



*“Carl Jung tried to treat every patient as individually as possible, and observed that the ‘cure ought to grow naturally out of the patient.’ In a similar way, we can work to heal attachment injuries and create secure attachment bonds by evoking attachment longings and needs within one LGBTQ couple at a time.”*

## Applying EFT to LGBTQ Couples

By Stephen McDonnell, LCSW, LMFT

As an EFT therapist and in my personal life, I believe that monogamous, committed relationships are the “gold standard” of secure attachment, but I struggle to apply this standard to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer couples with whom I work. Attachment theory, as a central part of EFT, may compete with client “self-determination” and an ideology present within some couples in the LGBTQ community: the “sex-positive” movement embracing open sexuality with few limits within a relationship. Some of the challenges that I have identified in applying EFT to LGBTQ couples include:

1. **Trauma:** in addition to possibly experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse similar to the general population, many LGBTQ clients experience the shame of rejection from their families, religion, and the predominant culture. The trauma may range from excommunication to bullying, and may include extreme legal limitations couples in the general population enjoy.
2. **Easy breakups:** While five states and the District of Columbia now offer same-sex marriage, 45 other states do not, including New York. Without the legal right to marry, leverage to work through problems in a relationship may be limited, and break-ups can be a much easier process for LGBTQ couples.
3. **Sex and avoidant attachment:** EFT therapists may find confronting typical patterns of avoidant attachment in the LGBTQ couples challenging, since many in the

cultural community may support common patterns of avoidance: separating sexual activity from an emotional bond, sustaining pornography and internet play, and engaging with multiple sexual partners—both inside and outside the romantic relationship. The challenge of “sexless” couples is also not uncommon, and the EFT therapist may struggle with applying attachment theory and the pitfalls of negative cycles to relationships where sexual connection has been lost.



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