



Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities' Position Statement on "Anti-Woke" Legislation

"Anti-woke" sentiment is a concept that has gained traction among many factions in the United States as a backlash against movements geared toward inclusivity. Demonstrating this phenomenon are examples like the Stop WOKE Act in Florida and the so-called Higher Education Enhancement Act in Ohio (and numerous others proliferating across conservative areas of the country), both of which are aimed at sanitizing the history of the United States to make it more palatable for people content to ignore the moral ignominy of the country's past. The appeal allows for the proliferation of problematic overcommitment to maintenance of white nationalist ideologies that have for too long gripped this country.

Broadly, this coalition of oppressive forces seeks to erase anything that does not fit into the neat box of white heteronormativity. The knowledge and experiences this sort of anti-woke legislation steals from students across the educational spectrum is manifold. For example, it eliminates students who fit the mold of whiteness, cis-heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness the opportunity to expand their scope of personal vision and experience beyond the limited bounds of their privileged identities. More crucially, such oppressive endeavors ensure that students who may hold these minoritized identities are feeling pushed more to the margins of society by having their fundamental life experiences obfuscated from view, leading to more feelings of othering and disempowerment.

The elements of our society and political system that peddle these anti-woke antics sidestep one basal fact of their ambitions: these laws abridge the First Amendment rights of students and teachers. They decry the concept of indoctrination, but they seem to equate exposure to multiple viewpoints with forcing children to adopt a belief. Their contradictory actions demonstrate the true nature of these efforts. These very actions perpetuate the systems of oppression that fuel mental health disparities for our marginalized clients, colleagues, and communities.

As a profession and national community, we have so much to lose if and when we do not speak out against anti-woke policies/legislation. Think about everything that we have gained from the Civil Rights Movement, including the battles that are still happening for women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights. To be truly seen as equal, all of our stories must be told. If national racial healing is to begin and be successful, all of our stories must be told. To deny the structural violence that has happened to Black communities, as well as the violence that is still going on,

we invisibilize Black voices everywhere, including the voices of our clients, their families, and our colleagues.

As counselors, we need to take a public stand. There is no amount of evidence-based counseling theory by itself that can take away the racial trauma and pain that impacts our communities today. Furthermore, our clients across many marginalized identities, are counting on us to do more than support them in our offices. We can no longer feel justified through trying to help marginalized communities solely through counseling efforts. If we do not step out of our comfort zones, we run the risk of perpetuating the Mental Health Industrial Complex, the ongoing and repeating cycle where we financially benefit from racial and minority stress related trauma while offering false consolation in our counseling offices.

Furthermore, we run the risk of perpetuating white racial dominance in the counseling field when we do not take a stand against anti-wokeness. We will lose many voices of color, especially QTBIPOC voices in the field of counseling, because we as a field do not do anything to empower minoritized communities to take leadership roles within our profession. Through our silence, we leave our QTBIPOC counselors and educators feeling unheard, pushing them out of the counseling field, which is already an ongoing problem in counselor education. Without our educators, what types of diverse perspectives will our counseling students receive in their education? This cultural erasure will trickle down into our counseling students, promoting white racial dominance among our clinicians throughout the country.

We cannot be complicit in maintaining white supremacy in the counseling field. We cannot provide false hope to our clients and colleagues of color. We must be that hope as a united field. We must remember who we are and the roots of this field. Remember that we are descendants of the Social Welfare Reform Movement, what is now known as Social Justice, a movement that has existed since before the 1900's. We must take a public stand, which is one of the bravest things we can ever do, and denounce anti-wokeness. Through banding together and denouncing anti-wokeness, we remind all of the healthcare professions about our oath to do no harm, to act in the beneficence of our clients, and to remind our fellow professionals that justice matters in every healing act that we perform for our communities. We also remind each other and the world that ALL of us matter, that we have the power to make differences in our national and global communities.

This statement represents SAIGE exclusively and not any other organizations.

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