Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Counseling

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M.A. in Clinical Mental Health, Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2012
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Intersex Experiences, Activists’ Perspectives, and Counseling Implications

Date: April 1, 2020
Time: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Place: Sigma-Aldrich Science Education Lab

Abstract
Intersex people are born with sex development differences, for example, atypical genitals. The intersex community is the only sexual minority population subjected to surgical and hormonal treatments in infancy designed to make their bodies conform to expectations for male and female bodies. The first protocol that instituted the irreversible treatments was developed in the 1950’s by John Money, a psychologist. Intersex activism to stop the medicalized treatments began in the late 1990’s. No other qualitative study has focused on the experiences of intersex activists who protect intersex infants from irreversible, damaging medical treatments. Four leading activists were interviewed in depth regarding their intersex, activist and counseling experiences. Data was collected through semi-structured interview and analyzed according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis qualitative methodology. A three stage Intersex Identity Model was developed to explain the psychological growth involved in moving beyond society’s pathologizing notion of intersex traits. The Intersex Identity Model stages addressed context, process and themes. The Identity Model’s three stages are Stage 1. Binary Only Framework: Intersex as Disorder, Stage 2: Breaking the Binary Only Framework, and Stage 3: Beyond the Binary Only Framework: Intersex Natural Bodily Variations. The intersex community is underserved by the counseling profession. An identity model developed specifically for intersex people will help counselors appreciate unique intersex psychological challenges. The American Counseling Association was one of the first organizations to oppose optional intersex infant sex-related surgeries, yet many counselors remain unaware of the controversy. Since 2006, the counseling profession has been directly implicated in optional intersex infant sex-related surgeries. The protocol, the 2006 Chicago Consensus, included professional counseling as a part of multidisciplinary teams that offer the irreversible intersex “fixing” treatments. This study will raise professional awareness so counseling professionals can distinguish themselves from therapeutic providers who are cooperating with medical providers who deny infants their right of self-determination.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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