



Sex the Measure of All Things: A Life of Alfred C. Kinsey

Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy

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A balanced, moving, humane portrait of one of this century's great researchers and social reformers.

"America produced Alfred Kinsey, but he's big enough to go around." —Elaine Showalter, *Times Literary Supplement*

"A deeply humane book...This biography's vivid portrait of a genius possessed is so compelling that you end up caring more about the man than the science. Kinsey is one of the most fascinating and influential figures of the century, a flawed visionary whose brave and amusing experiences are a testament to the rich complexity of human sexuality...With grace and wit Gathorne-Hardy has given us the full measure of the man." —Michael Shelden, *Daily Telegraph*

"At exactly the right moment, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy has produced a serious study of Kinsey, of the man and the work...This is the book we needed to cap Kinsey's work of liberation at this century's end. —Gore Vidal

For Gathorne-Hardy, Kinsey is primarily an artist, a collector, a novelist, a mythologist. He is a pioneer of modernism, along with Lawrence, Henry Miller and Picasso, and a philosopher of sexuality, along with Foucault. These may sound like strange bedfellows for the son of a strict Methodist family, growing up in small-town America. But in making Kinsey part of a global twentieth-century culture, Gathorne-Hardy opens the way for other scholars and critics to read the life and the work from a variety of intellectual and national perspectives.

Alfred Kinsey was this century's first scientifically reputable and most influential researcher into sex. His *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (The Kinsey Report), published in 1948, was an explosive bestseller, followed in 1953 by his even more radical statistics on female sexuality — both based on over 18,000 case histories. But Kinsey's exploration went much further than that. Bisexual, he experimented with many of the behaviors he was hearing about; and his wife and close colleagues experimented too. He pioneered observation and filming of sexual activity, the findings anticipated, and confirmed by, Masters and Johnson thirty years later. The revolutionary nature of his views on female sexuality could not become current until the feminism of the 1970s and 80s. There have been suggestions that his bisexuality and his courageous personal exploration biased his research. In fact, the reverse is true—they partly explain why it was so successful and, in a field where only approximations are possible, more accurate than any since. Except where the culture has changed (with pre-marital sex, for example), all his major findings—including his figures on homosexuality—still stand up. As a result, his data (only 10% went into his two vast books) is still being actively mined today.

This fascinating biography describes Kinsey's strict Methodist upbringing, his love of minute observation which he applied first to academic entomology and then to human sexuality, and the obsessive work ethic that contributed to his death. Kinsey is perhaps even more controversial today than he was when his work

was first published. Other researchers and religious groups have attacked his work from different perspectives. The man himself has frequently been lost in all of the claims and counterclaims, attacks and defenses, as well as the efforts to make him conform to predetermined theories about his personality and behavior. Gathorne-Hardy's literate, humane work is the first major biography to give a balanced portrait of one of this century's pioneering researchers and social reformers. He has interviewed in depth surviving family members, close colleagues, friends, lovers. He reveals, in this subtle, often witty, penetrating study, not just a series of new revelations, but whole new aspects of this complex, difficult, contradictory, heroic, obsessive, and ultimately sympathetic man.

Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy is the author of *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* and *The Public School Phenomenon*. He has also written a biography of Gerald Brenan, *The Interior Castle*.

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