

Delusions, drugs and a discredited doctor

Barry Austin of Birmingham is so fat that you only have to look at him to know that his favourite food is seconds. At 47 stone, he's the heaviest man in Britain. He is almost large enough to qualify for his own postcode. If he has ever watched Rosemary Conley's hip and thigh exercise video, he obviously didn't realise that it was not the sort of video you watch slouched on the sofa, funneling pizza down your throat.

He told Angus Deayton in the final episode of *The Temptation Game* (BBC1) that: "I get all miserable and really freaked out when I'm not eating." So he must rarely be miserable. John Owen, the landlord of his local, says: "Barry'll come in here, he'll start nice and quietly: 19 pints of Snakebite; ten BMWs, which is Bailey's, Malibu and whisky; ten large vodkas; eight large Bacardis; six bottles of Coke; eight bottles of orange." The man behind the

counter at the Hygienic Fish Saloon (slogan: "We're too busy frying haddock to think of a less stupid name"), filled us in on Barry's taste for a pre-supper snack: "A couple of kebabs. And while he used to wait for the kebabs he used to eat a saveloy. And a spring roll. And he used to have a piece of fish as well, to nibble on the way home."

His food intake has recently shrunk, after his stomach was tricked into feeling fuller by the insertion of a balloon (maybe one of Branson's spares). But at the height of his eating, Barry downed 43,000 calories a day — which, for those of you who follow a healthier diet, is roughly equivalent to two million lettuces. Claudia Schiffer eats less in an entire year.

Deayton was using Barry Austin's obesity as an example of the perils of succumbing to temptation, and how food can become as addictive as a drug. But it was only

when Barry announced "I don't think I am overweight, I think I'm a slim person", that I realised that kebabs and saveloys almost certainly have at least as strong an hallucinogenic effect as the plant that was being investigated in Channel 4's *Sacred Weeds*.

If you've never been accosted on dark street corners by somebody offering you *salvia divinorum*, that's because it's native only to a small part of Mexico, where the Mazatec Indians like to chew it during religious rituals. Too scared to monitor the effects first-hand, two anthropologists, a psychiatrist and a pharmacologist gave the drug to a couple of human guinea-pigs and then asked *them* how it felt.

The answer? Quite pleasant, but clearly not the same kind of hallucinogenic hit you get from 43,000 calories a day. But what was startling was how the academ-

REVIEW



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ics' observational research achieved the mind-bending effect of making recreational drug-taking seem dull. And why didn't they just ask the Mazatec Indians what it felt like?

You could see why Carlos Castaneda stuck to the peyote favoured by Yaqui Indians — a powerful drug which, only a short time after ingestion, had the cataclysmic effect of turning

Castaneda into a bestselling author in his native California.

But an infinitely more dismal and painful insight into what academics will do in the name of research came in *Secret History: Kinsey's Paedophiles* (Channel 4). We have known for some time that the first "scientist" of human sexual behaviour was a flawed man. But *Secret History* laid bare just how shameless and misguided Alfred Kinsey had been to use the detailed private diaries of a predatory paedophile as the scientific evidence for his claims that children often enjoyed sexual contact with adults.

He wrote in one book: "The adult contacts are a source of pleasure to some children and sometimes may arouse the child erotically and bring it to orgasm. It is difficult to understand why a child — except for its cultural conditioning — should be disturbed at having its genitalia

touched." Is it really that difficult?

Perhaps it is if you rely for information, as Kinsey did, on a rapacious paedophile like Rex King, a US Government land examiner whose job took him across Arizona and New Mexico. These trips gave King plenty of opportunity to prey on young boys and girls. He molested more than 800 of them, although — as Kinsey's researchers recalled — King would have sex with just about any person or animal that was handy. He'd already been through most of his relatives.

He kept detailed records of his encounters. Kinsey was thrilled. He wrote to King: "I congratulate you on the research spirit which has led you to collect data over these many years. Everything that you have accumulated must find its way into scientific channels."

Kinsey saw King's data as a gold

mine, proving that children were sexual beings from birth: but it wasn't scientific data, it was just a catalogue of child torture. Drawing conclusions from this data was, at best, like making jewellery from gold stolen from the fillings of those gassed in Nazi concentration camps.

At worst, the data was scientifically worthless: it didn't seem to occur to Kinsey that asking paedophiles if their victims enjoyed sex wasn't likely to produce the most objective answers. How did Kinsey accept their testimony that the children's quivering and yelping was evidence of orgasm rather than of revulsion and fear?

So why, then, wasn't there a public outcry when this drivel on children's sexuality was published 50 years ago? Paradoxically, it may have been due to the very ignorance about sex that Kinsey was trying to dispel. Now that really does blow your mind!

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