



1 X 90 International

KINSEY

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AMERICAN EXPERIENCE presents *Kinsey*, a 90-minute biography of a scientist whose repressed childhood, personal struggles, and obsessive nature propelled him to break through the silence on human sexuality, and conduct the first full-scale study of the sexual behavior of Americans.

Born into a repressive family, Kinsey defied his father by leaving his New Jersey home to study biology at Bowdoin and Harvard. Following a brilliant academic career, he took a post as a professor of entomology at Indiana University in Bloomington. There, Kinsey began to refine Darwin's theory of natural variation by studying a tiny flightless insect, the gall wasp. Decades of studying the insect revealed to Kinsey that no two specimens were the same—that infinite, subtle differences existed in every living creature. This theory would inform his later research on sexuality.

It was at IU that the twenty-seven-year-old Kinsey met and married Clara McMillen, a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate student. But it was months before Alfred and Clara finally realized that a physiological problem had prevented them from consummating their marriage. Frustrated, Kinsey sought answers about sexuality in available research, but was astounded to find that no reliable information existed. He took it upon himself to fill the gap in knowledge, and, in turn, share it with IU students by offering a marriage class.

What Kinsey learned through his research and interviews with students was that, like gall wasps, people's sexuality seemed to defy neat categories. Wanting to reveal the vast variety in human sexuality, Kinsey envisioned a major national study and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, established the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University. Together with a team of researchers, Kinsey traveled to small towns and large cities, conducting thousands of interviews at sewing circles, bowling alleys, gay bars, fraternities, teachers' conferences, and prisons.

Kinsey's research, however, was not limited to interviews. In time, he came to believe that personal experience was the only way to understand the full range of sexual activity brought to light by his growing data. Kinsey encouraged his team to follow his lead and experiment in a range of sexual relationships outside their marriages.

But Kinsey's insatiable desire to collect more and more information proved to be his downfall. After a careful review, the Rockefeller Foundation, which had long funded his research, found Kinsey's methods flawed and pulled its support. Facing shifting social mores in the 1950s, Kinsey was unable to secure another source of funding. Despite the success of his two groundbreaking books, Kinsey feared that if he didn't press on in his research, his work would be forgotten. He died in 1956 at age 62, a broken man who would never witness the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

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AMERICAN EXPERIENCE™

CREDITS

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