

## Minnesota Psychologist Threatened For Pro-Reorientation Therapy Stance

By Roy Waller

Raymond Sampson, Ph.D., a diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology, was recently the target of a complaint filed with the Minnesota Board of Psychology as the result of a letter-to-the-editor Dr. Sampson wrote for a local newspaper.

The complaint against Sampson was filed in November 2002 and was just recently resolved.

Dr. Sampson's legal saga began when he read an article in the March 18, 2002 edition of the *Duluth News Tribune*. It was entitled "'Therapy' For Gays Continues Despite Social Enlightenment."

Written by Duluth psychiatrist Lisa Capell, the article contained the signatures of psychologist Chris Henley and assistant professor of psychology Paula Pederson attached in support.

The article described conversion therapy for homosexuals as "unethical," "barbaric," and "misguided," and concluded with the statement, "This type of treatment is from the era of lobotomy and straitjackets. It should not be tolerated!" The article implicated NARTH as involved in such treatments.

Disturbed by the mischaracterization, Dr. Sampson wrote a response. Published in the letters-to-the-editors column, it was entitled "Principled Disapproval of Gays Is Not Intolerance." He objected to the labeling of reorientation therapy (what the columnists called "Christian therapy") as "unethical." Dr. Sampson argued that "the compassionate, principled disapproval of the homosexual condition does not constitute unfair discrimination or intolerance."

Making clear the historical fact that "no culture or time has ever considered homosexuality to be normal," Dr. Sampson also referred to a statement published in the journal *Psychological Reports* that hundreds of people had "reported positive change in their sexual orientation away from homosexuality."

A complaint was then filed against Dr. Sampson with the Minnesota Board of Psychology, although it did not list the name(s) of the complainer(s). The complaint charged that Dr. Sampson "exhibited a biased attitude and provided false and misleading information to the public by submitting the enclosed 'opinion' to a public news forum." The complaint listed several allegations, including:



Raymond Sampson, Ph.D.

(1) The fact that Dr. Sampson had inadvertently referred to the peer-reviewed journal *Psychological Reports* as an American Psychological Journal Association-published journal. (Although it is an independent journal, other, official publications of the APA have recently published papers that show favorable outcomes for reorientation therapy and support its ethicality.)

(2) The *Psychological Reports* article was supposedly misinterpreted by Dr. Sampson, based upon numbers of respondents to the survey in question, actual percentages of respondents according to their sexual orientations, etc. The allegation states that Sampson "overgeneralized and mischaracterized the content journal article." (The allegations ignored the fact that Dr. Sampson was writing a letter-to-the-editor, not a comprehensive, point-by-point explanation of a particular study.)

NARTH's Vice President, Dr. Dean Byrd, assisted Dr. Sampson in organizing a legal defense. "I believe that the most egregious 'overgeneralizing and mischaracterizing' actually occurred," Dr. Byrd said, "when the authors of the original article stated that reorientation therapy offered to clients who seek it is 'barbaric and misguided.'"

(3) The Board also alleges that Sampson, in his article and later follow-up letters requested by the Board to clarify his statements, referred to homosexuality as a "perversion" and a "condition." The Board claimed that his statements were "misleading, incomplete, and lacking in factual foundation," owing to the removal of homosexuality as a mental illness from the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

The allegation also cites the American Psychological Association's 1997 resolution stating that the "Association does not regard homosexuality as a mental disorder." (Yet that same resolution also states that "psychologists *should respect the rights of others to hold values that differ from their own*" and "they should not engage in *discrimination* based on sexual orientation." — our italics).

"Clearly," Dr. Byrd countered, "that same respect for diversity that the APA calls for, must also extend to people whose values preclude their living a gay lifestyle."

As to the specific issues involved in the complaint, the Board stated that the matters to be decided were —

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- Whether Dr. Sampson “violated a statute, rule, or order that the Board issued or is empowered to enforce,”
- “Engaged in unprofessional conduct which has the potential for causing harm to the public,”
- “Violated the rules of conduct/code of ethics adopted by the Board,” and
- “Made public statements that contained false or misleading information.”

On April 15, 2003, Dr. Sampson’s attorneys, Mohrman and Kaardal, P.A., sent a comprehensive response to the Minnesota Board of Psychology. Those attorneys rebutted the allegations made against Sampson; addressed the possible violation of the Board’s rules; and also how the Board’s investigation and continual prosecution of this matter was “a violation of Reverend Sampson’s First Amendment right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection and due process.” (Dr. Sampson is also an ordained deacon in the Catholic Church).

Dr. Sampson and his counsel then met with the Board of Psychology on April 25.

### **Vindication**

Less than one week later, Dr. Sampson was contacted by letter by the Minnesota Board of Psychology. They informed him that they had completed their review of the complaint filed against him and he was exonerated.

Because they believe the complaint should never have been filed or considered, Dr. Sampson and his legal counsel are currently considering legal action against the Minnesota Board of Psychology.

“This case is a textbook example of the politics of intimidation—how judicial boards are being influenced by activism instead of science,” said Dean Byrd. “We need to put the review boards on notice that we will not tolerate such abuses of power. When obviously spurious charges are filed, review boards should aggressively pursue those who filed the charges and reprimand them for having done so.”