

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

200
Natural Research
Council

FROM: RSM

DATE: December 16, 1953

TO:

COMMENTS:

AJW		
D.R.	DEC 17 53	DR

Sex Research
Kinsey

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AG has Niebuhr article,
1/6/54

SUBJECT:

I find nothing fundamental to disagree with in Reinhold Niebuhr's article on the Kinsey Report, although one could take issue with one or two of his interpretations if one wanted to. For example, I suppose one could carry on a pretty lively debate as to the nature of human freedom, mentioned towards the bottom of Page 141, as the attribute which gives a unique quality to being a human being. Also at the top of Page 139, Niebuhr mentions Kinsey's inability to measure any dimension of the "dignity of man." I certainly agree that Kinsey was unable to do so but I sometimes wonder if anybody else knows how to do it.

The real point I suppose is whether or not the Foundation should be disturbed about the fact that Kinsey has proved himself unable to do a complete treatise on all the aspects of the sexual behavior of man. I don't think we should. Insofar as Kinsey's work is scientific, it can be looked upon as one in a series of contributions to our understanding of sexual behavior. All science is made up of bits and pieces like this and nobody can sensibly criticise any scientific paper because it does not tell the whole story. This is one of the points I was trying to make in the recent memorandum to Mr. Rusk about the danger of trying to defend the work of the Foundation by referring to the practical applications in which scientific knowledge plays a part.

Personally I deplore the fact that Kinsey has not contented himself with being a scientist and seems to insist on pretending to be a psychologist, sociologist and moralist as well, but if he chooses to do it I think it is a good thing that there are people like Niebuhr and Lionel Trilling, who wrote a somewhat similar review of the first book, to point out Kinsey's very great naivete and prejudice in these spheres. As a Foundation officer, I am perfectly happy to stand on the conclusion of the Review Committee of the American Statistical Society that Kinsey's contributions to the physiology and elementary psychology of sex are greater than any other work in the field. It seems to me that it is up to society at large to see that these results get discussed and put in their proper perspective in relation to all the other sorts of knowledge which may bear upon the problem of ordering man's sexual behavior. Niebuhr's article may be looked upon as a significant contribution to the continuing process.

RSM:MER

RSM
R. S. M.