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NRCSex Research
(Kinsey)

June 2, 1947

Dear Mr. Potter:

Since I am leaving for the West tomorrow to be gone until the 21st I shall do what I can to answer your letter of May 28th.

On the point of statistical method, Dr. Lowell Reed of Johns Hopkins is a competent referee, and as a member of the National Research Council went out to the University of Indiana to review the statistical aspects of Kinsey's work.

I think that wherever possible an explicit statement should accompany tables made up from data not comparable in number or statistical validity with other tables that do possess these advantages. Like you, I found some of the tables are not easily understandable as they now stand. In the light of the advantage to an author of being readily as well as exactly understood, I should think Kinsey would only be grateful to you for suggestions along this line. The difficulties of having diminishing numbers of cases as one increases the breakdown into categories and sub-groups seem to me to be inescapable and at the same time self-evident. From the statistical point of view when the samples of a small sub-group are rather uniform in range their probable validity is higher than when the range is varied or large. The alternative to having some meager samples is to postpone issuing the book until the cases are adequate in number for every sub-class but there need be no failure to admit that the samples are small. The point that these results may be due to the moral decline of the war years does not impress me because most of the phenomena described in most of the case histories antedate the war years. It might be logical to assert that the candor requisite to obtain, study, and publish the result may be regarded as a wartime phenomenon, or a postwar breakdown. But that argument hardly meets the contention that we be free to study and report on human reproduction when there is a good method that has produced new information.

Your first two paragraphs under ethical considerations raise the general issue of freedom of scientific inquiry. You are publishing extensive evidence that certain unlovely traits and habits of the human animal may be expected or inferred from the replies given to Kinsey and his associates. Until 85 per cent of all males in the United States you refer to are actually proven to be as Kinsey's material suggests they probably are, you cannot speak of "publishing the fact" that 85 per cent of all males in the United States of a certain category do thus and such. If many of the remaining 15 per cent remain innocent of such conduct because they are ignorant of what

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others do then their resultant virtue derives more from ignorance than from the ethically superior motive of choice. Similar issues attended and attend the dissemination of the knowledge of contraception and venereal disease, and even the facts of life. Gray's Anatomy was not available to readers in the Tacoma Public Library in 1918. 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.

I think the statement you suggest is reasonable and an adequate protection. It should be amended, however, to read "...supported by the National Research Council's Committee for Research on Problems of Sex by means of funds contributed by The Rockefeller Foundation." We want this phraseology exactly since all of the Foundation funds used for Kinsey's work have come through the National Research Council and none directly, though the last grant was earmarked for Kinsey's work when the funds were appropriated to the National Research Council.

As to the matter of the interest of "educated laymen" you would not be able to restrict or control it anyhow. If you tried you would invite a particularly stormy attack that would only complicate your position. The magazine and newspaper men insist violently that the educated layman has as much right to what is published as any of the high priests be they clerical, scientific, or political. I think that they are right in this and that the abuses of candid publicity are on the whole less dangerous and less disagreeable than the abuses of reticence, secrecy, and the like. The people who won't like Kinsey's records and the inferences wouldn't want them even compiled, much less printed. So you can count on their criticizing you for publishing it at all. But why throw away the support of all the others who would respect your courage? They would think you hypocritical for trying to 'control' the readers. And so you'd satisfy neither group if you tried to restrict sales of what you publish. Mind you this is not a covert plea for sensationalism or courting publicity. I don't want that, nor do you, - nor will the book need it. There is quite enough interest already and even if it be in some cases morbid, in the over-all picture it is legitimate and natural. If the inferences from Kinsey's work appear to libel the human race I take some consolation in remembering that in American law truth is a defense against a suit for libel whereas in some other countries it is not.

But it is not the first time studies on human sex have stirred up an uproar. Experience in the past suggests to me that the period of disillusionment may be stormy but that we shall do well to meet it with equanimity.

Yours sincerely,

ALAN GREGG

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