



# Revisiting Romans: Advancing counseling ethics through a review of Paul's perspective on LGBTQ+ issues

Matt Bukowski, MA LPC & Charles Shepard, MA LPC

Presented at ASERVIC Conference July 14, 2018

Dallas, TX

# Origins

- Discussions in leadership class
- Attendance at the panel at ASERVIC 2017
- Desire for common ground, middle ground

## My background

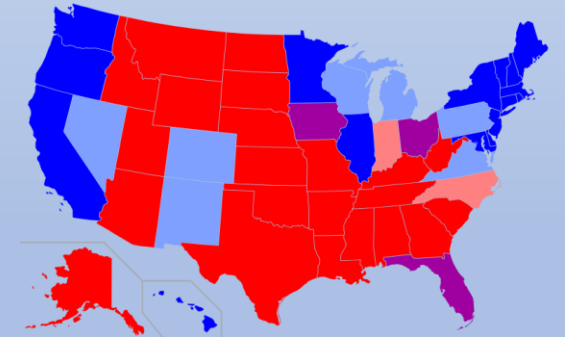
- No family orientation toward religion (avoidant God attachment)
- Quaker school for 11 years
- Attended one catholic mass (funeral), one bible school session with a friend.
- Majored in anthropology and religious studies, specialized in indigenous and eastern religions.
- Frequently debated a Baptist preacher who delivered free sermons to students.
- Have read more of the bible in preparation for ASERVIC presentations than at any other time.
- Charles was the bible guy ☹️

# Research questions

- Did the official response to Ward v. Wilbanks miss important facets of the conscientious objector (CO) trainee's motives?
- Can more thoughtful, detailed engagement help resolve conflicts between professional ethics and religious values?

# Where we are as a profession...

- 2009: Ward vs. Wilbanks challenges 2005 ACA code of ethics language as overly broad and interfering with constitutional rights.
- 2012: States (AK, KY, TN) begin implementing “conscience clause” legislation protecting providers who refer LGBTQ clients.
- 2014: ACA code revised, including more precise language.
- **2016: Divisive U.S. Presidential election stokes polarization, empowers evangelical, conservative, and some fringe groups.**
- 2017: Open conflict between white nationalists and progressive groups in Charlottesville, highlighting cultural divisions.
- 2017: ACA moves its national conference from TN to CA, dividing membership.
- 2018: Two conservative supreme court appointees alter ideological balance of nation’s highest court.
- 2019???: We must create more constructive dialogue, or risk further factionalization.



# Motivation for concern

- Gay and lesbian youth five times more likely to report a suicide attempt (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015).
- Transgender adolescents and young adults 25%-35% more likely to reports a suicide attempt compared to cis-gender peers (Kralovec, Fartacek & Ploderl, 2012).





# 2014 ACA Code of Ethics

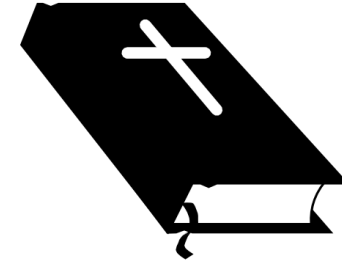
## A.11.a. Competence Within Termination and Referral

If counselors lack the competence to be of professional assistance to clients, they avoid entering or continuing counseling relationships. Counselors are knowledgeable about culturally and clinically appropriate referral resources and suggest these alternatives. If clients decline the suggested referrals, counselors discontinue the relationship.



# Ward vs. Wilbanks

“Based on Biblical teachings, Ms. Ward believes that God ordained sexual relationships between men and women, not between persons of the same sex. As such, Ms. Ward believes that homosexual conduct is immoral sexual behavior. Ms. Ward also believes, based on her sincere religious beliefs, that individuals are capable of refraining from engaging in homosexual conduct” (*Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2009, Compl. at 3-4, as cited in Kaplan, 2014).



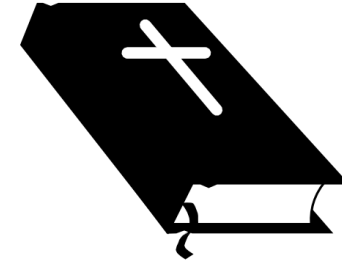


# Ward vs. Wilbanks

- Ward refused remediation because she was “unwilling to violate her beliefs by affirming homosexual conduct within the context of a counseling relationship.” (*Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2009, Compl. at 8, as cited in Kaplan, 2014).

## Discussion Questions:

- **Are counselors ever asked to “affirm conduct?”**
- **Why did Ms. Ward believe that she was being asked to affirm conduct?**
- **How does a student feel if they refuse remediation under threat of dismissal from a program?**



# Extending Ward's argument

- If a counselor believes that adultery is immoral, forbidden by the Bible, and a choice are they then permitted to refer any client who is engaging in adultery? (in order to “not affirm” the conduct)

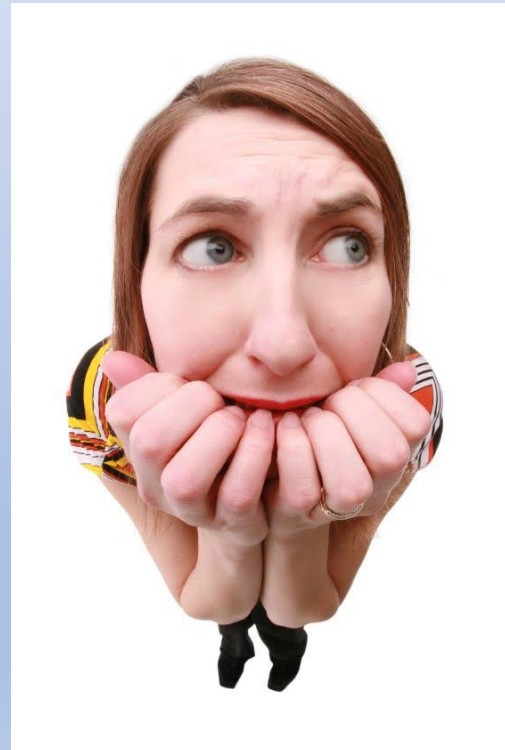


# Deconstructing Ward's objection...

- The basis for refusing to see clients appears to be a moral judgment of the client's behavior.
- Consideration of the client's need likely evoked emotional activation (fear).
- Presumably this impairs the counselor's ability to feel empathy for the client, and consequently impairs their ability to provide ethical interventions.
- The problem was not the client's behavior, it was the counselor's discomfort.



What are the fears/concerns of a counselor trainee who seeks to refer an openly LGBTQ+ client?



# Fears of the non-affirming trainee

1. They will feel “unholy” or somehow guilty for being complicit with sinful behavior.
2. They will be asked by the client to affirm their sexuality, or to give any opinion about it, and inadvertently do harm.
3. Undefined fear: the topic of sexual orientation is highly emotionally activating, and the clinician is unable to verbalize or make sense of their experience.
4. Interpersonal: they fear that others in their faith community will learn that they serve LGBTQ+ clients in a capacity other than conversion, and they will feel judged, rejected, or ostracized.



Are these fears realistic?

Do they impact the clinician's wellness (e.g. social support)?

Do CO clinicians feel that these fears/concerns are understood/appreciated?

Might they be valid, ethical reasons to refer a client?

Are these fears insurmountable?



# Questions...

- Have “diversity and multiculturally affirming” counselors worked to appreciate the motives, meanings and values of CO counselors?
- Are the categories of “inability” and “unwillingness” offered by Kaplan too binary and insufficient to describe the CO’s experience?
- For each counselor, no matter how ethical or well developed, is there not a client that would produce too much emotional activation to serve effectively? (e.g. a pimp, child sex offenders, neo-nazis, a person you are highly attracted to, someone who resembles a previous abuser)



# Reflection...

- Have we accurately understood CO's? Is the mainstream profession's response informed by other unidentified biases? (i.e. anti-Christian bias)
- Has remediation been presented in a culturally insensitive, intolerant and authoritarian fashion?
- Was the problem with Ward vs. Wilbanks the student's beliefs, or her refusal to increase her competence through remediation?



# Shifting the debate

- Some questions have been answered by Kaplan (2014):
  - Is it permissible to deny counseling services to a homosexual on the basis of a counselor's values? – **No**
  - Can counselors make referrals at any time they wish to do so? – **No**
  - When is a client a client? – **At first contact/assignment.**
- Despite these clarifications there is still substantial debate over CO referral and counseling professional ethics.
- Clearly, an authoritarian “do as you’re told” approach is not working and offensive to many counselors.



# Shifting the debate

- One potential reason this division is so persistent is that the tone of ACA and other mainstream counselors may be received as intolerant, condescending, and disrespecting the diversity of many conservative or evangelical counselors.
- Can we apply the same standard that we would to a client?
  - Honor the individual's beliefs
  - Promote growth and development
  - Raise concerns about potentially harmful behavior.



# What can we do?

A more compassionate remediation intervention that addresses the cognitive, affective, dispositional, cultural, spiritual and ethical components of the student and the profession.

- Not automatically blame the student or faculty/profession, avoid polarization.
- Possible components:
  - Science-Theology Paradigm Scale (STPS)
  - Scientific research on sexual orientation
  - Engagement with scripture, trainee's belief system, alternative viewpoints
  - Guided dialogue with LGBTQ persons



## ROMANS 1:26-27

*Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*



## JAMES 4:12

*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

## GALATIANS 5:14

*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

## LEVITICUS 20:13

*If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.*

## HEBREWS 13:1-5

- **1** *Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.*
- **2** *Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*
- **3** *Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*
- **4** *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*
- **5** *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

## ROMANS 1:26-27

*Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

# Interpretation #1

In this passage, Paul, who was quite familiar with biblical and secular views of sexual orientation, says that having sex with someone of the same gender is a sin. Some interpret this passage as a reference to heterosexuals who exchanged their natural sexual orientation for that which was not natural to them. The word that Paul uses for “natural” is not referring to what is natural to a specific person, but rather what is natural in light of God's intent for the sexual design of humanity. Ultimately, the passage serves as an introduction to verses 28-32, where Paul lists many other general sins that ultimately show our need for the Gospel

-Caleb Kaltenbach, Lead pastor of Discovery Church in Simi Valley, Calif



# Interpretation #2



Paul is explicit that the same-sex behavior in this passage is motivated by lust. His description is similar to the common ancient idea that people “exchange” opposite-sex for same-sex relations because they are driven by out-of-control desire, not because they have a different sexual orientation. And while Paul labels same-sex behavior “unnatural,” he uses the same word to criticize long hair in men in 1 Corinthians 11:14, which most Christians read as a synonym for “unconventional.” Christians should continue to affirm with Paul that we shouldn’t engage in sexual behavior out of self-seeking lustfulness. But that’s very different than same-sex marriages that are based on self-giving love, and we shouldn’t conflate the two in how we interpret this text today.

-Matthew Vines, Author of “God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships.”



# Redefining the goals of remediation

- GOAL: To increase cognitive complexity at the intersection of culture, religion, sexuality, values and professional practice.
- GOAL: To help counselors of faith more accurately understand and communicate their own values and how they intersect with mainstream counseling values.
- GOAL: To help trainees accurately understand professional ethics, bases for referral, definitions of competence and responsibilities of self-awareness and control.
- NOT: To force counselors against their will to take actions that violate personal ethical or moral standards.



# Another analogy: parenting

- What about evangelical parents who raise a child who identifies as LGBTQ+ and is unwilling/able to change?
  - A ready analogy to counseling through attachment
  - Children are like clients that you can't refer (until they turn 18)
- Is it possible for parents to work through their prior beliefs and understandings, and simultaneously honor their spiritual life and have a healthy parent-child relationship?



# Middle ground models

- Book - Messy grace: How a pastor with gay parents learned to love others without sacrificing conviction
- Mark Yarhouse: Suggests decreasing focus on orientation and instead on Christian sexual ethics



# The way forward

- Do some counselor educators still believe that it is ethical to refer LGBTQ+ clients, on principle, because the clinician perceives a conflict between their values and the client? – Probably
- The mainstream perspective seems clear that this is not permissible for professional counselors, it is a competence issue.
- Can the mainstream perspective shift to allow CO counselors to refer in cases where they have gone through additional training to increase competence?



# References

- American Counseling Association Governing Council. (2014). *2014 ACA Code of Ethics*. Retrieved from [https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=fde89426\\_5](https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=fde89426_5)
- BibleStudyTools Staff. (2015). Bible verses about homosexuality. Retrieved from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/bible-verses-about-homosexuality/>
- Boston Declaration, The*. (2017). Retrieved from <https://thebostondeclaration.com/>
- Bukowski, M. (2018). Positive parenting for LGBT youth. *Virginia Child Protection Newsletter*. 15. June 2018.
- Forest-Miller, H., & Davis, T. E. (2016). *Practitioner's guide to ethical decision making* (Rev. ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/practitioner's-guide-to-ethical-decision-making.pdf>
- Gibbs, J. & Goldbach, J. (2015). Religious conflict, sexual identity, and suicidal behaviors among LGBT young adults. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 19, pp. 472-488.
- Gushee, D. P. (2015). Reconciling evangelical Christianity with our sexual minorities: Reframing the biblical discussion. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 35(2), pp. 141-158.
- Jones, S. L. and Yarhouse, M. A. (2007) *Ex-gays?: A longitudinal study of religiously mediated change in sexual orientation*. IVP Academic: Downers Grove, Illinois.
- Kaplan, D. M. (2014, April). Ethical implications of a critical legal case for the counseling profession: *Ward v. Wilbanks*. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92, pp. 142-146.
- Kravlovec, K; Fartacek, C; & Ploderl, M. (2014). Religion and suicide risk in lesbian, gay, and bisexual Austrians. *Journal of Religious Health*, 53, pp 413-423.
- Shepard, C. (Submitted for publication). Resolving conflicts of conscience: Examining the gaps between religious and professional ethics and the influence they have on professional counselors of faith.
- Tenneson, M., Bundrick, D., & Stanford, M. (2015). A new survey instrument and its findings for relating science and theology. *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 67(3), pp. 200-222..
- Yarhouse, M. (2010). *A Christian perspective on sexual identity*. Retrieved from <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Yarhouse-Homosexuality.pdf>