

The Kinsey Institute

What's your mission?

Dr Alfred Kinsey began collecting sexual histories in the late 1930s to fill a 'gap in knowledge'. As a scientist, he was driven to provide scientific data to inform about sexual behaviour; as a professor, teaching a marriage course focused on human sexuality at Indiana University, he had searched for data to provide to his students. Since such data were quite limited, he began by interviewing students, then by reaching out beyond the university to various groups and communities. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction (more commonly referred to as The Kinsey Institute) aims to continue this mission, helping to advance knowledge on the human sexual experience.

How did you start?

In 1948, Dr Alfred Kinsey and his staff published the findings of his research in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. The year before publication, the Institute for Sex Research was formed in order to protect the identities of those who had contributed through interviews. Since Dr Kinsey was a faculty member at Indiana University, both he and the University President, Herman B Wells, felt that this would keep the data safe from the politicians and other political forces. Thus, when the book was published and public controversy ensued, the holdings were protected. This arrangement, as a private, research institute at Indiana University, has proven to be a successful approach to continuing the study of human sexuality over 60 years.

Where are you and how are you structured?

We are located on the campus of Indiana University, in Bloomington, Indiana, USA. The staff of approximately 20 includes researchers, library and collections staff, art curator and support staff. The research staff has joint appointments at Indiana University in psychology, gender studies and anthropology. Visiting scholars, affiliated researchers, graduate and undergraduate students and postdoctoral fellows also contribute to the research programme.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Who: The Kinsey Institute (for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction)

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What do you actually do?

We are a research institute, conducting research on sexual behaviour and health. We also have a unique archive, used by scholars in many disciplines. These collections include library materials, art and photography, films and archival collections of researchers in the field. The library contains the recorded writings of four centuries, representing the scientific, the scholarly record, and even the underground expression of sex and gender.

Researchers at The Kinsey Institute also work with other researchers at other academic centres to collaborate on research and to organise workshops or research meetings.

We also have gallery openings three or four times per year, and research panels for the public and for 'friends' (donors) of The Kinsey Institute.

Who are your typical users?

Our typical users are scholars and researchers (any individual with a research proposal may apply), including historians, sociologists, documentary researchers and even novelists, who use the collections for their own projects.

How do you reach people?

Currently, the Institute has two websites: www.kinseyinstitute.org and www.kinseyconfidential.org. Kinsey Confidential is a 'question and answer' site focusing on sexual health for a college-age audience. We also produce e-newsletters and an annual print newsletter.

What are the key issues you comment on to the press?

We help the press identify experts for particular stories, whether those experts are Kinsey Institute research staff or are based elsewhere. We also offer statistics, when available, to the press. We are willing to comment or give interviews when a story is relevant to the expertise of our staff. We also circulate press releases on selected research findings.

What's been your biggest triumph over the years?

People are often surprised to learn that The Kinsey Institute is located at Indiana University, in the conservative midwestern region of the USA. In fact, for over 60 years, since the publication of Dr Kinsey's original book, we have continued to grow the research collections (the library, new and historical artworks, and archival collections of private individuals), to conduct research and to publish the "Kinsey Reports". Continuing to grow as a centre for the interdisciplinary study of sex research, despite a somewhat conservative ethos in US politics generally, is – we feel – a great achievement.

What's been your biggest problem?

Funding for sex research is always a challenge. Also, since Dr Kinsey began his research in 1939, there have been outspoken individual and groups who feel threatened by the study of human sexual behaviour. In spite of this inevitable attention, we generally receive good support and respect locally and worldwide.

A more specific problem in conducting the research is developing the best methods to get at the truth, including constructing questionnaires, conducting interviews, or using new technologies, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), hormonal assays or psycho-physiological methods.

What are your most exciting plans/biggest hopes for the future?

We know that despite the abundance of availability of sexual images and information, people are searching for reliable sources on sexuality. We hope to encourage people to access the information of the Institute, online, for their own sexual health and information. We are incorporating new media into our website, developing new online research, and are offering more digital materials online towards the goal of advancing sexual health and knowledge worldwide. Eventually we would like to have space to accommodate and showcase our art and library collections, as well as to conduct research that requires new spaces, equipment and collaborations.

Editor's note

This is the second in a series of occasional articles on key health organisations worldwide. The Journal would be pleased to hear from other organisations, particularly those based outside the UK, which would like to be similarly profiled.