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### **N.3: Undergraduate Internship Program: Fall 2013**

Interview N-0025  
Robert Reid Wilson  
13 November 2013

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## ABSTRACT – ROBERT REID WILSON

Robert Wilson discusses his childhood in Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina as well as his time as a student at UNC-Chapel Hill from 1970 to 1973. He recalls his roles as sexual education activist leader, governor of Morrison Dorm, founder of the student-led peer-counseling group called Human Sexuality Information and Counseling Services, and group discussion leader coordinator for Dr. Takey Crist's Health Ed 33 class. He further discusses Dr. Takey Crist's influence on sexual education activism and his Health Ed 33 course which covered topics such as human anatomy, premarital intercourse, contraception, STDs, abortion, homosexuality, marriage, and relationships. Wilson also recalls his 1973 honors thesis titled "The Effects of Educational Stimuli on Change of Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes." In finding his calling through his work counseling, he planned the first problem pregnancy counseling conference in North Carolina and describes the importance of the availability of counseling for women facing female sexual guilt. Going on to work in the State Services Office of the Carolina Population Center as a training coordinator of the Mental Health Project (1973-1976), he also earned a master's degree in Counseling and a PhD in clinical psychology. He discusses his work in a specialty practice at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts and at his private practice in Chapel Hill, the Anxiety Disorders Treatment Center.

## FIELD NOTES – ROBERT REID WILSON

Interviewee: Robert Reid Wilson  
Interviewer: Ashley Templeton  
Interview date: November 13, 2013  
Location: Interviewee's Home Office, Chapel Hill, NC; 27516  
Length: 1:14:53

THE INTERVIEWEE. Robert Reid Wilson was an undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill and was a key member of the sexual revolution activism taking place at UNC's campus in the 1970s. He was a driven student and activist, and sought out ways to encourage sexual education throughout his college career. He was the graduate discussion leader coordinator for Dr. Takey Crist's Health Ed 33 class and the founder of the peer-counseling group, the Human Sexuality Information and Counseling Services (Oct 1971). The research for his honors thesis, focused on the Health Ed 33 class, "The Effects of Educational Stimuli on Change of Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes," began the momentum of his career. After graduation, he worked in the State Services Office of the Carolina Population Center as training coordinator of the Mental Health Project from 1973 to 1976. He now has his own private practice in Chapel Hill, Anxiety Treatment Center, and is internationally known for his work with anxiety disorders.

THE INTERVIEWER. Ashley Templeton is UNC-Chapel Hill undergraduate and an intern for the Southern Oral History Program in UNC-Chapel Hill for Fall 2013. She has been working with other interns on a project to explore student and faculty participation in the Sexual Revolution of the 1970s.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview was conducted in Dr. Wilson's home office, in a room furnished with warm lighting and comfortable chairs arranged in a doctor-patient set up. Dr. Wilson seemed to have an air of intelligence, organization and control. The interview began with the discussion of a childhood event that began his interest in sexual education. The interview then transitioned into a focus on his college days at UNC-CH, where he described himself as aggressively driven in his activist work. Dr. Wilson spoke about his introduction to Dr. Takey Crist, a major figure in the Sexual Revolution at UNC-CH, and his involvement in and perceptions of the Health Ed 33 class. He then spoke of the founding of the HSICS and the peer-counseling department's role on campus. Dr. Wilson discussed the idea of female sexual guilt as being one of the main things that needed to be combated at the time, and cited the inclusion of gay resource counselors in HSICS as a moment of personal growth in awareness. Dr. Wilson reflected on the successes and obstacles met in his career as a major leader on campus for sexual education, and the changes in sexual activity on campus that his honors thesis reported. An interruption occurred when someone knocked on the door. The

interview concluded with the sentiment that an interview with Dr. Crist is the next obvious step in this research.

## TAPE LOG – ROBERT REID WILSON

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Comments: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions.

### TAPE INDEX

Time            Topic

[Digital Recording, Starts at Beginning]

- 0:01            Informal chatting during preparation of the interview for sound check. Discussion on a bit of background information from a previous project done on the sexual revolution of the 1970s at UNC-CH.
- 2:40            Introduction: "My name is Ashley Templeton, I am at Dr. Reid Wilson's house in his at-home office and we are conducting an oral history focusing on the Sexual Revolution of the 1970s."
- 3:02            Childhood. Dr. Wilson was born in Raleigh, NC and raised in Charlotte, NC. He had two siblings, an older brother and a younger sister.
- 3:35            "Was there anything during your childhood that influenced you either wanting to go to UNC or your interest in sexuality and sexual education?" A problem pregnancy when he was 16 years old contributed significant influence on his interest in sexual education and his future career. Reflects on the fear of confronting his Catholic priest and the idea of sexual shame, and the process of fixing the issue overseas. Dr. Wilson cites his "tenacity" as a contributor to the problem's resolution. He cites this event as the motivator for his interest in sexual education and self-help: "I felt like I never wanted anyone else to be in that position again."
- 6:13            "Of course, even saying this is kind of a breach of family protocol." How did this event effect him as a person? Dr. Wilson discusses internal shame and the support

of adults in his life: “The adults around me stepped up, and I didn’t have to take on too many adult responsibilities as a sixteen-year-old.”

- 7:22 Allusion to other events in his childhood that Dr. Wilson was not willing to share – these unknown events contributed to an early “growing up” during his childhood. “I had parental responsibilities as a six-year-old onward, so if you can read between the lines about that...”
- 8:15 His journey to UNC-CH. High School interest in theater and debate. Average grades led his advisor to recommend against applying to UNC-CH, but it was the only place Dr. Wilson applied and he got in during early admissions. Lived in Morrison Dorm his freshman year.
- 9:20 “What year did you start the Human Sexuality and Information Counseling Services?” 1970. Dr. Wilson gives an overview of his emergence into the campus and the sexual education activism at UNC-CH. Dr. Wilson was elected governor of Morrison Dorm his sophomore year, and in October he hosted a successful Sexual Revolution Month – his first action in the field of sexuality education.
- 10:24 Met Dr. Takey Crist, who helped guide his activist goals and invited him to be a part of the Health Ed 33 class, Topics in Human Sexuality, he was planning to teach. Dr. Wilson discusses the university administration’s negative reception towards sexual education and the Health Ed 33 class. Health Ed 33 had to be offered as a graduate class in the School of Public Health (that undergraduates were allowed to take) in order to become part of university curriculum, and was the first course of its kind in the country. Reflects on the dynamic of an 18-year-old being in charge of a group of graduate discussion leaders. Dr. Wilson saw the founding of HSICS as an extension of his work to continue sexual education.
- 12:47 What was your perception of undergraduate understanding of sexuality and sexual health at the time? Could you see the need for sexual education on campus? “I just already knew, in essence, that we were missing the information.” Dr. Wilson says that the Health Ed 33 course opened his eyes to the information that students had been missing before. A mission of sexual responsibility rather than sexual activity.
- 14:20 Elaboration of university’s opposition of the course. Administrator discomfort over the written information in the pamphlet, “Elephants and Butterflies.” Jessie Helms, a TV commentator, supplied frequent opposition to liberal UNC-CH. Issues with financial support for the class, breaking the “no publicity” agreement made with the School of Public Health in order to pressure the university into giving the class the funds it needed to bring in lecturers. Some faculty opposition.
- 17:26 Student reception of Health Ed 33. Dr. Wilson remembers a 400-student waiting list, the course was “terribly popular.”

- 18:00 “What were your duties as a discussion leader organizer?” More of an administrative assistant for Dr. Crist, which put him in a great position to learn from others and absorb information.
- 19:05 “I was aggressive. People were so naïve about sexuality. I didn’t feel intimidated by the graduate students because they didn’t know much either.”
- 20:06 “What do you think was the most important thing for students at the time out of the [Health 33] content?” Sex attitude knowledge and behavior – topic for his honors thesis. The ability to talk about sexuality instead of it remaining taboo.
- 21:41 Mentions the importance of inclusion of homosexuality as a topic for HSICS.
- 22:19 Dr. Wilson discusses Dr. Crist as a person, mentor, and activist. Dr. Crist’s passion for sexual education. Dr. Wilson remembers only one moment of seeing Dr. Crist “getting clobbered” at the problem pregnancy conference that Dr. Wilson planned.
- 25:15 Talks about his role as an administrative aid to the Health Ed 33 class – Dr. Wilson organized the graduate student teaching assistants for the class. Discusses the dynamic of the group discussions in the class and the concept of peer counseling, which was new at the time.
- 27:43 Dr. Wilson talks about his motivation for starting HSCIS – the need for a better way to distribute information and the fact that students needed someone to talk to about their problems. Discussed the start-up and the procedure (or lack-there-of) involved, and described the atmosphere at HSICS. Described the excitement of the time, and the 21 original people involved becoming a family.
- 31:53 “Then it started to get a little tight.” Health Services got more involved in investigating HSICS and tension arose in a few ways because of that, but “No one ever tried to close us down.” Bruce Baldwin became the faculty advisor and supported the group. Things calmed down after “the eruption.”
- 33:17 Important anecdote – HSICS searches for gay resource counselors to join the peer-counseling team. “Bill Griffin and I were going into this meeting with these seven guys in the Student Union. And I was so scared because in my mind I said, ‘I’m liberal, I don’t know anything about this.’ I literally can still remember saying to myself, ‘What if I kinda get tapped, like a magic wand or something, and find out that I’m attracted to men?’ And then, walking into that room, it was like six seconds, and then it [that anxiety] was over. That was so useful to me to have that anticipatory dread...and to have it (snap) change in a flash was really enlightening to me.”
- 34:38 Expanding the counseling services based on the results of his honors thesis research. Dr. Wilson discusses the specifics of his thesis, “that what they

predicted was going to happen in ten years, in terms of sexual behavior, happened in four years... Going from about 37% of the population of undergraduates being sexually active to 73% - it was just unheard of.” Took this data to the administration and said, “We need to be serving these students.” When the administration refused to speak with him on the matter, Dr. Wilson went to the media with this information. “That was intense in terms of the heat that came down on UNC because I released that information. A lot of negative publicity for the University, which was the exact thing that Jessie Helms wanted to take advantage of.” Dr. Wilson discusses his naivety in terms of this public stunt, citing this as his one major regret in terms of his time at UNC-CH.

- 37:14 His search for more information on a state level, got together seven organizations and organized a problem pregnancy counseling workshop. 97-100 (out of 100) North Carolina counties were represented at the conference, Dr. Wilson mentions his pride over the success of this event and over sharing the sexual education aid he had been working on at UNC-CH with the rest of the state. Collaborated on a book on the topic with other counselors and physicians, which was given to everyone who attended. Wilke, the pro-life debater at the conference, brought balance to the event with his exhibit. After this event, Dr. Wilson felt ready to move on to his next project after graduation.
- 39:10 Discussion on the HSICS First Annual Report that Dr. Wilson wrote – Fall 1971 to Spring 1972. “What kind of impact do you feel that the counseling service was able to have on women [with female sexual guilt]?” Dr. Wilson said the counseling service gave them a safe place to talk about their sexual problems. Phone calls to the HSICS were popular because of the anonymity they allowed. “Permission to be yourself and stand up for yourself, and figure out what the guilt was about.”
- 41:30 The learning curve of being the first peer-counseling group of its kind in the country. “That’s what our meetings were for, trying to process what we’re hearing and how do we talk about it. Some of our trainings would be about, ‘Where do we go next?’ We had nothing to study.”
- 42:19 Posters and advertising for HSCIS – ‘Hey Charlie, did you score last night?’ Humor and support.
- 43:28 Women as the weaker gender at the time, because of the pressure and the lack of support.
- 44:04 Question about counselors response to problem pregnancies and “the five alternatives open to a pregnant woman.” Inclusion of suicide in the discussion as “an acknowledgement of how desperate they can become. A mass majority of these women...did not want to have the child. They didn’t want to die either, but I can relate to feeling like my life is ruined until you can figure out what to do next.”

- 45:43 Homosexuality in HSICS and the hiring of gay resource counselors. “They were well integrated, there was no problems. They were just nice human beings. You need to be able to talk to someone who’s gay if you’re gay.” Gay undergraduates becoming alcoholics because of their anxiety over their sexuality, they needed help. Rapid change in their trust in on-campus health by his fourth year at UNC-CH.
- 48:56 Homosexuality on campus. “Never spoken about. No one was pulling together, no activity. No groups, no nothing. It was all individuals, one-on-one. Which is a problem, of course! ‘I’m the only one!’ You have to understand that back then when you started to have feelings for someone of your own gender, you don’t know that other people have those feelings too.” Comparison of anxiety over sexuality at the time to other anxiety disorders. An important notion that was presented to students who were confused over their homosexuality – “One homosexual act does not make a homosexual.” The need to “talk these students down, or back – this is a behavior, you’re not ready to decide what your lifestyle is yet...slow down, son!”
- 52:25 “Did you feel your perceptions changing as the leader of the counseling service?” Nothing dramatic, aside from the anecdote with hiring homosexual counselors. Dr. Wilson said that he feels he evolved more after college than while he was in college.
- 53:01 Other activism at UNC-CH? Governorship of Morrison dorm, ran for the next office up –“Thank God I didn’t get it, because everything would have changed at that point.” Active in anti-war movements, helped close down the university in 1972 (as part of a national movement) – a powerful time for student activism. “Who would ever think the Soviet Union would break up? Who would ever think the Berlin Wall would come down? Who would ever think that students could rise up and influence enough of Americans that they reverse their course in Vietnam?”
- 54:54 “What was the most rewarding change that occurred during your time at UNC?” Dr. Wilson notes that finding his path in life during his college years was the most rewarding part of his UNC-CH experience. His confidence in himself as an innovator. Self-reflection on his personal growth during that time. “When you look at the four years, it’s like, ‘I was part of a movement.’ That was very exciting to me, very rewarding.”
- 56:38 More details on the problem pregnancy counseling conference that he planned and hosted. It was a sign of the beginning of change on a state level. The momentum of the success of this conference brought him into his next line of work after graduation, at the Carolina Population Services at the State Services Office on the Mental Health Project. He trained staff members in state health departments in how to deal with sexual issues. Dr. Wilson described the process

of de-sensitizing trainees on sexual issues through what was called a “sex attitude re-assessment.” Description of his published works after graduation.

- 1:01:23 Knock on the door, short break in interview conversation.
- 1:01:52 Return to conversation. Reflecting on the differences of back then and now.
- 1:02:32 Work after the Carolina Population Center? “I was the only one of my friends who didn’t work at a restaurant or throw pizzas or something – I was the only white collar guy.” Dr. Wilson worked at the Carolina Population Center for three years, then got his masters degree in counseling at Antioch University, then got his PhD in clinical psychology, then worked in a specialty practice at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Over the course of his career, he switched his focus from sexuality to chronic pain, and later switched again to anxiety disorders. He spent three years writing a book on anxiety disorders, which launched his career in anxiety disorders and self-help.
- 1:06:02 “That affinity has remained. I mean, that’s what I’ve been doing for 30 years now. And I’m so happy. I am, I’m so happy.”
- 1:06:40 Reflection on his work at UNC-CH. Any changed opinions on anything you did during your time at UNC-CH? Dr. Wilson said only the one incident with releasing his data to the media. “I think there was some ego involved in that, and some attention seeking.” Dr. Wilson also reflected on the ways in which his own personality was reflected in the protocol of the HSCIS.
- 1:08:20 Reflection on the most humiliating event of his UNC-CH days. A reporter from the Daily Tar Heel in 1972 interviewed him, then asked to re-interview him with a tape-recorder. The reporter then used the literal transcripts to show Dr. Wilson’s conversational stumblings, in order to purposely make him look bad.
- 1:10:03 “What were the highlights of your time at Carolina?” “You may know this yourself, but all of my learnings were outside of the classroom... Your lessons of Carolina are your life as a student.” His work on his honors thesis was extremely interesting and useful for him as a person. His first publication at 20 years old, remembers his work ethic during school years. “I’ve always been driven.”
- 1:12:20 “Was there anything that I didn’t mention that you’d like to talk about?” Dr. Wilson mentioned that it would be great to follow up his interview with an interview with Dr. Crist. Mentioned that Dr. Crist was a very interesting man – he collected art from Cypress and opened a museum, and also sustained a successful career in problem pregnancies and abortion which led him to carrying a gun under the seat of his car in response to all of the threats he’s received over the years.
- 1:13:09 Dr. Wilson lists a few names of potential future interviews. Bill Griffin(s?), worked with Dr. Wilson in the beginning of his work at UNC-CH; Lana Starnes,

student who wrote the Elephants and Butterflies column with Dr. Crist; Emily Kenan, girlfriend at the time and involved in HSICS.

1:14:17 "That's all. I'll say no more on the record."

1:17:53 END OF INTERVIEW.