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Cinematherapy and bibliotherapy : counseling LGBT clients in the coming out process

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Cinematherapy and bibliotherapy : counseling LGBT clients in the coming out process

Abstract

Research indicates lesbians and gay men report higher rates of therapy than heterosexuals, of which 20% sought counseling during the coming out process (Murphy et al., 2002). This implies the need for counselors to be aware of the challenges and concerns involved in the coming out process, as well as counselors being knowledgeable with appropriate counseling interventions for the LGBT population. Current literature purports the effectiveness of using cinematherapy and bibliotherapy for LGBT clients. This paper includes various movie and book recommendations and how to use them to promote personal growth in clients during the coming out process.

**CINEMATHERAPY AND BIBLIOTHERAPY:
COUNSELING LGBT CLIENTS IN THE COMING OUT PROCESS**

A Research Paper

**Presented to The Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education**

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of the Requirements for the Degree**

Master of Arts

by

Stephanie A. Germann

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Abstract

Research indicates lesbian and gay men report higher rates of therapy than heterosexuals, of which 20% sought counseling during the coming out process (Murphy et al., 2002). This implies the need for counselors to be aware of the challenges and concerns involved in the coming out process, as well as counselors being knowledgeable with appropriate counseling interventions for the LGBT population. Current literature purports the effectiveness of using cinematherapy and bibliotherapy for LGBT clients. This paper includes various movie and book recommendations and how to use them to promote personal growth in clients during the coming out process.

Cinematherapy and Bibliotherapy:

Counseling LGBT Clients in the Coming Out Process

According to research, lesbian and gay men report higher rates of utilizing therapy than those of heterosexuals, with nearly 20% seeking therapy during the coming out process (Murphy, Rawlings, & Howe, 2002). This research suggests the importance for counselors to be aware and knowledgeable about the coming out process as well as helpful interventions, such as cinematherapy and bibliotherapy, for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population. Cinematherapy and bibliotherapy consists of assigning films and readings to clients within the therapeutic process.

Literature Review

LGBT clients commonly face numerous concerns, questions, and feelings of isolation in the coming out process. "Coming out" or disclosing one's sexual identity can be risky for a client, as it may lead to homophobic discrimination, prejudice, harassment, and even violence from others, which can directly affect an individual's self-esteem and mental health (Murphy et al., 2002). Many clients may face questioning one's identity and experiencing possible loss, which may involve questioning one's religious identity, being rejected by family and friends, or losing one's job based on the revelation of one's sexual orientation (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). All of these fears and realities can take a toll on one's emotional, mental, physical, and financial well-being.

Cinematherapy and bibliotherapy offer many advantages when working with the LGBT population. Movies and books enable clients to easily acquire and access resources, which are especially important for LGBT individuals who have a need to obtain information safely and privately. Assigned movies and books also help clients to

discover healthy role models and to relate with characters who are similar to themselves in order to provide “support and acceptance” as well as a positive and hopeful outlook on one’s future (Lampropoulos et al., 2004; Slater, 1988). Research has shown that cinematherapy and bibliotherapy can be effective counseling interventions for clients by providing information, encouraging discussion, modeling coping and problem-solving behaviors, and promoting awareness, insight, and self-exploration (Jackson, 2001; Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, & Deane, 2004; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002).

Movie and Book Recommendations

There are many movies, documentaries, television series, books, and news articles, which are readily available to the public, depicting people and issues from the LGBT population. When working with individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered and are struggling in the coming out process for various reasons, it is important to find material which provides accurate information and positive examples of role models within the LGBT community. This paper suggests various movies and books which may be recommended for use within therapy to encourage and empower LGBT clients.

Books

Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence is a book filled with short stories written by gay and lesbian authors who seek to provide information, as well as entertainment, in order to increase awareness and “dispel myths” about homosexuality (Bauer, 1994).

Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism is a book which exposes the existence of oppression and homophobia, which is the fear and discrimination towards people of

variant sexual orientations, in daily life and how to make strides to combat it (Pharr, 1988).

What if Someone I Know is Gay? Answers to Questions about Gay and Lesbian People is a book geared towards kids and young adults, yet educates and helps people of any age explore how to approach and answer questions about sexuality and gay issues (Marcus, 2000).

Documentaries

Out of the Past: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Rights in America and *Before Stonewall* are documentaries which chronicle LGBT history in America and depict LGBT role models who have impacted the gay rights movement throughout the decades (Tobias & Dupre, 1998; Scagliotti, Schiller, & Rosenberg, 1984).

Motion Pictures

If These Walls Could Talk 2 is a motion picture which portrays the stories and struggles of lesbians across the span of three generations. Characters within these stories face issues concerning loss and grief, finding love, equal rights issues, and family planning issues (DeGeneres, Anderson, Coolidge, & Heche, 2000).

Prejudice, discrimination, and violence continue to be realities for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people in today's society. The films *The Laramie Project*, *Boys Don't Cry*, and *Soldier's Girl* depict the tragedies of how real people lost their lives from crimes born out of ignorance and hate (Kaufman, 2002; Pierce, 1999; Pierson, 2003). These stories invoke powerful messages about the need to love, understand, and accept others.

Normal and *Transamerica* depict the journeys and struggles of transgender people, regarding familial and social acceptance. These films explore gender diversity and help to challenge the rigid beliefs of dichotomous thinking about gender in today's society (Anderson, 2003; Tucker, 2005).

Television Series

There are rare occurrences on television at this point in time which follow the lives of LGBT people in an accurate and positive manner. *L Word* and *Queer as Folk* follow the lives of LGBT characters regarding their relationships and the joys and hardships they face in everyday life (Minahan & Troche, 2004; DeCarlo & Fawcett, 2000).

Treatment and Counseling Considerations

Cinematherapy and bibliotherapy can be effective interventions because of the ability use them with clients from diverse cultures and backgrounds with various issues or concerns. However, there are some treatment and counseling considerations to be aware of when assigning movies and books within therapy. When considering cinematherapy or bibliotherapy, it is important to carefully decide which clients would benefit from this type of intervention. According to research, it is the counselor's responsibility to evaluate a client's level of functioning, history of trauma or violence, and ability to gain insight and understand subject matter before assigning a movie or book for therapy purposes (Lampropoulos et al., 2004). For instance, assigning *Boys Don't Cry* to a client who has recently been physically or sexually assaulted may need to be reconsidered.

It is also important for counselors to select movies and books that have been previously viewed and read by the counselor before assigning to a specific client. Also, discussing any content which may be problematic for the client, before the client views the material, is important to either prepare the client for the material or determine whether the certain movie or book is appropriate at that time (Slater, 1988).

Processing and Discussing Movies and Books in Counseling

After the client has viewed the assigned movie or book, it is essential that the client's reactions, feelings, and thoughts about the material are explored and discussed.

Sharp et al. (2002) suggests asking the client general questions such as:

- Tell me about the characters in the movie/book.
- What was the character thinking/feeling?
- What did the character see as her or his main problem?
- How did the character resolve her or his issues?
- What other solutions might the character have used:
- What was her or his relationship to other characters?
- Who did you like/not like? (p. 273)

These are only a few suggestions for questions to use while processing the client's experiences as they relate to the movie or book. The counselor has the ability to adjust and create other topics of questioning in order to relate to the assigned material as well as meet the needs of the particular individual. Processing the client's experience with cinematherapy or bibliotherapy also gives the counselor ample opportunities to incorporate messages of hope, empowerment, and encouragement to further the growth of the client within the therapeutic process.

Conclusion

Overall, there are many different concerns and challenges faced by LGBT people who are in the process of coming out to friends, families, co-workers, and others.

Cinematherapy and bibliotherapy are important interventions which counselors can utilize to adapt to the unique needs of an individual client, especially within the LGBT population. Utilizing the provided suggestions for movies and books, as well as other available resources, is beneficial for clients because it allows them to gain more positive perceptions about themselves, their sexual orientation and identity, and the LGBT community as a whole.

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