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Movie Review  
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## DR. KINSEY'S SEX REVOLUTION

The religious right and other conservatives are having a field day with the opening of the film, *Kinsey*, which was released nationwide on November 12 to resounding critical acclaim. *Kinsey*'s critics take no notice of uncanny portrayals by Liam Neeson and Laura Linney as Alfred Kinsey and his wife, "Mac," nor the fascinating screenplay and direction by Bill Condon.

Instead, the anti-choice, anti-sex ed, abstinence-until-marriage crowd have seized upon this telling of a very powerful story as just another opportunity to shriek from op-ed pages across the country that *Kinsey* destroyed American values about sex and sexuality. That he did it with the connivance of organizations like ours, and that he was a criminal and a pervert to boot. This of course gives us the opportunity to say a few words about the facts.

### **Changing a World's Values**

*Kinsey*'s work certainly did change the world's values about human sexuality — but most would agree that the world was yearning for that change, and that we are all the better for it. *Kinsey*'s scientific investigations resulted in two thunderously popular volumes of landmark sex research that tore through century-old veils of hypocrisy about all things sexual. By unveiling widespread sexual behaviors throughout the U.S., *Kinsey* and his team of researchers demonstrated unheard of truths:

§ women and men masturbate

§ women and men have sex before marriage and outside of marriage

§ women and men enjoy oral and/or anal sex play

§ women experience orgasm by clitoral stimulation

§ many, many women and men have same-sex sexual fantasies and experiences.

Well, duh. But religious conservatives did not take the news so lightly.

### **From Stigma to Self-Acceptance**

*Kinsey*'s opponents take him to task for suggesting all these behaviors were normal. If normal means "typical" "conforming to a norm, standard, pattern, level, or type," then that is, of course, exactly what *Kinsey* did, and he did it definitively. The descriptions of sex and sexuality in both of *Kinsey*'s best-sellers — *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) — were based on spoken interviews with 18,000 women and men.

The survey instrument that *Kinsey* and his team memorized had from 350 to 521 questions — no sexual possibility was overlooked. In his books, he presents his team's findings in winding, and sometimes windy, narratives and more concise charts and graphs. All in all, it was easy for millions of his readers to recognize themselves in these pages. Finding that they were far from alone in their desires and preferences, millions of readers were able to free themselves of the stigma of abnormality that their more self-righteous fellow citizens were all too willing to mark them with.

### **From Self-Acceptance to Law**

Lawyers have sex, too. Like others from all walks of life, lawyers of the day also read Kinsey. They, too, found themselves, their friends, and members of their families in his pages. They asked themselves: If all these sexual behaviors are so apparently normal, isn't it wrong for us to throw people in jail for enjoying them?

In this way, Kinsey had a mighty impact on the formation of the highly influential American Law Institute's Model Penal Code of 1955, which called for the decriminalization of various kinds of private, consensual sex play. This was a turning point in sexual law. A decade later, privacy became the cornerstone of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which granted married couples the right to use contraceptives.

In 1967, privacy was cited by the court in its declaration that interracial marriage was constitutionally valid. In 1972, the court declared that unmarried couples had a right to use birth control. A year later, on the heels of *Eisenstadt v Baird*, privacy was again cited in *Roe v. Wade* — ending nearly a century of unsafe abortion in the U.S. — and most recently, last year, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, privacy was the winning argument to overthrow same-sex sodomy laws nationwide. Kinsey's validation of human sexuality has taken us a long, long way.

### **Hate the Sin, Not the Sinner.**

Like lawyers and other people, Kinsey had sex, too. He also found himself in his work and in the pages of his books. His personal journey to escape sexual stigma and gain self-acceptance is one of the stories that makes the film about him so powerful.

The religious right, however, does not view his story in the same way. It is fond of justifying homophobia, and other elements of the culture wars, with the ambivalent slogan, "Hate the sin, not the sinner." In Kinsey's case, the right is quite willing to damn the sinner as well.

Citing some of Kinsey's own sexual explorations, the possibility that he may have been not entirely straight, that he might have belonged to a sexual minority, and that he had recreational sex outside of a loving, dedicated, unbroken marriage, is just more fodder for their ideological grist mills. The right demonizes Kinsey for his exploration of his sex life, for his impact on ours, and for not reporting the people he interviewed to the police!

### **Not Always Likeable**

Kinsey was a genius. He was also a lot like a lot of the rest of us. He was, by many accounts opinionated, ornery, obsessive, and, on more than one occasion, offensive. But with a wide heart, he opened the world's eyes to its sexuality. That is what we remember him for. His personal human frailties do not diminish the positive impact his work has had on our lives, even on the lives of those who take him to task for his.

There were sex scientists before Kinsey, and many came after him, but his unique contributions sped our way to understanding a core belief that we hold dearly today: Sexuality is an essential, lifelong aspect of being human and should be celebrated with respect, openness, and mutuality. This belief is fundamental to the Planned Parenthood mission, vision, and promise, i.e., The free and joyous expression of one's own sexuality is central to being fully human.

Thank you, Dr. Kinsey.

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