Ethical Considerations When Working with LGBTQ Clients

Patricia E. Robertson, Ed.D., LPC-MHSP
Professor Emeritus of Counseling
East Tennessee State University
robertpe@etsu.edu
"Some day, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well-considered and yet fervent public conviction, that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit”  erik erikson
Some Basics in Our Role

- Never Assume One’s Affectional Orientation or Gender Identity – beginning at young age
- Know the Language (Matt’s Presentation)
- Do Our Own Work
- If LGBTQ – Appropriate self-disclosure
- If ALLY – Live it!
- If working with LGBTQ clients - and you will – BE ALLY
Ethical Principles in Social Work

- Service – help those in need and address social problems
- Social Justice – challenge social injustice
- Dignity and Worth of the Person
- Importance of Human Relationships
- Integrity – behave in trustworthy manner
- Competence – practice within areas of competence and develop and enhance professional expertise
Further Ethical Principles - ACA

- Non-maleficence
- Beneficence
- Justice
- Autonomy
- Fidelity
Cultural Competence and Social Diversity

“social workers ... obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to... sexual orientation, gender identity or expression...”

“counselors gain knowledge, personal awareness, sensitivity, dispositions, and skills pertinent to being a culturally competent counselor in working with a diverse client population.”
If counselors lack the competence to be of professional assistance to clients, they avoid entering or continuing counseling relationships.

Counselors refrain from referring prospective and current clients based solely on the counselor’s personally held values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Counselors respect the diversity of clients and seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when the counselor’s values are inconsistent with the client’s goals or are discriminatory in nature.
“Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of... sexual orientation, gender identity or expression...”

“Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or current clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants based... gender identity, sexual orientation...”
“Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group or class on the basis of... sexual orientation, gender identity or expression...”
Code of Ethics
Confidentiality

...prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm
Michigan Case

- Julea Ward – Eastern Michigan University
  - Removed from counseling program
  - Court supported University
  - Retrial later supported
    - Settlement of $75,000 and record of expulsion removed
  - CODE OF ETHICS - violated
Stages of Coming Out

- Not a one-time event
- Lifetime process
- Not linear
Why Fear Coming Out?

- Rejection
- Harassment
- Institutional Discrimination
- Alienation
- “Reality”
- Stigmatized

 › DSM removed it as pathology in 1974
Stages of Coming Out as LGBTQ

- Identity Question
- Internal Identity Acceptance and Education
- Support
- Pride
- Relationships
- Telling the Family
- Balance

The single best thing about coming out of the closet is that nobody can insult you by telling you what you’ve just told them.

Rachel Maddow
Core gender role identity formed by age 3
Sex object identification
Sub-conscious
Asking “Am I straight?” more than “Am I lesbian/gay?”
Learn from family/community thoughts/feelings about those who have same-sex attraction
Stage Two: Internal Identity Acceptance & Education

- Self – perhaps the hardest step
- Stops asking the question and affirms answer
- Educates self
- Fearful about coming out to others
Stage Three: Support

- Support Important – decisions about coming out
- Out to others
  - Role in client’s life
  - Power in client’s life
  - Position she/he has taken on LGBTQ issues
- Playing safe can be important
Stage Four: Pride

- Move from “yes, I am lesbian/gay/bi” to “yes, I am and I like it” – HUGE step
- Relief having people with whom to talk authentically/transparently
- Less shy – might contradict hetero-normative assumptions
Stage Five: Relationships

- Can happen at different stages and may look like adolescent sexual awareness
- Sexual responsibility
- Awareness of “wanting”
  - Love
  - Family
  - Commitment
Stage Six: Telling the Family

- May happen at earlier stage
- Threatening for many (power of family)
- Closet with family creates distance
- Family loss – grieving
- PFLAG
Stage Seven: Balance

- Balancing Affectional Orientation with all parts of life – it is only one other facet of who you are
- On-going “coming out”