



Lust's Thousand Avenues

Documenting "normal"

Just-married Clara (Laura Linney) and Alfred Kinsey (Liam Neeson) get help for sexual difficulties.

FOX SEARCHLIGHT 2004

KINSEY: Written and directed by Bill Condon. Produced by Gail Mutrux. Executive producers Michael Kuhn, Francis Ford Coppola. Bobby Rock, Kirk D'Amico. Cinematography, Frederick Elmes. Production design, Richard Sherman. Editor, Virginia Katz. Costume design, Bruce Finlayson. Music by Carter Burwell. Starring Liam Neeson, Laura Linney. With Chris O'Donnell, Peter Sarsgaard, Timothy Hutton, John Lithgow, Tim Curry, Oliver Platt, Lynn Redgrave and Dylan Baker. Fox Searchlight Films, 2004. R. 118 minutes.

Last Sunday, I found myself thinking about sex. First I read a *Washington Post* story by a health and human sexuality educator of 30 years. Deborah Hoffman said teaching about sex should educate, not dictate, and that it should be "based on scientific evidence." Later I saw *Kinsey*, an artfully done cinematic biography of the world's first scientist to actually study adult human sexual behavior. Were Alfred Kinsey alive today in the midst of a culture-war waged by the religious right against science, I have no doubt he would fully support Hoffman's recommendations.

No traditional biopic, *Kinsey* opens on a face-to-face training session between Kinsey (Liam Neeson) and his three research assistants, Clyde Martin (Peter Sarsgaard), Wardell Pomeroy (Chris O'Donnell) and Paul Gebhard (Timothy Hutton). In turn, each interviewer questions Kinsey about his sexual history and records his answers in code. Kinsey helps them achieve an open attitude toward sex, keep an interested but not judging demeanor, and use frank, non-euphemistic words about sexual behavior appropriate to the person's background — penis for well-educated subjects, he suggests, but prick, dick or other slang for the less educated.

Neeson's gifted, down-to-earth portrayal is astonishing, from his wispy hair to his bemused twinkling eyes. A nature-loving, serious scientist, Kinsey spent his first 20 years of academic life capturing a million specimens of the gall wasp and the remaining years asking just such candid questions of adult American men and women in the 1940s and '50s.

Kinsey's 1948 *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* sold out its first printing in mere days. His research showed that between 67 percent and 98 percent of men had sex before they were married. Fifty percent had extramarital affairs, a whopping

92 percent masturbated, and 37 percent had had at least one homosexual experience.

Kinsey's 1953 *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* showed that 50 percent of women had premarital sex, 26 percent had extramarital sex and 62 percent masturbated. Feminists will not be surprised to learn that this book was received with shock and awe by the patriarchy, nor that Kinsey

became a cultural untouchable as a result of publishing his findings.

The movie is about Kinsey's life, not only his work. His wife and former student, Clara McMillen (Laura Linney), is as brilliant, open-minded and adaptable as he is. Linney plays Mac, as she was called, with a delicate humor that almost belies the depth of her performance. She models for us the way such a

woman married to a famous man might find to keep her own life alive, while supporting him in the most important ways. The Kinsey's dinner conversations with their young adult children is absolutely hilarious. Mealtime with my family was nothing like this.

Sarsgaard's portrayal of Kinsey's assistant Martin is as nuanced as I have come to expect from him and as luminous as Linney's. Considered a member of the family, Martin's frequently found at the Kinsey home. He develops a special bond with both Albert and Clara.

We come to see Kinsey through the eyes of Clara and Martin, whose love for him enables us to see his almost-innocence, personal grief and manipulation. Kinsey is damaged goods, but love helps him find a redemption his work alone could not.

Kinsey's two great achievements are that he found a way to get people to open up about their sexuality without shame and guilt, and that he used the data he collected to show there is no such thing as "normal" sexual behavior. As he noted about gall wasps more than a half-century ago, no two individuals are alike: "There is only variation." His portrait of American sexuality at mid-20th century was followed by Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Response*, 1966, which has had an equally liberating effect on the lives of adult men and women. But Kinsey was the first.

Kinsey opens at the Bijou Saturday, Dec. 25, with my very highest recommendations. One of 2004's best pictures. **EW**



Active Imaginations

But it's not really true

FINDING NEVERLAND: Directed by Marc Forster. Written by David Magee, based on the play, *The Man Who Was Peter Pan*, by Allan Knee. Produced by Richard N. Gladstein. Executive producers Gary Binkow, Neal Israel, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Wenisten, Mischelle Sy. Cinematography, Roberto Schaefer. Editor, Matt Chesse. Production design, Gemma Jackson. Costume design, Alexandra Byrne. Music, Jan A. P. Kaczmarek. Starring Johnny Depp, with Kate Winslet, Julie Christie, Radha Mitchell, Dustin Hoffman and Freddie Highmore. Also, Ian Hart, Joe Prospero, Nick Roud, Luke Spill, Kelly Macdonald and Eileen Essell. Miramax Films, 2004. PG. 101 minutes.

This friendship between playwright James M. Barrie and a family of young boys carries the freight of our era, in which the natural, asexual attraction between child and adult creates hysterical fantasies of pedophilia in the leaders of the religious right. Barrie himself might have been that rare creature to whom the sexual drive was less animated than were his dreams and fertile imagination. We don't know. But I do know that's the way Johnny Depp plays him in this film, and his is a persuasive portrait.

Barrie (Depp) meets Sylvia Llewelyn Davies (Kate Winslet) and her fatherless sons in Kensington Park, where the boys are playing, and the writer is making notes for a new play. In a previous scene, Barrie's wife, Mary (Radha Mitchell), has made it clear to him she is tired of their bland marital relationship. An unhappy man, Barrie is touched by the high-spirits of the youngest of the Llewelyn Davies' boy, Michael (Luke Spill), who crawls under Barrie's bench to hide from his brothers.

The relationship between Barrie and the family grows when Sylvia thanks Barrie for helping 10-year-old Peter (Freddie Highmore) grieve for his recently deceased father. Barrie tells

the boy he isn't trying to take his father's place, and Peter learns to trust him. The film suggests a romantic connection between Sylvia and Barrie simmers from the beginning, but if so, it produces little or no steam. Admiration, certainly. Winslet makes a heroic, strong, hands-on parent.

Sylvia's aristocratic, censorious mother, Mrs. Du Maurier (Julie Christie), however, raises the temperature. She disapproves of Barrie spending so much time with her daughter's family and says so. Living in turn-of-the-century London, she is concerned about her daughter's reputation, since Barrie is a married man.

In reality, when Barrie became friends with Sylvia and the boys, her husband was still alive, so both were married. Liberties with facts abound. *Finding Neverland* is less about history and more about the solace and joy the creative imagination can play in human affairs.

Depp's performance is his warmest ever. He genuinely likes Highmore, whose award-worthy portrait of a sad boy is truly remarkable. Highmore understands that less is more, showing restraint and maturity far beyond his years. He and Depp respect each other as actors, which makes the boy Peter less a model for Peter Pan than even the writer believes. Late in the film, Peter tells a theater patron the real Peter Pan is Barrie himself.

Winslet's grounded, warm-bodied performance as a loving maternal woman of diminishing health does not play as attention-seeking or pitiful. Sylvia won't see the doctors until Barrie shows her that her condition threatens her boys' fragile self-confidence. In real life both Depp and Winslet have children, and here they model good parenting. *Peter Pan* shows that the Darling children had a comfortable, supported childhood. As a child, I identified with Wendy, who might be patterned on Sylvia.

Finding Neverland does not hold together as a film. Robbed of tension, it is a fractured work with no concrete connection between the dominant story of Barrie's relationship with the family and the secondary story of the stage production of *Peter Pan*. Barrie tries to heal Sylvia by showing her scenes from the play. An inadequate bridging device at best, the scene draws attention to the wide gap in realities of the widow and the writer.

Now playing at Cinema World, *Finding Nevermore* will bore little children expecting *Peter Pan*. Recommended for Depp, Winslet and Highmore's able performances. **EW**