

Kinsey's Biographers: A Historiographical Reconnaissance

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Authority must derive from reason, not from position.

—Herman B Wells, 1938¹

FOR ALFRED C. KINSEY, the end came in August 1956. Earlier that year one of his closest associates, Clarence Tripp, made the comment: "Of course now that you're famous, somebody will certainly want to write your biography." Kinsey demurred, snapping, "Nonsense! The progress of science depends upon knowledge. It has nothing to do with personalities."² Thus Kinsey pungently reiterated the traditional view that, in the history of science, ideas matter more than the people who develop them.

As the twenty-first century dawns, American society struggles with the sexual taboos unveiled by Kinsey fifty years ago, and scholars still disagree about his legacy. Even the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin, Kinsey's Victorian intellectual master, remain the subject of contemporary school board debate after more than a century.

Darwin provided historians with a first-person account of his life through the autobiography he wrote for his grandchildren.³ But Kinsey left neither autobiography nor memoir, so we have no words from his pen about his life, about the joys and sorrows he experienced, about the vicissitudes of his career as he saw them. What we do have is a mountain of personal and

¹From Wells's inaugural address as Indiana University president, in Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University: Midwestern Pioneer*, 4 vols. (Bloomington, IN, 1970–77), 4:382.

²Wardell B. Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research* (New York, 1972), 431–32.

³Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809–1882*, ed. Nora Barlow (New York, 1993).

professional correspondence, the books that he published, and the records of the Institute for Sex Research (ISR) at Indiana University. Oral history interviews and the secondary works of Kinsey's biographers augment such primary sources.

Whether it would have offended his historical sensibilities or not, Kinsey has become the subject of biography—in fact, the pioneering sex researcher has come repeatedly under the literary microscope. Recent historical studies of the man and his time have revealed new information about Kinsey's sexual behavior and focused greater attention on the issue of how his personal life shaped his professional career. Our study of Kinsey's biographers attempts to place their work in historiographical context, a context that is rich and complex. In it we examine the place of scientists' personal lives in their science and the place of science in Western society. We also consider the role of biography in historical understanding and the moral questions associated with knowledge and power. Our goal is to shed light on Kinsey's life and cultural context, on Kinsey as a scientist as well as a person; it is not to add fuel to the persisting fire that surrounds him and his legacy.

At the opening roar of the twenties, Alfred C. Kinsey, an intense biologist from Hoboken, New Jersey, established a new base for collecting gall wasps. One of America's first Eagle Scouts, he found an agreeable home at Indiana University in the wooded hills of Bloomington. When Kinsey joined the IU faculty in 1920, the university was celebrating its centennial year. Headlines reported that American women had finally been given the right to vote after waiting and struggling for over seventy years. Few people on campus took note that a local youth named Hoagy Carmichael had entered the freshman class. Kinsey too might have labored in relative obscurity had his interest remained focused on the taxonomy of gall wasps. But when it shifted to human sexual behavior, the naturalist tromped through more than one hornet's nest in the process of making his research known to the world. In a country formed by revolt and shaped by continuing debate over women's issues, Kinsey's work fomented another upheaval.

In 1938 Kinsey coordinated a marriage course that included frank classroom discussion of sexual behavior. Concerned by the lack of scientific information about human sexuality, Kinsey shifted his activities from teaching about human sexual behavior to studying it. In 1948 he and his colleagues at the Institute for Sex Research published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*.⁴ Despite its publication by a medical press, this book became a best-seller, and Americans learned about the surprising variety of male sexual behavior. Critics of all species, from moralists to statisticians, appeared and descended in swarms on Kinsey, the institute, and Indiana

⁴Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, 1948).

University. Despite these distractions, Kinsey continued to compile thousands upon thousands of interviews about the sexual lives of Americans and augmented them with filmed studies of human sexual response. Well aware of the dangers of being charged with pornography (materials imported for the institute library had on occasion been confiscated by U.S. Customs), Kinsey kept the films under lock and key, and few people outside the institute knew of their existence.

The public furor intensified after the publication in 1953 of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, another best-seller.⁵ Those with certain moral and religious concerns could not be quieted as Kinsey sought to add sexual freedom to women's hard-won political liberty by loosening the psychic shackles of Freudian frigidity and vaginal orgasm. Some saw Kinsey as a modern-day abolitionist who wanted to free all people from societally imposed definitions of sexual abnormality. As he had done with gall wasps, he worked to demonstrate the range of variation within nature. As a consequence, Kinsey—and, by association, Indiana University—achieved fame as well as notoriety.⁶

Included in our analysis are five major studies (four books and one dissertation) by four biographers: Cornelia Christenson (1971), Wardell Pomeroy (1972), James H. Jones (1972, 1997), and Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy (1998).⁷ These five studies fall into two historical waves, the first cresting in the early 1970s and the second in the late 1990s. Separated by twenty-five years, the two waves are distinct yet connected in crucial ways.

We begin with a description of the two waves of Kinsey biography, including notes on the respective authors, a characterization of their relationship with Kinsey, details on the context of their publications, and a brief synopsis of each work. Next we consider the private and personal aspects of Kinsey's life in relation to his public and professional role as a scientist. This leads us to explore how Kinsey's biographers approached their subject, in particular, how they formed their scientific and moral judgments. We conclude with a "field guide" to Kinsey today and recommendations for finding one's way through the Kinsey "ecosystem." As Kinsey's biographers have converted his life into an object of study, we are interested in that process and how it might contribute to historical understanding.

⁵Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, and Paul H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, 1953).

⁶In addition to the biographies mentioned below, this overview of Kinsey's life draws from Clark, 3:247–91.

⁷Cornelia V. Christenson, *Kinsey: A Biography* (Bloomington, IN, 1971); Pomeroy; James H. Jones, "The Origins of the Institute for Sex Research," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1972; James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York, 1997); Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Alfred C. Kinsey: Sex the Measure of All Things* (London, 1998). Indiana University Press published an American edition of *Sex the Measure* in 2000. All citations in this essay refer to the 1998 edition.

THE TWO WAVES: INDIVIDUAL CONNECTIONS AND LIFE WRITING

It is impossible to portray another human being without displaying oneself.

—Richard S. Westfall, 1985⁸

Propelling the two waves of Kinsey biography, with their distinctive bodies of literature, are personal trajectories and changing scholarly concerns. The studies that comprise the first wave were written by members of the Institute for Sex Research and are generally sympathetic to Kinsey and his work. Although they do not obscure all of Kinsey's flaws, they tend to support the party line, portraying sex research in a heroic manner. The biographies of the second wave, by contrast, were written by outsiders with little sense of obligation to the party line. To describe and analyze Kinsey's private life, they make a decisive break from the first wave by uncovering secrets long guarded by Kinsey and his coworkers.

Kinsey fostered a cohesive network of coworkers and support staff that extended to include spouses and informants. Persuasive and charismatic, he cultivated a high degree of loyalty to "The Project." Due to the nature of the research and Kinsey's concern about confidentiality, this network remained extremely secretive as well as resistant to outsiders. Thus it is not surprising that it was insiders who initiated the first wave of Kinsey biographies. After watching Kinsey, their colleague and leader, struggle to remain afloat among the repeated storms of criticism and controversy, Christenson and Pomeroy wanted to highlight Kinsey's scientific achievements.

Cornelia V. Christenson (1903–93), Kinsey's first biographer, had multiple and extensive connections to her subject. She was a staff member of the ISR from 1950 to 1967, and she knew town and gown as a Bloomington native, being the daughter of an IU professor and an Indiana alumna. Not only that, but as an undergraduate English major at IU, she knew a chemistry student named Clara McMillen, Kinsey's future wife. In addition, she graduated with Herman B Wells, who as president of IU from 1937 to 1962 was a staunch supporter of the right of Kinsey and all qualified researchers to pursue scholarly inquiry freely. Christenson married an Indiana professor in 1929 and was among the first students to take Kinsey's marriage course in 1938. Ten years later, she contributed her sex history to the Kinsey collection. While at the ISR, she coauthored or edited three books and several papers.⁹

When Christenson wrote her biography, she stated her intent to present an unbiased portrait of Kinsey, correct misconceptions about him, and

⁸Richard S. Westfall, "Newton and His Biographer," in Samuel H. Baron and Carl Pletsch, eds., *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1985), 175–89, 188.

⁹Christenson; Clark.

highlight his scientific and social contributions. She had been gathering materials on his life since the 1960s, and her 1971 study, *Kinsey: A Biography*, won Indiana's Author's Day award for best biography.¹⁰ She guided her reader through Kinsey's years at Harvard and into his professional niche as gall wasp expert and leading taxonomist at Indiana. While Christenson argued that Kinsey's transition from gall wasps to human sexual behavior was neither sudden nor unexpected, she acknowledged that he had hoped his sex research would ease the social constraints on people's lives. She painted a portrait of Kinsey as a controlling research director who was also a generous host, a lover of classical music and gardening, and a warm, open husband and father. Christenson concluded that Kinsey "was perhaps not a great man, but he had the necessary qualities to do an innovative, daring, and great piece of work."¹¹

As a staff member and director of the ISR, Christenson was undoubtedly privy to the inner circle secrets of the institute, but throughout her biography she elected to maintain the ISR code of silence and protect the confidentiality of research participants. Notably, she edited out the ad hominem attacks that Kinsey made against his opponents in his final dictation a month before his death. This is not to say that Christenson concealed Kinsey's weaknesses or refused to analyze critically his actions. She did note how he often got himself in trouble by overstating his position and how he indiscreetly advertised the financial backing that he had received from the Rockefeller Foundation. And she provided insight into Kinsey's youth, one that was marked by frequent illness and by bullying from other boys. His adolescence ended when his strict, religious father broke with his son after Kinsey decided to pursue his love of nature by studying biology at Bowdoin College in Maine.

Kinsey's second biographer, Wardell Pomeroy (1913–2001), was at the core of Kinsey's inner circle. Thirteen years of intimate work with Kinsey afforded him a unique perspective on his subject. As an interviewer, Pomeroy was nearly as prolific at gathering sex histories as was the master himself. Although born in Michigan, Pomeroy spent his youth in South Bend, Indiana, and attended IU as an undergraduate and master's student. He served as a clinical psychologist at the Indiana Reformatory in Pendleton and earned his master of arts in clinical psychology in 1941 (his thesis was entitled "Personality Factors in Superior Felons"). In 1941 he heard Kinsey deliver a lecture on sex and prisons and afterward gave Kinsey his sex history. Pomeroy was converted to "The Project" and became a full-time staff member in early 1943. He worked as a research associate from 1943 to 1956 (meanwhile earning his doctorate from Columbia University in 1954 with

¹⁰Reviews include Mark Freedman, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2 (1973): 273–76; Paul A. Robinson, "The Case for Dr. Kinsey," *Atlantic* 229 (1972): 99–102; Paul Weatherwax, *Indiana Magazine of History* 68 (1972): 273–74.

¹¹Christenson, 187.

his dissertation “Sex before and after Psychosurgery”) and became the ISR’s director of field research after Kinsey’s death. However, he grew dissatisfied with the institute’s shift in emphasis from the sex interview method to data analysis, and in 1963 he established a marriage-counseling clinic in New York City. Altogether, Pomeroy authored or coauthored ten books and more than fifteen papers concerning sexual behavior.

Pomeroy published his biography, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute of Sex Research*, in 1972.¹² In it he emphasized Kinsey’s sex research while protecting the secrecy of “The Project’s” subjects and insiders. Pomeroy’s explanations for Kinsey’s shift to sex research and his success at it were uncontroversial. It was the scientist’s interest in a new, undeveloped field and the reformer’s desire to make sex education for young people scientifically grounded that motivated Kinsey to pour his energy into researching human sexual behavior. In Pomeroy’s view, these deep convictions, coupled with a unique ability to communicate in a relaxed, frank manner with many sorts of people, made Kinsey a successful sex researcher.

The sympathetic tone of this “loyal biographer” may annoy readers who prefer a more neutral and less positive story.¹³ However, Pomeroy’s efforts to uncover Kinsey’s personality, his research through Kinsey’s personal letters, and his own memories of Kinsey provide an insightful if not fully revealing account of how the man and his colleagues came to commit themselves so completely to the scientific and social cause of “The Project.”

Historian James H. Jones connects the first wave of Kinsey biographies from the 1970s with the second wave of the 1990s. Jones contributed works about Kinsey to both waves, writing a dissertation about Kinsey and the ISR in 1972 and a full-fledged biography in 1997. In addition, Jones initiated the dramatic change that differentiates the second wave from the first. He cultivated relationships with several members of Kinsey’s inner group, learned their secrets, combined that information with exhaustive archival research at the ISR, and disclosed his findings in *Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*. Thus it is from the second wave of biographies, inaugurated by Jones, that the world learned of Kinsey’s covert sexual life.

Born in the small mining community of Bauxite, Arkansas, in 1943, five years before the publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Jones received his bachelor of arts degree from Henderson State Teachers’ College in 1964 and his master of arts from East Texas State University in 1966. As a doctoral student at Indiana University, Jones turned to institutional history, selecting the Institute for Sexual Research as a dissertation topic.

¹²Reviews include “Father of the Revolution?” *Economist*, July 15, 1972: 51; Frank A. Beach, “Pioneer,” *Science* 177 (1972): 416–18; Walter Clemons, “The Sex Collector,” *Newsweek*, March 13, 1972: 94, 98; Freedman; Nathan G. Hale Jr., “Humans Were Different from Gall Wasps,” *New York Times Book Review*, March 26, 1972: 4; and Robinson.

¹³Clemons, 94.

With Kinsey team member and ISR director Paul Gebhard on his committee, Jones completed his dissertation, "The Origins of the Institute for Sex Research," in 1972. Jones showed appreciation for Gebhard's cooperation but distanced himself from his advisor's views, writing that Gebhard had "corrected technical errors but resisted the temptation to persuade me to write history the way he remembered it."¹⁴ Although the dissertation was an institutional history, it nonetheless focused great attention on Kinsey himself and, in effect, provided an abbreviated biography. The dissertation concluded: "Behind [Kinsey] lay nearly a lifetime of interest and a decade of work to rationalize the most important study of human sexual behavior to date."¹⁵ Jones implied the need for a concentrated study of Kinsey's life but failed to acknowledge Christenson's 1971 biography. After his 1972 study of the ISR and before he completed his own revealing account of Kinsey in 1997, Jones strove to uncover the secrets of a very different research project in his first book, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*.¹⁶

From the margins of institute life, Jones, the IU graduate student, took his first step into the Kinseyan waters, waded through the ISR records, and looked about for a deeper story lurking beneath the surface. After twenty-five years of extensive exploration and the *Bad Blood* interlude, Jones reappeared with *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*, a tour de force that launched the second wave of biographies.¹⁷ Jones broke the

¹⁴Jones, "Origins," iii.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁶James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York, 1981). While Jones's exposé earned popular acclaim, some scholars were not impressed. Reviewers were variably critical of Jones: for being too dispassionate, see H. Jack Geiger, "An Experiment with Lives," *New York Times Book Review*, June 21, 1981: 9, 27; for ignoring the impact on women and children, see Pete Daniel, *Journal of Southern History* 48 (1982): 303–4; for not reporting what, if anything, was learned about syphilis in blacks, see Kenneth F. Kiple, *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 558; for ignoring the historical hegemony of medical research, see Allan M. Brandt, "Infernal Medicine," *New Republic* 186 (1982): 36–38; for giving an oversimplified explanation for how and why it all happened, for hiding significant information in a footnote, and for making unsubstantiated claims, see Barbara Gutmann Rosenkrantz, "Non-Random Events," *Yale Review* 72 (1983): 284–96. In her 1995 book, *Subjected to Science: Human Experimentation in America before the Second World War* (Baltimore, MD, 1995), Susan Lederer also questioned Jones's understanding of the twentieth-century history of ethics in human experimentation. Gathorne-Hardy summed up his view of *Bad Blood* this way: "This was a polemical journalistic work about something self-evidently wrong. It was a success" (367). While Gathorne-Hardy considered it polemical, others, as noted, found it too sedate. The differences in Jones's tone between *Bad Blood* and *A Public/Private Life* are notable and worthy of further examination.

¹⁷Jones excerpted *A Public/Private Life* in "Annals of Sexology: Dr. Yes," *New Yorker*, August 25–September 1, 1997: 99–113. Reviews of the book include Martin Duberman, "Kinsey's Urethra," *Nation*, November 3, 1997: 40–43; and Richard Rhodes, "Father of the Sexual Revolution," *New York Times Book Review*, November 2, 1997: 10–11. Also see reviews listed below for Gathorne-Hardy.

code of secrecy that Kinsey insiders had maintained, questioned the carefully preserved image of Kinsey as a disinterested scientist and traditional paterfamilias, and revealed Kinsey's private sexual life and the ISR filming of sex acts performed by Kinsey and his staff. Jones compiled materials from his impressive archival research and personal interviews into a biography that contained a wealth of well-documented new information about Kinsey along with controversial conjectures.

The other contributor to the second wave of Kinsey biographies is Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy. In 1998, close on Jones's heels, Gathorne-Hardy published *Alfred C. Kinsey: Sex the Measure of All Things*.¹⁸ With the perspective of someone standing outside the Kinsey and Indiana University circles, Gathorne-Hardy produced a reflective portrayal of Kinsey that also explored Kinsey's private sexual life. Son of a physician, Gathorne-Hardy was born in 1933 in Edinburgh, Scotland, studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and became a professional writer. His works range widely from children's fantasies and adult novels to comedies and social histories. Before writing his biography of Kinsey, Gathorne-Hardy published *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* (1972), *The Public School Phenomenon, 597–1977* (1977), *Love, Sex, Marriage & Divorce* (1981), and *Doctors* (1983).

To prepare his biography, Gathorne-Hardy traveled many of the same research paths initially blazed by Jones, and, like Jones, he interviewed people familiar with the intimate and previously secret lives of Kinsey and his associates. But the authors' paths diverged as they composed their biographies. Following Jones, Gathorne-Hardy knew which fork Jones had taken and consciously selected another.¹⁹ Although Gathorne-Hardy did not offer much new information, he provided a very different interpretation of Kinsey's life. Avoiding what he considered to be Jones's polemical tone, Gathorne-Hardy produced a more sympathetic portrait of

¹⁸Reviews include Kate Hubbard, "Don't Forget Your Toothbrush," *Spectator*, September 5, 1998: 37–38; Rachel P. Maines, "Rebel with a Cause," *New York Times Book Review*, April 23, 2000: 16; and Elaine Showalter, "Boccaccio in Indiana," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 30, 1998: 12.

¹⁹Gathorne-Hardy, 355–69; on 464–65, he stated, "Jones and I had, on the whole, spoken to the same people. Some were less open with me than with Jones; some more so, but as a result I already knew a good many of Jones' discoveries. Again to my relief, I found I did not have to alter my view of Kinsey. Yet as I read Jones' long book, I became more and more dismayed. There soon began to emerge a totally different Kinsey, not so much because of new facts but because of radically different interpretations. This would perhaps hardly have mattered, on the contrary indeed since different interpretations are the stuff of literary and critical discussion, except that this new Kinsey was a man appallingly warped and distorted, driven by vicious personal 'demons,' to such a degree and in so many ways that eventually he almost ceased to be a moral being, and largely ceased to be an objective researcher, his data 'skewed' and 'flawed' to such an extent that, in effect, essential parts of his science were fraudulent." Gathorne-Hardy noted that "key witnesses, upon whose information Jones had based his radical new view of Kinsey, were as dismayed as I was." As a consequence, he sought to provide a "corrective, a balancing view" and "decided that I would have to be more open than is customary when I disagreed with Jones' interpretation."

Kinsey's own sexuality and the three loves of his life—his wife and two of his male students—and provided a nuanced account of Kinsey's personal investment in understanding human sexuality.

From this review of the Kinsey biographies it is apparent that the first wave washed gently over the public life of Kinsey the scientist while the second wave broke powerfully and exposed Kinsey's private sexual practices. Although first wave authors Christenson and Pomeroy revealed Kinsey's stern upbringing and inquired into the reasons for his shift from the study of gall wasps to the study of human sexual behavior, it was only with the authors of the second wave, Jones and Gathorne-Hardy, that the relationship between Kinsey's private life and public science was minutely analyzed.

The revealing, microscopic dissection that Jones and Gathorne-Hardy performed on Kinsey's professional and personal lives demonstrates how biographers of scientists changed their approach to their subjects in the late twentieth century. This shift in methodology requires assessment of its impact. In turn, we must consider how each of Kinsey's biographers chose to incorporate the public and private elements of this scientist's life into their accounts.

PUBLIC PRIVATES: SCIENCE, BEHAVIOR, AND BIOGRAPHY

If Kinsey ever had an erotic impulse, he kept it well concealed from the record.

—Thomas D. Clark, 1977²⁰

The differences between the first and second waves of Kinsey biographies are tied to broad changes in the study of the history of science that have occurred in the last several decades. The new scholarship has increased our knowledge of the private lives of many famous scientists and has enriched our understanding of the connection between scientists' private lives and their public works. The list of "exposed scientists" includes many famous names. We now know that Galileo, champion of the Copernican system and mathematized physics, drew up astrological charts for the Medici court in order to earn the Medici family's favor; that Newton, the inventor of calculus and the theory of gravitation, consumed himself with priority disputes and attacked his perceived opponents viciously when he wasn't studying alchemy and esoteric Christian history; that Pasteur, a father of modern biology and medicine, lied about the vaccine types that he used in one of his most famous vaccine trials. Examples can be multiplied.²¹

²⁰Clark, 3, 275.

²¹Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Age of Absolutism* (Chicago, 1993); Richard S. Westfall, *Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge, 1980); Mary Jo Teeter Dobbs, *The Janus Faces of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought* (Cambridge, 1991); Gerald Geison, *The Private Science of Louis Pasteur* (Princeton, NJ, 1995).

With these revelations, have investigators simply dug up dirt? In a few cases, the answer is yes—they sought muck and raked it willingly. Nevertheless, what we now have is a much richer picture of science. Our notions of what motivates individuals to pursue science have diversified and grown more complex. While no consensus yet exists on how to judge a scientist's motives, at least our picture is colored less by scientific rhetoric and ideology and more by a concept of scientists as social and psychological beings, subject to all sorts of motivations. In consequence, the relationship between a scientist's private motives and professional work has become and remains a hotly contested issue, amply illustrated by the differing views of Kinsey the man and his science.

Biographers of the first wave left Kinsey's private life virtually untouched. Christenson did delve a bit into Kinsey's psyche and suggested that his original turn to a scientific career may have been due to his desire to take refuge from the restrictive circumstances of his youth. Although Christenson and Pomeroy mentioned Kinsey's strict Methodist upbringing and his private hostility to religion, they did not explore in great detail his private motives. Christenson explained Kinsey's research shift from gall wasps to human sexual behavior in intellectual terms: "Kinsey came to the study of human sexual behavior as a biologist, not a social reformer."²² Pomeroy followed Christenson's precedent in explaining the origin of Kinsey's research shift as largely intellectual, and he gave what might be called the ISR party line: "As he [Kinsey] came to realize that he was working in a research field virtually unexplored, the scientist, the collector, and the teacher came intellectually together in Kinsey the researcher in human sexual behavior."²³

More pieces of information about Kinsey's private life and personal development slipped into Jones's dissertation, written on the trailing edge of the first wave of biographies. Jones mentioned the openness toward sex that Kinsey showed with his children and observed that Kinsey overcame in adulthood a childhood guilt complex about sex. Still, Jones accepted the idea that Kinsey's research shift was fundamentally based on intellectual motives. Following Christenson, he contended that Kinsey wanted to prove biology useful in interpreting seemingly social phenomena. While Jones hinted in his 1972 dissertation that Kinsey's private life might be significant, he did not elaborate. It was several decades before Kinsey's "lifetime of interest" in sexual behavior became the subject of a great exposé.²⁴

The biographies of the more turbulent second wave pay more attention and attribute greater significance to Kinsey's private sexual life. Jones and Gathorne-Hardy both identified Kinsey's repressive upbringing as helping to create his lively interest in sex. This interest included a desire to

²²Christenson, 95.

²³Pomeroy, 61–62.

²⁴Jones, "Origins," 285.

explore his own sexuality and a strong sympathy for others who seemed damaged by sexual repression. And this interest preceded Kinsey's sex research. Thus, both biographers disputed the received view, handed down by Kinsey himself, that he launched his research for impersonal, intellectual reasons. Yes, Kinsey took up his study of sexual behavior after being dismayed repeatedly by both his students' ignorance and the lack of systematic research on sex, but Jones and Gathorne-Hardy made it clear that there was something more deeply personal at stake.

Here the similarities between Jones and Gathorne-Hardy end, for their assessments of Kinsey's private life diverge drastically. According to Jones, Kinsey's private sexual interests contaminated his science. It was clear that Kinsey and his research team formed a private sexual circle, often having sex with each other, each other's spouses, and trusted outsiders. Jones believed Kinsey was an intellectual authoritarian as well as an iron-fisted group leader who attempted to use his team's research to justify his own diverse social and sexual interests. Jones charged that Kinsey "placed a meaty thumb on the scale. Although he had been able to compile more facts on human sexuality than any other researcher in history, his methodology and sampling techniques virtually guaranteed that he would find what he was looking for."²⁵ Not only were Kinsey's interviewing and research self-serving, but his research group filmed many of their sexual activities. Jones cited these films as another example of Kinsey pursuing his own lurid interests rather than extending his research.

Gathorne-Hardy held a radically different view of the relationship between Kinsey's private life and his public science. First, unlike Jones, he did not assume a rigid dichotomy between the two. While Jones regarded Kinsey's private sexual life as a distinctly separate entity that acted upon and tainted his science, Gathorne-Hardy considered the two as spilling into each other to the extent that he deemed it a biographical error to identify them as separate. Second, he did not believe that Kinsey's private life contaminated his science. It was often extremely difficult for Kinsey to collect interviews in the first place, and it was impossible for him to amass a random sample, as today's social scientists might be expected to do. According to Gathorne-Hardy, Kinsey was intellectually honest and "scrupulously careful" about collecting as many interviews as possible and about preventing his private views of sexuality from influencing his research. Gathorne-Hardy also noted the fecund synergism in Kinsey's sexual interests and his scientific work. Kinsey's filming of sexual activities simply provides a good example of the extent to which Kinsey's private life and public science naturally overlapped.²⁶

In coming to terms with the issue of private life and public science, it might be useful to enlarge the study beyond Kinsey and examine scholarship

²⁵Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 532.

²⁶Gathorne-Hardy, 338.

on other scientific figures. Another twentieth-century scientist now well known for his sexual proclivities is Nobel laureate physicist Richard Feynman. In the last decade, Jagdish Mehra and James Gleick produced biographies of the maverick theoretician. Neither Mehra nor Gleick believed that Feynman's notorious womanizing impugned in the slightest the validity or importance of his scientific work. Mehra went so far as to downplay Feynman's private behavior and to deal with it in a short section completely separate from his discussion of Feynman's science.²⁷ If Feynman's personal foibles seem too far removed from his public science, perhaps it would be more helpful to look at a scientist whose public and private lives were more obviously connected.

In *The Private Science of Louis Pasteur*, Gerald Geison discovered that the legendary French bacteriologist was "no exemplar of modesty, selflessness, ethically superior conduct, or political and religious neutrality." In fact, Pasteur was a workaholic and a neglectful husband. He harbored scientific secrets, ruled his laboratory like a dictator, and shamelessly sought publicity. Geison, however, did not believe Pasteur's more distasteful traits should vitiate his scientific achievements; he found no reason to assume that a great scientist must be a moral exemplar. Geison carefully considered how to judge Pasteur's work in the light of his private behavior and weaknesses, writing, "For me . . . past scientists are great insofar as they persuaded their peers to adopt their ideas and techniques and insofar as those ideas and techniques were fertile in the investigation and resolution of important research problems."²⁸

But are sex researchers different? Does the study of human behavior imply an irreducible subjectivity? Biographers have explored these issues in the lives of sexologists besides Kinsey. For instance, there have been three distinct waves of biographies of British sexologist, philosopher, and literary critic Havelock Ellis.²⁹ The third wave of Ellis biographies, beginning in 1979, is equivalent to the second wave of Kinsey biographies, for it is among these that biographers began to examine fully Ellis's personal, sexual life. In fact, both of the third wave Ellis biographers explicitly and

²⁷Jagdish Mehra, *The Beat of a Different Drum: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman* (Oxford, 1994); James Gleick, *Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman* (New York, 1992), 291.

²⁸Geison, 10.

²⁹Wave one originated in the 1920s and includes two biographies by admirers of Ellis: Isaac Goldberg, *Havelock Ellis: A Biographical and Critical Survey* (London, 1926) and Houston Peterson, *Havelock Ellis, Philosopher of Love* (London, 1928). Wave two occurred at the end of the 1950s and includes Rose Ishill, *Havelock Ellis* (Berkeley Heights, NJ, 1959); John Stewart Collis, *An Artist of Life* (London, 1959); and Arthur Calder-Marshall, *Havelock Ellis* (London, 1959; the American edition is entitled *The Sage of Sex, a Life of Havelock Ellis* [New York, 1960]). The third wave of Ellis biographies commenced at the end of the 1970s and is comprised of Vincent Brome, *Havelock Ellis, Philosopher of Science: A Biography* (London, 1979) and Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (New York, 1980).

enthusiastically searched for a relationship between Ellis's private life and public work. As one of them, Vincent Brome, explained: "[Ellis's] clinical examination of general sexual behaviour makes it necessary to examine his own in detail. To understand his preoccupation with one, it is imperative to probe the other."³⁰ Jones and Gathorne-Hardy appear to have shared this sentiment. Unlike Jones, however, Ellis's two most recent biographers, Vincent Brome and Phyllis Grosskurth, did not assume that a connection between Ellis's private life and public work damaged the value of that work. They acknowledged the connection (indeed, it was their determined search for that connection that separates their works from earlier biographies), and they also were willing to critique Ellis's work on its own merit. But they did not believe Ellis's great personal interest in sex or his wish to destigmatize homosexuality cast doubt on his work.

Jones may have acknowledged grudgingly Kinsey's influence upon the scientific study of human sexuality, but his belief that Kinsey's private life "contaminated" his science is fundamentally troubling. One reviewer of Jones's biography, Richard Rhodes, complained that Jones holds to "the quaint notion that good science is disinterested science, that a scientist must somehow contrive to avoid emotional investment in his work."³¹ Indeed, Jones's notion is simplistic as well as "quaint" and perhaps outmoded.³² As an example, both Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr claimed deep emotional and even spiritual joy and fascination in their physics work. That joy and hardly disinterested fascination evidenced itself in Einstein's personal religious convictions and Bohr's private philosophical musings. Should we assess these as contaminants of Einstein's and Bohr's public science? As for the warped methods that Jones alleged, leading statisticians of Kinsey's own day approved his approach.³³

Kinsey's private sexual life and his research group's sexual practices were not conventional. Had these practices been publicly revealed in his lifetime, Kinsey's reputation would probably have been destroyed and his sex research dismissed. Today, his private life known, we need not condemn either Kinsey's research or his sexual tendencies. Biographers would be better off identifying the intimate connections between Kinsey's private life and public science as opposed to creating a dichotomy between the

³⁰Brome, xiii.

³¹Richard Rhodes, "Father of the Sexual Revolution," review of Jones, *Alfred Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*, *New York Times Book Review*, November 2, 1997: 10–11, 10.

³²Jones also appears to have a pre-Kuhnian view of the history of science: "In most cases, scientific knowledge builds incrementally, with each investigator making a discrete contribution and with each generation standing on the shoulders of the preceding generation" (*A Public/Private Life*, 771).

³³William G. Cochran, Frederick Mosteller, and John W. Tukey, *Statistical Problems of the Kinsey Report on Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Washington, D.C., 1954). See Julia A. Ericksen, "With Enough Cases, Why Do You Need Statistics? Revisiting Kinsey's Methodology," *Journal of Sex Research* 35 (1998): 132–40.

two. And, as we will see in the next section, whether they search for connections or dichotomies, biographers reveal themselves in their interpretation of another human's life.

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND NORMATIVE VARIABILITY

Dichotomous variation is the exception and continuous variation is the rule, among men as well as among insects.

—Cornelia V. Christenson, 1971³⁴

It is desperately strategic that our civilization realize something of the diversity in human sex behavior, and acquire some sympathetic understanding of that which is different from one's own.

—Alfred Kinsey, 1940³⁵

The growth in our knowledge of the private lives of scientists has yielded richer portraits of biographers as well as of scientists. All biographies have two aspects—the story of the subject and the story of the biographer. Explicitly or implicitly, a biography expresses the interaction between the two. More and more, biographers of scientists as well as their readers are becoming aware of the significance of this interaction. As late as 1979, when Thomas L. Hankins defended the use of biography in the history of science, he simply stated that good biographers could build their subject's character “as much as possible from evidence, and not from any preconceived ideas or anachronistic interpretations.”³⁶ But in 1985, Richard S. Westfall, considered among the best biographers of Isaac Newton, declared that biographers who thought that they had overcome the insertion of their biases “only inflate their egos” and attempted to explore the ways in which he had inserted himself into Newton's story.³⁷

Westfall's quest for the nature of the interrelation between himself and his narrative is closely connected to the transformation of scientific biography. Scientific biography has shifted from a reconstruction of an individual's life that emphasizes his or her professional accomplishments to a story of the subject as both a scientist and a person. The more a scientist's private life is introduced in a biography, the more explicit the author's way of approaching the subject becomes. The two waves of Kinsey biography illustrate the changing pattern of the relation between the authors and their narratives.

³⁴Christenson, 8.

³⁵Pomeroy, 78.

³⁶Thomas L. Hankins, “In Defence of Biography: The Use of Biography in the History of Science,” *History of Science* 17 (1979): 1–16, 2.

³⁷Westfall, “Newton and His Biographer,” 180–81.

The biographies by Christenson and Pomeroy were written from an insider's perspective and sought to reconstruct the scientist's life in a sympathetic and evenhanded manner. Christenson relied upon Kinsey's writings as well as the statements of those who knew him. While portraying Kinsey as a "friendly graduate professor," she acknowledged that he was "single-minded" and often irritating to others because he had difficulty "in curbing his direct and blunt manner."³⁸ According to Pomeroy, Kinsey radiated "a bright aura of warm understanding" to all but at the same time had a rather authoritarian personality and became aggressive when he was criticized.³⁹ Given that they operated within the boundaries of insider status, both authors attempted balanced portraits of the person whom they admired.

Neither Christenson nor Pomeroy made reference to Kinsey's private sexual life in their narratives, although as staff members of the ISR, both had knowledge of that life. In fact, Pomeroy cracked the code Kinsey had devised for the protection of informants' privacy, examined the files of sex histories, and identified "Kinsey's own history, his wife's, [and] his daughter's."⁴⁰ Yet they maintained the code of confidentiality at the institute and let Kinsey's private sexual life and his research group's sexual experiments remain undisturbed. Their loyalty circumscribed their narratives. This circumspection was apparent even to contemporary readers, who did not necessarily expect full disclosure of the scientist's sexual life in scientific biographies. Paul A. Robinson, one of the reviewers of Pomeroy's book, expressed his discomfort: "I suspect that Kinsey's great project originated in the discovery of his own sexual ambiguities. I also suspect that Pomeroy holds the same opinion, but that for ethical reasons he is unable to say so."⁴¹

What is missing in Christenson's and Pomeroy's works is the interaction between biographer and narrative. Both biographers were familiar with much of the available evidence concerning their subject's life, but their accounts do not reflect that awareness. While Christenson and Pomeroy appear balanced in describing Kinsey as a person, they did not make explicit their attitudes toward his life. Because of the restrictions they placed on the scope of their narratives, they did not even comment on what for some people would be problematic sexual behaviors.

In the dissertation that served to connect the first and second waves of Kinsey's biographies, Jones kept silent about Kinsey's sexuality, although he insinuated that something was amiss. When he stated, "To an educated man, conditioned to admire science, the [National Research] Council's

³⁸Christenson, 76, 122, 187.

³⁹Pomeroy, 5.

⁴⁰Pomeroy reports that Kinsey's pride about having an adept pupil overcame his chagrin about the invasion of privacy (107).

⁴¹Robinson, 100.

grant implied the ultimate in respectability,” Jones implied that Kinsey’s research lacked the credibility worthy of NRC approval.⁴² However, he did not offer evidence to support his insinuation until more than twenty years later.

Like his dissertation, Jones’s biography of Kinsey was infused with a sense of distaste for Kinsey’s research, but the biography elevated that distaste into an organizing principle. To condemn Kinsey, Jones seemed comfortable welding together tangential pieces of information into a solid portrayal of apparent fact. In one of his opening statements, he declared: “Beginning with childhood, Kinsey had lived with two shameful secrets: he was both a homosexual and a masochist.”⁴³ This apparently factual statement was based on a picture of Kinsey’s childhood elaborately constructed from little evidence and much conjecture. Jones’s main evidence for Kinsey’s early masochism was the discovery of an old toothbrush hidden under a floorboard in Kinsey’s childhood room. Jones spun a long tale involving the testimony of a toothbrush expert who, if the reader sorts it out carefully, merely testified that the toothbrush was in fact an old toothbrush, possibly of the same era as Kinsey’s childhood. Into this testimony, Jones insinuated his own argument, describing in excruciating detail how Kinsey inserted the brush up his penis in masochistic masturbation. Jones’s approach to his subject was apparently ruled by his preconception of Kinsey. While Jones may not frustrate readers by omitting information, as Pomeroy and Christenson did, he does disturb them with his accusations and reproaches. In his biography, Jones established a definite agenda and left little room for readers to contemplate alternatives.

Gathorne-Hardy’s approach was completely different from Jones’s. Gathorne-Hardy stated that he wanted to correct Jones’s one-dimensional narrative and to present a more tolerant view of the subject. He found Kinsey to be “a much more complicated, interesting, valuable, surprising, moving and profound man than the caricature” presented by Jones.⁴⁴ And he represented Kinsey’s sexuality, which Jones had criticized as a contaminant, as a major factor that fostered Kinsey’s scientific life.

Kinsey had a complex and contradictory personal background. Raised a strict Methodist, he had a fury, “sharpened by his sexual orientation, against the intolerance and dominance” of that religious tradition.⁴⁵ Gathorne-Hardy argued that this contradiction encouraged Kinsey to elaborate an extensive system that included infinite variations of human sexuality, just as he had done with variations of gall wasps. Gathorne-Hardy employed this flexible framework to describe Kinsey’s life. Rather than imposing a narrow agenda upon his subject, as Jones did, Gathorne-Hardy’s portrait of his

⁴²Jones, “Origins,” 168.

⁴³Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 4.

⁴⁴Gathorne-Hardy, 465.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 453.

subject's life allows for interpretive versatility. In Gathorne-Hardy's narrative, the reader can see the figure of the author as well as that of the subject, both of whom are fascinated by the incredible variety and complexity of human nature.

The differences between Jones's and Gathorne-Hardy's biographies of Kinsey suggest the normative variability of the authors. Jones preferred to guide the reader along a designated path; Gathorne-Hardy sought to encourage the reader to reflect upon a life in the panorama he presents. The way we understand Kinsey, who devoted himself to the clarification of the diversity of human sexuality as well as insect ecology, is still under discussion.

A FIELD GUIDE TO KINSEY TODAY

Perhaps biography is the flat map
Abstracted from the globe of someone's life.

—Maura Stanton, 1984⁴⁶

In light of the considerations raised in this “historiographical reconnaissance,” how should a researcher approach the current works on Kinsey? What other strategies exist that might enhance our understanding of Kinsey's life, his science, and the strange intertwining of the two that is at the heart of scientific biography?

At this point in the study of Kinsey, a biographer who attempts to evaluate Kinsey's research must also include an account of his sexual life and gauge the extent to which they affected each other. This terrain has been crossed in a variety of ways, with biographers arriving at very different interpretations. A number of intellectual, social, and psychological issues are at stake, and it may be helpful to identify and separate them. The major questions and controversies to date involve the following:

1. *The role of statistical methodology.* Kinsey has come under fire, most notably from Jones, for his statistical sampling and his use of certain groups such as prison populations and homosexual communities. Kinsey used a number of strategies, including interviewing 100 percent of various groups, to handle the challenge of gathering statistically valid information at a time when people were far more reluctant than they are today to discuss their sex lives. His work was evaluated positively by leading statisticians of the time, who wrote a detailed report summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of his approach. The report emphasized the importance of random statistical sampling but also acknowledged that a random sample was impossible given the difficulties of persuading people to give their sex histories. According to Jones, however, Kinsey played a key role in influencing the statisticians' report in his favor. In 1998 sociologist Julia A. Ericksen also reviewed Kinsey's interviewing techniques and

⁴⁶Maura Stanton, “Biography,” in *Cries of Swimmers* (Salt Lake City, 1984), 60.

sampling strategy, interpreting them in the context of their time and contrasting them to current methods. She found that Kinsey's methods, flawed by today's standards, were professionally acceptable at the time.⁴⁷

2. *The role of sexual experimentation and filming among the institute staff.* Accurate information about human sexual behavior was not easily available in America during the 1940s and 1950s. Kinsey responded by filming his own staff and other volunteers. The full effect of confidential filming and sexual acts on professional life at the ISR is a fascinating topic in its own right. Some staff members flourished in these unusual circumstances, while at least one, Vincent Nowlis, felt uncomfortable and left the institute. Explicit criteria for employment—"we cannot use anyone who is afraid of sex"—as well as unwritten rules on this issue must have affected hiring practices and personal/professional boundaries at the institute.⁴⁸ Some information from the films made its way into *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. But how else did the filming affect the results of the research? The first wave of biographies touched lightly on such potentially explosive issues.⁴⁹ In the second wave, Jones and Gathorne-Hardy described similar events in very different tones. Gathorne-Hardy emphasized the scientific nature of Kinsey's interest, while Jones painted a much darker picture in which Kinsey used the films to gratify his voyeurism.

3. *The role of sexual desire.* Ignored by the first wave of biographies, this issue was the crux of Jones's argument and thus became a key question in the second wave. Did Kinsey's research gratify personal sexual desires? If so, how did this shape or affect the research? Did it invalidate or problematize the research? How has the research stood up to the test of time? In the first wave biographies, Christenson and Pomeroy lauded Kinsey's objectivity and professionalism. In the second wave, Jones and Gathorne-Hardy once again provided very different sets of answers to these questions. Jones argued that Kinsey's sexual life tainted his research, while Gathorne-Hardy portrayed Kinsey's sexuality as an interesting influence but not a malignant one. Ericksen also argued against Jones's perspective, stating that "a more conservative researcher might have discovered a more sexually conservative America, but this too would be a product of the researcher's view of the world and not of more truthful results."⁵⁰

4. *The role of social and political agendas.* Did Kinsey have a personal mission to change public views of sexuality? If so, did it affect his research strategies, techniques, and results, and how? How can we place his views in the context of his time? The first wave biographies highlighted Kinsey's intellectual and humanitarian concerns as the basis of his interest in sex

⁴⁷Ericksen; Gathorne-Hardy, 340–41, 374–75; Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 638–65.

⁴⁸Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 494.

⁴⁹See Pomeroy, 172ff.

⁵⁰Ericksen, 132.

research; the second wave focused more on Kinsey's desire to change the way Americans viewed sex.

All four issues—statistical rigor, the filming of sex acts, sexual desire, and sociopolitical agendas—have become entangled in an analysis of Kinsey's life. At their heart, they relate in different ways to the central question: Was Kinsey doing good science? Christenson and Pomeroy shared Kinsey's scientific vision and defended his research. Jones found Kinsey's research to be biased and tainted due to what he saw as Kinsey's homosexuality, masochism, and voyeurism. Gathorne-Hardy, who examined the same information as Jones did, arrived at very different conclusions. In fact, these two writers did not even use the same terms to describe Kinsey: Jones repeatedly called him a homosexual; Gathorne-Hardy, in accordance with current understanding of sexuality, argued that he was decidedly not "homosexual" but bisexual. Although Kinsey certainly had homosexual relationships, the first great love of his life—and one that lasted throughout his life—was his wife, Clara. Unlike Jones, Gathorne-Hardy saw Kinsey's bisexuality as a force that fueled but did not necessarily damage his research. That biographers have come up with such drastically different views illustrates the essential role of the historian in interpreting the information at hand.

Other questions about Kinsey's research and personal life have yet to be fully addressed. One aspect of Kinsey's work that has gone unexamined is the relationship between his research on sexuality and the relevant strands of research in psychology at the time. Much has been made of his debt to biology, and there are clear correlations between his research strategies and data gathering on both gall wasps and humans. Kinsey's research methodology, sometimes criticized for tending toward biological reductionism, fit in well with the behaviorist Zeitgeist of psychology and other social sciences in the interwar period. Yet no biography has considered this issue in detail.⁵¹ Instead, the focal point has been Kinsey's criticism of Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic approach to sex. According to Jones, Kinsey "regarded Freud as a great theoretician" but severely lacking in empirical evidence to support his claims. Kinsey's Freud bashing has diverted attention away from the possible influences of behaviorism, which was concerned not with internal (hence unobservable) states but with observable conduct.⁵²

Robert M. Yerkes, one of Kinsey's strongest supporters, especially in his role as chairman of the Committee for Research in Problems of Sex (National Research Council), identified himself as a psychobiologist and was interested throughout his career in how natural science might provide a basis for social order. One commentator said of Yerkes: "Natural function was made a moral criterion; adjustment collapsed into adaptation; research

⁵¹This lack was noticed in Nathan G. Hale Jr.'s review of Pomeroy (1972) in the *New York Times Book Review*, March 26, 1972: 4, 37.

⁵²Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 300.

provided norms (typological, statistical, ethical) to guide social life.”⁵³ Kinsey shared that same scientific ideology.

Another individual who has an important tale to tell in the story of Kinsey’s life is Clara McMillen Kinsey, but her life has yet to be fully recovered or explored. The biographies of innumerable scientists have revealed that their life work was often due to the contributions of two lives, not one. Clara’s role changed drastically through the different histories in proportion to the weight and valence given to Kinsey’s own private and sexual life. In the first wave, Clara was portrayed briefly, in keeping with the conventional portrait of Kinsey’s home life. In the second wave, she was given two rather disparate treatments. Jones, although deeply focused on Kinsey’s private life, largely overlooked Clara and gave her a fairly one-dimensional character in his cursory treatment. In his text, Clara was introduced and subtly coded as lesbian—mannish and frumpy. The possibility of any physical attraction between Clara and Kinsey was dismissed, despite clear evidence in Kinsey’s sex histories that they continued to have sex until Kinsey’s illness late in his life. Clara was cast as a downtrodden wife who subjugated her career ambitions to her husband’s wishes and put aside her interests in chemistry to take care of hearth and home. Jones noted but did not explore the fact that Clara was crucial to Kinsey’s work as she deciphered, copied, and typed reams of diaries, notebooks, and letters; assisted him in his gall wasp collecting; and read proofs of his books. However, Jones did bring out certain moments that capture the unusual flair of life at the Kinsey home—for example, Clara’s entrance into a filming session with towels and refreshments for the participants.⁵⁴

Gathorne-Hardy offered a different view of Clara, even down to her name. Throughout the text, he called her Mac, the nickname that all her family and friends used. Gathorne-Hardy’s portrait reflected the dramatic shifts in American society since the 1930s as well as the personal nature of the choices and compromises that confront any marriage. Under Gathorne-Hardy’s pen, Mac emerged as a complicated figure. Called “the hottest thing on campus” as an IU undergraduate, she was fiercely intelligent, strong willed, independent, supportive of her husband even while she wanted more from him, and in the final analysis an equal creator in a marriage that began with sexual excitement, matured into an unusually deep tenderness, acceptance, and openness about all matters, and yet also had its disappointments and sacrifices.⁵⁵

The evaluation of Kinsey’s legacy remains an open question. Pomeroy and Christenson both saw Kinsey’s work as crucial to shaping perceptions of sex in American life, despite the criticism and controversy that surrounded him. Jones, in both his dissertation and his biography, established a picture

⁵³Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York, 1989), 71.

⁵⁴Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, esp. 393–96, 476–77, 693.

⁵⁵Gathorne-Hardy, 61.

of a changing American society that was ready for the arrival of a scientist like Kinsey to do sex research. Against this background, Jones downplayed Kinsey's contributions to history, concluding in his final analysis, "Of course, Kinsey's work did not cause the shifts in sexual attitudes and behavior that occurred in the United States after his death."⁵⁶ In Gathorne-Hardy's account, both America and Indiana were far less ready to accept open discussions about sex. His final conclusions were largely similar to Jones's but with a different emphasis: Kinsey was part of a larger societal change, but "it is hard to think of any *individual* who had more influence."⁵⁷ Sociologist Julia Ericksen also saw a greater role for Kinsey's work, concluding that he "had an enormous impact on creating a sexuality that freed many individuals from the stigma of abnormality. This change in the way we view sex was a far more important contribution of the Kinsey Reports than any specific finding. . . . This is the legacy of Kinsey and is the reason why his work remains worthy of discussion 50 years after it first appeared. His methodology has been superseded, but his influence appropriately continues."⁵⁸

These varying interpretations of Kinsey's sexuality and research illustrate the many different ways that historians can connect the points of data that we have on Kinsey's life. The information is copious but not self-revelatory. We have reams of Kinsey's business correspondence, but his personal letters seem to have been culled; we have his public tomes but not his private thoughts. The gaps leave much room for interpretation.

There is no consensus among the works that have been written on Kinsey, nor have all the pieces of the puzzle been filled in. There is Kinsey the loving and slightly staid family man dedicated to disinterested scientific research; Kinsey the demon-ridden, sex-obsessed researcher who skewed his data to get results for his public crusade against sexual repression; Kinsey the entomologist who is "starred" in the 1938 *American Men of Science* directory but who does not appear in the 1970 *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*; the Kinsey who is still cited extensively in the scientific literature.⁵⁹ Between these extremes, a composite portrait is starting to emerge: Kinsey the influential, driven scientist with complex motives and controversial techniques who forged a new direction in science and was a fundamental part of a deep and lasting change in the way sex was studied and talked about in America.⁶⁰ Kinsey's history has perhaps

⁵⁶Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 773.

⁵⁷Gathorne-Hardy, 446.

⁵⁸Ericksen, 139.

⁵⁹A recent citation search of the *Web of Science* covering 1987–99 resulted in 382 citations of Kinsey. Two referred to his biology texts, 20 to his gall wasps research, and the remaining 360 to his publications on sexual behavior. (For some perspective, a similar search for Darwin produced 491 citations and for Freud, 655 citations.)

⁶⁰A recent cultural study assesses Kinsey's impact: Philip J. Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriwether Lewis to Alfred Kinsey* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 233–38.

for a time been hostage to the historiographical desire for a straightforward story that conforms to certain notions of virtue and vice in scientific life. Kinsey's comments on classification and sexuality apply to the historiography of Kinsey himself. "It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separate pigeonholes," said Kinsey. "Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white."⁶¹

There is still much to explore for any historian interested in Kinsey. That holds true for historiographers too. One of the most striking aspects of the historiography of Kinsey is the way in which individual accounts have varied. Why did Kinsey's story inspire such different interpretations? This was a man of whom Jones said, "By late adolescence, if not before, Kinsey's behavior was clearly pathological, satisfying every criterion of sexual perversion."⁶² When speaking of the same period of time in Kinsey's life, Gathorne-Hardy mildly proposed "perhaps it is easier for a middle-class, middle-age Englishman to understand what seems to have happened" and drew on English public school tradition to discuss what he viewed as Kinsey's perfectly ordinary adolescence.⁶³ These different accounts illustrate how sexuality in all its variations—which Kinsey sought so ardently to record, classify, and demystify—still causes controversy. Moreover, the historian's own views on sexuality, as Gathorne-Hardy suggested, can deeply influence an interpretation of Kinsey's life. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we may still be uncomfortably close to Kinsey, his time, and his society. Our own mores and attitudes toward sexuality inevitably shape the way we evaluate Kinsey and the way we approach the works that have been written about him. In addition, our view of Kinsey's research and his legacy depend on our understanding of the relationship between personal motivations and scientific research. One thing is certain: a fuller understanding of Kinsey requires an analysis of his biographers.

In this examination of the assumptions and conclusions of Kinsey's biographers, we have sought to clarify the processes that underlie the construction of history. Just as Kinsey aimed to grasp the relationship between America's sexual practices and society, we have examined the connections between Kinsey's biographers and the histories they have produced. Kinsey's extraordinary tale demands retelling, to be further enriched with new perspectives. So too does the storyteller's tale.

⁶¹Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, 639.

⁶²Jones, *A Public/Private Life*, 82.

⁶³Gathorne-Hardy, 24.