PS1 for 4/20/89 # The $25 Million NIH Sex Study

The Federal Government wants to spend $2 million to ask 2,300 Americans when they last had sex, whether their partner was aman or a woman, and precisely what they did and what devices they used in the act. That's Phase I of the project, which is already underway and is expected to be completed in July.

Then comes Phase II. That involves spending an additional $13 million to ask similar questions of another 20,000 Americans.

If you favor this prying into bedrooms, you are supposedly supporting "science" and "public health," but if you oppose it you are just engaging in "politics." That's the way the issue is presented to the public.

The argument advanced for this boondoggle is that it is needed to combat AIDS. But why don't they spend the money trying to find a cure or treatment, instead of for voyeurism?

There is a fundamentally insolvable problem in connection with this type of research. The plain fact is that normal people won't answer questions and surveys about their intimate sexual behavior.

Any refusal rate higher than 15% is considered enough to skew results by at least 50%. Sex surveys usually have refusal rates at least three times that high, which means the "research" is virtually worthless (or methodologically flawed, to use the appropriate jargon).

The refusal rate in surveys of sexual behavior typically range from 40% to 60%, even after a first screening produces samples of people who say they will answer a questionnaire.

This is exactly how the famous Kinsey studies were flawed. The flaw is that only those persons who have a desire to shraee the graphic details of their sexual intimacies, real or imagined, will respond. The answers of these people cannot reasonably be considered as random samples of the entire population.

That's why the Kinsey reports (the famous one in the 1940s and the 1970 study made under a $350,000 contract from the National Institute on Mental Health) came up with such out-of-the-mainstream conclusions. Kinsey ended up interviewing mostly homosexuals, college students, and prisoners (who probably found answering intimate questions an entertaining break in their routine).

The National Research Council spent $400,000 to produce a 589-page book called **AIDS: Sexual Behavior and Intravenous Drug Use**. "[Kinsey's] claim for the legitimacy of science in the arena of sexuality," the book said, "was an attempt to change the 'rules of the game' that defined what conduct was normal and what was abnormal… The Kinsey research… changed the way in which sexuality was talked about in this country."

The new sex survey is done under the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which has already awarded the Phase I contract grant for the study, called “Social and Behavior Aspects of Health and Fertility-Related Behavior.” In the public controversy this has stirred up, it is colloquially known as the NIH Sex Study and is presently awaiting final approval from Health and Human Services Secretary Louis W. Sullivan.

Many people are concerned that this study will match personal identity with particular sexual behaviors. A Section D entitled “Partner Identification and Most Recent Sexual Activity” asks for the respondent’s number of sexual partners in the last year, names of partners, and the partners’ sex, age, race, ancestry, education, marital status, children, and religion.

People are also concerned about the bias in favor of accepting every kind of sex as normal on the part of several of those who will conduct the study. The design and development of the pre-test has been delegated to a University of Chicago graduate student named Stuart Michaels, who happens also to be the newly elected chair of the Lesbian and Gay Caucus of the American Sociological Association and a prominent homosexual activist.

Much of the research will be done by John Gagnon, a sociologist at the State University of New York who has been active in the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (which is working to decriminalize marijuana), is a Kinsey disciple, and is the author of a book in which he appears to condone sex between adults and children.

The NIH Sex Study is bizarre in its probing of intimate details of Americans’ sexual behavior. It can be reliably predicted that this study will tend to undermine human intimacy and establish standards of conduct based on relative behaviors instead of morality.

It is also predictable that the results of the study will be used by radicals to promote public acceptance of every type of sex, including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, pedophilia, perversions, sex education, and teenage pregnancies. On top of that, the study is unnecessary, predictably inaccurate, costly, awarded, without competitive bidding, inappropriate for the Federal Government and generally offensive.