

Cal Poly's Sexual Revolution

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by

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Abstract

The sexual revolution is perceived as a shift in sexual attitudes beginning in the mid 1960's and ending in the mid 1980's. The revolution was apparent at universities across the United States through the introduction of widely available contraceptives and education in sexual health. The purpose of this paper is to investigate and describe how the sexual revolution allowed for social and administrative change at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Through statistical reports as well as the ever-changing views of students and faculty on campus, it can be proven that although Cal Poly is historically conservative, it still experienced a sexual revolution.

Keywords: Sexual Revolution, Contraceptives, Augmented Care, Abortion, Chastity

Introduction

“I only prescribe the pill to girls who are married”, so responded Dr. Marge Jacks of California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo in a 1968 article of *Mustang Daily* when asked how easy receiving a birth control pill prescription was for students on campus.¹ Until the early 1970's Cal Poly's stance on student's freedom in terms of sexual health, reflected conservative ideals that were on the verge of disappearing in other parts of California.

The sexual revolution is defined as a shift in sexual attitudes beginning in the mid-1960s and ending in the mid-1980s. Viewed widely as a sexual liberation, moral stances on sex, contraceptives, and the rights of women changed dramatically. Coming out of the sexually restrictive fifties, Americans were ready for the end of the “sexual double standard”.² Starting predominately on college campuses, universities like UC Berkeley led the way by raising a

¹ "Doctor's Explain Pill Use." *Mustang Daily*, January 1, 1968.

² Sherwin, Robert, and Sherry Corbett. "Campus sexual norms and dating relationships: A trend analysis." *The Journal of Sex Research* 21, no. 3 (1985): 258-74. doi:10.1080/00224498509551266.

simple question, “Why not?”³ With the introduction of co-educational dormitories, contraceptives became widely available at a number of campuses across the country. Judith Treas, a professor of sociology at UC Irvine, stated that people with more schooling are more likely to be accepting “of sexual nonconformity”.⁴ This is because “education is an important mechanism of stability and change in attitudes” which in turn, leads to greater tolerance.⁵ As universities relinquished control over many facets of student life, more room was left for personal choice.

There is little research on this particular topic at Cal Poly. It is assumed by many that the university never experienced a sexual revolution and instead was just a bystander to shifting national attitudes. During the early 1970’s evangelical Christians were able to speak on Cal Poly’s campus about how “man has distorted the true meaning of sexual freedom” with no backlash, but when the university began supplying the pill, reporters arrived in droves.⁶ The school newspaper, *Mustang Daily*, which shares the opinions of students, featured articles calling the revolution not at all liberating and causing more harm than good. One *Mustang Daily* article in particular released in 1974 stated that a growing number of young people are facing what “Columbia University psychiatrist, Joel Moskowlts calls a ‘secondary virginity’, which is self-imposed chastity born of sexual disillusionment, insecurity and, oftentimes emotional confusion.”⁷ This implying that young adults, especially those enrolled in university, did not have the mental strength to participate in the type of sexual revolution occurring in places like

³ Taylor, Richard. "Within the Halls of Ivy--The Sexual Revolution Comes of Age." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 13, no. 4 (1981): 22-29. doi:10.1080/00091383.1981.10569817.

⁴ Judith Treas, "How Cohorts, Education, and Ideology Shaped a New Sexual Revolution on American Attitudes toward Nonmarital Sex, 1972–1998," *Sociological Perspectives* 45, no. 3 (2002): 267-83. doi:10.1525/sop.2002.45.3.267.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Tokunaga, Paul. "'I Want to Come Into Your Life!'" *Mustang Daily*, January 22, 1971. ; "Pill in 'Medical Use' Only." *Mustang Daily*, March 8, 1968.

⁷ "'Virginity a Curiosity' Sexual Habits Among Youth." *Mustang Daily*, May 22, 1974.

San Francisco during the Summer of Love. Throughout the 1960's, even official Student Handbooks contained pages dedicated to showing students the location of every church in San Luis Obispo. They even went as far as expressing Cal Poly's recognition of "the importance of religious experience [and encouraging] students to become active in the church of their choice".⁸ Upon first glance, one would think Cal Poly was an ultra-religious campus that banned sex all together especially compared to schools like UC Berkeley.

The term sexual revolution has no single definition, but instead is on a spectrum and it is important to distinguish it as such. In this paper, I will prove that although Cal Poly is historically conservative, it still experienced a sexual revolution. Despite Cal Poly's sexual revolution not being as notable as other universities such as Cornell or UC Berkeley, it does not mean it was nonexistent. I will be exploring the potential future impacts of how the sexual revolution was handled on campus, especially concerning the rise of the AIDS virus post-revolution. I will also be comparing the differences between historically liberal universities and Cal Poly's in terms of student and faculty actions during the sexual revolution.

Historiography

The sexual revolution as a whole and its effects on the handling of AIDS has been researched extensively, however, its relation to colleges and campus health has been more or less untouched because of its broad definition. Sources from this topic, usually from the 1980's or 1990's, only describe the aftermath of the sexual revolution. In a paper titled "Cal Poly's Response to the AIDS Crisis of the 1980's", the author, Tessa St. Clair, describes how successful Cal Poly was in teaching about the disease as well as students and faculty being vocal about their

⁸ "Student Handbook", 1961-1962. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

desire for AIDS education.⁹ St. Clair described Cal Poly as being progressive in terms of sexual education and followed other institutions when they became proactive. Although there was somewhat of a lag, Cal Poly eventually caught up to other universities and now tends to fall on the liberal side of the spectrum namely after 1972. There were still misconceptions and fears surrounding the disease with “years pass[ing] before Cal Poly stopped talking about AIDS and acted” which is similar to how the university handled the Health Center and its Augmented Health Services.¹⁰

By other universities’ standards, Cal Poly was still very conservative. Richard Taylor’s piece, “Within the Halls of Ivy: The Sexual Revolution Comes of Age”, describes professor-student relationships naturally occurring and faculty being wildly outspoken, feeling “no discomfort if they depart radically from accepted custom”.¹¹ Professors at Cal Poly, notably those in liberal arts, were able to speak freely, however, their publicity being controlled and usually within the confines of Forums and Seminars hosted by the university.¹² For Cal Poly, becoming socially liberal required a learning curve, and although it took a decade, the university eventually found its footing.

Pre Revolution: 1961-1972

Through the turbulent and ever-changing attitudes of the 1960’s, the university was determined to maintain its conservative image. With this reputation, parents eagerly sent their children to a university free from the corruption of other liberal, free love institutions. During the early 1960’s through early 1970’s the official Student Handbook, given to all incoming

⁹ Tessa St. Clair, “Cal Poly’s Response to the AIDS Crisis of the 1980s”, *The Forum*. . Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Taylor, Richard. "Within the Halls of Ivy—The Sexual Revolution Comes of Age." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 13, no. 4 (1981): 22-29. doi:10.1080/00091383.1981.10569817.

¹² “Speakers Forum Slates on Abortion”, Cal Poly Report, June 16, 1972. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

freshmen, was a thorough guide to Cal Poly and the city of San Luis Obispo. Unlike most universities, it read more as an advertisement for the school rather than a code of conduct, allowing Cal Poly's administration to subtly outline their strict standards and expectations. This meant featuring full two-page spreads showcasing every Christian church in San Luis Obispo.¹³ No other religions were included or given nearly the same attention as Christianity. Considering Cal Poly is a state-funded nonsectarian institution, its justification for the disregard of other beliefs was its so-called recognition of "the importance of religious experience in the individual and society and [its encouragement for] students to become active in the church of their choice".¹⁴ Accompanying this religious propaganda were rigid residence hall guidelines that included women's halls closing at certain times and describing signing out of dorms as being a privilege.¹⁵ With sex on the minds of youth growing up in a decade defined by a moral revolution, there was no mention of contraceptive and sexual health services or counseling being offered in the Student Handbooks until 1972, nearly a decade after what would later be deemed the start of the sexual revolution elsewhere.

With a lack of student pressure, the Health Center was the administration's only opponent. The marketing of the birth control pill in 1960 created a discrete way for women to take sexual health into their own hands. Despite the millions of women who went on the pill, many saw it as a threat to familial values. Publically, there was no indication that any form of contraception or sexual health services were being offered and Student Health Service Statistical Reports corroborated this. Regardless, in 1968, Health Center doctors were questioned by both

¹³ "Handbook – Mustang", 1961-62, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo.

¹⁴ "Handbook – Mustang", 1962-63, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo.

¹⁵ "Handbook – Mustang", 1963-64, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo.

parents and the press for over-prescribing the pill to female students.¹⁶ Even with pre-marital certificates being necessary at the time and patients having to prove the pill was for medical usage only, the Health Center still faced massive backlash.¹⁷ Cal Poly's lack of resources left many students without options or answers.

The Revolution Unfolds: 1971 and Beyond

The first recorded sexual health statistic at Cal Poly appeared in 1971 on a small piece of prescription paper, tucked away in an envelope folded between tens of unrelated Health reports. It nonchalantly detailed the 314 pregnancy tests, 503 pap smears, and 1,029 urethral smears in red sharpie.¹⁸ Although it could have easily been mistaken as trash, it is the first sign of Cal Poly's transition into the Sexual Revolution.

Established in 1971 on recommendation by the Health Center, Student Health Services Council acted as a link between the university community and student health services with council membership comprised of both faculty and students.¹⁹ With support from the Cal Poly Foundation, a nonprofit auxiliary for the school, Student Health Services implemented Augmented Health Services, a program that included premarital counseling, venereal disease education, and family planning.²⁰ La Femme Clinic, another branch of Augmented Health Services, provided information on contraceptives, gonorrhea culture and breast and pelvic exams, dispersion of the pill as well as other contraceptive agents. It acted essentially as an in house gynecologist on campus.²¹ The Augmented Health Clinic was wildly successful, with

¹⁶ "Pill in 'Medical Use' Only." *Mustang Daily*.

¹⁷ "Doctor's Explain Pill Use." *Mustang Daily*.

¹⁸ Billy Mounts ,MD, Student Health Service Sexual Health Statistics, July 1972, Box 650, '71-'72 Folder, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

¹⁹ "Health Council Links Students to Services." *Mustang Daily*, November 21, 1974. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

²⁰ Cal Poly Foundation Annual Report, 1974-75, Box 191.04, 1974-75 Folder. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

²¹ The California State Colleges Office of the Chancellor, Status Report on Augmented Health Services, January-

“over three thousand [obtaining] treatment” in its first year.²² One would think Cal Poly’s administration would support these services considering they were so incredibly used. In fact, Cal Poly President Robert E. Kennedy “strenuously object[ed]” to a “proposed executive order that would have prohibited student health centers from treating, examining, dispersing, or prescribing any form of birth control to the students” at all nineteen state colleges, yet did nothing to push state funding for his own university’s augmented services.²³ The Augmented Health Services were wholly student financed through an optional and completely voluntary fee separate from the mandatory Health Center fee. In many ways Augmented Health Services were fundamental for student health considering that from July 1973 to June 1974 there were 1,242 pap smears, 1,706 birth control pill prescriptions, 663 vaginal infection treatments, and 286 possible pregnancies recorded throughout the year.²⁴ In 1974, after the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, La Femme Clinic nurses were able to refer patients to other hospitals for abortions.²⁵ When Campus Health Center director, Billy Mounts was asked if there was a large increase in the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions since he began practicing at Cal Poly twenty years prior, he replied “yes”.²⁶ Health Center nurse practitioner Florence H. Mesler stated that in the case of accidental pregnancy “almost all girls choose [abortion and] the girls think for two days before making a decision about their pregnancy”.²⁷

June 1972. Box 650. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

²² David Graham, Student Health Services to Dean Chandler, June 29 1973, Box 650, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

²³ "Contraceptive Connoption Yields Health Center Win", *Mustang Daily*, January 11, 1971. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

²⁴ Student Health Service Statistical Report, July 1, 1973 through June 30, 1974. Box 650. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

²⁵ "Birth control and abortion services offered by clinic", *Mustang Daily*, October 1, 1974.

²⁶ "Contraception at Cal Poly", *Mustang Daily*, June 4, 1976.

²⁷ "Birth control by clinic", *Mustang Daily*.

Augmented Health Services did not come without criticism. In 1976, La Femme Clinic prescribed a record 3,232 birth control pills.²⁸ Some students described the distribution of the pill like “an assembly line”.²⁹ Some even calling the pill itself unsafe and the information on its potential side effects to be too weak to support its dispersal. Health Center staff rebuked these claims by arguing that three pregnancies a week were reported to the clinic.

By the mid 1970’s student opinions began to appear in the form of vivid exposes detailing students’ experiences which could be read in *Mustang Daily* articles and heard in public debates. The May issue of *The Outpost*, Cal Poly’s own magazine, featured a very graphic and raw account of a student who discovered she was pregnant and subsequently getting an abortion, all without telling her parents or her former partner.³⁰ Written one year before *Roe vs. Wade*, this piece was ahead of its time and paved the way for other students to speak out on issues that, prior to 1970, were seen as taboo. Faculty even began joining the conversation with A.C.W. Bethel, a professor of Philosophy, stating that mothers who get abortions should not be charged with homicide and obituaries are not written for miscarried embryos.³¹ Bethel’s statement was in reference to a Florida woman charged with manslaughter in 1971 after hospital staff reported her illegal abortion.

Relationship to the AIDS Crisis

The sexual revolution came to an abrupt end with the rise of the AIDS virus. By the 1980’s university campuses were known as “institutions full of young and sexually active individuals [where] sexually transmitted diseases were considered commonplace”.³² The

²⁸ “Contraception”, *Mustang Daily*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Does your boyfriend have enough to send you to Tijuana”, *The Outpost*, May 31, 1972.

³¹ “Confused Over Abortion” *Mustang Daily*, November 30, 1971.

³² St. Clair, “Cal Poly’s Response”, 79.

revolution made it so students could take their sexuality into their own hands with significantly less apprehension than their peers twenty years prior. Openness, meant riskier behavior and with the death toll from AIDS quickly rising, it was necessary for campuses to take action.

Campus sexual health services became a necessity for students in the 1980's. For the past twenty years it had been there so students could learn information on diseases, seek treatment, and easily obtain referrals to larger, more well equipped hospitals. Because AIDS was so new, myths and misconceptions ran rampant. Dr. James Nash, Director of the Cal Poly Health Center, became a prominent voice in the conversation concerning AIDS, creating seminars to discuss the disease and urging health education professors to inform their students.³³ Pamphlets became "widely available on the subject" however this new impartiality to sex brought on by the sexual revolution led to a dangerously relaxed sexual climate.³⁴ A *Mustang Daily* poll reported that a majority of students "are more concerned about AIDS than nuclear war, [but] few admit to changing their sexual behavior in response to fear of the fatal disease."³⁵ More alarming was that although condoms were the only protection against AIDS for sexually active individuals, "survey respondents indicated that their condom use has declined since they found out about the disease".³⁶

Post revolution Cal Poly meant that finally, the administration sided with the Health Center on a greater amount of issues, pushing the moral debate to the side. As the concern for AIDS rose, faculty members dedicated portions of their classes to cover the topic, with spring quarter of 1987 marking the first time the disease was actually put onto syllabi. Professors like

³³ Renee Shupe, "AIDS: Deadly disease threatens more than homosexuals." *Mustang Daily*, October 24, 1985.

³⁴ Kim Holweger. "AIDS: Feared More Than War." *Mustang Daily*, May 21, 1987.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Laura Freberg, a professor of human sexuality, stated that she “plans to cover the topic from an ethical viewpoint” and focus on “the risk of AIDS with casual relationships”.³⁷ In addition to educating students within the classroom, the administration also made a point of inviting guest speakers to cover the disease. Speakers like Richard Keeling, the director of the Department of Student Health and a professor of internal medicine at the University of Virginia, focused on how college students react to the disease instead of dry medical definition of AIDS. He painted a terrifyingly realistic picture of AIDS stating that “AIDS will come to the campus and when it does, it will have a face and a name” and that “college campuses [would] have a significant rise in transmission” meaning that on a campus the size of Cal Poly’s “about 45 to 50 students have the virus”.³⁸ This brutal reality created even more of a push for sexual safety.

There being a sexual revolution at Cal Poly did not mean that every student and member of the community supported the open display of contraceptives and safety talks on campus. The first resolution concerning condom dispensers being placed around Cal Poly was brought to the student senate in 1987. It narrowly passed by a vote of 12-11, just to be vetoed by Associated Students, Inc. President Kevin Swanson who stated that “condom dispensers would increase the number of AIDS cases, and opposed what he called a ‘public support of promiscuity’”.³⁹ Two years later, the Cal Poly AIDS Prevention Task Force, a student group dedicated to ending the spread of AIDS, “developed [a new] proposal for the installation of condom dispensing machines on campus”.⁴⁰ Despite this resolution being publically recommended by Cal Poly President,

³⁷ Carol Vance, “AIDS to be part of books, classes”, *Mustang Daily*, April 9, 1987.

³⁸ Mark Ahlemeyer, “Universities must face reality of AIDS crisis, says expert”, *Mustang Daily*, April 6, 1989

³⁹ Kim Holweger, “Student Senate Oks Condoms in Poly Restrooms,” *Mustang Daily*, May 22, 1987.

⁴⁰ Cal Poly AIDS Prevention Task Force. *Academic Senate Agenda*. April 11, 1989. California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

Warren J. Baker, many considered the open vending of condoms to be a moral debate.⁴¹ Hazel Scott, dean of Student Affairs, sought to obtain the opinion of a variety of different groups on campus including from the community of San Luis Obispo, concluding that “opposition to the issue, religious or otherwise, should be taken into consideration when making the decision to implement the plan”.⁴² Other than being illogical, this action proved that Cal Poly still held ties to its conservative roots, meaning that the well-being of students could still be overshadowed by the university’s need to maintain its conservative image.

Comparison to Historically Liberal Universities

On the complete opposite end of the spectrum was UC Berkeley. Described as a historically liberal university, Berkeley is considered the starting place for college campuses’ sexual revolutions. Just two years before San Francisco’s Summer of Love, the spring of 1965 marked the beginning of change that had many wondering why something “so seemingly innocuous, should have waited so long to occur”.⁴³ Richard Taylor, a professor of philosophy at the University of Rochester, described universities as the “natural focal point of revolutionary change” however some of these changes seem more harmful than helpful.⁴⁴

One aspect of the revolution Taylor described the practice of “an A for a Lay”. Professors who are very well known to their students “importune their female students for sexual favors, sometimes blatantly offering high grades in return”.⁴⁵ Taylor stated that “students for the most part did not seem outraged” and that it was offered with frequent success and without embarrassment. An A for a Lay is unmistakably unfair to students. In this case, the sexual

⁴¹ Doug DiFranco, “Poly ponders prophylactic placement”, *Mustang Daily*, February 8, 1989.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Taylor, “Within the Halls” 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

revolution was used as a veil to disguise professors looking to cash in on having sexual relationships with students. The relationships are laced with coercion due to the “unequal institutional power inherent in the teacher-student relationship”.⁴⁶ The problem lies with confusion over whether something is considered sexual freedom or sexual manipulation. Cal Poly’s sexual revolution occurred years after other universities and when the administration eventually sided with the students and Health Center in the 1980’s nothing so radical as sexual relations between students and professors. From its conception, Cal Poly has always promoted the professional relationship between teachers and students.

Something less damaging to students, yet described as the “most important single change in university life” was the establishment of co-educational dorms.⁴⁷ This in turn, allowed for student health services at a number of liberal universities to dispense an unrestricted amount of birth control. At the University of Rochester, vending machines were set up outside of the largest co-ed dorm, and at Cornell the contemplation of establishing its very own abortion clinic due to outside medical facilities being strained by the excessive amount of referrals.⁴⁸ Seemingly radical at the time, virtually all universities, including Cal Poly, followed suit in later years. The idea that co-ed dorms and the accessibility to contraceptives promoted promiscuity was groundless with Taylor finding that dorms, for the most, part were used more for their intended use.

Conclusion

Although Cal Poly’s sexual revolution was far less publicized than other institutions like UC Berkeley and the University of Rochester, its discrete nature proved to aid students in the

⁴⁶ Yale College Publications. *Policy on Teacher-Student Consensual Relations*. Yale University.

⁴⁷ Taylor, “Within the Halls” 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

long run. The lack of administrative support and discussion on matters pertaining to sex allowed students and the Health Center to take action, while maintaining a respectable reputation as a university. Through the creation of Augmented Health Services and students' outspoken support of controversial subjects it is apparent that Cal Poly experienced a sexual revolution.

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