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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Reflection of sexuality in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road***

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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

In the opening chapters theories of sexuality should be researched, for example sexual orientation. The historical and cultural context of American society in regard to attitudes toward sexuality and gender roles should be briefly described, especially societal changes taking place in throughout the 20th century. In this part the changing positions of women could be explored. Pertinent bibliographical information on Jack Kerouac and a short overview of his important works should be featured. The composition of *On the Road* as well as a brief summary of the plot, characters and style of writing should be described. The book's place in the context of the Beat generation and in the overall canon of American literature should be emphasized; later works and authors who were influenced by Kerouac and the Beat generation may also be included. The most important part of the paper should be an analysis of the sexual attitudes, encounters and relationships depicted in *On the Road* using the concepts and theories outlined in the first sections of the paper. One important aspect is the difference between sexual attitudes exhibited in the book and those of mainstream American society of the 1950s. Finally as a conclusion the influence of sexual and other attitudes expressed in *On the Road* on mainstream society even until today may be discussed.

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## **Abstract**

This paper is concerned with sexuality in 1950s America. It examines sexual and social conduct, sex education, gender roles, and the role of the state. Authors have described many aspects of human sexuality over the centuries, but in twentieth-century America many important changes took place. The main themes such as promiscuity, premarital sex and homosexuality, are brought into focus through an exploration of the Jack Kerouac novel *On the Road*.

## **Key words**

Sexuality, gender roles, sex education, promiscuity, premarital sex, homosexuality, 1950s America, Jack Kerouac

## **Abstract**

Tato práce se zabývá americkou kulturou v padesátých letech dvacátého století spojenou s tématem sexuality. Zkoumá sexuální a sociální chování v roli mužů a žen, sexuální výchovu, úlohu Amerického státu. Mnoho autorů popsal v průběhu staletí problematiku sexuality, nicméně v Americe došlo ve dvacátém století k mnoha důležitým změnám. Hlavními tématy této práce jsou promiskuita, předmanželský sex a homosexualita, které se odráží v díle Jacka Kerouaca *Na cestě*.

## **Klíčová slova**

Sexualita, mužské a ženské role, sexuální výchova, předmanželský sex, homosexualita, Amerika padesátých let, Jack Kerouac

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# 1. Introduction

The main subject of this thesis is an analysis of sexuality in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*. Kerouac, as a significant writer of the Beat Generation, protested against the mainstream values and codes of his day. *On the Road* depicts a series of cross-country trips throughout America, which represent Kerouac's own experiences and the real people he met during his youth and while he was traveling.

The thesis is in two parts. In the first part, from chapters one to three, which gives some theoretical background, I will briefly define sexuality and gender roles in the cultural context of American society and identify the mainstream values. Biographical information about Jack Kerouac is interpreted in chapter three. In chapters four and five, I will identify the main characters in *On the Road*, give a brief overview of the story and explore how the subject of sexuality is treated in the book. Part five offers some reflections on sexuality: the first section deals with homosexuality and sodomy; the second is devoted to gender roles; the third looks at the promiscuous behavior of some characters in the book; the next three sections focus on relationships and family life in 1950s America; the final section is devoted to women's attitudes as represented in the novel. The last part of chapter five describes Kerouac's relationship with his mother, with whom he lived for most of his life.

Kerouac's story offers many relevant observations and insights into the sexual manners of his day. For example:

*"Boys and girls in America have such a sad time together; sophistication demands that they submit to sex immediately without proper preliminary talk. Not courting talk — real straight talk about souls, for life is holy and every moment is precious."* (Kerouac, *On the Road*, 51)

By this, Kerouac is suggesting, among other things, that involvement in sexual intercourse is often determined by the need for physical nourishment. This paper will identify many other ways in which Kerouac graphically depicts the social and sexual environment of the 'beat' generation of which he was a part, and of American society as a whole.

## **2. Theory of sexuality**

Alfred Kinsey, one of the most significant social scientists in American history, founded the Institute for Sex Research, which explored sexual conduct in 1940s and 1950s America. His team of scientists carried out a number of anonymous surveys that investigated the sexual practices of eighteen million people. He openly talked about taboo subjects such as homosexuality, sodomy and premarital sex. His results were published in 1948, in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. A follow-up work, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, was published in 1951. The theme of feminine desires was scandalous; however, the book became the best seller of its time. Kinsey's perception of homosexuality was eventually overturned by his colleagues at the institute, and a law suit in 2003 finally ended "the criminalization of homosexuality" in America. (NNDB, Alfred Kinsey)

### **2.1. Basic terms**

"Human sexual behavior is different from the sexual behavior of other animals, in that it seems to be governed by a variety and interplay of different factors." Ludwin Molina, of Carolina State University, describes the process of animals or species being "driven by a 'force' to reproduce and therefore partake in sexual behavior." But sexual intercourse performed by human individuals is not carried out for the same reason: "Humans are not sexually active just for the sake of reproduction. Rather, there are a variety of complex factors that lead people to have sex." (Molina) Janis S. Bohan explains the term 'biological sex' as: "The dichotomous distinction between female and male based on physiological characteristics, especially chromosomes and external genitalia." (1996, xi) This means that an individual is either a man or a woman.

Sexuality has been defined as "the sum of the physical, functional, and psychological attributes that are expressed by one's gender identity and sexual behavior, whether or not related to the sex organs or to procreation." (Medical Dictionary) Human sexuality is usually described as either heterosexuality or homosexuality.

Homosexuality is sexual behavior of an individual who is emotionally and intimately interested in people of the same sex or, “sexual orientation toward or activity with persons of the same sex” according to the Medical Dictionary. Bohan defines the term ‘homosexual’ as “a person whose affectional and sexual orientation is toward members of the same sex.” (1996, xiv)

Heterosexuality is sexual behavior of an individual who is emotionally and intimately interested in people of the opposite sex: “sexual attraction to or activity with persons of the opposite sex” (Medical Dictionary). Bohan explains the term ‘heterosexual’ as: “an affectional and sexual orientation towards members of the other sex.” (1996, xiv)

Bisexuality is explained as “the state of being sexually responsive or attracted to members of both sexes.” (Medical Dictionary) The term ‘bisexual’ is defined by Bohan as “a person whose affectional and sexual orientations are towards members of both sexes, either serially or simultaneously.”(1996, xi)

Margot Canaday, an assistant professor at Princeton University, states that by the late 1940s and early 1950s, “many Americans [...] believed that individuals were either heterosexual or homosexual, and that “normal” men and women were those who had sexual relations with persons of the opposite sex.” (2009, 177) In her book *The Straight State* she also quotes Kinsey’s findings that “37 percent of American men had at least one homosexual experience.” (Canaday, 242) Interestingly, homosexual intercourse was banned both inside and outside of a marriage or other relationship. We may assume, therefore, that many of those people gained experience of homosexuality by using a prostitute. Prostitution can be defined as a commercial contact that is either heterosexual or homosexual; prostitutes, and their customers, can be either male or female. The use of alcohol or drugs during sex is quite common and can lead to unsafe sexual practices and the risk of sexually transmitted illnesses (STI’s). The phenomenon of STI’s was another reason for an increased interest in the taboo subjects of premarital sex, promiscuity and safe sex. Bolin and Whelehan define premarital sex as “sex before marriage” (2009, 533) and promiscuity as being “highly value-laden and referring to the

number of sex partners a person has.” (2009, 533) They describe safe sex as “those behaviors that will not transmit HIV or STI’s.” (2009, 525)

## **2.2. Gender roles and Sexism**

Gender roles are a cluster of social and cultural expectations applied to men and women. Children are naturally quite similar in their behavior, but there is evidence that parents tend to treat boys differently from girls. (Block, 1983) It can be assumed that cultural factors, such as how men and women are expected to behave, what types of jobs they perform, and even what they wear, have a strong influence on gender roles.

Hilary Klotz observes that “women felt tremendous societal pressure to focus their aspirations on a wedding ring.” The popularity of being married was seen as a trend. Klotz adds that:

Being married after high school was marked as standard. The leading topic of culture and media was a family unit. Even though there were women with other ambitions, this period persuaded them about the fact that a husband was more important than a university degree. Their role was family planning with a wedded partner, as being single and pregnant was intolerable, especially for white women. Many unmarried pregnant woman were refused by society for the duration of their pregnancy. However, young women were attracted to premarital sex in spite of the public demands to remain sexually inexperienced.

Describing the male situation in the 1950s, Stephanie Coontz suggests that “For the first time, a majority of men could support a family and buy a home without pooling their earnings with those of other family members. Many Americans built a stable family life on these foundations.” Klotz notes that “starting in the 1950s sex was viewed as a key component of a healthy and loving marriage.” This means an ideal man was a devoted husband, father and home-provider. Similarly, Michal Edward Melody and Linda M. Peterson, in their book *Teaching America About Sex*, suggest that the 1950s saw an increase in “the desire for stability and security and an end to sacrifice.” (1999, 115) Canaday describes the situation in the Work Projects Administration: “jobs were regularly reserved for married men, designed to put a brake on women’s eagerness to be

the family breadwinner.” (2009, 130) Furthermore, increasing materialism supplied most families with TV sets and cars, and most Americans conformed to the social and political ‘rules’ that materialism brought with it.

Ira L. Reiss, a sociologist who carried out a sociological Investigation of American Sexual Standards, suggests four types of premarital sexual behavior standards: abstinence, the double standard, permissiveness without affection and permissiveness with affection. This thesis mainly focuses on the latter three types of sexually active conduct.

The ‘double standard’ “entails using one standard to evaluate male behavior and another standard to evaluate female behavior, making it possible for a man and a woman to be judged quite differently on the identical sort of behavior.”(I.L. Reiss, 1964, 89) It does not apply only to sexual activities. There are spheres in which men and women participate together, such as the professional world and the world of religion, but where the tendency is for men to be better paid and to reach a higher status than women. (Reiss, 1964, 90) Speaking about the apparent double standard in premarital sexual behavior in the 1950s, Reiss adds “premarital coitus is wrong for all women, and thus women who indulge are bad women.” (1964, 92) However, the same judgment did not affect men. Their actions were less restricted, with only a small amount of control being applied by some parents. (Reiss, 1964, 92-95) In relation to the double standard, the term sexism means inequality between males and females, and that women’s status is destined to be lower than men’s. (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002, 1301)

Reiss labels women in Western cultural history as ‘subordinated’ and believes that a genuine standard that would treat females and males equally in terms of sexual morals has never really existed. (1964, 123) Men who were in favor of sexual double standards were remedied by sexual activities with prostitutes, whose class gradually developed throughout the centuries not only to sustain the double standard. Prostitutes were considered as “bad and worthless women because they violate the code of chastity [...] on the other hand, they are performing a necessary function for the double

standard.” Reiss described the promiscuous character among most male participants: “Double-standard men switch partners rapidly: their lack of respect for the girl with whom they indulge often makes them feel disgusted with her.” (1964, 102) The double standard also meant that women were forbidden premarital coitus in order to keep their virginity and chastity. Therefore, prostitutes were involved in sexual activities with men in order to maintain their sexual freedom. This pattern changed later in the twentieth century. (Reiss, 1964, 98-99)

Additional types in the book *Premarital Sexual Standards* are called ‘permissiveness without affection’ and ‘permissiveness with affection’.

‘Permissiveness without affection’ is behavior that contrasts the “conception of love” without particular care of such an individual. Their understanding of sexual contact is considered as normal and obligatory. (Reiss, 1964, 121)

Reiss compares this need to eating or breathing. This unspiritual satisfaction works as an excuse for such behavior. However, some individuals have faith in love to appear as an outcome of their act. On the other hand, some do not believe in affection at all. This means although women may not have been judged for their sexual activities, they might nevertheless have cared about their reputation. Furthermore, thanks to the “mobility effect” they could, according to Reiss, travel to places where they were not known, and so experience casual sex. “Females often date out-of-town men who do not know the double standard males in their home neighborhood [so that] they can act as they like and have no fears about their reputation being ruined at home.” (Reiss, 1964, 103-104)

‘Permissiveness with affection’ “is a single standard since it accepts coitus as right for both men and women when a stable affectionate relationship is involved.” (Nelson in Reiss, *Footie Sex as Play*, 1954, 126) Sexual coitus is not allowed without strong emotions or even love. (Reiss, 1964, 130)

Restriction of female sexual activity is mainly a consequence of unwanted premarital pregnancies. Mothers have always taught their daughters about the dangers of pregnancy to discourage them from having sex. Another useful threat has been venereal diseases such as syphilis. (Harvey Locke in Reiss, *Changing Attitudes toward Venereal Diseases*, 1939, 146-155)

Reiss suggests that the double standard is more popular than permissiveness with affection. (1964, 126) Reiss, warning about the dominance of heterosexuality, suggests that “both male and female homosexuality is never the dominant sexual mode for a society [but remains] subsidiary to heterosexuality.” (1964, 30)

### **2.3. Sodomy laws**

Sodomy laws were supposed to regulate private homosexual and heterosexual erotic practices. The American government has been interfering with the private behavior of homosexuals since the time of the English colonization. “The original thirteen American colonies derived their laws from English common law and continued the legal tradition in which sodomy carried the penalty of death.” (George Painter) In early 1950s America, however, some significant changes to the law were made: “The 1955 edition of the American Law Institute’s model penal code omitted sodomy laws for the first time. In 1961, the Illinois legislature revised their criminal code without prohibiting sodomy.” (George Painter) Patrick Chandler adds:

Homosexuality was considered as “sexual perversion”. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed *Executive Order 10450: Security Requirements for Government Employment*. The legacy announced that “sexual perversion” is a circumstance for dismissal of a federal employee and for refusing the option of employment to potential candidates. President Harry Truman had written an extensive policy for dismissal from federal employment during his administration before Eisenhower, but his guidelines were thought to be a little weak. Eisenhower categorized homosexuality and communism as national security threats. Later, in the 1960s, homosexuals started going to court, demanding action against federal job discrimination. (Salem Press, Chandler)

After Eisenhower’s Executive Order was created, the Federal Bureau of Investigation started checking on people and the places they gathered in, and also maintained a list of names. Agents sniffed around various states literally bullying and making threats. American society tented to be extremely “sexually orthodox”. (Canaday, 199) It is apparent that homosexuality was considered a crime against the state and against nature. Some homosexuals were discriminated against and viewed as mentally ill; some were

even persecuted and imprisoned. Lesbianism was also illegal. Canaday, referring to Kinsey's book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, states that "Kinsey observed that while sodomy statutes had generally been drafted in gender-neutral language that could encompass sexual acts between women." (2009, 174) His survey of the enforcement of sex law in New York revealed "three cases from the 1940s or 1950s in which women had been arrested for homosexual activity." (2009, 174) Melody and Peterson add that there were many people arrested and charged with, for example, violating public morals. (1999, 120)

## **2.4. Sex education**

The U.S. authorities tended to educate not only curious teenagers but also their parents. Many American homes were situated in the countryside, and this offered the possibility of teaching about sex through observing nature and the sexual reproduction of plants and animals. Developing from social anxieties, sex educators attempted to create "rational control" over possible sexual forces. (Jeffery P. Moran) Moran further states that:

Health reformers and ministers in 1830s America issued various brochures and books to inform the young man who left home for school or a job. These publications were characteristically of theological, nutritional, and philosophical content, but all tended to convince readers to control their sexual urges until they could be practiced in marriage without much harm. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, The American Social Hygiene Association was founded to inform young Americans by presenting a series of sex education lectures. (J.P.Moran)

In the 1950s, sex education started to be presented seriously, especially in schools, where educational films instructed young people to lead safe and clean lives, and demonstrated mature approaches to dating, using teenage actors. "They served as reminders to teenagers that there were customs and certain boundaries in dating, and if they violated them, there could be serious consequences." Most films portrayed cases of sexually transmitted diseases and "unwanted pregnancies". (Smith in Moran, 47-51)

### **3. The historical and cultural context of American society**

#### **3.1. American mainstream society in the 1950s**

After the United States entered the Second World War, American women found themselves having to support themselves and serve the nation. “Unprecedented numbers of women entered the ranks of factory workers, helping American industry meet the wartime production demands for planes, tanks, ships, and weapons.” (Metropolitan State College of Denver) Gender roles had changed, and “between 1943 and 1945, polls indicated that 47 to 68 percent of married women workers wanted to keep their jobs after the war.” (Metropolitan State College of Denver) However, soldiers returning from the war, as Sue Goodwin states, “created the baby boom.” (Goodwin, KC Library) According to S.J. Kleinberg, female employment and the postwar baby boom came into conflict, as “In 1940, the average woman had two children; this rose to three by 1950. By 1960, families of three and four children were typical.” (Modern American Culture, Kleinberg in Bigsby, 2006, 203-204)

Kleinberg adds: The growing divorce rate also contributed to increased female employment. But social pressure to get and stay married was emphasized by manufacturers and women’s magazines, which focused on women’s roles in the home and promised that technology would ease housework. The Ladies’ Home Journal published an extract “*Have American housewives traded brains for brooms?*” by Betty Friedan, in which she described the American effort to convince women that their position at home is genuine. This emphasis on the female being a spouse and mother was to blame for the agony of modern American women. (Kleinberg in Bigsby, 2006, 204)

Mainstream American society in the 1950s was strongly orientated towards the family. However, not all citizens of 1950s America were of the same mainstream mind. This traditionalism was refused mostly by economically independent American women. The fight for equality in the workplace and for women’s social rights and other opportunities, such as the education and sexual freedom that men had already benefited from, is commonly known as Feminism. Angela McRobbie suggests “The double standard has been exposed and overruled. If women emerge as subjects of sexual desire,

[...] thanks to feminism, as a kind of entitlement then men must beware. (2009, 36) Jack Kerouac and many other writers and artists rebelled against materialism with spontaneity and spirituality. Their aim was to confront the prototype of typical morals. (United States History) As a response “The Beats, [...] rejected the 1950s emphasis on acquisition, conformity, and obedience and authority.” (Melody, Peterson, 1999, 137-188) “Their literary work displayed their sense of freedom [they] glorified the possibilities of the free life.” (United States History)

### **3.2. The Beat Generation**

The Beat Generation was a group of writers “who met in the neighborhood surrounding Columbia University in uptown Manhattan in the mid-40’s.” (Asher, Literary Kiks) Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady and William S. Burroughs were a group of close friends whose mutual inspiration later led to antisocial protest. (Parkins, Beat Generation)

According to Ginsberg, the term Beat Generation first arose in a conversation between Kerouac and John Holmes when they were recalling the ‘Lost Generation’, and Kerouac said, “Ah, this is nothing but a beat generation.” (Ginsberg in Waldman, 1996, xiii) The second meaning of the term, according to Ginsberg, was influenced by the introduction of “hip language”, in which the phrase “beat” meant “subterranean” (Ginsberg in Waldman, 1996, xiii). To counteract a lot of misunderstanding in the media, the third meaning of ‘beatness’ was expressed by Kerouac as “darkness that precedes opening to light, egolessness, giving room for religious illumination.” (Ginsberg in Waldman, xiv) The word ‘Beatnik’ was a play on the Russian word Sputnik, its meaning being intentionally provocative, as its creator, Herb Caen, a Californian columnist, meant to “to cast doubt on the beatnik’s red-white-and-blue-blooded all-Americanness.”:

The post-war decade did not reflect the writers anymore, the authors decided to write about common life, rebellion as drug use and open sex. Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who represent the Beatniks’ works, observe the results of a new tendency in civil disobedience. This group of rebels favored peace, and challenged mainstream thoughts. The men of the movement never

showed richness of material life, women wore simple clothing; their apartments were small and barely furnished. (US History Project)

Ginsberg also reveals the core values that influenced the main themes of the Beat Generation. The stream of consciousness was connected with Eastern religion, multiculturalism, spiritual liberation (which influenced sexual liberation), and “interest in psychedelic substances as educational tools.” (Ginsberg in Waldman, 1996, xvi)

### **3.2.1. Allen Ginsberg**

Ginsberg was born in New Jersey in 1926. At the beginning of his studies at the University of Columbia, he developed a friendship with Kerouac, Huncke and Burroughs. (Waldman, 1996, 83) While studying at university, Ginsberg experienced a hallucination of William Blake reading some of his poems. According to Waldman this event was a major influence on Ginsberg’s attitude towards his life and work. (1996, 83) A clear picture of Ginsberg’s sexuality is described in *Howl*. Waldman states that *Howl* was “the object of San Francisco obscenity charges.” (1996, 83)

Ginsberg published a number of collections of poetry, including *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1961), *Planet News* (1968), and *The Fall of America: Poems of These States* (1973), which won the National Book Award. (Poets) Countercultural interests led Ginsberg to visit India in 1962-63, after which he became a practicing Buddhist. Ginsberg was also politically active, particularly in the area of challenging censorship, and in later life became a professor of English at Brooklyn College in New York. (Waldman, 1996, 83-84)

### **3.2.2. Neal Cassady**

Cassady met Kerouac in New York and they became close friends. Cassady was interested in writing, and most of his work was in the form of personal letters to Kerouac and others. His writing reflected his wild lifestyle (Waldman, 1996, 58), and Waldman adds that Cassady’s “vast, spontaneous, sexually explicit letters, full of street talk, brazen fun-seeking and personal intimacy, helped break Kerouac free from the straight mode of writing.” (1996, 58)

### **3.2.3. William Burroughs**

Burroughs met Allen Ginsberg in 1943 while studying at the University of Columbia. He later developed a friendship with Kerouac and other associates who “looked up to Burroughs as a sage elder and teacher, skilled in the ways of dope and the various ins and outs of criminal life, as well as a mighty intellectual visionary and social critic.” (Waldman, 1996, 162)

### **3.2.4. Jack Kerouac**

Jack Kerouac’s family was of French Canadian origin. His father Leo married Jack’s mother Gabrielle in 1915 and together they had three children: Gerard, Caroline and “Ti Jean”, who was the youngest. They spoke a dialect called Joul; Jack did not speak English until he started school. (Charters in Kerouac, x) Kerouac did not have an idyllic childhood. His brother Gerard became ill and died at the age of nine, and Gabrielle suffered a nervous breakdown. However, Jack always felt safe in his mother’s arms. (Amburn, 1998, 9-12) During his childhood “he expressed his sexuality, as many boys do, almost entirely in homoerotic terms.” Kerouac first experienced sexual play at the age of ten with a neighborhood friend. (Amburn, 1998, 5-15) He attended Lowell High school, and thanks to his athletic talent he was offered a scholarship to either Boston or Columbia; on his mother’s recommendation he chose Columbia. (Charters, 28, 29) Jack became a football hero at Columbia, but after seriously injuring his leg he was no longer able to play. In 1940, still considered a football star by his college associates, he wrote a football column in the university journal, “The Spectator”. (Charters, 1973, 32) Most of his early work was in private journals, or short stories inspired by the novelist Thomas Wolfe. Needing to maintain a ‘B’ average for his scholarship, his injury-induced rest from long football training sessions benefitted him greatly. One September afternoon in 1941, after Roosevelt’s famous anti-war “I hate war” speech over the radio, Kerouac walked off the football field without saying goodbye to the coach. He went home to his parents, who were angry with him that he had left university and insisted that he find a job. (Charters, 1973, 34) “He signed abroad as a scullion on the *S.S. Dorchester*, sailing that afternoon to Greenland with a

gang of airport construction workers.” (Charters, 1973, 36) In 1942, with the voyage over, Kerouac returned to Lowell, to his parents, who made him go back to Columbia and back to football. Jack, completely out of shape, was kept on the bench for the first game. This insulted Jack and his future as a footballer was finished. (Charters, 1973, 36-37) Excited about a career as a naval officer, he immediately joined the U.S. Navy, but later quit and became an ordinary merchant seaman. Before setting off he met a girl called Edie Parker, whom he promised to live with when he got back from England. Edie lived with Joan Vollmer, another woman who enjoyed Jack’s company, so he tended to spend time in their apartment more often. Edie introduced Jack to Lucien Carr, a friend whom she met while he was sailing. (Charters, 1973, 41, 42) Lucien was constantly followed around by Dave Kammerer, who introduced William Burroughs as his former classmate from Harvard. Edie and Jack got married but they split up only a couple of months later in 1944, the same year he met Allen Ginsberg. (Charters, 1973, 43-51) Allen’s friend Neal Cassady came to New York with his teenage bride Luanne in 1947. Neal organized his life so that he could divide his time between Ginsberg and Kerouac (so that he could learn how to write), and Luanne. (Charters, 1973, 67-70) A short time later, Cassady and Ginsberg started a relationship. Ann Charters also reveals Jack’s own sexual confusion: “the strongest emotion he ever felt” was for his mother. (Charters, 1973, 70-73) Despite this, in 1950 he married Joan Harvey. Their marriage lasted only six months, and, having problems finishing *On the Road*, Jack returned to his mother’s place. His fixation on his mother had a huge impact on his lifetime’s work. (Charters, 121-129) In 1966, he married Stella, his third wife, and they moved to Florida. Kerouac died of alcoholism in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1969, at the age of 47. (Charters, 356-366)

*On the Road* was finally published in 1957, although it was written in 1947. Other works by Jack Kerouac include *The Town and the City*, his first novel, *The Dharma Bums*, in which he depicted experiences of Buddhism, *The Subterraneans*, *Big Sur*, *Duluoz Legend*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *Doctor Sax*, *Mexico City Blues*, *Visions of Cody* based on his life hero Neal Cassady, and *Visions of Gerard* based on Kerouac's brother and memories of childhood. (Waldman, 1996, 16-57)

## 4. On the Road

In “*On the Road*”, Jack Kerouac provides a unique insight into 1950s American society, expressing the values of youth, freedom and rebellion. The book is divided into five parts, the first four of which each describe a journey Kerouac made around the USA and Mexico. According to Emory Elliott, Kerouac belonged to the group of writers who investigated the problem of contemporary life, and devoted his time to spiritual exploration and “moral values in a nuclear age.” (Elliott in Bigsby, 439) Kerouac’s method of writing nonstop, which involved rapid typing while using drugs, was strongly criticized. He wrote *On the Road* in three weeks. Fiona Paton, an assistant professor at New York State University, describes critical ideas in which Kerouac has been compared to a hooligan street bard who tells a good story. (Fiona Paton)

### 4.1. Character list

The storyline in *On the Road* represents Kerouac’s actual experiences with his friends, his lovers and with other people he knew. Ann Charters states that his intention was, “to gather all his autobiographical novels together in a uniform binding published with the names of real life [...] Allen Ginsberg was called ‘Carlo Marx’, William Burroughs was ‘Old Bull Lee,’ Herbert Huckle was ‘Elmo Hassel,’ in addition to Kerouac as ‘Sal Paradise’ and Cassady as ‘Dean Moriarty.’”(Charters in Kerouac, 1991, xxviii)

**Sal Paradise** is the main protagonist. His real name is Salvator, a Christian name as Kerouac was Catholic. (Shmoop Editorial Team) He is a young, well educated writer who, after the failure of his marriage, decides to make a few changes in his life.

**Dean Moriarty** is Sal’s best friend. Dean is a young, crazy womanizer who grew up in Lamer Street, Denver.

**Marylou** is Dean’s wife. She is very beautiful but dim-witted and cunning. She is an alter-ego of Cassady’s first wife, Luanne. (Charters, 1991, 102)

**Carlo Marx** is an old friend of Sal’s. He is a poet who likes writing poetry and talking. At some point in the story, Carlo is emotionally interested in Dean.

**Sal's aunt** is tolerant, supportive and kind. Sal lives with her in Paterson, New Jersey, and on Long Island. Throughout Sal's wanderings, she sends him money. She is always happy when Sal gets home "in one piece." (Kerouac, 10)

**Rita Bettencourt** is a waitress in Denver: "a fine chick, slightly hung-up on a few sexual difficulties." (Kerouac, 40)

**Camille** is Dean's second wife, for whom he divorces Marylou. Loyal Camille lives in San Francisco with her and Dean's children.

**Ed Dunkel** is a friend of Sal's and Dean's, and very loyal to the latter. He sometimes talks nonsense and usually just follows the group. Although he is married (to Galatea), he still enjoys having sex with other women.

**Remi Boncoeur** is an old prep-school friend of Sal's and is of French origin. Remi introduces Sal to a girl whom Sal later marries. (Kerouac, 1957, 54)

**Lee Ann** is Remi Boncoeur's girlfriend. She wants to become a rich Hollywood actress. Remi tries to please her every day but "Lee Ann had a bad tongue and gave him a call down everyday." (Kerouac, 1957, 34)

**Old Bull Lee** works as a teacher. His profession also expresses his character - he has been studying all his life.

**Lucille** is a married woman who lives in New York and whom for a while Sal wants to marry.

**Terry** is an attractive Mexican whom Sal meets on a bus to Los Angeles, and with whom he has a quality relationship. Sal spends some time with Terry and her little son Johnny, living in a tent while working as a cotton picker.

## 4.2. Plot overview

The story opens with the protagonist, Sal Paradise, living an ordinary life in Paterson, New Jersey. Chad King introduces Sal to Dean Moriarty, who is very keen to become a writer. They become close friends and go on many journeys together. On his first journey, Sal goes hitchhiking to Denver, where he meets with his friends Chad King, Tim Grey, Carlo Marx, Dean, and Dean's wife Marylou. Sal, already encouraged by Dean's stories, is very excited about the night-life in Denver. The spontaneous Sal is convinced he will be able to find a job in San Francisco, and his childhood friend Remi

promises to help him. Remi lives with his girlfriend, Lee Ann, and they are determined to share their one room flat with Sal. The two friends start working as police officers and share the cost of living, but everything starts to fall apart when Lee Ann becomes selfish and ungrateful. Sal decides to avoid the troubles and heads for Los Angeles. On his way he meets a beautiful Mexican girl called Terry, with whom he falls in love and plans a future.

Sal's second journey begins when Dean goes to see him in Virginia, while he, Sal, is staying with his brother for Christmas. For this journey, Ed Dunkel and Marylou are also on board. First, Dean drives to New York as he is determined to see Carlo Marx. On the way, Sal reveals that he is in a serious relationship with Lucille, whom he met at college. Their plans are interrupted as Sal gets a phone call from Old Bull Lee to come and collect Galatea, Ed's abandoned wife. The visit to Old Bull Lee and his wife Jane in New Orleans goes well. Dean, Marylou and Sal then head west. Once they reach San Francisco, Dean leaves them on the street and decides to reunite with Camille. Marylou and Sal share a room in a hotel, but their stay is unpleasant as they are constantly quarrelling. Sal becomes extremely disappointed with Dean and Marylou's behavior, and he eventually goes back East, completely broke.

In the spring of 1949, Sal decides to set out for Denver, but doesn't stay long as none of his friends lives there any longer. So, he goes to San Francisco. The night he arrives he knocks at Dean's door. Dean is living with Camille, who is expecting another child, but Dean admits to Sal that he is crazy about Marylou again. Marylou is dating a used-car dealer who threatens to kill Dean if he does not leave her alone. Dean tells Sal a crazy story about visiting Marylou's place and threatening to kill either her or himself; fortunately Marylou managed to calm him down. In the meantime Camille, not very happy about their visitor, constantly suspects Dean of lying and throws Dean and Sal out. The boys make a new plan to go to New York and then to Europe. Sal and Dean are offered a ride up to Denver, where Dean opens up to his desires. His lust for teenage girls almost kills him, and his passion for stealing cars also causes trouble. They find a man who needs somebody to drive his Cadillac to Chicago for him, and they jump at the chance. When they finally get to New York, Dean bumps into another girl, Inez, at a

party. They fall in love, she becomes pregnant, but their dream trip to Italy never happens.

Sal's fourth and final journey takes him to Mexico; after selling his book, he leaves New York alone. On arriving in Denver, he is informed that Dean is going with him to Mexico. Dean's excuse for going to Mexico is to get a cheap divorce from Camille so he can marry Inez. They travel to Mexico City making several stops. They spend time in a whorehouse having sex with under-age prostitutes, but in Mexico City, after further drug abuse, Sal gets sick and suffers from a fever. As soon as Dean receives his divorce documents he leaves Sal and Mexico City behind.

When Sal is well enough, he returns to New York where he finds out that Dean, having married Inez, has left her and the child to return to his second wife Camille in San Francisco. When Dean once more shows up in New York, Sal refuses to follow him back West as he is determined to settle down. The last time they see each other is when Remi organizes a group visit to a concert without inviting Dean. The story closes with Sal wandering along the riverside in New Jersey thinking of the road west and to Dean Moriarty.

## **5. Reflection of sexuality in *On the Road***

### **5.1. Homosexuality and sodomy**

A description of how social patterns prescribe sexual orientation is commonly used in novels, and in the first part of *On the Road* Kerouac introduces the theme of homosexuality. However, despite being a rebel against 1950s conventions, Kerouac does not speak openly about it. Rather, as a prohibited theme, homosexuality is subtly indicated by the character Carlo Marx, whose sexual mystique remains throughout the story. We must presume that Kerouac was at odds with propriety, yet there are certain moments between Carlo and Dean that suggest a romantic involvement.

“A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes. From that moment on I saw very little of Dean, and I was a little sorry too.” (Kerouac, 1957, 7)

Not long after Kerouac introduced Ginsberg to Cassady, Charters adds, “[they became] lovers.” (1974, 72) Confirming Charters’s statement in Kerouac’s biography, there is some evidence of a relationship between Dean and Carlo. “I wondered if Dean and Carlo were having their heart-to-heart.” (Kerouac, 1957, 41) Kerouac vaguely indicates the fact that Dean and Carlo might be having a romantic affair. Nevertheless, the truth that Carlo is a homosexual is never really revealed in the story. There are signs of Carlo’s jealousy when Dean is seeing another girl. Carlo is shocked, and seems disappointed. “‘What?’ said Carlo, ‘I thought we were going to talk [...] Oh, these Denver Doldrums!’” (Kerouac, 1957, 40) Sharing Dean with Marylou and Camille seems to be extremely difficult for Carlo; on the other hand, Dean is capable of loving more people at the same time. He makes a schedule because he tries to spend time with his lovers.

“There is always a schedule in Dean’s life. The schedule is this; I came off work a half-hour ago. At this time Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel [...] At one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille [...] giving me time to arrive at one-thirty. Then he comes out with me.” (Kerouac, 1957, 38)

Charters states: “Kerouac’s attitude toward homosexuality was complex and ambivalent. He couldn’t accept it in Ginsberg as anything but a weakness [...]” (Charters, 1974, 72, 73) There is one particular example of harshness toward Carlo. One night during Sal’s first trip in Denver, Dean and Carlo talk about the honesty and certainty between them, but Dean does not know what to say. Dean asks Sal for his opinion. “‘That last thing you can’t get, Carlo. Nobody can get to that last thing. We keep living in catching it once for all.’ [...] ‘There is nothing to tell,’ I said and laughed.” (Kerouac, 1957, 44) The reader may notice Sal’s arrogant reaction toward Carlo, who is rather hurt by his reaction. “‘Everything you say is negative.’” (Kerouac, 1957, 44) As a result, there is some evidence of bisexuality, as the rebellious Dean is already married to a woman, Marylou. We may assume, therefore, that both characters, Dean and Carlo, hide their sexual orientation in order to avoid arrest for the crime of

sodomy. “Twenty-one states required registration of persons convicted of homosexual related crimes. Loyalty oaths included references to moral turpitude”. (Melody, Peterson, 1999, 120)

## 5.2. Gender roles and sexism

The postwar atmosphere began to free up many people’s sense of morals, so although most of the women in *On the Road* are married or in a relationship with a man, reproductive sex appears to be substituted by the pursuit of sexual pleasures. On his first journey, Sal, already encouraged by Dean’s stories, is very excited about the night-life in Denver. “Also he had promised to fix me up; he knew all the girls in Denver.” (Kerouac, 1957, 39) Dean, while already married to Marylou, continues his promiscuous lifestyle without bothering about the question of safe sex. “to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on.” (Kerouac, 1957, 4) It is obvious that Dean is a cheater and does not care about anything other than sex. His young wife, Marylou, obviously suspects him of cheating, but as she is in love with her husband she does not dare to confront him. He was not of high status, but his sex appeal, in an unspoken way, made her excuse him many times. Dean often lies to her, abandons her at the hotel room and rushes to have sex with his new girlfriend, Camille. As a man without much of a conscience, he does not feel any remorse or the need for self-control. “Dean was making love to two girls at the same time, they being Marylou, his first wife, who waited for him in a hotel room, and Camille, a new girl, who waited for him in a hotel room.” (Kerouac, 1957, 38) The symbol of having sex in a hotel room may hint at Dean’s low commitment and to the tension that sexual pleasures created. ““Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel [...] at one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille of course neither of them knows what’s going on.”” (Kerouac, 1957, 38) Dean is confronted by his friend, Major: ““Moriarty, what’s this I hear about you sleeping with three girls at the same time?’ ‘Oh, yes that’s the way it goes.”” (Kerouac, 1957, 42) Instead of soul-searching or deep regrets, he reveals his cunning plan. ““I’m going to divorce Marylou and marry Camille and go live with her in San Francisco.”” (Kerouac, 1957, 43) Despite the fact that society in the 1950s pressurized women to stay married, in this case Dean decides about the divorce without

much hesitation and despite Marylou's confrontation. At this point, we notice the presence of the "double standard". (Reiss, 1964, 89) Dean is a male, whose actions do not have to be justified. Marylou agrees to the divorce, but insists on having intercourse as she loves Dean. "Marylou is all for it, but she insists on banging in the interim. She says she loves him – so does Camille." (Kerouac, 1957, 38) At this point, there is clear evidence of Marylou's "permissiveness with affection". (Reiss, 1964, 121) Marylou does not want to give up on the intimate connection with her beloved spouse until the marriage is officially finished. At the same time there is no hesitation about getting divorced, as official separation was nothing to be ashamed of. According to Kleinberg, the divorce rate increased; "In the 1950s there were approximately 15 divorces for every 1,000 married women [...]." (Kleinberg in Bigsby, 2006, 204)

### 5.3. Promiscuity

Bolin and Whelehan suggest that promiscuous behavior can be defined as a frequent changing of sexual partners, which seems to be connected to Reiss's definition of "permissiveness without affection". (1964, 121) Sal's own love life seems quite promiscuous. In the first part, before leaving Denver, he offers to have sex with Rita Bettencourt:

"She was a nice little girl, simple and true, and tremendously frightened of sex. I told her it was beautiful. I wanted to prove this to her. She let me prove it, but I was too impatient and proved nothing." (Kerouac, 1957, 51)

Rita clearly represents the first female in the story who is in favor of "permissiveness without affection". (Reiss, 1964, 121) As she does not mention any anxieties about her reputation being ruined, she is committed to sexual practices outside of a relationship. "Men and women are definitely not the same, and promiscuity is wholly opposed to woman's true feminine nature." (Melody and Peterson, 1999, 126) This statement suggests an injustice between men and women, which is also present in *On the Road*. When Marylou leaves Dean for the first time he calls her "the whore". (Kerouac, 1957, 5) This use of bad language could stand for the extending of his superiority in respect of his sexual manners, or his irritation may symbolize his dominance in their marriage,

which may have led to their divorce. Dean is free to do whatever he desires; Marylou is harshly nicknamed.

Marylou, however, seems to be sexually emancipated; she uses her sexual power to wreak chaos in the life of her ex-husband. After their separation, for example, she frequently challenges moral norms and refuses to abide by the rules. When Dean is settled down with Camille in San Francisco, he is not able to resist the temptation of making contact with his ex-wife. “He ran and found Marylou in a hotel. They had ten hours of wild making sex.” (Kerouac, 1957, 101) She dates a sailor, who supports her financially. When Dean arrives, she does not care about her former lover anymore. At this point we find evidence of ‘role reversal’. Marylou uses men to live on and takes advantages of her physical beauty; she is actually a type of prostitute. Sal explains that Dean loves Marylou because she is the only one who really understands him. During the period of their reunion after their divorce, Dean wants Sal to experience a threesome with himself and Marylou. Controversially, this time Sal gets emotionally involved.

“Marylou lay there, with Dean and myself on each side of her [...] She embraced me and I tried to forget Dean was there. Marylou was so lovely, but I whispered wait until we be lovers in San Francisco.” (Kerouac, 1957, 119)

During their stay in Mexico, Sal and Dean visit a whorehouse. “My girl charged thirty pesos, or about three dollars and a half, and begged for an extra ten pesos.” (Kerouac, 1957, 263) Sal, in the role of generous sex tourist, does not hesitate in exchanging money for sexual services. The whole scene is graphically depicted as a bar where extremely young girls dance mambo while drinking alcohol: “I’ve never seen a drunken woman, and only eighteen.” (Kerouac, 1957, 263) Alcohol and drug abuse in prostitution, and its links with the question of safe sex, is currently a topic of much research. Whether the boys performed safe sex in Mexico is not revealed. “Again I rushed off with my girl to her room [...] Dean and Stan switched the girls they’d had before.” (Kerouac, 1957, 264) Talking about safe sex performance, Moran has suggested that if citizens “only knew the medical dangers of sexual immorality [...] then they would rationally decide not to experiment with prostitution or promiscuity.” (Moran, Sex education) What is certain is that they did not judge the prostitutes for

working in the sex industry. Kerouac suggests that the critically low standard of living might have been an explanation for the high number of Mexican sex-workers:

“I couldn’t take my eyes off the little dark girl. [...] Of all the girls in there she needed the money most. [...] Mexicans are poor.” (Kerouac, 1957, 264) It appears that nobody gets hurt physically or emotionally. The only person who would be deeply disappointed is Inez, as she is at that time Dean’s partner.

Reiss uses the term “pleasure lovers” to describe a subtype of a more balanced attitude toward the double standard; such individuals are depicted as “well-educated bohemian iconoclasts”. These individuals consider sexual relations without affection as right and appropriate behavior. (Reiss, 1964, 120) Dean and Sal definitely act many times promiscuously; Reiss’s definition explains their attitudes very clearly.

## **5.4. Relationships**

The book presents a number of affiliations that are based on real people’s relationships.

### **5.4.1. Sal and Terry**

Sal meets Terry on his second journey, when he travels to Los Angeles. “A pain stabbed my heart, as it did every time I saw a girl I loved who was going the opposite direction in this too-big world.” (Kerouac, 1957, 73) The unique and close relationship between them develops quite quickly. Terry tells Sal that her previous marriage had made her miserable as her husband had beaten her. The marriage was a prison, and since then she has begun to act as a modern type of woman. “For the next fifteen days we were together for better or worse. When I woke up we decided to hitchhike to New York together.” (Kerouac, 1957, 77) They both tried to earn some money for their journey, but after many failed attempts to find a job in L.A., Terry suggests they go back to her home town, Sabinal, and work in the fields as seasonal pickers. The reader may feel deep sympathy for Terry’s lovable character as she was hard-working and kind. “You could have all your [girls] in the world: this was my girl and my kind of

girlsoul.” (Kerouac, 1957, 74) Even though Kerouac suggests that Terry is a “Pachuco wildcat” she has to survive in a male-dominated world. (Kerouac, 1957, 80) After leaving her abusive husband, Terry has to work for her father, and because she does not have a place to stay she is required to obey him. “Her father was yelling at her; I could hear him from the barn.” (Kerouac, 1957, 91)

Even though they seem to be a perfect couple, their relationship eventually fails. “Terry went home for supper and came to the barn [...] We made love on the crates. ‘Sallie, I want to go to New York with you. But how?’” (Kerouac, 1957, 90) After a dreamless night she resigns herself to not joining Sal. It is possible to argue that this woman’s emotionally motivated character was taken advantage of; like other Mexican women of her day, she owned nothing and was less important than men. Powerless Terry is morally imprisoned at the family farm with the duties and obligations of picking grapes and looking after her only child. She has to accept the “traditionalism”. (McRobbie, 2006, 36) Terry’s character represents a real person called Bea Franco; because of their romance, Kerouac postponed his meeting with Cassady and Burroughs. (Maher, 2004, 151)

#### **5.4.2. Remi and Lee Ann**

Kerouac describes a very complicated relationship, full of fighting over money, between his friend, Remi, and Remi’s girlfriend, Lee Ann. “‘I get so sick and tired of that sonofabitch’, snapped Lee Ann.” (Kerouac, 1957, 67) Lee Ann appears to be an opportunist: every time there is a chance of a better life or making money she will do anything to get it. However, even though Remi works quite hard, Lee Ann often appears unhappy and angry. Her behavior definitely represents a disobedient and rebellious type of woman. On one occasion, Lee Ann takes off all her clothes and lies down to sun herself on the flying bridge, while Sal watches from a distance and is attracted by Lee Ann’s sex appeal. “I wanted to jump down from a mast and land right in her, but I kept my promise to Remi. I averted my eyes from her.” (Kerouac, 1957, 66) Sal poaches Remi’s girl once, and she becomes Sal’s first wife. There are many such incidences that

suggest Sal's weakness for girls his friends have dated. On this occasion, however, their friendship wins over Sal's sinister passion.

### **5.4.3. Sal and Lucille**

Sal reveals that he is in a serious relationship with Lucille, a married woman, whom he met at college. "In New York, I have been attending school and romancing around with a girl called Lucille, a beautiful Italian honey-haired darling that I actually wanted to marry." (Kerouac, 1957, 105) He seems to be truly committed to Lucille, who has already experienced one bad marriage. "She was married to a longshoreman who treated her badly." (Kerouac, 1957, 113) Sal is charmed by her fragile, feminine character. "All these years I was looking for the woman I wanted to marry. I could not meet a girl without saying to myself, what kind of wife she would make?" (Kerouac, 1957, 105) While talking to Dean about his opinions on marriage, some interesting unsolicited advice to Dean follows, and Sal is truly aware of the highs and lows of a relationship. "'This can't go on all the time – all this franticness and jumping around. We've got to go some place, find something.'" (Kerouac, 1957, 105) He might be influenced by society's rules: he desires a female spouse, whom he can fully trust. He says he wants "to rest my soul with her till we both get old." (Kerouac, 1957, 105) This expression confirms his sexual orientation, which is clearly heterosexual. Sal seeks a mother and a lover in one personality, and with whom he can share a future. Their plans are interrupted as Sal begins to be sexually interested in Marylou. "When Lucille saw Marylou pushing me into corners and giving me the word [...] I knew my affair with Lucille wouldn't last much longer. She wanted me to be her way." (Kerouac, 1957, 113) Unfortunately the expectation between Lucille and Sal remains unfulfilled. "I wanted to have an affair with Marylou." (Kerouac, 1957, 116) Again, the reader may spot Sal's interest in his friends' girlfriends. Suddenly, the serious Sal does not want to be with Lucille, who does not like his friends and would not tolerate his trips or his associates. He prefers having an affair with Marylou to being in a serious relationship. Sal seems to be more comfortable with subordinate women. Reiss does suggest, however, that women do not necessarily have to submit to male leadership, and by learned behavior can make a difference in relation to the general equality between two partners. (1964,

19-20) Lucille wants to avoid the male's leadership, therefore refuses the "double standard". (Reiss, 1964, 89) "'I don't like you when you are with them.' 'Ah, it's all right, it's just kicks. We only live once. We're having a good time.' 'No, it's sad and I don't like it.'" (Kerouac, 1957, 113)

#### **5.4.4. Dean and his three wives**

Dean's first teenage bride, Marylou, is described as a very beautiful blond but also as relatively malicious. "But, outside of being a sweet little girl, she was awfully dumb and capable of doing horrible things." (Kerouac, 1957, 4) Throughout the story, Dean and Marylou's relationship is depicted as very unconventional. They never plan children or a proper stable home. We may presume the only connection between the two was their mutually satisfying sexual exchanges, which Sal describes in the story many times. "Dean and Marylou parked the car [...] and made love while I went to sleep." (Kerouac, 1957, 146)

Dean's second wife, Camille, appears to be very controllable compared to Marylou. "Dean opened [the door] stark naked. I saw a brunette on the bed one beautiful creamy thigh covered with black lace, look up with mild wonder." (Kerouac, 1957, 39) Shortly after Dean starts dating Camille, there is evidence that they had sex before they get officially married, which is classified by Bolin and Whelehan as "premarital intercourse". (2009, 539) Despite this, Camille appears to be quite conventional: they get married and she is expecting Dean's child not long after the wedding. "Dean lived in happily with Camille in San Francisco ever since that fall of 1947; he got a job on the railroad and made a lot of money. He became the father of a cute little girl, Amy Moriarty." (Kerouac, 1957, 100) Kleinberg suggests that families with three children were typical in the 1950s. (Kleinberg in Bigsby, 2006, 203) However, Dean never gives up his pointless trips from one coast to the other. "'I am going to New York and bring Sal back.' [Camille] wasn't too pleased at this prospect." (Kerouac, 1957, 100) Camille remains loyal and lives with the baby girl in San Francisco. Throughout the book she often calls Dean. "You just got another call – this one from San Francisco [...]. It was sweetest Camille, calling Dean [...] He leaped into

the phone booth and called San Francisco collect.” (Kerouac, 1957, 107) There is a clear connection between Camille and Dean as they communicate most of the time while he is not home via letters and phone. “In Washington, at four a.m., Dean again called Camille collect in Frisco.” (Kerouac, 1957, 109) Their communication is considered another important aspect. Two individuals must be able to find an appropriate solution based on compromises and an understanding of each other. We presume that a heightening of their attachment takes place at the end of the story.

Dean’s third serious relationship is with Inez, whom he meets at a party in New York. Surprisingly, Dean plans a future with Inez: “I’ve talked with her and we’ve got everything straightened out most beautifully.” (Kerouac, 1957, 228) Interestingly, Dean later reveals the truth about his faithfulness in their relationship. “All the time I’ve been here I haven’t had any girl but Inez - this only happens to me in New York! Damn!” (Kerouac, 1957, 228) Inez is already pregnant so she persuades Dean to divorce Camille in order to legitimize Dean’s child. 1950s American society required a pregnant woman to be married and supported by her husband. However, even though they get married, Dean leaves her for Camille and goes back to San Francisco.

#### **5.4.5. Sal and Dean**

Dean enters Sal’s life after the failure of the latter’s marriage. Sal is very emotionally distracted and feels like “everything [is] dead.” (Kerouac 1957, 3) His new friend, Dean, seems to fill his emptiness. Their mutual interest, creative writing, has brought them closer. Sal is almost immediately fascinated by Dean’s character and personality: “we understood each other on other levels of madness.” (Kerouac, 1957, 5) The protagonist admires the madness in Dean, but is not capable of being completely irresponsible himself unless he is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Sal explains that Dean’s specialty was “stealing cars, gunning for girls coming from out of high school, driving them out to the mountains, making them and coming back to sleep in any available hotel bathtub in the town.” (Kerouac, 1957, 35) Such behavior is unacceptable by any society, but admired by Sal, who views Dean as his idol. Dean’s character is based on a real person called Neal Cassady, whom Kerouac met for the first

time in New York in 1947. Neal became a hero to Kerouac and “*On the Road* made Cassady a legend.” (Charters, 67, 68) Interestingly, when *On the Road* was first published, nobody paid much attention to Kerouac or the stories of Sal Paradise. “None of this sounded as exciting as Moriarty’s exuberant personality or the emergence of a Beat Generation.” (Charters in Kerouac, 1991, ix)

Sal and Dean make a number of trips together, and these trips reveal their attitudes. They devote their lives to sexual exploration and drug abuse. They think that most women are easy to get and they get bored with them rather quickly. Reiss explains that all “double standard men”, who change sexual partners rapidly, are never charmed by them but rather disgusted. He further suggests that “such girls are valued mainly for sexual pleasures.” (1964, 102) However, any intimate relationship between the two characters remains unreal. Gary Handman talks about the intimate relationships within the Beatnik movement: “we not only have the fictional bond between Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, but the real-life symbiosis of Kerouac and Cassady.” (Handman, Berkeley library) Handman suggests that Cassady describes his emotions towards Kerouac in his letters and in stories of Carolyn Cassady, his second wife. (Handman, Berkeley library)

Even though Dean disappoints Sal many times, this never has a really destructive impact on their friendship. For example when they are on the trip in Mexico, Dean abandons Sal, who is sick in bed.

“Twelve hours later in my sorrowful fever I finally came to understand he was gone. When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of life [...]” (Kerouac, 1957, 267)

Again, Sal does not reject his best friend, but, as always, forgives him as a best friend should. Shortly after Sal comes back to New York he meets a new girl, Laura, who becomes the person he wants to spend the rest of his life with. Sal is strongly and deeply attracted to her and plans a future with her: “there she was, the girl with the pure and innocent dear eyes that I had always searched for and for so long. We agreed to love

each other madly.” (Kerouac, 1957, 278) He chooses staying in New York and getting married over a life on the road. Dean returns to San Francisco alone.

“So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over the west coast, [...] I think of Dean Moriarty.” (Kerouac, 1957, 280)

The ‘road’ symbolizes their freedom and they enjoyed its unlimited possibilities. This fact raises the question of the American Dream: all Americans see a happy life differently from the original idea, and to prove this, Kerouac invited us on a road trip in a car driven by his life’s hero, Neal Cassady.

## **5.5. Family**

### **5.5.1. Sal and his aunt**

Sal and his aunt present a distinctive family bond. Sal, despite being in his mid-twenties, lives with her in her house in New Jersey. One day Dean visits their house. “So we went out to have a few beers because we couldn’t talk like we wanted to talk in front of my aunt, who sat in the living room reading her paper.” (Kerouac, 1957, 5) Sal’s aunt seems to be very traditional, with a natural sense of good and bad. She does not consider Dean to be a suitable friend for Sal and advises Sal not to trust him.

“Although my aunt warned me that he would get me in trouble, I could hear a new call and see a new horizon, and believe it at my young age; and a little bit of trouble or even Dean’s eventual rejection of me as a buddy, putting me down, as he would later, on starving sidewalks and sickbeds - what did it matter?” (Kerouac, 1957, 10)

Despite disliking Dean, she always supports Sal while he travels, and worries about his safety. “My aunt was all in accord with my trip to the West; she said it would do me good. [...] All she wanted was for me to come back in one piece.” (Kerouac, 1957, 10) When Sal goes traveling, she always lends him money. “The money was in; my aunt had saved my lazy butt again.” (Kerouac, 1957, 92) It is obvious that they have a close

relationship and that they co-operate as a family. However, she never disciplines him and does not keep him under control.

### 5.5.2. Camille and Dean

During Sal's third journey, a unique insight into Dean and Camille's family life is provided. As Coontz describes, in the 1950s families lived in a house, had a car and were financially secure. All welfare was provided by a male, who was also a father and a husband. (Coontz) Looking at Dean and Camille's family life seems to correspond with mainstream expectations. "The experiences of the 1930s and 1940s translated in the 1950s into desire for stability and security and the end of sacrifice." (Melody and Peterson, 1996, 115) Similarly, the Moriartys live in a house. "It was a two-story crooked, rickety wooden cottage in the middle of tenements, right on top of Russian hill with a view of the bay." (Kerouac, 1957, 166) However, Dean is not the typical "Breadwinner" that Canaday depicts. (2009, 130) He is not able to look after his possessions properly. "Of course the Hudson was gone; Dean hadn't been able to make further payments on it. He had no car at all." (Kerouac, 1957, 166) Camille seems to be a typical housewife, however: she focuses on her home, looking after their child, and is already pregnant with another. "Their second baby was accidentally coming." (Kerouac, 1957, 166) Kerouac uses the word "accidentally", as during the time he wrote *On the Road* there was no contraceptive pill. Therefore women did not have absolute control over their reproduction as the contraceptive pill was not introduced until the 1960s. (Klotz, *The Pill*) However, the happiness within their marriage is at a low level. Camille accuses Dean of plotting tricks and constantly lying to her; she has to fight to be valued; she does not get the love she deserves. Having two children makes her feel that she needs a stable partner.

"'You are a liar! You are a liar! You are a liar!' [...] Camille finally went to sleep or spend the night staring blankly at the dark. I had no idea what was really wrong, except perhaps Dean had driven her mad after all." (Kerouac, 1957, 166,167)

There is evidence of gender role attitudes: Camille is irritated because she goes to work everyday, Dean does not help her much, and they do not separate the

housework equally. “So now I take care of baby while Camille works. [...] Moriarty has a sore butt, his wife gives him daily injections of penicillin for his thumb. ” (Kerouac, 1957, 169) Galatea and other friends who spend the night out with Dean and Sal strongly criticize Dean for his lack of responsibility. ““Dean, why are you so foolish?” said Galatea. ‘Camille called and said you left her. Don’t you realize you have a daughter?’” (Kerouac, 1957, 175) However, at the end of the story, Dean and Camille reunite and seemingly become a stable family. “So now he was three times married, twice divorced, and living with his second wife.” (Kerouac, 1957, 277)

## **5.6. Responsibility and commitment**

### **5.6.1. Dean’s liability**

As already mentioned, Dean represents a real-life person, Neal Cassady. Cassady’s gloomy childhood and life experience may have influenced his behavior.

Neal Cassady was born in 1926 when his parents traveled to California. His parents separated and Neal remained in his mother’s custody. However, his childhood was disrupted by his brother’s behavior. His brother, Jimmy, was of sadistic nature, which made Neal unbalanced. Neal’s sexual life started at the age of nine. Neal tended to be sexually attracted by both men and women. As a teenager he led a life of crime, particularly as an unstoppable car thief, which caused a number of arrests and he was sent to reform schools. (Beats Bios)

Kerouac writes about Dean’s early childhood, which was influenced by his father’s alcoholism. “Dean was the son of a wino [...] he used to plead in court at the age of six to have his father set free.” (Kerouac, 1957, 35)

“But Dean’s intelligence was every bit shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his ‘criminality’ was not something that sulked and sneered: it was a wild yea-saying outburst of American joy [...]” (Kerouac, 1957, 9)

Relating to the American Dream, in which it is possible to find success, comfort and happiness by hard work, on the one hand Dean is a loser, and on the other he is an achiever. Charters suggests that Sal tests the American Dream’s promise of limitless liberty by Dean’s example. “Dean is the dream’s reality.” (1991, xxi) Sal describes his

sexual passion as an obsession: “to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on.” (Kerouac, 1957, 4)

There are many more scandalous moments in which Dean challenges mainstream values. In Denver, Dean opens up to his desires. His lust for teenage girls almost kills him.

“Across the cornfield in back lived a beautiful young chick that Dean has been trying to make ever since we arrived. [...] ‘Trouble m’boy. That gal’s mother is after me with shotgun and she got a gang of high-school kids to beat me up from down the road.” (Kerouac, 1957, 199)

The reader might think of him as a pedophile or deviant. But as a man of ‘double standard’ behavior, he might feel hostility towards women who are not virgins. Hence he chooses teenage girls over mature women, and the more he thinks of himself as evil, the more he thinks that an angelic person might purify him. Reiss suggests “The male [...] views himself as a likable devil and the female as a lovable angel.” (1964, 101) The younger his lover is, the better he feels about having sex with her. However, he never maintains a relationship with such a person.

It may be that he feels pressurized by the morals of the day, and wants to keep all his wives, and although he makes many attempts to do so, the women reject his plan. They know he is unable either to look after them or to stay faithful. Contrary to the idealized vision of men as a home provider, Dean’s character, despite being a husband and father, is rebellious and immoral. When Sal comes to visit him in San Francisco, Dean’s priority is spending time with Sal, which makes the pregnant Camille desperate and furious. “It was horrible to hear Camille sobbing so. We couldn’t stand it and went out to buy beer.” (Kerouac, 1957, 166) Despite Camille being pregnant, Dean leaves her behind.

“He no longer cared about anything (as before) but now he also cared about everything in principle; that is to say, it was all the time to him and he belonged to the world and there was nothing he could do about it.” (Kerouac, 1957, 171)

At the end of the story, before Sal leaves for Mexico, he confronts Dean. Sal and his aunt make it clear to Dean that it is his responsibility to look after his family and to be committed to their happiness and well-being. “All I hope, Dean, is someday we’ll be able to live on one street with our families and get to be a couple of oldtimers together.” (Kerouac, 1957, 231)

## **5.7. Women’s attitudes**

### **5.7.1. Camille and Inez**

According to 1950s convention, many women became mothers, wives and faithful spouses. According to McRobie “Middle class women have played a key role in the reproduction of class society.” (2009, 132) In *On the Road*, two female characters, Camille and Inez, represent the mainstream values. Camille, however, seems to have some issues about control over her partner, Dean. In order to maintain her dominancy, she questions him about the time he is due to be back. “But, what time will you be back?” (Kerouac, 1957, 39) Unfortunately she can never claim victory as Dean is totally irrepressible. When they start seeing each other, Dean is still seeing his first, wild wife, Marylou. Nonetheless, Camille gets pregnant by him before they get married, which was totally unacceptable for a well brought up girl. Reiss suggests that women who would take pleasure in premarital intercourse would be considered as “bad women”. (1964, 92) Therefore they marry and start a family life, but this does not make Camille happy. When Sal comes to visit them in San Francisco, she gets annoyed about the way Dean has done the housework while she has been at work. “Dean minded the baby and did the dishes and the wash in the back garden but did a sloppy job of it in his excitement.” (Kerouac, 1957, 170) Dean’s irresponsibility seems to be the last straw for their marriage and Camille throws him out. “They were yelling at each other [...]. A few moments later Camille was throwing Dean’s things on the living-room floor and telling him to pack. (Kerouac, 1957, 170)

After their break-up Dean leaves with Sal for New York, where he meets another woman, Inez. At first, Inez is pictured as the perfect ‘double standard woman’.

She never asks about Dean's activities in his free time and gives him a lot of freedom. "See, that's all she does, she pokes her head in the door and smiles." (Kerouac, 1957, 228) Interestingly, the two ladies, Camille and Inez, keep quite gracious contact with each other. "Inez called up Camille on the phone repeatedly and had long talks with her [...]. They exchanged letters about Dean's eccentricities." (Kerouac, 1957, 228) It seems that they understand each other: Camille is part of Dean's life because she is the mother of his two children and, being in a similar position to Inez before Dean married her, most likely sympathizes with her. The unexpected twist occurs at the end when Dean returns from Mexico to New York with the divorce papers in his hand. "He jumped on a bus and roared off again across the awful continent to San Francisco to rejoin Camille and the two baby girls." (Kerouac, 1957, 277)

Dean makes one more attempt to win Inez's heart back, but this time he is confronted by Sal himself.

"What about Camille?' 'Gave permission of course - waiting for me. Camille and I all straight forever-and-ever.' 'And Inez?' 'I- I - I want her to come back to Frisco with me live other side of town - don't you think?'" (Kerouac, 1957, 279)

Dean's eagerness to keep both women never disappears. He comes back to Inez with new promises but she throws him out without compromise. Unlike Marylou, she refuses Dean as he cheated on her with Camille. She is a type of new woman, not afraid of getting divorced and bringing up her child as a single parent. "With Inez, he spent one night explaining and sweating and fighting, and she threw him out." (Kerouac, 1957, 279) This time Dean receives a letter from Camille "My heart broke when I saw you go across the tracks with your bag. I pray and pray you get home safe. [...] We all wait for you." (Kerouac, 1957, 279) Camille sends Dean an emotional message full of love to make him feel special. From a different point of view, she uses it to remind him that she relies on him, as well as the two children he is responsible for.

### **5.7.2. Marylou**

Marylou's love life displays her basic principles: she does not care much about the men she dates. Using the "mobility effect" (Reiss, 1964, 103) she passes through

New York, Denver, New Orleans and San Francisco, using men as her favors. She may care about her reputation but all she wants is to violate the mainstream codes. “The reader is never told much about her intentions or future plans. She gets married to Dean, never becomes pregnant, and never desires a stable home.

Her only need is sex and the occasional use of drugs. “Marylou took everything in the books; she took tea, goofballs, benny, liquor, and even asked Old Bull for a shot of M.” (Kerouac, 1957, 134) Marylou’s drug use may symbolize the beginnings of counterculture. John Hellmann describes counterculture as “an expression of dissatisfaction with broad aspects of American life as its members had experienced it growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s.” The appearance of drugs such as LSD and Marijuana offered a way of transferring self-consciousness. (Hellmann in Bigsby, 2006, 308) During the journey from New Orleans, she makes Sal vulnerable by pretending friendship and offers him a relationship. “Marylou and I waited in the car. She put her arm around me. I said, ‘Dammit, Lou, wait till we get to Frisco.’ ‘I don’t care Dean’s going to leave me anyway.’” (Kerouac, 1957, 148) The possible relationship attracts her, even though she is not in love with Sal and never devotes herself to him. “I saw what a whore she was. She walked on little feet and got in the Cadillac and off they went.” (Kerouac, 1957, 156) According to Reiss, during the twentieth century, “double standard women” obtained more freedom and began to participate in premarital coitus. (1964, 98-99) Marylou seems to fit this description, as she enjoys open sex. At the end of the story Dean reveals: “‘Did you know Marylou got married to a used-car dealer in Frisco and she’s having a baby?’” (Kerouac, 1957, 231) Against all odds she accepts traditionalism.

### **5.7.3. Sal’s aunt**

One day Dean comes round to visit Sal at his aunt’s place and they all sit and talk. She deliberately starts confronting Dean: “‘I hope you will be able to take care of your new baby that’s coming and stay married this time.’” She represents the mainstream opinion that a woman’s place is in the home and a man’s is earning the income. “‘You can’t go all over the country having babies like that. Those poor little

things'll grow up helpless. You've got to offer them a chance to live.'" (Kerouac, 1957, 231) By this she reminds Dean that he should provide his children with a suitable education, stable family and a suitable environment. Sal speaks about her: "My aunt - a respectable woman hung-up in this sad world, and well she knew the world." (Kerouac, 1957, 110) By this, Sal suggests that he looks at her with admiration, that she never disappoints him and that he is safe in her hands. "'Poor little Salvatore, she said in Italian. Where you have been all this time?'" (Kerouac, 1957, 97) Charters suggests that Sal's Aunt represents Kerouac's mother: "Feeling himself at the margins of his society [...] He imagined himself as 'Salvatore Paradise', an Italian-American who lived with his unnamed 'aunt' instead of [his mother]." (Charters in Kerouac, xxi) In addition, he once confirmed to Ginsberg about his attachment to her, as "the woman [he] wanted the most." (Charters, 1974, 129)

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to identify basic terms relating to sexuality, gender roles and their relation to 1950s American society. Mainstream core values, such as family and materialism, are identified, and the changing position of women suggests changes in attitudes toward gender roles. Some women became more independent, had jobs, were less afraid of divorce and sexual exploration. All these facts are then related to the novel *On the Road*, which is considered a work of revolt. Jack Kerouac wrote the novel in 1947, but due to editorial issues it wasn't published until 1957. Nevertheless, he became "the father" of the Beat Generation. *On the Road* depicted four journeys taken by Kerouac and Cassady. Cassady was turned into the young hero Dean Moriarty, who is not a typical husband and father. His personality pictures different values, rejects traditionalism and fights for sexual freedom. He is free from responsibility, and represents the wild youth of the Beat Generation by having open sex and taking drugs.

Firstly the topic of homosexuality is described, as Carlo Marx and Dean closely co-operate on Dean's writing skills. Kerouac reveals their togetherness and subtly puts forward an idea of their homosexuality. The *Eisenhower Executive Order*, which threatened the lives of all gays and lesbians, also had an impact on the novel. The reader is never explicitly told the truth. Furthermore, gender roles are defined and applied to the characters. The results give proof of unequal treatment towards women. Mainstream society accepted the male-dominated world, with females as obedient wives and devoted mothers. Compared to mainstream American values about the family, materialism and traditionalism, the reader of *On the Road* witnesses many acts of revolt. The position of women began to shift and women started to challenge men and become more independent. For example, Marylou does not care about stable family life, and Inez leaves Dean and decides to bring up their child alone. Sal meets Terry and Lucille who had both already experienced bad marriages. These two women are not afraid of being alone and being single parents. They start to prioritize their own values, which they would not find "on the road".

Kerouac depicts a certain individualism in the way Sal and Dean treat women. The misuse of the double standard, in which women were subordinated to men, hurt many conventional yet sincere women like Camille, Lucille and Inez. The two main characters, Sal and Dean are in a symbolic battle between family and love on one side, and freedom on the other. The exaggeration of sexual independence led to unhappy marriages and inevitable split-ups. At the end of story, Kerouac gives up on going on the road with Cassady as he realizes that the battle is over, with family and love as the winners. However, the remarkable friendship will not be forgotten.

## Resume

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou Amerických hodnot v padesátých letech dvacátého století, ve kterém Jack Kerouac napsal román Na cestě. Kerouac je považován za zakladatele generace Beatníků, která byla známa především nespoutaností stylu života a odborníky považovaná za nekonvenční. Mezi další významné představitele patří Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, ale také Neal Cassady. Kerouac jako začínající spisovatel, zachycuje Ameriku v daném období při jeho pěti cestách. Sám v tomto románu vystupuje jako hlavní hrdina, Sal Paradise, který se vydává napříč Amerikou, aby navštívil své přátele. Jeho obdivovaným přítelem se stává Dean Moriarty, nezkrotný mladík z ulic Denveru. Tato postava představuje právě Neala Cassadyho. Mladíci se seznámili v New Yorku v roce 1947 a stali se blízkými přáteli. Dílo zachycuje další skutečné osobnosti, například Allen Ginsberg představuje Carla Marxe a William Burroughs vystupuje jako Old Bull Lee. Postavy manželek Deana a Salovi přítelkyně jsou taktéž skutečné.

Hlavním úkolem této práce je analýza sexuálních hodnot padesátých let dvacátého století v Americe. Konvenční společnost této doby byla silně ovlivněna poválečným obdobím. V padesátých letech dochází k takzvanému „baby boomu.“ Muži vracející se z války chtěli nahradit své manželky v zaměstnání a stát se tak opět hlavou rodiny. Mnohé ženy tuto skutečnost respektovaly, vrátily se do domácnosti a začaly zakládat rodiny. Byly tu však i ty, které tuto skutečnost nechtěly úplně přijmout. Vyžadovaly rovnoprávnost nejenom na pracovišti, ale i při jiných společenských možnostech. Nezávislé ženy pak také začaly uplatňovat právo na sexuální svobodu. Nicméně, většina Američanů respektovala pravidla. Muži zaopatřili své rodiny pravidelným příjmem, ženy zůstaly v domácnosti a staraly se o děti. Tradiční rodiny žily v domech na předměstí, otec dojížděl do práce automobilem, matky se věnovaly dětem.

Kulturní aspekt měl však svá pravidla v sexuálním chování. Ira L. Reiss, Americký sexuolog, který provedl průzkum sexuálních předmanželských standardů upozorňuje na podřazenost žen. Společnost očekávala, že ženy zůstanou cudné až do

okamžiku svatby, kdežto muži by měli být zkušení a vybouření. Jestliže mladá žena holdovala předmanželskému sexu, byla považována za nečistou a pohoršovala společnost. Matky se snažily své dcery chránit před potencionálním problémem tím, že je upozorňovaly na rizika nechtěného těhotenství a sexuálních chorob. Mnohé mladé ženy, přesto žily sexuálním životem a nechtěly se ho vzdát. Ira L. Reiss uvádí, že se jednalo se buď o příležitostný sex v jiných městech, protože si ženy nechtěly nezničit pověst a nebo měly stálého partnera, který představoval budoucího a milujícího manžela. V té době se nejednalo pouze o heterosexuální svazky. Stát byl velkým odpůrcem homosexuálních svazků a sodomie byla zakázána zákonem. Homosexuálové byli pronásledováni a v mnohých případech postaveni před soud.

Kerouac ve svém románu *Na cestě* zachycuje pravidla sexuálního chování, ale také jejich časté porušení, v němž se Beatnici snažili prokázat svou individuální svobodu. Sal a Dean žijí nekonvenčním způsobem života, neřeší otázky budoucnosti, žijí ze dne na den a holdují sexu. Dean je naprosto posedlý sexem a střídáním partnerek i parterů. Kerouac nemluví přímo o Cassadyho vztahu s Ginsbergem, pouze upozorňuje na momenty, kdy si Dean a Carlo dlouho do noci povídají, hledí si do očí a scházejí se za výmluvami literárního psaní. Když Dean tráví čas se svou manželkou, Carlo má nesmírné deprese a žálí. Dean se ale dívek nechce vzdát, je ženatý s Marylou, svou první ženou. Můžeme tedy jen předpokládat, že Dean i Carlo skrývali svou sexuální orientaci, aby se vyhnuli případným trestům.

Promiskuita hlavních hrdinů i dalších postav se v díle čteně odráží. Sal na svých cestách zcela záměrně oslovuje ženy, o kterých předpokládá, že sex neodmítnou. Při své první cestě do Denveru, osloví mladou dívku jménem Rita. Nabídne jí nezávazný sex, aby jí ukázal krásy milostného aktu. Rita se ukáže jako první dívka, která nemá strach o svou pověst ani potřebu se emocionálně na Sala vázat. V průběhu druhé cesty do San Franciska, Dean nabízí Salovi sex nejen s Marylou, ale také s ním samotným. Sal je ale v rozpacích a požádá Deana, aby z ložnice odešel. Marylou se zde projevuje velice nekonvenčně, s trojtaktem souhlasí. Její nároky jsou také netradiční, nezmiňuje touhy po domově ani po rodině. Jedinou její prioritou se zdá být sex a drogy. Po dalším rozchodu s Deanem muže jenom využívá. Sal si to uvědomí a Marylou se už po zbytek

svých cest vyhýba. Dean mezitím opustí i svou druhou ženu, Camille, kvůli které se rozvedl právě s Marylou. Při Salově návštěvě se situace mezi Deanem a Camille znova vyostří a Camille oba mladíky vyhodí na ulici. Dean neváhá ženu opustit a vydává se opět napříč Amerikou. Na cestě do New Youku si opět užívá. Tentokrát jeho touha po mladých děvčatech ho téměř připraví o život, je napaden matkou dívky. Oba mladíci se ale z problémů opět snadno dostanou a směřují do New Yorku, kde Dean potkává Inez. Tato žena také neodolá Deanově mužnosti a otěhotní, požaduje svatbu a tak se Dean vydává do Mexica, aby mohl zařídit levnější rozvodové řízení. Během cesty Mexikem Sal a Dean navštěvují veřejné domy a holdují sexu s prostitutkami. V této části Kerouac upozorňuje na kriticky nízkou životní úroveň v Mexiku. Dean opět prokazuje svou nezodpovědnost tím, že se oddává nespoutanému sexu, přestože ho v New Yorku netrpělivě očekává jeho budoucí manželka a matka jeho dalšího dítěte, Inez. Sal, v té době nezadaný mládenec, nemůže být kritizován. Po velkém dobrodružství plného drog a sexu zůstává chorý na lůžku a Dean s klidem odjíždí za svou přítelkyní, Inez.

Vztahy v knize jsou také poměrně netradiční. Sal prožívá několik poměrně perspektivních vztahů, které však nikdy nepředčí jeho přátelství k Deanovi a cestování. Na začátku knihy, poté co se Sal rozvede se svou ženou, jejíž jméno je neznámé, přichází Dean Moriarty a vše v Salově životě zase dostává smysl. Začíná cestovat a nevázaně si užívat. Při své první cestě do San Franciska potkává Terry, mladou a krásnou Mexičanku, se kterou bázkivě plánuje budoucnost. K jejich společnému dlouhodobému soužití bohužel nikdy nedojde, protože bez udání větších důvodů Sal odjíždí zpět do New Yorku, kde zanedlouho potká Lucille, která ho svou ženskostí velice okouzlí, ale po špatných zkušenostech ze svého manželství, zůstává opatrná. Obě přítelkyně jsou důkazem „shovívavé lásky,“ v níž jsou partnerovi sexuálně odevzdané. Lucille a Sal jsou ve vážném vztahu do té doby, než se v New Yorku ukáže Dean s Marylou. Sexu chtívá Marylou poblouzní Sala, který vztah s Lucille neváhá ukončit. Odjíždí s Deanem a Marylou do New Orleans a poté do San Franciska. Ze Salova přístupu k ženám je patrné, že v jeho životě chybí něco, co musí být konstantně nahrazováno a nikdy to není na příliš dlouho. Jediná žena od které neodešel byla Laura. Ačkoliv podle Kerouacovi biografie, Ann Charters uvádí, že jedinou ženou se kterou chtěl být byla jeho vlastní matka. Kerouacova matka, která v díle vystupuje jako jeho

teta, je jeho nesmírnou podporou. Sal během svých cest je s tetičkou v nepřetržitém spojení, pomocí pohlednic jí často žádá o peníze, které jsou mu bez větších obtíží zasílány. Sal svou tetu obdivuje a když se vrací do New Yorku, jde vždy přímo k ní.

Deanovou první manželkou je nezpoutaná Marylou, velice mladá dívka z Denveru. Dean ji podvádí se svou druhou budoucí manželkou Camille, údajně ani jedna neví o druhé, přesto se Dean rozvádí s Marylou kvůli Camille, s kterou sdílí plány o založení rodiny. Přestože jejich rodina je materiálně zabezpečena, manželství Deana a Camille není úplně šťastné, protože Camille Deana podezřívá, že jí neustále lže. Když Sal přijíždí na návštěvu k Deanovi do San Francisca, rodinná situace se ještě vyostří. Camille má oprávněné podezření, že ji Dean lže a tak se rozhodne jejich vztah neoficiálně ukončit. Dean a Salem odjíždí do New Yorku, kde Dean potká Inez, svou třetí manželku a splodí další dítě. Dean se během několika let třikrát ožení a dvakrát rozvede. Nakonec se ale vrátí ke svým dvěma dcerám a Camille, která ho patrně bezmezně miluje. Můžeme také předpokládat, že právě ona je symbolem konvencí a touží po rodinném životě s otcem jejich dětí. Ženy v Deanově životě pravděpodobně znamenaly jistou vášeň. Deanova potřeba se oženit může být charakterizována vlivem doby, v níž otec je „chlebovárcem a hlavou rodiny.“ Nicméně Dean nikdy tímto milujícím manželem a oddaným otcem není. Inez, jeho třetí žena, ho jako jediná z jeho manželek nikdy nepřijme zpět, přestože se jí Dean snaží přesvědčit. Stává se samostatnou a rozhodne se vychovávat své dítě jako svobodná matka, protože rozvod už v té době nebyl nic za co by se ženy měly stydět.

Hlavní myšlenkou knihy je nespoutanost a rebelie proti konvenčním způsobům života. Dean představuje myšlenku amerického snu, na jedné straně nepracuje příliš tvrdě ani není nijak úspěšný, na druhé straně je naprosto svobodný. Jeho svoboda spočívá v naprosté ignoranci veškerých společenských pravidel, nechodí pravidelně do práce, je nevěrný manželkám a nakonec má děti o které se nestará. Sal obdivuje jeho nespoutanost, které on není zcela schopný pokud není pod vlivem alkoholu či drog. Nakonec ale dává přednost hodnotám jako je harmonické manželství a stálý domov před bouřlivým životem „Na cestě.“ Dean odjíždí z New Yorku na západ sám.

Pokud i vy chcete prožít vzrušující jízdu Amerikou padesátých let, nastupte do jeho vozu. Dean se už o vše postará, má na to svůj prohnání plán.

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