

# The Long, Lost Survey on Sex

*With data for AIDS epidemiology scarce, a major 1970 Kinsey Institute survey on sexual behavior is still under wraps because of a fight over authorship*

A one-of-kind national survey on human sexuality has been held captive for the past 8 years because the investigators fought over whose name should appear first on the manuscript. The spat is particularly galling to researchers who believe that the data would be valuable for predicting the spread of the AIDS epidemic.

The long-lost survey has become critical because so little is known about sexual behavior in the United States. The field is so bereft of good data, for example, that when the Centers for Disease Control was recently asked by the White House to estimate how many Americans are infected with the AIDS virus, it based its answer on surveys done during the late 1930s and early 1940s by Alfred Kinsey, who relied on respondents who were white, middle-class, college-educated, and from the Midwest. In his landmark work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey estimated that 4% of American males are exclusively homosexual throughout life, while 10% are "more or less homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55." Using these percent-

ages, CDC estimated that between 625,000 and 1,000,000 homosexual men are infected with the AIDS virus. Better estimates of the true numbers of homosexuals would help model with greater accuracy the number of Americans infected. Indeed, the field is so data-poor that the current director of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University in Bloomington stood up before the President's AIDS commission on 20 February and cited studies conducted by *Redbook*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Playboy*.

The lack of information about sexual behavior is "a national embarrassment," says Charles Turner, study director for the National Academy of Sciences' committee on AIDS research and the social sciences. Turner was instrumental in unearthing the lost data set, which has been gathering dust since 1980, when the authors squabbled over whose name should appear first on the title page of their 500-page manuscript. The data were originally collected for the Kinsey Institute in 1970.

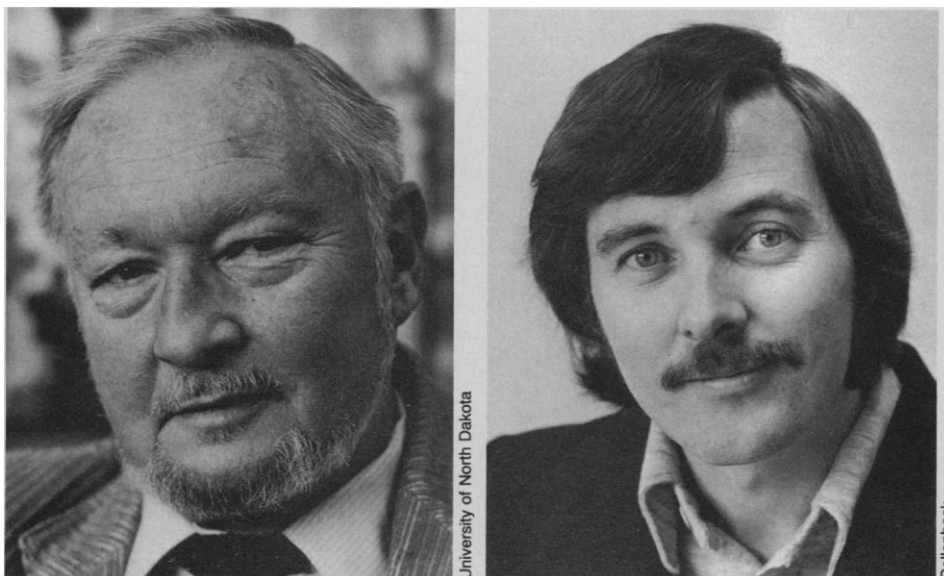
What makes the lost Kinsey data set so special is the fact that it is the only one of its

kind in which a large number of Americans from across the country were selected at random and quizzed about sexual behavior, including homosexuality. Studies with self-selected populations, which are the bread-and-butter of *Redbook* and *Cosmo*, are not useful for making generalizations about the population that does not read magazines and does not return sex questionnaires. "The popular literature is full of such studies. You can get an idea of the range of behaviors, but you can't break it down. The numbers are not representative of anything. . . . They're garbage," comments Ron Wilson of National Center for Health Statistics in Hyattsville, Maryland. John Gagnon, a sociologist at Princeton University, concurs: "We have at our disposal a vast collection of terrible studies done badly." As for the more scientifically sampled surveys, most are invariably based on specific populations, such as black women in Los Angeles, or gay men in Chicago, or married working women.

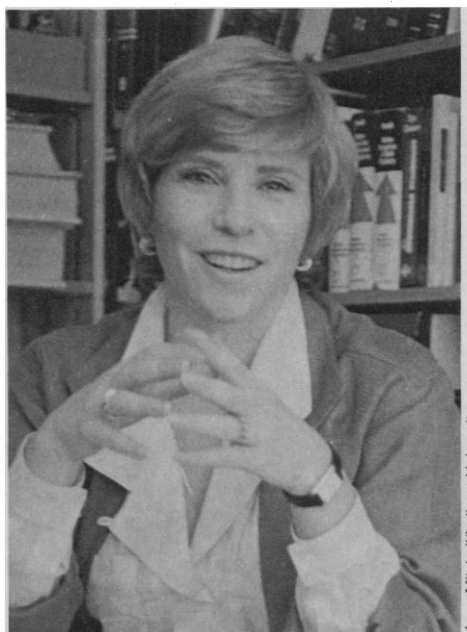
"People are ready to kill for the data," says Wendy Baldwin of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. At a recent meeting on the behavioral epidemiology of AIDS, Wilson called the Kinsey work "a fugitive study." Thomas Coates of the University of San Francisco says: "I can't believe that data of such vital importance are not out there."

The story of the lost data begins in 1968, at the middle of the sexual revolution, when a researcher named Albert D. Klassen, then at the Kinsey Institute, proposed a large national survey on sexual attitudes and behaviors. The National Institute on Mental Health agreed to fund Klassen's work at Kinsey, but suggested that Klassen, a sociologist without a doctorate, needed a collaborator. Eugene Levitt, a psychiatrist at Indiana University-Purdue University Medical Center in Indianapolis came on board. The understanding was that Levitt would only spend about 10% of his time on the project.

In the fall of 1970, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, on contract with Klassen and the Kinsey Institute, asked 3018 men and women what they thought about various sexual practices, many of which were labeled at that time "deviant," including homosexual behavior. The survey was divided into two parts. In the first, the subject was asked during a face-to-face interview about attitudes toward sex. In the second part, the subject was given a 12-page questionnaire to be answered in private and handed back in a sealed envelope. These were inquiries of a highly personal nature: What age was the subject when he first had sex with someone of the same gender? How many partners did he have? How often did he have sex? What



**Klassen and Williams.** Or Williams and Klassen? That was the question which held up release of the Kinsey data for the past 8 years



**In the middle.** June Reinisch of the Kinsey Institute inherited the authorship squabble.

were his feelings about sex? A sizable number of people refused to answer some of these questions.

After the data were collected, nothing happened very fast. Klassen describes himself as "meticulous." Levitt says that Klassen "polishes and polishes." A social scientist familiar with the dispute says, "Klassen was not just slow. He was incredibly slow."

"The scientific community understands that you can hold onto your data for a year or two," says Baldwin. This is not unusual. During this grace period, researchers play with their numbers and prepare their papers for publication. They also use the survey results to apply for new research grants, a nontrivial exercise. But at some point, Baldwin says, a computer tape that holds the data should be released, placed in an archive, and made accessible at cost to anyone who wants to work with it.

The 1970 Kinsey data have never been freely shared. Only the principal investigators and a handful of outsiders have ever seen them. Funding for the grant—which eventually totaled \$350,000, according to Klassen—ran out in April 1973. By that time, no papers had been published. And when the grant expired, Klassen left the Kinsey Institute and supported himself with part-time teaching jobs.

Paul Gebhard, then director of the Kinsey Institute, thought that Klassen was not moving fast enough. "He had trouble trusting my competence," says Klassen. According to Levitt, there was also pressure on the Kinsey Institute from the funding agency to publish the data. So in 1975, Gebhard brought in Colin Williams, a young sociolo-

gist at the Kinsey Institute, to help Klassen produce a manuscript. "Klassen knew the data backwards and forwards," says Williams. "My job was to write it up." Williams spent the next 5 years of his life doing just that. The three authors finally pounded out a manuscript which was circulated among publishers in 1979. Williams says the two principal authors worked well together.

But in 1980, Klassen and Levitt were informed by Gebhard that Williams would be the senior author. This was news to Klassen and Levitt. "It was totally unjustified," says Levitt. Klassen and Levitt refused to yield. So did Williams. "I figured I wrote it and I ought to be first author," says Williams.

Matters were complicated by turmoil at the Kinsey Institute, which was unrelated to the authorship huff. A new board of trustees was installed, Gebhard retired, and June Reinisch was appointed director. Williams went on to a job at Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis, while Klassen went north to become a senior research associate at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. Says Levitt: "The whole matter fell into a crack. . . . Nobody did anything." Klassen says that he and Williams have not spoken since 1980.

About 1 year ago, Turner of the National Academy of Sciences and Tom W. Smith, the director of the general social survey at NORC, were discussing ways to model the spread of AIDS, the deadliest of the sexually transmitted diseases. "I mentioned that we did a random sample in 1970 for the Kinsey people," says Smith. Turner's interest was piqued. He tracked down Klassen in North Dakota. "He asked me why I hadn't published," says Klassen. "He told me the data were so important that they should be published." An agreement of sorts was eventually reached between the three investigators. "It was resolved. I simply told June she could do whatever she wants to do," says Williams. Klassen says that Reinisch has reinstated him as senior author. The Kinsey Institute is currently shopping around for someone to publish its 8-year-old manuscript.

However, the matter is not completely resolved. Neither Klassen, nor Turner, nor NORC owns the data. The Kinsey Institute does. Robert Michael, director of NORC, says that he was instructed by the Kinsey Institute not to give Turner a copy of the data tape. Because NORC refuses to collect proprietary data, it stipulated in its 1970 contract with the Kinsey Institute and Indiana University that they "shall make available to qualified scholars all data based on the completed questionnaires no later than 5 years after the survey is completed." Michael

says he expects Kinsey to comply. If a curious researcher calls the NORC today and asks about the 1970 Kinsey data, he is read a brief statement and given the address of the Kinsey Institute. Michael described the situation as "quite unusual."

Reinisch says that the Kinsey Institute will now provide the data to "qualified scientists who send a letter and a vita." But the qualified scientist must also agree to show the Kinsey Institute what he has written before it is published. So far, Turner is the only outside researcher who has a copy of the tape, according to Reinisch, and his use of the data is restricted.

There may be more information about sexual behavior on the horizon, but it will be at least 2 years in coming. The National Institute on Child Health and Human Development has contracted with NORC to study the feasibility of doing another large, national survey of sexual behavior. This one would be far more ambitious than the 1970 Kinsey study, with as many as 25,000 subjects interviewed at a cost of more than \$15 million.

Good surveys on sex are extremely difficult to do. Training interviewers is a costly and time-consuming effort. According to Bruce Voeller of the Mariposa Foundation in Topanga, California, interviewers must be articulate, sensitive, and intuitive. Details of sex with minors, family members, and animals must not phase them. "Even a raised eyebrow, an intonation of the voice, is enough to make the interview invalid," says Voeller. Kinsey himself reported that a good interviewer must add to his common sense and scientific prowess, "the skills of a patent medicine vendor and a Fuller Brush salesman."

Often repeated interviews are necessary. For example, David Bolling, a gynecologist in San Antonio, Texas, reports that about one-fourth of 526 women he interviewed engage in anal intercourse. But such information is obtained from most women only after repeated personal interviews and the development of strong trust in the interviewer, says Voeller. Researchers at NORC are investigating how the use of pictures, lap-top computers, and interviewers of the same gender, age, and race, might encourage people to give complete answers about their sexual behavior.

Can a scientifically valid study be done? "I think it can. I really hope so," says Gagnon of Princeton, who is consulting for the NORC on the feasibility study. "Kinsey interviewed thousands of people during his lifetime. He convinced them that it was worthwhile to talk to him. We ought to be able to at least do what Kinsey did." ■

**WILLIAM BOOTH**