

KINSEY TODAY

A publication of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction

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Director's Column

by Dr. John Bancroft



Our fiftieth anniversary year has been busy and exciting. Mounting a major showing of selected works from our collections has been a wonderful way to celebrate, and the exhibition catalog is a memento that will be enjoyed for years to come.

It seems that author James Jones wanted to join our celebration with the publication of a new biography of Alfred Kinsey. Having read the book, I can confidently assure you that it fails to undermine, in any way, the importance and value of Kinsey's research. The "sensational revelations" about Kinsey's private sexual life are largely based on anonymous sources. I have yet to find someone who knew Kinsey personally who recognizes the man in Jones' negative portrait.

Those who have taken to attacking Kinsey in recent years will use Jones' book in a predictable fashion. The academic community will draw its own conclusions, particularly as Jones' book purports to be an act of scholarship. I await the scholarly reviews with interest. Here at the institute, we see the book and the response it is eliciting as manifestations of an ongoing issue—the attempt to obstruct sex research and education by attacking Kinsey and the Kinsey Institute. This is not a question of history; it is about today. We take heart from the fact that the majority of people in the United States and in other parts of the world recognize the need for good, disciplined scholarly enquiry into human sexuality. That is what we are here to do.

In this issue, read about our new and novel research program into male

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Exhibition Opening Celebrates Institute's Past, Heralds its Future

With a recording of some of Kinsey Institute founder Alfred Kinsey's favorite music playing in the background, more than 300 honored guests and 800 members of the general public gathered for the opening of *The Art of Desire: Erotic Treasures from the Kinsey Institute*, an exhibition celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. The show runs through December 5 at the School of Fine Arts Gallery at Indiana University Bloomington.

The exhibition is the first comprehensive survey of the extensive art and photography collections of the Kinsey Institute. More than 200 objects are on display, ranging from ancient Egyptian, pre-Columbian, and Roman objects to contemporary photography. A 116-page catalog featuring 49 black-and-white and full-color images from the show is available from Indiana University Press (812-855-6804).

As an anniversary event, the exhibition naturally focuses attention on the past, on the Kinsey Institute's first fifty years. But it also heralds the institute's future. The exhibition opening marked the formal launch of the Friends of the Kinsey Institute, a group of individuals whose support of the institute's mission will help the institute continue its vital research, clinical care, and collections activities into the next century.

While the anniversary exhibition is a testament to the power and pervasiveness of human sexual expression throughout time and across cultures, events surrounding the exhibition also attest to the persistence of fear of knowledge about sexuality. *The Art of Desire* opened on the eve of a protest on the Bloomington town square by the Concerned Women of America, one in a series of demonstrations across the country calling for the closure of the Kinsey Institute. Their objective appears to be to discredit Alfred Kinsey, and, in the process, to undermine and eventually eliminate sex education in public schools. Their overarching charge is that Kinsey is responsible for a

decline in sexual morals and in the importance of the family in American society.

In a lecture entitled "The Kinsey Institute Today" delivered as part of the exhibition opening events, Kinsey Institute Director John Bancroft told a standing-room-only crowd that "it is patently absurd to think that one man, Alfred Kinsey—whose main impact was to confront the world with what was already happening and in the process open up discussion and debate—was responsible for, or even contributed to, massive social changes, including changes in the family and sexual morality." He continued that it is equally absurd to "believe that by attacking and attempting to discredit Kinsey we will return to some happier, more virtuous state from the past when young people remained under the moral influence of their families or local communities."

In remarks made during the exhibition preview, IU Bloomington Chancellor Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis quoted a recent transfer student to IU who said, "What is most striking is that at my previous school, the professors always knew the answers to the questions they asked. Here at IU, not only are they willing to ask the questions that don't have canned or obvious answers, they let those questions hang in the air for long moments that are sometimes inspiring, sometimes terrifying."

"Surely others had the training, the research background, the ability to ask the sometimes frightening questions Alfred Kinsey asked us about ourselves," Gros Louis added. "Yet only he dared."

I N S I D E

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Male Research Program: New Model of Sexual Response

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KINSEY TODAY

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The mission of the Kinsey Institute is to promote interdisciplinary research and scholarship in the fields of human sexuality, gender, and reproduction. The institute was founded in 1947 by renowned sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey. A Harvard-trained biologist, Kinsey began collecting sexual histories after discovering that few scientific data existed on human sexual behavior. From 1941 to 1954, Kinsey's pioneering work was supported by the National Research Council, which was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Today, the institute has two components, an Indiana University research institute and a not-for-profit corporation, which owns and manages the institute's research data and archives, collections, and databases.

Improved Preservation and Access to Collections Are Keys to Serving Scholarly Community

With 75,000 prints, 218 amateur albums, and 1,732 vintage negatives depicting aspects of human sexuality and gender, the Kinsey Institute's photography collection is the largest holding of its kind in the world, and the institute's archives include important unpublished correspondence and other materials dating from the 1940s. These collections are a rich and unparalleled resource for scholars in a variety of fields. Until recently, however, they have been inadequately preserved.

"They've been deteriorating over the last 50 years, and we need to prevent further deterioration before any additional damage occurs," says institute Curator Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro. With funding from Indiana University's Strategic Directions Charter and the University Graduate School, that's just what the institute is doing.

The primary focus of the preservation project is the stabilization of humidity and temperature in the storage areas for the photographs and archives. "Any fluctuations in temperature and humidity can be extremely damaging to works on paper, potentially causing paper to crack and crumble, dyes to fade, or mold to flourish, depending on conditions," Yamashiro explains.

Unfortunately, the beautiful limestone buildings for which the IU Bloomington campus is known are part of the problem. "Our greatest challenge is that limestone lacks insulation, and moisture seeps in," Yamashiro says. To counteract this, the photograph and archival records storage areas and the institute's display gallery are being insulated and fitted with vapor retarder systems. Renovation of the photograph storage spaces will be complete by May 1998.

Establishing environmental control and rehousing the collections are essential not only to the longevity of the materials in those collections, but also to the institute's ability to win grant money for future initiatives. Foremost among these is making the collections more accessible to the scholarly community. "What we're doing now is the first step," Yamashiro says. "Once things are housed properly, then we can go on to improve access." Because informa-



Curator Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro examines an amateur album in the photograph storage area prior to renovation.

tion about the collections is not stored in a database system, searching for items of a specific type is often slow and difficult.

With preservation work under way, the institute was able to apply for funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to improve access to four key photography collections. "I targeted four areas that are currently heavily used or would be in great demand if they were organized," Yamashiro says. These areas are the Documentary, George Platt Lynes, Amateur Album, and Wilhelm von Gloeden Collections, which together include well over 50,000 images.

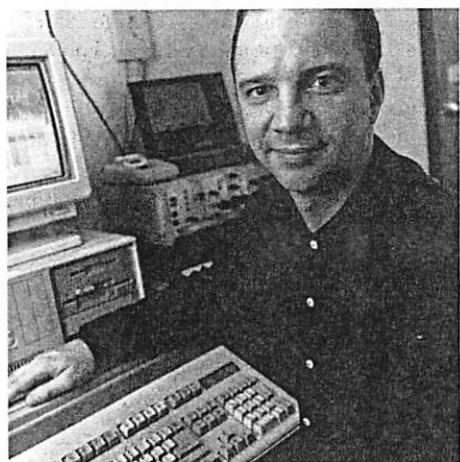
The institute is requesting NEH funds to catalog and process these collections using nationally accepted standards and to build an automation database that will have finding aids with brief, item-level entries. In addition, information about these collections will be available through a national bibliographic database.

The Kinsey Institute will find out in April if it received the two-year NEH grant, which would provide funding beginning in May of 1998. Yamashiro is optimistic. "I think our chances of getting the grant are excellent," she says. "But most important, we're well on our way to stabilizing the photographic and archival collections. That gives us time to work toward improving access."

Inhibition Plays a Role in New Model of Sexual Arousal

For many years, researchers have viewed sexual arousal as an on-or-off mechanism based on excitation. But a new model of sexual response in men developed at the Kinsey Institute suggests that a parallel system of inhibition, along with excitation, influences sexual arousal. "Our research starts from the premise that the *balance* between excitation and inhibition determines whether there is a sexual response," says Erick Janssen, an assistant scientist at the Kinsey Institute.

In exploring this model, Janssen and Kinsey Institute Director John Bancroft, M.D., are involved in psychophysiological research—a new area of inquiry for the institute. This research looks at both the physiological responses of a subject, such as changes in heart rate and blood pressure, as well as genital response and the subject's own report of sexual arousal. In the institute's new psychophysiology laboratory, researchers use the latest in data-gathering technologies, including a Portapres to measure blood pressure on each heart beat and a RigiScan to measure the circumference and rigidity of the penis. Janssen and Bancroft then relate this data to an individual's propensity for excitation or inhibition as determined by a questionnaire that they developed with Peter Finn, associate professor of psychology at IU Bloomington.



Assistant Scientist Erick Janssen observes data from a subject in the psychophysiological laboratory. The computer screen in the foreground shows cardiovascular responses while the computer screen in the background provides data on erectile response.

Not only do their results indicate that inhibition plays an important role in sexual response, but the data also suggest that there are two distinct inhibition factors involved. One, referred to as inhibition due to the threat of performance failure, involves the subject's concern about losing sexual arousal, pleasing a partner, or experiencing distractions. The other factor, inhibition due to the threat of performance consequences, includes concerns about the risk of being caught while engaged in sex, negative consequences of sex such as contracting a sexually transmitted disease, or issues of physical pain or violating social norms such as having sex with a partner who is too young.

In a recent study subjects who had scored high or low on inhibition scales as a result of the questionnaire were shown two kinds of films, one set with consensual sex and another set with coercive sex. The high and low inhibition groups did not differ in their genital responses to films of consensual sex. The two groups differed significantly, however, in their responses to films that were sexually threatening. The group rating low in inhibition showed a greater erectile response to the sexually threatening films. The researchers also found that the low inhibition group in general reported higher levels of sexual arousal.

In future research, Janssen and Bancroft plan to extend these studies to include specific subject groups, such as high-risk subjects and men with sexual dysfunctions, focusing on both excitation and inhibition. And eventually, they plan to explore the relevance of their measures to sexual risk taking.

"At this point, we can speculate that men who score high on the inhibition-proneness continuum may be more vulnerable to developing sexual dysfunctions, while men who score low on inhibition are more inclined to engage in high-risk sexual behavior," Janssen says. "This research is opening up a new research agenda that may help us understand why some people participate in unsafe sexual practices even though they are aware of the risks."

Interdisciplinary Seminar Q&A Bisexuality

The question below is based on the seminar "Bisexuality" presented October 10 by Martin S. Weinberg as part of the Kinsey Institute's Interdisciplinary Seminar Series. Weinberg is a professor of sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University Bloomington.

The foundation for this talk is research presented in the book *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality* by Martin Weinberg, Colin Williams, and Douglas Pryor, Oxford University Press, 1994, and a continuation of that research.

Q: How do you determine whether a person is bisexual?

A: Sexual preference or orientation is a complex phenomenon. Often individuals are at different places in terms of their sexual activities, sexual feelings, and romantic feelings. Some people, for example, engage in sex with people of both genders, but have romantic feelings only for one gender.

We also find that many people change their sexual focus over time. Does a person have to be attracted to, or having sex with, both sexes at the same point in his or her life to qualify as bisexual? What if the individual fluctuates in an exclusive orientation toward men and women in different years? Should that person be labeled according to an exclusive orientation at a particular point in time (gay, lesbian, or straight) or should the person be considered bisexual (or sequentially bisexual)?

People who are experimental by nature tend to experience more changes in their sexuality. Since 1983, we have studied one group of women and men who identify themselves as bisexual. From this group, we see that people can be very flexible in their sexuality over time depending on changing circumstances, availability of sex partners, and other factors. In many ways, these people have rejected the traditional gender schema in sexuality. It is difficult to draw boundaries and say that people are heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. People—and their sexuality—are much more complex than that.

(Director's Column, continued from page 1)

sexual response, with its relevance to both high-risk sexual behavior and sexual dysfunction. We are already getting fascinating results. Find out more about the work we are doing on our collections to safeguard against deterioration and to make them accessible to scholars with the help of modern information technology. We are poised to move forward into the next millennium as the foremost institute in the world dedicated to the serious interdisciplinary study of human sexuality. We'll keep you informed of our progress.

For information on joining the Friends of the Kinsey Institute, send e-mail to Ruth Beasley at kifriend@indiana.edu or write the institute at the address below.

Events at the Kinsey Institute

December 4

Interdisciplinary seminar, "The Role of Central Inhibition of Sexual Response," 12:30-2 p.m.

Presenters: John Bancroft, Director, and Erick Janssen, Assistant Scientist, The Kinsey Institute

Discussant: Kevin Dean Hunt, Associate Professor of Anthropology, IU Bloomington

January 21

Interdisciplinary seminar, "Precocious Sexual Initiation as an Indicator of Risk," 12:30-2 p.m.

Presenter: Gary M. Ingersoll, Professor of Education, IU Bloomington, and Professor of Pediatrics, IU School of Medicine

Discussant: John E. Bates, Professor of Psychology, IU Bloomington

Please call the Kinsey Institute at (812) 855-7686 for more information on these seminars.

Check our Web site for information on:

- additional interdisciplinary seminars
- upcoming conference on theories of sexuality
- tours available as part of Mini University
- Division of Continuing Studies class offering



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