

UNMASKING ALFRED KINSEY

DR. ALFRED KINSEY, author of the famous Kinsey Report, was quite the interviewer. His biographer, James H. Jones, writing in the Aug. 25 *New Yorker*, describes how Kinsey, inquiring into the most private and secret sexual histories of his subjects, would ask questions in staccato style so as to deny the interviewee the chance to think of a lie.

Questions - presupposed the behavior inquired about. It was, "At what age did you begin masturbating?" - not "Do you masturbate?" When asked how he could tell when a subject was covering up, boasting or lying, Kinsey retorted, "As well ask a horse trader how he knows when

to close a bargain."

For thousands of hours, year after year, Kinsey interviewed thousands of people about their sex histories. It was all supposed to be very scientific. Certainly, the language suggested rigorous scientific method. But there were no written records of the interviews, certainly no audio or videotapes. There was no formal questionnaire, just a personal code Kinsey designed to recall what subjects had told him.

Sexual Behavior in the Human Male - sounds downright anthropological, doesn't it? - created a sensation when it was published with the imprimatur of the Rockefeller Foundation. America embraced Kinsey ardently and uncritically. He asserted that deviant sexual behavior was absolutely endemic among teen-age American males, and America believed him - thus undermining the very concept of deviance. (Despite the title, the report did not attempt to

study "human" males, only American males growing up in a few East Coast states.) Kinsey made the claim that 10 percent of males were practicing homosexuals, a figure that was widely accepted for two generations. But in 1994, the University of Chicago's National Health and Social Life Survey found that only 2.8 percent of American men could be called bisexual or homosexual.

Though Kinsey was at pains to present himself as a tweedy, middle-American professor and family man, Jones reveals, he was in fact a missionary whose goal it was to release

"The truth is . . . tawdry and pathetic. . . Kinsey was not only interested in homosexual encounters - and he had many - but also in sadism and masochism."

America from the grip of "Victorian" inhibitions about sex. Why? Because Kinsey - wife and four children notwithstanding - was a serious sexual deviant himself.

The truth is about as tawdry and pathetic as Kinsey critics could possibly have imagined in their wildest dreams. Kinsey was not only interested in homosexual encounters - and he had many - but also in sadism and masochism. Jones, who had served as a scientific adviser to Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research, reveals that Kinsey, far from the anti-septic researcher serving science, was actually more of a panting voyeur, pursuing wilder and stranger

sexual exploits as his life unfolded.

He trolled through homosexual bars and nightclubs, supposedly seeking subjects for scientific research, but also seeking more private thrills. The subjects of his research were drawn disproportionately from among homosexuals. He had a particular interest in masochists.

At the Institute for Sex Research, Kinsey attempted to create a private sexual utopia, where everyone could have sex with everyone else. Kinsey's wife, Clara, who reportedly worshipped him, acquiesced, apparently even agreeing to be photographed masturbating and having sex with a staff member. There was, according to the wife of another employee, "sickening pressure" to agree to having sex on film.

As for the great man himself, he liked to be filmed - from the neck down - performing masochistic acts on his penis, like inserting pipe cleaners or swizzle sticks.

Toward the end of his life, Kinsey came to believe that there was nothing inherently wrong with sexual encounters between adults and children. It was society's attitude toward such contact that caused trouble.

In the 50 years since the Kinsey Report was published, Americans have behaved more or less as Kinsey would have wished, erasing centuries' old stigmas, jumping into sexual activity at a young age and placing sexual pleasure near the top of the hierarchy of life's goals.

Americans worship experts of every stripe - even to the point of abandoning common sense. Kinsey donned a lab coat and told us that all sexual behavior was "natural" and therefore beyond the reach of traditional morality. It was an absurd claim on its face - theft and murder are natural, too - and now we know that even the data he used were fraudulent. Jones has shown that Alfred Kinsey began the project we now call "defining deviancy down."

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Biography claims Kinsey's sex life tainted his research

By Gerry Lanosga
STAFF WRITER

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

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

See KINSEY Page 2

KINSEY

Continued from Page 1

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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