

ALGBTIC NEWS

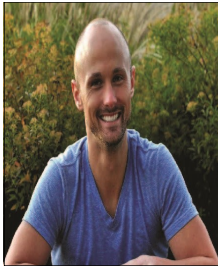
Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling

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A Division of the American Counseling Association

Message from the President Pete Finnerty



As I begin my journey as President of ALGBTIC I am reminded of those who have come before me. My first experience with ALGBTIC was in Charlotte at the ACA Conference a few years back. I knew I wanted to be involved but didn't exactly know how so I simply approached then incoming President Michael Kocet. He was incredibly welcoming and since then I've had the pleasure of working alongside great leaders and colleagues through the state branch committee and ALGBTIC's new Competencies for Counseling with LGBTQIA Individuals including outgoing President Amney Harper. This document will be available on our website (algbtic.org) and is the culmination of more than 3 years of difficult yet engaging work. I must thank all my colleagues who participated and reviewed this wonderful addition to LGBTQIA literature.

Amney's guidance and perseverance this last year has been particularly powerful for me

me because as I've often said I'd be a little lost without my colleagues being great at what they do. This last year has been incredible because Amney and ALGBTIC have made significant strides in working with relevant issues of the day. The work of the Presidential Safe Schools Taskforce is evidence of this as they have developed a pool of resources for school counselors to work with students within the academic institutions served. Amney has been grateful and a great leader in serving ALGBTIC as she involves everyone in the process, hearing all voices. This is a characteristic I hope to employ in these times of continual debate about counseling with LGBTQ persons on listservs, courts of law, halls of government and the classroom. This brings me to another great mentor, Michael Chaney, who as President created the now aptly named LGBTQIA Affirmative Counseling and Social Justice Committee that has been a force in developing literature and collecting resources in combating anti- LGBTQ sentiment.

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As we go forward I look to what we can accomplish this coming year and welcome all voices from our members to our clients. I believe in a shared vision of leadership rooted in a community of many, thus I hope to hear from all of you this year. We will have openings on nearly every committee and taskforce and I welcome all members to participate in our growing organization. There are many ways to be active, from participating on a committee or taskforce to developing a state branch of your own to assist counselors and clients in your backyard. The theme of this year, ally development, is something very near and dear to my heart in these times of school bullying, community violence and legislation that undermines the LGBTQIQA community. Ally development is pertinent to the creation of safe spaces for LGBTQIQA persons (particularly youth) in our schools, communities and counseling offices. This year I hope to expand ALGBTIC's efforts to create allies in our communities through this new taskforce by creating more literature and advocacy efforts. I hope to hear from all of you regarding your personal piece of ALGBTIC's continual process to advocate for our clients, members and LGBTQIQA communities.

Please feel free to email me with any questions, ideas or concerns at pfin-nert@kent.edu. Since some of the peaceful self-care activities I partake in are long-distance running events and triathlons I will utilize the following analogy for this coming year: although the road ahead may be challenging, full of peaks and valleys we sustain ourselves through a common vision of completing our own team goals rather than worrying about those who wish to beat us.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HELPING TO DEVELOP THE ALGBTIC NEWSLETTER?

Responsibilities:

- Putting out calls for submissions to the newsletter;
- Write articles on hot topics, legislation or newsworthy events;
- Review articles submitted to the newsletter and determine appropriateness for readership;
- Edit drafts of newsletters for content and errors; and,
- Develop and publish the ALGBTIC newsletter online for the website and distribution to the members of ALGBTIC

If you are interested please email the current Editor at:
angelogomez@yahoo.com

Message from Past—President Amney Harper, Ph.D.



Well, I have officially tossed my pebble in the pond! Now as I sit back and watch the ripples that come from it, I am hopeful that my contributions have made a difference and will continue to have a positive impact in

the future. I am reminded as the year comes to a close why I have chosen to be a part of ALGBTIC. This past year has brought me into contact with many different people: people I consider friends, allies, and family. ALGBTIC has always been a place where I feel a sense of connection and acceptance for all of who I am in the world. I know that even if I have never met you, we share a common desire: the desire to see LGBTQIA individuals treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. We desire to be a part of that through our work, different though it may be. We desire to cast our pebble into the world's pond, and rock the boat.

As the year comes to a close, I am exceptionally excited to announce that the Competencies for Counseling Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, and Questioning (LGBQQIA) Individuals have recently been officially endorsed by the ALGBTIC Board and released on our website. I have been a co-chair for this taskforce since the beginning of Michael Kocet's Presidential year, three whole years ago. It is hard to believe all the time and work that went into creating them, but even more hard to believe that they are now out there for everyone to use. It is my hope that these competencies will prove to be a valuable tool that will continue

to further the stated mission of our organization

For me, the competencies are exciting because of their potential to make a positive impact on the LGBQQIA community. I believe that if even one LGBQQIA person will have a better experience in counseling because their counselor utilized this tool, then it was worth the three years of bi-weekly conference calls, research, planning, and writing. As I worked on this project, I heard echoes in my head of all of the past hurts done by the mental health professions to LGBQQIA individuals. I remembered the stories I have heard, both past and present, of identities not honored, those who underwent reparative therapy, or individuals who experienced being misunderstood or rejected by their counselors. These are the voices and stories that have made this project so dear to my heart.

I have been so lucky to work closely throughout this process with my co-chair, Pete Finnerty, current President of ALGBTIC, and our taskforce members: Margarita Martinez, Amanda Brace, Hugh Crethar, Bob Loos, Brandon Harper, Stephanie Graham, Anneliese Singh, Michael Kocet, Linda Travis, and Serena Lambert. Each contributed their own unique voices and advocacy, without which the competencies would not be the same. I feel a particular kinship with each of them. I also want to thank our outside reviewers: Theodore Burns, Lore Dickey, Tonya Hammer, and the ALGBTIC members for their work in reviewing this document.

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Samuel Sanbria & Tara Hill, **State Branch Chapter Committee**

Amney Harper & Pete Finnerty, **LGB Competencies Task Force**

Kristopher Goodrich, Melissa Luke & Anneliese Singh, **Safe Schools Task Force**

Pia Smal & Charles Lenahan, **Technology and Resources Committee**

Kris Goodrich & Joel Filmore, **LGBTQQIA Affirmative Counseling & Social Justice Task Force**

Sean Moundas & Stacey Reicherzer, **Transgender Committee**

As the editor of the *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, I wanted to give members an update on how things are progressing. First, it seems that our transition from hard copy only to electronic publishing has gone relatively smoothly. The staff at our publisher, Taylor & Francis, have made this an easy process and have been very helpful in staying in contact and asking for feedback from the editorial end. It is also nice to have the opportunity to purchase the entire volume in hard copy at year end for a very reasonable price. I know that libraries are really pushing for more journals to go electronic as space is an issue. At my campus, the library staff loves the idea of having one volume in print rather than all the space it takes to have every issue.

Believe it or not, we are coming close to completing our sixth volume. It is hard to believe that we have been here for six years now; seven if you include the start up year. We are currently in the process of uploading Volume 6, Issue 3 and are working hard in conjunction with our guest editors for the next special issue on Addictions & Substance Use. We so appreciate all of the support we have been receiving to insure this is a quality and highly ranked journal. Our submission rate has increased by close to 75% in the past year, and our acceptance rate has recently moved from about 33% to closer to 25%. We are actively trying to encourage more international submissions with the marketing help of Taylor & Francis. The fact that their home offices are in London certainly doesn't hurt.

As always, we encourage you to let folks know about us, especially if they are interested in contributing to the LGBTQ literature. We are also on the lookout for potential editorial review board members; we are especially interested in potential review board members with expertise in areas like career, assessment, military & government and rehabilitation. You can always contact me with any questions or for more information on any topic related to the journal.

Ned Farley, Ph.D.
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... Past-President Message Continued

I hope as our members begin to read and use the competencies that you will feel just as excited by this new tool as I know each of us are.

I am also incredibly excited about the ongoing work of the Safe Schools Taskforce, led by Kris Goodrich, Anneliese Singh, and Melissa Luke. They have continued to compile resources for school counselors as well as formulating best practices for working with queer youth in schools. They have decided to continue their work into the coming year to continue to build on what they have created. This taskforce was the main focus on my Presidential Initiative, because of all the many LGBTQIA youth who have been bullied, committed suicide, struggled to come out to family and friends, or simply just struggled to be true to who they are because of the lack of safe spaces in their schools. I believe if we want strong queer leaders in the future, we have to get into the schools and support our youth. I am proud and grateful to the many ALGBTIC members who have supported or contributed to this work.

This past year has been one of some major changes in ALGBTIC. We have moved into a more technologically driven division, as our Journal moved to an online format and as we have upgraded our website and utilized it more in the past year. I am excited about this shift, and I hope ALGBTIC members will become active and involved in continuing to push us forward to new ways to connect through the use of technology. One hope that I have for the future is to see our division utilize our listserv more. I am guilty of not posting or responding enough, and I hope as I move into my Past President year that I can change my own behavior. I also hope you will all join me in doing so. Additionally, I look forward to ways we can continue to connect to issues of importance for LGBTQIA individuals through our blogs, podcasts, facebook page, and other technologies.

As I reflect upon the ripples in the pond, one thing that makes my small pebble not seem so insignificant is that I know that there are others out there casting their pebbles in too. I am already getting really excited for the many things I know are to come with our incoming President, Pete Finerty. Having worked closely with Pete for the past three years, I am assured in his capacity to care, his sense of social justice, and his passion for our community. Pete, I wish you a fabulous year, and I thank you for the service you have already given. I am also excited to see Hugh Crethar, our President Elect, begin his journey within ALGBTIC leadership. I have known Hugh for a long time, and I will never forget how he encouraged me as I made my first steps into service, social justice, and leadership while I was still a student. I also want to thank Mike Chaney, who just completed his Past President year. Mike, I have really appreciated how you have consistently been there as a resource for me throughout the past two years. Mike has made some valuable contributions to ALGBTIC over the last three years, and I am thankful for his constant support. To the many leaders and members of ALGBTIC, thank you for a wonderful year. Now let's go throw some more stones and rock the boat!

In Solidarity,

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God Is Not a Bully: Bullying Laws, Religion and Social Advocacy Efforts Counselors for LGBTQQ Clients Need to Know

By Dr. Misty Ginicola, Dr. Cheri Smith & Michelle Esteves

Recently, a bill passed through the Michigan senate designed to prohibit bullying and harassment at school, an important and timely addition to state legislature. Senate Bill 0137 or Matt's Safe School Law was so named after Matt Eppling, a gay teen that committed suicide in 2002 after being bullied at school. The passage may seem like a success on its face, but before it was passed, Michigan legislators added a few sentences that would make national headlines. "This section does not prohibit a statement of a sincerely held religious belief or moral conviction of a school employee, school volunteer, pupil or a pupil's parent or guardian" (SB-0137, 2011, p. 6). Everyone from the Washington Post to Stephen Colbert had something to say about the hypocrisy of allowing 'religious bullying' (Hibbard, 2011; Hirschfield, 2011). Even though the Michigan House later passed its own version of an anti-bullying bill without the religious language, the event pointed out a very complex and controversial intersection of issues: religion and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender or Queer (LGBTQ) population.

Research on the issue of bullying of the LGBTQ population, however, is not controversial. Research consistently indicates that the LGBTQ population are bullied more, experience more social stressors and have higher risks of suicidal behaviors than their heterosexual peers (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2011; Fedewa & Ahn, 2011).

This has caused a tremendous legislative response to pass anti-bullying laws at the state level (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). However, what

is the impact of these laws in states that either explicitly or implicitly prompt discrimination against those from a LGBTQ background based on tenets of religion? We all have been exposed to the loud conservative arguments calling same-sex marriage sinful, homosexuality an abomination and the host of biblical passages others use to justify discrimination. Where does this leave us as counselors?

Our role as counselors' demands that we engage clients to explore their own beliefs and values, seek congruence in the development of their identity, and promote wellness, healing and authenticity. In this population, it requires us to 1) use affirmative approaches in working with clients, 2) promote integration of a client's sexual orientation and religious identity, and 3) advocate for political and legislative change to promote human rights and social justice. Therefore, despite being in a state that may have discriminatory laws, our role as counselors is to support our clients, follow our ACA ethical guidelines which demand affirmative techniques and push for social justice and change for this and all populations who face discrimination (Ginicola & Smith, 2011).

When it comes to assisting clients to integrate their religious identity and sexual orientation, understanding the huge role that both of these identities play is paramount. Depriving a client of full access to spirituality and religion can have a dramatically negative impact. Depriving a client of full access to spirituality and religion can have a dramatically negative impact. At the ASERVIC 1995 Summit on Spirituality, spirituality was defined as the "animating force in life, represented by such images as breath, wind, vigor, and courage.

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Spirituality is the infusion and drawing out of spirit in one's life... This spiritual tendency moves the individual towards knowledge, love, meaning, hope, transcendence, connectedness, and compassion. Spirituality includes one's capacity for creativity, growth, and the development of a values system. Spirituality encompasses the religious, spiritual, and transpersonal" (Burke, 1998, p. 30; Miller, 1999). Religion can be viewed as an extrinsic authority while spirituality can be seen as an intrinsic orientation. Some of the values reflected by extrinsic authorities in many religions do not always seem to apply to gay and lesbian people. However, as Kelly (1995) states "it is especially important for counselors to know that there are biblical scholars, theologians, and religious leaders who provide ample evidence discrediting the non-contextual use of a few isolated Bible passages and the tradition's appeal to 'natural law' to support an antigay position" (p. 234-235).

Part of our role as counselors is to be aware of community resources that may be helpful to our clients. In this population, it means that counselors should be aware of the affirmative religious organizations that exist in their communities. A good resource on this topic can be found through the Human Rights Campaign Website (<http://www.hrc.org/issues/religion-faith>). Religions typically fall within four categories of acceptance: as they can refuse LGBTQ members, they can openly accept celibate LGBTQ members, they can promote some acceptance across the organization, or be fully affirming. A variety of religions are fully affirming, which are the only religions that counselors should use as referrals for clients. Some forms of spirituality, like those more centered on nature, see LGBTQ persons in a positive light. For example, many Native American peoples refer to this population as two-spirit people and view them as

beings with great spiritual power (Wilson, 1996).

There are also many religions that have organizations that are willing to publicly welcome and affirm all individuals without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. Counselors should become familiar with the affirming religions in their communities for these purposes. Several websites also offer lists of affirmative religions across the nation, including:

- <http://www.operationrebirth.com/affirmingchurches.html>
- http://www.gaychurch.org/find_a_church/united_states/united_states.htm
- <http://www.ucccoalition.org/programs/ona/who/list/>.

In addition, several organizations function as support networks and/or worship centers for all religions and can be found easily with a quick google search or by consulting published resource lists (Thumma & Gray, 2004), such as Dignity USA (Catholicism; <http://www.dignityusa.org/>), The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (<http://www.awab.org/>), A Common Bond (Jehovah's Witnesses; <http://www.gayxjw.org/>), Affirmation (Mormon; <http://www.affirmation.org/>), Huriyah (Muslim; <http://huriyahmag.blogspot.com/>), Lutherans Concerned (<http://www.lcna.org/>), More Light Presbyterians, (<http://www.mlp.org/>), Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns (Quaker; <http://flgbtqc.quaker.org/>) and Gay Buddhist Fellowship (<http://gaybuddhist.org/v3-wp/>), to name a few.

The one common thread across all of these religious organizations is the idea that God/Creator/Deity(ies) does not discriminate nor

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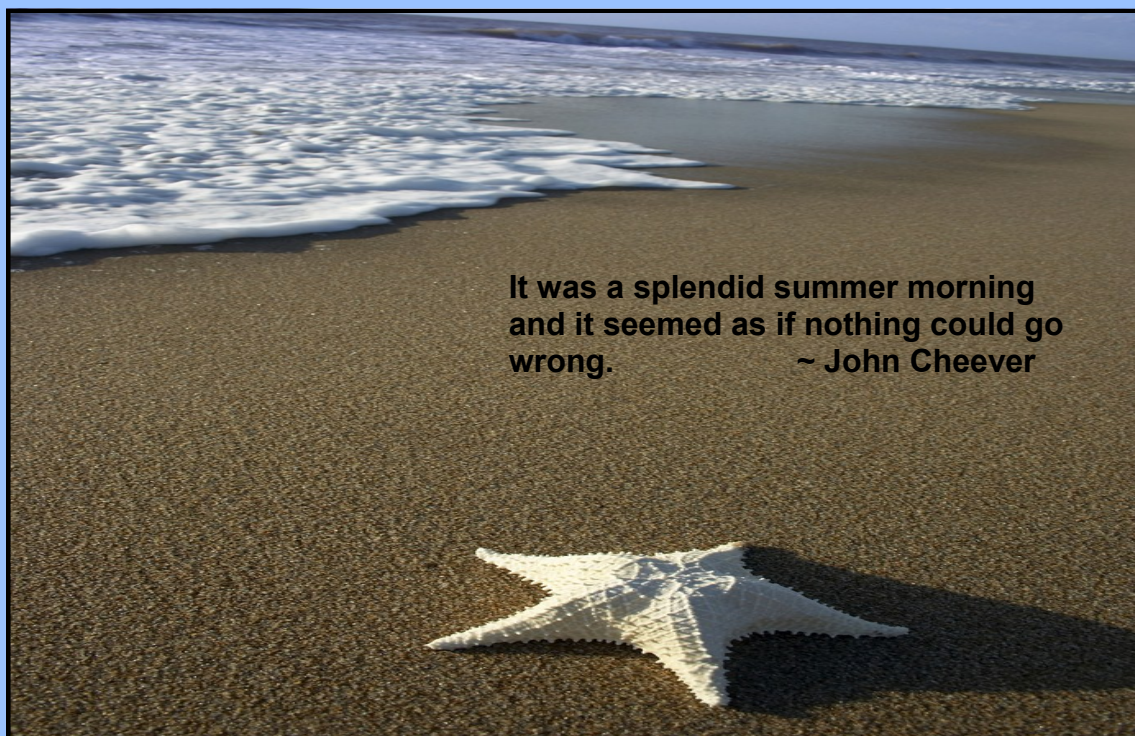
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bully. All individuals have the right to be authentic with their sexuality identity and to be loved and valued by a religious community.

As counselors, we must also work towards social justice for our clients and this topic particularly highlights this need. This means that at minimum we must be an ally, provide a safe space and work towards betterment of the culture's acceptance for those from a LGBTQ background. Being an ally can mean standing up for other's rights, fighting against unjust policies or just defending and teaching others to defend the victims of bullying. Research has shown that this simple act of standing up for a bullying victim in a school setting is associated with significantly lower levels of bullying (Salmivalli, Voeten & Poskiparta, 2011). However, focusing on changing the climate or culture of a school to be more empathic, respectful and tolerant of differences is probably the most important piece of curbing bullying of all kinds (Waasdorp, Pas, O'Brenan, & Bradshaw, 2011).

Despite the negative association between religion and the LGBTQ population, as counselors, we cannot forget to foster the spiritual and religious lives of our LGBTQ clients. Existential awareness, spirituality and faith are important coping mechanisms in any individual's life and this population should not be deprived this due to some outdated and closed- minded groups, despite how loud their voices may be. As counselors and advocates, we must learn to speak louder for our clients.

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Passing on the Torch: By Cindy L. Anderton, Ph.D., ALGBTIC Newsletter Editor



First of all I would like to welcome back Angelo Gomez as Editor for ALGBTIC's Newsletter!!!

That being said I would like to make it known that I came up with this title first and then realized the connection to the Olympics that were at the time happening in London. Maybe it was the fact that I wrote this article just after I had watched the lighting of the torch ceremony - thanks to DVR and thus, perhaps the creative title I thought I had come up with was not totally of my own creation after all.

This year I watched the young and up-and-coming athletes light the torch, where in the past it has been a well known and famous athlete from the hosting country, to be the one to do the final lighting of the torch. Regardless, the title and the metaphor of the lighting of this year's Olympics torch fits with my stepping down as Editor of the ALGBTIC Newsletter and handing off the torch (or should I say handing back the torch) to Angelo. I believe Angelo is an up-and-coming leader in the counseling profession and will be a strong advocate for LGBTQ issues. Over the last three years we have alternated positions between Editor and Co-Editor and it has been a true joy and a wonderful learning experience to have worked with him.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working on the newsletter, but alas it is time to say goodbye and pursue other leadership opportunities - at least for now. I would like to thank past-president of ALGBTIC - Michael Kocet for his kindness, his friendly and welcoming spirit, his mentoring, and his willingness to get me involved in the leadership of ALGBTIC by first appointing me to this position. I would like to thank Michael Chaney and Amney Harper for their diligence, in their roles as past-presidents, in reviewing the newsletter and making sure the newsletter was free from errors and also thank them for the ways in which they supported me and mentored me in my role.

I know that in the future I will once again become involved in ALGBTIC in some capacity. I am truly passionate about this organization and the work it continues to do to make sure that counselors who work with LGBTQ clients are competent, respectful, non-judgmental, and have unconditional positive regard for the person they are working with. Perhaps it is a stretch, and then again maybe not, to credit Rogers (1980) for coming up with the "core conditions" of what it means to be an "affirming counselor" for LGBTQ clients. Genuine-ness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard are, for me, the core conditions of any affirming counselor working with LGBTQ clients. I say affirming instead of "gay-affirming" not to downplay the importance, but to be only gay affirming is not inclusive or affirming of everyone in the LGBTQ community. Additionally, being LGBTQ is just one aspect of who we are because we are so much more complex, which demands that counselors be affirming of who we are above and beyond our LGBTQ* identity. I hope we will always fight to eliminate prejudice and oppressive forces that harm individuals in the LGBTQ community and I hope we will also remember that our clients are not just LGBTQ and be affirming of all of the other aspects of who they are.

Gay Blood = Bad Blood?

By Eric Crumley, M.Ed., NCC

I've always been one to help out where I can and even as I finish my Ph.D. and prepare to enter the workforce I am of the mindset that I can "change the world" through my actions and interactions with others. Several years ago I learned of the opportunity to register as a potential bone marrow donor for someone fighting for their life. After registering (via a painless, quick swab of the cheek) I promptly forgot until last year when I received a phone call that I was a potential match! I experienced so many emotions during that time – ultimately another donor was identified and chosen as a more "viable" match. Then, in a rare and exciting opportunity I was identified in May as a *second* match for a different individual. I again answered the health questionnaire and went in for confirmatory blood typing. At this stage I am still waiting to hear back but hope that I can go on to donate to this stranger in need.

This brings me to my point – as a gay male I have been blessed and very fortunate to be surrounded by a very supportive group of family and friends. Until recently, I had not felt the sting of discrimination and stigmatization that so many other gay men have. This process, however, brought up a form of discrimination that hit me like a brick wall. Granted I may have been uneducated and somewhat naïve, but there is a current Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ban on my blood. Even though many organizations (e.g., The American Red Cross) have come out in support of overturning this ban, it was recently (2010) upheld by

FDA. The ban was enacted in 1983 in the midst of the AIDS epidemic and, in my opinion, reflects an unfortunate standard of stigmatization and discrimination. While many of the rules with blood donation and bone marrow/stem cell donations overlap, luckily this is not one of them.

I cannot say for certain how significant a role my honest responses to the health questionnaire played in the doctor's decision last year; I only know it was information they were provided with. My coordinator with the donor center also assured me that she has worked with other sexually active homosexual males in the past who have gone on to donate – evidence she says that there are doctors that can "...see the forest for the trees."

I believe what I am taking away from this experience is something that has helped me to grow more into the role of an advocate. As someone who has placed little emphasis on my sexuality in the past, I know that there is more that I can do to bring attention to the ongoing discrimination and stigmatization that the LGBT population faces. I am continuously learning and experiencing and yes, still believe that I can "change the world." Regardless of the outcome of this experience, I will stay on the registry as a possible donor in the hopes that more doctors, politicians, the FDA, and society at large will be able to "see the forest for the trees."

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New Branch forming in



By Chad M. Mosher, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Forsyth

June is Pride Month and there is much to be prideful about in 2012. In early May, President Obama openly endorsed marriage equality for same-sex couples, citing the issue as a civil rights concern. A few days later, the NAACP responded with their endorsement of marriage equality, stating it is "the" civil rights concern of our time. On May 28, 2012, President Obama again echoed his support of marriage equality during his annual proclamation of Pride Month. In a White House Press Release he stated, "Because we understand that LGBT rights are human rights, we continue to engage with the international community in promoting and protecting the rights of LGBT persons around the world.... And because we must treat others the way we want to be treated, I personally believe in marriage equality for same-sex couples." The support from President Obama and the NAACP of marriage equality shifted public opinion across the U.S.

On June 1, 2012, members of the Arizona Counselors Association (AZCA) met to organize the Arizona Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (AzALGBTIC). This is historic for the Arizona Counselors Association as AzALGBTIC is the first branch within the state association. Elizabeth Forsyth, Gordon Gray, Chad Mosher, and Tonya Thompson are the founding members of the branch. Elizabeth Forsyth was voted in as Branch President and Chad Mosher as Branch Secretary. AzALGBTIC is presently working on developing its bylaws and mission statement. In addition, both Elizabeth and Chad, along with several other leaders from AZCA, will be attending the Institute for Leadership Training hosted by the American Counseling Association in July 2012 to meet with key leaders and politicians and advocate for the profession.

While we take the time out to celebrate Pride Month, we also recognize there is much work to be done. We need the support of ALGBTIC members across the nation, and the support of leaders of state branches, so that we can continue our efforts in Arizona. We hope to meet with you all in conferences, professional meetings, and other events to learn from you and grow from your ideas. Last year, *Counseling Today* featured leaders within ALGBTIC. These leaders urged us to stop "sitting on the sidelines." The members of AzALGBTIC are mobilized and excited to make needed changes in Arizona for the profession and for LGBTQ individuals.

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My Journey as an LGBT Ally:

By Ken Oliver, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
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I am heterosexual. Let me reiterate my message for those of you who like to “skim” over these newsletter articles. I AM HETEROSEXIST! Not the overt, openly homophobic, gay-slur slinging type of heterosexual many of you think about on first recollection. No, my heterosexism favors the type depicted in Hanna, Talley, and Guindon’s (2000) article outlining levels of oppression. I’m more of a secondary oppressor, or secondary heterosexual, in that I benefit from the dominant group privileges of being straight. While I fight to minimize my privilege (e.g., changing Marriage and Family course titles to Couples and Family or calling attention to heterosexual statements or media images), there are plenty of times where I give tacit approval for heterosexism to exist. I’m aware of my privilege to engage in public displays of affection (which I don’t!) with my partner should I choose without the fear of public ridicule or violence. I’m acutely aware that I can make life decisions without them automatically being attributed to my sexuality. I’m aware that I have not been shamed for my desires to develop in my sexuality as an authentic person, true to myself and the world around me. These privileges and my recognition of them, however, were not the catalyst for my development as an LGBT ally. What led me to my current status and my willingness to confront my own contribution to heterosexism was a combination of a few key elements in my own quest for liberation. Let me give you a “peek” into my journey.

Contrary to what one might assume, I don’t have a personal account of a close friend or relative struggling through the “coming out” process. No, my mission to serve as an LGBT ally started in a rather un-orthodox manner. Several years back I moved to a new area to begin work as a Clinical Director at a community mental health agency. The area was fairly rural and there were few, if any, professionals that shared my demographic characteristics (i.e., Black, late-twenties, and urban background). I was something of a novelty for the area! Now, don’t mistake my acknowledgement of my position in this new community as a source of pride. There are so many problems with a Black professional seeming “novel” that I can fill ten newsletters. From looks of puzzlement when I was introduced to the many erroneous assumptions about my background, purpose, or intentions, the novelty did not constitute a source of pride. The unusual nature of my role in this community did, however, have one positive outcome. During my two-year stint in this role, I encountered a wealth approximately 15-20) of adolescent and adult male clients who presented with issues related to them questioning their sexuality. None of them actually entered the counseling relationship with this as their presenting concern but, overtime, this became the source of great emphasis within the counseling relationship. While I would love to take credit for being welcoming to such disclosure, many of them discussed feelings of safety with me due, in part, to their perceptions of anonymity. “You aren’t from around here” or “we don’t know the same people, so I feel safer” were often stated when I asked what made them feel comfortable

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... My Journey as an LGBT Ally

telling me such intimate details. The looks of shame and discomfort expressed by these clients and their allowance for me to walk on their journeys of self-discovery have led me down the path of advocating for them; for giving them a voice. I became acutely aware that their expression of dissonance, disgust, shame, fear, doubt, and even self-loathe had nothing to do with their same-sex attraction. In fact, when they felt free to express their attraction in an open and non-judgmental environment, most expressed elation and used words like “freedom” and “liberation” to express their feelings. Instead, the negative expressions, I found, were typically due to their anticipation of what society would express. As a product of society myself, many of them would “test” the counseling relationship to explore my initial response to their questioning. Many would say something to the effect, “I’ve been having these thoughts” or “I’ve fooled around a few times with a friend of mine,” and they would almost always end with the question, “so, does that make me gay?” My response would usually be something like “dude, I can’t tell you if you’re gay or not,” usually followed by a description of individual (i.e., personal) identification versus societal identification. I would tell them that although societal identification has a tremendous effect on how one will see himself, the individual ultimately defines his personal identity. Reflecting lower stages of sexual identity development, many of them felt such relief from having a safe place to discuss their desires and feelings that they were able to explore the prospects of living authentically in other aspects of their lives as well. My experience in this rural, Midwestern town combined with my passion for humanism has led me to serve as a staunch advocate for LGBT rights and concerns. I was fortunate that these often burly, camouflage-clad men would allow me to join them on their travels to become authentic, fully-functioning human beings. They are who I think about when discussing the removal of heterosexist course titles from my counseling program. I think of them when I point out privileges and discuss the effects of harmful language. I think of them when discussing ethics the effects of religious values on the counseling dynamic.

My students often ask me why I become so passionate when discussing issues related to oppression. I typically tell them that I would want someone to be just as passionate to end my oppression as well. I truly believe that, as someone who claims to be an existential-humanist, I have no choice!

“...their allowance for me to walk on their journeys of self-discovery have led me down the path for advocating for them.”



Same-Sex Relationship Violence

**By Roberto L. Abreu & Isaac Burt, Ph.D. -
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Domestic violence is a problematic issue affecting same-sex relationships (SSRs) as much as it influences heterosexual relationships (James, 2008). Although domestic violence influences same-sex and heterosexual relationships equally, research indicates a lack of services for same-sex relationships. For example, Peterman and Dixon (2003), argued society minimizes the importance of same-sex domestic violence due to a number of factors. First, irrational societal beliefs exist believing both partners play the role of abuser /victim in same-sex violence. Second, this misconception leads individuals to view same-sex violence as mutual abuse. A possible explanation for this myth is the idea victims are more likely to retaliate when abused by a person of the same sex (Peterman & Dixon, 2003). Third, society's homophobic beliefs, fear, and discomfort toward SSRs, exaggerates the myth a well-functioning relationship is not possible (Miller, Bobner, & Zarski, 2000). In order to shed light on this rarely discussed topic, we discuss the affect violence has on same-sex couples. Furthermore, we address specific issues therapists need to know when counseling victims of same-sex domestic violence. Thus, the goal of this short article is dual fold. One, bring to awareness difficulties same-sex couples face when encountering domestic violence. Two, challenge readers to call into question society's dubious practices of consistently underestimating the impact domestic violence has on SSRs.

One of the most important issues counselors (therapists) need to be aware of is the influence of society's homophobic beliefs on

individuals in SSRs. For instance, many victims do not report violence in SSRs, due to lack of response from police and legal systems (James, 2008). Unfortunately, people in SSRs hold the belief violence involving same-sex couples is not held in the same reverence in the legal system as heterosexual couples. As thus, individuals neglect reporting violence because they fear police will not take the incident seriously. When individuals refuse to report violence, it is an unfortunate occurrence. For instance, research indicates SSRs are as vulnerable to violence as heterosexual relationships (James, 2008). For men in SSRs violence has the potential to produce life-threatening situations. Statistics disturbingly reveal after substance abuse and HIV/AIDS, domestic violence is currently the third largest health problem facing men in SSRs (Pattavina, Hirschel, Buzawa, Faggiani, & Bentley, 2007). Furthermore, people in SSRs are more likely to experience domestic violence by partners than by stranger anti-gay violence.

In a non-clinical study conducted by Turrell (2000), from a total of 499 homosexual male and female participants, 9% reported being currently involved in an abusive relationship. Additionally, 32% reported having been victims of violence at some point in their life. In another study conducted by Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, and Kupper (2004), from a community sample of 117 homosexual adolescents, 25% reported experiencing same-sex violence in their current SSR. This staggering finding concluded violence in same-sex relationships is an internalized process that begins at an early age. Clearly a problem exists that needs addressing. Although

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research shows individuals (especially men) are more likely to be victimized by their partner than by strangers, the law fails to pursue reports of SSR (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). Due partially to societal homophobic and heterosexist beliefs, failure to pursue reports affects certain ethnic and cultural groups disproportionately (Miller et al., 2000). Research suggests African American men in SSRs experience high levels of physical abuse by their partner (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). Coupled with this, SSRs with Latin women report high incidents of violence (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). Additionally, men in SSRs are less likely to report domestic violence than are women (Pattavina et al., 2007). When comparing SSRs and heterosexual relationships, both men and women underreport incidents of domestic violence. As explained beforehand, reluctance to report SSR violence is an indication of the lack of trust in police and legal system.

The Police and Legal System Response to SSR Violence

Research denotes a lack of police responsiveness to SSR calls involving violence, especially when compared to the manner in which they respond to heterosexual couples (Pattavina et al., 2007). Police sensitivity to SSR violence is an important factor, as research shows violence in SSR is as frequent and severe as among heterosexual relationships (Pattavina et al., 2007). Moreover, in a number of states, the legal definition of domestic violence excludes same-sex relationships (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, victims of SSR violence receive unequal treatment by the justice system (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). The reason for this discriminatory practice stems from numerous states not recognizing same-sex unions/marriages (Knauer, 2001). Therefore, acknowledging the occurrence of SSR violence also involves

recognition of the relationships themselves. Proceeding in this manner is in stark contrast to stated descriptions of legal relationships in those states.

More disturbing is that some police and legal professionals blame victims by describing the abuse a result of their own actions (James, 2008). When analyzing reports, police have classified violence between same-sex couples as "joint, shared, or communal fights" (Peterman & Dixon, 2003). Such language serves to indicate lack of training and support toward cases involving SSR violence. A study on bias against SSR victims in the court system reveals perpetrators often do not receive restraining orders in comparison to heterosexual couples (Chan, 2005). This lack of support indicates much work needs undertaking within the legal system to move away from stereotypical assumptions of victims and perpetrators in SSRs (Chan, 2005).

Cultural and Community Response to SSR Violence

Based on internalized societal homophobic beliefs, research suggests people are inclined to believe violence in SSRs is common, or part of the lifestyle (Brown, 2008). For example, Brown (2008) explained in addition to judgmental, stereotypical beliefs, the most influential difference in SSRs is living as an invisible minority in a society that unfairly judges them. Coupled with living in a judgmental society, individuals in SSRs fear isolation from their own community if they report violence (Peterman & Dixon 2003). Additionally, if the victim has not disclosed sexual orientation to family/friends, they sometimes fear being "outed" by their abusive partner (James, 2008). Furthermore, even when abused individuals reach out to their community, resources are often not available to

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provide protection and help victims cope with the violence. Many domestic violence shelters do not provide services to victims of SSR violence. Unfortunately, this lack of support forces victims to go back to the abuser and submit themselves to more physical and emotional abuse (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003).

Counseling Victims of SSR Violence

According to Miller et al., (2000), therapists counseling SSR couples need familiarity with issues of gender-roles and struggles SSR community faces. A therapist not aware of these issues will not only be unable to help the client(s), but may also further isolate the individual. Isolation may occur because the client may feel that not even a professional is capable of understanding their pain and struggles (Peterman & Dixon, 2003). Counselors also need to have awareness of the idea many battered SSR victims do not want anyone to know of the abuse. This apprehension is due to the fear society will think the SSR community is "sick, violent, and/or uncontrollable" (James, 2008). Therefore, it is very important for the therapist to assure victims violence is something many experience and is not a reflection of their overall community.

Building a strong therapeutic relationship based on trust is crucial when working with this population. In order to build a strong therapeutic foundation, counselors need to apply a person-centered approach. If the therapist actively listens to the feelings of the client, this therapeutic process allow the client to organize thoughts and visualize solutions (Kottler, 2002). A fundamental assumption of person-centered counseling is unconditional positive regard. Operationally defined, unconditional positive regard is the idea a person must be able to understand someone for who they are regardless if they agree with their actions or not. Therefore the counselor must be non-judgmental and realize the battered person might return to the abusive

relationship, even after understanding the risks (Peterman & Dixon, 2003).

Lastly, group therapy is a successful approach to counseling victims of SSR violence, as it reduces the feelings of isolation and provides a safe environment for victims. Provision of a warm, safe environment allows victims to work through their relationship turmoil with empathetic individuals experiencing similar emotions (James, 2008). In addition, group therapy may help perpetrators by placing them in an environment where confrontation can take place regarding their behaviors (James, 2008). However, it is important to state SSR victims and perpetrators of violence should attend different groups. Similar to their heterosexual counterparts, victims might feel isolated or unwelcomed in the group if perpetrators are members (James, 2008).

Conclusion

As explained in this brief article, in order to respond appropriately to SSR violence, major societal issues need addressing. Some of these societal issues include the role of heterosexist and homophobic beliefs and the lack of support from police. In addition, limited resources, such as access to shelters for victims and support of the courts, are major obstacles facing battered SSR victims. It is our contention interventions for battered SSR victims require support by local, national, and international organizations. Violence within SSR raises questions that are important for therapists to address. It is vital for therapists to have specific multicultural competencies on how to counsel battered clients in SSRs. Therapists should build a good rapport by actively listening to the client's struggles and providing unconditional positive regard. It should be the ultimate goal of the therapists to empower the client in order for them to see that there is a solution to the problem.

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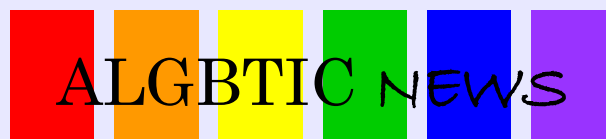
All submissions should be sent to the Editor via email as a Microsoft Word attachment. Please be advised that the Editor has the right to edit your submission due to space considerations and/or content issues.

Please send your submissions to:

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