

# Biography claims Kinsey's sex life tainted his research

By Gerry Lanosga  
STAFF WRITER

The late Alfred Kinsey, who was claimed and vilified for his research into human sexuality, is portrayed in new biography as a crusader for sexual liberation whose work was skewed by his own unusual sexual inclinations.

The book, by the well-regarded University of Houston historian James H. Jones, is excerpted in an article —

titled *Dr. Yes* — in *The New Yorker's* latest edition, which hit newsstands Monday.

The sometimes sordid account is sure to reignite debate about Kinsey at a time when his namesake, Indiana University's Kinsey Institute, has been working hard to move beyond the controversies that have dogged it.

*Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* is to be published in October — the same month the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Re-

production is planning to observe its 50th anniversary in the field of sex research.

Institute Director John Bancroft said he welcomed the book as a valuable historical contribution, but he worried about how condensed versions like *The New Yorker's* might be used to caricature Kinsey.

"It's 900 pages long," Bancroft said of the book. "It will get boiled down, people will take things out of context, and they'll use it in their ongoing

attacks on Kinsey, whom they see as a sort of Antichrist, a sort of architect of American decline.

"That's grossly unjustified. . . . He's an important figure in the 20th century. I think the majority of the people will recognize that importance even if they don't like everything he did."

Kinsey's pioneering studies of human sexual behavior in the 1940s

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and 1950s are credited with, in Bancroft's words, demystifying sex and making it something that can be openly talked about in U.S. society.

Kinsey died in 1956.

But his work in recent years has been strongly attacked by scholars questioning its methodologies and some religious conservatives complaining about its emphasis on "deviant" sexual practices.

Jones' book throws fuel on both fires.

While he echoes Bancroft's contention about Kinsey's legacy and adds that he was a devoted husband and successful father, Jones also depicts the renowned scientist as a homosexual and masochist "who, as he grew older, pursued an interest in extreme sexuality with increasing compulsiveness."

Those pursuits, according to Jones, included:

■ Kinsey, his wife, Clara, and others having sex with at least one of the subjects of his studies, a young professional man whom Jones does not identify.

■ Kinsey's decree that members of his close circle of friends and researchers could have extramarital sexual liaisons of all stripes, as long as he approved first.

■ The filming of various sex acts in the attic of Kinsey's Bloomington home, including Kinsey engaging in "masochistic masturbation."

Jones writes that one staff member's wife talked of feeling "sickening pressure" to have sex on film to protect her husband's career at the institute.

Jones, who has been researching Kinsey for 25 years, argues that the scientist's own sexuality carried over into his work and affected his findings.

"The Americans who most persistently engaged Kinsey's atten-

tion were people who were either on the margins or beyond the pale: homosexuals, sadomasochists, voyeurs, exhibitionists, pedophiles, transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists," Jones writes.

IU officials have steadfastly defended Kinsey over the years, but Bancroft and some former associates have acknowledged problems with Kinsey's statistical samplings.

But Bancroft takes issue with Jones' statement that Kinsey's "methodology and his sampling technique virtually guaranteed that he would find what he was looking for."

"(Kinsey) was a very principled scientist," Bancroft said.

He said that while Kinsey's methods may not be acceptable by today's standards, he thought he was doing the right thing at the time.

Still, Bancroft sees Jones' book as a valuable one.

"It tells us that clearly (Kinsey) had a very troubled sexual development himself, which I think we

probably all were aware of but didn't have it documented in so much detail," he said. "(And) I don't think it in any way detracts from his reputation as a pioneer."

Paul Gebhard, a close colleague of Kinsey's whom Jones quotes about the attic filming sessions, refused to comment on those matters Monday.

"One of the cardinal rules of the institute has always been that we cannot discuss the sexual activities of anyone," he said.

Gebhard did acknowledge being interviewed by Jones and said the author is a reputable scholar.

But he seconded Bancroft's concern about aspects of the book being distorted.

"There can't be much context if you have it in a short journal article," he said.

Jones, who served on the Kinsey Institute's science advisory board, received his doctorate in history at IU on the strength of a dissertation about the institute.

## OPINION/COMMENTARY



Details of the late Alfred Kinsey's personal sex life are discussed in a new biography.

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