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INTEGRATIVE THERAPY WITH GAY MEN…THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

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Part 1

Long before being verbal, a gay male censors the truth to make sure he is loved and accepted. He automatically and unconsciously presents this. He implicitly knows the risks of being his true self, and purposefully chooses to conceal his identity in daily life.

Part 2:

The Bridge From Past to Present

By engaging in experiential work, the power of achieving goals is accomplished while indirectly, a bridge to the past is provided where internal success is experienced like never before.

- internal focus
- reliance on self
- use of the entire self (without compartmentalization)
- expansion of resources
- exposure of the vulnerable self

PART 3:

THE POWER OF THE THERAPY RELATIONSHIP

Empathy and attunement create successes in therapy. Your ability to join your client in his world is a trance state where mutual closeness kindles a connection within himself that is new and exciting.
SHAME - THE HALLMARK OF GAY EXISTENCE

Shame stems from internalizing the painful history of growing up gay and hiding oneself. Buying into cultural stereotypes within the gay male community as well as expectations of the heterosexual community only reinforces the feeling of not measuring up. (Miller)

Attitudes of Providers

Objectives:
Researchers examined providers’ implicit and explicit attitudes toward lesbian and gay people by provider.

Results:
Among heterosexual providers, implicit preferences always favored heterosexuals over lesbian and gay people.

EVALUATE YOUR READINESS:

DIRECTIONS: Simply respond by circling “yes” or “no.” Room is provided to elaborate on why you have answered one way or another.

1. Do you understand the unique history that gay men have experienced?  
   Yes  No

2. Can you imagine its impact?  
   Yes  No

3. Are you able to appreciate a gay male client's issues without judgment?  
   Yes  No

4. Do you see your client as a whole person rather than seeing being gay as his identity?  
   Yes  No

5. Are you really at ease with gay people?  
   Yes  No

6. Can you convey respect and care in your interactions? (If he is coming to therapy with issues pertaining to sex, intimate relationships, or compulsive behaviors, feeling safe will be front and center for him.)  
   Yes  No

Elaborate on your answers without editing yourself: As you further consider what might arise for you, additional questions may form:

1. Are you comfortable enough with a gay male client for him to feel comfortable with you?  
   Yes  No

2. Do you convey a sense of professionalism?  
   Yes  No

3. Are you secure enough to reach out for additional guidance should you need it?  
   Yes  No

4. Can you form an alliance with a client who may be cautious in pronounced ways based on a history of feeling unsafe?  
   Yes  No

Again, elaborate on your responses without editing yourself:

LGBT-Competent Providers

- 9% had existing procedures to identify LGBT-competent physicians.
- 16% of participants reported having comprehensive LGBT-competency training.
- 52% reported having no training.

*Conclusions: There exist both need and interest to develop procedures and programs to train physicians to become LGBT-competent.
“Micro-aggressions” – brief verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, (intentional or unintentional), that communicate hostile or negative slights against LGBT individuals.

– D.W. Sue, Micro-aggressions in Everyday Life; Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation, 2010

COUNSELING AND VALUES

• This is a belief system that values heterosexuality as a superior to homosexuality.
• Fears of gay men maintains attitudes that heterosexuals are superior and could lead to unethical treatment of sexual minority clients.
• Men are significantly more homophobic than women.
• Other factors related to personal attitudes includes political conservatism, religiosity, and previous experiences with gay men.

Counseling and Values, American Counseling Association, Steve Rainey and Jerry Trusty.

Minority Stress

For African Americans and other ethnic minority groups, researchers describe antigay violence and discrimination as common for gays and lesbians.
MINORITIES

• Racial/ethnic sexual minorities face stressors that are multiplicative in nature.
• Chronic exposure to discrimination, rejection, and abuse can be expected to lead to internalized negative self-schemas.

How Does Sexual Minority Stigma “Get Under the Skin”? A Psychological Mediation Framework.
Mark L. Hatzenbuehler

Minority Stress cont’d

Interventions should aim to change the person’s way of evaluating their condition and coping with stress and adversity.

(But what about the institutions promoting hatred?)

Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence. Ilan H. Meyer

MINORITY SELF SCHEMA’S

• Social support from parents and from peers may be critical in determining whether early stress leads to resilience or risk among sexual minorities.
• Research with stigmatized groups, (especially African-Americans), has shown that various self-protective qualities exist based on social support.
• People report that they were less likely to isolate themselves after experiencing stigma-related events based on support from their minority group.

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MINORITY SELF SCHEMA'S

Individuals who have learned to effectively regulate their emotions in response to specific stressors are able to buffer themselves from negative mental health outcomes.

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MINORITY SELF SCHEMA'S

- Given the frequency of mental health problems in the LGBTQ community, many have recognized the need to intervene at the societal level.
- Changes in social policy and interventions are needed to alter various social environments in which prejudice-inspired stressors develop. This includes workplace discrimination against LGBT adults and school violence targeting sexual minority youth.

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POLITICAL AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES

If psychologists aim to decrease "stress" and to increase the "ego strength" of the individuals, do they risk forgetting that it is the perpetrator, not the victim, who is the real problem?

What political choices are they making in focusing on the problems of the oppressed rather than on the problem of the oppressor?

TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- The relationship is the primary factor in successful psychotherapy.
- Transformational relationships require sensitivity to differences and flexibility in responding to these differences.
- Skilled therapists do not challenge clients' core beliefs.

Dan Short- Transformational Relationships

Gay or Non-gay Therapist

Advantages of a non-gay therapist:

- Communication from a non-gay perspective is healing (from a female therapist, or a heterosexual male therapist.)
- Ability to acknowledge or express vulnerabilities with a parental figure.
- Indirect healing can occur as a result of having a non-gay therapist who accepts and loves the individual, compensating for earlier rejections.
- Less competition than with a gay male therapist.

Gay and lesbian youths whose families rejected their sexual orientation were at higher risk for health and mental health problems as adults.

Gay young adults are 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, and 2.4 more likely to use illegal drugs as well as unprotected sexual intercourse.

Latino men reported the highest number of rejecting behaviors from their families.

Accepting behaviors include:
- Accepting sexual orientation
- Welcoming LGBT friends and partners
- Interventions and education aims at helping families support LGBT children and decrease rejecting behaviors.

When families receive this, they often make changes that limit risk to their children.

Social Work Today December 2009, Vol 9 No.6
Family Acceptance Projects Helping LGBT Gay Youth-Chris Ireland
Starting age 4 or 5 they felt they were different from their peers:
• More sensitive
• Cried more easily
• Enjoyed aesthetic interests such as nature art and music
• Less aggressive
• Often not interested in sports
• Made fun of by other kids for being different

Isay: Being homosexual

GAY MALE DEVELOPMENT

By this stage,
• The gay adolescent has injured self-esteem
• Is rejected other boys
• Often is made fun of by peers
• Labels himself as different based on society's biases
• He believes his sexuality is disgusting

Isay cont'd

FATHERS

• Fathers often were distant and lacked attachment to their gay sons.
• Often fathers were detached or hostile as they sensed their son being different and didn't accept this.
• Sometimes gay boys were secluded, and based on differences between the father's expectations, they withdrew from their child.
• Fathers favored other male siblings who were more conventionally masculine and may not have been conscious of this.

Isay cont'd
Experiential work enables gay men to unwrap the protective shield around their inner selves and begin to expose and enjoy more of who they really are. It offers an opportunity to feel a comfort level with being their true selves.

UNDOING and REDOING.

**Experiential Work**

**With Gay Men**

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**THE RAPIST WORKSHOP**

**POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS**

**DIRECTIONS:**

The following list reflects some of the ways in which your gay client has experienced or navigated life until now, including paralysis, anxiety, rigidity, loneliness, alienation, and invisibility. This exercise will help you clarify the type of defenses your client has honed over his lifetime and, more importantly, how to guide him toward updating the ways in which he navigates his life.

Taking into account the vocabulary of your client, create a list of positive experiences or attributes that you will help him achieve to allow him to move beyond the parameters of his earlier defenses.

1. 
2. 
3. 

What types of interventions will you use to help him reach these goals?

1. 
2. 
3. 

Why do you expect these particular approaches to be beneficial to him?

1. 
2. 
3. 

How will you and he know that he has shifted his original position or gained more appropriate tools?

1. 
2. 
3. 

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"You can appreciate what it is that is happening inside of you. Thoughts that you are having, images that come to you, or pictures in your mind. You might even notice emotions that get stirred or physical sensations inside of your body.

Really pay attention to what it is that comes to you.

Be open to whatever these images, thoughts and sensations are, and we will discuss them in a few moments."

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**Body Awareness Script**
“Picture yourself in the driver’s seat, driving in a car down the road, looking into the rear view mirror. Have them notice or describe what the car looks like, smells like, etc. If you are working on a piece from their history, you may ask them to choose a car from that era. As you first look in the mirror, everything is close and you see it all so clearly. You even notice the small warning that says things in the mirror are larger than they appear. As you continue traveling along, things that were up close are now further and further away. Eventually, as you continue moving along this road, things that were right with you are no longer visible; they are further and further behind you now. You may remember what it is that you saw and left behind. Even though the image may be remembered, you no longer see it. You no longer need to see it. It just recedes, further and further away.”

**Religion**

**Religion: The set up**

- How do you feel good about yourself if you grew up in a religious family whose institution defines homosexuality as evil?
- Growing up Fundamentalist, Mormon, Evangelical, Catholic is very difficult.

The ideal or hope is to have a family who can compartmentalize...separate out the teaching of the church from their love of their child.

- Often the suggestions of switching churches is a vacant or too easy solution.
- The internalization of beliefs lives inside, frequently not at a different church.
- Others feel the pain of this on a more deep and profound level including self-hatred and self-loathing.

**Urban Gay Male Stereotype**

This stereotype is characterized by a white, young, hot, rich, gorgeous, popular and successful man who lives in a chic condo and drives an expensive foreign car.

Don’t forget about his vacation home on the water and his incredible wardrobe of designer clothes.

This has become an ideal that many people strive for and feel shame for falling short of. This is a double bind for minority gay males attempting to fit in.
URBAN GAY STEREOTYPE CONT'D

"Scene" refers to one predominantly white, middle class, and often upper-middle class segment of urban gay life that has significant cultural influence on much of the gay population. Many however are instead living a life of enforced cult homosexuality with parties, drugs and gyms ruling their lives.

Within the urban gay male world, men of all ages describe aspects of their lives with words like rigid, trapped, stifled, suffocating, oppressive, confining, and pressured.

AIDS 101

- In the early to mid 80's HIV became rampant in the gay male community.
- Gay men who lived or traveled in urban settings were bombarded with anxiety regarding HIV.
- At that time of diagnosis, people had a two year long life expectancy at most.
- Gay men in their 20's on up in age were being diagnosed, it caring for several ailing friends or losing multiple friends and it felt like the entire community was being decimated.
Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

- Truvada, originally used for HIV infection within 28 days of exposure to the HIV, is now being used to keep HIV-negative people from becoming infected.
- It is suggested (by the drug company) that taking this medication daily, along with employing safer sexual practices, will greatly decrease the likelihood of getting infected with HIV.
- It is reported that it is 92 to 99 percent effective in preventing the transmission of HIV.

Questions for Providers

- Will you appear comfortable while discussing sex with your client?
- Are you able to adapt your language to use the right words with your client?
- What are your internal instinctual reactions toward gay men?
- How do you feel about anal intercourse?
- Do you know that what you're talking about is accurate?
- Are you prudish (according to gay male standards)?
- What are your attitudes about casual, nonmonogamous sex or open relationships?
- Will you worry about offending him, or he worry about offending you?
Leading Effectively

When the Leader Doesn’t Lead Effectively

Tendencies of Therapists:
• To get caught in the bind of advising clients – rather than helping them decide what is best for them.
• Advising, at times, can feel like disapproval.
• It can be difficult for clinicians to hear about the details of their client’s adventures and know how to intervene.
• The primary goal is helping clients with sexuality is to elicit self-reflection and honesty so he can assess his own sexual behavior without you having to confront him on this.

Building Confidence

How to Increase Your Confidence

Develop comfort regarding behaviors, attitudes, and feelings about sex – which then increases skills in addressing sex discussions.
• Rate your own anxiety in addressing sexuality with clients.
• Establish supervision with mentors or colleagues to check in with.
• Learn how to speak in specifics, rather than in generalizations, with clients.
• Teach clients to do the same with you.
Sexual Intelligence

Key Concepts of Sexual Health

- **Sex Positive** – Having an active, pleasurable and emotionally meaningful sexual life. (As opposed to sexual judgements and labeling of behaviors as abnormal or pathological.)
- Important for therapists too: suspend judgement, affirm sexual pleasure, understand that sexuality is a basic need, and focus on motivation.
- Based on harm-reductions principals.
- **Shame reduction intervention.**
- **Relapse prevention.**

Sexual Intelligence

- **Information & Knowledge** – Imagine having your own unique owner’s manual to your body and your partner’s body.
- **Emotional skills**
- **Body awareness and comfort** (Marty Klein, Sexual Intelligence).

Three Components:

- **Know your conditions for good sex.**
- **Know your body as it is.**
- **Know how sex actually feels in your body.**
- **Redefine “sexy.”**
- **Communicate for great outcomes.** (Marty Klein, cont’d)

Developing sexual intelligence is knowing what your conditions are for good sex. This includes yourself, your environment, and your partner.
My Questions

- How did your family discuss, or not discuss, sex?
- How did you discover pornography? How did you get gay pornography, and at what age?
- Did you ever get caught masturbating? How was that handled?
- Were you ever caught having sex with guy friends? How was that handled, and how did you feel at the time?
- Which phone apps do you use? (This implies they do, and they may answer more honestly.)

RELAXATION AND CENTERING

Developing the capacity for internal focus will enable your client to:

- Develop confidence in welcoming sensate pleasures
- Possess more realistic expectations of what he is able to achieve
- Achieve confidence in decision-making based on healthy choices, wisdom, and desire
- Adhere to internal strength in “heat-of-the-moment”
- Allow self-forgiveness and compassion for earlier mistakes

The Mind & Body Connection - Self Reflection

Before Sex

- What were you thinking about beforehand?
- What did you notice was going on inside during this time?
- What were the physical sensations that you are aware of?
- What were your thoughts about your potential actions?
The Mind & Body Connection

During Sex

- What were you thinking about during this period of time?
- What did you notice inside your body during this period of time?
- What were the physical sensations that you are aware of?
- What were the emotions that you were aware of?
- What were your thoughts about your actions?

The Mind & Body Connection

After Sex

- What were you thinking about after?
- What did you notice inside your body at this point?
- What were the physical sensations that you are aware of?
- What were the emotions that you were aware of?
- What were your thoughts about your actions?

HEALTHY DISTRACTION SCRIPT

Remember moments where you were able to shift your focus in a healthy way, such as an activity that you enjoy that distracts you from stress or discomfort. It feels good to shift the focus and you really know how good this is for you. (Give past examples they have mentioned).

Experience what has come to you, thoughts, images, or sensations.

Appreciate the ways that you now feel as you remember these moments.

Now allow yourself to notice distractions or behaviors that you may know really aren’t good for you. As you know, everybody has these moments. Notice what you feel inside, both painful feelings or even appreciation for your ability to be honest with yourself. Any thoughts or feelings are just fine. I wonder if your ability to be honest with yourself might feel like a relief? (Expand on the healthy behavior and have them magnify these sensations).
10 Insights About Business Directions:

1. The comparing mind is always inaccurate. Comparing yourself to others creates feelings of inadequacy and disappointment. Instead, map your progress! How has your life changed for the better since you started on your own mindfulness journey?

2. Happiness comes from within; it emerges rather than being bestowed. Making good decisions regarding self-care protects that happiness. What can you do today that will feel like a good decision tomorrow?

3. Embracing who you are with confidence and care will radiate an energy that can be mirrored back. What would you like the world to know about you that you have kept hidden in the past?

4. A varied support network will be ready when you need it—one person or one group may not have all the answers. What connections can you imagine in the future, whether through an activity, an interest, or a shared concern?

5. Regular connection keeps the mind and heart open. Hosting dinners, book clubs, or other gatherings involves sharing yourself, your home, and your vitality with others. How might you create settings that are unique to you and welcoming to others?

6. Being alone sometimes is good, allowing you to rebalance, rest, and turn inward. What's more, being comfortable with yourself is essential to true comfort in the world. What are some things you can do with time away from others?

7. Giving back brings rewards. Altruistic activities improve mood and create a sense of purpose. What kind of volunteering might bring you contentment and allow you to feel appreciated for your special gifts?

8. Creativity comes in all forms, whether making wardrobe or design choices or cooking, writing, or singing, and creativity is the juice of a vital life. What talents—perhaps long ignored—could you make time for now?

9. Truly taking care of your body is part of taking care of your mind. A good diet, the right amount of sleep, and enough exercise support the beautiful, strong container that is you. What changes can you make starting now to show yourself love and compassion moving forward?

10. A practice becomes a lifestyle. Continuing to use mindfulness strategies, including relaxation, body awareness, appreciation, breath work, and listening to scripts, will help you to feel centered and strong when you are not in the therapy office. What strategies do you like best thus far, and how will you use them?