

Kinsey's Twist

By Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D.

Before the time of Alfred Kinsey, psychologists viewed sexual orientation on a vertical continuum—with homosexuality at the lower end of the developmental scale (representing incomplete psycho-sexual development), and heterosexuality at the top of the scale, representing mature, adult sexuality. This traditional model viewed same-sex behavior as a juvenile, usually passing phase on the path to adulthood and heterosexuality. It was a systematic, hierarchical view of human sexuality.

Then sexologist Alfred Kinsey accomplished a simple, yet revolutionary coup with his now-famous "Kinsey Scale of Sexual Orientation." By simply giving that same vertical bar a *horizontal* twist, he upset the traditional hierarchy.

His horizontal bar placed individuals along an **equal continuum** between homosexuality and heterosexuality, with neither orientation considered to be more normal or psychosexually mature than the other. Thus the science of sexual orientation stopped being hierarchically *evaluative*, and abruptly became merely *descriptive*.

Kinsey's influence has been enormous, not only in the social sciences but also in the discourse within pop culture on human sexuality. The Kinseyan approach of merely describing behavior without evaluating it has come to dominate the discourse, as psychology (and our culture) move away from old terms such as "perversion" (a

"turning away" from the norm or ideal) to "sexual deviations," and ultimately, to the value-free term "sexual variations."

This phenomenological approach has been adopted not only in the case of homosexuality, but has also influenced psychiatry's view of voyeurism, sadism, and the other sexual aberrations previously understood as perversions. We see an unwillingness to evaluate and explain what was long considered *maladaptive*.

Following the same non-evaluative Kinseyan philosophy, we see that the officially-approved treatment for homosexuality (gay-affirmative therapy) rests on two simple principles:

- (1) You are gay because you are gay (the cause is a question not to be asked); and
- (2) Your maladaptive lifestyle—any suicide attempts, drug abuse, alcoholism, promiscuity, or family problems—have nothing to do with the homosexual condition, but were induced by society.

We must now bracket once-clear terms such as "normal" and "mature" with apologetic quote marks, lest we be accused of the intellectual tyranny of adhering to an objective and systematic understanding of what those terms imply. A hierarchical understanding of sexual development is now deemed judgmental and undemocratic. ■

THE NARTH BULLETIN

Editor: LINDA AMES NICOLOSI

The *NARTH Bulletin* is published three times yearly by the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a non-profit educational association. For information contact NARTH



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