

Demythologizing the Kinsey Reports

By Sister Renée Mirkes, O.S.F.

Although the 50th anniversary (2003) of the Kinsey Reports (KRs) received modest attention from the news media, I assure you that the folks at the Kinsey Institute, their friends and supporters, were publicly toasting their founder's sociological triumphs. They understood why this commemoration deserved a Page 1, above-the-fold spot. And, truth to tell, they were dead right.

After all, it was only 50 years ago that Alfred C. Kinsey launched a culture war that has been decisive in advancing major, hard-to-win behavioral and social changes — and in record time, to boot. Protestations of scholarly objectivity notwithstanding, the simple fact is that the implicit social propaganda that permeates Kinsey's "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male," published in 1948, and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female," released five years later — the ethics of tolerance and sexual liberation — has been instrumental in changing the sexual behavior and milieu of millions of Americans.

As a scientific reference point, the KRs provide legitimacy for every sort of contemporary "sexual athlete": Playboy hedonist, exhibitionist, voyeurist, pedophile, transvestite, fetishist of every stripe. Similarly, our so-called abstinence-based public sex-education programs that even the kids dub "Porn



Alfred Kinsey

101," the legal/political movement that would define same-sex unions as marriage, the Supreme Court decision (*Lawrence et al. vs. Texas*) that would find no state interest in protecting sexual values — all could, if they wanted, point to professor Kinsey and his sex studies for their "scientific" validity.

The Catholic response? Demythologizing, not hand-wringing, should be the order of the day. For, only until we intelligently challenge at least some of the Kinseyan myths — those uncritically accepted beliefs that ground the KRs — will we be able to thwart their continued domestication and to expose their errors.

Myth #1: *The raw scientific data of the Kinsey Reports constitute a definitive authority regarding sexual behavior.*

What should not escape our notice is how, from authors to reviewers, all seem to fall into the habit of reverentially writing about either of the Kinsey Reports as “the Report.” In the written context, the capital “R” subtly dictates that the reader, at least subconsciously, acknowledge the singular importance and scientific authority of these studies. (Similarly, look at how, of all the pills in the world, the capital-p “Pill” refers only to that most famous of pills, the oral contraceptive.)

To read the Reports is, in effect, to hear Kinsey and his associates cry: “Pure Science!” and “Raw Scientific Data!” with every turn of the page. This studied effect — science is the definitive authority on sexuality — lies in the authors’ hope that their awestruck readers will genuflect before this latest manifestation of the “science god.” Kinsey et al. unquestionably trust that as each table, chart or graph quantitatively (and mechanically) describes every intimate aspect of what, for the most part, was formerly considered taboo sexual behavior, the reader will ever more surely conclude that, at last, this granddaddy of all scientific studies is just that: definitive.

With 6,000 case studies recounting male sexual behavior and 5,300 cases recounting female sexual activity, how could any unsuspecting reader of the Kinsey Reports *not* be bowled over by the sheer force of numbers? And, by ever so subtly leading the reader to requisite attitudinal changes, Kinsey and his associates were betting the farm that members of their audience would be tempted to a non-sequitur kind of reasoning. If *so many* successful people

are involved in *so many* varied, “non-traditional” kinds of sexual behavior with *so much* sexual satisfaction, such activity *cannot* be as bad for human beings and society as legal and religious norms have formerly duped them into believing. To disprove this myth is to demonstrate why the alleged authority of the Reports is far from conclusive or definitive. Two questions are pertinent: How scientifically rigorous are the Kinsey Reports? Are they a truly definitive account of male and female sexual behavior?

One critic’s assessment of the Reports summarily answers the question of scientific rigor. Kinsey’s fieldworkers, Philip J. Pauly points out in “Biologists and the Promise of American Life” (1997), “had traveled the countryside, opportunistically interviewing idiosyncratic populations about unverifiable, often long-past events, and then shoehorned responses into a biological framework whose intellectual limitations were papered over by the quantity of data.”

In other words, their lack of scientific rigor is rooted in the fact that the Kinsey Reports were, at base, a social survey with all the subjective factors that infect “the collection, tabulation, and analysis of responses to a questionnaire.” How reliable, for instance, is the response of Kinsey’s record-keeping pedophile that the children he victimized derived “definite pleasure from the situation [of molestation]?” As Pauly noted, “Looking to sexual molesters for information on childhood sexuality is like drawing conclusions on the sexuality of adult females from the testimony of rapists.”

And, as to the definitive nature of the Reports’ data, I defer to a repeated (and valid) criticism of the Kinsey

Reports which argues that the studies are more unrepresentative of human sexual behavior than they are representative. The first Report doesn’t describe the sexual behavior of the average male as the study’s title implies. It records the experiences of only 5,300 Caucasian, middle-class, college-educated, under-35-years-of-age American males, many of whom were chosen because their sexual lifestyles conformed to the Kinseyan pansexual, the-more-the-merrier, schematic. Similarly, the second Report is far from representative of sexual behavior among average females. Only 6,000 American, female volunteers were interviewed, most of whom were “frustrated, neurotic, outcasts of society,” according to James H. Jones in “Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life” (1997).

As a result, the studies’ methodology and sampling techniques can hardly be characterized as scientifically rigorous or “pure.” Examples are instructive. Kinsey purposefully dedicated more pages in his book to homosexual behavior than he did to that of married persons. Furthermore, the manner in which he conducted the Reports virtually guaranteed that Kinsey would find what he was looking for — namely, natural (normal), robust sex for American adults is best defined as “variety” sex. This thinking touts that the normal American will (and should) find release in as many outlets — self, heterosexuals, homosexuals, children, adolescents and animals — and with as much frequency as his or her sexual milieu will allow.

Myth #2: *The Kinsey Reports represent morally agnostic science: Their data merely describe sexual behavior; they do not, nor will not, judge it.*

Kinsey was right about one thing:

people’s sexual attitudes and mores change very slowly. He was confident, however, that once people had the Kinsey Report “facts,” the sexual changes already in the air would eventually seem irrefutable and irreversible. No matter how many times Kinsey feigned the objectivity of being nothing other than a counter and a classifier — the study reported “what people do,” raising “no question of what they should do” — it just ain’t so. His data are a thinly veiled polemic. The real Kinsey, then, was a supremely confident scientific observer turned philosopher/social engineer, says Jones. What got this sexual taxonomist out of bed in the morning and kept him burning the lab lights long into the night was his goal of a sexual utopia, the end of educating Americans “to think of sexuality as fundamentally a biological issue,” according to Pauly.

Against this backdrop, Kinsey had a definite preference for homosexuality and pansexuality, and he definitely was of a mind to shape the average American’s preference in that image. Along with other sex biologists of the early 20th century, Kinsey was fully aware that, with persistent effort, science could have a major impact on sexual thinking and behavior within the larger movement of the “modernization of sex.” In other words, these highly influential, intellectual elitists — crypto-reformers all — recognized, but would never publicly admit, the lesson that social scientists learned long before: Science and its so-called raw data have the power to manipulate, adjust and abrogate both sexual mores and sex-offender laws.

So, when Kinsey reported that 92 percent of American males and 62 percent of American females masturbated,

he was very much hoping that the reader would think: "Well, then, why should I feel shame about doing so?" And, when he reported that "half or more of the boys in an uninhibited society could reach climax by the time they were three or four years of age, and that nearly all of them could experience such a climax three to five years before the onset of adolescence," and all with the hope for greater sexual and mental health, he intended that the upbeat novelty of this bit of data would encourage the reader to propose, "Well, then, let the inhibitions fall!" And Kinsey's fanatical focus on orgasm — reducing sex to the physiological only, was a brilliant move, given his objectives. Not only did it go a long way to realizing his goal of upsetting traditional mores, but it also took the mystery out of human sexuality altogether.

I agree with Lionel Trilling who, in his 1948 review of the male volume, argued that Kinsey would have been ahead of the game and could have sought intellectual safety and credibility in "straightforwardly admitting that subjectivity was bound to appear [in the Reports] and inviting the reader to be on the watch for it" ("The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent: Selected Essays," edited by Leon Wieseltier, 2000).

Myth #3: *Human sexuality has no connection with procreation.*

Although in the preface to "Sexual Behavior of the Human Male," Dr. Alan Gregg refers to sexuality as "the reproductive instinct," in the body of the study, Kinsey avoids sexuality's connection to propagation like the plague. Kinsey did not single-handedly usher in the sexual revolution that came of age in the 1960s. He was, however,

instrumental in putting the mantle of scientific legitimacy around various strains of the revolution, such as the women's movement. If there is one aim of Margaret Sanger and her latter-day disciples to which Kinsey was also attached, it was that of affording (genetically superior) women the way and the right to decide if and when they got pregnant and whether, once pregnant, they would elect to stay that way.

Promoting these ends, though out of a completely hedonistic motivation, it comes as no surprise that Kinsey kept a close eye on the research of Gregory Pincus, which culminated in the easy availability of the Pill in the 1960s. Kinsey and his minions were painfully aware that their vision of societal reconstruction would be stymied until antidotes for the two nonreligious fears that kept people from frequent and diverse sexual activity — infection and pregnancy — were found. The antibiotic alleviated the fear of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases; the oral contraceptive provided a cure for the pregnancy inhibition.

More importantly, the Pill, in a much more efficient way than the condom, severed the natural connection between sex and procreation that religion and traditional morality taught are inextricably linked. The principal reason that the possibility of lifeless sex interested Kinsey was a psycho-sociological one: the oral contraceptive helped to rearrange the mental furniture inside women's minds, encouraging them to view their bodies and their fertility as men do.

We need to keep in mind that, given Kinsey's completely materialistic philosophy of sex, "having sex" is a mechanical response to physical stimuli for a narcissistic release of tension.

It has nothing whatever to do with giving of self and receiving the other as a gift. Since, for Kinsey, sex has nothing to do with love, it would have been completely out of character for him to see sex in procreative terms — that is, to see life as the culminating manifestation of love. It should come as no surprise, then, when the male volume indexes the topic of pregnancy (and, by extension, procreation), it does so under the category, "fear of."

Myth #4: *Because human sexual data comprise merely physical facts, the whole of human sexual experience is anatomi-*

cal and physiological; one's sexual life has no connection with one's emotional or social life.

The best way to demythologize this sort of opinion about the nature of sexual experience is to ask reasonable people (those who can get out from under the likes of Kinseyan propaganda) to reflect on their own experience of sexuality. Wouldn't thoughtful people recognize that their sexuality is something essential to who they are, inexorably connected to the personal — to human situations, aspirations and human — and, therefore, to something that cannot be reduced to biology only?

Perhaps, because of a growing mechanical view of life, readers are incapable of inserting Kinsey's mathematical account of sexual experience back into the human situation and human life from which they were abstracted. Whatever the case, most reasonable people intuitively reject the intellectually deficient idea that sex is nothing more than the quantitative measurement of its physiological aspects.

Myth #5: *Animal sexual behavior is the standard for what is natural in human sexual activity; human sexual behavior that conforms to natural animal behavior is normal.*

Of all the aberrant sexual behavior for which Kinsey wanted broadened social acceptance, homosexuality was at the top of the list. Given his own sexual proclivities, Kinsey's priority makes sense. Although he did not exhibit an attraction for sex with children, animals or other people's wives, Kinsey was intent on satisfying his own homosexual desires. And he was adamant in making sure that the world knew that his (or others') guilt feelings about satisfying these "natural" and "harmless" appetites were the logical ill effect of religiously induced sexual repression. One of his male research associates admits that he and Kinsey had sex "for the sake of their research" on a regular basis (see "Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life," Page 603).

Kinsey was astute enough to know what his "mind-bending" work was up against. He had to disprove what many of his day believed: that genital contact between persons of the same sex was unnatural and therefore immoral. And, like Havelock Ellis before him, Kinsey's argument to normalize (and

legalize) homosexuality focused on animals — dogs, sheep, cattle, white rats and monkeys — all of which exhibited same-sex coupling. Since homosexuality was a common — that is, natural — behavior among mammals, and the human being was a mammal, homosexuality, Kinsey concluded, is natural for the human being (or, in Kinsey's terms, the human animal).

Kinsey's argument *de animalibus* would be valid if the human mammal was a mammal in the same way that, say, the higher primates are animals. But as a modicum of self-examination proves, the human animal is the only mammal who is a person, a creature whose body reveals a metaphysical interior of intelligent freedom. Only the human being has, first, the intelligence to understand why the indulgence of one's homosexual desires would be an unreasonable thing to do, why it would fail to bring oneself and one's partner to sexual fulfillment. And, second, only the human mammal has a will to choose freely against pursuit of genital sexual relations with a same-sex partner precisely because it is unreasonable — that is, unable to bring either self or the other to genuine human happiness.

A postscript. Another weakness of Kinsey's "scientific" argument *de animalibus* is that, taken to its logical conclusions, it contradicts his Epicurean sensibilities. Would it not be incongruous for "the more-the-merrier" Kinsey to preach that, since it is natural for other male mammals (like dogs) to have sex only when the female dog is in heat, the most natural thing for human mammals would also be to limit their intercourse to the time when the female human mammal is fertile? And, furthermore, is a woman's sexuality any less natural just because the human

female no longer has the sexual periodicity common to animals?

Myth #6: *Many or most sexually aberrant people are mentally and socially healthy.*

Kinsey was shrewd. Take his choice of male case studies, for example. Their collective cachet is "college-trained," as in "professional," and Kinsey would like you to infer "successful," and Kinsey would like you to imagine "well adjusted and normal as that next-door neighbor you like so much." But as everyone knows, appearances are often deceptive. Kinsey was enamored of "Mr. X," the male interviewee whose sexual tastes evidently included, but were not limited to, sex with children. Kinsey even went so far as to acknowledge publicly his regret at not being able to thank him by name (pedophilia was and is a punishable offense). So Kinsey must have reasoned that if enough people read about a pedophile who was a college-trained professional, more and more would come around to espousing one of his lynchpin principles: The "natural man," the sexually robust, healthy male or female, Jones wrote, ought to "commence sexual activity early in life, enjoy intercourse with both sexes, eschew fidelity, indulge in a variety of behaviors, and be much more sexually active in general for life."

His critics proved that thoughtful people — at least initially — did not fall into line as Kinsey had hoped. The "more-the-merrier" and "the more-the-healthier" prescriptions for a naturally robust sex life just struck a lot of his readers as so much Enlightenment, progressivist bunk. I suspect many a reader reasoned that he would be as much of an intellectual and moral

midget to refrain from sexually harmful behavior solely out of fear of divine or ecclesial reprisal (one of Kinsey's objections) as he would be to engage in that same kind of behavior on the encouraging word of sexual libertines (one of Kinsey's hopes)?

Here's another way to adjudicate whether frequency and variety of sexual experiences do a well-adjusted male or female make. Is it not reasonable to suggest that the cause of an adolescent's frequent acts of masturbatory sex could just as well be an expression of anxiety, loneliness or a poor self-concept than, as Kinsey would argue, an expression of a robust sexual desire? Could the frequency of sodomistic, adulterous or pedophilic sex be caused not so much, as Kinsey would aver, by a healthy need for sexual expression as by a compulsion arising from psychological immaturity and an unhealthy addiction to sex?

I would suggest that to the extent that the anthropological and moral bankruptcy of the Kinseyan worldview is exposed, to that same extent will the power of Catholic sexual teaching to correct, enhance and inspire be manifest. Demythologizing the Kinsey Reports, then, is absolutely essential for the Catholic effort to stem the humanly destructive tide of the sexual revolution. †



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