Interpersonal Practice with Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgendered People

Social Work Course #707: Fall 2004
Family Assessment Clinic Building, 555 S. Forest
Thursdays 2:00 – 5:00

Instructor: Laura L. Sanders, MSW, ACSW
Phone: 734-662-3509
Email Address: createcoun@comcast.net

Course Description

This course seeks to immerse students in the most updated research, resources and affirmative practice principals and methods for interpersonal practice with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered clients. This population also includes those clients who identify as other than heterosexual or are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity in anyway.

The topics focused on in this course will expose students to the complexities of the LGBT experience and special issues including gender-sex identity, homophobia and heterosexism, coming-out, the multiple oppressions of race, class, culture and gender-sex identity discrimination, health issues, grief work and living with HIV/AIDS, family life and development through the lifecycle, and romantic relationships and sex. Special struggles that affect LGBT clients, but are largely ignored for this population, will also be addressed including substance abuse, suicide and domestic violence.

This course aims to provide the most current empirical findings and anecdotal information through lecture, discussion, reading, and many guest presentations of varying formats. It will also focus on personal growth and practice skills through experiential assignments (out of class), and participatory exercises, and practice role-plays (in class).

Note from the Instructor

I have been working with LGBT concerns and the community for twenty years, dating back to when my title was the “Lesbian Advocate”, Director of the “Lesbian Advocate’s Office” (at U of M student services) with my professional partner, at the time, Jim Toy,
who was the director of the “Gay Male Advocate's Office”. Now these offices are combined and entitled the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Affairs Office at the University of Michigan. At its inception, this office was noted as the first of its kind in the country on a college campus. We were, and still are, proud of its existence! Since then, I have been working with LGBT clients primarily in private practice in Ann Arbor.

Despite my experience with LGBT concerns, this is the first time I have attempted to create and instruct a course of this nature. In sifting through the many issues that affect the LGBT community, I have found it very difficult to include all of those that strike me as priorities. Even though my tendency is to try to squeeze too much into any one class period or syllabus, I am sure there are issues that will be left out or merely touched on that you feel deserve more attention. Some that immediately come to mind are spirituality among LGBT clients, LGBT clients with compounding disabilities, legal issues, more on romantic relationships and couple’s therapy, the intersex experience, LGBT sexual abuse survivors, etc. In your experiential projects, recommended readings, and community presentations, you might choose to focus on some area of interest that the course does not as thoroughly address.

Also, I will be counting on you to provide me with honest and thorough feedback through your written and verbal reactions to the classes. In this way you have the opportunity to help me to continue to create and improve the course for future semesters. My goal is for this course to be a dynamic learning experience for students that focuses directly on the most current knowledge in affirmative treatment with LGBT clients, and on clinical practice experience.

**What You can Expect from Me**

Most classes will be structured to include a lecture or presentation period and a discussion or practice experience. I will utilize many guests in varying formats to help teach numerous classes since the local LGBT community provides us with a wealth of human resources.

Expect me to share of my own personal and clinical experiences to enhance your learning. I intend to speak candidly as a therapist who works with LGBT clients, and the effects of this work on the therapist. Feel free to ask questions.

I intend to help students think critically about LGBT practice with individuals through challenging questions, assignments, readings, class experiences, exercises and discussion.

I will attempt to facilitate a safe environment that will encourage personal growth and sharing amongst students through modeling, class discussion, assignments, and experiential exercises. Of course the ultimate tone of safety and cohesion that emerges in the class has to do with the efforts of all individuals. I realize that my power to create this atmosphere is somewhat limited, and lies within all of us.
I have heard many students request a more practical clinical focus in interpersonal practice courses. Although it is difficult to build in clinical exercises, and students often feel vulnerable to practice in front of their peers, my goal is to include adequate in-class practice experiences to help students foster the clinical skills necessary to feel beginning competence in therapy with LGBT clients. These might include, traditional role-plays, open-chair role-plays, fishbowl exercises and practice role-plays with actual LGBT community members. Participation in at least one practice experience is required.

My feedback will focus both on your strengths and your weaknesses. You can expect honest, direct and constructive critique on written and practice assignments. In critiquing your work, I will not be expecting you to know everything, although some basic knowledge is obviously imperative. Rather, in your writing, I will be looking for the depth of your critical thinking, your self-awareness, and your grasp of the issues affecting LGBT clients as they are addressed in the course material. In your practice experiences, I will be looking for your attunement to the client, your use of self, and your ability to integrate what you do and don’t know about LGBT issues into your interactions with the clients.

I intend to be accessible, available and responsive to student’s questions and concerns. I am more likely to get back to you in a timely way if you call me rather than email me. I don’t get to my email as frequently as I would like to because I am in the field most of the time. I never sit at a desk. I do check my business phone daily during the week and will get back to you as soon as possible if you leave me a message. I don’t have regular office hours, but will be happy to set up an appointment with you if necessary.

**What I Expect from You**

Be on time, alert, and ready to participate in class. Class participation is imperative in this course. Take care of your own needs. There will be a short break at some point in each class, but if you get tired in the middle of class, get up and get a drink, but don’t fall asleep.

Read the required texts and articles for each class and integrate the readings into the class discussions and assignments. Be especially cognizant of completing readings before classes where we will have guest presenters so that you can come into class with some basic knowledge and formulate thoughtful questions and comments. (I have tried not to pile on too much reading).

I believe that good therapists must be self-aware and open to exploring their own issues regarding any given clinical concern or population. Be prepared to explore your own experiences and assumptions regarding the LGBT community, homophobia, heterosexism, and your own gender identity and sexual orientation issues. There will be a variety of ways students can do this through critical thinking, assignments, reaction sheets, and class discussions. You should not feel mandated to share personal information that will make you feel uncomfortable, but my hope is to create an environment where most, and hopefully, all of you will feel safe enough to take some
risks, and to be open about who you are and/or what questions you might have about your own identity.

I expect you to be an honest, sensitive, and mature class member. Please share your opinions and feedback with others in discussions and exercises, and when you do so, make sure they are stated in a sensitive and constructive manner. Also, be prepared to hear varying opinions and feedback non-defensively, and to use them constructively. We will review and use the ground rules developed for Multicultural Orientation – 2004.

Since the class is highly experiential, you must attend class and participate. More than two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your grade.

Complete class assignments on time. I expect all of your assignments to reflect your highest quality work.

I expect that you will get out of the course what you put into it. You are ultimately responsible for the depth, challenge and enjoyment of your learning. You are welcome to approach me about additional or alternate readings or assignments that meet your specific interests.

**Course Objectives:**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Comprehend and critically analyze theories regarding the development of sexual identity.
2. Articulate the basic areas of concern covered in the course and the points of special relevancy for LGBTNS clients (e.g., suicide, substance abuse).
3. Demonstrate sound and sensitive therapy skills for some of the issues in this course.
4. Articulate social work ethical values regarding practice with LGBTNS clients.
5. Describe the impact of characteristics, such as economic class, culture, ethnicity, gender, disability status, religion, and age on LGBTNS clients.
6. Write about and summarily describe the latest research and detailed therapy methods for some of the issues described in this course.
7. Address questions, concerns, and biases regarding sexual orientation’s intersection with the issues in this course when working with clients (e.g., being able to discriminate between issues that are related to sexual orientation and those that are not).
Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:

- **Multiculturalism and Diversity:** In role plays, students will learn about and be able to discuss and exemplify sensitivity to the impact that gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, education, geography (rural vs. urban), and other variables may have on LGBTNS clients, as well as how these characteristics intersect with the primary issues discussed in this course.

- **Social Justice and Social Change:** Social workers must be able to empower clients, interpret actions, and be aware of intersections of therapy issues and actions towards social justice. In working with LGBTNS clients, students will learn that they may be working toward social change and improvement of social justice in an agency or community. The impact of such work will be discussed in class. Students will also learn about the fight for social justice that this client population has made and is making.

- **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation:** Students will learn skills for health and mental health promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of problems, particularly in dealing with the issues of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, sexual identity development, and discrimination.

- **Behavioral and Social Science Research:** The readings for this course will be extensive, and evaluation of the current state of science will be an integral part of understanding the research and methodology constraints and limits for LGBTNS issues and treatment concerns. Students will learn about and analyze the strength of science in the areas this course covers. In addition, evaluation of treatment will be reviewed and special issues of evaluating therapy with LGBTNS clients will be emphasized.

Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:

This course is an example of the value social work places on diversity and work with oppressed populations. NASW ethics will be reviewed in relationship to working with LGBTNS clients and evaluation of practice. These ethics will be analyzed for potential weaknesses and misuse, as well as for use as guides to practice. The struggle of LGBTNS clients to be recognized as a client population and the struggles of practitioners and researchers working with these issues will also be discussed.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you need an accommodation for a disability, contact me as soon as possible. It is possible that aspects of the course can be modified to facilitate your learning process. There are resources available to help us to meet your needs including Students with Disabilities, the Adaptive Technology Computing Site, etc. If you disclose a disability to me I will treat that information as private and confidential.
Student Assignments

20% Student participation:
This part of your grade will be evaluated by the instructor. Participate in class discussions, exercises and role-plays. Come prepared to integrate your knowledge from the readings and ask thoughtful and sensitive questions of guest presenters. Every student will be required to participate and receive feedback from the instructor and the class on at least one therapist/client role-play.

20% Self-awareness paper on gender identity, sexual orientation, homophobia and the complexities of race, class, culture, ethnicity, etc:
This paper should be no longer than five single-spaced pages (12 pt. font) and should discuss your personal experiences, history, reflections and questions regarding your own gender-identity, sexual orientation, internalized phobias and your personal experiences with heterosexism, homophobia and the compounding complexities of race, class, culture, ethnicity, etc. This paper must site readings and class presentations on identity development. We will develop a list of thought-provoking questions early on that you can use as a jumping off point for this paper. For example: How do you identify in regard to your sexual orientation, and how do you know you are what you are? What internal and external factors have shaped your sexual orientation and/or identity? What was your first awareness of LGBT issues or people? How has your gender, culture, ethnicity, class, race, etc. helped to shape your identity and affected your biases? In what ways are you homophobic and heterosexist? What are your assumptions about gender and where do they come from? These are some you can start thinking about. This paper should not include your name, only your social work mailbox number. Due 10/14/04 – beginning of class.

30% Community Exploration Project:
I am struck by the wealth of resources that exist in our local community for the support and advocacy of LGBT clients. Community involvement that normalizes the LGBT experience and counter-acts social isolation is a primary intervention in the therapeutic treatment, mental health and well being of LGBT clients. My goal in this project is to get you involved in exploring this thriving network of resources. You will chose one to focus on through an experiential piece, a write-up of your experience with an integration of the readings, and a brief class presentation toward the end of the semester.

1) The choice of a project: On the first day of class, I will provide you with an extensive list of groups, organizations, events and activities that currently exist in the local community for the support and advocacy of the LGBT Community. I’m asking you to focus on a group or organization that is unfamiliar to you and challenging to your knowledge and biases. For example, if you are an out lesbian or gay man, don’t pursue the study of a coming-out group at the LGBT office. Move onto something you might be less familiar with, for example, Papa Dads, the Polyamory Support Group, or the Intersex Society of North America. Do not use something you are already involved in for this project. I do want you to pick an experience of interest and have some fun with this.
A brief, one page description of your choice of organization, why you chose it, and your progress in actually setting up your experiential contact will be due on September 30th.

2) The experiential component: This piece includes visiting, participating in, and/or interviewing members of your choice of group or organization. It must involve human contact. Some groups may be open to you visiting as a student, and be excited about your interest. Others may be confidential and closed to protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. Make an initial contact to your group, organization, activity or event, by calling the contact number. Persist until you talk to a sponsor, or spokesperson for the group, organization or event. Keep in mind the social work ethic of “do no harm” as you pursue your experience. Use your most developed interpersonal skills to introduce yourself, explain the project and why you want to make contact. Ask if you can visit a meeting or activity of your organization. If this is too intrusive, ask if there are members that would be willing to be interviewed. For groups that are closed, the spokesperson for the group may be the only person who is willing to discuss it. If there are very tight boundaries, and you cannot make a contact, respect the organization’s need for privacy and move onto another choice. You should start this contact early on. Don’t wait, because you don’t know whether it will go smoothly or be difficult. You might even have to make a second selection. Remember as you pursue this experiential piece that this is how our LGBT clients feel when they are pursuing support in unfamiliar territory. Keep notes on your experience as you go so that you can reflect on this in your paper.

3) The paper: Write-up your experience in a three-page paper (single-spaced, 12 pt. font). Include a discussion of the specific issues addressed by your choice of group, organization or event/activity. Include citings from the readings, or additional research in the paper. Reflect on the uses of this organization for LGBT clients, and how your experience with it has (or has not) grown or stretched you to become a better therapist with LGBT clients. Due 11/18/04 at the beginning of class.

4) Class presentation: Prepare a five minute class presentation on your choice of group, organization, event or activity that aims to inform the class of the uses of this resource for LGBT clients. Comment, as well, on how this project has (or has not) enhanced your capacities in work with LGBT clients. Be ready to present by 12/2/04.

10% Reaction Sheets:
You will be expected to thoughtfully reflect on most class periods through filling out a reaction sheet. These will follow almost any class that involves guest presenters. The sheet will be handed out at the end of the corresponding class period and will be turned in the following week. I recommend filling them out as soon as possible after class. You can fill them out by hand or transfer this simple form to your computer. If you use hand, please write legibly so I can read it. The purpose of the reaction sheets is for you to thoroughly process your class experiences. There is always limited discussion time and some people are more comfortable being candid about their reactions on paper, rather than in discussion. However, please do not use reaction sheets in lieu of class participation, since class participation will account for a larger portion of your grade, and I tend to value it a great deal. Reaction sheets will require you to reflect on your
immediate feelings and reactions to class material, after thoughts and critical thinking on the issues, questions or problems raised by the material, and how the class has (or has not) helped you to integrate material, stretch your thinking and feelings, and grow as a person and clinician.

20% Final Exam:
There will be an in-class essay exam during final’s week where you will be expected to explain how you would handle certain therapeutic dilemmas that might arise in your treatment with LGBT clients. The questions will be expressed in the form of vignettes. Bring an essay book to write in and your assigned books to class, as you will be expected to cite from the readings. Be prepared again to write legibly.

Assigned Reading:

There are three textbooks for the course and a coursepac. The books can be purchased at Common Language Book Store on Forth Avenue between Liberty and Washington. This is a queer-owned bookstore that services the LGBT community and friends. Take a few minutes to look around. It’s an excellent resource for you as therapists and for your clients.

The books include:


The coursepac can be purchased at Excel on South University. It is approximately 300 pages. There may be additional articles handed out in class as I am still in the process of collecting the most updated research and other reading. You can get stared on reading. The Green book should be your first priority, and it’s a good read.

A bibliography of suggested reading will be passed out at some point.
The Course Syllabus:

The following is a description of the class themes and expected readings for each week. This is subject to adaptation depending upon the availability of guest presenters, etc.

**Week 1: 9/9/03**
*Introduction and Expectations for the Course*
Cultural sexism, homophobia, heterosexism and privileged

**Week 2: 9/16/04**
*Who’s Who? and, What’s What? Definition of Terms:* Guest presenters
Brain storm questions for the self-awareness paper.
Practice Experience

Readings:
- Green, Chapter 1
- Hunter and Hickerson, Chapters 1 and 2
- Silverstein, Chapter 1
- Coursepac, *Introduction and Discrimination*

**Week 3: 9/23/04**
*Identity Development and Self-awareness*
Discussion of Identity Assignment
Practice Experience

Readings:
- Green, Chapters 2 and 3
- Hunter and Hickerson, Chapters 3 and 4
- Coursepac, *Identity*

**Week 4: 9/30/04**
*Coming Out:*
Guest presenters for the LGBT office at U of M
Practice Experience

Readings:
- Green, Chapters 4, 5 and 6
- Hunter and Hickerson, Chapter 5
- Coursepac, *Coming Out*
**Saturday October 2, Party at my House!!**
for all LGBT – friendly students, faculty, staff and your families and friends.

**Week 5: 10/7/04**
**The Gender Spectrum**
Guest presenters from the LGBT office, and around.
Practice Experience
Pink Triangle Exercise

Readings:
- Green, Chapters 7 and 8
- Hunter and Hickerson, Chapters 8 and 9
- Coursepac, **Gender**

_Somewhere around October 11th:_
**Jamison Green will be speaking in town sometime and somewhere to be announced.**
This is a highly recommended event. We will have just finished reading his book.

**Week 6: 10/14/04**
**People of Color and the Cultural Complexities of Race, Ethnicity, Religion and Class.**
Guest presenters from the LGBT Office
Practice Experience

Readings:
- Hunter and Hickerson, Chapter 10
- Coursepac, **People of Color**

**Week 7: 10/21/04**
**LGBT and Ally Therapists: Transference and Counter Transference**
The therapist’s use of self
Guest Presenters
Practice Experience

Readings:
- Silverstein, Chapters 5, 11 and 14
- Coursepac, **LGBT and Ally Therapists**
Week 8: 10/28/04
LGBT Health Issues and living with HIV/AIDS
Guest Presenters
Practice Experience

Readings:
    Silverstein, Chapters 2 and 13
    Coursepac, LGBT Health Issues

Week 9: 11/4/04
HIV/AIDS and Grief Work
Guest presenter
Practice Experience

Readings:
    Silverstein, Chapters 3 and 17
    Coursepac, HIV/AIDS and Grief Work

Week 10: 11/11/04
LGBT Families
Child Guest Presenters
Practice Experience

Readings:
    Hunter and Hickerson, Chapters 6, 7 and 11
    Coursepac, LGBT Families

Week 11: 11/18/04
LGBT Issues Through the Lifecycle
Guest Presenters
Practice Experience

Readings:
    Hunter and Hickerson, Chapters 13 and 14
    Coursepac, LGBT Issues Through the Lifecycle

Fall Break: No class – Have Fun!!
Week 12: 12/2/04
Substance Abuse, Suicide and Violence in the LGBT Community
Practice Experience

Readings:
  Silverstein, Chapter 6, 8, and 10
  Coursepac, Substance Abuse, Suicide and Violence

Week 13: 12/9/04
LGBT Romantic Relationships and Sex
Possible Guest Presentation
Practice Experience

Readings:
  Silverstein, Chapter 7, 16, 18
  Coursepac, LGBT Romantic Relationships and Sex

Week 14: 12/16/04
Final Exam