

Dr Alfred Kinsey (Zoologist, Univ of Indiana) – how did Kinsey get into sex and why does this matter?



1. 1938 – Dr Kinsey was asked to teach a short undergraduate course on “Marriage” but was shocked to discover just how little was known about human sexual behaviour. He decided to find out more...
2. Kinsey researched human sexuality as if investigating any other species: standardised methodology applied systematically to representative samples of human populations. Result = 18,000 “sexual histories”, eventually published in 1948 as *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, aka “The Kinsey Report”. He later published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 1953.

3. Sensational and shocking. Some compared him to Darwin or Copernicus in revolutionising our view of ourselves... others thought him depraved, mad, misguided, dangerous or a “Communist agent”!
4. What really shocked many was his contention that sexuality is not as fixed and clear-cut as most assumed: 37% of men indicated they’d had significant homosexual experiences, whilst for 10% homosexual experiences were predominant. The research highlighted the huge variations in human sexual practices, experiences and identities. Very little was, in fact, “typical”.
5. His revelations re female sexuality were esp shocking to his contemporaries, notably his evidence that most women (>60%) masturbated and that women enjoyed sex.
6. Was Kinsey right? Yes: everything he asserted has been supported by subsequent research, notably Masters & Johnson (1957-> 1990s) [see also Shere Hite & Elisabeth Lloyd (1970s → 2000s) – feminist perspectives. Donald Symons (1979 onwards)- anthropological/ evolutionary perspectives] See also British *National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* <https://www.natsal.ac.uk>

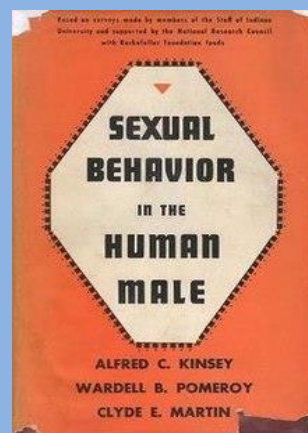
7. Does this matter? Yes, because Kinsey was the first systematically to research human sexual behaviour, throwing light on a previously much misunderstood and mythologised area of human experience. Without doubt, we know ourselves better because of Kinsey's pioneering work.
8. Did Kinsey have an agenda? Some said so: he was bisexual, so was much vilified by many religious and political groups. He believed sex to be a normal part of human experience and was determined "that no one else should suffer as I have suffered". Kinsey was raised in a very repressive family and grew up tormented by feelings of shame about his body & sexual urges. On the other hand, he never set out to be a "sexologist": his doctoral research was on wasps - entomology was his initial academic interest. The "sex stuff" came his way because no-one else wanted to teach it to students. Kinsey was so appalled by the ignorance he found that he decided to try to get to the truth, researching and documenting it scientifically.

9. Kinsey was so intrigued by what his research revealed that he realigned his interests to become the World's first "sexologist".
10. Some criticised his methodology: many claimed he focused too much on "abnormal" & minority groups (eg prisoners; frequenters of gay bars), but Kinsey was very careful to balance his samples to minimise the influence of minority sub-groups and he inserted "controls" into the standardised questionnaires used by his research teams.
11. Kinsey's findings highlighted that America's laws were deeply repressive (eg most states criminalised oral sex) and many Americans would, if their sex lives & histories were scrutinised, be deemed "sex criminals" – a patently ridiculous situation.
12. Kinsey was hounded by the authorities in "Cold War" 1950s America – the FBI made his life difficult, esp when it became known he was bisexual. Some believe his relatively early death at 62 was partly due to the stress caused by this harassment. He was branded a "communist agent"

who was “out to destroy American family life”.
Evangelist Billy Graham stated:

*“It’s impossible to estimate the damage
this book will do to the already deteriorating
morals of America.”*

13. The first edition of the “Kinsey Report” sold over 270,000 copies – clearly many were interested in its findings.



14. Kinsey died feeling a failure, but there is little doubt that his pioneering work on human sexuality had a profound impact on Western society. Certainly, he was one of the most widely read and influential scientists of the latter half of the C20th.
15. His ground-breaking work “opened the door” and pointed the way for other researchers. We now have a more sophisticated and nuanced

understanding of the complexities of human sexuality, gender identity and related matters.

16. Today, matters of sex, and sexual and gender identity, are widely discussed and debated – hopefully, reasonably and rationally. In most democracies, LGBT rights (incl marriage) are becoming the norm and many don't give such matters much thought – there is a level of acceptance which would have amazed and delighted Dr Kinsey.



17. This can, however, create other difficulties, notably where “labels” are concerned: it can be confusing - eg *cis*, *binary/ non-binary*, *ace*, *grey-sexual*, *intersex*, *pan-sexual* – more complex than the *heterosexual (straight)* and *homosexual (gay)* of old. Of course, it probably never was so “simple”: we need to be aware that simplistic labelling may be harmful.

18. Terminology

- **Sex** – biological term differentiating between female/male on basis of observable physical

characteristics and implied reproductive potential.

- **Sexuality** – psychological term referring to individuals' awareness of their own abilities to engage in sexual behaviours.
- **Gender** – contested term (may be biological, psychological, socio-cultural) by which individuals identify as “male”, “female”, “trans” etc. Gender is determined by an interplay of many factors.
- **Gender role** – psychological & cultural term referring to the adoption of behavioural traits regarded as characteristic of or “appropriate” to a particular gender. May vary hugely from one culture to another or within cultural sub-groups.
- **Sexual identity** – individual/ subjective – refers to an individual's “self-concept” as an object of sexual attraction to others.
- **Sexual orientation/ preference** – the erotic desire for a partner of the same, opposite or either sex or, in a few cases, none at all, or in very nuanced ways – grey-sexual, asexual, ace, demi-sexual etc.

19. It's very complex and confusing - the "landscape" is changing all the time. Note how *Stonewall*, originally a "Gay Rights" campaigning organisation, now campaigns on "LGBT+" issues.

20. We hope and expect that this school will be a community in which all members feel valued, safe and respected. (CRH, 2020)

