

# “A Noble Experiment”

## The Marriage Course at Indiana University, 1938–1940

DONNA J. DRUCKER

This was a noble experiment. Most of the lectures brought me material that I was ignorant of. For the first time, I had the opportunity to receive information on sex from reliable sources. However, it was not merely the biology side which was informative. To me, the information should serve as a basis for a successful married life.

Male student from fall 1938 session<sup>1</sup>

The front page of the *Bloomington Daily Telephone* on June 23, 1938, carried an article entitled “I.U. to Offer Course in ‘Marriage.’” Unnamed Indiana University (IU) officials praised the proposed faculty-run, twelve-session, noncredit course: “Dependence on our civilization

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<sup>1</sup>“Summary of Student Answers,” November 1938, folder 5, series V.A.1.i., box II, Alfred C. Kinsey Collection, Kinsey Institute Archives, Bloomington, Indiana.

is largely a matter of preserving the family on a high level. . . . The course on marriage to be offered at Indiana University is intended to help family conditions.” Next to news about recent hot weather and the comings and goings of IU professors, notice of the course likely generated little interest in the small, south-central Indiana town. However, the course would become increasingly popular and controversial until the resignation of its lead faculty member, zoology professor Alfred C. Kinsey, in September 1940. The marriage course proved to be an important moment in Kinsey’s intellectual history. Fascinated by the intimate sex histories of course participants that he had begun to record, and discouraged by the turn to laboratory work in evolutionary biology, he gave up teaching the course after seven sessions in order to focus on the initial data for what would become his two largest and most comprehensive works, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*.<sup>2</sup>

Marriage courses appeared on two- and four-year college campuses across the country beginning in the late 1920s, amid dramatic cultural change in the lives of teenagers and college-aged young people. Secular educators attempted to teach Christian morals and values while realizing that modern technology and urbanization had irreversibly transformed marriage. The first version of the IU marriage course in summer 1938 (with one important exception) followed the standard format of other marriage courses throughout the United States and echoed many established themes of the burgeoning marriage course movement and the scientific field of sexology. The course included optional personal conferences with the lead instructor, also a common practice. But Kinsey’s lectures for the course began to diverge from standard marriage instruction rhetoric. The shift began when students told him how much they appreciated learning about the uniqueness of people’s sexual anatomy and desires, and when he began to do more intensive research in sex, with data from marriage course students and from other nonstudent groups. As Kinsey discovered the diversity of sexual behavior among undergraduate and graduate students, faculty wives, and heterosexuals and homosexuals in Chicago and northern Indiana, his lectures opened

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<sup>24</sup>I.U. to Offer Course in ‘Marriage’: In Form of Series of Lectures and Will Be Open to Selected Group,” *Bloomington Daily Telephone*, June 23, 1938, p. 1; Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, 1948); Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, and Paul H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, 1953).

broad questions about sexuality that the marriage course, with its obvious focus on improving nuptial bonds, was not designed to answer. As changes in the texts of Kinsey's lectures show, over time he focused less on how a healthy sex life enriches and stabilizes marriage and more on a broad range of human sexual experience. While the question of sex in marriage would remain one focus of Kinsey's analysis, it would no longer be the only one.

Changes in Kinsey's lectures during the marriage course show his increased interest in applying his own version of scientific method to sex research. The importance of a biological approach to social problems, which Kinsey first learned from his graduate advisor, William Morton Wheeler, became increasingly clear to him as he gathered sex histories and read more widely in the developing field of sexology. As historian Stephen Garton has written, the study of early sex research "is a means of exploring how sexologists, psychiatrists, hygienists, sociologists, and reformers constructed commonplace knowledge about sex." This article shows how Kinsey constructed human sexuality, for his students and for himself, using his conception of scientific method. Based on more than twenty years of biological research, he learned (and taught) that a large sample size and broad geographic distribution were necessary if a research project were to yield significant results. Those precepts, combined with faith in standard scientific method (observation, recording, and interpretation of naturally occurring entities and events), would be solid foundations on which he could base valid conclusions. As he wrote to his friend and former graduate student Ralph Voris in late 1939, "We will prove to these social scientists [psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociologists] that a biological background can help in interpreting social phenomena." After he gave up the marriage course in September 1940, Kinsey was able to devote most of his research time to gathering sex histories, downplaying the counseling angle of the individual conference, refining his interviewing technique, and figuring out patterns in his data, using scientific method as he did so.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the history of sexuality, it is important to chronicle both national (even global) figures like Kinsey who have shaped societal

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<sup>3</sup>Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution* (New York, 2004), 200; William Morton Wheeler, "The Termitodoxa, or Biology and Society," in *Foibles of Insects and Men* (1920; New York, 1928), 205–17; Alfred C. Kinsey to Ralph Voris, c. October 1939, Voris File, Alfred C. Kinsey Correspondence Collection [hereafter KCC], Kinsey Institute Archives.

ideas about sexual behavior, and those individuals who changed their sexual behavior and mindset as a result of new knowledge and shifts in contemporary social mores. Much of what we can learn about IU students' reactions to the marriage course comes from their written course evaluations. Students not only provided feedback on the course itself but also defended it against campus gossip, supporting Kinsey as pressure for his resignation grew. Their comments suggest how seriously they took the course and reveal their dislike of lecturers who spoke in unhelpful generalities or predicted married lives full of strife. The comments also provide insight into the development of Kinsey's thinking and teaching on sex and suggest how young people in a small midwestern college town were managing their sexual feelings and desires.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, I contest the common perception that the IU marriage course and Kinsey's sex research in general were the products of Kinsey's overripe obsession with sex, as biographer James H. Jones has argued. Jones postulates that Kinsey moved from studying gall wasps to studying human sexuality with such intensity and thoroughness because he was driven by guilt about his homosexuality, masturbation, and self-mutilation. For Jones, all of Kinsey's work is rooted in that guilt, despite the fact that Kinsey himself never made connections between his personality, his sexual identity, and his work, and despite the fact that Jones admits that "almost certainly, Kinsey did not consider himself a homosexual or masochist."<sup>5</sup> Compounding the difficulty of Jones's theory, most of his claims about Kinsey's sex life come from interviews with three anonymous sources. Neither Jones nor his fellow Kinsey biographer Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, who interviewed the same anonymous individuals, has released the interview transcripts for other scholars to verify. Facing unverifiable quotes from anonymous sources, it is difficult to lend credence to such claims about the relationship of Kinsey's sex life and work. Instead, this article will suggest that Kinsey's interest in studying sexuality stemmed from his failure to advance a comprehensive

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<sup>4</sup>Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 5.

<sup>5</sup>James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York, 1997), 170. For further examples of guilt as a motivating factor for Kinsey's research, see pp. 22–23, 76, 288, 353, 368, 391–94, 481–82, 518–19, 532, 607–10, 738, 753, 772–73. In his review of *Alfred C. Kinsey*, the historian Thomas Laqueur criticized Jones's work for "the absence of even the semblance of evidence for Kinsey's inner state." Thomas Laqueur, "Sexual Behavior in the Social Scientist: Was Alfred Kinsey a Pioneer or a Pervert?," *Slate*, November 5, 1997. Available from <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe> (December 15, 2006).



Alfred C. Kinsey examining a  
Schmitt box of gall wasps, 1940

By 1940, prompted by his findings in the marriage course, Kinsey was moving away from the taxonomic work he had done with wasps and toward his groundbreaking work on human sexuality.

*Indiana University Arbutus*

theory of evolution through his gall wasp work. As Kinsey had consistently taught sex education methods to college students and heredity to high school students, he was well positioned to bring the techniques of scientific method to bear on a topic he had already examined from a biologist's perspective. As Kinsey's entomological career slowed following a poorly received book on evolution, he sought to make his mark on another field in which he already had a measure of expertise. The marriage course was a pivotal moment in Kinsey's life, as he turned from studying gall wasps toward studying human sexuality, with his full complement of taxonomic skills intact.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey*, 322, 335–36, 338, 343, 346–47; Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Kinsey: Sex the Measure of All Things: A Life of Alfred C. Kinsey* (1998; Bloomington, Ind., 2004).

Marriage courses in the United States were one way that social reformers sought to address what they viewed as the “marriage crisis” of the 1920s and 1930s. The 1920s had seen significant changes in gender roles and sexual mores in American society: woman suffrage, the rise of popular Freudianism, public debates over artificial birth control (and thus the separation of sex from procreation), an increasingly visible youth culture, and the rise of what Colorado judge Ben Lindsey would name “companionate marriage.” In this type of marriage, romantic love and sexual congruence took priority over financial stability and family background, and adults made their own choices about partners with little to no parental input, no expectation of children, few moral qualms about divorce, and unproblematic use of pre- and post-marital birth control. In his desire to hold on to some traditional values in the face of such increasingly popular marital choices, Ernest Groves, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, began teaching junior and senior men the skills he thought they needed to navigate dating and mating in a new social climate. Drawing from his classes and from his individual conferences with many of the students, Groves wrote a textbook on marriage education; and with the publication of *Marriage* in 1933, the pedagogical movement began in earnest.<sup>7</sup>

By 1938—when Kinsey began the IU marriage course—marriage education in high schools and colleges was a small industry, with approximately 250 U.S. colleges and universities hosting such courses. Marriage courses often combined lecture and small-group discussion, or lecture and individual conferences with instructors as regular features. The most prominent figures in marriage education—including Groves, Joseph Kirk Folsom (Vassar College), and Henry Bowman (Stephens College)—used the personal conference as part of standard marriage course practice. Evidence does not support Jones’s statement that “[student] conferences allowed Kinsey to transform his private needs into professional duty,” at least not in that statement’s implication that Kinsey’s conferences were somehow uniquely voyeuristic. Kinsey dif-

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<sup>7</sup>Estelle Freedman and John D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988), 265; Rebecca L. Davis, “‘Not Marriage at All, but Simple Harlotry’: The Companionate Marriage Controversy,” *Journal of American History*, 94 (March 2008, forthcoming); Beth Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love: The Marriage Education Movement in the United States,” *Journal of Social History*, 20 (Summer 1987), 715; Howard W. Odum, introduction to *American Marriage and Family Relationships*, by Ernest R. Groves and William F. Ogburn (New York, 1928), 5; Ernest R. Groves, *Marriage* (New York, 1933), vii–viii.

ferred from other marriage education instructors not because he conducted personal conferences during his marriage course, but because those personal interviews came to take priority as a means of gathering scientific data on sexuality.<sup>8</sup>

Kinsey's shift from studying gall wasps to the marriage course, and then to studying human sexual behavior, came in the context of more general changes in the study of entomology and evolution. By the mid-1930s, Kinsey's taxonomy-based gall wasp research was increasingly out of sync with the laboratory-based focus of the new intellectual movement known as the evolutionary synthesis. He learned, from presenting his own evolutionary theory at a 1936 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that the audiences for evolutionary studies expected synthetic theories with broad applications, regardless of his insistence on the limited nature of his conclusions. Kinsey was not interested in changing his entomological research methodology to match evolutionary theory's new emphasis on mathematical population genetics, so he made a decision, over time, to adapt his scientific method to a human research population.<sup>9</sup>

Kinsey's fifteen years of work with secondary science educators (and students in the field) on the teaching problems associated with the subject of human reproduction also factored into his decision to become involved in the marriage course. His guide to teaching high school

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<sup>8</sup>"The Future Adventure," *Living*, 1 (January 1939), 18; Henry Bowman, "Report of Committee on College Courses in Preparation for Marriage," *Marriage and Family Living*, 3 (May 1941), 37; "First Marriage Course Given to Seniors at North Carolina," *Michigan Daily*, September 27, 1938, p. 17. For examples of marriage course instructors using the individual sex conference, see J. Stewart Burgess, "The College and the Preparation for Marriage and Family Relationships," *Living*, 1 (May–August 1939), 39–42; Mary A. Johnson, "A Course in Human Relations at Brooklyn College," *Living*, 1 (November 1939), 73–74; Moses Jung, "The Course in Modern Marriage at the State University of Iowa," *Living*, 1 (May–August 1939), 43, 50; Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey*, 346–64, esp. 353; Bailey, "Scientific Truth...and Love," 721–22. For Groves's and Bowman's use of the individual sex conference, see Henry Bowman, "The Marriage Course at Stephens College," *Marriage and Family Living*, 3 (February 1941), 8–9, 11; Bowman, Flora Thurston, and Margaret Wylie, "The Teacher as Marriage and Family Counselor [sic]," *Marriage and Family Living*, 6 (November 1944), 76–78; Groves, *Marriage*, x.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, *The Origin of Higher Categories in Cynips* (Bloomington, Ind., 1936); Kinsey, "Supra-Specific Variation in Nature and in Classification from the View-Point of Zoology," *American Naturalist*, 71 (May–June 1937), 206–22; George Gaylord Simpson, "Supra-Specific Variation in Nature and in Classification from the View-Point of Paleontology," *American Naturalist*, 71 (May–June 1937), 236–67; Richard Goldschmidt, "Cynips and Lymmatia," *American Naturalist*, 71 (September–October 1937), 508–14; Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Genetics and the Origin of Species* (New York, 1937), 137, 229, 245, 257.

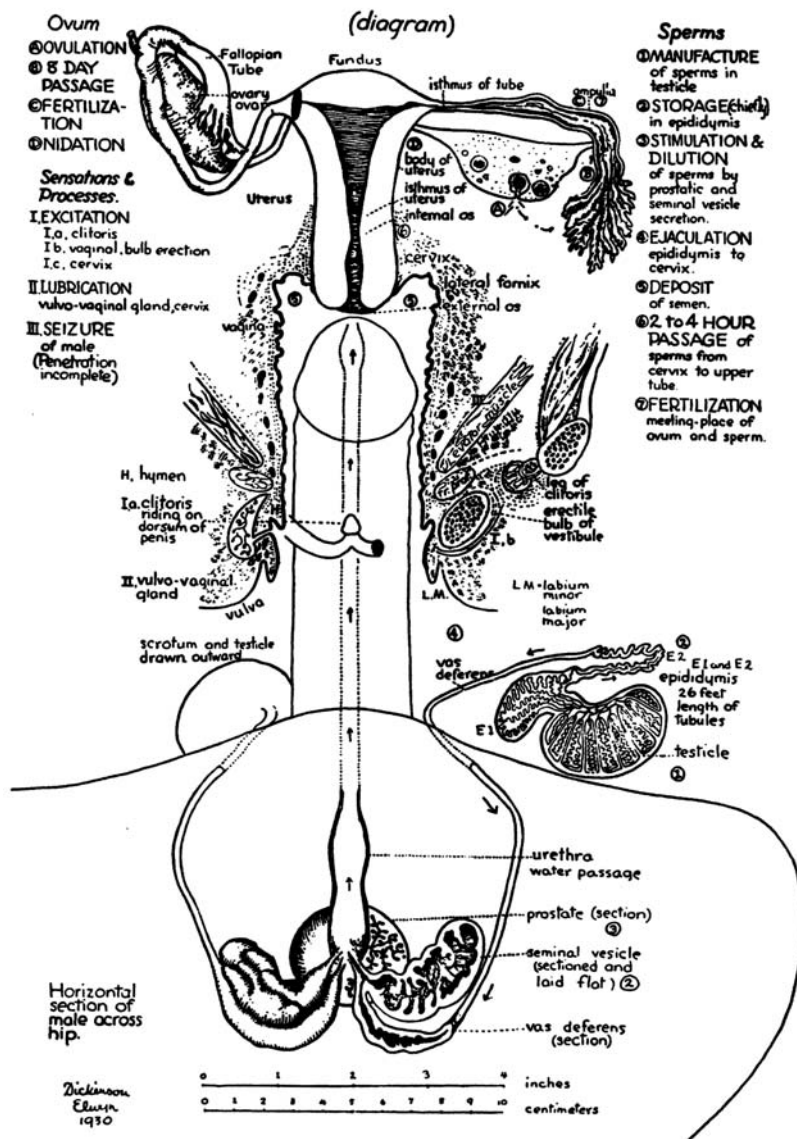
biology (*Methods in Biology*) and archival records of his involvement in Indiana high school biology curriculum development suggest that he had given considerable thought to the problem of teaching human sexuality (including masturbation and venereal disease) and reproduction to young people before the marriage course began. He argued in *Methods in Biology* that if sex and reproduction were taught without “any reference to the social and moral problems involved, and above all avoiding any emotional display in the presentation of the material, the reactions of the students should present no difficulties.” Kinsey also identified a more serious problem underlying poor sex education. “Under the guise of science,” he continued, “we too often have sex instruction which is a curious even if a well-intentioned mixture of superstition, religious evaluation, and a mere perpetuation of social custom.” Kinsey thought it best to use his version of the scientific method (large sample size, wide geographic distribution, and data obtained by observation) for evaluating materials to teach high school students about biology and human reproduction. His approach to teaching college students about sex would be no different.<sup>10</sup>

In early 1938, an informal IU student group, including leaders of the Association of Women Students (AWS), contacted Kinsey about chairing a course in the summer. There were many reasons why some among the 6,000-member IU student body became interested in hosting a marriage course. First, some students had likely become aware of the growing number of marriage courses at other campuses through reading the *Indiana Daily Student* “Collegiana” column (which compiled news from campuses across the country). Second, college-aged men and women were acquiring venereal diseases (mostly gonorrhea and syphilis) in increasing numbers across the country in the late 1930s, and students may have wanted advice on how to prevent infection before marriage or on how to manage the effects of the diseases. Third, students had grown increasingly less interested in the kinds of vague advice

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<sup>10</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, spring 1932 final exam, May 31, 1932, folder 3, series V.A.6, box II, Kinsey Collection; “Dr. Kinsey to Conduct Round Table Discussion on High School Biology,” *Indiana Daily Student* [hereafter *IDS*], July 30, 1938, p. 4; “Faculty Members to Give Talks at Extension Center,” *IDS*, February 4, 1939, p. 2; Minutes of American Association for the Advancement of Science in General Education, April 30–May 1, 1938, Columbus, Ohio, folder 4, series V.C., box II, Kinsey Collection; [Indiana] Committee on Secondary School Science Curriculum, “Tentative Draft of Science Education in Indiana High Schools,” February 1943, folder 5, series V.C., box II, Kinsey Collection; Kinsey, *Methods in Biology* (Chicago, 1937), 200–201.





“Relation between Penis and Structures at Sides of Vagina,” Robert Latou Dickinson, *Human Sex Anatomy* (Baltimore, 1933)

Alfred Kinsey made lantern slides from this book to show students in the IU marriage course, 1938–1940.

Courtesy Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

offered by religion-oriented marriage educators, including longtime campus marriage instructor and IU School of Medicine professor Thurman B. Rice. Rice thought that couples should not learn anything about sex before marriage but instead should learn through trial and error afterward. The information in his marriage course lectures never went beyond vague comparisons to amphibian and mammalian reproduction. IU students also regularly complained in the *IDS* about the dullness and uselessness of Hygiene 101, a required one-hour health course for campus freshmen. Fourth, Kinsey was already discussing sex education in his biology pedagogy classes for secondary education students, and those students would have been aware of his expertise in the subject. There was a ready on-campus audience for a course on marriage that offered some clear and practical advice on its realities, including sex, law, economics, pregnancy, and family dynamics.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, recent local crackdowns on student life, both on and off campus, may have fostered general student discontent with IU authorities. In November 1937, soon-to-retire Dean of Women Agnes Wells forced the closing of a popular off-campus bar, Nick's English Hut, for being less than two hundred feet from a church. But students—underage and over twenty-one—still knew where to obtain moonshine and homebrew. Female students were banned from smoking on campus but lit up anyway, and students owned cars in ever-higher numbers even though they were forbidden from driving on campus. Cars literally moved the university's social life off-campus, and opportunities for unsupervised mixed-sex outings expanded significantly. In their second sociological study of Muncie, Indiana, *Middletown in Transition* (1937),

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<sup>11</sup>"Enrollment Figures Show All-Time High of 6,106 Students at Indiana University," *IDS*, October 8, 1938, p. 1; "Collegiana," *IDS*, October 13, 1937; "Scannin' Collegiana," *IDS*, February 12, 1938, p. 4; "Include Sex Education Course in Curriculum, Say Students," *Michigan Daily*, October 19, 1938, p. 1; Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York, 1985), 147–49; "University Physician Favors Student Wasserman Tests," *IDS*, February 15, 1938, p. 1; "For a Progressive Indiana," *IDS*, February 15, 1938, p. 4; *IDS*, April 17, 1938, p. 4. Wasserman tests had become available at the University of Kansas in December 1937; see Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 225n19. "Dr. Thurman B. Rice to Speak at Meet: I. U. Medical Professor to Lead Discussions on Marriage at Summer Conference," *IDS*, May 28, 1938, p. 3; Katharine Bement Davis, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women* (New York, 1929), 66–67; Julian B. Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 10 (April 2001), 244–45; letter to the editor, *IDS*, March 8, 1938, p. 4; letter to the editor, *IDS*, October 31, 1939, p. 4; letter to the editor, *IDS*, November 8, 1939, p. 4.

Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd pointed out that young people increasingly used the freedom and privacy of the automobile for intimate encounters, even as teachers, librarians, and parents refused them information about sex. Requesting a marriage course that offered more detailed and practical information than the obligatory hygiene course or the Christian-based lectures advertised in the weekly religion section of the *IDS* may have been another way for students to express their discontent with the extant rules governing their mobility and actions, to learn more scientifically about their bodies, and to study the behaviors in which some of them were already engaging.<sup>12</sup>

Fourteen students, including leaders of the AWS, Pan-Hellenic Council, Inter-Fraternity Council, and Blue Key, signed the original petition, given to new university president Herman B Wells on May 14, 1938.<sup>13</sup> The marriage course also had the initial support of the new dean of women, Kate Hevner Mueller. It is not clear if the AWS asked Kinsey to lead the course or if he offered to do so; in any event, he became its chair. (While Jones and Gathorne-Hardy both state that Kinsey approached the AWS to volunteer to lead the course, the two AWS members whom they interviewed could not remember who approached whom. Mueller thought that Kinsey volunteered to give the course but could only confirm that her office was not involved in starting it.) The IU Board of Trustees approved the request on June 9, 1938, and Kinsey recruited seven other IU faculty and staff members to lecture on their areas of specialty. Part of their work as a group involved becoming familiar with literature on marriage education, family life, reproductive biology, and sexuality. The new chair was no exception, although he already had ideas on how to teach the last topic. Kinsey wrote letters requesting

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University: Midwestern Pioneer: Vol. 3, Years of Fulfillment* (Bloomington, Ind., 1977), 57–61; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York, 1937), 168–69, 171; Theodore Newcomb, “Recent Changes in Attitudes toward Sex and Marriage,” *American Sociological Review*, 2 (October 1937), 662, 667; Joseph K. Folsom, “Changing Values in Sex and Family Relations,” *American Sociological Review*, 2 (October 1937), 720–22; William S. Bernard, “Student Attitudes on Marriage and the Family,” *American Sociological Review*, 3 (June 1938), 356, 359–60.

<sup>13</sup>The marriage course at the University of Michigan was also formed by a joint student-faculty committee. See “Sale of Tickets for Marriage Lecture Series is Tomorrow,” *Michigan Daily*, October 30, 1938, p. 1; “Marriage and the Campus,” *Michigan Daily*, November 2, 1938, p. 4; Marriage Relations Course File, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

information from other college marriage educators and read transcripts of published college marriage courses. He also found illustrations for his lectures from the obstetrician/gynecologist Robert Latou Dickinson's *Human Sex Anatomy* (1933). After working through the suggested readings, the instructors also previewed each other's lectures, as did many of their spouses, in order to offer feedback and critique before presenting them to course participants. The marriage course was ready for its first student audience.<sup>14</sup>

The first notice for the summer 1938 marriage course in the classified section of the *IDS* stated its basics: "A non-credit series of twelve lectures on legal, economic, sociologic, psychologic, and biological aspects of marriage will be available for the first time during the Summer Session." The course would remain elective throughout its history so that students would attend because they wanted to, not just to gain extra credits. Lectures took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7 p.m., and

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<sup>14</sup>Board of Trustees Minutes, June 9, 1938, vol. II, pp. 259–60, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, Indiana; Christine Carlson et al. to Herman B Wells, May 14, 1938, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers, Indiana University Archives; *Bloomington Daily Telephone*, June 23, 1938, p. 8; Herman B Wells, *Being Lucky: Reminiscences and Reflections* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980), 100; Clara MacMillen Kinsey, interview by James H. Jones, typescript, December 10, 1971, Center for the Study of History and Memory, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana; Kate Hevner Mueller, interview by James H. Jones, p. 18, typescript, April 1, 1971, Center for the Study of History and Memory; Kate Hevner Mueller to Alfred C. Kinsey, October 25, 1938, Mueller File, KCC; Beth Bailey, "Scientific Truth...and Love," 718–20; Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey*, 322, 326, 828n36, 829n53; Gathorne-Hardy, *Kinsey*, 124–25, 151, 473n2. Kinsey's recommended options for the marriage course faculty included: Davis, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*; Gerrit S. Miller Jr., "The Primate Basis of Human Sexual Behavior," *Quarterly Review of Biology*, 6 (December 1931), 379–410; William S. Taylor, *A Critique of Sublimation in Males* (Worcester, Mass., 1933). Marriage course faculty reading list, c. June 1938, folder 1, series V.A.1.k, box II, Kinsey Collection. Hannah M. Stone and Abraham Stone, *A Marriage Manual: A Practical Guide-Book to Sex and Marriage* (New York, 1935); Raymond Squier, "The Medical Basis of Intelligent Sexual Practice," in *Plan for Marriage: An Intelligent Approach to Marriage and Parenthood*, ed. Joseph Kirk Folsom (New York, 1938), 113–37. Robert Latou Dickinson, *Human Sex Anatomy: A Topographical Hand Atlas* (Baltimore, 1933); Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey*, 831n18. Herman B Wells to Fowler Harper et al., July 9, 1938, Wells File, KCC; Kinsey to Wells, July 19, 1938, Wells File, KCC; Wells to Kinsey, July 21, 1938, Wells File, KCC; Edith Schuman, interview by James H. Jones, typescript, September 15, 1971, Center for the Study of History and Memory; Kinsey, "Indiana University Marriage Course—Fall 1938," c. November 1938, folder 1, series V.A.1.l, box II, Kinsey Collection; Harvey J. Locke, "Outline of Family Disorganization," July 28, 1938, Marriage Course 1942–43, Folder (9081-25), John H. Mueller Papers, Indiana University Archives.



The Chemistry Building at Indiana University, c. 1931  
The marriage course lectures were held in the building's auditorium.

Courtesy Indiana University Archives

applicants (who had to be married, engaged, or have senior class standing) needed to meet with Kinsey for admission. The location of the first session of the course is not clear, but from the fall 1938 session onward the sessions took place in the IU Chemistry Building auditorium. Ninety-eight students (twenty-eight men, seventy women) signed up for the first session of the course. The preponderance of women in this first session was likely due to the support of the AWS and the presence of the six male instructors' wives.<sup>15</sup>

"Biologic Bases of Society," the opening lecture of the first session of the IU marriage course, echoed the language that Kinsey had used in *Methods in Biology* to discuss teaching sex education in secondary schools. Kinsey began by pointing out that, in contrast to the significant amount of research on the reproductive behaviors of social insects, research on human pairing and sex behavior was comparatively scanty, and that general information about it was more often based on "gossip and guesses" than on scientific fact. Human marriage, he went on, was

<sup>15</sup>"Course in Marriage," *IDS*, June 22, 1938, p. 3; "Summary of Student Answers," August 1938, folder 1, series V.A.1.i, box II, Kinsey Collection.

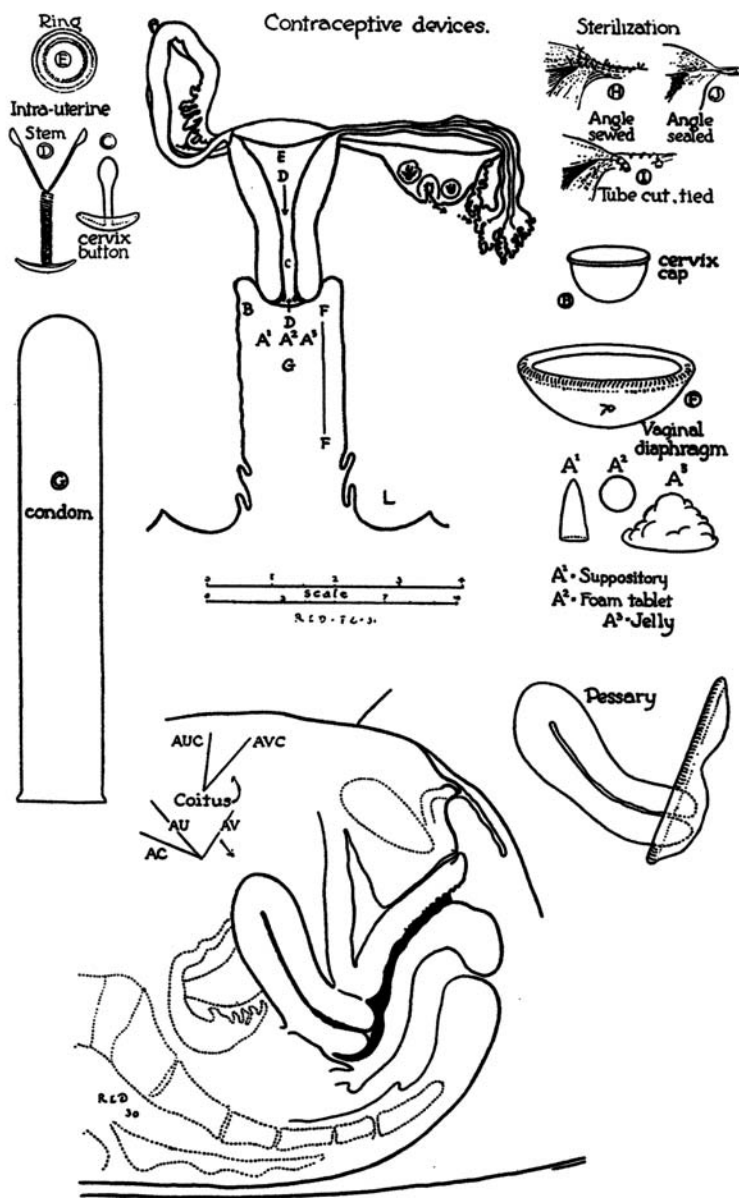
necessary to protect and raise children, but delaying sexual intercourse often psychologically damaged those who remained virgins until wed. Delaying marriage until the mid-twenties, as was increasingly common, not only precluded adjusting to another person's sexual desires and becoming familiar with one's own, but also made adjusting to married life difficult in general. Given that taboos against premarital intercourse were unlikely to change anytime soon, and "adequate and mutually satisfying means of contraception" were unreliable or hard to obtain, the marriage course would provide tools for students to tackle their difficulties. Kinsey concluded his lecture by telling students that "each man in his own field will present something of the special material which will provide the material by which you can work out your own solution." While he did not explicitly advise students to experiment with sex before marriage, many students heard this lecture as a tacit admission that doing so would be good for their health.<sup>16</sup>

Kinsey's second lecture, "Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology," was the fifth in the series. He showed black-and-white lantern slides of male and female embryonic genitalia in development, then genitals of mature men and women. He informed students that coitus was impossible without erection, but that women did not need to be aroused for intercourse to occur; and that the clitoris, not the vagina, was the primary source of women's stimulation, although many men were unaware of this. The next slides were of penile erection, aroused male and female genitals, and different coital positions, all from Dickinson's *Human Sex Anatomy*. Kinsey briefly covered pregnancy prophylaxis (tubal ligation, vasectomy, condoms, and diaphragms) but warned the audience that his lecture was only a glimpse of what sex was and what it meant in marriage:

It is quite possible to know all that need be known about the anatomy and physiology of reproduction and still grasp nothing of its art, but our excuse for bringing you this much of such material is a conviction that absolute ignorance makes it impos-

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<sup>16</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, "Biologic Bases of Society," June 28, 1938, pp. 1, 7, 11, folder 1, series V.A.1.g, box II, Kinsey Collection; Howard M. Parshley, *The Science of Human Reproduction: Biological Aspects of Sex* (New York, 1933), 300–301, 304; Davis, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*, 65; Squier, "Medical Basis of Intelligent Sexual Practice," 125, 127–28; Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses, *New Girls for Old* (New York, 1937), 191.



“Contraceptive devices,” Dickinson, *Human Sex Anatomy*  
Illustrations like this one showed marriage course students the proper position of prophylactics.

Courtesy Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

sible to become a master of anything. So I give you this much and we [the other instructors] give you the material in the later hours with the conviction that knowledge can do no harm and may be the means of working out adjustments that are fundamental.

At the end of this lecture, Kinsey reiterated the theme of his first address, that the “art” of sex was essential to happy marriages. Ideas on how to learn that art might be found in books such as *A Marriage Manual* (which he recommended for student reading) and *Human Sex Anatomy*, but Kinsey subtly placed more emphasis on “working out adjustments” in practice than on reading about them. “Reproductive Anatomy” was as explicit as lectures on sex in marriage education courses got, mirroring lectures by physicians such as Raymond Squier at Vassar College.<sup>17</sup> In this lecture, however, Kinsey left the question of when students should actually learn the art of reproduction—before or after marriage—unanswered.

In “Individual Variation,” the seventh lecture in the series, Kinsey emphasized the variations of human genitals and sexual behavior. Kinsey drew graphs on the chalkboard of average clitoris and penis lengths, showing in some cases how their lengths overlapped. His aim in doing so was to show how men and women diverge both within and between the sexes, and to demonstrate that these divergences blur rather than reify sexual differences. Furthermore, Kinsey advised, there was no such thing as abnormal behavior, as “nearly all of the so-called sexual perversions fall within the range of biologic normality.” As many men were ignorant of the fact that female orgasm was comparable to male orgasm, they needed to learn that most women needed manual stimulation of the clitoris to ensure sufficient lubrication for penetration and orgasm. While women could have intercourse without being aroused, as Kinsey had stated in the “Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology” lecture, if their husbands were skilled lovers there was no

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<sup>17</sup>Squier, “Medical Basis of Intelligent Sexual Practice,” 119; Alfred C. Kinsey, “Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology,” July 12, 1938, p. 13, folder 1, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection; Stone and Stone, *Marriage Manual*, 158–59; Davis, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*, 66–67, 69; Carter, “Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease,” 238–39, 247; Jessamyn Neuhaus, “The Importance of Being Orgasmic: Sexuality, Gender, and Marital Sex Manuals in the United States, 1920–1963,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 (April 2000), 456–57.



reason that they should have to. Knowledge of individual variation in marriage would lead to mutual respect and understanding as partners worked patiently toward achieving what Kinsey posited as a primary goal of marital coitus—not children, but simultaneous orgasm. This lecture, like “Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology,” informed students that their bodies and thoughts were normal, that it would take time to reach a mutually satisfying pattern of behavior, and that orgasmic equality (with the implied use of birth control) was a crucial element in successful marriages.<sup>18</sup>

Law professor Fowler V. Harper delivered the second and fourth lectures, which outlined basic legal guidelines and procedures for marriage and divorce. The third lecture, probably by Kate Mueller, does not survive. Zoology professor Robert L. Kroc gave the sixth lecture of the course, “Endocrine Basis of Sex and Reproduction.” Kroc discussed male and female hormonal development, menstruation, ovulation, pregnancy, and menopause. He also told the students that women could not depend upon a safe time in their hormonal cycle to prevent pregnancy; he recommended condoms, diaphragms, or abstinence as reliable forms of birth control.<sup>19</sup>

After Kinsey’s lecture on variations, Edmund S. Conklin, chair of the psychology department, spoke on the psychology of sex and love. Conklin downplayed the importance of sex in marriage and emphasized many other possible reasons for marital unhappiness. The next lecture, given by Kroc, covered the biological reasons for fertility and sterility. The final lectures of the course came from sociologist Harvey Locke, who dourly surveyed the state of modern marriage and who, like Conklin, downplayed sex as a basic factor in marital happiness; campus women’s doctor Edith Schuman, who spoke mostly about venereal diseases and their effects on women and children; and history professor Albert L. Kohlmeier, who praised the role of marriage in human devel-

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<sup>18</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, “Individual Variation,” July 19, 1938, pp. 1, 5, folder 3, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection; Squier, “Medical Basis of Intelligent Sexual Practice,” 120; Stone and Stone, *Marriage Manual*, 172–73; Neuhaus, “The Importance of Being Orgasmic,” 450, 457–58; Blanchard and Manasses, *New Girls for Old*, 196, 198; Paul Popenoe, *Preparing for Marriage* (Los Angeles, 1938), 10–12.

<sup>19</sup>Fowler V. Harper, “The Legal Aspects of Marriage I,” June 30, 1938, folder 3, series V.A.1.d, box II, Kinsey Collection; Harper, “Legal Aspects II,” July 7, 1938, folder 4, series V.A.1.d, box II, Kinsey Collection; Robert L. Kroc, “Endocrine Basis of Sex and Reproduction,” July 14, 1938, folder 2, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection.

opment but also advised against “too much” sex or sex in “vulgar” yet unspecified ways.<sup>20</sup> Thus the first IU marriage course contained a series of competing messages about marriage, sexuality, sexual practices, and men’s and women’s roles in intimate relationships.

After the second-to-last lecture, Kinsey passed out questionnaires to the students. He compiled the anonymous data (except for gender) from all ninety-eight, recording his aggregate results on a copy of one of the forms. He (or an assistant) then typed out the written comments in long lists, one for the course as a whole and others for each lecture individually. The questionnaire began with a series of general queries about the entire course; ninety-seven respondents said the biology section was most significant to them and fifty-five wanted the “Individual Variation” lecture to expand into two lectures, one focusing on sex education for children. The respondents agreed that men and women should hear the lectures together; that the course should continue as a noncredit elective; and that enforcing mandatory attendance at all lectures reinforced the importance of attending the whole series. Kinsey noted that he had met with thirty-two students individually regarding “marital problems and personal sex adjustments.” Those conferences, as Kinsey would tell Herman Wells, were not just opportunities for advice, but actually became the first sex histories Kinsey collected. He kept the specific data from his conferences confidential but shared the results of the questionnaire with Wells and the other instructors.<sup>21</sup>

Students responded enthusiastically to the course as a whole. According to their comments, the course gave them confidence about themselves, fulfilled a genuine need for knowledge not available elsewhere, gave them new understandings of life, and fostered healthy attitudes about marriage. And while the instructors had largely intended the

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<sup>20</sup>Edmund S. Conklin, untitled lecture, July 21, 1938, folder 4, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection; Robert L. Kroc, “Human Sterility,” July 26, 1938, folder 5, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection; Harvey J. Locke, “Family Disorganization,” July 28, 1938, folder 6, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection; Edith Schuman, “Medical Aspects of Marriage,” August 2, 1938, folder 7, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection; Albert L. Kohlmeier, “Ethical Aspects of Marriage,” August 4, 1938, folder 8, series V.A.1.b, box II, Kinsey Collection.

<sup>21</sup>Locke, “Family Disorganization,” pp. 1, 9; “Summary of Student Answers,” August 1938. Lectures were transcribed from the original presentation in order that students who missed lectures might read them. Kinsey occasionally spoke before or after a lecture, and his comments were recorded on the typescript.

course for senior collegians, a slightly older woman (perhaps a faculty wife or graduate student) wrote in detail about how the course material affected her:

30 yrs., female, married. I can't say I had any particular need to be met now—but it was of the greatest interest to me that had I heard the lecture on Individual Variation several years ago it would not have taken my husband and me several years of patient endeavor to have worked out a certain aspect of sexual adjustment, for we would have been put on the right track and needn't have worried and experimented our way along ignorantly until we finally stumbled upon the solution to our problem.

Comments on the first session of the marriage course strengthened Kinsey's conviction "that knowledge can do no harm and may be the means of working out adjustments that are fundamental." For the woman quoted above, earlier knowledge of genital anatomy and the basic mechanics of arousal, coitus, and orgasm would have saved her and her husband years of unsatisfactory sex and probably tension over other matters as well. Indeed, in 1928 Katharine Bement Davis had found that while 257 of 438 women said that knowing more about sex beforehand would have helped them adjust to married life, only 29 thought that that knowledge would have caused them harm. In his obstetrical practice, Dickinson also discovered that women had orgasms more easily from marital coitus if they had had a premarital medical exam and sex instruction, if not premarital sex. Based in part on work like Davis's and Dickinson's, Kinsey's lectures in particular struck a chord with the audience. The first session of the marriage course was a success.<sup>22</sup>

The marriage course was taught a second time in the fall semester of 1938. Word had clearly spread among returning students; the *IDS* published two articles and an enthusiastic editorial, stating that IU was now among the 250 American colleges and universities offering such a

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<sup>22</sup>"Summary of Student Answers," August 1938; Kinsey, "Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology," p. 13; Davis, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*, 66; Robert Latou Dickinson, *A Thousand Marriages* (Baltimore, 1931), 85; Angus MacLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford, 1999), 163–65.

course. Kinsey was particularly excited about the case histories he had collected. Wells was impressed with the synopsis of comments from the summer session: "Your summary of student answers to the marriage course questionnaire is sufficient proof of the worthwhileness of the course, if there were no other substantiating evidence." Kinsey also gave copies of the summary to the marriage course staff, telling them that "the results of our questionnaire indicate nearly unanimous approval of our program while offering constructive criticisms that should help in our further presentations."<sup>23</sup>

Course content changed and expanded from the summer. Edmund Conklin was not invited back (Kinsey wrote "given one semester only" across the top of Conklin's lecture). Kinsey added a lecture on "Sex Education." New lecturers included Professors Carroll Christenson and James Moffat, who both spoke on the economics of marriage; Bloomington obstetrician William Reed, who lectured on pregnancy; biologist Raymond Pearl, visiting from Johns Hopkins, who spoke on marital problems using examples from his own case histories; and John Mueller, who discussed the sociology of the family.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of the term, Kinsey again compiled the student comments to pass out to course staff, Wells, and the IU trustees. Overall, the students deemed the course a success (some lecturers notwithstanding). While the majority reacted positively to the course as a whole, their comments reflected gendered differences in students' reception of the information. Married and unmarried women admitted that they had been in the dark about sex and were open to hearing about both the spiritual highs and unromanticized lows of marriage. The men as a group wanted as much information as possible about the manifestations of intercourse—more position ideas, illustrations, verbal descriptions, and films. They were also more likely to request instruction on contraception and abortion. Some male students were clearly coming to the marriage course with a measure of sexual experience or knowledge that the women, unless they were

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<sup>23</sup>"The Marriage Course," *IDS*, September 28, 1938, p. 4 and "200 Are Enrolled for 16-Lecture Marriage Course," p. 2; "I.U. Will Offer Lecture Course on Marital Life," *IDS*, September 20, 1938, p. 3; Alfred C. Kinsey to Herman B Wells, September 12, 1938, Wells File, KCC; Wells to Kinsey, September 14, 1938, Wells File, KCC; Kinsey to marriage course staff, September 12, 1938, folder 1, series V.A.1.j, box II, Kinsey Collection.

<sup>24</sup>Carroll Christenson, "Marriage Course Lecture IV," [October 5, 1938], folder 4, series V.A.1.g, box II, Kinsey Collection; William Reed, "Pregnancy and Labor," [November 16, 1938], folder 7, series V.A.1.g, box II, Kinsey Collection.

married, did not—or pretended not to—have. Kinsey and the marriage course staff may or may not have noticed such differences in their audience. If they did, perhaps they thought it best to balance men's unscientific sources of knowledge with women's lack of knowledge and to use scientific data as a means of creating a level playing field for both.<sup>25</sup>

Before the spring 1939 series began, Kinsey shared the most recent student evaluations with the marriage course staff. He also updated Voris, a professor at Southwest State Teachers College in Springfield, Missouri, on the wealth of information he was finding in the case histories. Kinsey's correspondence makes clear that, while some of the sixty-four men and thirty-three women brought more than one problem to the private meetings, a handful of issues preoccupied most of them. Fifty-nine of the students, he wrote, wanted advice on petting, twenty-nine on premarital intercourse, thirty on reproductive anatomy and physiology, and thirty-six on masturbation. Nine also asked about homosexuality. The histories were beginning to dominate Kinsey's attention. In this interval, Kinsey also had an unpleasant exchange with Rice, who thought that the course's lectures on sex were designed for prurient rather than educational purposes. Kinsey was treading on turf that physicians had claimed for themselves, and Rice was angry that he had not been asked to participate in the course. Kinsey replied that Rice's concerns were unfounded, but Rice was unconvinced that Kinsey had genuinely answered his objections: "The course has set up a chain of circumstances over which you have no control, being responsible only for the first link."<sup>26</sup>

In early spring 1939, the *IDS* published articles on the upcoming session of the marriage course, praising its new, more liberal admission policy: any student over twenty-one, regardless of class standing or marital status, could sign up.<sup>27</sup> The comments collected at the conclusion of

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<sup>25</sup>"Summary of Student Answers," November 1938; "Indiana University Marriage Course Case Histories," c. November 1938, folder 1, series V.A.1.m, box II, Kinsey Collection.

<sup>26</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey to marriage course staff, January 11, 1939, folder 2, series V.A.1.j, box II, Kinsey Collection; Kinsey to Ralph Voris, November 28, 1938, Voris File, KCC; Kinsey to Voris, January 17, 1939, Voris File, KCC; Thurman Rice to Kinsey, February 18, 1939, Rice File, KCC; Kinsey to Rice, February 28, 1939, Rice File, KCC; Rice to Kinsey, March 8, 1939, Rice File, KCC.

<sup>27</sup>The precise composition of the spring 1939 course is not clear, as the lectures for this session no longer exist. Edith Schuman had stepped down after two terms; Raymond Pearl did not return to guest lecture. Schuman, interview; Alfred C. Kinsey to Herman B Wells, May 19, 1939, Wells File, KCC.



Thurman B. Rice laying the cornerstone of the Indiana State Board of Health building in Indianapolis, 1948  
Rice opposed Kinsey's marriage course and helped to convince university president Herman B Wells to ask Kinsey to stop chairing the course.  
Courtesy IUPUI University Library Special Collections and Archives

that session of the course continue to show that students had no singular reaction to the presentation of sexual material, although their thoughts on premarital sexual behavior were less clearly gendered than before. Some who had already planned to stay chaste before marriage reported that the sex-related lectures helped them to learn more about their bodies so that they could be better spouses in the future. One man thought that "these discussions tend to discourage fornication, because we realize now that satisfactory intercourse is obtained only after *many* attempts—and attempts now out of wedlock will only prove embarrassing." A woman agreed: "I believe a thorough understanding of one's own body means less fear of it. An intelligent attitude makes for a stronger will power and self-control and realization of the importance of preserving a

healthy body for marriage.” Others wanted to put their sexual knowledge to use immediately or even saw it as a seduction tool. One man declared that “frank discussion never leads to so many maladjustments as repression,” and another believed that “most girls are glad to know that the fellow has taken this course. It gives them an assurance to know that if pre-marital intercourse is done the fellow knows plenty about it.” All of the students agreed on two principles: that “knowledge can do no harm” and that “you can work out your own solution.” What they did with their newfound knowledge was up to them, and in their course comments they expressed appreciation that Kinsey trusted them enough to handle it.<sup>28</sup>

Kinsey was a busy man in the summer of 1939, as he was not only leading a fourth session of the marriage course but also beginning to travel to Chicago and northern Indiana to begin another sort of research—gathering the sexual histories of homosexual men and their heterosexual friends.<sup>29</sup> Inspired by the sex histories he had already taken in the marriage course, he set off to find more. While he considered the job of educating students about marriage important for their health and well-being (in one instance, Kinsey requested that an IU physician provide ongoing treatment for a student with gonorrhea), the data he was gathering about human behavior—and his method for collecting it—had the potential to make a broader impact on American society. He had come to an understanding of the potential significance of his own work, as he began to envision how an objective, scientific approach could transform the study of sexuality beyond marriage and bring it to a wider audience. Kinsey wrote to Voris:

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<sup>28</sup>“Marriage Course to Meet Monday,” *IDS*, February 2, 1939, p. 1; “Marriage Course Open to Many,” *IDS*, February 3, 1939, p. 1; “Questionnaires Valuable,” *IDS*, February 9, 1939, p. 4; Alfred C. Kinsey, “One Prof Says,” *IDS*, February 4, 1939, p. 4. Compiled student questionnaire data, April 1939, folder 8, series V.A.1.i, box II, Kinsey Collection. Emphasis in original.

<sup>29</sup>Before the summer session, both Christenson and Kohlmeier resigned from the course in disagreement with Kinsey’s emphasis on the “vulgar” aspects of marriage. IU law professor Bernard Gavit replaced Harper in the legal section of the course, and Kinsey replaced Kohlmeier with a pair of lecturers who would discuss marriage in explicitly religious terms: Rev. W. E. Moore of the local First Christian Church for the Protestant perspective and Father Thomas Kilfoil of St. Charles Borromeo Church for the Catholic perspective. Fowler V. Harper to Alfred C. Kinsey, August 13, 1939, Fowler V. Harper File, KCC; W. E. Moore, “Protestant Conception of Marriage,” March 20, 1940, folder 14, series V.A.1.e, box II, Kinsey Collection; Thomas Kilfoil, “The Ethical Aspects of Marriage,” February 19, 1940, folder 5, series V.A.1.e, box II, Kinsey Collection.

Then, of course, this marriage course program has prospered and multiplied work. In the first four semesters we have had 100, 200, 230, 260=790 students. A few flurries with unfavorable criticisms from older faculty who had no firsthand knowledge—but even that is gone. The students would do anything for us, their appreciation is so great. We have their written comments at the end of each semester. Several have written personal letters to express their appreciation for their personal benefit. Following your suggestion, we have tapped fraternity house gossip and find the course treated *most* considerately. The Gridiron [football] banquet brought only one reference to it—a reprimand to a couple of boys for having engaged in biologic activities “without benefit of Kinsey’s course in connubial calisthenics”. . . . [The course] has given us a wealth of material by which, Mr. Man—I hope to prove to the world someday that any subject may be a profitable field for scientific research if zealously pursued and handled with objective scholarship.

While Kinsey was willing to pass on a joke about the course to Voris, he also saw the potential to add to scientific knowledge about sexuality, “if zealously pursued and handled with objective scholarship.”<sup>30</sup>

Before the fall 1939 course began, the student editorial board of the *IDS* again commended the course for its meaningfulness to a broad variety of participants, from traditional coeds to older attendees. Perhaps members of the editorial board had heard of the resignations of Schuman, Kohlmeier, and Christenson; the objections of Rice; or the unpleasant campus gossip. Whatever the case, IU students were protective of the marriage course and wanted to guard it from administrative interference. Kinsey was also receiving positive responses from others: parents of marriage course students thanked him; former students asked him for personal advice about new marriages and requested sex education lectures in their hometowns; and the director of the Bloomington Hospital nursing school thanked him for his lectures to nursing

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<sup>30</sup>Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey*, 369–74; Kinsey to Voris, c. December 1939, Voris File, KCC; Kinsey to Voris, July 6, 1939, Voris File, KCC. Emphasis in original.



### Speaking of Courses

And so they were married and lived happily ever after . . .

The University has begun where the fairy tales end. We speak of the marriage course.

The course is necessary. Enrollment has increased 45 members over the first semester enrollment of last year. If anything necessarily increases after a one year trial, there is fair reason to believe it has been at least moderately successful.

The course is worthwhile. Many comments have been heard on this score. It offers for the most part an open presentation and discussion of those questions that so often have troubled not only youth starting out in life, but more mature persons who had to find out what marriage meant without at least a chance of recognizing many of its problems.

The course is progressive. Each semester it changes to include only what is deemed to be important to the student body. New material from other universities is presented.

*Indiana Daily Student* editorial

September 29, 1939

The student newspaper's editorial board defended Kinsey's marriage course at the onset of its fifth session.

*Courtesy Indiana Daily Student*

students. As outside criticism of the course grew, the students' defensive posture would only become stronger (as exemplified in the comments for the spring 1940 session).<sup>31</sup>

Change was definitely in the air in spring 1940, as the sociology professors (including John H. Mueller, Kate's husband) had resigned from the marriage course as a department. They complained in a letter

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<sup>31</sup>"Marriage Course to Begin Monday," *IDS*, September 21, 1939, p. 1; Alfred C. Kinsey, "Copy of Report to the President and Trustees," c. May 1939, folder 3, series V.A.1.j, box 2, Kinsey Collection; "Marriage Course," *IDS*, September 22, 1939, p. 2; "Marriage Course Shows Increase of 45 This Year," *IDS*, September 28, 1939, p. 1; "Speaking of Courses," *IDS*, September 29, 1939, p. 4; R.L. to Kinsey, November 17, 1939, KCC; Kinsey to Mrs. R. L. C., December 19, 1938, KCC; M. A. C. to Kinsey, October 7, 1939, KCC; M. E. Y. to Kinsey, May 15, 1939, KCC.

to Wells that “the importance of the work of the sociologists in the course is much less than had been anticipated.” Despite that ominous prelude, the spring 1940 session proceeded, with Kinsey giving revised versions of the four lectures that he had given in previous sessions (he added the fourth, “Sex Education,” in the fall 1939 session). In “Bases of Society,” he asserted that “individuals can reach their finest development as a result of marriage.” Such optimism about the place of marriage in the human life cycle had been less prominent earlier in the course, suggesting that Kinsey took seriously students’ belief that marriage could indeed be a means to happiness. However, “Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology” revealed distinct changes in Kinsey’s thinking and teaching over the past year and a half. As he had stated concerning the basics of coitus in a summer 1938 lecture: “It is quite possible to know all that need be known about the anatomy and physiology of reproduction and still grasp nothing of its art.” At that time, Kinsey had not gone into detail about how to learn such an art, beyond recommending *A Marriage Manual* and hinting that premarital experimentation was wise. In this session, Kinsey spent more time on the mental stimulation accompanying arousal, foreplay, and intercourse—not precisely a discussion of the “art” of sex but of how attraction begins and then changes over time:

In the human erotic reaction, we depend on a combination of physical and psychological stimulation. The capacity of an individual to respond to a psychological stimulus depends on the previous experience the individual has had, [and] the set that he has toward it, so that ultimately there may be built up such mental associations around sexual contacts that the psychological stimulus alone will bring forth erotic response.

In the space of a year and a half, Kinsey had shifted from suggesting that premarital sex would make marital sex more pleasurable—and blaming “prudish ideas” for sexual unreadiness—to testing broader theories on the development of human arousal and sexuality in general.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Edwin H. Sutherland to Herman B Wells, January 14, 1940, Wells File, KCC; Alfred C. Kinsey, “Bases of Society,” February 5, 1940, p. 1, folder 1, series V.A.1.e, box II, Kinsey Collection; Kinsey, “Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology [Summer 1938],” July 12, 1938, p. 13, folder 1, series V.A.1.b, Kinsey Collection; Kinsey, “Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology,” February

The same lecture also included, for the first and only time in the marriage course, Kinsey's thoughts on the relationship between sex and love. Even as he argued for the importance of love and happiness in inspiring and sustaining marital relationships, he insisted that feelings and emotions could not withstand the scientific scrutiny that sex could. Whatever his personal feelings on the subject, he had little use for love as a point of scientific inquiry:

Now intercourse consists of a series of physiological reactions which are as mechanical as the blinking of an eyelid. . . . Emotional acceptance of this series of physiological events may be what you recognize as love. It may provide the inspiration for the writing of the poet, and the philosopher, of all mankind, but fundamentally, at base, the first part of the story is a story of mechanical responses which are as inevitable when the stimuli are provided as any other ordinary reflex of any other part of the body.

In this analysis, love was, at its most fundamental level, an emotion that people attributed to a natural desire for intercourse. Perhaps attaching feelings to sex was unique to humans, but the desire for intercourse and reproduction was not, as Kinsey illustrated through the example of male moths following the scent of females from miles away in order to mate with them. Love was not physiological, but it could become part of the "mental associations around sexual contacts" that people would bring to their sex lives. Neither did love guarantee or even portend a mutually satisfying sex life in marriage. Finally, Kinsey added that while birth control may have separated sex from procreation, it did not separate idealizations of love from marriage. In this version of the "Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology" lecture, Kinsey began to articulate one of the guiding principles of his future research: to understand the nature of human sex behavior, it was necessary to divorce sexual behavior from

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21, 1940, p. 12, folder 6, series V.A.1.e, box II, Kinsey Collection. Kinsey's findings on the psychology of sexual response would take an entire chapter of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, and the chapter's introduction would use nearly identical language. Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 642–89, esp. 643–44.

love. Behavior and even arousal were quantifiable phenomena that could be observed and studied objectively, but love was not.<sup>33</sup>

The 1940 version of the lecture on "Individual Variation," while framed in a marital context, was not much concerned with the wedded life. It was a thumbnail sketch of how Kinsey was beginning to tackle problems beyond the scope of the marriage course. Kinsey articulated three additional developing principles of his sex research: first, that the only kinds of abnormal sex were none at all or those which caused harm; second, that all other forms of sex, however rare, were simply variants on the complex continuum of human behavior; and third, that sex researchers were likely to bias their results according to their own values, and thus should make a special effort to be neutral:

There is practically nothing in human sexual behavior . . . which deserves the term abnormal in the sense that it interferes with physiological well-being. There are cases when you might label a phenomenon abnormal in the sense that it interferes with the well-being of the species and in connection with that the only sexual abnormalities are celibacy, refusal to marry; abstinence [*sic*], failure to have intercourse; and delayed marriage, and that is a very different list than is ordinarily given in the books. In actuality, the classification into normal and abnormal that is usually made merely represents the type of behavior that the classifier has not happened to engage in.

Further, Kinsey identified the problem of understanding the interrelationship of the sexual body and social culture, stating that the reasons behind human behavior were never easily explainable: "It is one of the most difficult factors for the student of biology . . . even more so for the student of sociology to determine how much is environmental and how much is acquired." Even a decade later, when he published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey felt he still had not solved this fundamental problem to his satisfaction, but neither had anyone else.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, "Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology," 10–11; J. Howard Howson, "Emotional Maturity and the Approach to Marriage," in *Plan for Marriage*, ed. Folsom, 60.

<sup>34</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, "Individual Variation," pp. 9, 7, February 28, 1940, folder 8, series V.A.1.e, box II, Kinsey Collection; Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, pp. 295, 327.

Kinsey's last lecture in the spring 1940 series was "Sex Education." He was aware that many in the audience had never heard a forthright lecture on the subject, and so he designed the talk as much for the adults as for their future children. He began by arguing that sex education should be given to children by parents and not "experts." Parents should begin sex instruction when the child was between five and seven years of age, when sex had no erotic connotation and before he or she would begin to learn about it from other children. Both boys and girls needed to know that having sexual feelings was a healthy sign of growing up, and that sublimation of such feelings usually caused emotional harm: "I have seen people who are completely unstrung by the attempt to avoid it and get along without sexual outlets." Boys especially needed to learn that masturbation was not harmful, as they had on average 3.5 orgasms per week in adolescence, compared to less than one for girls. "If you can set your boy straight on that subject you will have saved them eight years of worry."<sup>35</sup>

After covering the basic problems faced by adolescents, Kinsey described how he had begun to collect sex histories. When students in earlier sessions of the course came to him for personal conferences, they most frequently asked him about premarital petting, and he realized how pervasive it was. Kinsey concluded that he could collect data from those conferences in order to investigate petting and other behaviors, and how they affected people after marriage. He then offered some statistical backup, taken from his case history data, for a related theme that he had been hinting at in previous lectures: "There is statistical correlation between premarital petting and effective sexual adjustment at the marriage. There is practically no correlation between premarital intercourse and ease of adjustment after marriage." He also addressed a topic that a handful of students had inquired about—homosexuality—stating that "biologically, it is still part of the normal sexual picture, and the individual who suffers through the social condemnation which is a result of the branding of the phenomenon as abnormal has the most difficult sexual problem that I know of. It is a phenomenon that society will some day [face] with more objectivity." Kinsey's direct references in the lecture to individual conferences and sex histories indicate their signifi-

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<sup>35</sup>Alfred C. Kinsey, "Sex Education," March 6, 1940, pp. 9, 11, folder 10, series V.A.1.e, box II, Kinsey Collection.

cance for his teaching methods and their impact on his thinking. The reference to homosexuality and its normalcy reinforces the fact that Kinsey was moving away from marriage per se as a subject for analysis and toward studying the whole of human sexual behavior.<sup>36</sup>

The comments that Kinsey collected from the spring 1940 session were more serious and defensive in tone than those he had received in earlier sessions. With the objections of Rice, Schuman, both Muellers, and Kohlmeier circulating around campus, the students who wrote about the course as a whole used the opportunity to register their opposition to critical gossip. Mixed in among praises for the course were comments condemning “outsiders.” “I also feel sorry that outsiders criticize the biology lectures so much,” stated one man. “It is too bad that...biology, where students are uninformed, [is] relegated to such a small part of the course.” Another wrote, “I fail to see where anyone could take offense at any of the lectures if they attend with an open mind.” A woman agreed, echoing Kinsey’s own language: “The persons who criticize [the lectures] are those who have not heard them, and still uphold Victorian views of prejudice and ignorance concerning sex and marriage relations. The ice should be broken sometime.” Several students saw a broader picture of what the unpleasant gossip said about education at Indiana University. One man wrote: “Of what good is a college education if we do not know how to live and what life is all about?”<sup>37</sup>

Most students insisted that Kinsey keep the course going. One woman alluded to possible ulterior motives on the part of critics: “Do these objectors want us to get [sexual information] from ‘quack Dr. Books,’ street conversation, or perhaps they want us to learn of the dangers [by] making mistakes?” One man described with regret his own sexual experience prior to the course:

Why should people continue to wreck their lives through the false idea of sex? I appreciate this fact, because it has damaged part of my life already. Why should anyone object to the knowing

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 12, 14.

<sup>37</sup>Marriage course comments [whole course], April 1940, folder 12, series V.A.1.i, box II, Kinsey Collection.

of their own bodies is beyond me. I burn to think of such people, even though my parents are among them. I say to hell with the criticism. Continue to try to bring . . . human anatomy of this forbidden nature to light to struggling persons who have had not the chance of finding it out before.<sup>38</sup>

By the summer of 1940, Kinsey was increasingly aware of the objections of several IU faculty to the explicit content of the course, and in particular to the idea of the normality of masturbation and homosexuality. In May 1940, Albert Kohlmeier, who had lectured in five of the six marriage course sessions to date, wrote a letter to President Wells as chair of the University Committee on Religion, stating his concern “regarding the moral and social implications of the present methods of conducting the non-credit course on marriage.” Later in the summer, feeling pressure from IU sociologists, campus physicians, local Christian leaders, and some parents, Wells asked Kinsey to choose one of two courses of action: resign from the marriage course and continue to take the sex histories of students, or continue to teach in the marriage course but allow the IU health center to take over the individual counseling sessions. A brief flurry of letters to Wells followed, including a petition with 163 signatures asking that Kinsey not be forced to resign under such conditions. As Kinsey pointed out to Henry G. Nester, chair of the Butler University physiology department, it was culturally acceptable for physicians to give sex advice, however muddled with morals, but the same men and women objected to anyone else (including a biology professor such as Kinsey) giving explicit, practical, nonjudgmental instruction. But Kinsey did not worry over the loss of the marriage course for long. Ten days after he sent his resignation letter to Wells, he wrote to IU graduate student Glenn Ramsey about the heterosexuality/homosexuality scale on which he was working.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Marriage course comments [individual lectures], April 1940, folder 14, series V.A.1.i, box II, Kinsey Collection. The idea that people who experimented with sex before marriage got what they deserved in terms of venereal disease was an undercurrent in contemporary VD prevention campaigns, and it is not surprising that Kinsey’s students would challenge such a notion.

<sup>39</sup>“Memorandum of Conversation Regarding Marriage Course,” September 23, 1939, Marriage Course 1942–43 Folder (9081-24), Mueller Papers; Alfred C. Kinsey to Herman B Wells, marked “never sent” [c. August 1940], Wells File, KCC; Albert L. Kohlmeier and Frank O.

Kinsey continued to take the histories, and the marriage course proceeded under the leadership of his old opponents, Rice and Schuman, through fall 1942. According to Kate Mueller, the course ended due to wartime exigencies, not because it devolved into the jumble of pro-eugenic, antisex, misogynistic information that one student's notes indicated. IU student and future Kinsey collaborator Clyde E. Martin, the author of the extant notes on the fall 1940 marriage course, was highly sarcastic and critical of three of the lectures. In one lecture, Willis D. Gatch apparently told male students: "You have as much right to marry a woman and starve her to death as any other man. . . . Don't worry too much about brains. A too profound intellect [is] sometimes evidence of abnormality." When Kinsey left the course, his scientific tone and the interest of many IU students in taking the class left with him.<sup>40</sup>

In its initial sessions, the IU marriage course was comparable to other courses in the secular marriage education movement, which included a mixture of practical household instructions, idealistic discussion of the joys of marriage, personal conferences with instructors, and explicit instructions about sex. The early sessions of the course were a

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Beck to Wells, May 20, 1940, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Kinsey to Wells, August 7, 1940, Wells File, KCC; Wells to Kinsey, August 8, 1940, Wells File, KCC; O. J. Price to Wells, October 29, 1939, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Rosann R. Van Valer, Enola R. Van Valer, and Mrs. R. W. Van Valer to Wells, September 7, 1940, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Maurice A. McGlasson to Wells, August 13, 1940, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Edward Van Kooten to Wells, August 2, 1940, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Van Kooten to Wells, August 26, 1940, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Kinsey to Wells, September 10, 1940, Wells File, KCC; Wells to Kinsey, September 17, 1940, Wells File, KCC; "Information on the Marriage Course," May 16, 1944, Kinsey-Marriage Course File, Wells Papers; Kinsey to Henry G. Nester, November 21, 1940, Henry G. Nester File, KCC. The scale would be one of Kinsey's most well-known legacies for sexologists. See Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 638; Kinsey to Glenn V. Ramsey, September 20, 1940, folder 1, Glenn V. Ramsey file, KCC.

<sup>40</sup>Mueller, interview; Alexandra Minna Stern, "We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear": Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 103 (March 2007), 3-5; [Clyde E. Martin], notes on [David A.] Boyd, "Psychological Aspects of Sexual Adjustment," October 21, 1940, folder 1, series V.A.1.f, box II, Kinsey Collection; [Martin], notes on [Edith] Schuman, "A Practitioner's Point of View—The Care of the Conditions of Pregnancy," November 27, 1940, folder 2, series V.A.1.f, box II, Kinsey Collection; [Martin], notes on "Mr. Medical Man [Willis D.] Gatch," "Practical Marriage," November [1940], folder 3, series V.A.1.f, box II, Kinsey Collection; Martin, "Some Memories of Clyde E. Martin about the Research and Kinsey," June 1960, p. 2, folder 18, series I.E.3, box I, Kinsey Collection.



hybrid of the more liberal contemporary thinking on companionate marriage, marital sex advice, marriage education literature, and the new scientific sexology of Katharine Bement Davis, Hannah and Abraham Stone, and Robert Latou Dickinson. Opponents of the companionate marriage concept were eased off the stage of the marriage course, and it was their protests that eventually led to Kinsey's resignation.

During his time directing the class, Kinsey moved from focusing on marital sexuality to exploring and declaring the normalcy of most other forms of sexuality as well. In his final set of lectures, Kinsey also showed signs of the philosophical and scientific approach he would soon apply to the sex research for which he gained wide renown. He built his philosophy on those elements of the marriage education and sexology literature that he had initially valued: firm statistics, clear language, a nonjudgmental attitude toward most types of behavior, an absence of religious or moral judgment, and a desire to teach the "truth" about sex in marriage as much as anyone could. While those principles continued to guide him, he also read and thought more about sex as a cultural, social, and physical phenomenon, and kept taking sex histories as the course continued. Kinsey's 1938 marriage course lectures chastised a world where premarital contact was forbidden and marriage was fraught with problems, and subtly promoted sexual learning before marriage. His 1940 lectures described the psychological nature of sexual experience, called for love to be removed from scientific studies of sex, pointed to the almost infinite variation in human behavior, declared the naturalness of most sexual behavior (except for abstinence), and questioned the relationship between body and mind. The honest responses that Kinsey believed he had elicited from students and others during individual sex conferences led him to think that personal, private interviews constituted the best way to gather mass amounts of information on sexual behavior. As of 1940, Kinsey still had more questions than answers, but he now had a set of research principles—and a working interview form—that satisfied his desire for scientific validity and truthfulness.<sup>41</sup>

As Thomas D. Clark wrote in his history of IU, "No one that summer [1938] could have predicted that Indiana University, in agreeing to

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<sup>41</sup>Glen V. Ramsey, interview by James H. Jones, typescript, pp. 4-7, March 15, 1972, Center for the Study of History and Memory.

sustain a set of lectures on domestic family affairs, had set its feet upon the high road toward investigating human sexual behavior.” Of course, like others of its kind, the IU marriage course was about much more than “domestic family affairs.” Over a two-year period, Kinsey transformed the course into a venue for asking the kinds of broad questions that no scientist had yet answered about human sexuality. By the time that Kinsey’s tenure as chair of the course ended in 1940, he had started to craft the ideology and theoretical framework and to collect the data for the work that would become *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. The circumstances that moved him out of the course did not deter him from his research, but rather encouraged him to pursue another endeavor. Twelve lectures on “domestic family affairs,” given in a noncredit marriage course on a midwestern college campus, turned into “a noble experiment” by its first chair to investigate not just marriage but the whole of human sexual experience.<sup>42</sup>



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<sup>42</sup>Clark, *Indiana University*, 30; “I.U. to Offer Course in ‘Marriage,’” p. 1; “Summary of Student Answers,” November 1938.