

Kinsey Institute Director Sues Indiana University

The Kinsey Institute, a center for the study of sexual behavior created at Indiana University (IU) in 1947 by world-renowned sexologist Alfred Kinsey, seems to be heading for a major legal showdown 4 years after a controversial review of the institute failed to force June Reinisch, its director, to resign. Reinisch announced on 20 March that she will take the university to court to pry open the files containing backup documents for the review.

The trouble now coming to a head began in 1988 when university officials asked Reinisch to resign following what was initially intended to be a routine review of the center. The review committee expressed concern about the quality of research conducted under her then 6-year tenure. What is more, the head of the review committee says, Reinisch had failed in her mandate to shift the institute from a sociological orientation to a biological one in sexuality research. Reinisch told *Science* that the review also included allegations of financial mismanagement and tales of her mistreatment of staff members, allegations she describes as "relatively trivial and totally undocumented." The 1988 review prompted Morton Lowengrub, then dean of research at IU, which provides the major funding for the Kinsey Institute, to write Reinisch a letter formally asking for her resignation.

Vote of confidence. But Reinisch refused to resign and was backed by the institute's own board of trustees, the only body with the authority to fire the director. The trustees' vote of confidence did not settle the matter, however, because the ensuing standoff between the university and the institute seems to have created problems for Reinisch and her staff. In her lawsuit, Reinisch cites a number of incidents she believes resulted from the controversial review: The university deprived the institute of needed librarians, and it cut annual salary increases for her staff by 50% and significantly reduced hers. And since the review, four separate audits—one by the federal government, two by the university, and one by an independent accounting firm—have looked at either the institute or Reinisch herself.

And now, as the institute comes up for its periodic review again, Reinisch is apparently worried that history will repeat itself and has

thus fired off a preemptive lawsuit: She is suing the university to compel it to divulge all the information on which it based its 1988 request for her resignation. During the last review process, Reinisch says she became the target of anonymous letters charging her with financial and other improprieties—and she says she needs to see all that material in order to dispel the allegations against her. When she gets to court, Reinisch intends to argue that the 1988 review was conducted in "blatant violation" of university procedures, that the committee has never allowed her to see

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documentation to back up its allegations, and that it failed to respond to material she provided—a 100-page rebuttal, accompanied by 100 pages of documentation—to refute the charges. "There was no due process at all," says Reinisch. "They told me I had no right to see any of the evidence." She says she only discovered last December that she had that right by state law. For their part, university officials refused to comment on the lawsuit. But despite the uproar in 1988 and now, they have not withdrawn their request for Reinisch's resignation.

Why has this feud continued and turned so bitter? Several people familiar with the institute told *Science*, on promise of anonymity, that they believe two factors behind the tussle are the unhappiness of longtime Kinsey employees resentful of Reinisch's aggressive—some say abrasive—management style, and the politically volatile nature of sex research. For her part, Reinisch doesn't challenge this notion: "There are all kinds of forces out there who would like to see the institute back as quiet as it was in 1980," she says.

But she does hotly contest the views of biologist Rollin Richmond, now at the University of South Florida, who headed the 1988 review committee. Richmond says the conduct of the review was "fair and straightforward" and "consistent with academic

traditions." What's more, he says, it is important to remember the reasons why Reinisch was hired back in 1982. In the eyes of many sex researchers, the institute had gone downhill since Kinsey's death in 1956 and needed rejuvenation. As part of such a process, a primary objective of the search committee that selected Reinisch was to move the institute's research away from its sociological orientation to one that would be more biological in nature.

Suspect surveys? That failed to happen when Reinisch took over, says Richmond: "My personal feeling is that the published research from the institute did not assume a significant shift towards biomedical investigations of human sexuality." Richmond also claims that the sociological work conducted under Reinisch's leadership was not first-rate. "The quality and quantity simply wasn't good enough," he says. Richmond cites two specific

studies—one a campus-wide survey on sexual behavior and the other a survey taken of lesbians at a women's meeting—that were suspect and controversial in his eyes.

Reinisch dismisses these pointed criticisms, saying that her own research has brought in funds of more than \$3 million directed toward more biomedical research. In her eyes, Richmond and the review panel came in with preconceived notions and "really spent very little time evaluating or discussing what we did." Reinisch also expressed exasperation that the review panel did not understand the amount of time and effort necessary to evaluate and prepare data responsibly on human sexuality for publication. Referring to Richmond's research on the fruit fly, she says, "It's not going to frighten or concern millions of Americans. Our research [on human sexuality] can have that effect." And of the two studies Richmond specifically mentioned, Reinisch defends both of them strongly as vital and well-done work about AIDS and sexual behavior.

As the battle between Reinisch and Indiana enters the courts, it appears the one clear loser is the Kinsey Institute, which has suffered a tidal wave of negative publicity. Says Richmond: "In this whole dispute what is getting lost is the importance of the Kinsey Institute.... The reputation of the institute as well as its role in the study of human sexuality is at stake." Calling his statement "incredibly ironic," Reinisch counters: "The people who have done the most to damage the institute have been the review committee and Indiana." Of course, that's a matter of opinion—and now, at least in part, of judicial opinion.

—Constance Holden

With reporting by John Travis