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How Jennifer Gildner Came Back to the Midwest:
An Interview with Carleton's Newest Wellness Center Counselor
By Jedda Foreman ’08

Jennifer Gildner is a (relatively) new counseling psychologist working in the Wellness Center. Though she grew up close-by in Minnesota, she was not well prepared for her January start at Carleton. Ultimately, she chose to come to work at her ideal vision of a small, liberal arts school instead of listening to her childhood desire to never return to the Midwest. As she says, it really says something about the nature and strength of Carleton that she was pulled back to the long winters and flat landscapes of Minnesota.

Before coming to Carleton, Jennifer received her M.S. in Clinical Psychology at Abilene Christian University in Texas, her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at the University of Houston, and completed a Post Doctoral Fellowship in Sports Psychology at the University of Southern California. At the Wellness Center, Jennifer specializes in LGBT issues, athletes, LGBT athletes, and general wellness and self-care. In her off days, she cycles and runs around Northfield, and welcomes students who want to housesit and take care of her dog.

What drew you to Northfield?
Honestly, only Carleton. I didn’t intend to come to a school this small, but in the end, size didn’t matter.

What made you want to be a counselor, especially a counselor at a college like Carleton?
The students. I did a lot of hands-on work in my masters and PhD programs, and I just kept going back to college-aged people. They have so much going on, in terms of identity-development, and everything is so exciting and tumultuous. There is a ton of growth, hope, and expectation, and I’ve experienced it all too, so I really feel like I can relate to student’s on their end of things. It really just comes down to college students being fun: they play hard and they work hard.

Do you see a lot of queer-related problems at Carleton?
As a psychologist, not really. Coming out is an issue in general, no matter where you are. Carleton is really pretty good. I see students who are scared to come out, but that’s normal, and in the end, Carleton is really safe. I haven’t seen a lot of people who are having issues because of being specifically at Carleton. There are the usual complaints though around the community of campus being too small, the queer community being too small, the dating pool being far too small and the everyone knowing everyone else’s business. But those aren’t reasons people are coming to the Wellness Center.

What are the different ways that women can orgasm?
As you may know, clitoral stimulation is probably the most well-known method for orgasm and can include anything from hand to tongue to sex toy play. Another common method for orgasm is through penetration. Penetration means either vaginal or anal, and can (but doesn’t have to) include exciting the g-spot. Many women orgasm from pain or other intense sensations from S/M. More surprising, though, is that some women can orgasm purely from breast stimulation, and some (like tantra practitioners) can reach orgasm solely through mental stimulation and fantasy. For a number of women it takes some combination of any number of these practices in order to orgasm. Additionally, no orgasm is the same, so don’t worry if what you’re experiencing isn’t how your friend described it. As Our Bodies, Ourselves (available in the GSC library) explains, “orgasm can be mild like a hiccup, a sneeze, a ripple, or a peaceful sigh” (238).

There is a lot of stigma around anal sex, what’s the deal?
1) Not all gay men have or want anal sex. In fact, “oral sex and mutual masturbation are more common among gay men in long term relationships” (goaskalice.com).
2) Straight men can like anal sex. Desiring anal sex, being curious about anal sex, or having it, does not mean that you are gay.
3) Women can also desire anal sex.

Use lots of lube. The anus, unlike the vagina, can never produce enough natural lubrication to make anal penetration pleasurable. You may want to start with something small, like a finger (clean and with well-trimmed nails), then move up to sex toys (make sure they are designed for anal play, or are soft and flexible) or a penis. Having anal sex face down can decrease anal pressure and increase pleasure. Go slowly and make sure the internal sphincter muscle is relaxed. Make sure to communicate with your partner about what feels good and when to stop. Pushing through pain can result in fissures and other things that sound bad. Condoms. Always. You should know this one already.

Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists
This book is a collection of texts about Buddhism as it relates to the gay male perspective, or at least anyone born in the body of a male. It does not really go into the place of women and genders in Buddhism, but has bits that are helpful to people of other sexual orientations and genders. The personal essays and poetry are pretty much from the white, privileged, gay, and biologically male perspective. For me, the historical essays and contemporary essays are the best parts, and they are extremely interesting. There is a Vol 2, but as far as I can tell it is focused on the same perspective as the first. Overall, this book is worth reading and will answer some immediate questions, but it really could have been so much more.

Book Review by Lawrence Dykeman ’09

Volume 6 Issue 6
Let's Talk About SEX...

This advice column is produced by an alliance of SWAs and GSCAs in order to bring you the most up-to-date and comprehensive information about anything and everything you ever wanted to know about sex. Have sex questions of your own? Thought you'd never be able to have them anonymously—and thoroughly—answered? Well, place your questions in mailbox 1422 or 1143, and we’ll try to have them answered in the next newsletter.

Special “Best Of” Edition with all the words of wisdom from the past year gathered together!

What STIs are most common on campus?

50% of sexually active people get HPV (Human Papillomavirus) at some time in their lives.

I’ve never had an orgasm. What am I doing wrong?

Some tips for having an orgasm:

• Experiment!!

• Take your time. Some women orgasm in 5 minutes, others can take 30 or more minutes.

• Don’t feel confined to one path toward orgasm. Human sexuality is not linear.

• Try sex toys, particularly a vibrator.

• Touch yourself :-)

• It’s fun to fantasize.

Never underestimate the power of doctor consultation. There may be something simple they can help you change.

What’s the difference between circumcised and uncircumcised penises? Is there any difference in sexual pleasure?

As far as sexual pleasure is concerned, the most common theory today is that circumcision decreases sexual pleasure. According to this research, the foreskin’s job is to protect the head (glands) of the penis. These glands are a particularly sensitive area, which, without the protection of the foreskin, become desensitized due to consistent rubbing and chaffing, thus decreasing sexual pleasure. Additionally, the foreskin, itself, is filled with nerves, which could increase sexual pleasure.

How often is *too* often to use your vibrator? I hear rumors of becoming desensitized and losing the ability to orgasm without vibrator stimulation. True? Not true?

Good news. The rumor that using a vibrator will desensitize the clitoris is a myth. It can temporarily cause mild discomfort, but masturbating and using a sex toy will ultimately enhance the quality and likelihood of an orgasm.

So want a dildo? try the Jollies Polka Dot Dildo or the G-Force Dildo available online at the smitten kitten website.

How is Carleton different than other schools you’ve worked at?

Very different. When I was at University of Southern California, I worked in the athletic department, and people did not come out. They didn’t come out at USC and they definitely didn’t come in the athletic department. I think its hard at a school like USC that is so big because people only have one specific group of friends and there’s just too many people to really branch out, so the fear of coming out is huge, because if you lose that one group of friends, that’s it. USC also has a lot of Greek life, and that really contributes a whole new dimension of homophobia. It really feels a lot safer at Carleton. There are good policies here—no other place I’ve worked has had partner benefits, but Carleton does—and that really helps make the environment feel that much safer.

Can you speak a little bit about a queer community among the faculty and staff?

I feel like faculty could be more out. Which is definitely not a criticism of the faculty, because if they don’t feel safe they shouldn’t come out. But there is something to the fact that these are smart, educated people in a relatively safe community and a job with partner benefits, and they’re really not openly out. Most of the adults I see at GSC events are staff. I know there are tenure issues, and many other some things going on, but that definitely seems weird to me. I haven’t figured it out yet, so I’m not sure what could be done.

Do you identify as queer with your clients? If so, does that change the therapist-client relationship?

Sometimes I do and sometimes, I don’t. It really depends on whether I think its therapeutic. I came out in my resume and in my interview here and I attend GSC events, like the Rainbow Retreat, so Carleton’s been weird for me in that sense because I’m not really making that decision very much. Many students who come to see me already know I’m queer. In most situations, I don’t think it really matters. Although, I think for people who come to see me that also identify as queer, they feel more comforted by someone they know has had similar situations. Even though my coming out story and my experiences haven’t been the same and often they’re completely different, we’ve still probably faced similar issues and common themes. And I think it makes people a little more open about their relationships and about sex. It’s easier to talk to someone who you know won’t think its weird, or won’t know what something is. That’s about it. I can’t really think of any negative reaction, certainly not at Carleton.
Second, we want to challenge the culture of alcohol and sex at Carleton. Many people rely on alcohol to hook-up, and don’t feel comfortable expressing sexual desire while sober. The “Carleton Hook-up,” a GSC Brown Bag discussion that occurred in the winter, attracted a number of students who were all stumped when we asked them to tell us about a good Carleton hook-up. However, they had plenty of stories about bad Carleton hook-ups. The consensus seemed to be that alcohol was necessary to express sexual desire and to be sexual with others without a dating relationship, however it was also the thing that made the hook-up not so satisfying, and in some cases, regrettable. Students expressed discomfort with their own bodies and a real reluctance to communicate their own sexual desires to a partner. We hope that though our educational efforts, we can challenge this reliance on alcohol to be sexual.

Third, we want to provide people with the skills to have healthy relationships, healthy hook-ups, healthy dates, and healthy 4-year anniversaries. Those not the skills that are taught in sex ed, where the primary message is often only how to say “No!” to sex. Sometimes we want to say yes, or we want to know if our partner is thinking yes, but we haven’t been provided with a script for that. This is where Mike Domitrz and his “Can I Kiss You?” talk came in handy because it literally gave all of us a script so we could learn how to get to yes, or hear a “No!”

Fourth, we want people to learn about their bodies and the bodies of their partner(s). Knowing how your own body works is a crucial component to being healthy and having good, safe sex. Events like “Test Fest” and the “Female Orgasm” were initiated this year in order to give people access to information about their bodies. If you are sexually active, being tested for HIV and other STIs is imperative. With on-campus HIV testing, students now have easy access to information they need to protect themselves and their partners. Programs like “The Female Orgasm” give people the words and the understanding to know what’s happening to their bodies, to their partners’ bodies, and that people experience all sorts of things in different ways. Hopefully this knowledge translates into respect for one’s own body and desires and respect for other peoples’ bodies and desires.

Fifth, we want to create a supportive and aware community for survivors. As the year comes to a close, we have realized that we didn’t address this aspect very much. There are Carleton students who have experienced sexual violence both on and off campus, and we need to create a community that is ready and able to listen, believe, and support these survivors. One program scheduled for next fall, the creation of a “One in Four” Chapter (oneinfourusa.org), will help create a campus community that is comfortable and safe for survivors.

We hope that you’ll join us to confront sexual violence in all its forms and to create a campus environment that promotes healthy, safe, and respectful relationships.