

Pseudo-science still tries to 'cure' LGBT people

By Tyneisha Bowens, NYC chapter of FIST

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the official handbook of U.S. mental health workers. Created by and a registered trademark of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the DSM categorizes mental health conditions and the criteria for diagnosing them.

First published in 1952, the DSM has played a role in creating classifications of mental health "illnesses" and "disorders" that have stigmatized the poor, women, people of color and LGBT people.

For example, until 1973 the DSM categorized homosexuality as a mental disorder and recommended it be "treated" aggressively. These "treatment methods" for homosexuality included surgeries such as clitoridectomies, lobotomies and castration; hormone treatment; and shock treatment, both electric and pharmacological. Only through a protracted struggle by the LGBT movement was the "disorder" removed from the manual.

To this day, LGBT communities and especially trans peoples and LGBT youth are forced to undergo extensive physical and psychological abuse in the guise of treatment to "cure" their sexual and gender identities. Many times it is their sexuality or gender identity that is the basis for being institutionalized in a mental health facility.

There have been four major revisions of the DSM, with DSM-IV published in 1994. The next revisions are scheduled for May of 2012, with an early draft of DSM-V due for comment in 2009.

In May 2008 the APA named Kenneth Zucker as the committee chair of the so-called "Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders" section of the upcoming edition. Zucker's research and treatment work at Toronto's Clarke Institute—currently the Centre for Addiction and Recovery—has been labeled as part of the "ex-gay" movement and seen by multiple "ex-gay" groups as working to "cure" homosexuality.

However, Zucker's appointment has outraged not only the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities but also progressive mental health workers across the U.S.

Leading the charge against Zucker's appointment, and particularly his research on a so-called "treatment" of so-called

gender identity disorder (GID), are trans and gender non-conforming organizations and activists. GID and gender dysphoria are so-called diagnoses by the medical and mental health establishments to account for the existence of trans and gender nonconforming peoples in society. Zucker claims, for example, that in order to "treat" GID, young boys should be forbidden to play with dolls.

Although the creation of the GID diagnosis was meant to further mentally pathologize trans people, its current inclusion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual has led to an important debate within the trans communities.

Using the diagnosis to their advantage, trans activists fought and won to have Medicaid pay for hormone therapy and other health care needs.

Transgender lesbian activist and author Leslie Feinberg explains: "From the standpoint of gender variant individuals, the diagnosis of DSM has been used as a weapon to enforce gender conformity. But for some transsexual men and women, particularly the poorest, the diagnosis can mean access to physical transition. It is the right of the transsexual communities, particularly nationally oppressed communities, the poor and the uninsured and underinsured, to decide when and how to replace the DSM diagnosis."

Science, specifically the fields of psychology and medicine, can be abused to establish hierarchies and thereby systems and institutions of oppression. Heterosexuality as a sexual identity, as well as manifestations of conforming to assigned gender norms, have never been scrutinized and classified as mental illnesses. The institutional inequality is evident. The abusive past and present "scientific" view and "treatment" of

homosexuality and gender variance are a part of something unrelated to psychological health.

The use of "science" to prove one race, sex, gender, sexual identity or class inferior to another dates back to the initial need for validation of the oppressive and exploitative systems stemming from private property. These systems of hierarchy and biased classifications and experiments have historically been used to prove the political, mental and physical inferiority of women, LGBT folks, people of color and working class people—through the criminalization of poverty and alternate



In the LGBT Pride march in NYC, on June 29 FIST marched in an anti-imperialist contingent and was well received. Onlookers joined in chants of "NYPD go to hell! We are all Sean Bell!"

economic survival tactics. It should be noted that these hierarchies have been established through the exclusion of LGBT folks, women, people of color and the working masses in the processes of defining normality and variance.

The validity of the LGBT community's response is further understood when one looks at the trend to use oppressive pseudoscientific arguments, even when they have been disproven, to repress the working class and the oppressed during times of political unrest. These arguments include the "abnormality" of homosexuality and gender variance.

It is evident in this time of economic crisis and seemingly endless advances of U.S. imperialism that the ruling class is correct to see this as a period of potential, and some may argue current, political unrest. ■

Loans for junior colleges becoming extinct

By Larry Hales, Denver FIST

Some of the largest banks in the country are now ceasing to extend student loans to those attending junior colleges, community colleges and technical schools. More than 40 percent of students enrolled in college attend community colleges, as they are considerably less expensive than four-year colleges or universities.

The standards for borrowing, even for four-year schools, will become stricter and will rely on the borrowers' histories and their parents' histories of credit.

The annual report released by the College Board for 2007-2008 showed that tuition costs jumped 6.6 percent from the previous year. The jump is twice the rate of overall inflation. Factor in room and board, and the total costs of a public four-year university are up 5.9 percent, with an average total of \$13,589 per year.

The total cost of a private four-year school is more than \$32,000, with tuition accounting for more than \$23,000 of the total.

The Pell Grants, which do not have to be repaid, have failed to keep up with inflation. According to the College Board, the average recipient of a Pell Grant received \$2,494 in the 2006-2007 school year.

Students wanting to obtain a higher education should not have to rely on student loans. The price tag continues to climb beyond the reach of the average student; so loans are ultimately a trap, putting students in debt to the tune of \$20,000 on the average.

Some students rack up debt as high as \$100,000, especially if they require advanced degrees for their profession of choice.

However, the recent development of lending institutions denying loans to many two-year schools will affect people of color and the poor, as these schools are usually the most reasonable and sensible option.

The reasoning behind the denials, according to the banks, is the high default rate among students who attend two-year schools, and for the banks this constitutes a high risk.

But the problem is much deeper than that. The decision has much more to do with the overall credit crisis, especially considering that most student loans are federally guaranteed. Going into default means constant harassment of the borrower, including wage garnishment, federal lawsuits and tax refund seizure.

A March 20th article, "Financial crisis hits students," in Workers World newspaper illustrated how the financial crisis was partly brought on by the subprime mortgage loan problem. Julie Fry wrote: "Here's what is happening: many state and local governments secure money for public or quasi-public programs through a venue that most people have never heard of called the market for auction-rate securities. Before the financial crisis, auction-rate securities offered the government borrowers a very low interest rate and it offered lenders (banks and other corporations) ready access to their cash investment through regularly scheduled auctions for the bonds, where they could sell their investment and get their cash back on sometimes a weekly basis. They were earning a higher return than they would with their money in a bank.

"All the investments were insured by companies called bond insurers, which specialize in guaranteeing this kind of debt. Here is where things started to unravel. These bond insurers also insure other types of debt—like subprime mortgages. Now that these insurance companies are going to have to secure those loans, the banks don't think they can guarantee student loan debt as well."

Though there are many institutions that still lend to two-year colleges, there is an overall crisis of the student loan industry. The Department of Education has had to assume \$40 billion of debt from student loans, and large lenders have reported huge losses; for example, Sallie Mae reported a loss of \$104 million for the first quarter of 2008.

If the losses affected only the lenders, the CEOs and the super rich, then it would be cause to celebrate, but it is the poor, workers and people of color who will feel the brunt of the pain of one crisis after another.

More and more jobs are being lost—300,000 already this year. Wages are being cut in half or at least lag far behind inflation. The price of gas continues to rise, now at an average of \$4 per gallon. The price of food climbs further. Hundreds of thousands of people around the country face being kicked out of their homes, both those who are owners and those who are renters. The U.S. has one of the highest rates of illiteracy amongst the industrialized countries.

All of these crises are occurring when the option of higher education is being denied and getting further out of reach. ■

FIST on Tibet

What is behind US attacks on Olympics in China?

The Dalai Lama is known to the U.S. public as a peaceful Buddhist leader who represents the interest of the Tibetan people through his role in the "Free Tibet" movement. But to millions of Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is known as an oppressive feudal leader whose past power came not from democracy but from "divine" placement instead. Under the Feudal system of the Dalai Lama, the people of Tibet were serfs and slaves with no education or healthcare. In contrast, the Tibetan people now have education, healthcare, and most importantly freedom from feudal oppression.

However the United States and the old feudal powers of Tibet have a different idea of what constitutes freedom for Tibet, one that includes U.S. domination and a class system where the few profit off the many.

It is clear that the recent international attention toward Tibet is part of the ongoing U.S. attack on China. The United States has been trying to undermine China with a barrage of negative media attacks since the Chinese revolution. The current disproportionate level of media attention to Tibet is just another part of this continuing campaign.

The United States hopes to gain popular support for illegal involvement in Tibet through the "Free Tibet" movement, which is now being used to attack China's hosting of the Olympic Games. This movement and its public leader, the Dalai Lama, are not reflections of the Tibetan people and must NOT be supported!

Some facts about Tibet

- Tibet has been a part of China since the 13th century and has been an autonomous part of China since 1959.
- Before the Chinese revolution Tibet was a feudal society, meaning that a small noble class owned the country's land and 90% of the population were serfs and slaves.
- In pre-revolutionary Tibet there was no religious freedom. Since the Chinese revolution this has changed.
- Torture was commonly used in feudal Tibet, especially as punishment for speaking or acting against the oppressive feudal government and the Dalai Lama.
- In feudal Tibet women had absolutely no rights.
- The Tibetan culture, language, and religions are practiced freely in modern day Tibet. (continued on page 6)