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### School Counselor Competency and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth

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## School Counselor Competency and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth

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**School Counselor Competency and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,  
and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth**

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### **Abstract**

Much research has been dedicated to the difficulties LGBTQ individuals face. Further, school counselors have been challenged to assist LGBTQ individuals in the school setting. Being aware of the specific issues and being educated about specific ways to assist these individuals enable school counselors to be more effective clinicians (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). This article will address three components of counselor preparation and affirmative school counseling interventions: counselor self-awareness, LGBTQ sexual identity development, and LGBTQ-affirmative school climate. For each component, an activity is presented to assist professional school counselors become more LGBTQ-affirmative.

## **School Counselor Competency and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth**

School counselor competency related to working with and advocating for LGBTQ youth is a topic that has been addressed for decades and has recently regained a surge in attention. This article will address three components of counselor preparation and affirmative school counseling interventions: counselor self-awareness, LGBTQ sexual identity development, and LGBTQ-affirmative school climate. For each component, an activity is presented to assist professional school counselors become more LGBTQ-affirmative.

Scholarship focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals indicates that sexual minority adolescents are at an increased risk for depression, suicide, poor school performance, absenteeism, psychiatric care and hospitalization, running away, substance abuse and high-risk sexual behavior due to heterosexism and related discrimination (Stone, 2003; Vare & Norton, 1998; Weiler, 2004). Further, researchers (Chung & Katayama, 1998; MacGillivray, 2000) noted that environmental stressors play a major role in LGBTQ youths' psychosocial development process. For example, LGBTQ youth have little or no chance to take part in dating relationships, friendships, or to develop intimate relationships in the same manner in which heterosexual adolescents are permitted (Deisher, 1989; Schneider, 1989). Instead, LGBTQ individuals are often "forced to explore their sexuality secretly" (Macgillivray, 2000, p. 309).

Teasdale and Bradley-Engen (2010) suggested that schools may in fact be a fundamental location for intervention geared towards assisting sexual minority youth

because many peer and school related factors are significant sources of symptoms for depression and suicidal ideation. Schools have a unique position as one of the few institutions that almost all LGBTQ students must attend. School counselors, then, have an opportunity to facilitate growth, awareness, knowledge and understanding so that both sexual minority and heterosexual individuals can learn and develop in a positive school environment (Black & Underwood, 1998; Weiler, 2004).

The need for supportive and accepting counselors and educators is evident. Over 20 years ago, research indicated that 50% of LGBTQ individuals have been unsatisfied and displeased with the counseling received, due not only to the counselors' lack of understanding of LGBTQ concerns but also due to the negative and heterosexist attitudes held by the counselors (Rudolph, 1988). Many LGBTQ individuals end up terminating their counseling after just one counseling session. These statistics are extremely concerning especially when taking into account that lesbians and gay males are 2 to 4 times more likely than heterosexual individuals to seek counseling (Rudolph, 1988). Although the previous research is more than 20 years old, much research suggests that conditions have not changed much. Recent research indicates that sexual minority individuals, specifically lesbians, noted that they did not view their counselors as competent clinicians in terms of sexual orientation (Hunt, Matthews, Milson, & Lammel, 2006). Further, Kosciw, Diaz, and Greytak (2008) reported that over the last ten years of research they have conducted on the national school climate for LGBTQ individuals, things have improved very little.

This charge of school counselors increasing their awareness and skills and providing an affirming school climate is echoed by professional associations. The

American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) state that counselors assist students in self-discovery and are available to help in development of a strong, positive personal identity which includes cultural identity (ACA, 2000; ASCA, 2007). The ASCA 2007 position statement on sexual orientation also states that counselors are to encourage respect and uphold equal opportunity for all students regardless of sexual orientation and the ASCA Ethical Standards (2004) indicates that each student has the right to respect, support, and advocacy from a school counseling program that includes and affirms all students regardless of "sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity/expression" (p.1). The standards also discuss counselor responsibility:

Professional School Counselor's (PSC's) responsibility to gain education and training that will: improve awareness, knowledge, and skills and effectiveness in working with diverse populations: ethnic/racial status, age, economic status, special needs, ESL or ELL, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity and appearance. (p. 4)

This includes prevention work and direct training opportunities for school staff to understand issues related to LGBTQ youth (Black & Underwood, 1998). Since schools have an ethical, moral and legal obligation to provide support and protection for all students (Weiler, 2004), training on LGBTQ issues is an important part of professional school counselor training and outreach within schools.

Frank and Cannon (2009) noted that school counselors may possess the desire to help LGBTQ students but may not know how to properly do so. Especially important

for school counselors is the fact that LGBTQ individuals are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to school counselors than they are to any other school staff member (Harris & Bliss, 1997). Fontaine (1998) found in a follow up study, that of the junior/senior high school counselors surveyed, 51% reported having contact with a student presenting with sexual orientation issues. This study also noted that 21% of the elementary school counselors surveyed reported seeing students with similar concerns. Interestingly, Fontaine noted that of the school counselors who reported negative feelings toward the subject of homosexuality, all had not had a student presenting with sexual orientation issues.

Being aware of the specific issues and being educated about specific ways to assist these individuals enable school counselors to be more effective clinicians (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). Non-supportive counselors may in fact misdiagnose these individuals due to their own lack of understanding of psychological or developmental issues specific to this population (Buhrke & Douce, 1991).

### **Counselor Self-Awareness**

Ethical counseling practice is dependent on the counselors' awareness of their attitudes toward individuals from minority groups. When counselors lack this awareness for the need of affirming attitudes, the counseling process and client relationship can be harmed (Matthews & Bieschke, 2001). Trainings that fail to challenge counselor's examination of personal biases may contribute to this lack of awareness (Matthews & Bieschke, 2001). Counselors, no matter how they self-identify, must be aware of the beliefs and attitudes they hold about sexual identity and how their assumptions impact understanding LGBTQ individuals in general (DePaul et al., 2009; Gonsiorek, 1988) and



the counseling relationship and therapeutic process more specifically (Kissinger, Lee, Twitty, & Kisner, 2009).

The call for counselors to address their biases and work with LGBTQ clients is unavoidable, particularly given historical legal decisions. For example, in the 2001 case (*Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc., 2001*) an employer's decision to terminate a counselor after the counselor requested to not counsel a client due to the client's homosexual orientation clashing with the counselor's personal religious beliefs, was sustained by a federal appeals court (Hermann & Herlihy, 2006). Further, the court noted that clients could be harmed emotionally when a counselor refused to counsel a client because of concerns about homosexuality (Hermann & Herlihy, 2006).

Additionally, recent cases at Eastern Michigan University and Augusta State University call further attention to this topic. In 2009 both cases came to light when one current student from each of the above mentioned counseling programs, were dismissed after refusing to counsel homosexual clients because of conflicts with religious beliefs (Shallcross, 2010). In both cases, federal judges upheld the decisions by the universities to dismiss the students. Important to note is that in both cases, these students were training to be school counselors (*Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2010*; Shallcross, 2010).

In the court record (*Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2010*) classmates from Augusta State University provided affidavits that detailed discussions with Keeton. The following is an excerpt from that case:

During another discussion outside of the classroom, Plaintiff admitted to me that in a counseling situation where a client discloses to her that he/she is gay, it is

*Plaintiff's intention to tell the client that their behavior is morally wrong* and then help the client 'change' that behavior. Plaintiff admitted further that if she were not successful in helping this hypothetical client 'change,' she would refer him/her to someone practicing conversion and reparative therapy. (p. 10)

These recent situations and beliefs are troubling at best and the authors echo the statement "When Georgia's LGBTQ youth are being bullied or thinking about committing suicide, we want them to be speaking with trained counselors who will help not harm them," added Nevins the supervising senior staff attorney in Lambda Legal's Southern Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia (Bagby, 2010, p.1). However, the authors are also aware that when faced with such issues, many school counselors "simply don't know what to do or what we can do" (Anonymous School Counselor, personal communication, March, 26, 2009).

In regards to education and training in the area of LGBTQ competencies, an essential place to start is with self- awareness. Pearson (2003) discussed that "regardless of the training format, activities and assignments that focus on awareness, knowledge, and skills should be incorporated" (p.298). Much of the multicultural literature addresses the components of knowledge, awareness and skill in self-exploration exercises. Further, such exercises that ask participants to reflect personally about beliefs and attitudes held about LGBTQ individuals have shown to be successful in increasing the multicultural competencies of knowledge, awareness and skills (Dillon et al., 2004). Additionally, personal reflections that ask individuals to think about early messages received as a child about LGBTQ individuals and to possibly challenge held

beliefs and/or biases is another important piece of training (Pearson, 2003). The following is an activity that asks participants to do the abovementioned items.

### **Activity**

The following activity, adapted from the GLSEN Safe Space Training (GLSEN, 2006) may be useful to facilitate self-exploration. Take a moment and think back far into your memories. Try to think of some early messages you received as a child (growing up), as an adolescent, as an adult- about LGBTQ individuals. These messages could have been covert, unnoticed, or misunderstood at the time. Also, these recollections or thoughts may have been positive, negative, or even neutral. Spend a few minutes in thoughtful reflection. Write down some of your recollections.

When you have given this concentrated consideration, consider the following questions: To what extent have I internalized the messages I received about LGBTQ individuals? To what extent do I agree with the messages I received? To what extent do I disagree with the messages received? After examining your present beliefs and understandings about the messages you received, spend some time thinking about and possibly identifying some stereotypes about LGBTQ individuals that could have been formed from early experiences.

It is important to note that while doing this activity and thinking about early recollections and possibly stereotypes, you should not feel guilty about the inaccurate information you received and/or believed. Anti-LGBTQ ideas and beliefs permeate our society and affect us all in many ways. As an ally, and advocate, and a competent counselor, you will be asked to become aware of and even unlearn any biases or stereotypes you may have been taught and possibly still carry with you.

After further contemplation of this self-exploration activity, it is beneficial if counselors ask themselves: To what extent do messages, beliefs, and biases I hold play a role in the therapeutic relationship? How do my biases and/or stereotypes affect my ability to act as a competent, ethical counselor? How can I work to be aware of these topics and more as I seek to serve a diverse population? Thank you for considering and exploring your thoughts and memories.

### **LGBTQ Youth Sexual Identity Development**

Vivian Cass (1979) conceptualized the first model of sexual identity development (SID) and/or formation, which describes the developmental phases and/or the sequence of events in one's development. A few other sexual identity models were developed after Cass's [i.e. Troiden's 1989 homosexual identity developmental model and Sullivan's 1998 model of sexual identity development] and important to note is that the coming out process is a component of each model. The coming out process is a component of sexual identity development for LGBTQ youth and can be detrimental (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997; Lemoire & Chen, 2005) and can lead to increased feelings of rejection that can increase mental and emotional distress and risky behaviors, including suicide (Gagne et al., 1997; Harrison, 2003; Lemoire & Chen, 2005).

In regards to the coming out process, it is also important to consider that when adolescents are at this point, it is essential that they are provided with a safe atmosphere. Given these consequences, understanding the needs of this population may equip counselors and educators to provide the support system needed to promote success for these students (Callahan, 2001). Furthermore, "the relational aspect of

individual counseling allows for a restoration of the capacity for interpersonal authenticity in adolescents who may have presented false selves to the world for some period of time" (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009, p. 38).

### **Case Scenario**

The following is a true story submitted by one of the author's peers (who requested to remain anonymous). When you read this case scenario, please consider what you would do if you were the school counselor with whom this young man went to speak. Processing questions follow.

**Braden's story.** *Growing up as a young gay teenager in a very small rural town was difficult to say the least. I fought internally with the fact that I was gay, and attracted to guys, and had always been told by my family and everyone else around me that it was wrong, and that I would go to hell. I finally began to realize that this was just who I was, and that there was nothing I could do to change it, or feel the way that I was "supposed" to feel. I was teased throughout middle school, making it pretty rough. Always the outcast, with only a few friends throughout school, I cherished these relationships. I knew that I was going to have to hide my secret indefinitely, because of fear of the reaction from my mother and father, so I just decided to myself that was just the way it was going to have to be.*

*I only knew of one other gay male. He lived a city away from me. We went to hang out and saw a movie together. Later, I wrote him a letter, expressing my feelings and how much I liked him. I signed it with the word "love." For some reason or another I guess my mother sensed I was doing something "wrong" and came into my room in the middle of the night and took the jeans I had on that day from my room. The noise that*

*she made awakened me. The letter was in the pocket. I had not had a chance to give it to him yet. I lay in bed literally frozen with fear. Heat came over me, I knew there was nothing I could do about this, the day I never wanted to come, had come. My mother read the letter. She came in with my father and told me to get in the car. My parents were taking me to my father's work (which he had access to the entire building) so that the neighbors would not hear the fight. Everyone was silent on the ride.*

*She proceeded to yell, and scream, and curse at me, throwing the letter in my face, telling me to "READ IT OUT LOUD. I WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY THESE SICKENING THINGS". But I just tore it up. She had made copies with the copy machine at the office. I kept tearing up the pages, and she had MORE. MORE proof that I was gay. I was told that night by my parents that I could not stay under their roof, they "could not support something so sickening and evil." I was of course distraught. Crying non-stop, and couldn't even think straight. I had JUST turned 16.*

*We went back home, the fight continued a little while longer. My mother kept screaming at me to get out of her house. I left that night from home, it being a school night, I didn't know what to do. I called my best friend (the only person that I had come out to), and her mother gladly offered me a place to stay.*

*I went to school the next morning, tired, confused, not sure what the hell was gonna come from my life or what I was supposed to do. I went to the school counselor's office first thing in the morning. I sat down, and told her, "I am gay," told her what had happened at home, and it was basically an unlivable situation, and didn't know what I was supposed to do. This story has been truncated due to space limitations. Refer to Appendix A for the entire story.]*

Reflect on the following process questions. What do you think your initial internal reaction would be to hearing Braden's story? What do you think your initial response would be after hearing Braden's story? Are your initial reactions focused on how you, the counselor is feeling or how Braden, the client is feeling? In either of the first two questions you answered, have any feeling words come to mind as to what Braden must be going through? Have you offered any reflection of feeling associated with his pain? Have you avoided assumptions and/or stereotypes while thinking through this scenario? How might this case be related to LGBTQ identity development?

The processing questions listed here are offered to incite thinking about how you would potentially respond to a similar scenario beforehand so as to give an opportunity for deep consideration and time for reflection. Below are some items to think about in situations when someone comes out to you. Not all of the ideas offered would necessarily apply in a counseling setting, but can still serve as beneficial to think about in general terms for when someone comes out to you. GLSEN (2009, p. 14-15) states:

- Offer support but don't assume a student needs any help. The student may be completely comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity and may not need help dealing with it or be in need of any support. It may be that the student just wanted to tell someone or just simply to tell you so you might know them better. Offer and be available to support your students as they come out to others.
- Be a role model of acceptance. Always model good behavior by using inclusive language and setting an accepting environment by not making assumptions about people's sexual orientation or gender identity, and by addressing other's (adults and students) biased language and addressing stereotypes and myths about LGBTQ people. By demonstrating that you are respectful of LGBTQ

people and intolerant of homophobia and transphobia, LGBTQ students are more likely to see you as a supportive educator.

- Appreciate the student's courage. There is often a risk in telling someone something personal, especially sharing for the first time one's sexual orientation or gender identity, when it is generally not considered the norm. Consider someone's coming out a gift and thank them for giving that gift to you. Sharing this personal information with you means that the student respects and trusts you.
- Listen, listen, listen. One of the best ways to support a student is to hear them out and let the student know you are there to listen. Coming out is a long process, and chances are you'll be approached again to discuss the process, the challenges, and the joys of being out at school.
- Assure and respect confidentiality. The student told you and may or may not be ready to tell others. Let the student know that the conversation is confidential and that you won't share the information with anyone else, unless the student specifically asks for your help in doing so. If they want others to know, doing it in their own way and their own timing is important. Respect their privacy. \*Author note- this means not sharing with other counselors, teachers, or staff. Confidentiality means telling no one!
- Ask questions that demonstrate understanding, acceptance and compassion. Some suggestions are: (a) Have you been able to tell anyone else? (b) Has this been a secret you have had to keep from others or have you told other people? (c) Do you feel safe in school? Supported by the adults in your life? (d) Do you need any help of any kind? Resources or someone to listen? (e) Have I ever offended you unknowingly?
- Remember that the student has not changed. They are still the same person you knew before the disclosure, you just have more information about them, which might improve your relationship. Let the student know that you feel the same way



about them as you always have and they are still the same person. If you are shocked, try not to let the surprise lead you to view or treat the student any differently.

- Challenge traditional norms. You may need to consider your own beliefs about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender roles. Do not expect people to conform to societal norms about gender or sexual orientation.
- Be prepared to give a referral. If there are questions you can't answer, or if the student does need some emotional support, be prepared to refer them to a sympathetic counselor, a hotline, your school's Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), or an LGBTQ youth group or community center. \*Author note- this referral is not to be confused with counselor referral because of refusal to counsel. This is discussing referral to a counselor from a non-counselor (e.g. friend, teacher, parent, etc.).

### **LGBTQ-Affirmative School Climate**

Having an LGBTQ affirming school climate is necessary to support LGBTQ students. The degree to which LGBTQ adolescents have supportive and understanding relationships with others and develop positive coping skills will impact their success in adapting to the stigmas they will inevitably face (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). In a study on sexual discrimination and teasing among high school students, positive school atmospheres and parental support served as protective features against drug use and depression for sexual minority youth (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). Sexual minority youth who have support from parents and peers are found to have less mental health concerns when compared to LBG youth without these protective features (D'Augelli, 2002, 2003). Tharinger and Wells (2000) supported this as well, noting that family and schools provide support and a connectedness that serve as aspects of positive outcomes for sexual minority youth. However, Murdock and Bolch (2005) noted

that having parental and peer support alone was not effective in minimizing the effects felt from a negative school environment. Other researchers note that peers and non-family adults were found to be more supportive to sexual minority youth than family members as many participants indicated having not come out to family and/or friends due to fear of rejection (Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). Espelage et al. (2008) found that having positive, supportive school atmosphere is a critical protective feature for LGBTQ youth and can decrease behavioral issues and negative psychological issues. School counselors can provide this support in the schools and can assist others in this initiative as well.

It is essential that LGBTQ individuals have supportive school counselors and are afforded the same opportunities that other students and minority groups are afforded (Pope, Bunch, Szymanski, & Rankins, 2003). Black and Underwood (1998) noted that educational institutions perpetuate heterosexism by refusing to institute support and advocacy that would assist in increasing positive school atmospheres and by refusing to address and protect LGBTQ individuals from prejudice, discrimination, and abuse in the same manner in which they protect other oppressed groups. Having nonbiased school counselors who advocate for the success of all students can provide support and assist in normalizing, not alienating, this minority population. It can also aid in the personal, social and educational development of these students. Identity validation and normalization facilitate the process of building coping mechanisms that allow these adolescents to deal with stigma management (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). Stone (2003) emphasizes that society and family support have a very important roles in successful identity development. This support provides the normal vital relationships that most

heterosexual students have, but most LGBTQ youth often find inaccessible (Stone, 2003).

### **Supporting a Positive School Climate**

School counselors are to develop ways to foster an affirmative school climate.

Considering the strategies that follow, brainstorm concrete ways to apply these strategies to your school system.

- **Be visible.** As school counselors, we know how important it is to be visible in our schools and for our students. Another aspect of being visible that can promote a positive school climate is being visible to LGBTQ students. GLSEN (2009) suggests making offices and classrooms inclusive by displaying LGBTQ symbols such as the pink triangle, rainbow triangle, or safe space stickers. Another aspect of visibility is considered for the school (not just your offices). Display material that supports LGBTQ individuals (GLSEN, 2009) such as bulletin boards with positive quotes by famous LGBTQ individuals. Another idea is to infuse LGBTQ information and history with other information and history posted in the schools.
- **Spread the word.** Letting other educators and staff in your school know that you are an ally and talking about the importance behind making our school safe for all is a necessary place to start to increase student's safety as school (GLSEN, 2009).
- **Understand the importance of language.** Using inclusive language is important and something that everyone can start doing to promote a more positive school climate. An example of inclusive language is saying 'partner' instead of 'husband/wife' or 'boyfriend/girlfriend' (GLSEN, 2009).
- **Don't ignore anti-LGBTQ comments or behavior.** LGBTQ students are victims of acts of school violence and sexual harassment, and nearly one-third of the students who reported assaults or harassment to a school official or staff member state that school staff did nothing (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). Learning how to respond to anti-LGBTQ behavior can be challenging. However, ignoring this

behavior sends a message that it is ok to discriminate and bully thus leading to individuals feeling unsafe in school. Take some time to do more research, read the (free) GLSEN's safe space kit, and practice some ways in which you feel comfortable addressing anti-LGBTQ comments and behavior.

### **Summary**

Understanding the needs of this population will help counselors and educators to assist these individuals to provide the support system needed for LGBTQ students' success. The degree to which LGBTQ adolescents have supportive and understanding relationships with others and develop positive coping skills will impact their success in adapting to the stigmas they will inevitably face (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). As research indicates, adolescents that are questioning their sexual orientation must have their thoughts and feelings understood and normalized in the same manner as those self-identifying as LGBTQ (Lipkin, 1999). School counselors may be the only person with whom the adolescent feels it safe to discuss these sometimes terrifying and very perplexing thoughts and feelings (Cooley, 1998). These supportive relationships fostered by school counselors may greatly impact quality of life and serve as a protective factor for many LGBTQ individuals (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Teasdale & Bradley-Engen, 2010).

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## ***Appendix A***

### Braden's story

Growing up as a young gay teenager in a very small rural town was difficult to say the least. I fought internally with the fact that I was gay, and attracted to guys, and had always been told by my family and everyone else around me that it was wrong, and that I would go to hell. I finally began to realize that this was just who I was, and that there was nothing I could do to change it, or feel the way that I was "supposed" to feel. I was teased throughout middle school, making it pretty rough. Always the outcast, with only a few friends throughout school, I cherished these relationships. I knew that I was going to have to hide my secret indefinitely, because of fear of the reaction from my mother and father, so I just decided to myself that was just the way it was going to have to be.

I only knew of one other gay male. He lived a city away from me. We went to hang out and saw a movie together. Later, I wrote him a letter, expressing my feelings and how much I liked him. I signed it with the word "love." For some reason or another I guess my mother sensed I was doing something "wrong" and came into my room in the middle of the night and took the jeans I had on that day from my room. The noise that she made awakened me. The letter was in the pocket. I had not had a chance to give it to him yet. I lay in bed literally frozen with fear. Heat came over me, I knew there was nothing I could do about this, the day I never wanted to come, had come.

My mother read the letter. She came in with my father and told me to get in the car. My parents were taking me to my father's work (which he had access to the entire building) so that the neighbors would not hear the fight. Everyone was silent on the ride.

She proceeded to yell, and scream, and curse at me, throwing the letter in my face, telling me to "READ IT OUT LOUD. I WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY THESE SICKENING THINGS". But I just tore it up. She had made copies with the copy machine at the office. I kept tearing up the pages, and she had MORE. MORE proof that I was gay. I was told that night by my parents that I could not stay under their roof, they" could not support something so sickening and evil." I was of course distraught. Crying non-stop, and couldn't even think straight. I had JUST turned 16.

We went back home, the fight continued a little while longer. My mother kept screaming at me to get out of her house. I left that night from home, it being a school night, I didn't know what to do. I called my best friend (the only person that I had come out to), and her mother gladly offered me a place to stay.

I went to school the next morning, tired, confused, not sure what the hell was gonna come from my life or what I was supposed to do. I went to the school counselor's office first thing in the morning. I sat down, and told her, "I am gay", told her what had happened at home, and it was basically an unlivable situation, and didn't know what I was supposed to do. I came to her for GUIDANCE, for SUPPORT. A 16 year old kid pours his heart out to you and tells you everything and pleads for help. All she offered after a lot of "uh-huh's" and "oh, I'm sorry's" was, "I don't know how to deal with this, this gay problem." "I've never dealt with a gay problem, so I'm not sure what more to tell you than you have to go home to your parents and do what they say." WHAT? As an adult, this STILL pisses me off. No matter what a circumstance, I could never imagine someone who is supposed to be a counselor that I came to with a problem as a LAST DESPERATE RESORT, is telling me that I am a "problem."

My mother ended up reporting me as a runaway even though she had told me to get the hell out of her house. I ended up having to go back home for a day or two. My mother went to the guidance counselor at school, who told my mother everything I had told her. I was under the assumption that a counselor wouldn't do that to me. Which, after my mother found out everything I had told the counselor, my home life was even worse. The counselor had betrayed me. My mother was now even more enraged, presumably from "embarrassment" that everyone knew she had a "faggot" for a son.

The next few years were turmoil. My parents moved us away from that town, I guess hoping that I wouldn't be gay anymore. She even said the people I had hung out with "made me gay." I kept running away from home, as I couldn't take it any longer. The situation also got more violent. Police were called on her by me during fights, etc. When the police arrived, my mother turned it and blamed me for everything, I was crying and upset. The policeman came into my room, sat on my bed, and said, "why are you treating your mother like this? You seem like a nice boy. You don't seem like a troublemaker." I then told him she fought with me because I was gay. He said, "Well, they're your parents, and you have to do what they say." And left. Abandoned again by someone I was taught as a child that would be there to help me, and didn't offer any support or referral whatsoever.

I continued to try to run away (from being in a horrible situation and from repeatedly being kicked out) and found myself in compromising situation after compromising situation. Things are very scary when you are a teenager, gay, jobless, and homeless.

## **Biographical Statement**

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