

Reading Alfred C. Kinsey: Sexuality and Discourse in
Mid-Century America

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Abstract

This project concerns various 20th-century rhetorical strategies for sexual liberation. First, I examine the work of Alfred C. Kinsey through the theories of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. In the second chapter I look at Kinsey's *Female* volume and argue that he uses the mid-century concern for marriage as a strategy for sexual liberation. Next, I trace the ways in which four female, post-Kinsey writers use Kinsey (explicitly or implicitly) for their own particular strategies for sexual liberation. Finally, my conclusion asks how we can develop an effective strategy for this new century.

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Preface

When I was 16 my rural high school gave a week-long sex education class it was the final and most graphic of the periodic sex education sessions I received in West Virginia's public school system. Parents had to complete and sign a permission form for students to sit in the lectures; alternative assignments were given for those who were not allowed to attend the lectures. I took my permission slip home expecting a battle with my strict dad. Because of pride, more than any other factor, I wanted my dad to allow me to take the classes; I didn't want to be one of the kids who had to go to the library. When I gave him the permission form, my dad and I had a long talk about it, most of which involved me begging him, with tears and all, not to embarrass me. I reminded him that I was a good Christian, that I never got in trouble, and that I would not have sex outside of marriage. His answer, then, was that I shouldn't care about the class that sex was a private issue between husband and wife. For him, there was nothing in that class that I needed to learn about. I agreed, but continued to make the argument that I would be embarrassed in front of my friends if I couldn't take the class.

My dad made a decision that shocked me. He signed the form, but did not complete it. While leaving for work on the morning the form was due, he told me that

he would leave the decision up to me. He said that I knew his position, but that he would let me check “yes” or “no.” Despite my guilt over disappointing my dad, I took the class.

This story is not about a daughter’s new responsibility; instead, it is about a father’s very real assumptions about sexuality and marriage. My dad felt that sex was a private act between two married people. I think that he is representative of a particular conservative position that opposes a permissive sex education in public schools, and who probably prefer abstinence education as their ideal. Moreover, it is important to understand that abstinence education is, ironically, a coherent “strategy for sexual liberation” it *does* make sense in its own world. For my dad, abstinence education can liberate reckless young people from a sexuality that condemns them to a literal burning hell.

As an adult, I’ve developed my own ideas about sexual liberation. For me, sexual liberation means being liberated from any ideologies about sex that inhibit pleasure. However, coming from a very conservative place in the world has allowed me to see that many permissive strategies for sexual liberation do not always respect the very real concern of conservative individuals about morality, disease, and pregnancy. While, personally, I believe that sexual liberation should first and foremost be about

pleasure, I cannot force my belief system on those who come from a very different ideological place in the world.

For example, a typical liberal way of responding to abstinence education argues that it isn't necessary because sex isn't bad. A permissive sex education assumes that if young people make poor decisions it is because they don't know enough about sex, not because they know too much. And indeed, abstinence education exacerbates problems by sometimes spreading misinformation about sexuality. A permissive sex education says all people should experience sexual freedom, another "answer" coherent in its own terms. This is the approach that Joan Jacobs Brumberg critiques so strongly in *The Body Project* (1997). Although I disagree with her particular alternative to both abstinence education and a permissive sexual ideology, I can agree with her that the strategy for sexual liberation that preaches permissiveness is not a practical approach for addressing the current debates around sexual practice in America *because* it presupposes that all or most sex is a good thing. Rather than an overtly permissive sex education, a more useful way of fighting for an informed sexual practice, and against abstinence education, would be to develop a strategy for sexual liberation that makes sense to even the most conservative members of American society.

No matter our particular sexual ideology, we have to start out where people are. Especially for those of us who practice and believe in a permissive sexual ideology, we need to remember that ultimately our goal is one of persuasion. Therefore, we must cloak our liberation in a rhetoric that makes sense to conservative teens and parents, as well as to those who think like us. For example, I will argue that the problem with what Brumberg calls the “protective umbrella” model is that it depends on emotionally “mature” and knowledgeable adult women who can protect younger females.

Brumberg assumes that such adult women exist or exist in large enough numbers to help their younger sisters. However, Brumberg never tells us what a mature woman looks like or how she behaves. Who are these mythical “mature” caregivers? Clearly Brumberg is writing to parents and other adults who have a relatively permissive attitude towards sex education. Do they always *consciously* make “mature” and “responsible” decisions about sex or have they fallen into a responsible sexuality through marriage? Brumberg’s strategy for sexual liberation doesn’t work strategically because she makes unexamined assumptions about the choices of adult women. Her formula doesn’t add up.

Rather than the impractical, if not impossible, “protective umbrella” composed of nurturing older women, it would be more helpful in this century to cloak a

permissive sexual ideology in the rhetoric of health. We need a way to explain how a permissive sexual ideology is healthy for all people, rather than allowing it to be seen as a site of potential disease. Such a rhetoric is but another strategy for sexual liberation like my dad's promotion of sexual ignorance and Brumberg's protective umbrella. However, I think that re-conceptualizing "healthy sex" could act as a rhetorical bridge between various sexual ideologies.

Moreover, through the rhetoric of health, the general public needs to understand the truth about abstinence education. Recent studies show that it doesn't work. Abstinence education is akin to addressing obesity by encouraging the practice of strict fasting. Sexual abstinence, like fasting, isn't inherently bad, it's just impractical or impossible for certain people at particular times of their lives. These two strict approaches require a discipline that few experienced adults can muster, much less the new or almost adults that we refer to as teenagers. In everyday life, kids not only disobey their parents, but also compromise their own belief systems. I had sex even though I believed, as only a 17 year old could, that I could be sent to a literal, fire-burning hell for such actions. I don't think I'm being extreme by saying that we do things all the time that go against our personal belief systems. Young or old, we're compromised individuals. Even if a permissive sex education promotes so-called

promiscuity, the potential risks to graduates of abstinence education of even a single uninformed choice about sex are too great to ignore. It only takes one careless decision to completely and fundamentally alter the life of a young woman and all her potential relationships.

But this project isn't about "sex education" and school children; instead, it is about various strategies for sexual liberation that support the different positions on the sexual education of the general public. I look at which strategies work, why, and when. My first chapter talks about the problems with Brumberg's strategy and introduces the work of Alfred C. Kinsey. I feel that Kinsey's strategy for sexual liberation should be a model for anyone concerned with social change in America today.

My second chapter shows that Kinsey works well because, in order to speak to the concerns of a conservative 1950's America, he foregrounds the importance of long term relationships. Granted he had his opponents, but many Americans appreciated his frank discussion of sexuality because he cloaked it in a concern that marriages not fail because of sexual ignorance. It is important to understand that he didn't argue explicitly for the open lifestyle that he led because he knew it would get him nowhere.

Finally, the third chapter of this project highlights a few post-Kinsey female voices each of whom has her own particular strategy for sexual liberation. I think it is important to listen to these voices in order to understand the impact of their residual meaning on the way we think about a permissive sexual education today. While the strategies of these women were useful in their day, it seems to me that we need to be aware of the limitations of a sexual liberation that seeks to liberate women from an explicitly patriarchal relation with men. It is not that these voices are no longer valuable, but that it is more useful rhetorically to look at them next to Kinsey's in order to understand their particular strategies and contexts.

Kinsey's strategy for sexual liberation sought to liberate individuals from a repressive moralism: many women after Kinsey had a strategy for sexual liberation that sought to liberate women from repressive power relations between women and men. For Kinsey, liberation was about pleasure; for many women after Kinsey, liberation was about power. Both the problem with and attraction to these particular strategies today is that people understand them as totalizing worldviews rather than as a rhetorical tactic. My conclusion will explore how we might navigate issues of power and pleasure without turning these tactics into a new absolutism.

Chapter One: Institutionalized Kinsey

Joan Brumberg's book, *The Body Project* (1997), complains that a permissive and overly-commercialized sexual culture has been destructive for teenaged girls. Implicit in her reading of American culture is the notion that certain kinds of bodies are ill-prepared for the responsibilities of a sexually active life. In particular, Brumberg argues that young female bodies shouldn't have sex. Such an argument aligns Brumberg with a conservative moralism that links sexual development exclusively with emotional development. For Brumberg, the sexually mature "body projects" pervert the growth of the American girl's mind. She argues that a mature, rational mind must learn to govern the appetites of the body in order to produce a healthy sexuality.

As I do with most champions of abstinence, I find her argument not only constraining, but also not particularly helpful for the problems that young people face; Brumberg ignores the complexities of their sexually explicit post-modern culture, and she harkens to an idealized past. For instance, in praise of Victorian girlhood Brumberg claims that intergenerational women's groups provided a "protective umbrella" (18) that encouraged girls to focus on their social and emotional development rather than on their physical, or sexual, development. Brumberg uses

this concept of the umbrella to contrast what she considers the lack of concern about young women in contemporary America. While Brumberg raises some serious issues around the commercialization of the young female body, her solution that young women need more guidance from “mature” older women does not address the multiple power relations in which sexuality operates. That is, she assumes that older women make responsible and enlightened decisions about their bodies independent of those parts of the culture that problematize adolescent sexual practice.

The underlying problem with Brumberg’s critique, and the reason that she refuses to acknowledge the problems that adult women face concerning sex and the body, is that 1) her definition of sexuality is never explicitly stated, and 2) the implied definition is extremely limiting. Her understanding of sexuality completely undermines sexual liberation and patronizingly moralizes a young woman’s body and selfhood. For example, she says, “Adolescents raised in this permissive environment become extremely stressed precisely because they have been denied a comfortable envelope of adult values that allows them enough time to adjust emotionally to their developing bodies” (199). Here, Brumberg doesn’t seem to approve of sex because she employs the same narrow definition of sexual activity that is promoted in the culture she critiques. She suggests that there is a healthy and responsible “adult” sexuality and

that anything else is unhealthy or dangerous (197). Her use of “adult” not only denigrates child and adolescent sexuality but idealizes adult sexuality. Indeed, her last chapter, “Girl Advocacy Again,” provides only sketchy “real-life” suggestions for readers because Brumberg never recognizes that sexuality is a highly complex and often irrational behavior even for adults.

Regardless of one’s age or degree of “personal development” sexuality can only be “healthy” when an individual understands her or his own body’s pleasure-making capabilities and motivations. Understanding one’s body is not necessarily connected to psychological development or adulthood. Moreover, no amount of cover from a morally “protective umbrella” will replace the value of direct experience. All women, young or old, need encouragement and the freedom to experience sexuality first hand, as well as “information,” in order to make truly responsible and satisfying decisions about their bodies. While Brumberg’s call for more concern about girls and young women has its obvious attraction, her moralistic tendencies undermine her appeal. My argument is that a patronizing and moralistic “guidance” actually produces an unhealthy sexuality because it assumes an ideal that has no base in reality. A better guidance is a sex education that does not seek to protect the young, but that seeks to uncover the diversity of actual sexual practice. However, such a guidance needs to be a

strategy for sexual liberation that speaks to people who *do* want to protect the young, rather than a strategy for alienation.

A rhetorically strategic voice that calls for a truly radical and liberating sexuality is that of entomologist and renowned sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey. Kinsey, unlike Brumberg, suggests that every kind of body is entitled to sexual pleasure. Rather than relying on developmental psychology and moral codes, his work in sex research in the mid-twentieth century, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), presents sex as a basic biological function of the human body that may interact with other aspects of a human being, such as psychological development and socialization. Moreover, in the *Female* volume, the published data extracted from his interviews challenge both 20th- and 21st-century American theories on female sexuality. Looking closely at his life and work reveals a compelling argument for the proliferation of sexual knowledge and freedom that needs to be re-mobilized in our present era.

Alfred Kinsey was born in 1894 and died in 1956 at the age of sixty-two. He spent the early part of his childhood in Hoboken, New Jersey, a heavily populated city outside of New York. In 1904, when Kinsey was around 10 years old, his family moved to South Orange, a new suburb of New York. He left South Orange in 1914 to study

biology at Bowdoin College located in Brunswick, Maine. In 1917 he began graduate study at Harvard; by this time he had narrowed down his biological interests to Entomology. He left Harvard with a Ph.D in 1920 for Bloomington, Indiana, the home of Indiana University. It would be nearly 20 years before Kinsey officially began his work in sex research. Kinsey began conducting research sometime in the 1930's, although it is not clearly exactly when. By 1945, he was writing *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948). In 1947, with a grant from the Nation Council for Sex Research, Kinsey established the Institute for Sex Research, commonly known as the Kinsey Institute. He began writing the *Female* volume in 1949 and it was published in 1953. He died three years later.

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the work of Alfred C. Kinsey by situating his research in its biographical and theoretical contexts. I want to propose that we need to look to Kinsey's work as a model of how to fight for and gain sexual liberation, especially in our neo-Conservative culture that concerns itself with moral correctness. We cannot hope to make real social progress by operating in the margins of the social or by belittling the concerns of those who do not think like us; instead, as Kinsey's life and work shows, resisting a constricting moralism means meeting its proponents on their own terms; it means developing a *strategy* for sexual liberation.

There are two similar and “true” stories about Alfred C. Kinsey’s move into sex research. The first story was popular in the 1950’s and can still be heard today in the debates around the recent movie, *Kinsey*. Prior to his role as sex researcher, Dr. Kinsey collected gall wasps and taught biology courses as a Professor of Zoology at Indiana University. The August 24, 1953 issue of *Time* tells the “official” story of his introduction to sexology:

It looked as though, in its professor of zoology, Indiana University had a man who would enjoy fame only in the narrow circle of gall-wasp taxonomists. But in 1938 some undergraduates asked Dr. Kinsey about sex adjustments in marriage. Then he was off. He forsook the birds, bees & flowers for human specimens. (53)

According to this “official” story that Kinsey told over and over again, the research began as a direct result of questions from Kinsey’s students in Indiana University’s Marriage Course.

The other story of Kinsey’s introduction into sex research is embedded in his biographies and shows that even the Marriage Course evolved from a Kinsey already deeply interested in preaching a sexual gospel. James Jones’s biography, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*, traces the way in which Kinsey’s personal life informed his

sex research. Jones suggests that Kinsey's deep interest in sex education and reform reflects his repressive childhood. His religious and authoritarian father, Alfred Seguine Kinsey, caused the young Kinsey to follow a "cultural script" of Victorian childhood (Jones 22). Kinsey's childhood entailed intense practice at "moral perfection" and "rigid self-control" (Jones 23). And indeed, Kinsey's practice paid off, if not with his impossible father, certainly within his community so much that eventually he was able to leave his father's control and family life and be responsible for himself. For Kinsey was an exemplary young man who, after the family move to the suburbs in 1904, excelled in school, in music, and in the Boy Scouts.

It was through his affiliation with outdoor groups like the Boy Scouts and YMCA that Kinsey developed a love for both nature and teaching. The older Kinsey grew, the more he used his privileged position in the boys' groups to teach moral lessons to younger members. He provided moral guidance to help the young men in his charge adapt to their transition from childhood to manhood; one of their most pressing anxieties was sexual deviance. Jones explains that besides "premarital sex, no behavior worried middle-class Americans at the turn of the century more than masturbation, and Kinsey could not have missed the Boys Scouts' crusade against it" (69). Kinsey helped young men of the early twentieth century like himself practice

Christian, middle-class values that encouraged abstention from all sexual practice. Moreover, one story that Kinsey related to his inner circle years later details an experience that he had with a young camper who came to him plagued with guilt. The boy could not overcome his desire to masturbate so he came to Kinsey for advice. The young Kinsey explained that he too had the same problem, so perhaps they should pray together in order that they might be delivered from such an overpowering temptation (Jones 75). This camp story shows Kinsey's dedication to the very sexual ethic in his younger years that in later years he was intent on reforming. However, until he entered graduate school, Kinsey maintained his faith in the value of chastity and preached it to younger men whenever he could.

Kinsey continued to proselytize even when he lost his faith in religion to his faith in science and education. Concerning Kinsey's disenchantment with Victorian morality Jones notes, "Many deeply religious young men of his generation entered graduate school in the sciences only to emerge agnostics or atheists because they were unable to reconcile conflicts between science and religion. Undoubtedly this was what happened to Kinsey" (154). What's interesting, however, is that even though his message clearly changed, his method did not. Kinsey played by the rules as a young man to escape a strained relationship with his father, and played by the rules as a

grown man to change the way Americans thought about sexual behavior. Kinsey developed a strategy of sexual liberation that used American values such as hard work and the glorification of “expert” knowledge to challenge and change other American values such as the confinement of sexuality to marriage.

Indeed, Kinsey’s first clear jaunt into a liberatory sex education was with his own children. In a lecture Kinsey gave in 1940 called “Sex Education,” he used anecdotal evidence from his experience with his own children who were, at the time, teenagers¹ (Jones 258-9). Jones says, “He placed his hopes on sex education, a solution that was at once rational, positivistic, and progressive, registering his strong agreement with the public’s faith in the power of education to mold individuals and to reform society” (258). Kinsey wanted to “shield [his] young from debilitating guilt” (259) and to relieve them of the ignorance that plagued him and his wife, Clara, when they married in 1921. Apparently, the newly-weds did not consummate their marriage until well after their honeymoon because Clara had an adherent clitoris that made penetration extremely painful, and hence impossible for the Kinseys (236). Finally, months after their return to Indiana, they decided that they wanted to have children so they sought medical help. Jones claims that “Kinsey regretted their failure to seek help sooner and blamed Victorian prudery for the delay” (236). Just as he felt guilty in

his youth about his compulsion towards sexual activity, he felt guilty in adulthood about his previous unscientific reticence towards sexual activity, and he wanted to save his children from similar self-crippling approaches.

Kinsey not only saw the importance of rearing his own children with a healthy attitude towards sex; he also advised graduate students who worked with him in the field hunting gall wasps. Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy's biography, as well as Jones's, reveals Kinsey's paternal relation with his students. In *Sex the Measure of All Things*, Gathorne-Hardy explains that Kinsey's interest in sex manifested itself in the lives of nearly everyone around him – especially his students. Gathorne-Hardy suggests that Kinsey “had discovered to his amazement totally different patterns” in the sex lives of his circle of friends and colleagues (121). Also, as time went by Kinsey was “increasingly appalled [...] at the sexual ignorance and sexual frustration of young students” (121). Perhaps he was even more appalled because Indiana University provided a “sex hygiene” course that, like many other universities, supposedly educated its students about ins and outs of sexual activity. However, from all accounts the sex-segregated hygiene course was “decidedly proper” (Jones 320) and completely uninformative. Indeed, students felt so poorly served by the class that Indiana University's student newspaper began a campaign against the moralistic “Hygiene

Course” (321-2). In sympathy with student demands, in the mid-thirties Kinsey organized a new “Marriage Course,” in place of the “Hygiene Course,” that would help students understand the “truth” about sex.

For the Marriage Course, Kinsey arranged a series of lectures from multiple disciplines. Besides his own biology lectures, professors from economics, sociology, psychology, law, and religion helped teach the course. Not surprisingly, Kinsey’s lectures on the physiology of sex were the most abundant and popular (Gathorne-Hardy 126-129). Because of the increasing interest in the physiology of actual sexual practices, i.e., student questions about what’s “normal” and what is not, Kinsey began interviewing his students to determine the range of actual sexual practice. Gathorne-Hardy claims that “it is likely that he had already begun in a small way to find out some things with his questionnaires to fraternities in the early 1930’s” (127) because he was already prepared to interview the first students enrolled in the Marriage Course. In other words, in this version of Kinsey’s introduction into sex research, he was already deeply invested in sex research well before he made it official.

Kinsey’s ability to research and counsel did not arise from his own innate common sense about sexuality. Rather, he learned about sex through books. Because of his turn-of-the-century puritanical childhood and difficulties in consummating his

own marriage, Kinsey developed an interest in sex research, reading anything he could find. Because he believed his moralistic guides from childhood had been wrong about sex, Kinsey turned to his new religion, Science, as a way to measure the validity of the information he found. Jones argues that for Kinsey, “[s]cience was a moral issue, a matter of right and wrong. When he vowed to uphold the highest canons of scientific rigor [...], Kinsey sounded like some born-again Christian dedicating his life to Christ” (204). Kinsey’s rigorous faith in science caused him to judge other sex researchers harshly: they were measured and found wanting, for their science was contaminated with morality. Moreover, Paul Robinson argues that “Kinsey departed from his scientific predecessors only in the abandon which he brought to bear on the delicate subject of sexuality” (49). Jones details Kinsey’s intellectual relationship with other sexologists:

From the moment he read their works, however, Kinsey was sharply critical of the sexologists, including [Havelock] Ellis. According to [another IU Professor, Robert] Kroc, Kinsey dismissed the lot of them with the terse statement ‘You know, there isn’t much science here.’

Kinsey made this remark not as a casual observation but as a considered verdict, one that reflected his personal assessment of the literature. By

the mid-1930's, he had given the matter enough attention to pull his thoughts together in a formal lecture. (305)

Clearly Kinsey wanted to use science against other sex researchers, not only because he thought his science better, but because it was the most effective way to challenge the implicit moralistic tendencies in their science. Furthermore, through his own studies of previous sex research, Kinsey used those older models to challenge the “truth” that the prior models had produced. That is, because many of the other models claimed that they were scientific, Kinsey used his “real” science to work against what he thought of as their pseudo-science. The degree to which Kinsey’s intentionality matters is complex, but not so important here. What matters more is that we can read Kinsey’s texts as a particular strategy for sexual liberation that worked on its own terms. In order to read Kinsey’s science as a strategy it is important to look at it in the context of the work of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault.

Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault are key here because of their theories of power relations and social institutions. They claim that a person’s interaction with the ideologies of social institutions constitute power relations. Althusser and Foucault argue that social institutions such as the church, the school, and the family seek to “normalize” the citizen, but this is not simply an issue of the overt, repressive power of

the state. Instead, Foucault in particular insists that subjects internalize the discourse of social institutions and, therefore, monitor themselves. What is most important in this study is that because power relations work through normalization rather than repression, they can be changed. The subject can resist within power relations if she/he has an effective strategy. Specifically, Althusser and Foucault allow for a reading of Kinsey's work as a resistance to the normalizing moral values of early twentieth-century America.

For example, we must first understand that Kinsey staked a claim for legitimacy by connecting his interest in sex to his campus teaching and research. It was not enough, either for Kinsey or for the establishment, to research and advise; he had to institutionalize it through the context of the school to garner the respect he wanted from colleagues and the general public. Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) helps explain the importance of the context of education to situate Kinsey's sexual ideology, and thus his sex research. Althusser defines ISAs as the various institutions of the "ruling class" that define how subjects of a given society should live (75). Furthermore, Althusser claims that the Church was once the dominant ISA because it defined people's lives most successfully, i.e., for the most part, subjects properly internalized the ideology of the Church. However, after the fall

of the Church and the advent of humanism, the School became the dominant ISA (80). The School was able to educate and enlighten individuals the way revelation from God once worked. Only this time, the revelation was based on empirical evidence rather than now-suspect faith (81). But we know that older ideologies do not simply die off; they co-exist, sometimes peaceably, sometimes not, with the dominant ideology.

The moralism of the Church, under the guise of social responsibility, certainly found a place in American Universities. Kinsey had to be aware of these tensions inherent in the University once he decided to practice his research in the context of the institution. Although Althusser specifically addresses the primary and secondary education of children in his discussion of the School, one can easily see how the University's General Education classes, such as the Marriage Course, are a continuation of the School's functions. On the one hand, the University-as-School is responsible for the production of "responsible" citizens, hence the mandatory General Education curriculum and its course on "sex hygiene." However, the other function of post-secondary education, and where Althusser leaves us, is the University-as-place-that-produces-knowledge.² Because he is concerned with primary and secondary education, what Althusser's argument does not address, but what Kinsey confronted,

was the tension in the University between the moralizing *in loco parentis* function and a knowledge-production function of state university institutions in the U.S. in the early to mid-twentieth century. Sometimes knowledge-production, or “academic freedom,” conflicts with a given culture’s definitions of moral and ethical responsibility. While Kinsey’s research was protected and encouraged by the University proper, he had to challenge its moralizing discourse to reduce the tension around his work. In order to illuminate the unique way in which Kinsey challenged the moralizing aspect of the University, I will examine some of his decisions through Michel Foucault’s arguments about power.

Kinsey saw the power relations at play in Indiana University and used them as a strategy for sexual liberation; he recognized the power of the moralizing discourse and turned that power against itself by using the knowledge-production function of the University. Similar to Althusser’s ISAs, Foucault’s essay “The Subject and Power” (1982) defines power in terms of multiple, often conflicting “power relations.” Foucault moves beyond Althusser, however, by claiming that nothing can be outside these relations; there is no power relation independent of the overall matrix. They are all interconnected and interdependent. Moreover, Foucault claims that the constraints of power relations are not necessarily bad, especially if a given subject understands the

way they operate. Therefore, being caught inside power relations does not have to mean the same thing as powerlessness. As a professor researching a controversial subject outside his academic discipline, Kinsey was caught in the power relations of the University. He knew that the University distributed moral guidance through the Hygiene Course, but that course was not his version of sex education because it was based on moralism instead of his version of science. These two functions of the University—moralism (“hygiene”) and science (“sex education”)—are two conflicting power relations that Kinsey needed to harmonize in order to proceed with his interest in sex research.

The Marriage Course, which focused on biology as well as social responsibility, began to merge morality and science. Furthermore, Kinsey chose to make the unofficial interviews conducted through the Marriage Course an official research project because that action simultaneously challenged and used the University’s power. Indeed, in later years Herman B. Wells, president of Indiana University at the time, justified Kinsey’s research in the face of criticism because Kinsey practiced with the approval of Indiana University (Jones 713-4). According to Wells’s logic, the research could not be harmful to society because it operated within the walls of the

University. Ideally, the University produces responsible adults through knowledge production.

When the course he developed in the 1930's came under fire because Kinsey was interviewing and counseling students about their sex lives, he was asked to choose between the research and teaching (Gathorne-Hardy 150). In the late summer of 1940, he chose the research. This event provides important commentary about the extent to which the moralizing constraints operated in spite of Kinsey's initial success with challenging the moral authority of the Hygiene Course. The "system" would not allow Kinsey to be both a moral authority and a scientist. However, even though he gave up the course, by having permission to continue the research, Kinsey, the entomologist, made an inroad that may not have been possible without the course.

As with the tensions within the University, over and over again throughout Kinsey's life, he "worked the system" for his own benefit. For example, recall that in Kinsey's young adult life his relationship with his father became too constraining for him to remain a part of the family. Instead of immediately running away, however, Kinsey's strategy involved following the rules long enough, going along with Mr. Kinsey's education plan, etc., so that when he was ready to leave, he was able to attend Bowdoin College, even though his father wouldn't support him emotionally or

financially. While he obeyed his father by attending the local Stevens Engineering Institute for a year, behind-the-scenes he secured himself financial aid at a school that would allow him to study biology (Jones 95-102).

Likewise, Kinsey's research can be read as a calculated "resistance" to the constraining aspect of the University-as-School. Without the Marriage course to use as a platform for his sex education, Kinsey "taught" through the two volumes of data he published as a result of the interviews. Through these he continued to resist traditional moralism and tried to assert a scientific moralism around sex education. Foucault provides a useful discussion and definition of resistance in "The Subject and Power" through which we can read Kinsey's work.³ Resistance in Foucauldian terms simply means working strategically within the power relations, rather than trying to overcome "power" as an institution. Foucault's description of resistance highlights, among other points, the following characteristics: resistances "question the status of the individual"; they struggle "against the privileges of knowledge"; and they "attack not so much 'such or such' an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique or form of power" (420). Each of these aspects of resistance is manifest in the purpose and practice of the Kinsey's interviews.

In the first chapter of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* under the sub-heading, “Historical Background,” Kinsey explains that he began the research because there was no adequate source of information for the individual that “was not biased by moral, philosophic, or social interpretations” (5). He asserts that while the literature about sexuality seems plentiful, he and his colleagues “discovered that scientific understanding of human sexual behavior was more poorly established than the understanding of almost any other function of the human body” (5). He then names particular researchers and points out the problem(s) with their research. Finally, he ends the section by explaining his interviewing process and its superiority. He admits that the sample is “inadequate” but claims that because his team does not judge or correct behavior and guarantees confidentiality, they have earned the trust of more than 16,000 people (7). Aptly, the next section in the chapter begins with a deeper discussion of his methods in relation to “The Scientific Objective.” A closer examination of the above statements in light of Foucault’s theory of resistance helps illustrate the potential consequences of Kinsey’s research.

The first point I chose from Foucault speaks about the resistance to naming and separating the individual. Kinsey’s implicit argument with previous forms of sex research that are based on “moral, philosophical, or social interpretations” is that they

seek to name the individual as something other than “normal” and therefore pathologize behavior and people who do not measure up to the norm. Hence Kinsey’s problem with Havelock Ellis. Robinson explains that although Ellis challenged Victorian myths about sexuality (4-21), he still felt the need to define people in relation to their behavior. Since Kinsey’s expressed purpose precludes moralizing and pathologizing, we can read his work as a resistance to the norms he described as unscientific. His books act as a resistance because in them Kinsey avoided defining people; rather he simply counted the number of people involved in particular kinds of behavior. Admittedly, he made his own “interpretations,” but he did so in an entirely different normalizing discourse, namely that of sexual liberation.

Additionally, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* resists the privileging of certain kinds of knowledge. Kinsey implies above that previously the only kind of “knowledge” about sexual behavior was knowledge based on biased opinion or wild theorizing rather than scientific fact. In *SBHF*, Kinsey repeatedly does his own theorizing, but always concludes that the scientific community doesn’t really know why some people participate in sexual behavior that others find intolerable. For example, Kinsey’s chapters on the “Physiology of Sexual Response and Orgasm,” the “Psychologic Factors in Sexual Response,” the “Neural Mechanisms of Sexual

Response,” and the “Hormonal Factors in Sexual Response” explore each discipline’s explanation of sexual activity without asserting the validity of any mode of inquiry in particular. In fact, much like his presentation of statistics, he seems to be supplying the information so that the reader can decide for herself. He does make interpretations, but does not privilege any given discipline.

Finally, Kinsey’s work as resistance does not attack any specific institution, but shows a larger problem with how erroneous assumptions about sex operate as power through various institutions and classes of people. A glance in *SBHF* shows how Kinsey classified his compiled data. For example, in the chapter on “Pre-Marital Petting,” after presenting the information, he interprets it in light of various ISAs: Kinsey has “Moral Interpretations” where he discusses the information in light of various religious ideologies that condemned the behavior; next he writes about “Legal Implications,” where he questions the legal apparatus that criminalizes widespread behavior. He also discusses pre-marital petting through the power matrices of Class and Education. In other words, he talks about the “effects” of power relations that constrain people from what Kinsey thinks of as clearly “natural” behavior. Indeed, in his chapter on “Homosexual Responses and Contacts,” Kinsey explains the naturalness of male and female homosexuality in mammalian behavior (448-451). He

condemns anyone who would profess otherwise since such assertions would not reflect actual behavior.

Through meeting three of Foucault's most prominent descriptions of "resistance," it seems that Kinsey did intend to resist "the government of individualization" ("The Subject" 420). And, according to Foucault, resistance isn't about simply overthrowing "the king" (the powers that be) and living in social utopia. Rather, because one can never be outside the matrices of power, resistance seeks to establish a new relation, or a new norm. When struggling to break free of one power relation, there's always another there to colonize the individual (421). So Kinsey establishes a new norm for individuals to measure up to: his strategy of sexual liberation from traditional moralism becomes a norm of sexual liberation. Strategy plus relative success equals norm.

Specifically, Kinsey's interviewing process acts as a resistance to the inhibitive power structures that govern sexuality and establishes a new norm. For Kinseyan subjects, the interview is "confession" a ritual of the School via Scientific Inquiry that exposes particular body practices. Concerning the confession, Foucault says:

[It is] a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who

articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (*History* 62)

Because the data from so many interviews are published together, they have the effect of a mass confession of the American public that seeks to re-normalize sexual behavior. Indeed, Kinsey argues that “the restriction of sexual knowledge to a limited number of professionally trained persons [...] has not sufficiently served the millions of boys and girls, men and women who need such knowledge to guide them in their everyday affairs” (*SBHF* 11). For Kinsey, the American public needed to hear the mass confession of their peers so that they could use “such knowledge to guide them,” so that they could be liberated from misconceptions about human sexuality.

A closer look at Kinsey’s chapter on “Masturbation” shows the hopes of the Kinsey team in providing “salvation” through the information they’ve made available to women. He notes that many people think that masturbation causes physical harm. Some women interviewed claimed that their masturbatory practices caused “facial pimples, mental dullness, poor posture, stomach upsets, ovarian pains, ovarian cysts, cancer, appendicitis, various infections, weak eyes, sterility, headaches, kidney troubles, weak hearts, lack of hormones, and other difficulties” (166). Then he reports that people who found “moral objections to masturbation were the ones who most often

insisted that physical and mental damage had resulted from their activity” (167).

Kinsey assures the reader that masturbation does not cause these problems even though many so-called “authorities” promote the myth. First, the Kinsey team hopes to reduce guilt over such practice by explaining to readers that describing masturbation as somehow harmful is absolutely unscientific. Secondly, they want to encourage more women to masturbate for the good of society (172). That is, Kinsey argues, women who understand the sexual response of their own bodies are more likely to have happier marriages. By the early 1950’s women were expected to enjoy sex in the context of marriage, but Kinsey uses this discourse to encourage masturbation. Moreover, since Western culture generally believes that “the family” is the foundation of society, then happier marriages mean a better society. Kinsey was willing to mobilize this discourse on the importance of family to advance his own agenda of sexual liberation. Hence, in his paradigm, one can have satisfying sex and a satisfying family life through female masturbation.

A similar discussion takes place about “Extra-Marital Coitus.” Kinsey wanted to know about the attitude behind women’s practices as much as he wanted to know about the practices. He claims that in most cases, “the extra-marital coitus had not appeared to do as much damage as the knowledge that it had occurred” (433). Often

Kinsey uses this argument, that people's assumptions about sexual activity cause more harm than the activity itself, to encourage his readers to consider alternative explanations about why some types of sexual behavior can be disturbing. Because the Interview acts as a confession about body practices of many Americans, it absolves guilt about various sexual behaviors. The priest's "Go and sin no more" is Kinsey's "Go and sin no more by holding puritanical and unscientific notions about sex."

What Kinsey encouraged, however, was not necessarily a masculine fantasy of female sexuality. Kinsey reported and advocated "variation" in *human* sexual behavior, especially for women. For example, he declared the vaginal orgasm a myth with a careful explanation of the difference between orgasm and the vaginal contractions that some women experience during orgasm (*SBHF* 582-584). He went out of his way to avoid any value judgments about any type or intensity of female orgasm.

Also, he challenged men and women alike to learn about each other's sexual response (*SBHF* 666-669). Interestingly, throughout the *Female* volume, Kinsey cites both cultural and biological speculations for the apparent differences between male and female sexuality. Consider the following excerpt from his discussion on "Responses to Being Bitten:"

It is difficult to know how much of the response of an individual who is being hurt is the product of the physical stimulation, and how much is the product of the stimulation provided by psychologic conditioning, the association of sexual and sado-masochistic phenomena, and the psychologic satisfactions which are to be found in submitting to a sexual partner. It is also very difficult to determine how many of the physical and emotional responses which are manifest in a sado-masochistic situation are sexual and how many are more properly identified as some other sort of emotional response. (677)

This passage is typical of Kinseyan explanations for various types of sexual behavior. Sometimes he goes into deeper speculation about biological or psychological causes, but his purpose seems to be something other than *explanation*. Kinsey's quasi-*explanations* are really arguments about the complexity of human sexuality and his belief that most individuals should not experience legal and/or social consequences for their sexual behavior (*SBHF* 539).

Because only part of Kinsey's arguments about sexuality have been used as normalizing discourse, such as pre-marital sexual experience being healthy or his exposé of the "vaginal orgasm," much of his overarching sexual ideology has been

ignored or sometimes vigorously attacked. Those who ignore or attack him still use the normalizing judgments implicit in moral and developmental arguments, such as the Brumberg model. Kinsey's work ultimately seeks to re-normalize sexual behavior in a way that resists traditional restraints and hopes for a more open ideology of the subject-as-body. Gayle Rubin's essay, "Thinking Sex" (1984), describes something like such an ideology:

A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression. Such a theory needs refined conceptual tools which can grasp the subject and hold it in view. It must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history. It requires a convincing critical language that can convey the barbarity of sexual persecution.

Kinsey's work, by using the rhetoric of science, ironically meets Rubin's criteria of a "radical theory of sex" and resists the naturalness of cultural conditioning.

Furthermore, Kinsey as professor bridges the radicalness of his ideology to the concerns of mainstream America. In that way, it is an effective strategy.

One of the traditional restraints on a free and open sexuality is the fetishization of a monogamous, "true love," sexuality. If we examine Brumberg against Kinsey, we

can see one major theme that Brumberg takes for granted in her protective model of sexuality—the assumption that a young woman’s sexual training should prepare her, as it did in the Victorian era, for a monogamous, “safe,” lifestyle. Kinsey, for better or worse, challenged such an ideology by playing the tensions between moral discourse and scientific research. As the next chapter shows, his work promotes a fulfilling sexual practice for all Americans, not just “responsible adults,” regardless of the social institutions that try to promote stable sexual identities.

Chapter Two: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female: Marriage as an Argument for the Liberation of Female Sexuality*

“How hypocritical to go upstairs with a man you don’t want to fuck, leave the one you do sitting there alone, and then, in a state of great excitement, fuck the one you don’t want to fuck while pretending he’s the one you do. That’s called fidelity. That’s called civilization and its discontents.”

Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying*

Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (1953) is the second volume in a two-part series published from the results of research conducted by the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University. The first volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948), was enormously successful and made the director of the Institute for Sex Research, Alfred C. Kinsey, famous. These works brought Kinsey criticism as well as praise, for, through speaking of sex frankly, they challenged the sanctity of marriage and the home. But Kinsey wanted to challenge any institution or power structure that interfered with his hyper-rational world view. Since traditional ideology of “the home” conflicted with Kinsey’s research on sex, the social institution, marriage, presented both problem and solution for him. If good sex made for strong marriages, then Kinsey needed to argue that sexual liberation, sex outside marriage, strengthened the marriage bonds.

From his biographies we see that Kinsey very much supported the institution of marriage. However, Kinsey defined marriage differently than did others of his era. For most people, marriage meant sexual monogamy, but Kinsey (and his wife and friends) neither advocated nor practiced this kind of marriage. Instead, their marriage seemed to be a life partnership that attempted to balance individual desires with the common, family good. Through an examination of his two volumes on Human Sexuality, especially *SBHF*, we see that, in Kinsey's eyes, unconstrained sexual practice could be beneficial for both the individual and the family. Conflict arose only when individual family members conflated love with sex.

Sexual Behavior in the Human Female presents an argument about sexuality using the social institutions of marriage and romantic love. Kinsey claims that while "many persons" such as clergy, doctors and teachers understand that "improved sexual relationships might contribute to the improvement of our modern marriages," in 1953 these "experts" had no extensive scientific knowledge to help couples with sexual adjustment (12). Kinsey felt that the experts were more concerned with sexuality as morality than sexuality as physiology. In response to other sex researchers, Kinsey uses his findings on female practices to advocate an exploratory sexuality that should be used as mortar to build strong homes and marriages. He argues implicitly that

Americans should re-define marriage and revise moralistic ideologies of sexuality. Moreover, Kinsey's focus on physiological sensations and desires puts more authority into the hands of the individual. It attempts to remove sexuality out of the realm of moral, medical, and psychological authorities. Kinsey uses his own scientific authority to empower the individual. According to Kinsey's arguments in *SBHF*, the only authority that a woman really needs to consult is her own body.

Overall the female volume attempts to establish an innate female sexuality in conflict with social codes; it also documents the individual female's sexual practices in relation to her social development. Kinsey is interested in how females from different backgrounds respond to sexual stimuli as socialization increases. For him, sexuality does not develop so much as it is uncovered from years of social development. For example, when discussing the impact of early sex play on "adult patterns" he notes, "When the parents had not become emotionally disturbed when they discovered the child in sex play, there was little evidence that the child's experience had done any damage to its later sexual adjustment" (*SBHF* 115). Kinsey believes that nothing causes greater harm to a female's "marital adjustment" than a sexually restricted childhood and adolescence. In the male volume, Kinsey wants to see legal and moral codes that

more closely match sexual practice. In the female volume, he establishes that, for women and girls, these codes need to more closely match desire as well as practice.

Kinsey often argues, as in the above statement, that social over-reactions do more harm to marital and/or adult adjustments than actually taking part in a particular sexual activity. Taking this a step further from pre-marital experience to a female's desire/practice within marriage, he claims that if the members of a given couple did not have the expectations of a sexually monogamous relationship, then there would be no harm in "marital infidelity." Whether he's making an argument about childhood sexuality, homosexual experience, or heterosexual experience, Kinsey's overall position is that a loving marriage does not have to be sexually monogamous. In fact, he claims that monogamy can often make an otherwise good marriage grow stale and lead to divorce.

In order to show Kinsey's desire to unite marriage and sexual liberation, I will focus this chapter on the "meat" of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, "Part II: Types of Sexual Activity Among Females." These chapters can also be thought of as the "Outlet" chapters in that most of them focus on different kinds of sexual outlets. Indeed, the last chapter in the section, where Kinsey compares the statistics from various activities, is called "Total Sexual Outlet." These sections show not only charts

and figures detailing Kinsey's findings, but in these chapters Kinsey interprets his data and shows his reaction to the various activity where females take part. His interpretations most often lead to an argument that any sexual behavior benefits the individual female; if he has evidence that a particular experience negatively affected her, he blames social reactions rather than the experience. Ultimately, however, Kinsey's interest in female sexuality centers on marriage. For Kinsey, the married couple's degree of acceptance of individual variation for themselves and each other determines the health of a marriage. Using concern for such a sacred institution allows him to make a stronger argument about the need for a liberatory view of female sexuality.

In addition to content, a short word needs to be said about the organization of "Part II." At first glance it may seem as though Kinsey has organized these chapters based on sexual development. For example, he begins with "Pre-Adolescent Sexual Development," moves on so that the middle-ish chapter is "Marital Coitus," and ends, as noted above, with a comparison of the different outlets. However, a closer look reveals that Kinsey's organization is more complicated than that of development. For it would be a mistake to assume that Kinsey makes a correlation between his arrangement of these chapters and his actual findings about female sexual behavior.

For example, as far as Kinsey shows, there are not many points of innate difference between male and female sexuality with the exception of sexual development. In the “Total Sexual Outlet” chapter, Kinsey finds again and again that regardless of sexual activity women steadily increase their sexual practices from adolescence until around age 30 where they level off for the next 20 years or so (whereas he found that men peak at much higher rates at around age 18 and decline gradually for the rest of their lives). The different kinds of “outlets” a woman might use often depend on opportunity rather than a physiological, psychological, or social development although he does speculate on the impact of these other kinds of development.

While these chapters seem to be organized developmentally, the chapters really are organized by who is involved in the particular activity (446). The first chapter in the section, pre-adolescent sexual activity, is unique in that often the child may have sexual experiences without realizing that they are sexual. Or the child may still be in the stage of exploring what or who is or is not a socially appropriate source of sexual arousal. Unlike the “Pre-Adolescent” chapter, the rest deal with an individual’s different types of contextually specific sexual contacts. For example, the next two chapters deal with solitary activity; these concern masturbation and nocturnal sex dreams. After that come chapters concerning sexual relations primarily engaged with

the opposite sex – pre-marital petting, marital coitus, and extra-marital coitus. Next comes a chapter about relations with members of the same sex. And finally, Kinsey reports on sexual experiences with animals. Since many of these sexual acts happen at different times for different women (*SBHF* 282), the chapters seem to be classified by the particular social situation of the sexual activity. Kinsey’s rhetorical move in his choice of organization shows that he does not value any particular activity over another. Marital coitus is just another opportunity for sexual “outlet” for women, rather than the penultimate emotio-sexual experience. Furthermore, he warns against classifications of people based on judgments about particular behavior saying, “Masturbatory, Heterosexual, and Homosexual are of value only because they describe the source of the sexual stimulation, and they should not be taken as descriptions of the individuals who respond to the various stimuli” (447). He wants to make clear that he is recording factual data about people’s sexual *behavior*; his book is not a classification of people who are or are not appropriate marriage partners. Indeed, his overarching point is that people in a heterosexual marriage can, and perhaps should, practice all sorts of sexual behavior, even those behaviors that take the husband and/or wife outside the marriage bed.

In the first chapter of “Part Two: Types of Sexual Activity Among Females” Kinsey defines orgasm as the “sudden release of neuromuscular tensions” (*SBHF* 101). In this chapter, “Pre-Adolescent Sexual Development,” Kinsey needs to establish that orgasm, and by extension sexuality, is a physical phenomenon that mostly exists independent of the social and the psychological. Kinsey claims:

What an individual does sexually will depend on the nature of the stimulus with which he or she comes into contact, on the physical and physiologic capacities of the individual to respond to that stimulus, and on the nature and extent of the individual’s previous experience with similar stimuli (101).

Kinsey does not attempt to exclude the social and psychological; he simply wants to assert that below the overlays of experience, human beings, especially women, quite simply feel sexual pleasure. His implicit questions are “What is wrong with feeling that sexual pleasure?” and “Why is it that, in certain social situations, that which is pleasurable makes us feel shame or guilt?” Kinsey suggests that “what an individual does sexually” in the context of marriage will depend on how marriage is defined by the culture at large.

Additionally, Kinsey shows that sexual response and sexual conditioning often occur before adolescence. Moreover, he equates sexual response to an ability to respond to a specific sort of “tactile stimulation” (102). By using the word “tactile” Kinsey asks the reader to think of other sorts of tactile stimulation a human being may feel or respond to in various ways such as cold, heat, pain, itchiness, soothing massage, etc. Just as these other tactile stimulations have unique responses according to the context and individual, so does the sexual. In a way, the parallel makes sense; however, in a society where sex is linked with privileged knowledge via institutions such as religion and medicine, establishing that sexual response is first and foremost a physiological response becomes crucial. One way for Kinsey to successfully undermine the linkages of sex with emotion and marriage is to first establish that sexual response is a physiological response and then to make the knowledge widely available. Kinsey uses the *Male* and *Female* volumes to establish that sexual response is physiological. He then argues, “We believe that the scientist who obtains his right to investigate from the citizens at large, is under obligation to make his findings available to all who can utilize his data” (10). Kinsey publishes the volumes to establish sexual response as strictly physiological and marriage as something entirely separate.

He goes on the offense, for example, in his discussion about pre-adolescent sexuality in the female; Kinsey comments on the delicate nature of the topic, especially concerning those contacts with adult males “who [are] at least 15 years of age” and “five years older than the female, while the female was still pre-adolescent” (117). He goes on to discuss in “Significance of Adult Contacts” the emotional trauma that a young girl might feel, noting that about “80 percent of the children had been emotionally upset or frightened” (121). He claims:

Some of the more experienced students of juvenile problems have come to believe that the emotional reactions of the parents, police officers, and other adults who discover that the child has had such a contact, may disturb the child more seriously than the sexual contacts themselves.

(121)

While admittedly, for many people, Kinsey’s claims about adult/child sexual contacts are controversial and/or offensive, I am interested here in his definitions of “adult” and “child,” that he has precise definitions for each, and what circumstances constitute a damaging sexual contact between the two. Kinsey considers that some contacts cause *physical* damage (122), but his ultimate purpose is to show that any incurred *psychological* problem is more the fault of the girl’s culture rather than the activity. In

fact, it seems that his case rests on arguing against a common cultural assumption that “sexuality” happens as a part of adolescence or “puberty” or, for some, not until marriage. Kinsey is really arguing for the sexual child; he suggests that perhaps some people are horrified about sexual contacts between adults and children because they are invested in a picture of childhood in which sexuality has no part, or they are invested in a picture of sexuality in which only marriage has a part. Obviously if a child’s heterosexual contact decreases during adolescence because “parents may increasingly restrict the female’s contacts with the opposite sex” (116), then those hypothetical parents must have believed their daughters’ sexuality non-existent before the onset of adolescence. Moreover, it seems that these same parents want to guard a female’s sexual response until marriage is possible.

Unlike his contemporaries, Kinsey’s main argument in “Chapter Four: Pre-adolescent Sexual Development” is that many pre-adolescent females do, in fact, have a sex life. Likewise, he believes that such a sex life should not necessarily carry punishments—legal, physical, or psychological—until as a society we understand more about pre-adolescent female sexuality. That he even includes this chapter in the “Outlet” section is curious since in the other “outlets,” such as “Masturbation” or “Homosexual Contacts,” Kinsey includes his data on pre-adolescent girls. However, it

seems that he wanted to establish first and foremost that many girls exhibit sexual response from an extremely young age. I think he did this so that when he examined the outlets, he could do so from his own idealized notion of childhood concerning how we change or do not change according to the dictates of culture. For Kinsey, childhood is innocent because it often includes a sexuality that is free of definition, free of the context of marriage. He claims that “many children would not recognize the sexual nature of their early responses” (103). The child could not recognize her response as sexual if she had no definition of sexuality; it would simply be a pleasurable *physiological* response.

In Chapter Five, “Masturbation,” Kinsey begins to discuss the ways in which sexual arousal and sexual release — physiological responses — change according to specific context. Once these sexual activities are labeled they become “deliberate,” increasingly social actions rather than pure tactile stimulation. For example, Kinsey says that masturbation is the “deliberate self-stimulation which effects sexual arousal” (133). His point here is that the action must be intended to cause sexual pleasure to be labeled masturbation. He says, “Instances of orgasm induced by accidental self-stimulation are not, strictly speaking, masturbation” (133). So with masturbation, sexuality is not just a physiological response to tactile stimulation but an act “which

bring[s] satisfaction” (134) and which “may or may not have orgasm as its objective” (133). Kinsey wants to disassociate sexual pleasure from “orgasm” for women because it might have procreative connotations since male orgasm is stereotypically the objective of (especially) marital sexual intercourse. In contrast, a woman can masturbate, experience arousal, decide whether or not to climax, just getting to know how her body responds without the pressure of finishing before or with her partner.

Kinsey’s focus on sexual pleasure rather than orgasm may seem surprising, especially since he opens the chapter claiming that women more frequently experience orgasm as a result of masturbation than any other form of sexual contact (132). However, the distinction between sexual pleasure and orgasm shows respect for the fact that many women engage in sexual activities for a variety of reasons which may or may not include “getting off.” As well, he makes the distinction because some women in his sample did not know that the pleasure experienced from masturbation had any “sexual connotation” (139). He attributes this to “the ignorance which is frequent among females of sexual activities which are outside of their own experience” (138), noting that “not a few females” knew that men masturbated before they understood that women could masturbate as well. While Kinsey’s frustration with the ignorance about sexuality is evident, he clearly does not blame the women.

Instead, he blames a puritanical society that links sexual pleasure with the marriage bed—especially in terms of the sexual education of women. It is understandable then that Kinsey takes delight in the fact that some females learned about masturbation from “religious lectures which were designed to discourage masturbation” (139).

Another important way in which Kinsey defines female sexuality in the “Masturbation” chapter is to differentiate it from male sexuality explicitly. For example, Kinsey notes that masturbatory experiences of women compared to men are distinctly different. He says, “The active incidences of masturbation were lowest in the younger groups, and highest in the older groups of females” (143). For single women, only 30% masturbated at the age of 15, yet by age 35 over 60% of single women had masturbated (143). Moreover, once a woman began to masturbate, she generally continued at the same frequency, single or married, throughout her life (144). On the other hand, single men peaked in their masturbation habits in their late teens and steadily dropped throughout the rest of their lives (144). Additionally, Kinsey says, “Females may choose their masturbatory techniques from a longer list than males ordinarily utilize” (158). Although most women—84%—relied on clitoral stimulation, many females had used other methods to produce sexual pleasure or orgasm, such as crossing the legs, voluntary muscular tensions, stimulation of breasts, etc (159-163).

Whereas historically male sexuality has been the ideal, according to these findings and/or suggestions, female sexuality appears to have advantages because women have a larger variety of pleasure inducing practices. Kinsey argues that once a woman discovers her sexuality, she continues to explore and develop that part of herself until well into middle age regardless of her relationship status. Moreover, he suggests that she can especially benefit from sexual activity not confined to the marriage bed.

The next chapter in which Kinsey compares female sexuality to male sexuality is “Nocturnal Sex Dreams.” He aligns female sexuality and male sexuality much more closely in this chapter and suggests that women have experiences concerning sex dreams similar to men’s. That is, they remember them for the same reasons. Noting that a man’s ejaculation may seem more obvious (and thus the stereotypical adolescent male “wet-dream” connotation), Kinsey says that “vaginal secretions often bear similar testimony to the female’s arousal and/or orgasm during sleep. As with the male, the female is often awakened by the muscular spasms or convulsions which follow her orgasms” (192). Kinsey also says that sex dreams along with masturbation “provide the best measure of a female’s intrinsic sexuality” (192). This area where women really aren’t that different from men is also where women exhibit their *real* sexuality an uninhibited dream world sexuality. Again, Kinsey wants to question why women

behave so differently in the waking hours from men; and again, he points to societal reasons. He says that because other persons are involved in other sexual acts, women behave differently in marital relations, often to suit her partner (192). Kinsey makes a case for why women and men, wives and husbands in particular, need to learn about female anatomy. Obviously, if women are having better sex in their dreams, something may be wrong in the master bedroom of the sacred home.

However, one shouldn't think Kinsey's primary concern was simply good sex in marriage, for he wanted to disassociate sex and marriage. Rather, his foremost concern was discovering what good sex could be within and outside of marriage. In the "Nocturnal Sex Dreams" chapter, Kinsey links female and male sexuality to disprove a stereotype about women that sex can only be connected with emotion for women. Kinsey shows that sexual activities for women can be as unemotional and frustrated as they are for men. For example, he says, "As with the male, the [female's] dreams often had a distressing way of stopping just short of the climax of the activity" (196). Kinsey suggests that women may possess an autonomous sexuality not bound up in marital relations, whether or not they act on it.

In the next chapter, "Pre-Marital Petting," Kinsey expands on the idea of an autonomous, exploratory female sexuality that women *do* often act on. Kinsey hints

that this popular activity may have “considerable social significance” (227). Even though some think of the activity as unnatural, Kinsey claims that “non-coital contacts occur among mammals and among children of the human species where such activity is usually defined as *sex play*” (228-9) [original emphasis]. For Kinsey, “sex play” has a significant social role that is especially natural and possibly beneficial. He continues to make his case for sex play’s significance by showing its animal as well as historical origins. He notes, “The ancient origins of the extensive vocabulary by which the various techniques of petting have been designated provide some evidence that a considerable amount of such activity occurred in previous centuries of human history” (231). Finally, after reporting that it is common and has biological and historical precedents, Kinsey examines why sex play may be important socially. He claims that more often than not, couples have more satisfactory marriages when they determine that they can “adjust emotionally and sexually to each other” (266) before marriage. The conclusions are interesting because Kinsey talks about emotional adjustment as something separate, but related to, sexual adjustment. He says, “Pre-marital petting experience provides an opportunity for the female to learn to adjust emotionally to various types of males” (266). And then, presumably after learning about her body, she picks the type who most suits her needs. Kinsey claims that pre-

marital petting actually allows a woman to explore and define her own sexuality so that she can find a suitable partner. What Kinsey doesn't say, but certainly implies throughout the text, is that if she happens to define her sexuality as something that has little to do with the marital arrangement, that's her prerogative.

The innateness of a female sexuality becomes less important to Kinsey as more people enter the picture of a woman's romantic life. Rather, a sexuality defined by the individual female in relation to a heterosexual partner and the demands of cultural expectations emerge in this chapter on "Pre-Marital Petting." Clearly what Kinsey means by "pre-marital petting" is exactly that—a sex play that happens before marriage, and that allows a woman to judge what is acceptable to her in a sexual relationship—which for many women is the same thing as a marital relationship.

Of concern for Kinsey, more so than petting, is the significance of pre-marital vaginal intercourse. He opens "Chapter 8: Pre-Marital Coitus" noting that with so many warnings against the ill effects of pre-marital sex, readers should pay special interest to his findings in this chapter. He says:

The social significance of the coitus was, of course, more important than its function in providing a physiologic outlet for the female. In our culture, its significance has been enhanced by the moral and legal

condemnation of such activity before marriage, and this has made it difficult to secure any objective evaluation of the relation of pre-marital coitus to the individual's sexual needs and to society's intrinsic interests.

(282)

These legal and moral codes prohibiting pre-marital sexual intercourse, according to Kinsey, compromise the physiological nature, or purity, of the experience in many cases. Kinsey wants to make clear here that any supposed psychological disturbances to "marital adjustment" are due to inadequate social codes rather than physiological realities.

To demonstrate this, we can look back to the "Foreword" of the text, where we see that Robert Yerkes and George Corner cannot help but mention Freud when writing about the social significance and possibility of Kinsey's work. Specifically they say that Freud "proposed theories which laid the foundation for a task he was not fitted by nature or training to carry on" (viii). It is easy for a contemporary reader familiar with *Civilization and Its Discontents* to draw a line from Freud's work to Kinsey's work. Freud hypothesizes that the sublimation of sexual drives, while necessary for "civilization," may also cause deep psychological problems. Kinsey embraces such a hypothesis and turns it on its head. With his research, he not only

attempts to prove Freud's claim, but asks about the necessity of the control over sexual behavior. Kinsey wants both the social benefits of marriage and the individual's true sexual liberation. Even Yerkes and Corner cannot help but say, "From the Kinsey project, sufficiently extended, should come basic knowledge of sexual phenomena against which theory may be checked, modified and supplemented" (viii). Kinsey's "Pre-Marital Coitus" chapter really begins his direct challenge to a sexually monogamous marriage and proposes an alternative via sexual liberation within marriage.

When Kinsey writes about the "Psychological Significance" (313) of pre-marital coitus he addresses the concerns around the repression of sexual desire for women. Two primary revelations stand out: 1) those females who had previous coital experience were far more likely to be open to more pre-marital sexual experience (314), and 2) most women who had pre-marital coital experience did not regret it (316). Furthermore, Kinsey says, "That a considerable portion of the pre-marital coitus is psychologically satisfactory is, of course, evidenced by its continuation and considerable prolongation in the histories of many of the females who begin such activities" (319). Kinsey is speaking back to a culture that claims that pre-marital sexual experience is bad for the woman and her marriage. Regret isn't the only issue

here as well. That the women tended to be open towards more sexual experience once they started reveals that once some women learned that sexuality wasn't necessarily dangerous or earth-shattering, they continued with the practice. At first glance this point seems like an obviously moral consideration — once a person has “sinned” it is easier to sin more because she has broken her faith. But examined in context of his other claims in the book, Kinsey implies something a little different than moral degeneracy; he's pointing to the difference not between innocence and experience but rather that between ignorance and experience.

In the next chapter of heterosexual contacts, “Marital Coitus,” Kinsey discusses the importance of experiential knowledge within the home. First, he explores the ideology and fears of contemporary American culture in relation to marriage. He notes with some optimism that what makes marriages in the mid-twentieth century unique is that for a growing number of marriages all members of the family are thought to be partners in the home rather than there being a dominating male.

Furthermore, he says:

As a result of this awakened interest in more human and more substantial family partnerships, there is developing in this country, as well as in some other parts of the world, an increasing interest in

understanding some of the factors which contribute to the effectiveness of a home, and an increasing emphasis on training modern youth and adults to be more effective marital partners. It is in these terms that the significance of sex education, of pre-marital sexual outlets, of non-marital sexual activities for adults, and of the techniques and frequencies of marital coitus are being evaluated today. (347)

Kinsey's progression in opening this chapter is very powerful rhetorically. He first agrees that the family is important in Western culture, noting that attempts at a non-nuclear family structure have been tried and have failed. Next he moves to discussing the changing family structure. Then, based on those two discussions, he argues for the need of sex education both formal and experiential. His argument is that if people are expected to form healthy partnerships then they have a duty to come to that partnership with knowledge.

In order to support his claims, Kinsey launches directly into the problems of marital sexual relations. He notes that women have the largest amount of marital intercourse within the first years of their marriages (348). Next, he discusses the wide "individual variation in frequency" (350), averages from once a week to up to four times a week. Then he talks about the frequency of orgasms in these marital

experiences (352). In all of these areas he finds that women were having more sex and less frequent orgasms in the early part of their marriages; then as they get older, they have less marital sex but experience orgasm more often when they did have sex. However, he quickly points out that this information does “not provide any evidence that the female ages in her sexual capacities.” He notes that “it is primarily [the husband’s] aging rather than the female’s loss of interest or capacity which is reflected in the decline” (353). He refers to the mismatch in male and female sexual desire as “a tragedy” (353). Furthermore, Kinsey thinks that the problem could be further exacerbated by the fact that because their young wives may not have been as interested in sexual activity as their young husbands (usually because they had been inhibited for so long as adolescents), as older men they assume the situation is still the same with their older wives. In reality, wives desire more marital coitus in the later years of marriage. Kinsey wants the average person to have more knowledge about the differences in the male and female’s biological capacity for response at different ages.

Kinsey not only wants the public to know on an intellectual level the average response patterns for females, but he also argues that experiential knowledge, especially on the part of the woman, may contribute to a more even match in the couple. For example, when discussing the correlation of orgasm in marriage and

orgasm in pre-marital experience he says that “there was no factor which showed a higher correlation with the frequency of orgasm in marital coitus than the presence or absence of pre-marital experience in orgasm” (385). Kinsey doesn’t necessarily argue for sex outside of marriage with a partner, but rather suggests that a woman who explores her own sexuality before marriage has greater satisfaction with sex after she marries. Furthermore, he says, “It is doubtful if any type of therapy has ever been as effective as early experience in orgasm, in reducing the incidences of unresponsiveness in marital coitus, and increasing frequencies of response to orgasm in that coitus” (385-6). After beginning the chapter with his discussion of experience and desire in relation to age, we can see that he thinks that if females have a more exploratory sexuality prior to marriage they may be able to enjoy marital sex much earlier than if not. Kinsey first acknowledges the biological reality for women, then points to social causes for the reality. For, as he shows in the “Masturbation,” “Pre-Marital Petting,” and (as we’ll soon see) in the “Homosexual Relations” chapters, these forms of sexuality are often condemned by a girl’s social structure, be it parents, school, or church. So essentially he’s arguing that these social gods are responsible for sexual misunderstandings in the marriage bed.

Kinsey argues against social authorities even more strongly in the next chapter, “Extra-Marital Coitus.” If pre-marital sexual experience provides a greater satisfaction within marriage, then, logically, extra-marital experience could as well. Knowledge, for Kinsey, is consistently better than the other alternative. Kinsey begins the chapter by restating supposed knowledge. He claims: “It is widely understood that many males fail to be satisfied with sexual relations that are confined to their wives and would like to make at least occasional contacts with females to whom they are not married” (409). Kinsey then explains that even for husbands who don’t engage in extra-marital coitus, they are at least sympathetic or understanding to males who do have sex outside of marriage. He then states: “[M]any females find it difficult to understand why any male who is happily married should want to have coitus with any female other than his wife. [For most males such questions seem] the best sort of evidence that there are basic differences between the two sexes” (409). Before we go any farther into Kinsey’s discussion, it is important to note the language he uses in these first two paragraphs. He begins by using “widely understood” then moves to mere public opinion. Kinsey paints a picture here of popular conception that is not necessarily based on any fact. Things just “seem” that way. Furthermore, he uses “happily married” to describe men

involved in marital infidelity. Kinsey implicitly questions assumptions about the nature, cause, and practice of extra-marital coitus.

He does so more blatantly in the next paragraphs. He claims:

[T]he preoccupation of the world's biography and fiction, through all ages and in all human cultures, with the non-marital sexual activities of married females and males, is evidence of the universality of human desires in these matters, and of the universal failure of the existent social regulations to resolve the basic issues which are involved. (409)

He jumps from an implicit questioning to a linkage of the universality of male and female sexual desire and the lack of social regulations to adequately address actual practice and desire. Kinsey moves on to examine infidelity among animal species that have mating systems. He says, "Both the females and the males in these mammalian mateships are quite ready to accept coitus with individuals who are not their established mates; but females are deterred by their male mates, and males are limited [...] by other males" (410). Kinsey makes a comparison between animal and human desire for extra-marital coitus, noting that the situation is no less complicated in the animal's world. He asks, if humans are more advanced socially than animals, shouldn't

there be better ways of dealing with extra-marital relations that both maintain the home and accommodate sexual desires?

Apparently not, says Kinsey, for anthropological data suggests that throughout history and many different cultures the female's extra-marital coitus is more rigorously controlled and condemned (415). Then he lists the various reasons that society may have for needing to exert special control over the female's sexual behavior – most of these have to do with childbearing or child rearing. Furthermore, he says, “It is generally believed that extra-marital coitus invariably leads to marital discord and/or divorce, with all of their consequent social implications” (415). Once again, he presents common opinion, then follows with the evidence. He understands that “society” has a strong case against female infidelity, but he convinces people to think differently if he has the right evidence. He's already told us how marriage has changed due to the greater rights and responsibilities of the female. The male and his family no longer “own” the wife; rather she is a partner. The question Kinsey will need to answer in his presentation of evidence is whether the female's assertion and/or practice of her sexual rights as a partner in marriage will indeed be dangerous to the social structure, i.e., the family.

At the end of the chapter on “Extra-Marital Coitus,” Kinsey discusses 12 aspects of the social significance of sex outside of marriage where the female is the acting party. He notes some reasons and reactions regarding why women participate in sex outside of marriage. Importantly he claims, “The females who had accepted their extra-marital activity as another form of pleasure to be shared, did not so often get into difficulties over their extra-marital relationships” (433). Kinsey seems to value this attitude above all others concerning marital infidelity. He suggest that partners who are “strong-minded and willing to accept the extra-marital activity” (433) are able to both satisfy their biological desires for sexual variety and maintain the home. Furthermore he claims that “[s]ometimes sexual adjustments with the spouse had improved as a result of the female’s extra-marital experience” (433). Overall Kinsey’s findings here send the message that if both partners can be open and understanding with each other in regard to their respective sexualities, no marriage need be in danger. Moreover, this responsibility of openness falls especially heavily on the male since traditionally it is the female’s sexuality which has been under more social restriction. Although he does not state it explicitly, Kinsey wants marriage to move away from the ownership of another’s sexuality, to a partnership between two human beings with physiological drives.⁴

Kinsey makes his most damning strike against the confinement of sex to marriage in his chapter on “Homosexual Responses and Contacts.” He does this by attempting to separate actions from identities. For example, Kinsey argues:

The classification of sexual behavior as masturbatory, heterosexual, or homosexual is [...] unfortunate if it suggests that three different types of responses are involved, or suggests that only different types of persons seek out or accept each kind of sexual activity. (446)

Kinsey not only wants the public to de-pathologize homosexuality, but also wants to question the supremacy of a heterosexual identity. Moreover, he challenges such an identity; for Kinsey, a person is not simply the sum of her actions. He claims that whether or not a person will accept homosexual stimulation depends on the capacity to respond sexually, the conditions of first (usually childhood) homosexual experience, and the individual’s willingness to go against social norms. Obviously Kinsey thinks that if it weren’t for the social codes against homosexual behavior anyone would and could have homosexual relations. Indeed, Kinsey turns psychoanalysis on itself by suggesting that those who advocate any particular stable sexual identity are no doubt suffering from a pathology. I can hardly think of a more serious attack on middle-class

marriages of the mid-twentieth century, marriages based on heterosexual romantic love.

However, I don't want that to be an overstatement. Marriage was under attack from Kinsey's camp, but there's no real evidence that he wanted to destroy the institution. Rather, he wanted to change it: he wanted to remove the monopoly marriage had on sex. Even in terms of long-standing homosexual relationships between women Kinsey attributes social causes to the longevity of the relation rather than an attachment tied to a specific sexual identity. Explaining why he finds long-term homosexual relations more common among females than males, he says, "A steady association between two females is much more acceptable to our culture and it is, in consequence, a simpler matter for females to continue relationships of some period of years" (456). Later in the book when he discusses "Psychological Factors," Kinsey suggests that women may have a greater disposition toward maintaining long-term relations because of psychological conditioning about her importance to the home. It is important to note, however, that Kinsey in no way suggests that women should maintain these more stable relations, that they are without complexity, or that his findings make a case for a certain kind of biologically innate female sexuality. In fact, due to his own long-term commitments, I would argue that Kinsey especially

values long-term relations such as marriage; he simply doesn't think that sex is limited only to marriage or other long-term relations. For Kinsey, these partnerships are based on platonic love and mutual commitment rather than an everlasting sexual attraction. Romantic love often exists in marriage and long-term relations, but it happens outside the boundaries of these relations as well. In Kinsey's world these are just as important to individual happiness as the stability of the home.

In the last and very short outlet chapter, "Animal Contacts," Kinsey again reports the data and takes another opportunity to separate sexual fulfillment from marriage. He says, "In discussing this matter in our volume on the male [...], we pointed out that there is no sufficient explanation, either in biologic or psychologic science, for the confinement of sexual activity to contacts between females and males of the same species" (503). Furthermore, Kinsey wonders why more people do not have sexual contacts with other species (504). As far as females go he says that frequently girls are "kept away from breeding animals by their parents" and did not know "that coitus was possible in any animal, let alone the human, until they were adolescent or still older" (504-5). Again, Kinsey uses the low incidence of female human contacts with animals as an excuse to attack the institutions that keep sexual knowledge away from young women. Moral, social, and legal codes all prohibit sexual

contacts between the human animal and other animals. Kinsey says, “There are in older literature a few records of females receiving the death penalty for such contacts” (508). He suggests that the prohibition is so strong, considering that very few women actually make these contacts, because, especially for women, sex should be confined to contacts between marriage partners.

In order to understand the complexities of Kinsey’s “have your cake and eat it too” attitude towards marriage it is important to take a brief glance at the historical context in which *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was published. The Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS) discussed in Elaine Tyler May’s book, *Homeward Bound* (1988), finds many correlations between Kinsey’s findings and attitudes revealed by the KLS respondents. For example, May explains that the KLS of 1955 finds that the primary concern with many respondents is the happiness and security of the home. Given that Kinsey was of this generation, and that his biography does not suggest otherwise, we might hypothesize that the home was important to Kinsey as well. And, indeed, that his interest in the stability of marriage was a genuine concern. It seems that he really did believe that sex outside the marriage could be good for the individuals involved and, therefore, be good for the marriage. What is different about Kinsey from the respondents of the KLS is that Kinsey did not advocate

“containment.” May argues that because of fears over the Cold War and Communism, many Americans contained their desires and ambition within the capitalist nuclear family, otherwise known as “the home.” What the KLS questionnaire reveals is that some women who engaged in extra-marital sex may have felt uncomfortable or confused about their sexual experience because it was outside of the confines of the sanctioned home. In short, during the 1950’s sex outside the home was akin to Communism.⁵ The American suburban home was represented as the epitome of American values. Moreover, some of the Americans in the KLS felt that the Kinsey studies accurately described their sexual experience; pre-marital experience made them more responsive sexually during marriage (May 125).

It is important to recall that Kinsey was both married and practiced a polymorphous sexuality. He seems to have been especially interested in homosexual behavior at times. In our current, neo-Conservative culture saturated with a Disney version of “true love” and marriage, it may be difficult to think that this man could have had a satisfying marriage. However, all evidence suggests that Kinsey did have a “good” marriage. His wife knew about his sexual exploits. In fact, she participated in extra-marital sex as well. The only troublesome account of the Kinsey marriage that I have found refers to Mac’s (Mrs. Kinsey’s) frustration at her husband’s demanding

research schedule during the last years of his life. One can hardly blame her since it seems that he worked himself to death. Other than that, even Kinsey's most critical biographers can find no evidence that "Prok" and "Mac" had anything other than a happy, mutually supportive marriage. They were a team who approached the mundane details of their home and child rearing as a team. So Kinsey wasn't just putting forth a random hypothesis or advocating some idyllic life that his imagination conjured up. Rather, he based his suggestions on the inner workings of his own marriage. He shared both a marriage and sexual freedom with his wife. And he wanted to spread the word around that such things were possible (Jones 336). His work seems to suggest that he wanted to undermine and redefine the twentieth century's conception of marriage as sexual ownership.

So now we know that Kinsey wanted to challenge a sexually monogamous ideology of marriage. But what about the emotional side of marriage? Did he never expect that unmarried sexual partners would become emotionally attached? Did he not understand that such emotional attachment, regardless of the sexual aspect, could be detrimental to a stable home? Again, we must look to the evidence in Kinsey's biography to answer these questions. Kinsey himself proclaimed to have loved partners in addition to Mac. Given that, it seems that he would approve of emotional

polygamy as well as sexual. However, one incident concerning his staff suggests that Kinsey believed emotional entanglements in extra-marital sexual contacts were risky. The incident with Alice Martin, the wife of Clyde Martin, and Paul Gebhard reveals Kinsey's feelings about emotional attachment outside the marriage. Kinsey encouraged his staff of interviewers to practice an open sexuality. One interviewer and writer, Dr. Paul Gebhard, began an affair with his young colleague's wife, Alice Martin. Alice fell in love with Gebhard and briefly left her marriage; she wanted Gebhard to do the same. When Clyde Martin brought news of the situation to Kinsey, he was furious. Kinsey ordered Gebhard to end things with Alice and more or less forced Alice to go back home to Clyde.

This situation reveals two things about Kinsey. First of all, he did not want any of his staff members involved in any publicly scandalous behavior. His interviewers had to be happily married because he felt they would be more effective in getting people to open up about their sex lives. It seems though that respectability wasn't Kinsey's only concern. He was angry that Alice did not play by the rules. She had mixed sexual involvement with emotional involvement to such a degree that she risked the stability of her own marriage. She believed in and practiced containment. Rather than experiencing marriage as a partnership, she related to her sexual partners in

terms of emotional and sexual ownership.⁶ She wanted to contain her feelings within a romantic and sexual bond that excluded others. Kinsey did not get upset because Alice loved Gebhard, but because she would not love both her husband and Gebhard. This episode suggests that as with sexuality, Kinsey thought that emotional attachments were products of cultural expectations rather than innate “feelings.”

Kinsey uses *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* to demythologize the sacredness of sexuality and marriage. For a nature-loving Man of Science like Kinsey, the everyday was in a sense “sacred” and he believed that creating definitions that separated “the sacred,” sex within marriage, from “the profane,” sex outside of marriage, made individuals frustrated and unhappy and therefore made marriages frustrated and unhappy. The 1950’s notion of “containment” appears akin to the “protective umbrella” of Brumberg’s polemic. The implicit argument in both terms is that there is something precious or sacred about sexuality that needs to be contained, protected, covered up, or redirected. Kinsey resisted this idea both in his personal life and in his professional work and used marriage as an argument and strategy for the sexual liberation of the individual.

Chapter Three: Sex and Some Post-Kinsey Women: A Sexual Revolution?

While, clearly, I find Kinsey's arguments about marriage insightful and even liberating, I have to admit that Kinsey is, to a lesser degree, guilty of one of Brumberg's problems that I mentioned in Chapter One. Unlike Brumberg, Kinsey doesn't completely ignore the multiple power relations through which sexuality operates, but he does underestimate the degree to which ideologies about sex, love, and family determine many Americans' lives. The previous chapter argues that he had to underestimate these social institutions in order to make his strategy for sexual liberation work. However, this chapter will show that, for the most part, Kinsey's radical sexual ideology did not catch on in the years after the publication of his work. Granted, in popular imagination, before and after the sexual revolution following Kinsey, many liberated souls experimented with alternative family and sexual arrangements as discussed in Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) and The Boston Women's Health Book Collective's *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971). However, a closer look at some post-Kinsey, early second-wave feminist novels will reveal that the situation for women, at least, was not much changed. Yes, many women had unprecedented access to birth control. But did that, and did the popularization of

Kinsey and sex, change the way women thought about relationships and marriage?

Perhaps not in the way that Kinsey envisioned, but even though these women did not adopt Kinsey's message wholesale, their strategies for sexual liberation do suggest that Kinsey's work was valuable strategically for some feminist projects.

A word needs to be said here about the sexual revolution. Common perception of the sexual revolution is that it was a social movement of the 1960's that had roots in free love, drugs, and rock and roll. Moreover, one might be tempted to characterize "the sexual revolution" as the reaction of one generation against the repressive values of their parents. However, as Kinsey's evidence suggests, such a characterization isn't really accurate. Indeed, I could claim that Kinsey's data argues that the sexual revolution began at the turn of the twentieth century. But that wouldn't be entirely accurate either. The problem with these definitions of the sexual revolution is that they attempt to homogenize several different kinds of movements that sought to liberate sexuality from different and, sometimes conflicting, constraints.

Nevertheless, many people do think of the movements of the 60's and 70's as "the" sexual revolution. So let's briefly examine two primary strategies for sexual liberation during those two decades. We need to remember that "the sexual revolution" wasn't a single, cohesive social movement that completely changed the way

Americans approached sexual relations. Indeed, as Beth Bailey shows in *Sex in the Heartland*, the sexual revolution began much earlier for men than women.⁷ Bailey's book looks at the way in which the so-called sexual revolution played out in Lawrence, Kansas, the home of University of Kansas. While her analysis of Lawrence isn't meant to be representative of the U.S., or even Kansas, it does provide an illustrative comment on how the sexual revolution emerged and change in one all-American town. For example, her discussion of the sometimes violent panty raids (at colleges across the country men stole women's panties) illustrates that the sexual revolution for men was already beginning in the 1950's, and that the male sexual revolution was clearly not revolutionary for women (Bailey 45-48). In another example, even as late as 1967, seven years after "the pill" became available, in ordinary towns like Lawrence, Kansas, having a prescription for birth control was still controversial for unmarried college women (Bailey 118-125).

As the following books will demonstrate, the female sexual revolution had a long way to go and was fundamentally different from a revolution that liberated male sexuality. It wasn't until the mid-1960's, with the help of the student movement and second-wave feminists politics, that the sexual revolution began address the specific needs of women (D'Emilio and Freedman 301-325). For women (and in D'Emilio and

Freedman's analysis, gays), "sexuality emerged more clearly than ever as an issue of power and politics" (308). A book like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, then, is a demonstration of a feminist strategy for sexual liberation that utilizes Kinsey's focus on the value of sexual knowledge.

One of the most popular books for women prior to the feminist sexual revolution of the 1970's was *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) by Helen Gurley Brown. Published nearly ten years after Kinsey's *Female* volume, this book demonstrates just how far an open female sexuality had come, yet how ideas about marriage and monogamy remained the same. Gurley Brown's strategy for sexual liberation bridges Kinsey's liberation from a restrictive culture and the 2nd wave feminists liberation from patriarchal sexual relations. Her "how-to" guide shows young, urban, single women the way to "date around" instead of "settling down," often focusing on how to get the short-term boyfriend to give the single woman presents and cash. Gurley Brown's first chapter, "Women Alone? Oh, Come Now!," establishes the mood of the book. It claims that "single" does not mean "alone." Single, on the other hand, means that girls can have as many guys as they want. However, unlike Kinsey, Gurley Brown does not focus on sexual pleasure and exploration. Rather, she tells young women how to keep themselves unscathed in a man's world. In this way, she's a little more

realistic about the constraints that women live under than Kinsey. But Kinsey would have liked this book because it is practical. It tells a particular set of women how to negotiate the world of pre-marital, heterosexual relationships. Even when Gurley Brown talks about emotions, she gives practical advice for falling in and out of love.

Her best example of practical advice is in her discussions on dating married men. Gurley Brown feels that married men are more plentiful and more interested in a young single woman. First she claims that good men (for love affairs) are hard to find (227). Next, Gurley Brown says, “As a woman grows older and the eligibles become fewer, it becomes increasingly tempting to take a married lover; but it is best to know what you’re in for” (234). Additionally she notes, “To a single woman it sometimes seems as though [married men] are the *only* thing buzzing” (235). Giving advice about dating the Married Man is crucial because it is a reality for many young women. Gurley Brown knows that for a young woman who wants a love affair, being aware of all the options is crucial. Like Kinsey, she wants to deal with the realities of a woman’s sexual life rather than moralizing about its appropriateness. In fact, she warns the recipient of a married man’s affection about having unreasonable expectations: “I think he is much maligned. It isn’t his wife who doesn’t understand him. She understands him perfectly! It’s his girl friend. And what she doesn’t

understand is how come he doesn't get a divorce" (22). His lover must accept the fact that the Married Man is not marriage material first and foremost. He will almost never be available on weekends, holidays, or for all the other typical boyfriend activities. As a result, the woman must learn to be a "player."

Gurley Brown claims that once a woman understands the down side to dating married men, she can better appreciate them for what they do have to offer. She says that the Married Man "will love [her] more passionately" than he does any other woman. He will often be her "devoted slave" while she's free to date others when he's off with the family. He won't like her dating, so she shouldn't be too vocal about her "extra-curricular" activities. Gurley Brown even says that "a potpourri" of married men can be fun. And of great importance to a single girl, they are "frequently marvelous in bed and careful not to get [her] pregnant" (24). Basically, Gurley Brown's advice boils down to the notion that married men make great lovers for experience's sake alone. Her most practical and straight-forward advantage for dating a married man argues, "He is often generous with gifts and money. If he isn't, you can explain to him the economic facts of life." Gurley Brown doesn't explain to the reader "the economic facts of life," but implicit in her argument is that a single woman is a valuable commodity. The Married Man who is often unavailable for her needs should show the

woman, in a tangible way, just how much he appreciates her love and affection. Gurley Brown's *Married Man* advice assumes that young women are interested in sexually satisfying love affairs but warns the women involved to see the situation for what it is the girl's not getting the ring or the evening and weekend time, but she should ensure that she gets more than enough to make up for it, clearly a notion before the sexual revolution for women.

It's not just with married men that Gurley Brown gives this advice. She never says why but she quite clearly believes that when a woman gives a man attention, she sets up an economy in which the man must reciprocate. Because a woman can get lots more attention from members of the opposite sex, the man owes the woman more than simply the pleasure of his company. Gurley Brown argues that the only time it is acceptable for a woman to "Dutch treat" is when she wants to do something that "he hates" (111). Of course, the reverse of this argument is that since men are paying for regular dates, then the single woman must be partaking in an activity that she finds boring. Perhaps that is often the case when a woman is trying to find an suitable partner with whom to have an affair. For example, the one time that Gurley Brown mentions Kinsey concerns the poor state of available men. She says, "I agree with Dr. Kinsey that months or even years may elapse between affairs for most single women,

not because of prudery but because of lack of a suitable him” (228). It seems that putting up with boring dates is a fact of life for the single woman who wants male company from time to time. Moreover, Gurley Brown never tells the single woman that she owes a man anything. When he pays for dinner, he’s paying for the pleasure of her company at dinner. That’s it.

Although Gurley Brown often assumes that a single girl will eventually get married, her book is not a guide for finding a lifetime partner. In fact, her last paragraphs say:

You may marry or you may not. In today’s world that is no longer the big question for women. Those who glom on to men so that they can collapse with relief, spend the rest of their days shining up their status symbol and figure they never have to reach, stretch, learn, grow, face dragons or make a living again are the ones to be pitied. They, in my opinion, are the unfulfilled ones.

You, my friend, if you work at it, can be envied the rich full life possible for the single woman today. It’s a good show...enjoy it from wherever you are, whether it’s two in the balcony or one on the aisle don’t miss *any* of it. (267)

It is a challenge to marriage, but different than Kinsey's. Kinsey wants more of an open marriage rather than no marriage. But Gurley Brown thinks that married women have given up the freedom and simple economy that a single woman has; in this way Gurley Brown pre-dates some of the issues that the feminists will take up only a few years later. In fact, Gurley Brown's vision of the Married Woman here, and elsewhere in her book, is reminiscent of the attitude in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) published only one year later. Like Friedan, Gurley Brown argues that marriage is often bad for women, but for Gurley Brown, an active sex life before or instead of marriage is ideal. Marriage throws the single woman into a different economy with a man — an economy burdened with tradition. Gurley Brown encourages her readers to reconsider such a choice in light of the growing world for single women, but she doesn't want to completely change the way we think of marriage.

Another popular, and probably more important, advice book for women, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1971), both wants to change the way we think of marriage and assumes that women are interested in sexuality as a meaningful part of their lives. Whereas Gurley Brown skips the how-to's of sexual exploration, *Our Bodies'* strategy for sexual liberation encourages women to get to know their bodies in an intimate way. Because they are writing for the sexual

revolution for women, their desire and strategy for sexual liberation is very different than Gurley Brown's. Whereas Gurley Brown seems content to work within traditional power relations between men and women, these second-wave feminists are more interested in challenging those power relations in a fundamental way. And their strategy is able to use Kinsey as well.

The mood of the book is empowering in that it shows partnered and single women how to take care of their bodies. Although the chapter on "Sexuality" refers specifically to Masters and Johnson, it also relies to some extent on Kinsey's data usually from other sources. While this comes almost 20 years after Kinsey, its view of relationships stem from sexual ideologies that are rooted in Kinsey's studies. For example, on page 31, they use a quote from Hackman's *Practical Sex Information* that says both Kinsey and Masters and Johnson support female masturbation as a way of becoming more responsive in relations with others. Also, they cite the Hegelers' *An ABZ of Love* to suggest that when women get distracted they lose their sexual excitement more easily than do men (38). The Hegelers draw their conclusions from Kinsey.⁷ Because the Collective's sources on sexuality use Kinsey, it is no surprise that their advice is a condensed, strictly female-focused version of his work. For these

women, relationships are about growing and discovering oneself with another rather than the need to own or be owned.

In a very Kinseyan paragraph, the book claims, “Only by learning to please ourselves can we have more mutual and honest relationships” (23). Like Kinsey, the focus is about the value of personal development being beneficial to relationships. Again, like Kinsey they note, “Part of the reason so many people have problems about sex is that sexual feelings are thought to be separate or different from other kinds of feelings we have” (24). Here sexuality is just another feeling, a tactile stimulation that has unfortunately been targeted as a dirty or shameful act by many people in a woman’s life. The Collective wants women to understand the unnecessary psychological and emotional damage they might have concerning sex as a result of socialization. While they’re focused on a woman learning about her own sexuality, they also suggest that she learn about sexuality in general and that of her partner. Women need to set an example for men: “Mutuality in lovemaking hasn’t been stressed enough; we need to take more shared responsibility in lovemaking than we have in the past” (35). As with Kinsey’s advocacy of knowledge rooted in bodily experience, women are encouraged to produce and discover knowledge about sexuality so that they don’t get hurt by conventional “knowledge.”

Where these women seem to differ from Kinsey is in their initial stress on the fact that, because of the sexual revolution, women are expected to have sex “without anxiety, under any conditions and with anyone, or [they]’re uptight freaks” (23). Kinsey’s work in part created these “new” problems for women. He certainly advocated sexual experience over sexual reticence. The Collective women seemed more concerned with taking one’s time with sexual liberation—making sure that “liberation” wasn’t another trap for female sexuality. On the other hand, as in Kinsey’s discussion on the benefits of pre-marital sex, they note that learning about one’s sexual self helps one choose appropriate partners. For both Kinsey and the Collective, personal exploration is the key. If a woman chooses to be part of a pair, it should be a pair that suits her tastes and desires. In the end, the BWHC’s strategy for sexual liberation warns against the ways in which a permissive sexual ideology can be used against women, as was the sexual revolution for men.

The reader shouldn’t think that the Collective’s concern about partner choice necessarily encourages pairing off, or marriage. They are simply speaking to the realities that many women live. In that way, their book is a bridge to the novels discussed below. The Collective will not ignore that many of the women they speak to and for are married or desire to be; they do not advocate marriage or complete

relational independence. It seems that the Collective simply wants to be honest about the realities of marriage. For example, they attack American notions of traditional marriage just as Kinsey does. They claim that the “fantasy of romantic love” and marriage can be a “false promise” (29). They see that the implicit assumption in romantic love and traditional marriage is an exclusivity that just doesn’t bear out in real life. For these women, romantic love within marriage is fine so long as it doesn’t play the “fantasy” role as being the foundation of the marriage. I think this is why Kinsey avoided talking about romantic love and sex. These women show that for many women, sexuality is often far removed from the marriage bed of roses. It can show up when women are alone and masturbating, in alarming fantasies, with other women, etc. Not that a marriage based on romantic love is necessarily “bad,” but that it is often a disappointing fantasy for many women. Like Kinsey, for the Collective, sex, love, and marriage are different, although sometimes parallel, spheres.

Erica Jong’s novel, *Fear of Flying* (1973), published ten years after Gurley Brown’s guide and more or less contemporaneous with *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, explores the tension that a married woman faces when contemplating sex outside of marriage. Jong’s heroine, Isadora Wing, simultaneously feels afraid of staying in and running away from her secure married life. She runs away with her lover Adrian, but returns

“home” in the end. Isadora’s problems stem from being rooted in her body. She’s aware of and enamored with her own sexuality; however, when conflicted about what to do with her marriage, Isadora traps herself in the married/single binary—a no-win situation. She desperately wants the security, and I think the familiar love, embodied in marriage, but she also yearns for sexual freedom and love without strings—the “zipless fuck.” In the end, she rejects both the zipless fuck and the maddening security of her marriage. But, however much Jong’s novel may seem revolutionary because of its frank and celebratory treatment of sex and the body, it fails to give any real alternatives for Isadora’s struggles with the dissatisfactions of marriage. She goes back to her husband, Bennett, knowing that she needs an alternative to their stifling marriage, but she cannot name that alternative. Her sense that something about American marriage is wrong is very Kinseyan, but Isadora’s inability to see outside the married/single binary shows that she has no clear strategy for sexual liberation. Because she cannot see that she wants to be liberated from that binary, she has a long way to go if she ever wants to feel at peace with the problems she so well describes.

For example, early on in the novel, Isadora complains about the trappings of marriage. She says, “Underneath it all you longed to be annihilated by love, to be swept off your feet, to be filled up with a giant prick spouting sperm, soapsuds, silks

and satin, and of course, money. Nobody bothered to tell you what marriage was really about” (10). What really bothers her is not “sharing your life with another,” but the American definitions of what marriage should be. The problem here and with the novel in general is that she never discovers what marriage is all about – except to restrain, confine, and procreate. She cannot see that by re-conceptualizing marriage, it can be an institution that provides both security and sexual freedom. In the end, she chooses marriage again only after Adrian leaves her alone in Paris. Faced with “What to do now?” Isadora only knows that she must make a decision, but doesn’t know what she’s deciding about. She says, “Every choice excluded some other choice” (289). In one way she could be arguing that a more open marriage excluded “true love” with her husband, but she never really discusses an open marriage as a choice. All her choices are conventional. Get divorced and date or remarry, get divorced and be a lone wild-woman writer, stay married and reconcile, stay married and have babies. These seem to be the only choices she will allow herself to imagine.

Only once does she get close to a new way of thinking. On the train headed for London, she talks with an American professor about the problems of “permissive” American education. Isadora agrees that there’s a problem but says the problem is that Americans are not permissive enough. She argues that there is “too much

bureaucratic disorganization masquerading as permissiveness.” Furthermore she says, “I meant that genuine permissiveness promotes independence” (304). The real problem with her relationships with men is that she is too dependent on all of them. It seems impossible for her and Bennett to imagine having a mutually dependent marriage based on a permissiveness that promotes personal independence – the viable option that Isadora always overlooks.

In the end, the important question that the novel raises but does not answer is the possibility of a different kind of marriage. Isadora wonders, “It was not clear how it would end. In nineteenth-century novels, they get married. In twentieth-century novels, they get divorced. Can you have an ending in which they do neither?” (311). There is a possibility in which they do neither, but are those committed to the rhetoric of true love strong enough to have it both ways – to have freedom and security? Jong as Isadora doesn’t know. She doesn’t seem to even know how to begin thinking about such a possibility and the reader gets the sense at the end that she’s going back to Bennett to see if he will tell her the answer, if he will give her a strategy for liberation. However, earlier in the novel she shows that Bennett clearly does not have the answers. After a pseudo-threesome between the husband, the lover and the wife mid-

way through the novel (142-3), Bennett pretends it never happened. He still gives Isadora the either/or of marriage as monogamy.

As for Adrian, who does have some unconventional answers – he is in an open relationship – Isadora doesn't begin to understand his approach until he leaves her. She considers that Adrian may have been right about love, that she expects too much out of such a flimsy emotion. Also, she agrees with Adrian that she should identify more with her work than with whatever man she happened to be with at the moment (300). But Isadora implies and argues throughout the novel that it is easy for men to give those arguments because they are men and have been socialized to think so casually about love and so passionately about work. She's afraid that giving in to those arguments means turning her back on her feminine side – constructed and pathological or not. She is addicted to her own pathologies as Woman (her obsessive need for male attention that eventually leads to heartbreak) and does not want to let them go. Looking to a Kinseyan solution to the problems of American marriage means getting over her addiction to the hunt for true love. It means re-defining marriage and sexual relationships. Unfortunately, this novel brilliantly names the problems of American marriage, but does not offer any solutions.

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) attempts to re-define sexual relationships in a way that is far more self-conscious and Kinseyan. This novel tells the story of Connie Ramos, a Mexican-American woman institutionalized for "violent" behavior. Connie is also a "catcher" – a person whose mind is open and receptive enough to be able to make contact with and visit the future. In her visits to the future, Connie primarily contacts one group of people living in a technologically advanced, yet agrarian, egalitarian utopia. Because this novel gives Connie two (or three) settings in which to contemplate sexual relations, its solutions to the problems of American sexual ideologies are clear. For Piercy, an effective strategy of sexual liberation includes a complete socio-political restructuring. Unlike the BWHC and Jong, Piercy's character Connie is not simply a woman, rather she is a poor woman of color at the mercy of degrading social institutions. She cannot begin to "know" herself because of her institutionalization; and even if she did, it would hardly matter. Piercy creates a future world where sexuality is liberated only when all people are liberated from traditional family and social structures. This utopian future completely re-conceptualizes social bonds and relations.

Connie first discovers the nature of sexuality in the future through her "sender," Luciente. Luciente talks of sexuality in Kinsey's terms. That is, when asked

about how people relate romantically, she answers that future people have sex with many different people for many different reasons. Answering Connie, who unthinkingly connects sex and childbirth, Luciente says her people have sex “[f]or love, for pleasure, for relief, out of habit, out of curiosity and lust. Like you, no?” (64). Of course, Connie understands these reasons for having sex; they’re almost cliché. Connie herself has had husbands and lovers; and she’s not particularly prejudiced against homosexuality. But, like a Kinseyan subject, what she or her 20th century friends practice is different from what she preaches. What has felt good and right in her sexual history is often very different from how her culture tells her she should feel.

For example, Connie describes the strangeness of her friends of the future as childlike. She uses the term in an almost denigrating way. Connie exclaims to herself, “Indeed, they were like children, all in unisex rompers, sitting at their long kindergarten tables eating big plates of food and making jokes” (75). Connie has internalized the psychoanalytic notion concerning what counts as proper adulthood being differentiated by gender and having monogamous attraction for members of the opposite sex. What is most interesting, however, is that when she thought Luciente was a man, she was interested in him sexually (64). But, upon finding him to be a

female, Connie quickly orients herself to what she understands as a womanly friendship with Luciente. Even so, at intimate moments between the two it is clear that Connie feels confusion because she has “improper” feelings for Luciente. Once, during a time travel experiment, Luciente and Connie literally put their heads together:

Hardly ever did she embrace another woman along the full length of their bodies, and it was hard to ease her mind. She could feel Luciente concentrating, she could feel that cone of energy bearing down on her. It reminded her of the old intensity of a man wanting...something her body, her time, her comfort that bearing down that wanted to grab her and push her under. But she was weary and beaten and she let herself yield. What had she to lose? (68)

In the next paragraph, Connie lets go by remembering that Luciente is a woman and she would not have to worry about sex with her. She began thinking of her as a close woman-friend. Here, Connie feels uncomfortable with the childlike ease of an open sexuality that is not bound by arbitrary rules of an age gone by.

Connie also remembers one of her first sexual encounters as a child when she sees two young children at sex play. When she first sees the two children, she wants

someone to stop them. But her friends do not understand her. Then she remembers sex play with two of her brothers when she was a child: one experience which was unpleasant and one experience which she enjoyed. The experience that she enjoyed was with a nicer brother. The play was consensual and mutual. On the other hand, her experience with her cold-hearted older brother was not mutual, even if it was consensual. Connie's older brother, Luis, simply pulled down her pants and poked at her. He used her body not for pleasure, but as a spectacle. We wonder if Connie's experience with Luis would have been better had it been more pleasurable and mutual if she could have explored his body. For she describes the mutual exploration of each other's bodies with her younger brother as a "pleasurable game" (139). She knew she was not supposed to enjoy sex play with her brother, yet the narrator ends her musings thinking, "But not one ounce of Connie's flesh believed it had done her any harm" (139). So while Connie often rises up in fear, disgust, or confusion over the child(like) sexuality of the future, after consideration she realizes that her own pleasurable experiences are those of childlike wonder and exploration.

Another example from her own life that Connie repeatedly calls up from her memory is that of her former long-term lover, Claud. Claud, in many ways, was childlike in bed with Connie even if she never uses those terms. Connie explains that

partially because of his blindness, Claud took his time exploring, feeling her body having “her pleasure opening out full and slow in her” (109). Obviously, being blind didn’t automatically make Claud a good lover or childlike. But one can’t help but get the feeling in reading Connie’s memories that because he was a poor, blind, black man, taken advantage of over and over again by those with power and money, that Claud seemed somehow childishly vulnerable to her. And she let herself be childishly vulnerable with him. She claims that “his blindness took her off guard” (109). As in most power relations, there’s more going on in Connie’s pleasurable sexual relations than simply the exploratory nature of a child’s sexuality. As an abused woman, Connie needed to feel safe with those whom she has enjoyed sexually. However, I can’t help but see that besides the security factor, good sex in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is synonymous with an exploratory attitude towards sexuality.

In the end, there’s not that much real difference between Connie’s world and Luciente’s world as far as people’s practices are concerned. However, in Luciente’s world, these practices are accepted. Just as Kinsey suggests that reactions to sexuality cause more damage than the actions themselves, Piercy shows that this is true in the contrasting worlds of her characters. Both Connie and Luciente have had several sexual relationships, but Connie’s twentieth-century America disapproves of her

relations whereas Luciente's future world encourages such relations. The novel preaches the Kinseyan message in a way that conserves Kinsey's revolutionary spirit.

A radical sexuality isn't simply about sex before marriage, it is a completely different way of conceiving the way in which human beings relate to each other, something Joan Jacobs Brumberg fails to understand when she calls for the "protective umbrella." All four books by these post-Kinsey women writers show the very real psychological and social pitfalls of connecting sexuality with ownership of another human being. Traditionally, women have been most often the victims of relationship as ownership, and often this happens for the sake of "protection." Moreover, even in an era in which we can talk and think intelligently about these issues, many women, as Jong especially shows, are psychologically wedded to the idea of marriage as ownership. It seems that we can, at best, only imagine a world where security and freedom co-exist. Obviously the world has changed greatly since these women writers working before and after the so-called sexual revolution, but most people still think of marriage in terms of sexual monogamy and a romanticized ownership. Thirty years later feminists need to ask what it is that we are resisting and why. What does a strategy for sexual liberation mean to us now in this new century?

Conclusion: Developing a Strategy for Sexual Liberation in the 21st Century

“Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are.”

-Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”

The strategies of sexual liberation that I have discussed in this project can be read in at least two ways. One way of reading Kinsey and the women after him might say that they have helped us discover the truth about sexuality. We could say that once upon a time we held antiquated notions about female sexuality and that now, thanks to Kinsey and women’s lib, we know better. However, another way of reading these writers, and better I think, shows that they refused “the truth” about the sexuality of their respective moments in time. I’ve shown, for example, that Kinsey refused several conventional truths about female sexuality in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. While I admire his work, I do not think that we need to refuse the same truths that Kinsey, or the women after him, refused. Instead, we need to use their strategies to refuse our own truths of this century.

It seems to me that controversies around sex and women today center on the desire for a universal, if not natural, femaleness. Today our idealized female is both physically and psychologically healthy. She has a toned body and makes “responsible”

decisions. This, for example, is the truth that Brumberg desires when she idealizes adult female sexuality. She wants girls to grow up to become emotionally healthy women; only then they can make “the right” decisions about their sexuality. I think that many people, conservatives and liberals alike, would agree that teenagers aren’t emotionally mature enough to make “responsible” decisions about sex. As a culture, we assume that adults make “good” decisions and know what’s best--especially when the conversation concerns children. However, if we think about it, adults make “bad” decisions about sex all the time. Adults have unplanned pregnancies, carry and spread sexually transmitted diseases, and have sex in situations that they later regret. Are these behaviors any less “unhealthy” for adults as for minors? But that isn’t the point. The point is that we imagine ourselves as adult and healthy. Indeed, as adults we have a social responsibility to be healthy. Therefore, if we imagine ourselves to be healthy, then refusing what we are sexually means refusing the rhetoric of a “healthy sexuality.”

But how do we refuse the rhetoric of health? Perhaps we should look to Kinsey one last time to understand what such a refusal means. Kinsey was part of a historical moment that was deeply concerned with social health. When he began his work in the 1930’s, the General Education Movement was taking root in American universities. This progressive era social movement was concerned with, among other things, how

education could impact social health and disease. As a result many schools “provided broad courses in college adjustment and guidance, in the methodology of learning, or in contemporary civilization” (Berlin 92). Kinsey’s team-taught Marriage Course, the replacement for the hygiene course, was an example of these kinds of general education classes.

Understanding Kinsey’s involvement in General Education helps to illuminate his strategy for sexual liberation. When he first began his research he used the general concern for social health as a means to institute a more permissive sex education at Indiana University. He wanted to transform a social moralism into a scientific moralism. Indeed, in 1953 Kinsey claims:

[W]e have recently seen poorly established distinctions between normality and abnormality lead to the enactment of sexual psychopath laws which are unrealistic, unenforceable, and incapable of providing the protection which the social organization has been led to believe they can provide. (*SBHF* 8)

Here Kinsey uses a concern for the social organization to justify re-thinking categories of normality. Just as Kinsey used his science against earlier appropriations of science, it seems that we may once again be at a point where we can use one scientific rhetoric

against another. Today we can use this strategy to think about how we make “poorly established distinctions” between healthy and unhealthy. What if, like Kinsey, we radically re-conceptualize a healthy sexuality?

I want make clear that I’m not saying that we shouldn’t be “healthy.” Indeed, as the Boston Women’s Health Collective showed, a desire for physical and psychological health can be an extremely effective strategy for sexual liberation. My point here, however, is to recognize that, ultimately, all strategies for sexual liberation can become a moralistic agenda, including one of health. For example, today many people don’t talk so much about good and bad sex as about healthy and unhealthy sex, the distinction hinging upon the presumed morality of monogamous loving relationships. Hence one might argue that this rhetoric of health and disease is not inherently different from my dad’s moralistic concerns about sex, and it can serve as the basis for moral condemnation of anyone who participates in what gets labeled as “unhealthy” sex. Gay AIDS victims, for example, are too easily condemned for what is perceived to be their indulgence in “unhealthy” sex. We may therefore need to refuse the rhetoric of healthy and unhealthy sex: Kinsey is useful strategically here because he argued again and again against defining sex in moralistic terms. His scientific description of

behaviors removed the implicit stigma in a label like “unhealthy”: *this is what people actually do.*

Once again, instead of focusing on an idealized version of health, we need to look at what people actually do. At a fundamental level, “what people actually do” concerns pleasure. A rhetoric of health often overlooks why people make so-called irresponsible decisions about sex; most people make decisions about their lives that reward them, that bring them pleasure, in one way or another. Even if young women aren’t “mature” enough, as Brumberg argues, to understand their body’s pleasure making capabilities, when they participate in sexual activity they are no doubt receiving some sort of pleasure, even if “only” psychological or social. My problem with the Brumberg model and abstinence education in general is that it assumes that young people can be protected from pleasure. Of course, no one says “pleasure,” instead it is disease, pregnancy, abuse, etc. But young, old, or in-between, what people actually do when they have sex is engage in a pleasurable activity. Otherwise, they wouldn’t do it. What we have to remember is that what some people call pleasurable, others call “perverted” power relations.

Unfortunately, the scope of this project does not permit a full examination of the rhetoric of a healthy sexuality and pleasure. If I continue work on sexuality, I

would like to analyze artifacts from contemporary culture that speak of sex in terms of health and disease. Moreover, one related issue that needs more examination is the pleasure-power binary. First, we need to think about what “pleasure” means. Who has a right to sexual pleasure and who doesn’t? As some critics of Kinsey suggest, does focusing too narrowly on individual pleasure undermine the importance of power relations in a sexual relationship? These are difficult questions that I cannot easily answer. Any reader interested in what it means to refuse the rhetoric of health, and to re-conceptualize pleasure, might look to the works of Gayle Rubin and Pat Califia. Like Kinsey, these two writers provide intelligent and insightful commentary on sexualities that are marginalized.

Notes

¹ Jones claims that Kinsey used the garden to teach his children about sex so that it came about gradually and naturally rather than a “lecture” about the sex act. The children claim to have known the basics of sex by the time they were five or six, with information getting more detailed as they grew older. Additionally, to ensure that their children felt comfortable about the human body, the parents “practiced and encouraged a good deal of nudity in the household” (Jones 260-1).

²Indeed, Althusser, possibility because of the differences between European and American education, does not address the tension in the University between competing agendas. Moreover, in some ways reminiscent of Kinsey, he argues that Science is outside the realm of ideology. Although I have to say that it seems that Kinsey, no matter how much he believed in the power of science, understand that it operated in the context of something bigger, the University.

³ I refer to Kinsey as the author of these reports even though he had help in the form of Clyde Martin, Wardell Pomeroy, and Paul Gebhard. However, all of those involved in the project acknowledge that the project was Kinsey’s first and foremost.

⁴ A note needs to be made here about birth control. Kinsey was an advocate of birth control. For example, Jones reports that Kinsey told his graduate and Marriage Course students how to use, store, and reuse condoms (274, 330).

⁵ Kinsey lost his funding from the NCRS (via the Rockefeller Foundation) in part because of the McCarthy hysteria gathering around Kinsey’s “perverted” work.

⁶This episode is complicated because of Alice’s relation to Kinsey and the research. Kinsey chose the other two couples involved in the research, the Pomeroy’s and Gebhard’s, based on the fact that both husbands and wives were already practicing open relationships. But Kinsey did not hand-pick Alice. Rather, because he wanted Martin to have more authority as an interviewer, Kinsey pressured Martin to get married after Martin was already involved in the

research . It seems as though Alice Martin's aversion to open sexual relationships didn't become evident until Gebhard joined the group shortly before publication of the *Male* volume (Gathorne-Hardy 247).

⁷ Unfortunately, my analysis here does not address the complexities of the sexual orientation aspects of "the sexual revolution." But the reader should understand that these discussions and strategies aren't simply about heterosexual relations.

⁸ *An ABZ of Love* (1963) is a Danish sexual encyclopedia of sorts that relies heavily on Kinsey's work. See pages 12, 30, 31, 62, 71, 153, 219, 254, for just a few examples.

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