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Recommended Citation

Majka, Sydney, "Hoot Magazine and the Sexual Revolution at DePauw" (2019). *Student Research*. 18.
<https://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearchother/18>

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Hoot Magazine and the Sexual Revolution at DePauw

By Sydney Majka

The multifaceted nature of the sexual revolution in America is a complicated topic to disentangle, but examination of the different strands of the movement reveals how people from all walks of life participated in this transformation of mores, even if they themselves were not consciously aware of their contributions. Beth Bailey's work *Sex in the Heartland* closely examines these different factors that composed the sexual revolution, while emphasizing the theme that the sexual revolution was a complex combination of events that was experienced and constructed by different people in widely disparate ways.¹ Bailey uses the town of Lawrence, Kansas and the University of Kansas as a case study for examining the manifestation of the sexual revolution,² which makes her work a valuable source in exploring the sexual revolution at DePauw University. Examination of the *Hoot* humor magazines from 1952-1954, minutes from DePauw's Publication Board, and *The DePauw* student newspaper illustrate how several facets of the sexual revolution intersected with one another on DePauw's campus and reveal themes of tension between students and administrators over new attitudes about sexuality, and ways in which students themselves upheld sexual double standards.

In order to fully understand and analyze how these differing strands of the sexual revolution interacted at DePauw, it is necessary to contextualize the atmosphere in which *Hoot* came about. A major factor influencing the freedom of students on college campuses across the nation at this time was the existence of strict rules that mandated that female students sign in and out of their places of residence by a certain time each night, and these women were also often

¹ Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12.

² Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 4.

required to disclose where they were going and with whom.³ The existence of these rules for women while men's activities went unregulated shows how prominent the sexual double standard was in daily campus life at the time. These rules were designed with the goal of restricting sexual activity among students, but Bailey writes that, "The myriad of rules... did not prevent sexual relations between students so much as structure the times and places and ways that students could have sexual contact."⁴ Frustrations with these strict rules and the ways that students challenged them are reflected in the campus humor magazine *Hoot*, which contains countless content that supports Bailey's point that sexual behavior still happened in spite of these rules. One issue of *Hoot* opens with a statement that is highly critical of the restrictions placed on DePauw's students, and it reads, "DePauw traditions...somewhat reek of purity."⁵ A later issue of *Hoot* proclaims "For college humor is little more than over-emphasis on sex."⁶ These statements reveal that student opinions on sexuality were often in direct conflict with the sentiments behind the rules administrators forced upon them, which displays why college campuses were at the front lines of the sexual revolution.⁷ As a student run publication, *Hoot* offers a unique opportunity to investigate how these tensions played out and how they were indicative of the influence of the sexual revolution at DePauw.

One way in which DePauw students rebelled against rules meant to restrict their sexual behavior was by engaging in "blanket parties." These "blanket parties" are referenced throughout the pages of *Hoot*, and although they are never explicitly defined, it seems clear from the language surrounding them that they were a way for students to engage in sexual behavior

³ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 79.

⁴ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 79.

⁵ "Statement," *Hoot* magazine, 1952-1954, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections.

⁶ "Jeopardy," *Hoot* magazine, 1952-1954, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections.

⁷ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 49.

covertly. One issue of *Hoot* features a piece entitled “Shakespeare on Blanket Parties,” and one Shakespearean quote selected for inclusion was a line from *Hamlet* that reads ““Get thee to a nunnery.””⁸ This choice of quote seems to imply that “blanket party” attendees are engaging in behavior that is unholy or inappropriate in some way, thus necessitating the need to go to a nunnery. The illustration included with this feature also speaks to the covert nature of blanket parties:

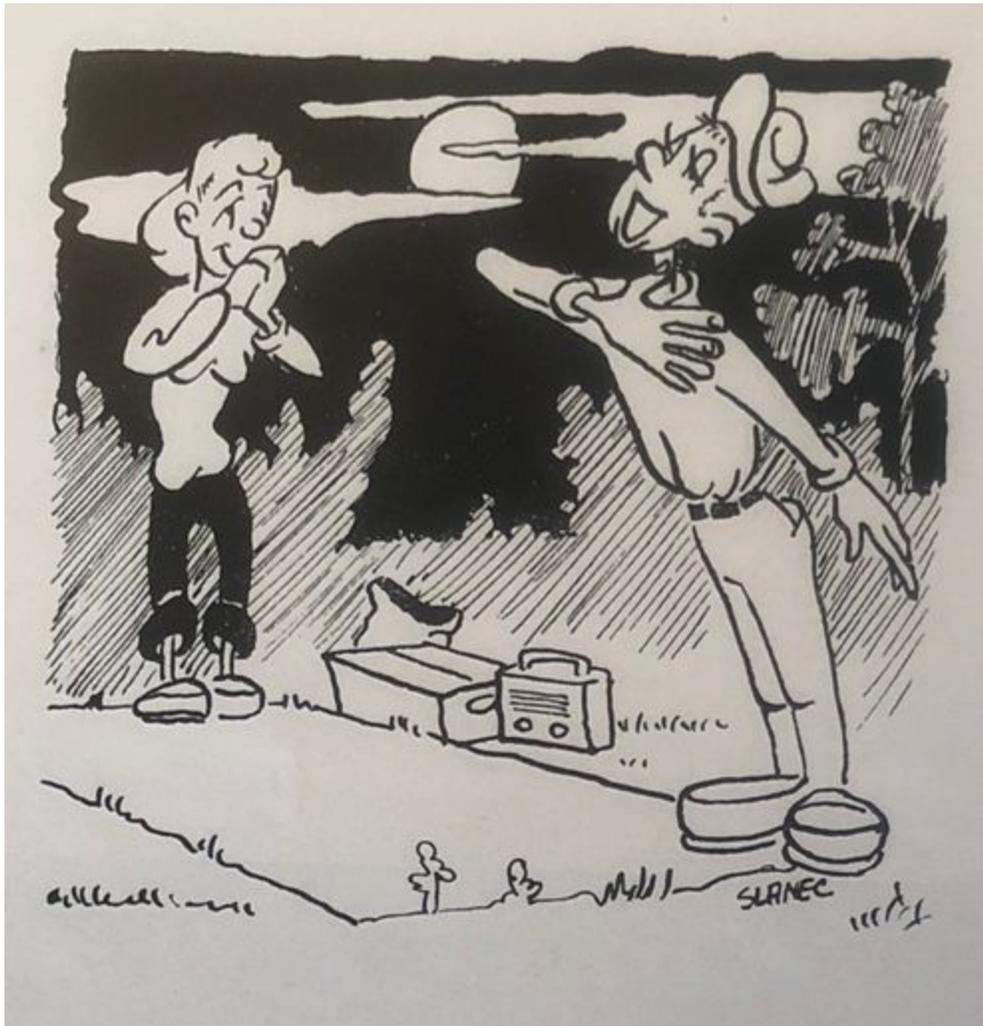


Illustration accompanying “Shakespeare on Blanket Parties,” photograph in possession of author

⁸ “Shakespeare on Blanket Parties,” *Hoot* magazine, 1952-1954, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections, 18.

The young couple pictured in this cartoon are together in an isolated place, surrounded by trees and foliage, at night. These details of the setting suggest that the couple may be breaking curfew rules to engage in sexual behavior, which illustrates Bailey's point that these restrictions did not have much effect in preventing sexual contact between students. The disregard of these rules by the students is representative of how college students' ideas about what was acceptable in terms of sexuality differed vastly from the ideals held by the older adults who imposed the rules on them, and this dissonance in part promoted the redefinition of sexual mores that occurred during the sexual revolution.

References to sexual behavior in the pages of *Hoot* also document that students were redefining the connection between sex and marriage, another important facet of the sexual revolution. Middle class notions of respectability were quite influential in setting norms of the time,⁹ and Bailey reveals a cornerstone of these values: "At [their] heart was a simple stricture: no sex outside of marriage"¹⁰ Although this moral position may have been common, Bailey's overall argument centers around the notion that there were no absolutes in the event we call the "sexual revolution," and content from DePauw's *Hoot* magazines underscores Bailey's point. For instance, one issue contains a quiz for readers to complete entitled "Are You Socially Cool?"¹¹ One question asked of readers is "The purpose of dating is," and the correct answer to this question is listed as "sex," which prevails over the options "The intellectual joining of two minds" and "The companionship of two people with considerable in common."¹² Redefining sexual activity before marriage as something "cool" represents a rejection of middle class

⁹ In class notes taken 4/8/19

¹⁰ Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 76.

¹¹ "Are You Socially Cool?" *Hoot* magazine, 1952-1954, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections, 7.

¹² "Are You Socially Cool?" *Hoot* magazine, 7.

respectability norms that defined sex as something appropriate only in marriage. *Hoot* characterized sexual behavior as something entirely in the realm of acceptability, even outside of marriage, and the magazine was quite critical of marriage itself. One opinion listed in *Hoot* reads “Matrimony puts an end to more petting than all the park police put together.”¹³ Here, marriage is positioned as something undesirable due a perceived lack of sexual activity within the institution. Although this statement is noteworthy for its rejection of marriage, it also implicitly communicates a new idea about marriage brought forth by the sexual revolution: that an essential part of a successful marriage was enjoyable sexual activity, and that marriage was not just about companionship and love. This redefinition of marriage and what features were important within it illustrates how the sexual revolution transformed even the most seemingly infallible ideas about sexuality.

Due to controversy that the content of *Hoot* stirred, campus administrators surveyed students for their opinions on the magazine, and the results of this survey imply acceptance of the sexual norms suggested in the magazine, which speaks to the influential power of the sexual revolution. The survey discovered that 92% of students approved of *Hoot* as a publication, and that 73% of students were satisfied with the content of the magazine.¹⁴ These data display that the majority of students approved of *Hoot*, which is representative of a theme that Bailey noted of campus humor magazines at Kansas University, the idea that “for [a] brief moment...sex seemed to be what united, rather than divided, men and women.”¹⁵ The fact that the majority of students on DePauw’s campus viewed *Hoot* favorably may suggest a similar form of consensus

¹³ “Opinion Section,” *Hoot* magazine, 1952-1954, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Publication Board, 1940-1956, DC 1908, Folder 6, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections, Greencastle, Indiana.

¹⁵ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 159.

between genders on DePauw's campus. Defying the restrictive curfew rules as well as challenging what was socially acceptable in terms of sexual behavior seemed to be in the best interests of all students at this time, and sexual liberation seemed to be prioritized over women's liberation, a notion which is evidenced by the fact that, "By the late 1950s the campus humor magazines had run out of steam, replaced by national publications like *Playboy*."¹⁶ The rise of *Playboy* illustrated that at the time, the sexual revolution was mainly concerned with freeing women from sexual mores for the sake of men having more opportunities to experience sexual pleasure, an incongruity that was later addressed by the women's liberation movement.¹⁷ Despite the content in *Hoot* that is clearly sexist in the eyes of today's readers, this student opinion survey indicates that in this particular moment at DePauw, the shifts in sexual norms that were being promoted in *Hoot* were viewed as acceptable by the majority of students, even if some implications of their acceptance were problematic for women. Student approval of these shifts in sexual mores signifies their participation in the sexual revolution, even if their actions were not particularly radical, because the event we call the sexual revolution would not have happened were it not for majority consideration and acceptance of the new ideas it presented.

The implied and oftentimes quite overt challenges to curfew rules and marriage that were published in *Hoot* as well as its overall raunchiness eventually led to the magazine being shut down by DePauw's Publishing Board, a fact that again illustrates the dissonance between the ideals held by young people and those held by older adults. Concerns about the magazine were raised at a meeting in December 1952, when issues such as "The title *Hoot* carries a negative and objectionable connotation," and "...no doubt taste has been stretched thin by *Hoot*..."¹⁸ These

¹⁶ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 159.

¹⁷ In class notes taken 4/3/19

¹⁸ Minutes of the Publication Board, DePauw University Archives and Special Collections.

arguments against *Hoot* display the fear that university administrators felt over the redefinition of sexual norms that was implicit in the pages of *Hoot*. The fact that administrators interpreted the text of *Hoot* as such a threat implies that administrators read the magazine's content as having a deeper meaning than just jokes; rather, they saw traces of the sexual revolution and the menace they posed to middle class respectability norms within *Hoot*'s pages. Sadly, the Publication Board meeting minutes are not preserved from 1954 and beyond, so the specific circumstances surrounding the demise of the magazine have been lost. However, an issue of *The DePauw* newspaper reported in March 1957, "Unless the next issue of 'Hoot' is definitely an the upgrade the magazine 'Hoot' will not be published in the future."¹⁹ In the eyes of the administration, *Hoot* did not improve their standing to the degree considered essential, and this proved to be the end of the magazine. Although the magazine itself no longer existed, this does not mean the ideas of the sexual revolution no longer proliferated at DePauw. Rather, the closure of the magazine symbolizes that the majority acceptance of the magazine and the ideas of the sexual revolution that it promoted were viewed as very threatening by DePauw's administration, and their decision to shut down the magazine reified the power of the sexual revolution on campus.

The sources of *Hoot* magazine, the minutes of the DePauw Publication Board, and *The DePauw* newspaper provide important insight into shifting norms around sexuality at DePauw during the sexual revolution, but as Bailey emphasizes the sexual revolution was comprised of many strands and these three sources do not tell the whole story of the sexual revolution at DePauw by any means. Examination of these primary sources raises several questions, such as what specific content prompted the administration to shut down *Hoot*, and did the content differ

¹⁹ Elizabeth Turnell, "Pub Board Reveals Action Taken on Status of 'Hoot,'" *The DePauw*, March 4, 1957, 2.

significantly from the features discussed above? This question could prompt inquiry to campus institutions other than the archives, such as the administration, to see if any evidence of the specifics regarding the demise of *Hoot* survive today and could fill the hole created by the lost Publication Board minutes. Another interesting question raised by this research is what sorts of sexual behavior did DePauw students actually engage in? Of course, records of such behavior may not exist, as is unfortunately often a problem encountered in researching the history of sex. This information could reveal if students actually acted in accordance with the norms presented in *Hoot* that they claimed to approve of, or if they only voiced acceptance to seem, as the magazine termed it, “socially cool,” without actually living by these “cool” standards. The sexism present in issues of *Hoot* also sparks interest in how feminism and women’s activism was present on DePauw’s campus. Again, a majority of students seemed to be accepting of the misogynistic content in *Hoot*, which raises questions about the history of women’s activism on campus. When did women begin to protest and question the objectifying ideas promoted in *Hoot* and other magazines like *Playboy*? Many of these questions could likely be answered through a more extensive review of the DePauw Archives, but material of interest may also be found at the Women’s Center or the Hartman Center for Civic Engagement on campus. Overall, any research into the sexual revolution has the potential to spawn larger research projects, as the different facets of the sexual revolution are impossible to fully disentangle from one another.

The sexual revolution on DePauw’s campus, and in particular shifts in norms that were documented and disseminated by *Hoot* magazine, closely resembled the manifestation of the sexual revolution on Kansas University’s campus. Such events on both campuses are representative of how the larger movement we term the “sexual revolution” impacted the daily

lives of college students across the nation. Although the experiences of students at DePauw and Kansas University share similarities, the actions and events that occurred on these campuses are only one strand of the sexual revolution, as Bailey repeatedly emphasizes.²⁰ Ultimately, the contributions to the sexual revolution that occurred on these two campuses are but one thread of many that united together to create the fabric of overhaul and redefinition of sexual norms that we today call the sexual revolution.

²⁰ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 5.

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