

Monthly Newsletter

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Clinician Spotlight:
Jill M. Krahwinkel-Bower,
Ph.D., LPC, CAADC, CCTP,
CT/RTC, JSOCC

Jill M. Krahwinkel-Bower received her Ph.D. in Counseling & Counselor Education from North Carolina State University (2013) and received her Master's in Education with an emphasis in Mental Health Counseling from Western Kentucky University (2006). She became Reality Therapy Certified (2008). Prior to that, she received certification as a Juvenile Sex Offender Counselor through the University of Louisville (2007).

Dr. Krahwinkel-Bower has been a Counselor Educator since 2014 and has been counseling since 2006 with a variety of clinical experience working with adults, adolescents, children, and families on needs related to depression, anxiety, trauma, bereavement, adjustment, relationships, self-esteem, wellness management, substance use, and more. She offers a culturally responsive, social justice-oriented approach that concentrates meeting the needs of LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Dr. Krahwinkel-Bower has experience working in many different types of clinical settings—outpatient, residential facilities for children, foster care, court ordered addiction treatment, nonprofit, & private practice. Her approach to counseling is rooted in Reality Therapy with emphasis on Relational Cultural Theory, emphasizing that the counseling relationship is the agent of change to help clients meet their desired goals.

She actively follows best practices in the field and her area of foci when doing research includes counselors' cultural competence when working with diverse clients and counselor clinical skill preparation. Dr. Krahwinkel-Bower also provides clinical supervision for master-level intern students and graduates working towards their licensure as professional counselors. She advocates at the state and national level, attends and presents at regional and national conferences, and volunteers in her local community.

The Five Basic Needs of Reality Therapy and the LGBTGEQIAP+ Experience

Choice Theory identifies five genetically encoded needs that drive all human behavior: survival, love and belonging, power and achievement, freedom, and fun (Glasser, 1965; 2011;2013). This section will examine how each of these needs may manifest uniquely for LGBTGEQIAP+ individuals.

Survival

Choice Theory positions survival, encompassing safety, security, and health, as the foundational need that must be met before the others (Glasser, 2011). Research shows that LGBTGEQIAP+ individuals face disparate threats to their basic survival needs, including hate crimes, violence, homelessness, and discrimination in healthcare, housing and employment, with transgender women of color being especially at risk (Romero et al., 2020). Hate crimes continue to be a threat for members of the LGBTGEQIAP+ communities with transgender women of color being at the most vulnerable. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2022) reported LGBTGEQIAP+ communities recorded their highest totals of hate crimes in the past five years and increased by more than 10% since 2021. A momentous increase of nearly 40% was reported anti-transgender incidents.

Homelessness and housing are another aspect of the survival need that can be unmet for LGBTGEQIAP+ individuals. LGBTGEQIAP+ youth and adults who are homeless report harassment, violence, and other challenges in shelters and other services that may prolong their homelessness (Romero, et. al., 2020). The Trevor Project (2021) report indicated 28% of all LGBTGEQIAP+ youth experience homelessness or housing insecurity during their lifetime, impacting Indigenous LGBTGEQIAP+ youth more than any other racial group. Additionally, food security is a threat to LGBTGEQIAP+ youth's survival need. 30% of youth reported food insecurity in the last month and 19% of youth shared they did not eat in the last month when they were hungry because there was not enough food (Trevor Project, 2021). Further, the American Heart Association (AHA) (2020) reported 56% of LGBTGEQIAP+ adults and 70% of those who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming report experiencing some form of discrimination from a health care professional, including the use of harsh or abusive language.

Using Reality Therapy, a counselor prioritizes assessing and addressing the survival needs of LGBTGEQIAP+ clients, connecting them with resources and empowering them with strategies to increase their sense of security. During the biopsychosocial clinical assessment, a counselor working with LGBTGEQIAP+ clients would identify any unmet survival needs of the client and incorporate into the initial treatment plan as a guide for focusing on survival needs first. More, counselors using Reality Therapy understand gender-affirming care is a survival need and use their ethical responsibility (ACA, 2014) to advocate for LGBTGEQIAP+ clients by referring to affirming and competent medical and mental health providers.

Love and Belonging

Glasser (1965; 2011; 2013) believed that most long-lasting psychological problems stem from relationship issues, emphasizing the essential role of satisfying connections in mental wellbeing. Reality Therapy and Choice Theory stress the importance of fostering better relationships by identifying needs for belonging and sources of disconnection.

LGBTGEQIAP+ individuals frequently face family rejection, social stigma, and isolation; over two-thirds of homeless LGBTGEQIAP+ youth mention family rejection as the reason (Durso & Gates, 2012). It is important to note most LGBTGEQIAP+ individual's chosen family compliments rather than competes with biological/biolegal family. Further, individuals older than 55 and individuals who are transgender are less likely to include biological/biolegal family as part of their current family composition (Hull & Orty, 2018). Even as societal acceptance has grown, almost half of LGBTGEQIAP+ people still encounter discrimination in their workplaces and communities (Sears & Mallory, 2011), with an alarming 90% of transgender individuals reporting harassment and mistreatment (Grant et al., 2011).

A counselor using Reality Therapy assesses the quality of an LGBTGEQIAP+ client's family, romantic, friend and community relationships. Chosen family, shared identity communities, and other supportive connections can provide vital sources of affirmation and validation (Ceatha et al., 2019). For example, a counselor using Reality Therapy will identify the unmet needs of a client in relation to their love and belonging and make an intentional effort to help the client make better connections with their born or chosen family, co-workers, neighbors; or even create new connections that were not previously established. Additionally, the therapeutic relationship itself can model healthy interaction as the counselor collaborates with the client to evaluate choices, set goals, build relational skills, grieve relationship losses, and create a nurturing support network.

Power

In Choice Theory, power refers to achievement, competence, recognition, and respect (Wubbolding, 2000; 2015). Systemic barriers and minority stress can hinder LGBTGEQIAP+ people from fully meeting their power needs. For example, LGBTGEQIAP+ students face educational inequalities despite comparable potential (Sansone, 2019) and as previously noted by Sears & Mallory (2011) LGBTGEQIAP+ individuals continue to experience discrimination in their workplaces and communities.

These inequalities and discriminations can impact a client's overall occupational satisfaction including but not limited to their ability for promotion or advancement in their jobs. Using a Reality Therapy lens, counselors can help LGBTGEQIAP+ clients set meaningful goals, identify strengths, find sources of mastery and affirmation, and connect with LGBTGEQIAP+ mentors/leaders all which can create accomplishments to foster a sense of pride and empowerment. For example, a counselor might recognize an LGBTGEQIAP+ client's struggle for recognition or advancement at their place of employment and work with them in session to find ways the client can meet their power and achievement needs at work. Additionally, using Reality Therapy a counselor will look for other sources of recognition and achievement through hobbies or community activities. Further, counselors might find themselves in the role of advocate to be a voice for their clients who might be experiencing oppression at school or work(ACA, 2014).

Freedom

Glasser (1965; 2011; 2013) defined freedom as the need for autonomy, independence, and having choices. LGBTGEQIAP+ people's freedom is often externally constrained by oppressive laws, policies and attitudes around sexual orientation and gender identity (Hagai et al.; 2020). In 2023, a record of over 520 anti-LGBTGEQIAP+ bills were introduced in state legislatures (Human Rights Campaign, 2023) that directly impact LGBTGEQIAP+ clients' needs for freedom. Counselors can help LGBTGEQIAP+ clients explore ways to affirm their identities even in unsupportive climates; identify spheres where they have more control, like self-expression, relationships, or advocacy; and make self-determined choices while acknowledging societal limitations using a Reality Therapy approach. For example, a counselor might have a client who is part of an organization with limited choice in restrooms; using a Reality Therapy lens, the counselor would not only advocate for all LGBTGEQIAP+ clients (ACA, 2014) to use the restroom of their choice but would also teach and help the individual client to self-advocate to enhance their freedom need. The counselor would likely role-play with the client a conversation the client might have with their supervisor about incorporating gender-neutral restrooms.

Fun

Fun represents the need for play, pleasure, and enjoyment (Glasser, 1965; 2011; 2013). However, LGBTGEQIAP+ people often face exclusion or harassment in sports and leisure spaces (Ceatha et al., 2019). Using Reality Therapy, counselors assess LGBTGEQIAP+ clients' access to enjoyable activities that align with their interests and affirm their identities, connecting them to LGBTGEQIAP+ recreational groups, creative outlets, and celebratory spaces. For example, if a trans youth client is being barred from participating in school sports, a counselor using a Reality Therapy would help the client to identify recreational sports teams outside of school for them to participate, while the counselor advocates (ACA, 2014) for all trans youth to be able to participate in school organized sporting events.

Counselors addressing minority stress and internalized stigma can also remove mental barriers to experiencing fun. Pellicane & Ciesla (2022) found LGBTGEQIAP+ clients who experience rejection, internalized transphobia, and concealment also experience increased depression; which can impact one's ability to meet their need for pleasure. By acknowledging, validating, and addressing LGBTGEQIAP+ clients minority stress in sessions, a counselor using a Reality Therapy lens can help clients balance feelings of depression while simultaneously experiencing moments of joy.