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Research Strategies, Library Tools, and Resources Used in Writing “Sexperts and Sexpertise”

The process of researching and writing “Sexperts and Sexpertise: The Demands of the Cold War Era Professionals in the Bedroom,” was an intellectual challenge for me, and an opportunity to use the Kinsey Library. Writings about 1950s sex advice publications have examined the effects of the publications on the sex lives of married couples, and the place of sex publications in the 1950s mentality of “domesticity.” I wanted to pursue a similar course, but explore more deeply the intricacies, contradictions, and impacts of the specific instructions *within* marriage manuals and women’s magazines, and what failing to follow those instructions may have meant to 1950s couples on a personal level.

My research strategy for most essays has been to explore a wide range of sources on a shallower level; typically, it has not been necessary to read many of them in full. Yet, in the case of “Sexperts and Sexpertise,” I needed to deeply read a small number of primary sources in full to grasp the nuances in the instructions of specific publications, and the contradictions within and between publications. Most of my research was devoted to carefully reading *Love Without Fear: How to Achieve Sex Happiness in Marriage*, “Why Premarital Sex is Always Wrong,” and *Sex in Marriage*. Even so, I explored secondary sources on a wider level typical of my other projects. I used them to look at the context that fostered the phenomenon of “sexpertise.” My secondary source articles helped me to explain the 1950s fascination with psychology and expertise, and the extensive ideologies of domesticity and marriage—the reasons why the instructions in my primary sources had such a firm hold on couples in the 1950s

“Sexperts and Sexpertise” allowed me to familiarize myself with basic library tools. I wrote this essay for my J300 history course, the first class at IU where I needed to use the library. Because I was learning to use IU library tools, my use was very unsophisticated compared to what I would do now. I focused on learning the basics: becoming comfortable with using IUCAT to find sources online, and then learning to track down those sources within the library. I pulled my secondary sources from the Wells Library East Tower Stacks, and West Tower Undergraduate Core Collection.

My unique approach to using library resources for this essay was to do some of my primary source research at the Kinsey Library. As my essay demonstrates, I am very interested in American sex and gender history. I had wanted to find a way to use the Kinsey Library ever since I came to school at IU. I picked this essay topic because studying a sex-related topic in the 1950s would allow me to do that. Two of my three primary sources were from the Kinsey Library, and while I was still narrowing down my topic, I was able to explore a variety of other sources in Kinsey, and interact with the staff—who provided helpful ideas and suggestions for sources. This also gave me a sense of the research possibilities to be found in the other libraries on campus besides Wells.