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LGBTQ Topics and Christianity in Social Work: Tackling the Tough Questions

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Proposal #29830

LGBTQ Topics and Christianity in Social Work: Tackling the Tough Questions

BACKGROUND

In 2014 the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) convention offered a workshop whose abstract stated coverage of controversies, ethics, governmental policies, and faith related to reparative therapy. In this workshop, presenters expressed support for using reparative therapy at clients' requests. In response to this, a member of the Caucus of LGBT Faculty and Doctoral Students in Social Work (LGBT Caucus) organized a letter with over 120 social work faculty and practitioner signatures and submitted it to NACSW expressing concern that reparative/conversion therapy was offered as a viable mental health treatment at a professional social work conference, and requesting that future proposals regarding LGBT issues be reviewed for ethical and culturally sensitive practice. Simultaneously, Shelley Craig of the CSWE Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (CSOGIE) convened a caucus group for dialogue around larger religious issues in social work education and accreditation. Several NACSW members were also concerned about the reparative therapy workshop and supportive of an opportunity to work with CSWE in support of LGBT populations. Monthly collaborative conference calls between the LGBT Caucus and NACSW board members have resulted in a revision of NACSW convention and journal review practices, the development of a FAQ document addressing these issues, and continuing discussion of the ongoing work needed in this area of practice.

RATIONALE

Throughout history, people from many religions have contributed to social work and its development (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012; Faherty, 2006; Stein, 1956). Social work's foundational values are congruent with many religious beliefs, including Christianity. However, social work is not a faith-based profession founded on any one religious tradition. Some religious individuals are called to enter social work because of their religious values such as a belief in social justice, yet some people of faith struggle with issues around serving LGBTQ people. Sometimes one's religious beliefs may conflict with professional values, and the tension that is produced may lead to ambivalence either in practice decisions or in potentially unethical practice. Social justice, which includes equality, equity, and professional ethics, are guiding principles of social work practice and can help with resolution of some of these struggles (Barsky, 2010; Judd, 2013; Stewart, 2013). Professional social workers have duties and obligations that differ from other members of society. We are obligated to relieve, reduce, and not cause harm. We are responsible for understanding factors that cause, increase, reduce, or relieve harm. Social workers are expected follow the profession's standards of practice,

and can be disciplined when they willingly or knowingly choose to not uphold professional ethics and standards (Kaplan, 2006).

The difference between religious discrimination and inhibition of religious freedom of expression, and experiencing discrimination based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity, may be misunderstood. This may be due to the relationship between social identity and social power, and the difference between experiencing discrimination on an individual level vs. on structural or institutional levels (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Within the Code of Ethics, discrimination based on religion or LGBTQ identity are prohibited. Just as a social worker who identifies with the LGBTQ community or an atheist must engage religious clients in a culturally competent manner, social workers with religious beliefs that oppose same-sex sexuality or non-binary gender identities must do the same with LGBTQ clients. Social workers should not use their religious beliefs to discriminate based on sexual orientation (Reamer, 2003, 2014) or gender identity. Religious freedom is generally understood as a person's right to practice their religion in their personal lives without undue constraint by government. Social workers don't have the right to practice their beliefs in professional settings at the expense of a client's well-being. One person's religious freedom ends where discrimination of another begins. A distinct difference exists between discrimination based on a person's religious identity, and using religion to discriminate against others (Dessel, Bolen, & Shepardson, 2011). A person or system can use their power over others to discriminate or oppress them (Adams, et al., 2007). Social workers hold the power in the professional-client relationship thus must defer to clients' values/beliefs, keeping the focus on the client.

RESULTS

The coalition's FAQ addresses common needs and concerns of Christian and LGBT social workers when considering religious beliefs and non-discriminatory ethical practice with LGBTQ clients and students. These include:

- Ethics, Duties, Personal Beliefs
- Discrimination and Oppression
- Cultural Humility, LGBTQ populations, and Religious/Spirituality Issues
- Referring LGBTQ Clients
- LGBTQ Rights, Social Justice Advocacy
- People of Faith Affirming LGBTQ Clients
- Reparative/ Conversion therapy
- LGBTQ Christian Resources
- Facilitating classroom conversations around sexual orientation, gender diversity, and religious beliefs

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Title:

LGBTQ Topics and Christianity in Social Work: Tackling the Tough Questions

Preferred Presentation Format:

Interactive Workshop

Submitter's E-mail Address:

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Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to identify at least 3 reasons and 3 strategies for forming alliances between the faith based and LGBT communities is critical to the future of social work education and practice.
- Participants will be able to identify at least 3 common concerns that religious social workers and students have about working with the LGBT community and understand ways to resolve these.
- Participants will be able to identify at least 2 ethical strategies to use in working with LGBT clients without using reparative therapies.

Overview:

The presenters will share information from a collaboration that developed an FAQ, "LGBTQ Topics and Christianity in Social Work: Tackling the Tough Questions." This can assist in formulating strategies for developing alliances between faith-based and LGBT social workers that can support the future of culturally competent and ethical social work education and practice.

References:

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Primary Presenter

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Biographical Sketch: Dr. Kaplan has been teaching graduate, undergraduate, and doctoral courses in “brick and mortar” and online universities for 15 years and has 20+ years of practice and continuing education experience in mental health, HIV/AIDS, addictions, trauma, and ethics. Courses taught and develop include practice, multicultural/diversity & social justice, and ethics. Dr. Kaplan has multiple publications including two co-authored texts, *The Helping Professional's Guide to Ethics* (2015). Lyceum Publishing and, *Confronting Oppression, Restoring Justice: From Policy Analysis to Social Action*. 2nd edition. (2012) CSWE Publications

Student: No

Co-Presenter

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Biographical Sketch: Dr. Jon E. Singletary joined the faculty at Baylor in 2003 after completing his Ph.D. at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he taught social work planning and administration. Singletary is co-director of the Strengthening Congregational Community Ministries Project. He has served as co-director of the Faith and Service Technical Education Network (www.FASTENnetwork.org). He teaches in the areas of policy, research, and social justice.

Student: No

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Biographical Sketch: Dr. McCarty-Caplan specializes in research and teaching related to intersections of macro and micro-level social work education and practice, with a special focus on the health of at-risk youth, support of LGBT populations, social policy, and HIV/AIDS prevention. His clinical experience includes training youth activists to be sexual health educators, counseling HIV+ incarcerated adults and their families, and mentoring emotionally disturbed adolescents. Dr. McCarty-Caplan has also recently presented at local and national conferences, and published refereed journal articles on drug use and sexual risk among men who have sex with men, and the impact of school-based sex education on LGBT families.

Student: No