

Former APA President Describes His Work With SSA Clients

20% of clients with successful outcomes changed sexual orientation; the rest reduced promiscuity

Dr. Nicholas Cummings is past president of the American Psychological Association and served for years as Chief of Mental Health with the Kaiser-Permanente Health Maintenance Organization. He is co-author with Dr. Rogers Wright of Destructive Trends In Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm. Wright and Cummings gave keynote speeches at the NARTH Conference in 2005.

Q: When you were at Kaiser-Permanente, how many clients did you see who were dealing with same-sex attractions?

Dr. C: During the 20 years I was at Kaiser-Permanente (1959-1979) San Francisco's gay and lesbian population burgeoned, so we were seeing a much larger number of such patients than might be seen in a usual psychotherapy practice. I personally saw over 2,000 patients with same-sex attraction, and my staff saw another 16,000. We kept extensive notes as we were working very hard to develop psychotherapeutic approaches to meeting the needs of these patients. In many respects we were pioneers in meeting the needs of this population.

Q: Of these, how many were reoriented toward heterosexuality, how many failed in this effort; and how many remained identified as homosexuals?

Dr. C: Of those we saw in psychotherapy, 67% had good outcomes. We did not attempt to reorient same-sex attraction to heterosexuality unless the patient strongly indicated this as the therapeutic goal.

Twenty percent of the 67% successful psychotherapies did so reorient, while 80% of this 67% pursued sane, sexually responsible, and happy gay lives.

Q: A third of your clients weren't helped at all by therapy. How would you describe these individuals? Compulsive? Obsessive?

Dr. C: Remembering that these percentages do not describe the homosexual community at large, but only those individuals who sought treatment with us, about one-third were sexually compulsive, driven to seek anonymous sexual encounters, never satisfied, and constantly obsessing on what they termed as their sexual addictions. There was a high incidence of drug abuse among this group, and often the thought of repeated sex with the same individual was terrifying. I recall one patient who thought he was having an anonymous encounter when the man with whom he had a forgotten previous contact called him by his first name. My patient fled in terror.

Q: You have been critical of the psychological community for its part in distorting research on sexual orientation. Can you describe why you are critical of the APA?

Dr. C: First, let me say that I have been a lifelong champion of civil rights, including lesbian and gay rights. I appointed as president (1979) the APA's first Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Issues, which eventually became an APA division. In that era the issue was a person's right to choose a gay life style, whereas now an individual's choice not to be gay is called into question because the leadership of the APA seems to have concluded that all homosexuality is hard-wired and same-sex attraction is unchangeable.

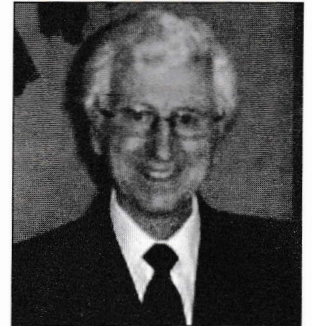
My experience has demonstrated that there are as many different kinds of homosexuals as there are heterosexuals. Relegating all same sex-attraction as unchangeable--an oppressed group akin to African-Americans and other minorities--distorts reality. And past attempts to make sexual reorientation therapy "unethical" violates patient choice and makes the APA the *de facto* determiner of therapeutic goals.

Q: What is your basic premise of the book *Destructive Trends in Mental Health*?

Dr. C: The APA has permitted political correctness to triumph over science, clinical knowledge and professional integrity. The public can no longer trust organized psychology to speak from evidence rather than from what it regards to be politically correct.

Q: What must be done to correct the situation?

Dr. C: At the present time the governance of the APA is vested in an elitist group of 200 psychologists who rotate themselves in a kind of "musical chairs" throughout all the various offices, boards, committees, and the Council of Representatives. The vast majority of the 100,000 members are essentially disenfranchised. At the 2006 APA Convention in New Orleans I gave a speech, "Psychology and the APA Need Reform," which was widely circulated on psychology listserves but has been totally ignored by the leadership of APA. It is not going to reform itself out of office! •



*Nicholas Cummings,
Ph.D.*