

TO: CIB *CIBA*
FROM: WW
SUBJECT: Kinsey

0 200 *A. J. W.*
National Research Council
Sex research
Kinsey
DATE: May 7, 1951

NOV 23 1959

It is my intention to take a useful and constructive, not a carpingly critical, attitude towards this project. But I have come to be convinced that our continuing support of Kinsey is a mistake; and as a matter of conscience I think I ought to state my conviction. If Alan were continuing his administrative responsibility for this project, I might very likely feel that I should be silent. But since this is no longer his personal project, I make this statement in the interim before it becomes the personal project of anyone else. I myself have something of a personal stake in this situation, since the appropriations for the N.R.C. Committee for Research in Problems of Sex were, from 1934 through 1941, recommended to the Trustees by me.

Since I intend this to be my final and definitive statement on this subject, I am going to include all the aspects which seem important to me, although I realize that this involves going over some old ground.

At the outset I want to emphasize that my objections are emphatically not based on reluctance to deal with such a subject, nor upon any desire to neglect or suppress the facts in this area, whatever they may be. Even if I were convinced, which I am not, that open publication of the facts of present-day sexual practice would harm some of the present generation of young people, including my own son and daughter, I would still be in favor of open publication. Society as a whole and over the long haul will, in my judgment, always gain from an honest facing of facts.

My chief reservations about the project relate to three questions:

1) Is the Kinsey research of high quality?

I am not convinced that this is high-quality work, nor do I think that the supposed pioneering character of the work excuses or justifies the lack of high quality.

It should be remembered that this study is, by its own claim, merely a process of collecting and presenting data. Actually the volume on the human male contains, either directly or by inference, a considerable amount of critical interpretation. This is a weakness viewed in terms of the avowed purpose of the volume. And it is probably an absolute weakness, for I have heard no claim that Kinsey is well equipped to review such material in an broad critical way.

The three important steps in the process of collecting and presenting these data are:

The Sampling Procedure

The selection, out of the vast total population of human males, of the individuals who are actually interviewed.

The Interview Procedure

The asking and answering of questions, as a result of which process it is assumed that one has facts about behavior.

The Statistical Treatment of the Data

The summarizing description of the data, together with inferences drawn therefrom concerning the population which was sampled.

Two of these essential steps, the first and last, are rooted firmly and inescapably in statistical theory. The application of rather simple statistical techniques (averages, charts, etc.) to the problem of summarizing and describing the data after it has been taken is not the really important aspect, although the Kinsey work has been heavily criticized for its amateurishness and carelessness in this regard.* The really

*My attention was recently called to an instance in which Kinsey quotes an "average"; and on examination of the underlying data, it turns out

important matter, of course, is the design of the experiment as a whole, with the sampling procedure as the critical issue, and the resulting degree of confidence which one is justified in having concerning the inferences about the population.

I know of no evidence that Dr. Kinsey understands the underlying statistical character of his work. He seems to have neither the competence to do anything about it himself, nor the interest to add to his staff anyone who could properly deal with the statistical aspects. He was urged to do the latter by Lowell Reed late in 1942, and six years later, on December 10, 1948, Dr. Reed in a letter to Kinsey said: "If the type of statistical guidance had been provided that I had in mind, I feel sure that you would now be free of some of the criticism that is now being justly leveled at the work."

There is a general impression that Dr. Reed has approved the whole set-up. This impression is doubtless largely due to the fact that Kinsey said, in the foreword of his book: "The statistical set-up of the research was originally checked by Dr. Lowell Reed of the School of Hygiene and Public Health at the Johns Hopkins University." But in a letter which

that this is an "average" of just one case!

As another illustration, here is a quotation from a letter from Wallis to me:

"There is an article on Kinsey in the current (Autumn 1949) issue of the University of Chicago Law Review that tops my criticism of Kinsey's assertion that 95 per cent of males have committed illicit acts for which, if the laws were enforced, they could be sent to prison. You will recall that I argue (1) that the sampling is so inadequate that no such generalization from the data is valid, (2) that even if the sampling were adequate, the arithmetic is so inaccurate that you cannot be sure 95 per cent is correct, and (3) that even if 95 per cent is the correct figure it does not mean that 95 per cent of males have committed such acts. The Law Review article shows (4) that even if 95 per cent of males have committed such acts, they have not by any means all been illegal, and in fact at most 30 per cent (or 47 per cent of males over 16) would be conceivably subject to punishment. Most of the acts that Kinsey describes as illegal are illegal only in certain states and then only in certain circumstances."

Dr. Reed wrote on December 10, 1948, to Mrs. Aryness Joy Wickens, Dr. Reed said: "As I told you, although I feel very strongly that he man-handled me in putting my name in the preface as he did, I don't want to let personal feelings interfere with rescuing the values that I know exist in some of this material and that could exist to even greater extent in the future material that will be collected...the main difficulty arises from the fact that he was not working continuously, shoulder to shoulder, with a well-trained statistician."

Dr. Kinsey's lack of appreciation as to what was, and still is, needed is clearly expressed in a sentence from his own letter of January 21, 1943, addressed to Dr. Reed: "I am glad that you recommended the additional help for statistical computations" (underlining mine); and again in his letter of August 16, 1943, to Dr. Reed: "In actuality what we most need is someone to do the routine calculating on the calculating machines" (underlining mine). In retrospect, these are shocking statements. What Dr. Kinsey most needed was certainly not computers. What he needed was someone, mature enough and able enough to influence the basic plan for the project. He needed someone who understood the modern statistical theory of design and interpretation of experiments.

As far as I know there has never been, in this group, any trained mathematical statistician who comes within gun-shot of having the competence, training, and experience which are required. In Dr. Kinsey's own listing of his staff (Progress Report, April 1, 1950) he says that Mr. Clyde E. Martin "continues in charge of the statistical handling our data." Mr. Martin holds, so far as I know, only an A.B. degree from Indiana. His scientific stature has not as yet caused him even to be listed in American Men of Science,

the latest edition of which contains about 50,000 names. Dr. Kinsey further states about Mr. Martin that he "has also assumed the chief responsibility in the gathering of materials for our study on artists," this being a study of "the relationship of the artist's erotic interests and his artistic production." This is the man who is in charge of the statistical aspects of this study. Dr. Kinsey must approve highly of him, for in 1951, he raised his salary by 36 per cent.

There is now also a woman, at a very modest salary, who is called a "statistical assistant" - doubtless a computer. In his own diary record of a visit to Kinsey in July, 1950, Dr. Gregg said, under the heading of personnel: "Past and present needs remain unsatisfied in point of... and statistics." This fault - this admittedly absolutely basic fault - existed in the project in 1942, it has existed ever since, there is no promise whatsoever that it will cease to exist - and we do nothing about it.

It is a truism, but a truism that should not be neglected or forgotten, that useful inferences concerning a population can be obtained from a sample of that population only provided the sample is correctly taken. My confidential conversations with two outstanding statistical experts (members of the American Statistical Association committee which has been studying Kinsey's work) certainly lead me to think that they view his sampling procedures with great concern. And they also indicated to me they were not sanguine that Dr. Kinsey would understand their objections, would be interested in them, or would follow them.

As to the interview procedure, I have no knowledge as to what it is, and would have no competence to judge if I knew all about it. The tradition is that Kinsey is very skillful in this regard, and has

developed an excellent technique. But the objective evidence to substantiate an enthusiasm for his interview procedure seems to consist almost wholly of the good impression gained by a few persons who were interviewed. This seems rather subjective, and very possibly uncritical, in character. These persons may have been impressed by the length and scope of the questioning, the frankness with which all aspects were handled, the assurances of anonymity; and these persons may have been surprised at how much they were led to say. But does all this mean that the interview was a good one?

The interview is presumably good in direct proportion as it seeks answers to really important questions and as it obtain answers which accord with the actual facts of past behavior of the person in question - not answers which result from faulty memory, or from shame, or from boasting, or from what the person may think he did or may wish he had done.

As I say, I have no competence concerning such interviewing techniques; but I cannot believe that there are not ways to investigate the validity of such procedures. I do not know of any such study of Kinsey's interviewing technique; and it seems to me distinctly unfortunate, even if it is necessary, that so much of the interviewing method is maintained as secret. I mention as a concluding remark on the interviewing, that Kinsey obviously is working in an area where one should view all answers with suspicion.

I have frequently heard it argued that this work is so pioneering in character that one must expect many mistakes, and should forgive these mistakes. On two grounds this seems to me questionable.

First, my friends of the American Statistical Association committee

who have been studying the Kinsey project, have told me that they were completely surprised at the volume and value of other work done in this field. When I talked with them they were not as yet ready to say whether Dr. Kinsey's work actually exceeded, in volume or quality, other work. The only thing they were sure of was that Dr. Kinsey had a large edge with respect to publicity. Thus there is at least reasonable question as to pioneering character.

Second, I do not see that there is any reason whatsoever why anyone could not have written down , thirteen years ago when this project began, the three underlined points on page 2 of this memo; and could not have taken advantage of then existing knowledge of statistics to plan this work. The first edition of Fisher's "Statistical Methods for Research Workers" was written twenty-six years ago; and it seems to me quite inexcusable to neglect to use, and to fail to appreciate the necessity of using, information that was readily available.

2) Does the Kinsey research require RF support?

If the Kinsey work is not good, then it should not be supported. But even if it is good (I would say, if it were good) it is legitimate to ask whether it really requires support from the RF.

The financial picture of this project, as it stands in our own records, is a partial and confused one. Dr. Kinsey reported to Mr. Gray, in February, 1950, that his total budget was \$100,000, "of which the University has been providing one-third." In other statements, the University seems to be furnishing only about \$14,000 of the \$100,000 budget. We do not have, so far as I know, any detailed record of royalties; but in the same February, 1950, interview Dr. Kinsey said that Volume I had sold by

then 250,000 copies (royalties 97.5 cents per copy), and was then selling at 1,000 at month. Dr. Kinsey has estimated that Volume I will eventually sell a million copies. Dr. Kinsey has also stated that he expects the royalties from Volume II to be as high as those from Volume I. What backlog Dr. Kinsey now has from royalties I do not know, but it is clear that he has received to date well over a quarter of a million dollars of royalties, and that he expects to receive much more than this in the future. Indeed his own estimate of total sales of a million copies of Volume I, plus an equal sale of Volume II, would put the royalties near the two million dollar mark.

In the absence of facts which are sufficiently complete and sufficiently detailed to justify any really firm conclusion as to whether Volume III would be financially threatened by stopping RF support at any stated time*, there is fortunately an alternative way of considering the financial problem. And I must confess that it leads to conclusions which seem to me really distressing.

When a large project is presented to the RF for partial support, it is inevitable that the budget be prepared so that our contribution appears to pay for the best and most attractive part of the project.

This is an illusion. If we contribute \$40,000 to a \$100,000 budget, we must face the fact that we are buying the poorest \$40,000 of work in the project, not the best. For if our contribution were withdrawn, what would occur? Either the responsible persons would drop the

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Of course this is a little academic. Prior to the April meeting we were committed to support up to July 1, 1952; and we are now committed to support up to July 1, 1954.

poorest \$40,000 worth of what they are doing (which would automatically prove my point), or they would be so foolish as not to do so. In this latter case, they are obviously not sensible enough to be supported at all.

Thus we should remember that we are always shown cards off the top of the pack, but when we make a purchase, we always buy cards off the bottom.

Now what is the weakest \$40,000 worth of activity in the Kinsey project, how disastrous would it be if it were discontinued, and how proud are we of supporting it?

Dr. Kinsey in 1947 started to collect a library of erotic literature, and a collection of pictures and other "art" objects of erotic significance. Dr. Kinsey himself has said, concerning the scope of this collection, that they include travel, anthropology, history, biography, fiction, drama, poetry, art, religion and "many other departments of literature, the only criterion being that the book contain some material bearing on sex." In February, 1950, he valued the collection at \$150,000, and he has stated that he is devoting to the library alone some \$30-40,000 per year. "It is the largest sex library in the United States," Dr. Kinsey has proudly remarked. In addition to books, they are collecting drawings, paintings, and photographs of "rare" and ordinarily inaccessible material. The latter phase has become sufficiently important so that they have installed and equipped a complete photographic laboratory, and have a full-time photographer (I almost said full-time pornographer) who receives \$4,800 per year. In close relation to this collection, there is the so-called "Art Project" which is studying such questions as "the sexuality of artists

in relation to the quality of their art." Dr. Kinsey has remarked that "a large number of artists has helped us secure material which is not available in general circulation, and much of which is highly confidential."

This library was started with the aid of a grant, additional to his then general support, made directly from the RF to Kinsey and for the specified purpose. As a matter of record, I remind you that I opposed that grant when it was discussed in officers' conference.

Now this library-art aspect of their work surely requires, out of his total general budget, an amount which, by Dr. Kinsey's own figures, is more than the total annual amount the RF is contributing. I contend that it is perfectly realistic to say that the RF is paying for this collection of erotica and for the activities directly associated with it. And I say further that I don't think we need to, or ought to.

If this does not seem sufficiently conclusive as to the budgetary need for RF funds, I would like just to mention without comment one item of activity and expenditure during the year which closed in July, 1950. Under the heading of "Field Work" Dr. Kinsey lists:

"Cuba: Two trips of a week each, for the sake of getting the general picture of publicly expressed sex custom, and for the sake of orienting some of our thinking on American custom."

3) Is the RF honorably bound to continue this support?

It has been argued, and on two grounds, that the RF is at least to some extent honorably bound to continue supporting Kinsey. The first of these arguments is (and I quote from a docket item) "Withdrawal of RF support before Volume II comes out would have the flavor of disavowal of Volume I even if royalty funds were sufficient to insure publication."

This idea that, whether or not the money is needed, we ought to give it to keep from hurting Kinsey's feelings or merely to emphasize that we are glad that we made a previous grant, is an idea that I find very difficult to accept.

The second argument is that support of Kinsey is channeled through the N.R.C. committee, that this committee has done a generally good job, that we want to continue to support this committee, that we cannot approve of part of what they do and disapprove of the rest, and that we are therefore more or less stuck to continue.

I find this argument also a difficult one, although I admit that it seems to me more reasonable than the former.

The NRC. committee support of Kinsey began, I think, in 1941 or 1942. In 1941, no mention was made of Kinsey in a list of the "six major grants" which the committee made that year. By the academic year 1943-44, the committee was allocating \$23,000 per year to Kinsey. By 1946, the Kinsey project had grown to such dimensions that the N.R.C. committee specifically asked the RF to give individual consideration to support for Kinsey, apart from the other and regular program of the committee. Thus there is a precedent, based on the committee's own suggestion, for separating the Kinsey project and the other work of the N.R.C. committee. This separation continued until July 1, 1949; and although in subsequent years the committee received its Kinsey money and its other money in the grant, the two portions were clearly earmarked.

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Inasmuch as the RF has now granted funds to Kinsey up to July 1, 1954, more than three years from now, it might be asked why I am making

this statement at this time.

I am making it now because I think it is the only moment - just after Alan lets go and before Andrew really takes hold - when I can make it.

And I am making it now because I think it would be very wise indeed to tell the N.R.C. committee and Kinsey now, when the time of warning is so obviously ample, that we think it fair and proper to warn them that it seems altogether unlikely that the RF will make further contributions to the support of this project.

WW:vg