



## *RESEARCHER WORKS TO HELP LGBTQIA+ YOUTH THRIVE*



Megan Paceley, Ph.D., was amazed by the transformations she witnessed. In the five years she worked at a community center with teenagers who identified as LGBTQIA+, she saw teens who had been quiet and unsure of themselves, who felt shame about their sexual identity, or faced mental health issues, blossom. Witnessing firsthand how teens thrive when they are part of a supportive community was so impactful for Paceley, who identifies as queer, that it helped set the trajectory for her career.

As an assistant professor for the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, Paceley wants to better understand -- and improve -- the experiences of gender and sexual minority youth in Kansas.

In past decades, research has focused on uncovering the risks LGBTQIA+ communities face. In contrast, Paceley is using a strengths-based approach in her work, focusing on how to empower youth and communities to reach their goals.

She just completed a study of Kansas transgender youth aged 13 to 24 to learn about their experiences in their families, schools, and communities, and how those experiences affected them, sparking feelings of pride or shame.

In July 2019, she began a year-long case study in Kansas in which she will work with four youth under the age of 18 who identify as transgender, and their families, in order to understand the barriers they might face to receiving health care that affirms their identity. The goal of the research is to identify specific areas in which to advocate for better care.

Throughout all her research initiatives, Pacey says, “Our overall goal is to change systems and change communities. The problem isn’t the young people. It’s our society and how it treats them.”

## RESEARCHER WORKS FOR BETTER FUTURE FOR LGBTQIA+ SENIORS



As a master’s student working in long-term care facilities serving older adults, Sarah Jen had residents discreetly come out to her as non-hetrosexual and transgender. She was struck by the fact that the residents felt uncomfortable expressing their sexual and gender identities in the facilities and by how unprepared some of the facilities were to serve these residents’ needs.

“I identify as bisexual. I saw a window into my future and didn’t like what I saw,” shares Jen, Ph.D. This experience helped set the course for Jen’s research into better understanding the needs of LGTBQIA+ seniors and developing interventions that will help them thrive. “We have an opportunity to shape the field the way we want it to be,” she says.

Today, as an assistant professor at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, Jen is working to discover how we can better support the needs of LGBTQIA+ seniors.

On the national level, she is engaged in a National Institutes of Health study that explores the health and wellbeing of midlife and older LGBTQIA+ people. The data uncovered so far in the study show poor mental health outcomes for bisexual people compared with lesbian and gay counterparts, which was a big surprise for Jen.

“I thought bisexual older adults were doing fine, compared to other sub groups. But the study shows their outcomes are worse,” she says. “I wanted to understand why.”

That quest is inspiring the research she wants to do in Kansas. “One of the things that drew me to Kansas is the need for rural research,” she explains, as much of the existing research on LGBTQIA+ midlife and older adults comes from large, urban centers.

She plans to study the long-term care sector in Kansas to learn what sexual issues have come up in their facilities, the sexual policies in place, and their awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues. With this knowledge, Jen wants to pilot a strengths-based intervention that equips facilities to better support seniors’ sexual expression and the needs of LGBTQIA+ residents.

Jen admires the strength and resiliency she has witnessed in LGBTQIA+ older adults in Kansas. She wants to play a part in providing them with a retirement that is welcoming and inviting, where sexual and identity differences are celebrated.

## NEW FACULTY WILL CONTRIBUTE TO LGBTQIA + RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE



*Briana McGeough, Ph.D.*

**RESEARCH FOCUS:** Understanding the mechanisms underlying mental health disparities for sexual minority populations and improving therapy outcomes for sexual minority clients.

**CLINICAL EXPERIENCE:** She has served as a therapist for LGBTQIA+ clients living with severe and persistent mental illness, and helped develop and pilot a curriculum for service providers about working with LGBTQIA+ youth in foster care.

*“I’m interested in doing research that supports the mental health of the LGBTQ community. I’m most excited about preparing future social workers to provide clinical social work for members of marginalized communities.”*



*Michael Riquino, Ph.D., LCSW*

**RESEARCH FOCUS:** Learning how to better assist individuals struggling with self-harm, especially youth with historically marginalized identities such as LGBTQIA+ youth, who are often at greater risk because of their experiences with discrimination and oppression.

**CLINICAL EXPERIENCE:** He has over eight years of post-MSW practice experience working with children, adolescents, and families in community and mental health settings.

*“I’m excited to partner with individuals across campus and in the community to learn how to better address the needs of young people who struggle with self-harm. I’m also passionate about social work education and can’t wait to begin working with students and learning about Kansas from them.”*





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