



*Alfred Kinsey (seated center) surrounded by his family in Bloomington, Indiana, in September of 1953: his son Bruce daughters, Joan (left) and Anne, with their husbands. Kinsey's carefully controlled public image was that of a tweedy*

## ANNALS OF SEXOLOGY

## DR. YES

*In his reports on America's sexual behavior, Alfred Kinsey hoped to free society of Victorian repression. But what really inspired the author's crusade was his own secret life.*

BY JAMES H. JONES

**I**N January of 1948, the W. B. Saunders Company, of Philadelphia, published "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male," by Alfred C. Kinsey. W. B. Saunders was a respectable publisher of scientific books, mostly medical textbooks. Kinsey, then fifty-three years old, had been a taxonomical entomologist—his specialty was the gall wasp—at Indiana University. The book itself weighed three pounds, cost six dollars and fifty cents (compared with the three dollars then typically charged for a new hardcover book), had no photographs or illustrations, and was loaded with charts, statistics, and footnotes. Except, perhaps, for its subject, nothing about the book suggested that it might be of general interest.

"Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" was an immediate sensation. The Kinsey Report, as it was quickly dubbed, sold more than two hundred thousand copies between January and July, 1948, obliging the publisher to run two presses around the clock in order to satisfy demand.

Reflecting on the phenomenal sales, an article in *Time* exclaimed, "Not since 'Gone With the Wind' had booksellers seen anything like it." *Life* declared, "To find another purely scientific book with a record which even approaches this, it probably is necessary to go back to Darwin's 'On the Origin of Species.'" Tin Pan Alley produced songs called "The Kinsey Boogie" and "Thank You, Mr. Kinsey," and Martha Raye produced a jukebox hit, "Ooh, Dr. Kinsey." At Harvard, where Kinsey had done his graduate work, students crooned, "I've looked you up in the Kinsey Report / And you're just the man for me." Delegates to the 1948 Republican National Convention, in Philadelphia, wore buttons that read "We Want Kinsey, the People's Choice."

A cartoon in this magazine showed a

woman seated in a comfortable chair looking up from her copy of the book with a quizzical expression and asking, "Is there a Mrs. Kinsey?" "YES, THERE IS A MRS. KINSEY," a headline in *McCall's* answered, and the accompanying article revealed her to be a homebody who cooked and sewed, entertained the many visitors her husband brought home, and never, ever complained about his long workdays.

For the most part, the reviews echoed the tone set by Dr. Howard A. Rusk in the *Times Book Review*. Rusk, a well-known New York physician and educator, called the book "by far the most comprehensive study yet made of sex behavior." Kinsey and his co-authors, Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin, had ascertained, among other things, that more than ninety per cent of the (white) males they had interviewed had masturbated, that about eighty-five per cent had engaged in premarital intercourse, that between thirty and forty-five per cent had had extramarital sex, that some seventy per cent had patronized prostitutes, and that thirty-seven per cent had experienced at least one homosexual act leading to orgasm.

In the postwar forties, Kinsey's revelations were alarming. Behind the data, some commentators suspected, was an attack on the moral code—and the institutions charged with enforcing that code—which had held American society together. Throughout, Kinsey's book was full of provocative inferences from the findings, such as his sharply worded description of members of the legal system—the "legislators and judges" whose view of sexual morality he called "largely a defense of the code of their own social level."

But the effects of the Kinsey phenomenon were just as widely perceived as salutary. Americans previously had debated such sex-related issues as prostitution, venereal disease, birth control, sex



far left); his wife, Clara; and his two academic and a family man.

education, and the theories of Freud. But the cultural debate that greeted Kinsey's first study banished taboos that had inhibited Americans from thinking and talking about their erotic lives. Suddenly, the extent of premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality became acceptable topics of polite conversation. Americans had been given permission to talk about sex.

In many ways, the Kinsey Report polarized the nation. The American Statistical Association was asked to evaluate Kinsey's methodology, prompted by criticism that his findings were statistically flawed. While educators and physicians praised him for bringing new illumination to a vexing subject, intellectuals, such as Margaret Mead, Lionel Trilling, and Reinhold Niebuhr, accused him of moral obtuseness. J. Edgar Hoover saw in Kinsey's work an implicit threat to "our way of life"—as he told the *Reader's Digest*—and ordered the F.B.I. to compile a dossier on Kinsey and his Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University.

NEARLY half a century later, Alfred Kinsey remains an eminent figure in the field of sex research. In addition to providing the benchmark against which subsequent studies have been measured,

the Kinsey Reports—the book on male sexuality was followed, in 1953, by "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female"—have inspired sex-education programs in high schools and encouraged several generations of sex therapists to tell their patients, "If it feels good, do it."

Because of current difficulties in fashioning accurate estimates of the extent of AIDS, Kinsey's insistence that, in his time, ten per cent of American men had had more than casual homosexual contacts is still debated, especially in the light of such recent studies as the University of Chicago's "National Health and Social Life Survey," released in 1994, which placed the number of gay or bisexual men in the American population at just 2.8 per cent. Questions persist about Kinsey's personal life. At the height of the McCarthy period, two years before Kinsey's death in 1956, a special committee in the House of Representatives investigated charges that Kinsey's research served Communism by undermining the American family. More than four decades later, in 1995, Steve Stockman, a Republican congressman from Texas, introduced a House resolution calling for a congressional inquiry into charges that Kinsey had trafficked with child molesters and

asking for a ban on federal funding of any sex education influenced by his work. (Like the earlier investigation, this one came to nothing.)

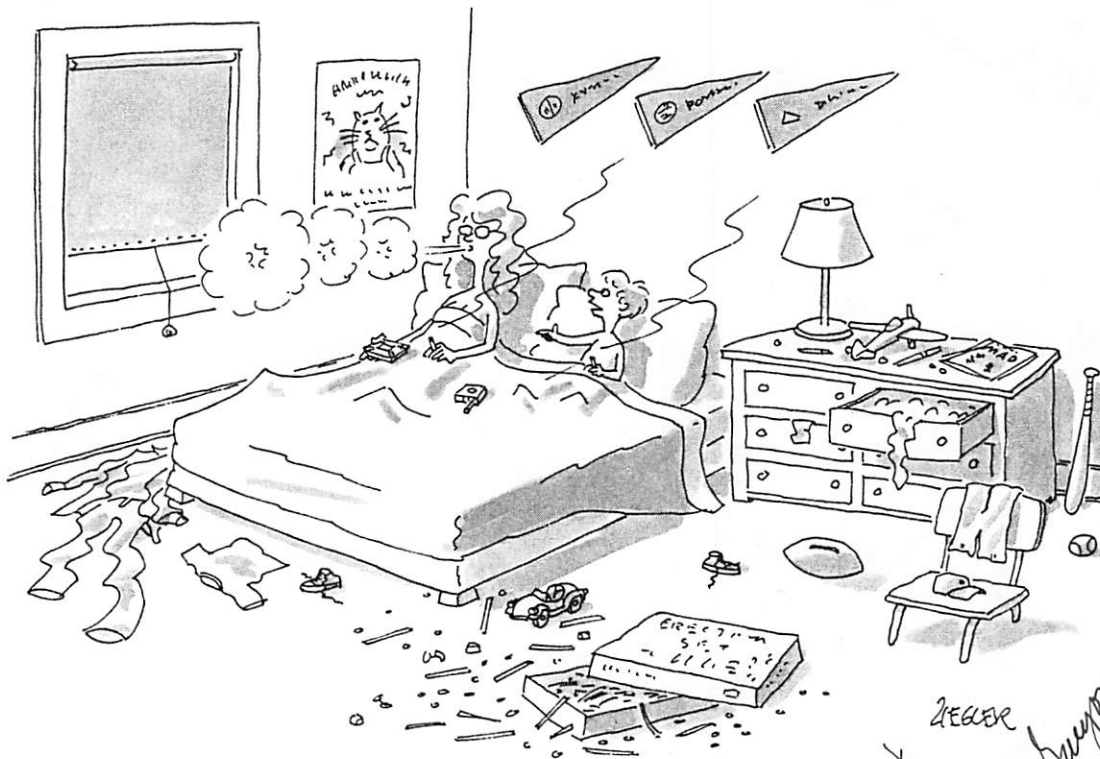
Kinsey was not, of course, a Communist. (He had little discernible interest in politics, and remained a registered Independent who voted Republican.) But he was not quite what he appeared to be—the genial academic in baggy tweeds and bow tie, the simple empiricist disinterestedly reporting his data. As I discovered while researching a biography of Kinsey (I have also served on the institute's scientific board of advisers), he was, in reality, a covert crusader who was determined to use science to free American society from what he saw as the crippling legacy of Victorian repression. And he was a strong-willed patriarch who created around himself a kind of utopian community in which sexual experimentation was encouraged.

In his obsessive energies and powers of persuasion, Kinsey resembled a late-twentieth-century cult leader. In other ways, he was perhaps even more like one of those protean eccentrics of the nineteenth century—a self-created visionary with a burning belief in his mission (and ability) to change the world. He found time not only to conduct the vast labors

of research and writing which produced the reports, but also to make serious contributions to biology education and entomological science; to engage in physically challenging exploration in the field; to design his own house and an elaborate flower garden that served as a family classroom; to cultivate a connoisseur's knowledge of classical music and ornithology; and to change (and often dominate) the lives of scores of people with whom he came in contact.

Though hardly Victorian in his beliefs, he was decidedly Victorian in the contrast between his public life and his private life. His greatest contribution as a sex re-

87%  
in front  
of  
OKay  
to talk  
about  
sex



"I want you to know, Sheila, that you'll always be more than just another babysitter to me."

Reverse  
Raymond  
Andy  
19/10

searcher was to reveal the chasm between prescribed and actual behavior and to show the high price exacted by society's sexual prohibitions. No one embodied this divide more than he did. After delving into the institute's archives, reading thousands of letters, and interviewing his associates, I concluded that Kinsey was himself beset by secrets: he was both a homosexual and, from childhood on, a masochist who, as he grew older, pursued an interest in extreme sexuality with increasing compulsiveness. His secret life was shared with a small circle of intimates, a few of whom became his sexual partners, sometimes in the name of "research." Remarkably, his activities did not prevent him from being a devoted husband and a caring, successful father. But they almost certainly did affect the objectivity and detachment of his work as a scientist; his celebrated findings, I now believe, may well have been skewed. From the very beginnings of his research into sexual behavior, the Americans who most persistently engaged Kinsey's attention were people who were either on the margins or beyond the pale: homosexuals, sadomasochists, voyeurs, exhibitionists, pedophiles, transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists. As Saul Bellow once observed of Hawthorne's writing of "The Scarlet Letter," "there's nothing like a shameful secret to fire a man up." Not all of Alfred Kinsey's secrets were shameful, but rarely has a man been more fired up.

KINSEY was born in 1894, and spent the first decade of his life in Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. Hoboken was then a drab and dirty waterfront town, and Kinsey hated it. When he looked back on his early years there, he claimed to remember only such public events as the first automobiles, the first paved streets, and the fireworks on holidays.

His parents were evangelical Protestants who practiced a fiery brand of Methodism. Theirs was an Old Testament God, who knew a person's every thought and deed and punished those who broke the Commandments. God's surrogate was Kinsey's father, Alfred Seguine Kinsey. He forbade popular music, dancing, tobacco, and drink in his household, and, as teen-agers, his three children, Alfred, Mildred, and Robert,

were prohibited from dating. Alfred, the oldest, suffered from diseases—rickets, rheumatic fever, and typhoid fever—that kept him bedridden for long stretches.

When Kinsey was ten, the family moved to South Orange, New Jersey, which at the turn of the century was a well-to-do, almost rural village. There is a snapshot taken on the eve of the First World War of Kinsey in the uniform of an Eagle Scout. Sitting on a brick wall, he looks at the camera with a broad smile, sunlight glistening on his curly blond hair. His demeanor bespeaks obedience to Scouting's injunction to be courteous, respectful, cheerful, and patriotic.

In South Orange, his health improved dramatically, and he started exploring nearby hills and marshes. He pored over books of natural history and became an avid collector of butterflies. Bird-watching was a national craze, and Kinsey took part in it with the fervor other boys devoted to memorizing bat-

ting averages. At sixteen, he wrote an essay entitled "What Do Birds Do When It Rains?" He revisited the topic years later, when he wrote a best-selling high-school-biology textbook, answering the question in a chapter called "Bird Behavior":

A bird is a peculiar creature in a rain storm. While its feathers will shed water for a time, prolonged wetting soaks them and reduces their efficiency in conserving the body heat. So most birds take to the thick shelter of the bushes and trees at such a time. Only a few of them (as the robin) stay out and scold at warm rains, and a few of them (as the song sparrow) remain quite as active and cheerful as in the sunshine. . . . Parent birds usually keep their nestlings covered during a rain storm.

The passage illustrates Kinsey's approach to scientific research. In order to satisfy his curiosity, he framed simple questions that could be answered by tenacious, direct observation, even if it meant standing for hours in dripping clothes.

At Bowdoin College, in Maine, Kinsey



*"Just another of our many disagreements. He wants a no-fault divorce, whereas I would prefer to have the bastard crucified."*

## LETTER FROM ARTHUR CRAVAN TO MINA LOY

*This letter (and those that follow throughout the issue, which were recently released from private collections) appears for the first time. It is one of many written by the Dadaist Fabian Lloyd (a.k.a. Arthur Cravan) to the avant-garde poet Mina Loy urging her to join him in Mexico, where he had fled to escape the draft. She did, they married, and she became pregnant, but soon afterward he mysteriously disappeared. "Looking for love with all its catastrophes is a less risky experience than finding it," she wrote.*



Mexico City, December 30, 1917  
MY DEAREST, MY MOST BEAUTIFUL ONE,  
Won't you come soon? I'm no better, I never will get better. My mind is going. If you have one last drop of pity you'll wire me. If only you could see me! Why weren't you more trusting? It was only on the last day that I understood your tenderness toward me. If you had said just once "I love you," you would have seen how tender I can be. But instead you always let me think that, while you respected me, despite all my efforts you couldn't love me. Why did you play this game, which made me do the same? If you had been frank, you would have known the sweetest moments of your life; it requires no effort for me to be kind when I don't have to be defensive. And I know you are an angel. Didn't I tell you so the first day? Come down here. I will do as you wish. We will work things out for your children. I've thought about it a lot and I swear that I haven't done so egotistically. Since leaving I have become tremendously pure, and if I manage to sur-

vive I'm thinking of becoming a saint. But I don't think I will survive. If you don't get any more letters you'll know that I'm dead or else that I've gone mad. If you can't console me I'd rather disappear from the world of the senses or at least of the intelligence. I can no longer see a star or read a book without being filled with horror. I have almost no strength left for writing to you, and if I knew that I was doing it in vain, I would kill myself in five minutes. All I do is think about suicide.

As you have probably never been in this state, you can't understand. If you had suffered half as much as I do, you would fly to my side. Listen, Mina, I would almost ask you to lie. The idea of death fills me with horror, so even if you couldn't come, could you give me the sweet illusion that I will see you again? I could never bear the truth. Madness terrifies me more than death. My brain can't manage to repair the losses, and the only thing I really grasp is that I am lost. Wire me for God's sake. This is the Christmas of a lost soul. It will be the New Year of a man who is condemned to death. Give me a present, Mina, the most beautiful one of my life: write to me. I pray endlessly to God to come to my aid, but I think God has abandoned me. What have I done? It's too much for me; I didn't deserve this. Won't you come? Tell me no if it has to be no and that will be the end. You will have lied to me. I've cried so much that I thought of sending you a vial of tears. When I tell you that I have the most outrageous ideas! Hurry up if you want to save me. Mina, I can't believe, I don't dare believe, that you will abandon me. If you do come, I swear to you on my eternal soul that I will never cause you pain and that your life will be sweeter than that of any other woman. Forget the past. I was full of lies, but now I only want to live for the truth. I can take care of you.

Listen to my plea. *De profundis clamavi.*

YOUR POOR FABY, THE ANGEL OF  
YOUR HEART

(Translated, from the French, by Carolyn Burke.)

took a double major in biology and psychology, and became a campus leader—active both in the biology club and on the debating team. He joined a fraternity, but seems not to have been especially close to his fraternity brothers, some of whom remembered him as “a loner.”

Kinsey went on to Harvard for graduate study at the Bussey Institution, a major center for Darwinian “new biology.” His mentor was William Morton Wheeler, the world's leading authority on the social behavior of insects and an avid taxonomist, whose lectures were based heavily on his own field observations. By the First World War, many of the brightest young scientists were casting their lot with experimental biology, electing to work in genetics, biochemistry, and the like. Only a relative handful became descriptive biologists, who relied on empirical observation to test hypotheses. In deciding to study with Wheeler, Kinsey took the less fashionable path, inspired by a love of nature and the towering example of Darwin.

Under Wheeler's supervision, Kinsey wrote his dissertation on the taxonomy of gall wasps. It was distinguished by three things that became defining features of his subsequent work: huge samples (in this case, many thousands of wasps), rigorous field work, and concise prose that gave coherence to difficult and diverse data. In 1920, Kinsey emerged from Harvard with his doctorate and a new, clear direction.

KINSEY arrived at Indiana University as an assistant professor of zoology in August, 1920. During his first months in Bloomington, he met Clara Bracken McMillen, a young woman from Fort Wayne, who as an undergraduate had been Indiana University's top chemistry student. Lively and robust, Clara, who dressed in masculine clothes and enjoyed long nature hikes, was apparently delighted on Christmas when Kinsey presented her with a compass, a hunting knife, and a pair of Bass hiking shoes. Barely two months after their first date, Kinsey proposed marriage. Clara, who considered herself a freethinker, kept him waiting for two weeks before accepting, because she feared that he was too “churchy.” She need not have worried; the devout Methodist had long since begun to give way to the hard-nosed young

scientist. (In later years, Kinsey stoutly declared himself an atheist.) Throughout their lives, they called each other by nicknames: she was Mac, an abbreviation of her surname; he was Prok, a contraction of "Professor" and "Kinsey."

During their honeymoon, which was mostly spent hiking through the White Mountains, they failed to consummate their marriage. Kinsey later confided to a friend that the problem was the result of both inexperience and physiology. "Kinsey wasn't altogether clear how to go about this," the friend recalled, "and Mac was completely inexperienced, as well." In Bloomington, Clara consulted a physician, who advised minor corrective surgery in her genital area. Years later, Kinsey told a colleague in the zoology department about the operation, saying that he blamed Victorian prudery for their delay in seeking help. In any case, Alfred and Clara went on to have four children—Donald, Bruce, Anne, and Joan. The oldest, Donald, who was diabetic, died at the age of three, causing the Kinseys enormous sorrow from which Clara, in particular, never fully recovered.

"I believe in marriage as an institution," Kinsey told a class of students in 1940, because "it provides for the procreation of the race and for the care of the offspring." He went on to praise the institution as "a mutual aid society which provides for the best development of two individuals. It is quite possible to walk through life alone but not as efficiently as when there is someone else to go with you to share your plans and your ambitions, to stand by when few others will support you, to help at every turn."

Kinsey's preference for efficiency over romance reflected a new "progressive" ideal embraced by many middle-class Americans between the wars: "companionate marriage," as it was called by nineteen-twenties social reformers who promoted a new egalitarianism between the sexes. Nonetheless, in some ways the Kinseys' marriage resembled the patriarchal union of Kinsey's parents. He made teaching and research the center of his life; she abandoned her interest in chemistry for domesticity. "I always realized that his work would have to come first," Clara later said. "You can't ask a man just to give up what is the driving force of his life because he is your husband."

People close to Clara considered her an equal partner in the marriage, how-

ever. Unlike many faculty wives, whose interests did not extend beyond the home, Clara was able to share her husband's intellectual life, thanks to her intelligence, her interest in the outdoors, and her undergraduate training in science. She had read marriage manuals, perused nudist magazines; like Kinsey, she had developed a local reputation as a sex expert, dispensing advice and information to neighbors and their children, not to mention her own offspring. She had become aware of her husband's homosexual inclinations—as well as his masochism—and even enjoyed, with his approval, a sexual relationship outside the marriage.

The Kinseys' "companionate" ideal extended to their children. Sex education, Kinsey argued, had to begin at home. Parents who shirked this duty, he warned, ran the risk of injuring and alienating their children, and of opening a gulf between the generations that would never close.

To inspire positive feelings about the human body, Kinsey taught by example. He would stand naked before the mirror while he shaved, making up singsong rhymes to entertain one of his children. In 1934, when the children were still youngsters—Anne was ten, Joan nine, and Bruce six—the Kinseys took a family vacation in the Great Smoky Mountains. Their cabin was isolated, next to a stream, and the family bathed nude together.

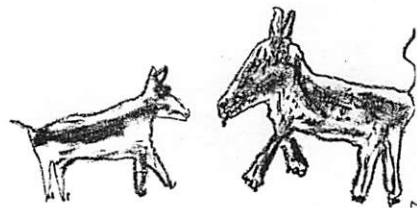
AT Indiana University, Kinsey persisted in his study of gall wasps for eighteen years, with an energy that amazed his colleagues. He travelled more than seventy-five thousand miles, across the United States, in Mexico, and in Guatemala, collecting specimens by the hundreds of thousands and earning, among the small circle of scientists who did taxonomic work on insects, the reputation of a man whose devotion to research was nearly fanatical. Kinsey's work seems to have given him visceral pleasure. In contrast to the gray tone of most science writing, his monographs were filled with effusive language (one gall wasp was

called "a splendid thing"). He would sit for hours, green eyeshade in place, peering through his microscope. Then, as a lab assistant recalled, he would suddenly exclaim to no one in particular, "Astounding!" or "Wow!"

It became apparent that Kinsey was an unconventional and highly opinionated scientist. During his second year in Bloomington he had started putting together material for an innovative biology textbook, to be used in high schools. He wanted to offer students what he called "a bird's-eye view" of the seven fields he regarded as essential to a basic understanding of biology—taxonomy, morphology, physiology, genetics, ecology, distributional biology, and behavior. In 1926, J. B. Lippincott published the first edition of "An Introduction to Biology," and it was successful enough, particularly in later editions, to give Kinsey considerable financial independence.

The book was distinctive in several ways: its tone was friendly, as though Kinsey were chatting with students; it exhorted young people to get out of the classroom to see for themselves how nature works; and it took a strong position on evolution, which had become a national issue in the summer of 1925, on account of the so-called monkey trial of the high-school science teacher John Scopes, in Tennessee. Kinsey's textbook laid out the basics of Darwinian evolution matter-of-factly, as though he were discussing something as uncontroversial as the life cycle of the fruit fly. The tone, which he would employ to the same effect in his books on sexuality, was intended to indicate that nothing remained for discussion: religion had lost; science had won. In the textbook, and in other writings as well, Kinsey encouraged students to think independently and skeptically. "Don't get a notion that things are true because they are in print," he advised them. A wise person had to "remember that even authorities sometimes publish things that aren't so," and to bear in mind that "what experts believe to be true may be found incorrect upon further investigation."

Kinsey's process of self-liberation was apparent on his field trips. One of the male students who accompanied him as assistants during a wasp-collecting trip to the Ozark Mountains was struck by Kinsey's casual immodesty. "He would go naked if we were in a campground,"



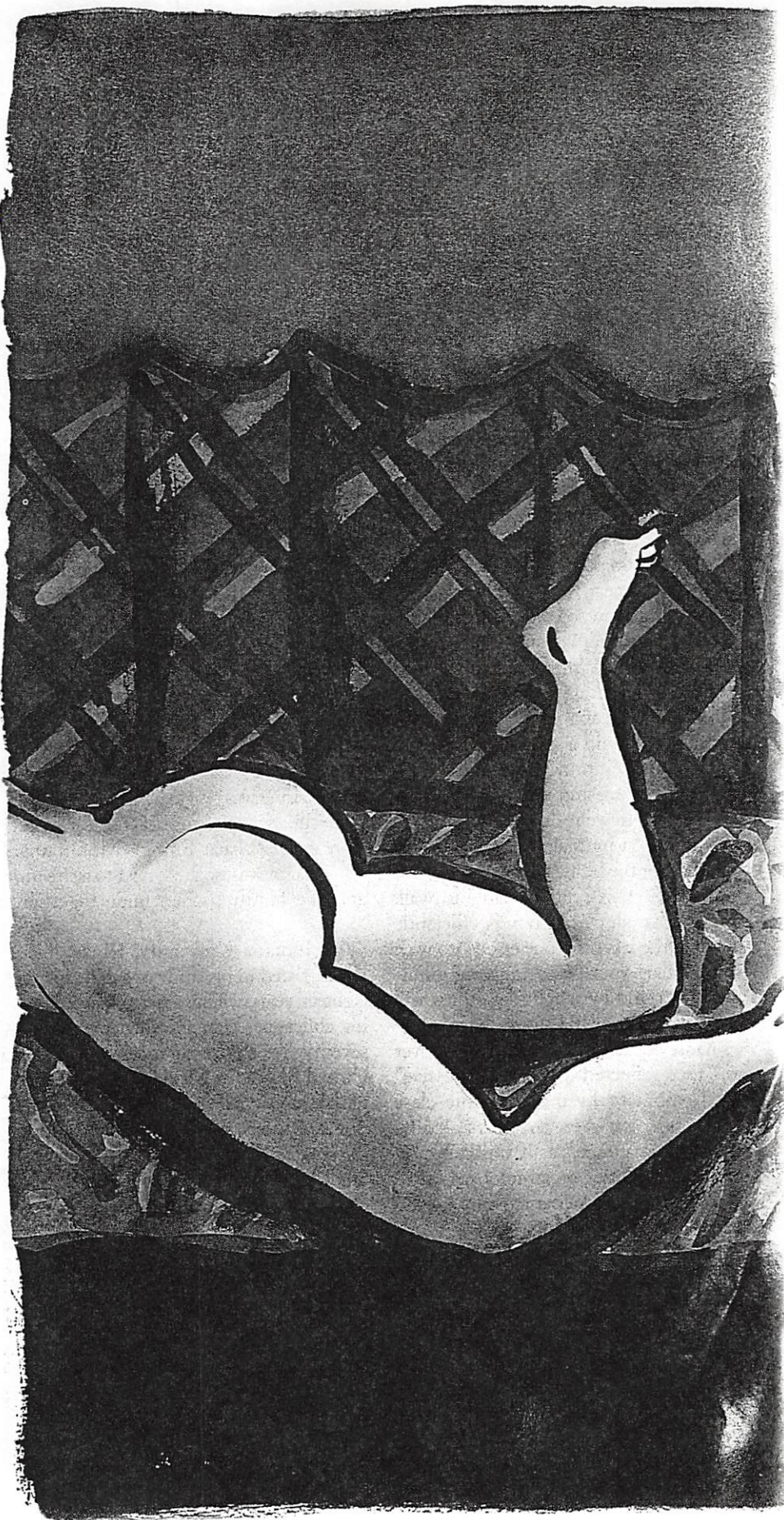
Homer T. Rainwater recalls. "He just plain didn't give a damn. Nor did he show any inhibitions about his bodily functions." Kinsey's eagerness to talk about sex was more disconcerting. After several nights, Rainwater discerned a pattern. Kinsey would begin by sharing intimate details about his own private life. "He'd talk about his wife, and what a good sex partner she was, and then he'd go from there. He had a pretty wife, and apparently she was very accommodating, and he talked about that to us, I thought, more than was appropriate." Much to Rainwater's embarrassment, Kinsey would then ask about *his* sex life.

IN later years, after Kinsey became famous, he attributed his interest in human sexual behavior to a pioneering course he developed on marriage and the family, which he began teaching in 1938. In the "Historical Introduction" to his book on men, he wrote that many of his biology students had brought him questions about human sexuality, and that when he consulted the available literature on the subject he'd been "struck with the inadequacy of the samples on which such studies were being based, and the apparent unawareness of the investigators that generalizations were not warranted on the bases of such small samples." Accordingly, he saw "ample opportunity for making a scientifically sounder study of human sex behavior," and he went on to explain, "The more recently published

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## FRENCH POSTCARDS

*The Parisian artist Jacques de Loustal travels to exotic destinations—the volcanoes of Java, the medinas of North Africa, the streets beneath the Williamsburg Bridge—and makes sketches, in ink or pencil, on the spot; he adds colors later, in his hotel room, while his impressions of the light are still fresh. His paintings and watercolors, even of imagined scenes, such as the one depicted in "Le Contemplatif," at the right, exhibit a peculiarly Gallic immediacy that owes something to Matisse (the sunniness, the prurience) and also to Godard (the studied carelessness, the cool edge). Loustal's work goes up this fall in a show at an appropriate setting: the Erotic Art Museum, in Hamburg.*







research provided a considerable basis for deciding what should be included in a sex history, and our background in both psychology and biology made it apparent that there were additional matters worth investigation."

Kinsey did not mention that he had been pumping students about their sex lives long before he started the marriage course. Nor did he note that it was his personal interest in the "additional matters" which had led him to examine areas of behavior that previous sex researchers knew little about, largely because most of them had not dared to ask.

No previous investigator had ever attempted what Kinsey had in mind. What he set out to do—with the university's support—was to recover every knowable fact about people's sex lives and erotic imaginings. Because he believed that people routinely hid the truth about their private needs and activities, he was all the more determined to discover what they actually thought and did behind closed doors, safe from judgmental scrutiny.

Early in his research into human sexuality, Kinsey realized that his respondents would be more trusting and cooperative if he could not only guarantee confidentiality but avoid the use of written questionnaires. Accordingly, he produced no written key to his interview, preferring to memorize the questions and the order in which they were asked. If a subject balked, or gave an answer that suddenly suggested a new area for discussion, Kinsey had to be able to leap to another round of questions, while keeping mental count of the items in each round. This enabled him to move smoothly through the hundreds of items covered in each history without losing eye contact, and insured that only he and a handful of researchers he had trained knew the specific questions asked, and the answers elicited.

Still, some kind of notation was necessary, so Kinsey devised a form and a code for recording sex histories which made his records unintelligible to outsiders. In later years, Kinsey took delight in handing visitors a sheet of paper bearing an assortment of odd-looking symbols. Explaining that the paper contained a complete record of a subject's

sexual history, he would challenge his visitors to decipher it. None of them could.

While he was busy designing safeguards, Kinsey developed his interviewing skills. He learned how to read people's eyes and body language for signs that they might be holding back or lying. He taught himself to phrase questions in a straightforward manner, avoiding euphemisms that could obscure meaning. He assumed that everyone had engaged in forbidden behavior unless he or she said otherwise, and he phrased his questions so as to facilitate confession. For example, instead of asking people if they had ever masturbated he would inquire how old they were when they started masturbating. It was an approach that proved particularly effective with regard to illegal behavior.



To skeptics who wondered, in Kinsey's words, "how it is possible for an interviewer to know whether people are telling the truth, when they are boasting, when they are covering up, or when they are distorting," Kinsey snorted, "As well ask a horse trader how he knows when to close a bargain!" Over the years, Kinsey learned to employ a staccato method of asking questions, which reduced the time a subject had to think up false but plausible answers. He also made a point of maintaining eye contact, believing that it would be harder for people to lie to someone who looked them in the eye. If he suspected lying, he would stop the interview, reprimand the culprit severely, and order him to tell the truth or get out.

**I**N June of 1939, Kinsey taught his last class of the week and left Bloomington on a new kind of field trip. Until now, he had interviewed mostly college students, family members—including Clara and their children—and friends. Yet even within this small circle, he had managed to spread the word that he would be happy to counsel people who had sexual problems. On that afternoon, he was headed for Chicago. Waiting for him was a man who had promised to introduce him to what would today be called the city's gay community.

Kinsey checked into his hotel, the Harrison, just off Michigan Avenue, and set off to interview a group of young men

who lived together in a boarding house on Rush Street. Things went well. Because he showed no hint of moral condemnation, the young men were willing to trust him. Kinsey assured them that he would never divulge their confidences, and stressed that whatever they told him would benefit science. Kinsey would continue to make numerous forays into the gay subculture of other large American cities, and his reports of those experiences have an almost childlike enthusiasm. "Have been to Halloween parties, taverns, clubs, etc., which would be unbelievable if realized by the rest of the world," he wrote to a friend after one trip to Chicago. "Always they have been most considerate and cooperative, decent, understanding, and cordial in their reception. Why has no one cracked this before?"

With homosexuals, as with other subjects, Kinsey employed what statisticians call a "grab" sample—meaning that he surveyed only people who agreed to cooperate, without giving much consideration to whether their backgrounds added up to a fair representation of a particular group. He also did what is known as "snowball" sampling, which involved contacting friends and acquaintances of people who were already part of his pool or relying on the good will of an organization to get to the entire membership. He made a point of targeting groups he felt were underrepresented in other scientific samplings and who—like homosexuals—had a special attraction for him. These practices, as his critics later charged, were bound to result in a distorted representation of America's male population.

Throughout Kinsey's career, his success would turn in large measure on follow-up work. He crafted thank-you letters with care, assuring the recipients that their contributions to his research had been crucial and unique. And on rare occasions, Kinsey wrote to the parents of his subjects. Because he wanted to understand why men became homosexuals, he was eager to learn everything he could about their home lives.

Often Kinsey got caught up in the lives of the people he interviewed. To one of them, he wrote, "Your capacity for love is the thing that stands foremost in my thinking of you. Your question is a fair one—if love is extolled by poets and teachers, then what can be wrong about it in any form that remains fine"

and real?" No wonder these young men trusted Kinsey. This mild-mannered, soft-spoken, middle-aged scientist made it clear that he liked and respected them. Kinsey must have seemed like an approving father.

By December of 1940, Kinsey had compiled seventeen hundred histories, more than enough to establish the feasibility of his research. Convinced that he would need a hundred thousand histories for a reliable sample, he applied for a grant from the National Research Council's Committee for Research in Problems of Sex, or C.R.P.S., which was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. The C.R.P.S. was willing to take a modest risk on helping to finance what appeared to be a promising study, and awarded him a small grant in the spring of 1941. When Kinsey requested a larger grant the following year, Robert M. Yerkes, the committee's chairman and a distinguished Yale psychologist, arrived in Bloomington to see what Kinsey was up to. With him were George W. Corner, a distinguished embryologist at the Carnegie Institution, and Lowell Reed, a pioneering biostatistician and the dean of the School of Hygiene and Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. Kinsey promptly persuaded them that the only way they could understand his project was to submit to his interview. All three did, and emerged astonished at his skillfulness in drawing them out.

Yerkes and Corner were also treated to a demonstration in the field. For some time, Kinsey had been taking personal histories in the state's penal institutions. On this occasion, he drove his guests to the men's prison, then to the women's prison, and, finally, to a house of prostitution in the slums of Indianapolis. At each stop, his visitors watched while he conducted an interview. Many years later, Corner recalled the subject at the men's prison as having been "a major offender of some sort, I think murderous assault or something like that." Sitting face to face with the man, Kin-

sey abandoned the vocabulary and persona of a college professor and spoke fluently in the language of the streets. His observers were amazed by the performance, and when Kinsey was attacked by critics who questioned his ability to obtain accurate data, Corner replied, "He made me talk, and he made a Negro criminal talk, and I thought he could deal with [anyone]."

Large grants—lots of them—followed. Kinsey used the funds to build a research institute, which he filled with staff members, a library, and an archive, and for travel expenses. Over the next several years, he and his colleagues interviewed a wide assortment of people in several regions of the country. By the mid-nineteen-forties, they felt that they had compiled more than enough data to justify publication, and Kinsey was dividing his time between field work and sitting down to write the first of his explosive reports on American sexuality.

SHORTLY after Kinsey began writing "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male," in 1945, he collapsed—a portent of recurring health problems that he would have for the rest of his life. He attributed his condition to physical fatigue. "I have been exhausted and in bed part of the time for the last several weeks and

I am glad that my traveling is over for the first half of this year," he wrote to a friend. "It has taken three years of continuous calculation on the statistics, and there is a tremendous amount of detail to work into the text that I hope will be rather easy reading."

Easy reading it was not. The strategy behind the first Kinsey Report was to shout "Science!" through an exhaustive accumulation of technical jargon and massed statistics. At every turn, Kinsey, who had refused to delegate any of the writing to others, cautioned readers not to attach too much emphasis to specific findings (while arguing that the bulk of his data was both representative and reliable), and denied any intention to influence social policy. His approach to what he liked to call "the human animal" was, he wrote, "agnostic."

Tolerance was the underlying message of the book. Kinsey bombarded his readers with the theme of sexual diversity. "There is no American pattern of sexual behavior, but scores of patterns, each of which is confined to a particular segment of our society," he wrote. He took pains to show that many forms of sexual behavior labelled criminal or rare were actually quite common. (He argued that "at least 85 per cent of the younger male population could be convicted as



*"You're wonderful, Kimberly, and I want to be married,  
but I'm looking for a complete unknown."*



*"And if you prick me, do I not bleed?"*

sex offenders if law enforcement officials were as efficient as most people expect them to be.")

Kinsey divided his book into three sections. The first part, "History and Method," contained four chapters designed to persuade readers that his research was superior to all previous studies, that his sole aim in launching his investigation was to fill a hole in science, and that his numbers were sound. The second part, "Factors Affecting Sexual Outlet," had chapters on, among other things, age, marriage, religion, and social class. To show how each of these factors affected sexuality, Kinsey used the orgasm as his basic unit of measurement—that is, masturbation had the same value as intercourse. No approach could have been more subversive of traditional morality. (In a statistic that was to become celebrated, Kinsey found that the average male between adolescence and the age of thirty had precisely 2.88 orgasms per week.) The third part, "Sources of Sexual Outlet," was a catalogue of the various practices that resulted in orgasm.

For all its science, Kinsey's analysis contained considerable social commen-

tary. Society, he argued, began its efforts to inhibit and control the sexuality of its members in childhood, with prohibitions and restrictions that continued for life. His case histories revealed that most boys had sexual experiences before reaching adolescence, and he expressed regret that preadolescents did not have more.

One of Kinsey's most provocative discoveries was that males of different social backgrounds and educational levels presented strongly dissimilar sexual histories. Young single males who had gone to high school but not beyond had the highest number of orgasms, while those who had gone to college had the lowest. Kinsey wrote, "Each social level is convinced that its pattern is the best of all patterns. . . . Most of the tragedies that develop out of sexual activities are products of this conflict between the attitudes of different social levels." He continued, "Sexual activities in themselves rarely do physical damage, but disagreements over the significance of sexual behavior may result in personality conflicts, a loss of social standing, imprisonment, disgrace, and the loss of life itself."

The chapter "Homosexual Outlet" was fifty-six pages long. Kinsey went straight to the heart of the debate over the origins of homosexuality. He rejected any connection between it and endocrinological imbalance, and dismissed conventional psychological explanations as well. "Psychologists have been too much concerned with the individuals who depart from the group custom," he wrote. "It would be more important to know why so many individuals conform as they do to such ancient custom." Homosexual behavior, he maintained, was part of the human and mammalian heritage: as a member of the animal kingdom, the human animal possessed the capacity for same-sex eroticism.

Yet Kinsey stopped short of arguing that homosexuality was biologically determined. Whether or not people engaged in homosexual behavior, he explained, de-

pendent in large measure on experience and conditioning. If their early childhood experiences happened to be with members of the same sex and if those experiences turned out to be enjoyable, there was a fair chance that the individual would repeat them, gradually forming a pattern that culminated in adult homosexual behavior.

Binary labels such as "homosexual" and "heterosexual," Kinsey argued, could never capture the rich diversity and overlapping experiences of human beings. "The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats," he declared. "Not all things are black nor all things white. Instead, he argued that human sexual behavior was fluid, and he advanced this thesis with his celebrated seven-point scale. The individuals who registered zero were exclusively heterosexual, while those who rated a six were strictly homosexual. Offered as a finely tuned instrument, the scale was designed to blend sharp distinctions and to find common ground that united people in the sexual behavior they shared. Most people fell into the intermediate categories, with private lives that combined

both heterosexual and homosexual elements. Their differences from one another were matters of degree rather than of kind.

Kinsey ended the book with this disclaimer: "The social values of human activities must be measured by many scales other than those which are available to the scientist." He failed to acknowledge, however, that he had placed a thumb on the scale—that his methodology and his sampling technique virtually guaranteed that he would find what he was looking for.

FROM 1945 to 1947, Kinsey received dozens of inquiries from publishers who were eager to explain why their houses were uniquely positioned to present his material to the American public. Kinsey realized that it would be more prudent to sign with a medical publisher, which catered to a professional audience, in order to forestall any charges of sensationalism or that he was trying to influence public opinion.

The task of editing Kinsey's manuscript fell to Lloyd G. Potter, the vice-president and senior editor of W. B. Saunders, and he worked closely with Kinsey throughout the summer and fall of 1947. Potter failed to note any of the instances in which Kinsey had editorialized, but his critique of the manuscript anticipated many of the complaints that would dog the book after it was published. The most serious would involve statistics.

Potter asked Kinsey for assurances that the statistical method and data in the book were, in his words, "bullet-proof." He continued, "The assumption is, of course, that your findings can be applied to the United States population as a whole, but the data seem preponderantly to be collected in the eastern part of the country, and very little relates to the west and the south." Kinsey's response—that he repeatedly admitted the limits of his approach ("The calculations," he said, "are always subject to the adequacy of the sample")—was scarcely satisfactory. Still, Potter was reassured to learn from Alan Gregg, the director of the medical division of the Rockefeller Foundation, that Kinsey's statistics had been carefully reviewed by Lowell Reed, at Johns Hopkins. The real concern, said Gregg, who wrote a preface to the book, was "the general is-

sue of freedom of scientific inquiry." He added, "I have no doubt that the book will stir up criticism. Psychoanalysis did and yet it has now become the subject of numerous books that encounter no great risk of suppression and occasion no storms."

Kinsey, in fact, turned out to be extraordinarily skillful at manipulating the media. Because of his subject, journalists had pursued him from the early years of his research. Fearing that no good could come from premature publicity, Kinsey had routinely asked officials in charge of scholarly conferences at which he spoke to omit any reference to his session in press releases. When reporters did show up, he declined to be interviewed, but told them that he would be happy to cooperate when his findings were ready for publication. "With a few exceptions, he didn't like the press," Paul Gebhard recalled, adding that Kinsey "disliked being recorded or quoted . . . [out of fear] that he could be held accountable for this and criticized."

On the eve of publication, Kinsey devised an ingenious plan for controlling the press. He would invite a select group of journalists to Bloomington. There they would receive a detailed summary of the book prior to its release date or, if they preferred, would be permitted to read the proofs. Either way, they would be free to write whatever they liked. In exchange, however, they would have to agree not to publish their articles until December, 1947—roughly a month before the book arrived in the stores—and to submit copies of their ar-



ticles to Kinsey prior to publication, so that he could review them for factual accuracy.

Kinsey's policy worked as planned. Beginning in the late summer of 1947, an orderly procession of feature-story writers and reporters made the trek to Bloomington. Most of the journalists spent two or three days at the institute, and, as had many visitors before them, they saw Kinsey only as he wanted to be seen: as a middle-aged family man and a dedicated scientist, whose passion for objectivity was beyond question. With reporters sitting at his feet like schoolchildren, Kinsey told his story of how the research got started, explained his taxonomic method, and closed with deftly chosen remarks on the reliability of the data. He even persuaded many of the writers to give their own sex histories in the hope of banishing all doubts about his skills as an interviewer.

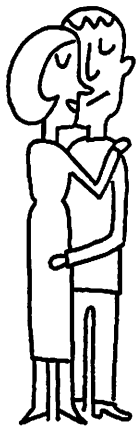
When November arrived, Kinsey was confident of success. He wrote to the pollster George Gallup, "My guess is that right now there are perhaps 100,000 people in the country who know something about our research. By the last week in November, several million will have seen magazine articles and by the middle of January there should be a very high proportion of the total population that has had information about it." The magazines fell into line: "Today, on the rustic campus of a Midwest university, a soft-spoken, keen-eyed man is quietly at work—producing a social atom bomb," *Look* announced. In language that could have come from an institute press release, *Harper's* declared, "Experts who have closely scrutinized the interviewing techniques of Kinsey and his associates endorse their scientific validity and state further that the people so far interviewed represent a fair cross section of the American population."

ALTHOUGH the mainstream media's reaction to the Kinsey Report was overwhelmingly favorable, the response in academic circles was decidedly mixed. As *The New Republic* told its readers, "not a few" specialists were "heating the cauldron in anticipation of the feast at which Kinsey will be the main dish." Anthropologists led the attack. Writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Geoffrey Gorer, a Briton, charged that "the

sampling is so poor that the only reliable figures are those for college graduates in six of the northeastern states." The basic problem, Gorer argued, was that sound sampling procedures required "some carefully planned system of randomization which avoids bias on the part of the investigator." At a minimum, he maintained, Kinsey should have used "stratified sampling"—a system that rests on "the calculation that the distribution of characters being studied is directly correlated with other criteria such as age, education, religion, region, economic level, etc."

Speaking at a symposium on the book held in New York in March, 1948, Margaret Mead argued that Kinsey had atomized sex by taking "sexual behavior out of its interpersonal context" and reducing it "to the category of a simple act of elimination," and for flagrant puritanism. "Nowhere have I been able to find a single suggestion that sex is any fun, not anywhere in the book, not a suggestion," she declared. "The book suggests no way of choosing between a woman and a sheep."

In a long essay in *Partisan Review*, Lionel Trilling amplified Mead's concerns, criticizing Kinsey for failing to comprehend that sex involves the whole of an individual's character; for his seemingly willful misrepresentation of Freudian psychology; for allowing the notion of the natural to develop into the idea of the normal; and for advancing his own peculiar views while simultaneously proclaiming his objectivity. The Kinsey Report, Trilling declared, betrayed "an extravagant fear of all ideas that do not seem to it to be, as it were, immediately dictated by simple physical fact." Even so, Trilling found much to praise in the motives behind the book. Commenting on "how very characteristically *American* a document it is," he explained, "I have in mind chiefly the impulse toward acceptance and liberation, the broad and generous desire for others that they not be harshly judged." In a conclusion that seems the fairest assessment of this curious work, Trilling remarked, "Although it is possible to say of the Report that it brings light, it is necessary to say of it that it spreads confusion."



Kinsey was especially wounded by the Gorer and Mead critiques, all the more because he suspected professional ill will and collusion. Writing to a supporter, Kinsey snapped, "The Gorer review either represents stupidity or deliberate maliciousness. He criticizes us as though our technique had been that of proportionate sample, and ignores the careful and elaborate explanation which we made of stratified sampling techniques." Kinsey rejected all negative assessments, moral and technical, of his work. He saw himself as the one scientist in the world who had uncovered the facts about human sexual behavior and had placed the truth before the public.

Another battle was more troublesome. From the moment news stories about the report started appearing, the book was linked in the public's mind to Kinsey's principal patron, the Rockefeller Foundation. For years, Alan Gregg had cautioned Kinsey against making too much of this connection. His concerns proved to be justified. The foundation found itself drawn deeper and deeper into the controversy around Kinsey's work. For the six years after the report was published, the foundation continued its support of his research, despite strong objections from some of its most powerful board members, notably John Foster Dulles and Arthur Hays Sulzberger. Although the mixed reception in 1953 to "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" mirrored that of the first volume, the foundation's president, Dean Rusk, decided, in 1954, under pressure from the board, to cut Kinsey loose—largely out of worry that politicians would attempt to use Kinsey as a brush with which to tar the foundation.

THE battles had been hard on Kinsey. Restless and irritable, he was having trouble sleeping. The fatigue was starting to show in his face; his eyes had lost their sparkle. One colleague advised him, "It's time you let your Scotch-Presbyterian conscience drive you into taking a real vacation, for the sake of your most important program." Another friend recalled that Kinsey was plagued by "a constant sense of mortal-

ity," adding that "a great many decisions and a great deal of the spirit of the research" resulted from the fact that Kinsey "was haunted by the brevity of his life."

Kinsey had begun to build a private world that would provide the emotional support he needed. Within a select circle of staff members and trusted outsiders, he set out to create his own sexual utopia, a scientifically justified subculture whose members would not be bound by arbitrary and antiquated sexual taboos. Kinsey decreed that the men could have sex with each other, and that the wives, too, could be free to embrace whatever sexual partners they liked.

One of the outsiders, whom I'll call "Y," has given a detailed account of his experiences at the institute. Y was a handsome young professional with a diverse sexual history, which included sadomasochism and extensive homosexual contacts. When Kinsey took his history, Y was astonished by Kinsey's gift for putting people at their ease. "You were instantly . . . at peace with yourself," he recalled.

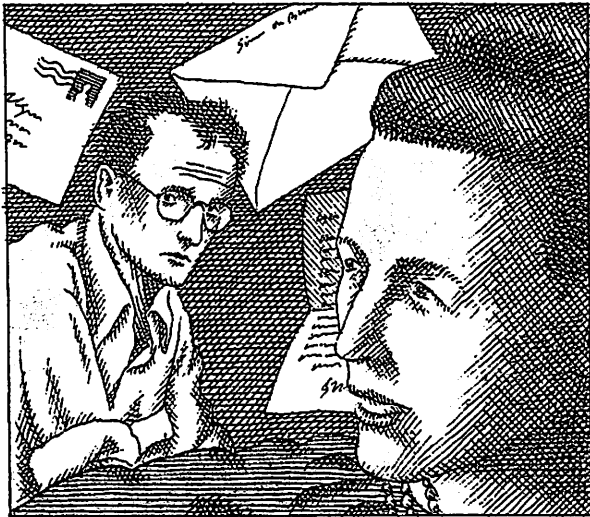
The men became friends, and during one of Kinsey's trips they met in a hotel room. "I told him I had a fantasy of having sex with him," Y recalled, "and he sort of said, 'Take off your clothes.' So I did, and we started right there." At Kinsey's invitation, Y made several trips to Bloomington for consultation and sex. Y recalled sleeping with Clara, and others, of both sexes and noted that Kinsey was an eager participant in these sessions. Y stressed, "It wasn't all homosexual."

During his visits to Bloomington, Y always stayed at his host's house, and he observed Kinsey's strong emotional bond with Clara. "I don't think they were sexy to one another, just deeply appreciative and deeply loving," he recalled. "There was a real, durable love between the two of them. They totally accepted what the other one did."

Still, according to Kinsey's friends, there was something grim in the way he was approaching sex. He had always loved, as one friend put it, "to skate very near the edge of the cliff . . . to shock people" in order to demonstrate that he was "absolutely . . . unconstrained by moralistic forms." By the late nineteen-forties, however, his risk-taking was becoming compulsive. If the press had

LETTER FROM SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR  
TO NELSON ALGREN

*The author described her long and passionate relationship with the writer Nelson Algren in her novel "The Mandarins" (1954), and in the third volume of her autobiography. She was thirty-nine when they met, committed to Jean-Paul Sartre, and writing "The Second Sex." "I work on the book about women," she wrote to Algren from Paris. "When it will be written, darling, men will know everything about women and so they will not be interested in them anymore."*



Friday  
26th septembre 1947  
NELSON, MY LOVE.

It was only 23 hours to arrive to Paris, we landed at 6, it was dawn. I was very tired after two nights without sleep, I drank coffee and took two little pills in order to keep myself awake through the long day. Paris was very beautiful, a little foggy, with a mild grey sky, and the smell of dying leaves. I was very glad to find I had much to do here, so much to do that I shall go to the country only next month. First the radio gives to the *Temps Modernes* a full hour each week to speak about what we like, in the way we like. You know what it means, the possibility of reaching thousands of people, and trying to make them think and feel in the way we believe right to think and feel. This must be managed with much care and we had a kind of conference this morning to speak about it. Then the socialist party wishes to confer with us, to try to make a connection between policy and philosophy. People here seem to begin to believe

ideas are something important. Then, there were letters of many kinds, and for the magazine itself much work to do. I was glad, I want to work, to work very much. Because the reason I do not stay in Chicago is just this need I always felt in me to work and give my life a meaning by working. You have the same need, and that is one of the reasons for which we understand each other so well. You want to write books, good books, and by

writing them to help the world to be a little better. I want it too. I want to convey to people the way of thinking which is mine and which I believe true. I should give up travels and all kinds of entertainments, I should give up friends and the sweetness of Paris to be able to remain forever with you; but I could not live just for happiness and love, I could not give up writing and working in the only place where my writing and work may have a

meaning. It is very hard, because I told you our work here is not very hopeful, and love and happiness are something so true, so sure. But yet it has to be done. Among the lies of communism and of anticommunism, against this lack of freedom which happens nearly everywhere in France, something has to be done by people who can try to do it, and who care for it. My love, this does not make any discrepancy between us; on the contrary, I feel very near you in this attempt to struggle for what I feel true and good, just as you do yourself. But, knowing it is all right, I cannot help nevertheless to cry madly this evening because I was so happy with you, I loved you so much, and you are far away.

SATURDAY. I was so tired, I slept fourteen hours, I just wake up once in the middle of the night to think of you and cry a little more. I was so ugly this morning by crying so hard that, meeting Camus in the street he asked me if I was not pregnant: he told me I had the mask!

SIMONE

got a hint of what was happening, his work and career would have been ruined.

KINSEY compounded that risk by documenting, in his attic, many sexual acts on film. Not all of his colleagues and their spouses agreed to his request to be filmed. One staff wife later complained of "the sickening pressure" she was under to have sex on film, saying that she felt that her husband's career at the institute depended on her acquiescence.

Kinsey tried to justify the filming as essential to his scientific—and social—mission. Yet he also made it clear to those he took into his confidence that while they were free to enjoy the fruits of sexual liberation, they had to accept his limits on their behavior. Anyone contemplating an extramarital affair, for example, was told to clear it first with Kinsey. Paul Gebhard remembered him saying, "You've got to tell me who it is and explain it all, and then I'll tell you whether you can or can't." Gebhard added, "That edict was not necessarily obeyed."

No one felt the force of Kinsey's unyielding demands more strongly than Clara. In keeping with her behavior over many years, she did her best to throw herself into her role as the wife of the high priest of sexual liberation. Clara was filmed masturbating and having sex with a staff member. Gebhard, speculating on why she agreed to be filmed, said, "Mac so deeply believed in the research that Kinsey was doing, I swear if he'd asked her to cut her wrists she probably would have. She idolized the man, even though she was quite free in saying he irritated her occasionally."

The writer Glenway Wescott and his companion Monroe Wheeler were two of the gay outsiders who performed in Kinsey's attic. In 1949, Wescott met Kinsey for dinner during one of Kinsey's visits to New York, and later he confided to his diary, "Kinsey is a strange man, with a handsome good sagacious face but with a haunted look—fatigue, concentration, and (surprising to me, if I interpret rightly) passionateness and indeed sensuality."

As the director of exhibitions and publications at the Museum of Modern Art, Wheeler was happy to put Kinsey in touch with dozens of gay artists and writers in the city. Through these con-