

Integrating Gay Issues Into Counselor Education

JOSEPH L. NORTON

Human rights in recent years have begun to include the rights of gays whose sexual orientation should be irrelevant to jobs, housing, and public accommodation. The old sickness theory has been discarded and the morality of same-sex orientation championed. But many counselors-in-training have not been helped to demythologize homosexuality, and this article presents ways to reeducate about gays to help counselors-in-training be better able to work with their counselees with this topic. The primary method suggested is helping students get acquainted personally with gays.

Gays of both sexes have become more vocal in recent years in seeking inclusion in human rights statements, and the American Personnel and Guidance Association was one of the earliest professional associations to recommend inclusion of "same-sex orientation" in all antidiscrimination statements (APGA, 1971). Counselors and counselor educators frequently support gay rights, but some need help to understand why gays should not be looked at in the terms used in the past.

There have been same-sex-oriented people throughout history, and they have been variously accepted in different societies (Boswell, 1980; Karlen, 1971). Only in the latter half of the 19th century was the word *homosexuality* invented, and used to add *sick* to the already used terms *illegal* and *sinful*. But once Kinsey showed gays that they were far more numerous than previously believed, they began to work for greater recognition of their oppression. (There were earlier scattered efforts in the first half of the century, but they were ineffectual).

Pointing out that almost no one chooses to be gay, but rather to act on inner feelings, gays began to resist police harrassment, churchly put-downs, societal hostility, and oppressive laws. They pushed to educate the public that the myths about gays were just that. Data were reported indicating that gay teachers and gay parents do not make children and youth gay (Claiborne, 1978; Green, 1978). Long-term relationships were reported (Silverstein, 1981), and a wide range of occupations other than the male stereotypical ones of hairdresser, interior designer, artist, and dancer were also reported (Spada, 1979; Jay & Young, 1979). The same studies showed that role-playing of "butch" and "femme" seems to be mostly a thing of the past.

Joseph L. Norton is a professor of Education at the State University of New York at Albany.

Despite all of this information, and despite the fact that in 1974 the American Psychiatric Association took homosexuality off its list of mental illnesses, there are homophobic counselors and students. Even those students who have not been exposed to an outmoded abnormal psychology course need help in developing a sense of being comfortable in working with same-sex-oriented clients. Students need exposure to the current concepts and facts about homosexuality to dispel the myths and misinformation so widely held. This article will present specific suggestions for various courses. The most important point, however, is for educators and counselors to know enough to be comfortable with the 10% of the population that are same-sex oriented.

If a counselor education program has a required course in the psychology of sexuality, that course would probably deal with the gay culture enough to provide a beginning awareness. Counselor educators should verify that such is the case, however; most current texts have a fairly open attitude, but it pays to check that institutionalized homophobia is not passed on in the local course. Most counselor education programs do not require a sexuality course, however, and such a course should not be depended on to do the job fully. Thus, the following are suggestions of a variety of ways for getting current information on gays into the counseling curriculum.

- *Introduction to community agencies courses.* Include a visit to (or from the staff of) the local gay community center or campus gay alliance, the gay hot line, or whatever agency is available (look in the telephone book). The best way for people to get over their fear of same-sex-oriented people is to get to know some. The gay visitors can discuss the kinds of problems that come to them and the kind of help needed from counselors. Ask the visitors if they have any information that students can keep to read themselves and reproduce for future counselees. I have available on request the one-page flyers "Some Myths about Homosexuality" and "About Homosexual Teachers' Influence on Children." Also available is "Gay Aids for Counselors" from the American Library Association ("Gay aids for counselors," 1980). Every counselor should have on hand a pamphlet on "Coming Out." The phrase, of course, denotes accepting one's self and growing comfortable with telling others about one's gayness ("About coming out," 1978; DeBaugh, 1978).

- *Introductory courses in counseling.* Use gay problems among illustrative cases. In addition to Coming out and How do I know if I am gay? cases (with happy as well as sad outcomes), use lesbian relationship problems or gay male jealousy problems so that counseling students learn that these problems may be no different from heterosexual ones.

- *Testing courses.* Point out the heterosexual bias of most tests and that the gay may indeed be upset by some of the questions asked in the

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Discuss the terror that a gay male may feel at a high masculinity-femininity (MF) score if he has not yet come to terms with his sexuality, and comment on the issue of how much the MF scores reflect interest in people rather than things, instead of reflecting on sexual orientation. Point out that homosexuality is not a condition to be discovered or diagnosed, but a way of life for about 10% of the population. Remind students that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality per se from its diagnostic and statistical manual in 1974.

- *Occupations courses.* Mention the stereotypes that are long since disproved (Jay & Young, 1979; Kopay & Young, 1979; Spada, 1979). Discuss the irrelevance of sexual orientation to jobs, perhaps having a debate about gay child-care workers to bring out the facts and prejudices.

- *Groups courses.* Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the all gay groups versus those of heterogeneous groups. If you have AA representatives in to talk to the class, check to see if there is a gay AA group nearby that also can send a speaker.

- *Internship courses.* Have students discuss with the agency staff their reaction to a counselee who asks for a gay counselor. Compare agency reactions.

- *Consultation courses and courses in organization and administration of guidance programs.* Prepare students to help schools and agencies deal with gay clients or groups. Discuss sponsoring high school gay liberation groups, or what is known of homosexual rape in prisons. Help students be aware of the subtle ways they can let possible counsees know they will find a receptive person willing to talk of same-sex orientation (gay cartoons beside the heterosexual ones on the bulletin board; notices of availability of appropriate books, such as *Young, Gay and Proud*, or *The Gay Mystique, Right to Love* (Anonymous, 1980; Fisher, 1972; Vida, 1978). Discuss in-service training for counselors prepared in an earlier era, perhaps including some historical note on the witch hunts of the past.

- *Couple counseling courses.* Have gay couples in to discuss their perception of any special problems facing the same-sex-oriented couple (custody problems, harrasment of children, etc.).

- *Supervision courses.* It is appropriate to discuss working with student counselors and the "obviously gay" counselee, the stereotype that still persists. But helping an excessively effeminate young man adjust enough so that he can get a job is a challenge for counselors. The student dealing with such a counselee sometimes needs reminding that most gays are indistinguishable from the non-gays.

- *Courses dealing with counseling on religion and values.* Mention should be made of the Metropolitan Community Church, a church primarily of service to the gay community. A minister or worship coordinator could be invited in to discuss religious problems of this minority. Representatives of Dignity (Gay Catholics) or Integrity (Episcopalians), or of any of

the gay caucuses of the major denominations could contribute; there are even gay Mormons and Pentacostals who might be available in the community. Certainly, discussion of the pressures put on gays by the organized churches, at least until recently, is appropriate in talk of religious counseling. The list of churches now opting for support of gay civil rights is also appropriate.

- *Courses on counseling parents, or counseling for mid-life crises.* Invite a representative of Parents of Gays to discuss what it is like to come to terms with having a gay child. Reference to the book *Now That You Know* (Fairchild & Hayward, 1979) as a good resource is appropriate.

- *Courses in counseling the disabled.* Point out the added problems of the gay quadriplegic, and so forth. Only recently have blind gays, and others with disabilities, begun to make themselves and their needs known. In courses involving counseling any different population, use materials like *Let Me Be Me* (Vacc & Wittmer, 1980) to bring awareness to counseling students. It would seem wise for any course on counseling minorities to include a section on this minority. As in any counseling course, cases on Can I tell my parents and still have their support for college, or Should I put my gay lib activities on my vita in applying to medical school could be discussed (Norton, 1976, 1977, 1980).

- *Student personnel administration courses.* Discuss the pros and cons of segregated dorm facilities for gays as well as the heterosexual's jealousy of the same-sex roommates and lovers. Discuss the cases (citation would be helpful) where colleges have been forced by the courts to allow gay lib groups, as well as those that have not. Use illustrations of good and poor organizational functions of gay lib groups to supplement those of ski clubs, chess clubs, and so forth.

CONCLUSION

There is not a course in counselor education in which gay issues are not appropriate. It is better that the topic appear as but a minor part of all courses, so that students get a feel for the pervasiveness of the gay group, but also a feel for the fact that this special population is really an integral part of the entire population. They are in fact an invisible minority who often need to feel more comfortable with themselves and with becoming more visible, not in the stereotyped form, but as proud to be what they are.

REFERENCES

- About coming out.* New York: National Gay Task Force, 1978.
American Personnel and Guidance Association. Minutes of meeting of the Senate, April 1971.

- Anonymous. *Young, gay and proud*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 1980.
- Boswell, J. *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: Gay people in western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Claiborne, R. Who's afraid of gays? *The New York Times*, June 14, 1978, p. A25.
- DeBaugh, A. *Coming out!* Washington, D.C.: Universal Fellowship of Community Churches, 1978.
- Fairchild, B., & Hayward, N. *Now that you know*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979.
- Fisher, P. *The gay mystique: The myth and reality of male homosexuality*. New York: Stein & Day, 1972.
- Gay aids for counselors*. Philadelphia: American Library Association, Gay Task Force, 1980.
- Green, R. Sexual identity of 37 children raised by homosexual or transsexual parents. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1978, 135, 692-697.
- Jay, K., & Young, A. *The gay report*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.
- Karlen, A. *Sexuality and homosexuality: A new view*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1971.
- Kopay, D., & Young, P. D. *The David Kopay story*. New York: Arbor House, 1977.
- Norton, J. L. The homosexual and counseling. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1976, 54, 374-377.
- Norton, J. L. Counseling about homosexuality. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 1977, 3 (2), 29-30.
- Norton, J. L. Same sex preference. In N. Vacc and J. P. Wittmer (Eds.), *Let me be me: Special populations and the helping professional*. Muncie, Ind.: Accelerated Development, 1980.
- Silverstein, C. *Man to man: Gay couples in America*. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1981.
- Spada, J. *The Spada report: The newest survey of gay male sexuality*. New York: New American Library, 1979.
- Vacc, N. A., & Wittmer, J. P. (Eds.). *Let me be me: Special populations and the helping professional*. Muncie, Ind.: Accelerated Development, 1980.
- Vida, G. (Ed.). *Our right to love: A lesbian resource book*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1978.