles. Giedt's study "tried to measure reported changes in behavior and attitudes of college students following rather intensive study of Kinsey's findings."⁸⁶ For the first time in this related field of study, a scientist employed a control group in order to compare the actual progress of the experimental group. In this study, the difference between the control group and the experimental group lay in its familiarity with the statistics of the Kinsey report. The experimental group studied the Kinsey report extensively in an upper-level psychology course at UCLA. Furthermore, they were quizzed on the material in order to ensure a thorough knowledge of Kinsey's methods and results. The control group was composed of students similar in age and major to the experimental group, but without exposure to the Kinsey report in a classroom setting. Although the control group may have been familiar with the Kinsey report from the

public controversy, they were not held responsible for academic knowledge of the report. Giedt used this important difference between the experimental group and the control group in an effort to determine sexual behaviour as a result of the Kinsey report. Unfortunately, the sample sizes of the study were rather small: the control group was composed of fifty-one subjects, and the experimental group was composed of sixty subjects.

Interestingly, the experimental group proved to have conflicting responses concerning their sexual behaviour. Some individual respondents reported slightly less sexual behaviour than those in the Kinsey report, while others reported a slightly higher incidence of sexual behaviour when compared to the Kinsey report. Giedt attributed the variation in these results to each individual's interpretation of the Kinsey report. He argued that based on one's own personal values, one forms judgments on the prevalence of sexual behaviour. Based on his findings, Giedt reported that his "results do not indicate that studying Kinsey's book is followed by significant changes in sexual behavior."⁸⁷ Giedt found that the students in his study had very similar results to Kinsey's interviewees: the rate of heterosexual intercourse was exactly the same (64%); there was nearly the same rate of homosexual experience (32% versus 33%, respectively); nearly the same prevalence of masturbation (97% versus 94%, respectively); and also nearly the same rate of sexual experiences with prostitutes (29% versus 28%, respectively). The sexual behaviours of these university students, particularly the single males, "show very nearly the same accumulative incidence of various types of sexual behavior that Kinsey's findings would indicate."⁸⁸ While it appears that Giedt's subjects had similar sexual behaviours when compared to Kinsey's, he did note that "a significant change toward freer sexual attitudes is shown in the experimental group,"⁸⁹ particularly "towards much greater personal acceptance of most sexual outlets."⁹⁰

Once again, a scientific study of young adults in America revealed freer attitudes toward sex among university students. The experimental group that extensively studied the text of the Kinsey report accepted practices such as homosexuality, premarital intercourse, and prostitution far more than the control group participants accepted them. F. Harold Giedt's study at UCLA, conducted just three years after the release of the Kinsey report in America, further substantiates the idea that while sexual behaviour was not greatly increasing in its prevalence, attitudes of acceptability were changing – much to the horror of Kinsey's critics.

In a subsequent study conducted among students in the Midwest, researchers finally rejected the idea that young adults were capable of evaluating changes in their own sexual behaviour or attitudes towards sexual behaviour. In 1952, Clifford Kirkpatrick, Sheldon Stryker, and Philip Buell published an article entitled “An Experimental Study of Attitudes Towards Male Sex Behavior with Reference to Kinsey Findings” in the *American Sociological Review*. The authors discussed not only their studies at the Universities of Minnesota and Indiana, they also made references to previous studies, including Crespi's and Stanley's, Bernard's, and Giedt's. The authors pointed out the faults of the previous studies: they were opinion-based, or lacked a control group. They made an attempt to correct these errors in their own study, thus improving the validity of the results. In reference to Bernard's study, the authors astutely claimed that “it should be noted that these students merely gave opinions about their attitudes and behavior rather than attitudinal reactions subject to experimental analysis.”⁹¹ And while the authors of this study were somewhat impressed with the UCLA study, particularly the author's use of a control group, they claimed that “the lack of experimentally demonstrated changes together with the extremely small number of cases in certain categories throws some doubt upon the conclusion that students

intensively studying the Kinsey report became differentially liberal as compared with a control group.”⁹²

In reference to Crespi’s and Stanley’s study, Kirkpatrick et al. commented that the study “suggested that college students believed that the report would have more effect upon attitudes than upon practices.”⁹³ In this article’s two studies, Kirkpatrick et al. took the conclusion from the Crespi and Stanley study and examined it within a different context at the University of Minnesota in 1949, and again at Indiana University in 1951. The two studies that this article discussed differed in that the personal opinions of the students that were not providing evidence for the authors’ conclusions. Like Giedt’s study, there were both experimental groups and control groups, with the experimental groups given exposure to Kinsey’s findings. The hypothesis of Kirkpatrick et al. was that both an “increase and a decrease of tolerance toward male sex behavior might be expected in a group exposed to Kinsey findings.”⁹⁴ Again, aligning with Giedt’s study, the authors thought that some of the young adults might justify the prevalence of such behaviours as reported by Kinsey as a reason for becoming more tolerant of similar sexual behaviour, while others would be appalled by the immorality of the behaviour and therefore become less tolerant of similar sexual behaviours.

Kirkpatrick et al. were the first authors of university-based studies that explicitly defined the sexual subject matter that they were studying, including: nocturnal emissions, masturbation, petting to climax, premarital intercourse, prostitution, extramarital affairs and homosexuality. The authors were trying to gain insight as to the level of tolerance for these behaviours among their student subjects at the Universities of Minnesota and Indiana.

Both the experimental groups and the control groups in these studies were given questionnaires within which they rated their level of tolerance for these various sexual behaviours. They rated

the behaviours using a numbered rating system called a Likert scale.⁹⁵ The experimental groups, after they rated their tolerances toward the subjects, were given a packet containing excerpts of Kinsey's material that included statistical findings on these taboo behaviours. They were then given the same scale as before, and told to rate the subjects according to their tolerance again. The control groups were given a packet generalizing the Kinsey report without revealing any pertinent information that could alter their conceptions of the subjects, such as statistics of behaviour or suggested accepted attitudes. Then, as the experimental groups did, they were handed a second survey to re-test their attitudes concerning their tolerance of the seven stated sexual behaviours.⁹⁶

Kirkpatrick et al. found that their hypothesis was incorrect: "it was apparent that there is no significant tendency for a general increase in tolerance toward male sex behavior on the second test for either experimental or control groups." By 1949 and 1951, respectively, the cultures at these universities were such that their tolerance toward the aforementioned sexual behaviours was the same for both groups – despite the experimental group's greater exposure to Kinsey's findings. Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell's results aligned with the previous studies' findings in sexual behaviour and attitudes. The authors concluded that "it may be that the Kinsey findings will not change sex behavior on the verbal and overt levels as much as might be expected."⁹⁷

This certainly contributes to the theories that various sexual behaviours were already common in American society during the late 1940s and the 1950s, as Alan Petigny argues in his article.

The studies at the University of Minnesota in 1949, and again at Indiana University in 1951, help to further illustrate the complexities that arose in the study of sexual behaviour. Kirkpatrick et al. seemed to be keenly aware of scientific imperfections; they attempted to control their variables by not allowing students to rate their attitudes toward something as merely positive or negative,

and they, like Giedt, employed the use of control groups in order to substantiate their findings. This experiment, performed at two different universities, two years apart, came up with similar findings in both areas. From a scientific perspective, it is important to be able to replicate an experiment and achieve the same results, as this determines the validity of the experiment. The studies at the Universities of Minnesota and Indiana served to further promote the idea that the sexual behaviour of the time was not undergoing any rapid change, yet attitudes were becoming more tolerant. It is interesting to note that the Indiana University students were within a close proximity of the source of the controversy, since Kinsey was a professor of zoology there. The university was also the location of Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research. Regardless of these factors, their attitudes toward sexual behaviours were similarly tolerant as those of the students at the University of Minnesota.

One last significant study in the area of sexual behaviour was conducted in April of 1968 at the University of Georgia. By the time this study took place, millions of American women were using the birth control pill as a means of contraception.

Despite this common access to the means of preventing conception, the University of Georgia study demonstrates that the frequency of sexual behaviour had remained constant since Kinsey's era. Ira Robinson, Karl King, Charles J. Dudley and Francis J. Clune discussed their study of 244 students at that university in the article "Change in Sexual Behavior and Attitudes of College Students." Robinson et al. composed a questionnaire seeking to determine the rate of coitus and the attitudes of the students studied. The authors hypothesized that since the widespread use of the birth control pill provided security in sexual relations, and that since the material from *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was already twenty years old, that the

behaviour and attitudes of university students concerning premarital coitus would be more liberal than their counterparts in the 1950s.

Contrary to their hypothesis, the authors' study yielded results on sexual behaviour that paralleled the statistical results of Kinsey's studies: "years later, no major changes in the percentages of premarital coitus had occurred in the present study."⁹⁸ In his reports, Kinsey stated that sixty-seven percent of university males and twenty-nine percent of university females had engaged in coitus. As a result of their study, Robinson et al. reported that sixty-five percent of males, and twenty-nine percent of females had engaged in coitus. There was also no significant change in the amount of "petting" that university students were engaging in when compared to Kinsey's results. Twenty years later, these percentages were nearly identical to Kinsey's, even though the oral contraceptive pill had been approved by the FDA eight years previously.

However, these late-1960s students seemed to embody the more liberal attitude toward sexual activity that was prevalent in America at this time. As opposed to the attitudes of the 1940s and 1950s, where sexual activity outside of marriage was considered to be immoral, large numbers of both men and women "do not agree that intercourse is immoral...less than half of the females hold to the extremely moral position and only about a sixth of the men."⁹⁹ The authors point out that "this is a distinct change from the Judeo-Christian tradition which has in the past tended to lead to public condemnation of all aspects of sexual behavior."¹⁰⁰ The students in the study felt that "such behavior no longer is considered to be a community or religious question, for the locus of the responsibility lies with the individual."¹⁰¹ Thus, as in the other studies, there was no change found in the behaviour of university students, yet there were significant changes in their attitudes.

The release of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953 undoubtedly shocked the values, mores, and beliefs of many Americans. The controversy that ensued embroiled the nation in various moral dilemmas. Scholars and common citizens alike struggled with the sexual education they were receiving as a result of the Kinsey reports. Because of national interest in the widespread controversy, the study of sexual behaviour became increasingly interesting to scientists, professors and students alike. Furthermore, the studies at Princeton University, Pennsylvania State College, the universities of California at Los Angeles, Minnesota, Indiana and Georgia all provided evidence that the sexual behaviour of university students was not dramatically affected, while their attitudes changed only. These studies, which occurred between 1948 and 1968, differed in their methods, sample sizes, gender focus and questions. However, the studies demonstrate that sexual behaviour had not changed during this twenty-year period. Critics who thought that the increase in the prevalence of sexual behaviour that would occur as a result of the release of the Kinsey report were faced with evidence that sexual behaviour in America was relatively constant in the two decades after the release of the report: “when it became obvious that ‘nice girls’ were having sex (which, according to Kinsey, a good proportion of them had been doing for decades), a scapegoat was found in the pill...The pill’s detractors intimated that the pill might encourage women to ‘sleep around.’”¹⁰²

This so-called “sexual revolution” of the 1960s was not a revolution in behaviour. In actuality, it was a physical manifestation of the 1950s war on acceptability. Alan Petigny writes that “contrary to popular belief, the sexual revolution (on a behavioral level) did not start in the 1960s, it was not ignited by the introduction of the birth control pill...by carefully distinguishing between norms and values, it is possible to understand the sexual revolution in a way that departs

sharply from the meta-narrative.”¹⁰³ The Kinsey report served to alleviate the feelings of guilt that young adults were feeling in response to their participation in sexual activities. The report also provided a foreground for tolerance of sexual behaviours that, for decades, had been labeled “taboo.” However, despite the societal fear of the abnormal, sexual behaviour in American universities between 1948 and 1968 remained constant after the release of the Kinsey report. In the 1950s, the standard of suburban life dictated that a “woman’s place was in the home... Getting married and becoming a mother were the only genuinely valued activities for women, to which women’s behavior conformed.”¹⁰⁴ The adherence to norms and values that Americans so vehemently promoted in the 1950s created the setting for a hidden sexual revolution in attitudes during the 1950s.

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- ¹ Acknowledgment given to research advisor Dr. Sharon Ann Murphy.
- ² Throughout the paper, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* will be referred to as the Kinsey report; *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* will be referred to as the female Kinsey report.
- ³ Kirsten Gardner, "Alfred C. Kinsey," in Gary Nash and Allan Winkler ed. *Encyclopedia of American History*, vol. IX (New York, New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 162-163.
- ⁴ Gardner, Nash, and Winkler, vol. ix, 162-3.
- ⁵ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (New York, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 324.
- ⁶ Albert Deutsch, "The "Kinsey Report and Popular Culture," in Jerome Himelhoch and Sylvia Fleis Fava, eds. *Sexual Behavior in American Society: An Appraisal of the First Two Kinsey Reports* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1955), 385.
- ⁷ C.T. Morgan, "A Major Social Science Study by a Biologist." *Scientific Monthly* 67 (1948): 451.
- ⁸ F. Harold Giedt, "Changes in Sexual Behavior and Attitudes Following Class Study of the Kinsey Report," in Jerome Himelhoch and Sylvia Fleis Fava, eds. *Sexual Behavior in American Society: An Appraisal of the First Two Kinsey Reports* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1955), 408.
- ⁹ D'Emilio and Freedman 278.
- ¹⁰ Molly McGarry, "Spectral Sexualities: Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism, Moral Panics, and the Making of U.S. Obscenity Law." *Journal of Women's History* 12 (2000): 21.
- ¹¹ D'Emilio and Freedman 276.
- ¹² McGarry 8.
- ¹³ McGarry 20.
- ¹⁴ D'Emilio and Freedman 278.
- ¹⁵ Juliann Sivulka, "Historical and Psychological Perspectives of the Erotic Appeal in Advertising," in Jacqueline Lambiase and Tom Reichert ed. *Sex in Advertising: Perspectives on the Erotic Appeal*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003) v.
- ¹⁶ D'Emilio and Freedman 278.
- ¹⁷ D'Emilio and Freedman 277.
- ¹⁸ Winifred Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1992), 8.
- ¹⁹ Breines 89.
- ²⁰ D'Emilio and Freedman 277.
- ²¹ D'Emilio and Freedman 280-281.
- ²² Breines 8.
- ²³ Breines 8.
- ²⁴ Breines 8.
- ²⁵ As quoted in Breines 8.
- ²⁶ William L. O'Neill. *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945-1960*. (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 140.
- ²⁷ O'Neill 140.
- ²⁸ O'Neill 26.
- ²⁹ O'Neill 214.
- ³⁰ O'Neill 214.
- ³¹ Regina Markell Morantz, "The Scientist as Sex Crusader: Alfred C. Kinsey and American Culture." *American Quarterly* 29 (1977): 578.
- ³² Morantz 575.
- ³³ Morantz 575.
- ³⁴ 11. James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York, 1997), 689, as quoted in Alan Petigny "Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexual Revolution." *Journal of Social History* 38 (Autumn, 2004): 66.
- ³⁵ 13. Robert R. Bell and Jay B. Chaskes, "Premarital Sexual Experience Among Coeds, 1958 and 1968," *Journal of Marriage and The Family* (February 1970), pp. 81-84; Harold T. Christensen and Christina F. Gregg "Changing Sex Norms in America and Scandinavia," *Journal of Marriage and The Family* (November 1970), pp. 616-627; Patricia Y Miller and William Simon, "Adolescent Sexual Behavior: Context and Change," *Social Problems* (October 1974), pp. 58-74, as cited in Alan Petigny "Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexual Revolution." *Journal of Social History* 38 (Autumn, 2004): 66.

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- ³⁶ Breines 1.
- ³⁷ Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 59.
- ³⁸ Morantz 574.
- ³⁹ Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.
- ⁴⁰ Bailey 5.
- ⁴¹ Bailey 11.
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- ⁴³ Watkins 34.
- ⁴⁴ Petigny 72.
- ⁴⁵ D'Emilio and Freedman 306.
- ⁴⁶ D'Emilio and Freedman 307.
- ⁴⁷ Petigny 66.
- ⁴⁸ Watkins 11.
- ⁴⁹ D'Emilio and Freedman 305.
- ⁵⁰ Watkins 13.
- ⁵¹ Watkins 12.
- ⁵² Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires* (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 233.
- ⁵³ Tone 238.
- ⁵⁴ Tone 239.
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- ⁵⁶ Ira E. Robinson, Karl King, Charles J. Dudley, and Francis J. Clune, "Change in the Sexual Behavior and Attitudes of College Students." *The Family Coordinator* 17 (1968): 123.
- ⁵⁷ Morgan 451.
- ⁵⁸ Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters, and Virginia Johnson* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 118.
- ⁵⁹ Morantz 564.
- ⁶⁰ Morantz 564.
- ⁶¹ George Gallup, "Two American Institute of Public Opinion Surveys on the Kinsey Reports," in Jerome Himelhoch and Sylvia Fleis Fava, eds. *Sexual Behavior in American Society: An Appraisal of the First Two Kinsey Reports* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1955), 380-381.
- ⁶² Gallup 380.
- ⁶³ Morantz 575.
- ⁶⁴ Francis E. Merrill, "The Kinsey Report: Manifest and Latent Implications." *Social Problems: Sexual Behavior in American Society* 1 (1954): 169.
- ⁶⁵ Merrill 169.
- ⁶⁶ Dorothy S. Brady, "The Kinsey Report on Females." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 49 (1954): 703.
- ⁶⁷ It is impossible to mention Dorothy Brady without touching on the question of whether Kinsey's methods were statistically accurate. The debate as to the accuracy of Kinsey's findings has been ongoing ever since the publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948. There have been several scholars and scientists who claim that Kinsey's findings were skewed, and there have been just as many who defend his methods as a scientist. However, this topic would constitute an entirely different paper, and it will not be touched upon in an analysis of the controversy. In this paper, it is not the scientific controversy being addressed; it is the controversy of the morals and mores of the American people, according to Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey.
- ⁶⁸ Harriet R. Mowrer, "Sex and Marital Adjustment: A Critique of Kinsey's Approach," in Jerome Himelhoch and Sylvia Fleis Fava, eds. *Sexual Behavior in American Society: An Appraisal of the First Two Kinsey Reports* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1955), 145.
- ⁶⁹ Leo P. Crespi and Edmund A. Stanley, Jr., "Youth Looks at the Kinsey Report." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (1948-1949): 688.
- ⁷⁰ Robinson, King, Dudley, and Clune 123.
- ⁷¹ As quoted in Wardell B. Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research* (New York, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 287.
- ⁷² Crespi and Stanley 688.
- ⁷³ Pomeroy 305.

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- ⁷⁴ Crespi and Stanley 689.
⁷⁵ Crespi and Stanley 689.
⁷⁶ Crespi and Stanley 689.
⁷⁷ Crespi and Stanley 688.
⁷⁸ Crespi and Stanley 693.
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⁸⁰ Crespi and Stanley 696.
⁸¹ Crespi and Stanley 688.
⁸² Jessie Bernard, "A Note on Sociological Research as a Factor in Social Change: The Reception of the Kinsey Report." *Social Forces* 28 (1949): 189.
⁸³ Bernard 189.
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⁸⁵ Clifford Kirkpatrick, Sheldon Stryker, and Philip Buell, "An Experimental Study of Attitudes Towards Male Sex Behavior with Reference to Kinsey Findings." *American Sociological Review* 17 (1952): 580.
⁸⁶ Giedt 406.
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⁸⁹ Giedt 409.
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⁹¹ Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell 580.
⁹² Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell 581.
⁹³ Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell 580.
⁹⁴ Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell 581.
⁹⁵ Likert scales are commonly used in the field of psychology as a system for rating attitudes and feelings about any particular subject. A common Likert scale will present a subject, then present numbers ranging from 1 to 5. Each number has a varying level of tolerance attached to it. On average, the attitudes attached to numbers 1 to 5 are (in order) "dislike strongly, dislike, neutral, like, like strongly." For the purpose of this study, Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell attached the phrases "strongly condemn, condemn, disapprove, doubtful tolerance, and tolerance" to their scale of 1 to 5. Oftentimes, scientists will add the totals in order to gain a rough score of each survey. As there were seven behaviors studied here, the range in total scores for the students could lie anywhere from seven to thirty-five.
⁹⁶ It is curious to note that these students were given the same questionnaire in such a short time span, as most of the students would probably remember how they had rated the behaviors on the first questionnaire. Many people, in an effort to present themselves as *not* influenced by the reading material that they had been exposed to, may have lied on the second questionnaire that they took. This, however, is merely speculation; the students may have either consciously or unconsciously done this, or perhaps this information was not falsified whatsoever.
⁹⁷ Kirkpatrick, Stryker, and Buell 586.
⁹⁸ Robinson, King, Dudley, and Clune 123.
⁹⁹ Robinson, King, Dudley, and Clune 121.
¹⁰⁰ Robinson, King, Dudley, and Clune 120.
¹⁰¹ Robinson, King, Dudley, and Clune 123.
¹⁰² Watkins 66.
¹⁰³ Petigny 63.
¹⁰⁴ Breines 50.