

THE MINEFIELD OF EDUCATING PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS ABOUT LGBTQA ISSUES WHILE TEACHING IN AN ISLAMIC COUNTRY

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Abstract

How do you teach Master's level counseling psychology students about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and ally (LGBTQA) issues while living in a highly homophobic Islamic country? Homosexuality is illegal in several Middle Eastern countries and is punishable by the death penalty. Although homosexuality is not illegal in Egypt, it is disparaged. There is zero tolerance for any non-heterosexual sexual intimacy. This intolerance is rooted in the Quar'an which forbids acts of homosexuality and labels these acts as sinful. As such, in the Egyptian population, 90% of which is Islamic, there is extraordinarily limited understanding or tolerance for non-heterosexual intimate relationships. The lack of tolerance is palpable and homophobia is rampant in Egypt. This poses an obstacle when teaching master's level psychology counseling students in Egypt. How do you teach tolerance and acceptance in the midst of outward public disdain to a marginalized portion of the population? This paper will discuss the complications of using the standardized American Safe Zone Training to raise awareness in students about LGBTQA issues in Egypt. This paper will address how changes to the standardized Safe Zone Training may be beneficial when conducting training sessions in Islamic countries. The training that will be discussed in the proposed paper is scheduled for February 2014.

Keywords: homosexuality, Safe Zone, education

Biography

Justus joined The American University in Cairo in 2007 and focuses on applied clinical psychotherapy and research in the Middle East. Justus worked in Cairo throughout the Egyptian Revolution starting in 2011. She continues to reside in Cairo and has a subspecialty in treating acute stress related to political violence.