Mutuality in Multiple Roles: The Relational-Cultural Approach to Mentoring

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I fundamentally believe in the importance of relationships. In all areas of my life, I have experienced that through relationships people are changed, enhanced, and improved. This life philosophy is consistent in my approach to both teaching and research. I approach my classroom experiences, students, colleagues, and research as ongoing opportunities for new and ever evolving relationships. This is demonstrated in my teaching and research – as relationships with students, with participants, with colleagues are the priority. It is my theoretical belief (Gilligan, 1982; Vygostky, 1978, Baker Miller, 1976) that through relationships we cognitively, socially, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally develop. Thus all of my teaching, each of my research projects, and all of my service is driven towards that end. I believe that students, participants, colleagues, and myself grow and learn through our relationships with one another and while each experience has a point or outcome, the process and interaction is as important and collaboration is key. Toward that end I often engage with students, colleagues, and participants in a variety of ways as the relationships evolve. For me the personal is professional and research is teaching, and teaching, research, as well as, all of it is learning. From my view students, colleagues, participants, and community partners are all researchers, teachers, students, collaborators, mentees and mentors. All of my life experiences, interactions, and professional endeavors are both teaching and learning...
Relationships Matter
Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT)

• Developed by Jean Baker Miller and the Stone Center at Wellesley, now the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute
  http://www.jbmti.org/index.php

• Believes in the primary need for connection and emotional joining – relationship is central to any human experience

• Critique of Western psychological focus on autonomy, independence and individuation - instead values interaction, empathy, mutuality, connection

• One’s autonomous self is not enhanced by care for and exhibiting just action toward others, but
RCT in Mentoring Students

- Moves beyond the psychosocial and instrumental approach of mentoring to an interactional process
- Reciprocal, fluid, and synergistic
- Quality and nature of relationship is more meaningful than quantity or structure
- Authenticity, commitment, self-disclosing, engaged
- Found to mediate stress & depression, increase self-esteem, self-actualization, cooperation, and relationship satisfaction
- Increases motivation and innovativeness
- Students are personally strengthened & inspired to take action
Mutuality

- Influencing another person through one’s thoughts, feelings and actions while also remaining open to his or her influence
- According to Jordan (1991) it involves an acknowledgement of sameness in the other, appreciation of the differentness, accommodation and willingness to be changed by an interaction
- Flattening of the power hierarchy in traditional mentoring
- Mentoring mutuality has been found particularly successful with female and minority students
- Inspires confidence, fosters a professional identity, responsibility, creativity, competence and
Multiple Roles

- Mutuality and increasing connection calls for complexity in the relationship and thus in roles, which is considered relational competence.
- Growth fostering relationships are fluid, interactive and developing.
- Teacher/student, mentor/mentee, advisor/advisee, collaborators, colleagues, expert.
- As relationships develop, so do roles and opportunities for learning and growing.

Case Example – Lindsey

- MSW student
- Internship Supervisor
- Research Assistant – local conference
  - Lindsay Price, School social workers attitudes towards gay and lesbian families. CHE Research and Creative Activities Forum, Poster Presentation
- Independent Study – regional conference
- As alumni initiated and mentored RA, Amy, in two local conference presentations & a peer reviewed publication
Lindsey presenting
Virginity Definitions and Meaning Among the LGBT Community

ABSTRACT

The literature on LGBT virginity is almost nonexistent, thus this pilot study was completed to understand the meaning of the term virginity and the role it plays in the LGBT community. The research questions asked members of the LGBT community to define virginity, discuss its meaning and to share experiences. Data were collected from two focus groups and six individual interviews and were analyzed. Results indicate that there are a range of virginity definitions, there is little discussion of the topic, and that "coming out" is a more important site of passage in the LGBT community. Implications for social work practitioners and sexuality researchers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

There is little research that has been done on the topic of virginity loss within the LGBT community (Gross, 2003). The research that is available posits that the definition of "virginity loss" is highly individualized and does not have a fixed definition. Much of the knowledge surrounding sexuality and virginity is seen through a heterosexual lens and often does not include the experiences of people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered (Richardson, 2004). Virginity is often viewed as an important site of passage in terms of sexual and personal identity (Carpenter, 2005). What is not understood is how this site of passage is viewed or critiqued within the LGBT community. This pilot study attempted to understand the meaning of this term and its role in the LGBT community.

METHOD

Qualitative methodology utilized two focus groups with two LGBT student organizations connected to colleges in Eastern NC and then we conducted six follow up interviews with participants of the focus groups to gather further details and depth. Participants were aged 18 and older, varied in sexual orientation and identity, and were racially diverse. Focus groups were one hour in length while individual interviews lasted 30-45 minutes. The focus groups and interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Qualitative content analysis was completed via independent coding of the three researchers who then met repeatedly in order to discuss and reach agreement in themes.

RESULTS

The results of this study support the idea of virginity as a heterosexual concept. Because LGBT definitions and experiences of virginity are so varied, it points to the limitation of sexuality researchers in attempting to operationalize and adequately define sexual behavior in regards to the LGBT population. In these two LGBT communities "coming out" was viewed as the most important site of passage. Implications of this research suggests that Social Work practitioners need to value LGBT individuals’ "coming out" stories as an important life event rather than focusing on sexual behavior.
Conclusion

• By focusing on developing increasingly connected, authentic and mutual relationships where students have a voice, a choice, control and respect as colleagues who have something to give, the result can be life long relationships and research productivity.

• Students and faculty can both be changed through the relationship and connection. Both can develop new competencies, new supports, new knowledge, enhanced confidence, produce synergy that results in creativity and increased competencies in the next mentoring relationship.
References


