

Dating, Marriage and Sex in the 1950s

I. Prior to the 1920s, teens “courted” (boy visits girl at her home, she is in control.)

II. How did dating change in the 1920s?

III. By 1950, teens were dating (boys were now in control of where, when, how.)

- a. Millions of teens went on at least one or more dates a week!
- b. If a girl wasn't dating by _____ she was considered a “late _____.”



IV. By the end of the 1950s, more than 14 million girls were married by the age of 17!

V. Stages of romantic relationships:

Hang out on playground when young -> flirt & talk -> date (start with double dating/blind dates/set-ups and move on to single dating -> going steady -> marriage

VI. Changes over time in the meaning of “dating” – before the war, going steady meant that you were headed towards marriage. After the war, the term “going steady” was used more loosely and instead had come to mean you were dating exclusively but it was not guaranteed that they had serious thoughts of marriage.

VII. What was expected of teenage *girls* with regards to dating, relationships and sex?

VIII. What was expected of teenage *boys* with regards to dating, relationships and sex?

IX. How did American society regard the topic of sex?

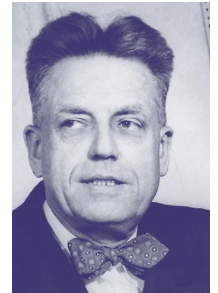
- a. What was acceptable? _____
- b. What was unacceptable? _____

The Fifties: A Burning Desire

1. What messages did the media (films, books, theater, etc.) send to teenagers in the 1950s?
2. The average age of young women and men marrying in the 1950s dropped sharply to _____. Why do you think this was?
3. How did American society regard sex in the 1950s?

The Professor Who Discovered Sex

1. Who was Alfred Kinsey?



2. What was Kinsey out to discover/prove? How did Kinsey gather his research?

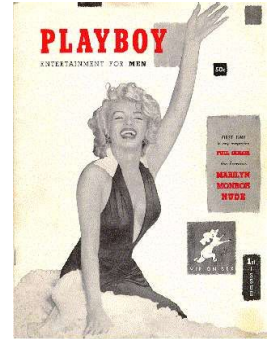
3. What was the Kinsey Report? What did it prove and how did the public react?

4. What did teens know about sex in the 1950s? Where did they get their information?

5. How was Kinsey's second book, Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, received by the public? Why?

I. Marilyn Monroe, Hugh Hefner and *Playboy*¹

- a. **Marilyn Monroe** was made famous by appearance on the first *Playboy* cover.
- b. "We lived in what I then and now viewed as a very repressive, sick society... And then when I was in college the first Kinsey report came out in 1948. And it was a revelation for me, because it confirmed the hypocrisy for me, the gap between what we said and what we actually did."
- c. **Hugh Hefner**'s goal: wanted a more open discussion of sex, believed sexuality could be views in a classy manner, sophisticated
- d. Message to the American public
 - i. Sex is natural & should be embraced – don't be embarrassed, male sexual fantasies are normal
 - ii. Don't deny pleasure, pleasure is natural
- e. Target audience
 - i. Middle class Americans
 - ii. Part of a larger, more sophisticated lifestyle – advice on buying, ordering, wine, language, etc.
 - iii. 1954 – 100,000 subscriptions
- f. **In what ways did both Marilyn Monroe and Hugh Hefner carry on Alfred Kinsey's legacy?**



II. **Birth Control Pill**

- a. Margaret Sanger initially conceived the idea for the birth control pill (as a form of population control for the poor.)
- b. Within 2 years of FDA approval of the pill, 1.2 million women were taking it. Within 5 years of FDA approval, over 6 million women were taking it.
- c. By 1964, the pill had become the most popular form of contraception in the country, used by 1/4 of all couples using contraception.
- d. **What was the impact the pill had on young women & how it contributed to the sexual revolution of the 1960s?**

¹ David Halberstam, "Discovering Sex", *American Heritage*