

TAGLBIC News

The Newsletter of the Texas Association of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling (A Division of Texas Counseling Association)

Volume 2, Issue 2, Fall/Winter 2002

Moving Our Division Forward

A letter from the TAGLBIC President

By Colleen Logan, Ph.D.

Greetings everyone! It is with great pride and a large helping of humility that I step into the role of TAGLBIC president. As you well know, Dr. Colleen Connolly, our division's first president, led our organization with great and skillful wisdom. I truly believe that we are where we are today, in large part, because of Dr. Connolly's steadfast and capable leadership. I will do my best to stay the course she has set for our organization, working hard to continue building a division that meets the needs of counseling professionals who are committed to providing quality counseling services to GLBT clients and their significant others.

Fortunately, I won't have to — nor could I try to — do this all by myself. Dr. Connolly will continue to serve our organization by representing TAGLBIC on the Texas Counseling Association senate as well as continuing her stellar career as the newsletter editor. Dr. Penny Sanders joins the TAGLBIC leadership team as our combined Secretary/Treasurer. In her short tenure on our team, she has already attended a training workshop for emerging leaders as well as spearheaded a letter-writing campaign designed to apprise the members of the Texas School Counselor Association of the resources our division can offer. Finally, I am thrilled to be working with Vanessa Schein-Joy. She is the chair of our Membership and Public Relations Committee and together with Pam Kessler, has already designed a membership letter and started to create an e-mail listserv to enable us to communicate with each other throughout the year. I am so excited to be working with each and

every one of these wonderful and highly creative women, and together we will work hard to continue moving our division forward. Remember, we need your help. If you're interested in serving our organization in any way, please talk to any of us at the conference or e-mail us if you're not able to attend.

"I will do my best to stay the course...working hard to continue building a division that meets the needs of counseling professionals."

The annual TCA conference is just around the corner. This year it will be held in Austin, and it is shaping up to be one of the best conferences ever. For the first time, we will have a combined luncheon with two other TCA divisions, Texas Mental Health Counselors Association (TMHCA) and Texas Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (TAMFC). This is such a great opportunity to network with

friends and colleagues, and I really hope you will make plans to join us. The luncheon is of particular importance this year because we will be awarding the first *TAGLBIC Service Award* to a much deserving recipient. Please join us in honoring this person. We also will have a booth this year. Please stop by and say hello or even volunteer to staff the booth for a few hours if you have the time. Our presence at the booth is critical, allowing the opportunity for us to educate and connect with our counseling colleagues. Note also how many programs related to sexual minority issues and concerns are listed in the conference program. Kudos and a

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Uniformity or Unity?

By John L. Garcia, Ed.D.

Sweet are the uses of adversity; which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head and this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything.

— William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Perhaps never before in the course of the American human experience has the line been drawn so severely as now with regard to where greed, avarice, aggression, arrogance, homophobia, and hypocrisy interface with human dignity, generosity, acceptance, human regard, and educated altruism. Sadly, our appointed political officials present themselves as blindly addicted to the former, and human rights have been set aside in favor of the corporate agenda.

The *Zeitgeist* of this, the emerging 2000s, is one of anxiety and adolescent impulsivity on both individual and collective levels. True to the adolescent mind, which simultaneously craves attention and the opportunity for deflection of any personal responsibility, an outside aggressor or bully, real or imagined, is always the perfect platform. This is the oldest, simplest, and quickest route to a political definition. And, as any observer of life and its story over a period of time can attest, when one adversary is eliminated another is quickly located or invented.

In this kind of climate people may respond in a variety of ways. Two frequent yet vastly different responses are either *uniformity* or *unity*. Both are coping strategies that have been used by people across recorded time, and both have been effective in a variety of situations for better or for worse. From a developmental perspective, uniformity is more *conformist* and *external*, while unity is more *self-aware* and *internal*.

Uniformity is in the realm of the masculine. It means literally *of one shape* and is designed to give the visual appearance of a larger and thus assumed to be

the more powerful presence. In the world of the hunter, bigger is always better, and the larger one "looks," the more of a threat one "is." Uniformity is fear-driven and appeals to the most base common denominator of animal behavior.

Unity is in the realm of the feminine. More than of just one appearance, it refers to being *as one* while not necessarily looking *like* one. Unity is a more complex and typically more enduring state than uniformity. Also, it is far more difficult to achieve. People may march to one step for any number of reasons while not really believing in what they are stepping for beyond an immediate reward that may simply be avoiding punishment. For example, how many persons do you know who comply publicly with the Civil Rights Law and still harbor racism and hatred in their hearts? *Uniformity can be legislated, unity cannot.* If people are united, however, they may step in different ways but are joined with each other in a heartfelt resolve not contingent upon any immediate reward or outcome. In other words, whereas uniformity is *positional* and *postural*, unity is *relational* and *resolute*. And, it must be added that people can find unity around evil as well as good, so for a lasting unity with human benefit, those united must remain always at a high level of moral self-questioning and reasoning.

The popular lexicon suggests that the antonym for unity is *diversity*. Lest I sound arrogant myself, I disagree with this assessment. Rather, I believe that diversity is the antonym for *uniformity*. This may just read like word play, yet I think it has a deeper significance, especially for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons. For example, what is the uniform of a gay man or lesbian woman? How does *one* look or act? I think anyone would be hard-pressed to come up with any unitary visible form, as might be attempted more readily with race, gender, or even political affiliation. So, what then are the

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Making Schools Safe for GLBT Students: Is It the Right Way to Go?

By Pam G. Kessler, M.A.

I recently began reading a book titled *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*, by Wendy Mogel. You see, I have a four-year-old daughter (she just turned "this many") who recently began to intelligently question all of my "yeses" and "noes" and demand a reason. This broadening in her learning made me look carefully at my role as a parent. Am I the authority who must have all of the answers and teach her right and wrong, or am I supposed to keep her from drowning and other big dangers and let her figure out the rest on her own? Hopefully, there is a middle ground falling closer to the latter. But, in reading about the big mistakes our society might be making by taking learning out of the child's hand and instilling fear of this world we live in, I began to think of my upcoming presentation at the Texas Counseling Association 2002 Conference. My colleague and I have been researching ways to change the system in schools to make them safer places for GLBT students. By gathering ideas on how to change their school system, are we taking control out of the GLBT or Questioning student's hands and pretending we could make the school "safe"?

As it stands right now, our 1.5 hours will include a panel of gay or bisexual students, an educational portion, and an action plan section. With our panel discussion, we hope to offer the audience individual school stories of tragedy or triumph. With our educational piece, we hope to shock some and remind others of what GLBT students face in school, including daily taunting from students and/or teachers, sexual abuse or harassment, physical violence, and more. With our action plan portion, we hope to give each seminar participant a piece of paper with a list for them to complete, a way for them to play a part in creating a safer environment.

But have we really missed the boat here? Are we moving in the wrong direction in fighting the monster wave of homophobia? Why do we feel pressure to make the schools safer? Is the world safe

for them? Are their homes always safe for them? Why create a fake environment? Or, is it that the world is mostly safe and we are frightened to let our children/students really learn to negotiate that environment because it means getting hurt and feeling sad sometimes. This, says Dr. Mogel, is one of the basic mistakes we are making in raising our children. The mistaken belief is that it is our job, as adults, to make sure that the children in our charge do not feel sadness or pain for very long — if at all.

The truth for any GLBTQ person is that they have their own set of struggles in dealing with people in this world. The American society is heterosexist and they need to learn to negotiate it. The sooner they learn, the sooner they will find themselves in charge of their own full and fulfilling lives. But the clinician in me, who has worked with kids who were kicked out of their homes, knows that these kids sometimes face impossible terrain. I know that being GLBT makes these kids more likely to drop out of school and more likely to commit suicide. So I cannot ethically ignore those facts and depend on the kids to "tough it out." Again, there must be a middle ground.

I am not sure what this means for our presentation, which will hopefully be well attended and provoke discussion, concern, and action. Maybe we need to make a list for the participants that will give them an action plan to help the GLBTQ students in negotiating their world. Quite possibly we should focus on participants' homophobic thoughts and behaviors in order to lessen their own pain and fears. Surely, this would benefit the students in their schools. In the meantime, I am going to continue to expose others to the images of same-sex couples and transgender people. I want others to know we are here and that we will be dealing with the world the way it is until it changes yet again. Also, I hope to continue this discussion with friends, professionals, and especially my four year-old. I have a lot to learn from her.

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Advocacy Training Report

Penny G. Sanders, Ed.D., Secretary/Treasurer

Because our TAGLBIC president was at home with her partner and their new baby, I was happy to stand in for her at the Texas Counseling Association (TCA) Advocacy Training and President's Workshop that took place in Austin on September 27 through 28. The workshop provided a full two days of information and activities designed to educate and energize new and emerging leaders in TCA. The program was exceptionally well planned and gave all of us an opportunity to see and hear firsthand why being a part of TCA is so important.

TCA is our voice, and we are TCA. As members, we must be willing to speak out and advocate for the issues and ideas that we see as important to the counseling profession. As members of TAGLBIC, this may be even more significant because some of the issues that we see as important may not be heard unless we are there to speak up for ourselves, our clients, and our constituencies. Through the course of the weekend, I was continually reminded that change does not happen as we sit idle and silent. As members of TCA and the counseling profession, we are already the beneficiaries of many strong and courageous advocates who have gone before us. Fortunately, TCA has a strong history of advocating for our issues and our profession. I walked away with a primary message: TCA is your advocate, but *you* are TCA.

I must admit that the idea of going to Austin and talking with members of the state legislature is not necessarily something that comes up on my Top 10 list of things I like to do. However, decisions will be rendered. Laws will be passed. We can be there and make sure that our voices are heard and our issues addressed, or we can sit idle and silent and just wait and see how things flesh out. Augh! Sounds scary, doesn't it? I challenge you just as I have been challenged: TCA is your advocate, but *you* are TCA. As we approach our time together in Austin for the TCA conference, I hope that you will consider not just being a part of TCA and TAGLBIC, but that you will consider being an active, vocal, participating member. We need your voice. *Speak up!*

Uniformity or Unity?

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implications of this for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons when the numbers are counted by a dominant patriarchal system that looks for one form? Is ten percent enough to sit at the table? Apparently, not yet.

Even though uniformity is difficult for a people based in diversity, I maintain that unity is by all means possible. Unity is of the heart and is often cultivated when any group of people identify with each other in a deeper way than an agreed-upon uniform. Unity is a product of survival over time and not a reflexive response to the latest outside aggressor. Recently I have been struck by the numbers of people reporting feeling unsafe given the climate of the times. For gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, feeling unsafe is a way of life and has been a constant companion since their earliest awareness of being somehow different. And to compound and confuse the difficulty, the most virulent aggressors were often identified as supposedly trustworthy (e.g., church, school, government, etc.).

So, what does all of this mean for an organization like TAGLBIC, which is founded on diversity and thus perhaps even antithetic to uniformity? It means that the only choice is real *unity*. And because here is a group of people who are survivors of a quieter, socially sanctioned, yet nonetheless violent form of terrorism, I believe that the fiber and character that arise and grow from sustained overcoming of adversity are sufficient to the task. What are the emotional and ethical strands that bind our family together? These must be identified, advertised, and advocated. This organization, through genuine unity, must continue to heal the wounds of its own through validation of the experiences of those so familiar with invalidation. And then clear voices of reason must ring and reach out with the compassion that grows where a wound is healed. Some will hear and some will not, but empowerment belongs to the speaker for having said it rather than for everyone having heard it.

John L. Garcia is Associate Professor of Counseling at Southwest Texas State University and is the 2001 recipient of TAGLBIC's prestigious Joe Norton Award.

TCA Conference in Austin

Wednesday, November 13

∇ TAGLBIC Exhibit Booth 103, 3:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Thursday, November 14

∇ TAGLBIC Exhibit Booth, 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

∇ Happy and Gay: Supporting Same Sex Relationships in Counseling, 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

∇ Homosexuality: How It Affects the Individual, Family and Students, 11:50 a.m. to 1:20 p.m.

∇ Gender Dysphoria, A Historical Perspective, 1:40 p.m. to 3:10 p.m.

∇ In Line with the Future: Working Effectively with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth, 1:40 p.m. to 3:10 p.m.

∇ TAGLBIC Business Meeting, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Neches Room, Convention Center.

Friday, November 15

∇ TAGLBIC Exhibit Booth, 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

∇ TAGLBIC Luncheon with TMHCA and TAMFC, 11:50 a.m. to 1:20 p.m. Pat Love speaking on *Counseling: Now More Than Ever*. Cost: \$17.00. Hill Country D Room, Hyatt.

∇ Adolescent Suicide and Sexual Orientation: A Risk Factor Approach, 11:50 a.m. to 1:20 p.m.

∇ A Systemic Approach to Supporting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth: How to Impact the School Environment, 1:40 p.m. to 3:10 p.m.

Letter from the President

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heartfelt "thank you" to our Program Committee coordinator, Lisa Pearson, for her efforts, as they have clearly paid off.

So, as you can see, we are percolating right along as the newest division of TCA. Thank you for all your support. We still need to grow our membership, so please tell a friend or a colleague about our division. Looking forward to seeing you in Austin.

Peace, Colleen

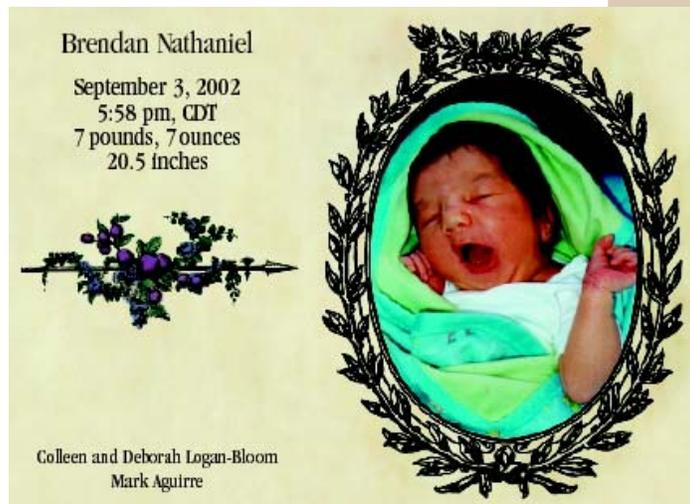
Treasurer's Report

Penny G. Sanders, Ed.D., Secretary/Treasurer

According to past records, TAGLBIC began officially collecting membership dues in July of 2001. At that time, we had collected approximately \$110 from 12 members. Because we have been in the beginning stages of creating a membership base, this was not reflective of the number of people committed to and involved in TAGLBIC. Still, this was the foundation from which we began just over one year ago. Certainly, there has been much time and effort expended on our behalf by Colleen Connolly and Colleen Logan, but our initial bank account had about a hundred bucks in it. Therefore, I consider it good news to report that we now have 58 members and an account balance of \$316.21.

I would like to thank all of you who have been involved at whatever level in getting TAGLBIC off the ground. It seems to me that we've made great strides in a relatively short time. This is an exciting time to be involved in a new and growing division of TCA. Please remember to continue supporting TAGLBIC when you renew your membership for this year. And of course, be sure to inform your friends and colleagues and encourage them to join. TAGLBIC professional membership is \$10 and student membership is just \$5.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the TCA Conference in Austin. Make your plans to join us for the fall business meeting scheduled for Thursday, November 14, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Your input and participation is greatly appreciated. See you there.



Visit us on the Web at www.taglbic.org

TAGLBIC News

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