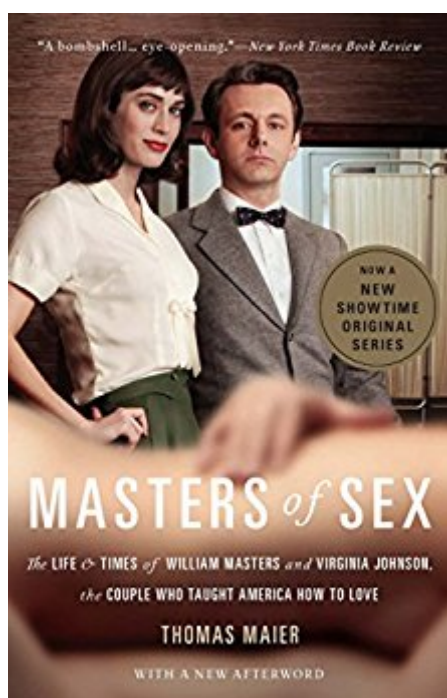


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# Masters Of Sex: The Life And Times Of William Masters And Virginia Johnson, The Couple Who Taught America How To Love



## Synopsis

Now a New Showtime Original Series Showtime's dramatic series *Masters of Sex*, starring Michael Sheen and Lizzy Caplan, is based on this real-life story of sex researchers William Masters and Virginia Johnson. Before *Sex and the City* and *Viagra*™, America relied on Masters and Johnson to teach us everything we needed to know about what goes on in the bedroom. Convincing hundreds of men and women to shed their clothes and copulate, the pair were the nation's top experts on love and intimacy. Highlighting interviews with the notoriously private Masters and the ambitious Johnson, critically acclaimed biographer Thomas Maier shows how this unusual team changed the way we all thought about, talked about, and engaged in sex while they simultaneously tried to make sense of their own relationship. Entertaining, revealing, and beautifully told, *Masters of Sex* sheds light on the eternal mysteries of desire, intimacy, and the American psyche.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a well-researched biography of the two sex researchers who made such an impact on

American attitudes towards sex in the 1960s. It attempts to chronicle their research and its impact on a still-puritanical America while also providing details on the private lives of an unusual couple in the context of American society vastly different from today's. These varied objectives are sometimes in conflict as the author shifts from analysis of complex and sometimes problematic medical findings to often gossipy information about the intimate lives of the two protagonists. Maier does a good job of placing that research within the sexually repressed society of the time. He also manages to portray both researchers as fascinating people with complex emotions and personalities. Masters was a hard-working, conservative, patriarchal doctor, yet he was driven to understand the physiological aspects of sex in ways that were abhorrent to the conservative, patriarchal society of the time. He treated his own wife as a traditional sub-servient homebody there to take care of the family and support his career. Yet he also was willing to recognize that an untrained female secretary was worthy of equal billing on their joint research. His work opened the way for a more equal understanding of female sexual needs and capacities, yet he used his position to force a female subordinate to have sex with him in a way that would easily have led to a sexual harassment suit today. Masters was both a man of his times (particularly in regards to homosexuality) and a transformative figure who, as much as anyone, helped change the attitudes of those times. Johnson was equally complex and even more fascinating. A former singer, thrice married, but raising two children on her own, Johnson, although with little medical or research training, somehow had the energy and intellectual ability to become a driving force in the ground-breaking medical research partnership. Maier benefits from extensive interviews with the by-then aged Johnson, but never quite captures a full picture of her life. We learn little of her earlier marriages or how they may have impacted her drive to understand sex. This powerful drive to understand, as well as to achieve status, led her to accept a somewhat coerced sexual relationship with Masters. Later, this relationship, driven by Masters' jealousy, became a marriage that appears to have been short on love. The author does a good job in explaining how her contributions to the research were critical to its success, but is less able to show why she was willing to sacrifice time with her children and at least two different love relationships for that research success and her emotionally repressed partner. Maier does not shy away from the problems and failings of the later work of Masters and Johnson. The defects of that work, particularly the book on homosexuality, may be seen as failures, but also show, by contrast, the bold brilliance of their earlier work on sexual response and sexual inadequacy. The latter part of the book illustrates the difficulties of the multiple tasks the pair faced: continuing ground-breaking research, converting that work into more best-selling books, raising funds and satisfying donors, providing clinical help to people with sexual

problems, managing a multi-faceted institution, handling the publicity generated by their work and dealing with their own conflicting sexual and emotional needs. Sadly these tasks often proved too much for them particularly as age made its inevitable inroads on their energies and intellectual capabilities. The book is excellent on its own, but it is particularly useful for those who have watched the Showtime adaptation, "Masters of Sex." It provides the factual basis the overall story. This helps the viewer to distinguish what is known about the couple and the sometimes fanciful elaborations concocted by script writers charged with keeping viewers interested.

Being an avid viewer of the TV series I needed something to read during an upcoming cruise, so I decided to purchase this book as the Kindle edition would be easy to fit into our luggage, and reading the printed version may have been a bit confronting to some of the people on the ship. Although the TV series varies in a number of ways to the book, things that were mentioned in passing in the book were major features of the series. Overall I found the book very enjoyable to read, offering a more in depth insight into the personalities of the story. Although the timeline does "jump around" a bit, I believe this is necessary in order to bring the reader up to speed on the background of the two major characters, taking one to a point in the life before leaving them and then bringing the other character up to the same point in time, however, I didn't find this confusing like a number of other reviewers have stated. Overall, I loved the book and would recommend it to both viewers of the TV series and those who have never seen it.

Seems well-grounded in fact, as opposed to the TV series, but it's correspondingly less dramatic. The flow is slowed rather than enhanced by the author's characterizations and comments, which often seem heavy handed. Many of the quotes from interested parties are so banal that they could better have been omitted, except that they reflect on the banality of the speakers. Of those quoted, all protect themselves, and make light of others' faults, and we are left to ourselves to intuit that this is a sign of what the times were like back then. Dirty work was done in private, harassment wasn't illegal, and people kept their wounds a secret. It looked good from a distance but must have been painful as hell. Or, more likely, was hermetically covered with booze and denial.

Fascinating character study of revolutionary people in interesting times. We owe so much to Masters and Johnson for the information and openness that created the sexual revolution, yet it was amazing how they interacted in real life. Johnson remains to me the real enigma in this as she seemed to idolize Bill Masters and yet be fearful of his control her whole life, resenting it even after

his death. The degree of enmeshment in their professional and personal lives makes for great drama that to be sure was very messy in real life. Well written study of the contradictory mores of the time. For those watching the series, it is interesting to see the poetic license taken with the lives of people in the book to show the many facets of sexuality studied in the real life work. I hope the series continues to show the complexities of the lives of these people and the costs they paid for their work, personally and professionally.

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