

In Memoriam

Nathaniel (Neil) McConaghy, M.D., D.Sc. (1927–2005)¹

Neil McConaghy, a founding member of the International Academy of Sex Research and a member of the Editorial Board of *Archives of Sexual Behavior* from 1971–2001, was born in Brisbane, Australia. He won a scholarship to attend Brisbane Grammar School and subsequently studied medicine at the University of Queensland. His medical studies exposed him to Darwinian evolutionary theory, via the study of comparative anatomy, providing a perspective that strongly influenced his later scientific work. Following graduation, Neil moved to Melbourne in 1951, where he worked at Royal Park Hospital. His exposure to Pavlovian concepts in the psychology department led Neil to conceptualize behavior through a physiological model which synthesized biological and psychological factors. In the mid to late 1950s, Neil worked in Canada and then trained at the Maudsley Hospital in London, before returning to Melbourne. He was appointed to the School of Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in 1964, where he was a founding member of this new university department.

Neil was promoted to Associate Professor in 1970, and continued to teach and conduct research at UNSW until his retirement in 1992. He played a major role in incorporating teaching about human behavior in the medical curriculum at UNSW in the 1970s, and convinced his peers that the scientific study of behavior was as relevant to medicine as an understanding of physiology or anatomy. In 1990, Neil was awarded the prestigious Doctorate of Science by UNSW. The citation highlighted his outstanding efforts to understand the problem of intentionality in human behavior, and noted his success in integrating findings from neurophysiology, experimental psychology, and psychiatry. He maintained his connections with UNSW following retirement, and was a visiting professor and postgraduate student supervisor at the time of his death.

Neil's scientific interests were often far in advance of the prevailing zeitgeist. As an example, in 1960 he began an article in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* as follows: "Surprisingly little interest has been taken in recent decades by either psychiatrists or psychologists in the ways in which people think." He went on to outline a new conceptualization of the disordered thinking that characterized people experiencing a schizophrenic psychosis, and demonstrated that this type of thinking was also present among the general population, and particularly apparent among those with high levels of creativity, such as successful visual artists. This dimensional construct has now become a part of mainstream thinking about schizophrenia and psychosis. Neil's seminal ideas spawned a range of laboratory-based studies that aimed to identify the neurophysiological bases of attention in patients with schizophrenia and normal volunteers.

He also had a long-standing interest in the dimensional nature of sexuality, and published widely on the incidence of bisexuality and opposite sex-linked behaviors in the general population. Although many in the gay and lesbian community respected Neil's work in the scientific study of sexuality, his earlier attempts in the 1960s to offer treatment to those who wished to suppress their desires to engage in then-illegal homosexual activities created considerable controversy, and colored perceptions of his work in this area long after his research focus had shifted, and social changes had rendered such studies irrelevant. When he attempted to discuss some of his work in this area at the American Psychiatric Association meeting in San Francisco in the early 1970s, a near-riot occurred that was reported in *Time* magazine. He remained a fearless champion of the application of scientific methods to the study of human sexuality, and his 1993 book, *Sexual Behavior: Problems and Management* was widely recognized as an important contribution to this field.

As a clinician, he was a pioneer in the field of behavior therapy, and developed new behavioral treatments for impulse control disorders, such as pathological gambling, and worked with convicted sex offenders to determine

¹This memoriam was written by colleagues and friends of Dr. McConaghy.

whether such behavioral techniques could assist them to control the urge to re-offend. This groundbreaking work was conducted in the Behaviour Therapy Research Unit at the Psychiatric Unit at Prince of Wales Hospital, where Neil worked as a clinician from 1976, until his retirement in 1992. Many who worked with him there remember with great fondness the camaraderie that Neil engendered among members of his treatment team, and his expert clinical skills that were an inspiration to the medical students and trainee psychiatrists he taught.

Neil's intellectual curiosity was not limited to scientific and academic domains, but extended across the

breadth of human accomplishment: art, music, architecture, literature, and history were all areas of which he had prodigious knowledge. He had read widely, travelled extensively, and enjoyed sharing his enthusiasm for these interests with family, friends, and colleagues throughout his life. It would be fair to say that he inspired many to pursue truth and beauty through his example. Neil's breadth and depth of knowledge, and his great personal warmth, made him a much admired figure among his academic and clinical colleagues, and an inspiration to the many students and trainees he taught and mentored during his long career.