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Celebrating Masters & Johnson's *Human Sexual Response*: A Washington University Legacy in Limbo

Susan Ekberg Stiritz*
Susan Frelich Appleton**

*There are in our existence spots of time,
Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating Virtue . . .
. . . by which pleasure is enhanced.*¹

INTRODUCTION

Celebrating anniversaries reaffirms² what nineteenth-century poet William Wordsworth called “spots of time,”³ bonds between self and community that shape one’s life and create experiences that retain their capacity to enhance pleasure and meaning.⁴ Marking the nodal events of institutions, in particular, fosters awareness of shared history, strengthens institutional identity, and expands opportunities and ways for members to belong.⁵ It comes as no surprise, then, that

* Associate Professor of Practice & Chair, Specialization in Sexual Health & Education, the Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis.

** Lemma Barkeloo & Phoebe Couzins Professor of Law, Washington University in St. Louis.

1. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, Bk. XI (1805)*, in WILLIAM WORDSWORTH 565, 559–68 (Stephen Gill ed., 1984).

2. See, e.g., Brock Boekhout et al., *The Loss of Loved Ones: The Impact of Relationship Infidelity*, in LOSS AND TRAUMA: GENERAL AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIP PERSPECTIVES 358 (John H. Harvey & Eric D. Miller eds., 2000).

3. Wordsworth, *supra* note 1, at 565.

4. See Eugenia Bitsani, *Promoting Traditions of Multicultural Communities as a Tool for Social Cohesion in Trieste, Italy*, 148 PROCEDIA – SOC. & BEHAV. SCI. 412 (2014).

5. See, e.g., Erin York Cornwell & Linda J. Waite, *Social Disconnectedness, Perceived Isolation, and Health Among Older Adults*, 50 J. HEALTH & SOC. BEHAV. 31, 44 (2009) (examining “effects of social disconnectedness and perceived isolation on health and well-

human groups and their organizations would invest significant effort and resources in promoting creation of salient stories and devising occasions for celebrating them.

And institutions do—but often in ways tailored to protect established hierarchies of power and privilege. Stories that might challenge or disrupt the carefully constructed institutional “brand” or that might prompt uncomfortable conversations receive no celebration and then gradually fade from the collective memory, taking with them into oblivion possibilities for future generative investments.

In this Essay, we contribute to the School of Law’s 150th anniversary by doing our part to revive a lost Washington University story, expanding institutional and cultural consciousness. We focus here on our efforts to bring about official recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Human Sexual Response* by world-renowned sex researchers and therapists William Masters and Virginia Johnson,⁶ who did much of their early work at Washington University.⁷ In our eight years of collaboration on scholarship and teaching about the regulation of sexualities⁸ and on related advocacy projects, we have often noted with dismay the erasure from our

being”); Judith V. Jordan, *Relational Awareness: Transforming Disconnection*, in *THE COMPLEXITY OF CONNECTION: WRITINGS FROM THE STONE CENTER’S JEAN BAKER MILLER TRAINING INSTITUTE* 47, 47 (Judith V. Jordan et al. eds., 2004) (suggesting that “people gain a central sense of meaning, well-being, and worth through engagement in growth-enhancing relationships . . . [and] that an active interest in being connected and movement toward increasing connection are at the core of human development”); Tyler J. VanderWeele et al., *On the Reciprocal Association Between Loneliness and Subjective Well-being*, 176 *AM. J. EPIDEMIOLOGY* 777, 778 (2012) (“examining the effects of subjective well-being on loneliness and of loneliness on subjective well-being”).

6. WILLIAM H. MASTERS & VIRGINIA E. JOHNSON, *HUMAN SEXUAL RESPONSE* (1966) [hereinafter *MASTERS & JOHNSON I*].

7. See THOMAS MAIER, *MASTERS OF SEX: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM MASTERS AND VIRGINIA JOHNSON, THE COUPLE WHO TAUGHT AMERICA HOW TO LOVE* 66–140 (2009).

8. See, e.g., Susan Frelich Appleton & Susan Ekberg Stiritz, *The Joy of Sex Bureaucracy*, 7 *CALIF. L. REV. ONLINE* 49 (2016) [hereinafter *Stiritz & Appleton I*]; Susan Ekberg Stiritz & Susan Frelich Appleton, *Sex Therapy in the Age of Viagra: “Money Can’t Buy Me Love,”* 35 *WASH. U. J.L. & POL’Y* 363 (2011) [hereinafter *Stiritz & Appleton II*]. See generally Susan Frelich Appleton & Susan Ekberg Stiritz, *Going Wild: Law and Literature and Sex*, 66 *STUD. L., POL., & SOC.* 66 (2016) [hereinafter *Stiritz & Appleton III*] (describing co-taught course, *Regulating Sex: Historical and Cultural Encounters*, taken by law students and students in other disciplines, including social work and women, gender, and sexuality studies).

University's history of Masters and Johnson's accomplishments.⁹ Today, we can contrast this longstanding institutional neglect not only with Indiana University's tribute to its own famous sex researcher, Alfred Kinsey, through the continued operation of the Kinsey Institute,¹⁰ but also with the entertainment industry's claim to the Masters and Johnson legacy through its successful Showtime television series *Masters of Sex*, which ran for four seasons until 2016.¹¹ This special anniversary volume of *The Journal of Law and Policy*, which exemplifies the use of celebration to strengthen social connection, provides an opportunity for us to reclaim the legacy on behalf of Washington University and to include the 1966 publication of *Human Sexual Response* among the events deemed worthy of official recognition and future institutional investment.

The story of *Human Sexual Response*—as it happened at Washington University and as it has been portrayed on television—raises questions of gender, sexuality, taboo, human research ethics, scientific method, academic freedom, and complicated personal and professional relationships. This Essay considers these questions as well as what the story of *Human Sexual Response* teaches us about opportunities, perils, and possibilities for continuing progress in sexuality studies. We note, on the one hand, how the *Masters of Sex* series seems to trivialize a significant chapter in Washington University's history and the history of sex research. On the other hand, we acknowledge how the television series saved the Masters and Johnson legacy from near-fatal neglect. Accordingly, with an eye on the future, we examine the relationship between the narrative portrayed on the screen and the literal truth that inspired it, evaluating both what we have lost and what we have gained from having television tell (and partly fictionalize) this story.

9. See Stiritz & Appleton II, *supra* note 8, at 369. Neither of the two volumes on the history of Washington University has an index entry for these researchers. See RALPH E. MORROW, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS: A HISTORY (1996); CANDACE O'CONNOR, BEGINNING A GREAT WORK: WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS, 1853–2003 (2003).

10. See KINSEY INST., <https://www.kinseyinstitute.org/> (last visited Dec. 29, 2016).

11. *Masters of Sex*, SHOWTIME, <http://www.sho.com/masters-of-sex> (last visited Dec. 29, 2016). See Nellie Andreeva, "Masters of Sex" to End: No Season 5 for Showtime Drama Series, DEADLINE HOLLYWOOD (Nov. 30, 2016, 10:21 AM), <http://deadline.com/2016/11/masters-of-sex-canceled-showtime-four-seasons-1201861753/>.

I. HUMAN SEXUAL RESPONSE

The published results of William Masters and Virginia Johnson's data on the physiological responses of human subjects engaged in sexual activity proved paradigm-shifting in several ways. First, *Human Sexual Response* rejected sex exceptionalism—the idea that sex and sexualities are inherently different from all other human activities and topics of study.¹² By making sex a subject of scientific investigation, including clinical observation, Masters and Johnson's first book went beyond Alfred Kinsey's publication of collected survey replies on sexual practices and interests.¹³ In doing so, *Human Sexual Response* propelled sex from the realm of taboo to the realm of personal health and wellbeing and recognized its vital role for individuals and couples.¹⁴

Second, this book established new narratives of sexuality, for example, validating masturbation as normative sexual behavior for both females and males,¹⁵ affirming elderly sex as part of positive human development,¹⁶ and challenging psychoanalytic assumptions that the sexual subject is an autonomous individual rather than part of a relational partnership. Masters and Johnson included a number of “family units” in their research¹⁷ and introduced a new relational understanding of sex focused on the couple and based on

12. As Jennifer Rothman has explained, the term “sex exceptionalism” refers to the way our culture, including law, treats “sex differently from other activities.” Jennifer E. Rothman, *Sex Exceptionalism in Intellectual Property*, 23 STAN. L. & POL'Y REV. 119, 120 (2012). She continues: “This sex exceptionalism often exhibits a negative view of sex that either dismisses the value of sex or, worse yet, treats it as something harmful.” *Id.* For other references to the term, see, for example, Elizabeth F. Emens, *Compulsory Sexuality*, 66 STAN. L. REV. 303, 356 (2014); Margo Kaplan, *Sex-Positive Law*, 89 N.Y.U. L. REV. 89, 110 (2014).

13. MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 95–102, 256. See ALFRED C. KINSEY ET AL., SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE HUMAN MALE (1948); ALFRED C. KINSEY ET AL., SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE HUMAN FEMALE (1953).

14. See MASTERS & JOHNSON I, *supra* note 6, at 3–4 (contrasting this study with Kinsey's work and explaining that this research can provide a foundation for treatment of sexual inadequacy).

15. *See id.* at 63–65, 197–200.

16. *See id.* at 221–70 (chapters on “geriatric sexual response”).

17. *See id.* at 14, 305–07. *See also id.* at vi (accepting view that “the greatest single cause for family-unit destruction and divorce in this country is a fundamental sexual inadequacy within the marital unit”).

interdependent dynamics that became even more consequential when they turned their attention to sex therapy.¹⁸

Finally, and perhaps most famously, *Human Sexual Response* played a major role in giving voice to women's own understandings and experiences of their sexuality. In exposing what Masters and Johnson called "phallic fallacies,"¹⁹ the book reversed the gendered hierarchy of sexual power. Its reported research identified the clitoris as the agent of women's orgasmic pleasure, reducing the role of the thrusting penis.²⁰ Masters and Johnson debunked the Freudian dogma of the vaginal orgasm as a myth discouraging female sexual pleasure and, in turn, inspired other feminist explorations of the issue.²¹ And, contrary to the prevailing portrayal of relative sexual capacities of (white) males and females, *Human Sexual Response* put women on top, documenting their multiorgasmic potential, a capacity not found in men.²²

Human Sexual Response's challenge to psychoanalysis and its report of the discovery of female sexual preeminence not surprisingly generated controversy. Nonetheless, the researchers' transgressive work found support in the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, a cultural shift that they in fact helped to fuel.

Human Sexual Response also provided a foundation for the partnership's subsequent accomplishments. Masters and Johnson went on to publish *Human Sexual Inadequacy* in 1970,²³ founded the sex therapy profession in America,²⁴ and coined the term "sexual

18. This contribution underlies their development of dual or conjoint sex therapy and couple-centered treatment, presented in the pair's second book. See generally WILLIAM H. MASTERS & VIRGINIA E. JOHNSON, *HUMAN SEXUAL INADEQUACY* (1970) [hereinafter MASTERS & JOHNSON II].

19. MASTERS & JOHNSON I, *supra* note 6, at v (quoting Dickinson). See *id.* at vi.

20. See *id.* at 66–67.

21. See, e.g., SHERE HITE, *THE HITE REPORT: A NATIONWIDE STUDY ON FEMALE SEXUALITY* (1976); Anne Koedt, *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*, in *RADICAL FEMINISM: A DOCUMENTARY READER* 371 (Barbara A. Crow ed., 2000); Susan Ekberg Stiritz, *Cultural Cliteracy: Exposing the Contexts of Women's Not Coming*, 23 *BERKELEY J. GENDER L. & JUST.* 243 (2008); Nancy Tuana, *Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance*, 19 *HYPATIA* 194, 195 (2004).

22. See MASTERS & JOHNSON I, *supra* note 6, at 283–84.

23. MASTERS & JOHNSON II, *supra* note 18.

24. Their ideas about and techniques for therapeutic interventions landed them on the cover of *Time Magazine*, May 25, 1970. MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 211.

dysfunction.”²⁵ As we have theorized before, their far-reaching influence might even explain the current popularity of Viagra and other erectile-dysfunction drugs, despite the very different interventions they had pioneered.²⁶

II. THE LOST LEGACY

Although this pair of transformational researchers began their work together at Washington University’s School of Medicine in 1957,²⁷ neither of the University’s official history books mentions them or their accomplishments.²⁸ So suppressed was the story that these revolutionary scientists received no recognition as part of the Missouri History Museum’s yearlong public exhibit in 2014 of significant contributions in our city’s 250-year history.²⁹

Fortunately, journalist Thomas Maier filled the gap when, in 2009, he published *Masters of Sex: The Life and Times of William Masters and Virginia Johnson, the Couple Who Taught America How to Love*.³⁰ Seeking to launch his book with a talk at Washington University, however, he could not prompt a response, much less an invitation, from the University.³¹ Similarly, after the publication of

25. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 178–79.

26. See Stiritz & Appleton II, *supra* note 8, at 366.

27. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 87–88.

28. See MORROW, *supra* note 9; O’CONNOR, *supra* note 9.

29. *250 in 250: A Yearlong Exhibit Commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of St. Louis*, MO. HIST. MUSEUM, <http://www.mohistory.org/node/8725>. See Email from Andrew Wanko, Public Historian, Missouri History Museum, to Susan Stiritz (Jan. 30, 2017, 1:06 PM CST). But the pair does have a “star” on the St. Louis Walk of Fame on Delmar Boulevard. See JOE EDWARDS, ST. LOUIS WALK OF FAME: 140 GREAT ST. LOUISANS 121 (2013).

30. MAIER, *supra* note 7.

31. When one of us invited Thomas Maier to visit a class at Washington University in Fall 2009 to discuss his book, *supra* note 7, he sent the following reply:

Hi Susan,

Where were you when I needed you? I tried several speaking venues at Washington University last spring before the book came out, but with no luck. Many friends of Masters and Johnson suggested that WU had an animus towards them and their work, witness the absence of any official recognition of them by the university. When I was in St. Louis in May, I wound up going to Left Bank Books instead of Wash U. . . . I’m delighted by your invitation and I appreciate your interest in “Masters of Sex”. . . .

Maier's book, which highlighted the significance of Virginia Johnson's contributions, efforts by interested faculty members and their students to persuade the University to award her an honorary degree went nowhere.³² Indeed, upon Johnson's death, the University failed to offer words of remembrance, even when prompted to do so.³³ In the meantime, we have attempted to correct such omissions by including material on Masters and Johnson in our co-taught course³⁴ and writing about them in some of our scholarly publications.³⁵

One would think the University would proudly claim and celebrate its connection to stunning achievements in any field. We do not know for certain why Washington University instead abandoned the legacy of Masters and Johnson. Of course, the subject matter itself, sex, provides one tempting explanation, as the sexual revolution gave way to more conservative "family values" campaigns³⁶ and as universities everywhere began to direct their energies to fundraising and external rankings.³⁷ Such pursuits discourage projects that could invite controversy. Indeed, Masters and Johnson's own complicated relationship—including what we would see today as quid pro quo sexual harassment³⁸ as well as their

All the best,

Thomas Maier

Email from Thomas Maier to Susan Stiritz (Aug. 4, 2009, 10:06 PM EDT) (on file with authors).

32. Recollections of Susan Stiritz.

33. Email from Susan Stiritz to Mark Wrighton, Chancellor, Wash. Univ. in St. Louis (July 25, 2013, 12:08 PM CDT) (on file with authors).

34. For example, we have assigned to our students our article on sex therapy, which tells the story of Masters and Johnson. Stiritz & Appleton I, *supra* note 8. See Appleton & Stiritz, *Going Wild*, *supra* note 8, at 54. We have also shown a film about the researchers and their achievements, *Biography: Masters and Johnson: The Science of Sex* (1996), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0401129/>.

35. Stiritz & Appleton I, II & III, *supra* note 8.

36. See ROBERT O. SELF, ALL IN THE FAMILY: THE REALIGNMENT OF DEMOCRACY SINCE THE 1960S 399 (2012).

37. See, e.g., DAVID L. KIRP, SHAKESPEARE, EINSTEIN, AND THE BOTTOM LINE: THE MARKETING OF HIGHER EDUCATION (2004).

38. See Stiritz & Appleton II, *supra* note 8, at 380 n.93 (explaining the basis for this inference).

eventual marriage and subsequent divorce³⁹—challenged scientific and professional boundaries, making their work on a controversial topic even more controversial. Equally important, Virginia Johnson's indispensable contributions to the team's accomplishments, documented by Maier, and her well-deserved equal billing in their publications represented a direct affront to the academic hierarchy, given that she had never earned even a bachelor's degree.⁴⁰

If these factors help explain Washington University's neglect of the Masters and Johnson legacy, they probably also suggest why pop culture saw an opportunity worth seizing. Their story brings together all the major elements of human drama—sex, power, and transgression.

III. *MASTERS OF SEX*, TELEVISED

From 2013 through 2016, the Showtime cable network glamorized the story of Masters and Johnson in *Masters of Sex*, which features appealing Emmy-award nominated actors⁴¹ as well as sets and clothing recapturing the tastes of the times. It revels in the physicality of the research presented in *Human Sexual Response*, with frontal nudity and light pornography, and it develops rich plot lines that situate this professional work in the context of messy personal, familial, and varied sexual relationships. The writers concocted an inviting mix of fact and fiction avidly followed by over two million viewers.⁴²

A. Factual Elements: Building Blocks of the Legacy

Much rings true in *Masters of Sex*, if we use Maier's biography as our reference point. We learn in Season One that William (Bill) Masters struggles with burdens from a difficult—even brutal—childhood that pervade both his professional and personal life.⁴³

39. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 235–38, 338.

40. See *id.* at 215.

41. See *Masters of Sex*, EMMYS, <http://www.emmys.com/shows/masters-sex> (last visited Nov. 14, 2016).

42. The episodes of Season 4 averaged 2.16 million viewers. Andreeva, *supra* note 11.

43. We learn of the physical abuse that Masters endured as a child. See Gwen Ihnat,

Michael Sheen's convincing portrayal gives us a character with significant deficits in the ability to feel empathy and who, in turn, evokes little empathy himself. By contrast—just as described by Maier—Virginia Johnson, luminously played by Lizzy Caplan, comes across as engaging, even beguiling, with an intuitive understanding of how to forge personal relationships and an appreciation of sex as a valuable, though not exceptional, aspect of humanity—and certainly not a source of shame.

Signal aspects of the history, although embellished, vividly unfold on screen. For example, we see Masters's reliance on sex workers in the initial phase of the research,⁴⁴ and one of them, the wisecracking (and fictional) Betty, assumes an ongoing role in the show.⁴⁵ The assault on Sigmund Freud's glorification of the vaginal orgasm plays out dramatically, with the opening salvo occurring during a lecture by his psychoanalyst daughter Anna Freud, who represents the conventional wisdom.⁴⁶ The same episode includes an encounter by Libby Masters (Bill's wife) in a Florida hotel with an elderly but very sexually active couple⁴⁷—likely an allusion to the portion of *Human Sexual Response* devoted to “geriatric sexual response.”⁴⁸ In addition, consistent with Maier's account, we see Masters's presentation of his research to his Washington University colleagues evoke condemnation and ridicule, ultimately resulting in the pair's departure from that institution.⁴⁹

Most important, the series accurately (based on Maier's book) honors Virginia Johnson's immense if unlikely role, presenting as

Masters of Sex: “Fight,” A.V. CLUB (July 27, 2014, 10:00 PM), <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/masters-sex-fight-207165> (reviewing Episode 3 of Season Two).

44. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 76–83.

45. Annaleigh Ashford plays Betty DiMello. See *Masters of Sex*, SHOWTIME, <http://www.sho.com/masters-of-sex/cast/betty-dimello> (last visited Jan. 3, 2017).

46. See David Sims, *Masters of Sex*: “Brave New World,” A.V. CLUB (Nov. 3, 2013, 10:00 PM), <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/masters-of-sex-brave-new-world-104412> (reviewing Episode 6 of Season One).

47. See *id.*

48. See *supra* note 16 and accompanying text.

49. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 136–40; Jonathan Adler, *Masters of Sex Season Finale Review: “Manhigh” (Season 1, Episode 12)*, WE GOT THIS COVERED, <http://wegotthiscovered.com/tv/masters-of-sex-season-finale-review-manhigh/> (reviewing Season One, Episode 12) (last visited Feb. 26, 2017).

indispensable her participation in the “study” and later the therapy. Her winning ways, her ability to anticipate the concerns and needs of the research subjects and then patients, and her commitment to the scientific enterprise all stand out in Caplan’s representation of Johnson’s essential contributions to the work. Caplan also brings to life Johnson’s challenges as a single working mother, including her often competing attachments to her children and her projects with Masters.⁵⁰ We witness not only her drive and resourcefulness but also the personal costs she bore.

B. Taking Liberties with the Story: Distorted Heritage

Of course, the television series departs in several important ways from what we would expect in a scholarly analysis or historical treatment. Relying on a television series to preserve the legacy of Masters and Johnson and their work has come with significant losses, including the conspicuous examples that we examine below.

The Showtime version of the story completely obliterates the heroic role of Washington University’s Chancellor Ethan Shepley and his commitment to academic freedom. From the beginning, Shepley supported Masters’s proposed sex research, regardless of the controversy it might have engendered, and took action to fend off possible complaints by the St. Louis Police Department, the St. Louis Archdiocese, and the Washington University Board of Trustees.⁵¹ According to the television series, however, a fabricated tale of blackmail allows Masters to launch the study at Washington University. In this version, Masters obtains initial approval because he threatens to disclose that his fictional superior, Provost Barton Scully, is gay.⁵² When Provost Scully then chooses electro-shock

50. Indeed, in the series Johnson must overcome obstacles even beyond those she confronted in life. For example, in Season Three of *Masters of Sex*, Virginia has a fictional third child soon after the publication of *Human Sexual Response*. See Gwen Ihnat, *Masters of Sex: “Three’s a Crowd,”* TV CLUB (July 19, 2015, 10:00 PM), <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/masters-sex-threes-crowd-221902>.

51. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 66–78.

52. See Bonnie Stienberg, *Masters of Sex Review: “Standard Deviation”* (Episode 1.03), PASTE (Oct. 14, 2013, 1:00 PM), <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2013/10/masters-of-sex-review-standard-deviation-episode-1.html> (reviewing Season One, Episode 3).

therapy in an effort to rid himself of his “perversion,”⁵³ Masters tries to dissuade him from what we now know as much-repudiated “conversion therapy”⁵⁴—an ironic touch, given Masters and Johnson’s highly criticized third book suggesting that their therapeutic interventions could alter sexual orientation.⁵⁵ A prominent person’s struggle with his sexuality and efforts to stay in the closet⁵⁶ might well provide more dramatic fare than the pursuit of knowledge and respect for scientific discovery, but all those who become acquainted with Masters and Johnson’s work through the television series will never learn of Shepley’s courageous and pivotal role. On this point, Washington University could have done better than the entertainment industry: illuminating Shepley’s modeling of academic values.

The television series converts a history of institutional integrity to sleazy and self-serving fictions. In Season Four, it also suggests that Masters and Johnson saw their therapeutic techniques as proprietary business assets, to be jealously guarded against competition.⁵⁷ In reality, Masters and Johnson ran a full-time training program for sex therapists and envisioned sharing with others what they learned in hopes of eradicating sexual dysfunction.⁵⁸

Finally, the series papers over some important critiques that Masters and Johnson’s research has elicited on the merits, including

53. See Lily Rothman, *The Reality Behind That Literally Shocking Masters of Sex Scene*, TIME (July 14, 2014), <http://time.com/2981731/the-reality-behind-that-literally-shocking-masters-of-sex-scene/> (providing background for Scully’s resort to electroconvulsive therapy or ECT).

54. See, e.g., *Ferguson v. JONAH*, 136 A.3d 447 (N.J. Super. Ct. Law Div. 2014) (allowing suit for consumer fraud to proceed against organization promising to change clients’ sexual orientation); Erik Eckholm, *Gay ‘Conversion Therapy’ Faces Tests in Court*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 27, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/28/us/gay-conversion-therapy-faces-tests-in-courts.html>.

55. See generally WILLIAM H. MASTERS & VIRGINIA E. JOHNSON, *HOMOSEXUALITY IN PERSPECTIVE* (1979).

56. This fictional story line echoes Johnson’s relationship with Lee Zingale, a socially prominent member of the St. Louis community who accompanied her to social events and traveled with her after her divorce from Masters; Johnson knew that Zingale was gay and had another life. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 349–53.

57. See Amanda Steinmetz, *Masters of Sex Season 4 Episode 7 Review: In To Me You See*, TV FANATIC (Oct. 23, 2016, 11:11 PM), <http://www.tvfanatic.com/2016/10/masters-of-sex-season-4-episode-7-review-in-to-me-you-see/>.

58. See MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 206.

claims that they helped concoct the very results they purported to find. For example, evidence that Johnson excluded from the study inorgasmic women as well as those who did not orgasm during intercourse, but did orgasm with clitoral stimulation, and coached some female subjects to increase the likelihood of their achieving orgasm, if true, compromises the results of the research.⁵⁹ Critics have assailed the four-phase cycle presented in *Human Sexual Response* as a misleading contrivance and a not particularly original construct at that.⁶⁰ Indeed, despite the confluence of several of the findings with contemporary sex-positive feminist thought, the researchers' approach belied very traditional assumptions, found in their beliefs that their "discovery" of the clitoris would facilitate women's orgasms during vaginal penetration (thus narrowing the "orgasm gap" in heterosexual intercourse)⁶¹ and that a more accurate understanding of the physiology of sex would principally advance monogamous marriage.⁶²

C. Enhancing the Story: Poetic License

Some who worked with Masters and Johnson, specifically Robert Kolodny, M.D., eventually the Associate Director and Director of Training of the Masters and Johnson Institute, have condemned the Showtime series because of its historical inaccuracies. As Kolodny has observed, "It would be a shame for young students in the field to believe that the Showtime series has any factual basis whatsoever

59. LEONORE TIEFER, *SEX IS NOT A NATURAL ACT AND OTHER ESSAYS* 43–44 (2d ed. 2004).

60. *Id.* at 41–58 (presenting "historical, scientific, clinical, and feminist criticisms" of Masters and Johnson's model of the human sexual response cycle).

61. On the gendered "orgasm gap," see, for example, MARCIA DOUGLASS & LISA DOUGLASS, *THE SEX YOU WANT: A LOVERS' GUIDE TO WOMEN'S SEXUAL PLEASURE* 1–38 (2002); ELISABETH A. LLOYD, *THE CASE OF THE FEMALE ORGASM: BIAS IN THE SCIENCE OF EVOLUTION* 21–43 (2005).

62. See, e.g., MASTERS & JOHNSON I, *supra* note 6, at 307 (describing one couple in the study who "stated categorically that they have found program cooperation of significant importance in their marriage"). In particular the therapeutic techniques developed by Masters and Johnson attracted attention because they promised to curtail rising divorce rates. Thus, as Maier reports, *Time Magazine* entitled its 1970 cover story on the team "Repairing the Conjugal Bed." MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 211–12.

other than managing to get [Masters and Johnson] at the right medical school in the right city.”⁶³ In terms of literal truth, Kolodny makes a compelling point, but he overlooks how some of the historical inaccuracies convey significant contextual information, in turn providing a more nuanced representation of the zeitgeist and inviting a more capacious understanding of the cultural storms that Masters and Johnson had to navigate.⁶⁴

For example, although Masters and Johnson’s orbit largely brought them in contact principally with persons who, like themselves, were white,⁶⁵ the series highlights the racial divides that infected St. Louis at the time. Several of these plot lines feature Libby Masters, whose racial ambivalence begins as she variously gives birth at Buell-Green, a hospital reserved for African Americans; volunteers to work at the local office of the Congress of Racial Equality; and initiates a sexual relationship with one of her Black co-workers there.⁶⁶ In one particularly dramatic episode, Libby’s white privilege undermines her ability to empathize, and she treats atrociously her baby’s African-American nanny, Coral. Discovering her child has a lice infestation, Libby insists on scrubbing Coral’s head to delouse her, over Coral’s protestations. Not only does Coral not have lice but she also does not have the money to have her hair restyled after Libby ruins what was a recent coiffing.⁶⁷ This

63. Email from Robert C. Kolodny, M.D., to Susan Stiritz (Nov. 2, 2016, 9:36 AM EDT) (on file with authors).

64. See Gail Pennington, *The Facts, Fictions of ‘Masters of Sex,’* ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH (July 12, 2015), http://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/television/gail-pennington/the-facts-fictions-of-masters-of-sex/article_ef924652-2f3f-57bb-838a-a56f2c3b0add.html.

65. In discussing its research population, *Human Sexual Response* identifies some as “Negro family units.” MASTERS & JOHNSON I, *supra* note 6, at 14.

66. The relevant episodes occur at the end of Season One and in Season Two. See Molly Langmuir, *Masters of Sex Season 1 Finale Recap: Making It Rain*, VULTURE (Dec. 16, 2013, 8:45 AM), <http://www.vulture.com/2013/12/masters-of-sex-recap-season-1-finale.html>; Kate Phillips, “*Masters of Sex*” *Recap: Some Ties That Bind*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 21, 2014, 11:01 PM), <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/masters-of-sex-recap-libby-and-robert-are-finally-an-item/> (summarizing Season Two, Episode 11, with reference to previous episodes).

67. See Gwen Ihnat, *Masters of Sex: “Dirty Jobs,”* A.V. CLUB (Aug. 3, 2014, 10:00 PM), <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/masters-sex-dirty-jobs-207569> (reviewing Season Two, Episode 4).

presumably fictional interaction goes far in exposing unconscious ethnocentricities and racist conduct prevalent at the time.⁶⁸

Likewise, racially charged sparks fly when Masters—dismissed from both Washington University and then another hospital—takes a position at Buell-Green and seeks to include African Americans in the “study.” The head of the hospital refuses. According to *Masters of Sex* showrunner, Michelle Ashford, this turn of events was created to demonstrate awareness by African Americans themselves of the stereotype of Blacks as sexually voracious and to recognize their agency in rebutting the stereotype.⁶⁹ Indeed, this theme echoes in Libby’s liaison with her Black co-worker,⁷⁰ in which her appetite reveals the stereotype as a white projection. No doubt, this is all fiction, but it allows the audience to experience salient social cross-currents of the times.

Other unexpected twists serve a similar purpose. For example, Margaret Scully (the fictional Provost’s wife) finds herself in a polyamorous relationship after she leaves her gay husband,⁷¹ and a “swingers’ party”⁷² and a visit to a nudist camp⁷³ figure prominently in Season Four. In challenging mainstream norms, these devices help convey both the transgressive quality of Masters and Johnson’s

68. See Dee Lockett, *With Unrest in Ferguson, Masters of Sex Has Become Surprisingly Topical*, SLATE (Aug. 20, 2014, 11:14 AM), http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2014/08/20/masters_of_sex_and_ferguson_the_showtime_series_adds_historical_context.html (examining contemporary relevance of issues of race raised in series); David Sims, “*Masters of Sex*” Is Throwing Too Many Weighty Issues at the Wall and Not Enough Is Sticking, ATLANTIC (Aug. 18, 2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/08/masters-of-sex-is-throwing-too-many-weighty-issues-at-the-wall-and-not-enough-is-sticking/378718/> (criticizing series for “trying to grapple with all of the racial and sexual tensions of the ‘50s”).

69. Michelle Ashford, Statement at the Washington Univ. Assembly Series, *Sex in America, Then and Now: The Lasting Legacy of Masters and Johnson*, (Nov. 3, 2016), <https://wustl.box.com/s/mj41uajq8z69atfxdg2kboy74qwiga2v>.

70. See Phillips, *supra* note 66 (summarizing Season Two, Episode 11).

71. See Sean T. Collins, “*Masters of Sex*” 3×4 Recap: There’s No “I” in Threesome: Allison Janney and the Power of Polyamory, OBSERVER (Aug. 2, 2015, 11:00 PM), <http://observer.com/2015/08/masters-of-sex-3x4-recap-theres-no-i-in-threesome/> (summarizing Season Three, Episode 4).

72. See Amanda Steinmetz, *Masters of Sex Season 4 Episode 4 Review: Coats or Keys*, TV FANATIC (Oct. 3, 2016, 12:43 AM), <http://www.tvfanatic.com/2016/10/masters-of-sex-season-4-episode-4-review-coats-or-keys/>.

73. See Lauren Hoffman, *Masters of Sex Recap: Wherever We Tell You To*, VULTURE (Oct. 17, 2016, 10:12 AM) (summarizing “Family Only,” Season Four, Episode 6).

research and the spirit of the sexual-revolution era in which *Human Sexual Response* emerged.⁷⁴

The dramatization also offers practical benefits. While the *Masters of Sex* series irritates some current sex therapists for the license it takes with aspects of sex therapy, others welcome the series as a teaching tool. Sharing film clips with clients can helpfully normalize sexual dysfunctions, dissatisfactions, and treatments. Clients can learn to feel more comfortable with a sex therapist by watching scene after scene of fictional sex therapists working with fictional patients. Some contemporary therapists say they ask clients to watch particular episodes to see the origins of interventions still in use, such as “sensate focus,” shown in the last episode of Season Two.⁷⁵ Watching the series, therapists say, can also help clients integrate the biopsychosocial lessons they are learning in their treatment by discussing how they would handle a particular *Masters of Sex* case.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

On balance, the *Masters of Sex* series has gone far in crystalizing the “spot of time”⁷⁷ we want to celebrate. It not only temporarily revived a lost legacy but also expanded the public for whom the story could hold meaning. Without the television series, far fewer Americans today would know of the accomplishments of Masters and Johnson, would have developed interest in the fields that they helped create, or would have even attended an event we organized at Washington University to honor the fiftieth anniversary of *Human*

74. The Preface to *Human Sexual Response* laments the longstanding fear and prejudice responsible for ignorance about sex, in turn revealing the pathbreaking nature of this publication. MASTERS & JOHNSON I, *supra* note 6, at v-vii.

75. See Alan Seppinwall, *Season Finale Review: ‘Masters of Sex’—‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’: The New Frontier*, HITFIX (Sept. 28, 2014, 11:01 PM), <https://hitfix.com/whats-alan-watching/season-finale-review-masters-of-sex-the-revolution-will-not-be-televised-the-new-frontier> (reviewing Season Two, Episode 12, and referring to “non-sexual touching” exercises). On sensate focus, see MAIER, *supra* note 7, at 181; MASTERS & JOHNSON II, *supra* note 18, at 146–84.

76. Email from Heather Simonson to Susan Stiritz (Nov. 2, 2016, 8:07 AM EDT) (on file with authors).

77. See *supra* note 1 and accompanying text.

Sexual Response.⁷⁸ Moreover, through its fictions, the series conveyed a narrative truth that gave lie to facts in order to represent a more profound reality about sex, race, monogamy, gender, and cultural revolution than a more official University recognition or a peer-reviewed scholarly study probably could have delivered. This deeper reality exposed by the show, although centered on a distinctive place and era, evoked widely relevant contemporary issues and concerns as well.

What will happen next? The storyteller has the privilege of making such decisions. Although we felt disappointed to learn that *Masters of Sex* ended after Season Four,⁷⁹ we turn our attention back to Washington University. Might the one-time professional home of Masters and Johnson now pick up the thread and how might it do so? We appreciate the recent expressions of interest by our Provost, Holden Thorp, who we learned is a *Masters of Sex* fan. He has suggested an annual lecture in honor of Masters and Johnson's work at Washington University—an overdue but very gratifying start, in our opinion.⁸⁰

Our imaginations take us to even more ambitious possibilities, however. Suppose Washington University had, like Indiana University post-Kinsey, established the Masters and Johnson Institute, which then would have survived the death of its founding researchers. And, suppose Washington University had pursued sexology as a legitimate object of academic study, following up on Masters and Johnson's acclaimed success. This University might have become a leader in the field, inspiring other top institutions and research centers to develop in that direction. Now, only two universities in the United States offer PhDs in human sexuality.⁸¹ In

78. See *Assembly Series: Thomas Maier and Michelle Ashford*, WASH. U. RECORD (Oct. 31, 2016), <http://assemblyseries.wustl.edu/people/thomas-maier-and-michelle-ashford/> (announcing program entitled "Sex in America, Then and Now: The Lasting Legacy of Masters and Johnson" for November 3, 2016).

79. See Andreeva, *supra* note 11 (reporting cancellation of series).

80. Conversation of Holden Thorp, Provost, Wash. Univ. in St. Louis with Susan F. Appleton & Susan E. Stiritz (St. Louis, MO, Nov. 8, 2016).

81. Such programs exist at Widener University, see *Ctr. For Human Sexuality Studies*, WIDENER U., <http://www.widener.edu/academics/schools/shsp/hss/default.aspx>, and the California Institute of Integral Studies, see *About the PhD in Human Sexuality*, CAL. INST.

short, the institutional shunning of sex research and therapy has left both the field of sexology and Washington University poorer. As we look back on the publication of *Human Sexual Response* fifty years ago, we also look forward to a renaissance of the excitement, innovation, and leadership that Masters and Johnson's work at this University brought to the field.

The series and its popularity provide new opportunities for Washington University to reclaim the legacy, to continue the story of Masters and Johnson. After all, they were once the University's own and, thanks to the series, they are now popularly recognized as an important part of Washington University's "brand."

INTEGRAL STUD., <http://www.ciis.edu/academics/graduate-programs/human-sexuality/about-the-program>.