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SECTION I:

WELCOME & DEFINITIONS

Dear Ally Network Member:

Welcome to the Ally Network at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. We hope that the initial orientation gave you a sense of the purpose and mission of the Ally Network. We would like to take a moment here to review the intent of the Ally Network. Below is the Ally Network's mission statement.

Mission Statement:

The Ally Network is a group of self-identified faculty, staff, teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and resident assistants, who work both to facilitate the development of all students around issues of sexual orientation and to improve the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students at the University of Illinois. Members of the Ally Network support and actively realize these goals in a variety of ways: providing information, raising awareness, engaging in political and social advocacy, and through personal example. The Ally Network strives to examine and address the obstacles presented by homophobia and heterosexism to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) communities and to the straight community alike. The Network is sponsored and administered jointly by the Sexual Orientation and Diversity Allies (SODA) Committee of the Counseling Center and the Student Affairs Office for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources.

Because an initial meeting cannot cover all that is important, we have assembled this manual to supplement the training. There is information in the manual about a variety of topics that may be salient to you as an Ally. There are also Ally Network meetings from noon to 1:30 on the first Friday of every month from October through May. These meetings provide a forum for additional training and discussion for those of us in the Network. Additionally, we maintain an e-mail listserv of all Allies to distribute information and to allow for further discussion. Feel free to direct any questions or comments you may have to this listserv by emailing Gina Arnold at glarnold@uiuc.edu and requesting that she send your message to the list. Meetings and future Ally Trainings will be advertised on the listserv, as well as in Inside Illinois. We hope that you will assist in disseminating information regarding the Ally Network by informing others of the events advertised on the listserv. Finally, because the Ally Manual is a work in progress, we welcome any comments and suggestions about its current form. We look forward to seeing you at future Ally meetings.

Sincerely,

The Counseling Center SODA Committee and The Office for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources.

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DEFINITIONS¹

Lesbian: This is one of the oldest and most positive terms that labels the affectional or sexual preference or orientation of women towards other women. A woman who forms her primary loving and sexual relationships with other women; a woman who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic preference for someone of the same sex. Some lesbians prefer to call themselves “lesbian” and use the term “gay” to refer to gay men; others use the term “gay” to refer to both gay males and lesbian females. Term of pride.

Gay: A man who forms his primary loving and sexual relationships with other men; a man who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic and/or erotic preference for someone of the same sex. A term adopted by the gay male community, though some lesbians use it also, as a sign of pride in their sexual orientation.

Bisexual: A person who has an affectional, emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to men and women. Degree of preference and choice of primary relationship partner varies for each bisexual.

Heterosexual: A heterosexual is a man who forms primary loving and sexual relationships with women or a woman who forms primary loving and sexual relationships with men; a woman who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic preference for men (or vice versa). Heterosexuals usually (but not necessarily) engage in overt sexual relationships with people of the other sex.

Homosexual: A clinical and technical term that is not generally used to refer to lesbian and gay people or their community. For example, Congressman Barney Frank refers to himself as gay, or openly gay, not as admittedly homosexual or a practicing homosexual.

Coming Out: An ever-evolving process of self-acceptance and integration of one’s sexual identity. It is an intra-personal as well as interpersonal process and may include public proclamation of identity as well as political action in the larger society.

Being Out or Out of the Closet: A term which means being open and public about being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. A closeted person hides the fact that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. Some people are “out” in some settings (for example, with friends) and not “out” in other settings (for example, at work or with family).

Heterosexism: “The societal/cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, acceptable sexual orientation.”

Sexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex or gender and thereby its right to dominance.

Heterosexist Privilege: “The benefits and advantages heterosexuals receive in a heterosexual culture. Also, the benefits lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity.”

Homophobia: “The fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians, gay men, or any behavior that is outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles. Homophobia can be manifested out of fear of association with lesbian or gay people or being perceived as lesbian or gay. Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbian and gay people to physical violence against people thought to be lesbian or gay.”

Biphobia: The discomfort and fear others feel around bisexual people and the myths that exist about bisexuality. Bisexuality is often misperceived as an invalid sexual identity. Biphobia is structurally supported by monosexism, “the structural and cultural privileging of sexuality directed toward only one gender (heterosexuality or homosexuality).” Bisexual people are not only stigmatized by heterosexual people, but also by lesbian and gay people because they “blur the boundaries between insider and outsider.”²

Heterosexual Ally: “Heterosexual person who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexual privilege in themselves and others out of self-interest, a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and a belief that heterosexism is a social justice issue.”³

Lover, Partner, and Significant Other: Terms that lesbian, gay and bisexual people use to identify those people with whom they have romantic or sexual relationships.

Queer: “Originally a derogatory label used to insult lesbians and gay people or to intimidate and offend heterosexuals. More recently this term has been reclaimed by some lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, and transgender people as an inclusive and positive way to identify all people targeted by heterosexism and homophobia. Some lesbians and gay men have similarly reclaimed previously negative words such as “dyke” and “faggot” for positive self-reference.”

Sexual orientation refers to the gender of the persons that someone is attracted to, emotionally and physically, i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and others in between, as well as asexual.

Transgender: A broad term that covers many aspects in the gender experience. People who identify as transgender feel that their prescribed gender role does not fit with their experience of their gender. Transgender people can be, but are not always, transsexuals. Some people decide to redefine themselves by changing their gender expression only and others feel that they also need to change their bodies. Sex hormones, electrolysis, plastic surgery, or sex reassignment surgery can help people make a physical change that feels more congruent with their self-image. The term transgender includes the following.

- **FTM (female to male):** People who were born female but see themselves as male.
- **MTF (male to female):** People who were born male but see themselves as female.
- **Intersexed:** Some babies are born with genitalia of both sexes. Some parents and doctors elect surgery for the infant and assign a gender. Because a person’s true gender cannot be known by their genitalia, an assignment at birth can be wrong. Intersexed people have been treated differently by different societies over history. In some other cultures they are given special places in the group and revered as special. Generally, the more homophobic a society, the less understanding and acceptance there will be for trans- or inter-sexed people.

Gender identity refers to how a person sees himself or herself socially: as a woman, as a man, as masculine, as feminine, as a combination, or as neither.

Gender expression is how an individual chooses to express their gender. For example, regardless of their body or what they claim as a gender identity, if a person dresses and acts in a manner that is consistent with society's definition of being female, that person is expressing a female gender.

LGBT Activist: An individual who engages in a continuum of direct action in the service of securing civil rights and social justice for people of all sexual orientations. This continuum of action can range from educating oneself on the issues to recognizing and interrupting homophobic and heterosexist behaviors on a personal level to participating in rallies, protests, and other efforts with the aim of achieving political and social change on a community level.

SYMBOLS OF PRIDE⁴

Listed below are some symbols that have been adopted by gay men, lesbians and their allies along with the significance of each:

Stonewall & Pride Celebrations

On June 28, 1969, a routine raid on the Stonewall Bar on Christopher Street in New York City turned into a riot when patrons resisted. The police barricaded themselves inside the bar. The riot escalated until reinforcements arrived. The riots continued for several evenings. This rebellion, begun by drag queens and bar patrons, marked the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian movement. Each June, Pride marches, rallies, and celebrations are held throughout the nation commemorating Stonewall.

Double Woman's Symbol

Also known as “the mirror of Venus,” this symbol represents the planet Venus, metal, copper, and femininity. The double woman's symbol represents woman loving woman.

Double Man's Symbol

Derived from the astrological symbol of Mars. Mars was the Greek God of War and patron of warriors. The arrow is a phallic symbol. A double man's symbol represents man loving man.

The Pink Triangle

During World War II, concentration camp prisoners were classified by a set of colored triangles; pink was reserved for homosexuals. When liberation came in the mid-1940's, most of the survivors were set free. Homosexuals, however, were taken by the U.S. Army personnel from concentration camps to allied prisons.

Since the 1940's, the pink triangle has become one of the most recognizable and powerful symbols for gay people and the oppression they have faced throughout Western History. The pink triangle was a commonly used insignia throughout the early gay liberation movements. It appears in photographs and film footage of the early marches and demonstrations. The pink triangle was ubiquitous at the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1987. It is a reminder and statement, “Never Again!”

The Rainbow Flag

The Rainbow Flag has been adopted by the gay and lesbian community as its own design. It depicts not the shape of the rainbow, but its colors in horizontal stripes.

Created in 1978 for San Francisco's Gay Freedom Celebration by local artist, Gilbert Baker, it was inspired by the "Flag of the Races", which had five stripes representing each of the colors of humankind's skin, flown at the 1960 college campus demonstrations. Major gay and lesbian parades in New York, Houston, Vancouver, and Toronto began to fly the six-stripe Rainbow Flag. It is prominently displayed at all events. In New York, the Rainbow Flag drapes coffins of people who have died of AIDS, and is frequently displayed on hospital doors. The AIDS ward of a Sydney, Australia hospital flew the Rainbow Flag as a symbol of hope. In a few short years, the flag has spread worldwide to represent a movement. Its success is not due to any official recognition, but to the widespread spontaneous adoption by members of the communities it represents.

The Labrys

The double-bladed ax comes from the myth as the scepter of the goddess Demeter (Artemis). It may have originally been used in battle by female Scythian warriors. The labrys appears in ancient Cretan art and has become a symbol of lesbianism.

The Lambda

Chosen by the Gay Activist Alliance in 1970 as the symbol of the gay movement, the lambda is the Greek letter "L". A battle flag with the lambda was carried by a regiment of ancient Greek warriors who were accompanied in battle by their young male lovers and noted for their fierceness and willingness to fight to the death.

Freedom Rings

Designed by David Spada with the Rainbow Flag in mind, these six colored aluminum rings have come to symbolize independence and tolerance of others. They were quickly adapted by the Gay community and at a recent march in New York, onlookers waited five deep to purchase them. The rings are frequently displayed or worn as jewelry and can be found as necklaces, earrings, bracelets, rings, and key chains.

Transgender Symbol

Designed as the logo for the International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE), this logo has become recognized as the symbol for crossdressers, transvestites, transsexuals, and transgenderists.

HETEROSEXUAL QUESTIONNAIRE⁵

In an effort to develop a basic awareness of heterosexism in society today, the following questionnaire is aimed at pointing out the many biases that gay, lesbian and bisexual people encounter in everyday living. It is a turn-around experience.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual?
3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?
4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you have never slept with a person of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good gay or lesbian lover?
6. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react?
7. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Can't you just be what you are and keep it quiet?
8. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex?
9. Why do heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into their "lifestyle"?
10. A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexual. Do you consider it safe to expose children to heterosexual teachers?
11. Just what do men and women do in bed together? How can they truly know how to please each other, being so anatomically different?
12. With all the societal support marriage receives, the divorce rate is still spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?
13. Statistics show that lesbians have the lowest incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. Is it really safe for a woman to maintain a heterosexual lifestyle and run the risk of disease and pregnancy?
14. How can you become a whole person if you limit yourself to compulsive, exclusive heterosexuality?
15. Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual like you?

16. Could you trust a heterosexual therapist to be objective? Don't you feel they might be inclined to influence you in the direction of the heterosexual lifestyle?
17. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change if you really want to. Have you considered trying aversion therapy?
18. Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing the problems they would face?

SECTION II

COMING OUT & DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES OF GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS

Throughout the lifespan, people of all ages face developmental tasks they have to wrestle with and master. Often, an individual's normal struggles with maturation are confounded by environmental and societal barriers. LGB individuals, for example, sometimes face unique developmental struggles because their development occurs within the context of a heterosexist and homophobic society. Being left-handed is as common as being gay, and yet left-handed people do not have the same difficulties with forming an identity. When working with a student facing developmental struggles, it is important to not only look at the student's strengths and weaknesses, but also at the social milieu within which the student is located.

One of the most salient tasks for LGB students, particularly during the undergraduate years, is coming out. While making one's sexual orientation public in all aspects of one's life is not necessary for developing into a mature adult, wrestling with coming out is a necessary component of development. Below, we will discuss definitions and dynamics of coming out, the benefits and liabilities of coming out, and ways to assist students engaging with this process. We will then discuss the coming out process for transgendered individuals, as well as for LGBT people for whom gender, race, or religion may be salient.

COMING OUT AS LESBIAN, GAY OR BISEXUAL

What is "Coming Out"?

Coming out for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people involves an acknowledgement and acceptance of one's attraction to and orientation toward others of the same sex, and involves the acceptance of one's identity. It occurs initially when one acknowledges to oneself and then to others that one is gay, lesbian or bisexual. Since society tends to assume a person is straight, people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual are repeatedly put in the position of deciding whom they would like to share their sexual orientation with. It is useful for allies to have some familiarity with the ebb and flow of coming out processes.

What Stages Are Involved in Coming Out?

A common misconception about coming out is that it consists of one dramatic event. In fact, coming out is a life-long process characterized more by the minutia of deciding what to share with whom. In an attempt to describe the process of coming out, researchers have proposed several stage development theories. These theories outline a series of challenges that most LGB individuals face as they come to terms with who they are. Cass' theory⁶ is the most widely known and used. The model includes the following stages:

1. **IDENTITY CONFUSION:** Conscious awareness of the existence of LGBT orientation and that it has some relevance to self, but at the same time is confused about the issue. "Maybe this information about gay people pertains to me, maybe it does not."
2. **IDENTITY COMPARISON:** Aware that feelings of sexual and affectional attraction are for people of the same sex and that these attractions are different from many peers, family, and

from society at large. Begins to have “relationships” with same sex partners, but rationalizes it with, “This is a special case. It is not because she is a woman, but because she is THE PERSON I LOVE.”

3. IDENTITY TOLERANCE: Has increased contact with the gay community, but continues to believe and perpetuate stereotypes and myths about LGBT people. Is ambivalent about meeting other LGBT people and reluctant to embrace gay culture. Thinks, “I am probably LGBT, but I’m not sure I like that idea or can accept it.”
4. IDENTITY ACCEPTANCE: Actively seeking out LGBT culture and contacts and an increased involvement and commitment to being LGBT. Finds validation in contacts with other LGBT individuals and feels at home with others like them. However, continues to “pass,” keeps closeted about orientation, and attempts to fit into the majority culture. “OK, I’m LGBT and I am comfortable as long as I keep that life separate from my straight friends and people in the outside world. It is not anyone’s business how I live my personal life.”
5. IDENTITY PRIDE: Strong sense of belonging in the LGBT community and wants to be political and active. Has a strong sense of loyalty toward the LGBT community and anger toward the straight world. Immersed in LGBT culture and community and wants to separate themselves from straight people. “I am LGBT and proud of it. I prefer to have as little contact with straight people as possible. We are better than them and I cannot be close to them. I do not trust them.”
6. IDENTITY SYNTHESIS: No longer feels the need to separate from straight people and renews trust in straight people. Awareness that orientation is but one aspect of a more integrated person. Is comfortable in both worlds and with both straight and gay individuals. “I am LGBT, but that is just one part of me. I am comfortable with people gay or straight as long as they can be comfortable with me.”

While the above model is intended to apply to both men and women, some researchers suggest that identity development for lesbians may be slightly different. Therefore, McCarn and Fassinger⁷ offer the following model of Lesbian Identity Formation. This model also improves upon Cass’ model by presenting phases, rather than stages, which allow for a more continuous, circular process. No one moves through developmental stages in the same way. Further, people can be at different places within different contexts at the same time. For example, a student may be out to most everyone on campus, but s/he may be closeted to his/her family. The specifics of where, when and how people are out vary by their circumstances.

Each phase of the Lesbian Identity Formation model includes challenges one faces while developing one’s individual sexual orientation identity and challenges related to finding one’s place within the LGB community. A person can meet these challenges simultaneously or separately. In this model, disclosure of identity is NOT a necessary part of developing into a mature adult. Phases of identity formation include the following.

- Phase 1: Awareness
 - In this phase, a person may gain an awareness that they feel different than most others around them.

- Additionally, they may become aware that a sexual orientation other than heterosexual exists.
- Phase 2: Exploration
 - A person may begin exploring strong/erotic feelings for people or a person of the same sex.
 - They may also explore where they fit within the lesbian and gay community.
- Phase 3: Deepening/Commitment
 - A person deepens their self-knowledge and becomes more committed to self-fulfillment. In this stage, they may crystallize choices about their identity.
 - They may also become more committed to personal involvement with group, and gain a deeper awareness of oppression and consequences of their choices.
- Phase 4: Internalization/Synthesis
 - A person integrates their love for the same sex and their sexual choices into their overall identity.
 - They may also internalize an identity as a member of a minority group across a variety of contexts.

There are other theories that follow a similar pattern: the initial stage involves some awareness that another way of being (besides being heterosexual) exists and that it is somehow attractive and fits. In this first phase, the nature of one's attraction is unclear. This is followed by attempts to explore that way of being, the community, and culture that it represents as well as attempts to explore how it fits. Then, the individual goes through some phase of coming to terms with their identity and orientation. This phase may include rationalizing it away and denying it until some resolution is reached that ends in self-acceptance and grows into self-appreciation. And finally, the final phase is synthesis of one's sexual orientation with the rest of the person.

One criticism of such models is that they can be used to label and even pathologize LGB people. Therefore, it is important to understand that these models are only frameworks within which to understand the coming out process. It is important to remember that, while LGB people face unique challenges in their identity development due to institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism, all individuals face developmental challenges as they work to develop autonomy and relatedness. At times, everyone needs assistance in moving through these developmental tasks.

Benefits of Coming Out and Liabilities of Staying In the Closet

Coming out can help serve a number of important functions:

1. It is an important part of developing a healthy and positive identity as an LGB individual.
2. It can help a gay, lesbian or bisexual person feel more positively about themselves.
3. It can help a gay, lesbian or bisexual person gain more support on a personal level. Additionally, communities of LGB individuals and allies can share ideas more easily and strategize ways to combat heterosexism and institutionalized oppression.
4. It can make friendships closer by sharing such an important part of one's life. Being completely honest with a significant others in their lives can be a very enriching experience for a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person.

5. It can allow a gay, lesbian or bisexual person to lead a more integrated life, in which they can be appropriately open about their important relationships and about who they are.
6. It can increase the visibility of LGB people which may make it more difficult for stereotypes to persist. Additionally, it may inform people that they, indeed, do know gay people. Sometimes, people have more difficulty supporting discrimination when a face has been put on those who are discriminated against. It can also make it easier and perhaps safer for other LGBT people to be out once someone else has come out in a given environment.

Similarly, there are very real consequences to staying closeted. These liabilities include the following difficulties:

1. Identity development as an LGB person becomes very difficult when one has to pretend to be otherwise.
2. Often, staying closeted makes it more difficult to recognize and deal with internalized homophobia that may interfere with one's self-esteem.
3. To reduce any suspicions regarding their sexual orientation, some people avoid the LGB community. Others may not know how to access the community. In either case, those who remain in the closet are more likely to be isolated from those who might help them feel more positive about their sexual orientation and from collective efforts to dismantle oppression of the LGB community.
4. Individuals must often be dishonest within relationships in order to stay closeted. Hiding such a large part of oneself from others results in less intimate and genuine relationships.
5. This dishonesty can also result in living a double life, one gay, one non-gay, which can be physically and emotionally draining.

Benefits of Staying Closeted and Liabilities of Coming Out

While staying closeted can be a taxing and costly choice, it can also serve a number of important functions:

1. A person may be able to preserve important relationships, in which they may be rejected if they reveal their sexual orientation.
2. People are more likely to be seen as individuals rather than stereotyped as a group based on sexual orientation.
3. A person who stays in the closet may be physically, financially and emotionally safer. Depending on the context, this function can be more or less important. For example, someone may be comfortable being out socially, but may not be able to risk being out at work.

Some of the risks associated with coming out include the following:

1. Coming out can result in rejection and loss of relationship, especially from family and friends who do not understand or approve.
2. Coming out sometimes involves not just revealing one's sexual orientation, but also coming out about lies one has told to stay closeted. Often, significant others are most upset about the previous dishonesty when someone comes out.
3. People may initially be judged and labeled based on simplistic, distorted, and inaccurate stereotypes perpetuated by society. Additionally, because people assume that most people

are heterosexual, they believe they do not know many LGB people. Therefore, people may assume that an out individual is representative of ALL LGB people. This is a lot of pressure on a person, because it puts them in the position of being the “expert” on all things gay.

4. There is a very real possibility of harassment and abuse from others, ranging from disdainful ignoring to verbal insults to physical violence and property damage.
5. LGB people may have to deal with institutionalized discrimination and prejudice such as being fired, not being hired, being denied housing, losing child custody, and being denied other equal opportunity rights.
6. LGB individuals may suffer from more covert occupational and educational discrimination in the form of being excluded from informal networking and professional development opportunities.
7. There are liabilities particular to college students who may be financially dependent on their parents and who often only visit their parents on the holidays (which, arguably, is not the ideal time to come out).
8. People may be giving up power and privilege bestowed on people perceived to be heterosexual.

The pros and cons described above do not represent an exhaustive list. Instead, the point is simply that coming out involves complex and often conflicting forces. As an ally, it is important to appreciate that being in the closet creates a series of moral dilemmas for a person. There is often a tension between being forthright and honest or being safe and protected from emotional and/or physical harm. While allies are by no means the custodians of integrity, allies may be able to help queer people live a life with some integrity, while also understanding the complexities of the coming out process.

Working with Students who Need Assistance in Coming Out

There are always risks associated with coming out. If someone comes out to you, it is important to realize that they are entrusting you with valuable information. Additionally, they are allowing themselves to be vulnerable with you, at least to some degree. It is appropriate to communicate with them about how confidential this information is and to respect that confidentiality. When in doubt, keep your mouth shut! It is important to treat that information as a gift of trust.

Students, friends or family may present to you needing assistance with decisions around coming out issues. The following are some questions you may want to present them with to facilitate their decision-making process.

Questions to Consider When Coming Out to a Loved One

- 1) Relationship to the loved one
 - a. What does this relationship mean to you? This information can help you make the decision, but it might also be useful to communicate to the loved one while coming out.
 - b. What does coming out to this person mean to you? (This information might also be useful to communicate to the loved one while coming out.)
 - c. How will coming out improve this relationship?
 - d. How might coming out strain this relationship?

- e. What will be obstacles for this person to accept your sexual orientation?
 - f. What internal resources does this person have to cope with these obstacles?
- 2) Timing
- a. What are the pros and cons of coming out to them at this moment?
 - b. Could there be any financial ramifications of coming out? Can you afford to deal with those ramifications at this time?
 - c. Many students only go home on holidays or at stressful family times. Is this the best time for you to come out? If not, do you need to schedule a trip home devoted to coming out or do you need to come out in a letter or phone call?
 - d. Given your current internal and external resources, is this the best time to come out for you?
- 3) Location
- a. Where will the person feel most comfortable hearing this news?
 - b. Where will they feel the least attacked, put-on-the-spot, or humiliated?
 - c. Where will you feel the most comfortable?
 - d. What will you do after coming out?
 - e. Is there a person you can talk with afterwards?
- 4) Resources
- a. What are your internal and external resources?
 - b. What external resources (books, brochures, referrals, etc.) can you offer to your loved one?
- 5) Support for person coming out
- a. What kinds of support do you need for your coming out to be a positive experience?
 - b. Do you have a safe person(s) to talk with?
 - c. What might you say in order to come out? What order might you say it in? How can you prepare for any issues (especially negative reactions) you can anticipate arising during the conversation?
 - d. Coming out to certain people (especially family) can be very stressful regardless of whether the outcome feels positive or negative. What can you do to take care of yourself in the event of a stressful coming out experience? What can you do to celebrate or congratulate yourself after a stressful coming out experience?

It is especially useful for allies working with college students to understand this process, as many students find college a safer place to come out than their homes. Of course, some people come out earlier than the undergraduate years and may find coming out issues less overwhelming or salient than those in the midst of coming out for the first time. As with many things, the most important thing to remember is that we need to listen to students and meet them where they are.

COMING OUT AS TRANSGENDERED

The Process and Meaning of Coming Out as Transgendered

Coming out as transgendered is in some ways similar to coming out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. However, where ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, and ‘bisexual’ are terms that refer to sexual orientation, ‘transgendered’ is a term that refers to a person’s gender identity and experience. We might consider gender identity as the sense of maleness and femaleness, masculinity and femininity that a person has. The United States has a rigid sense of gender, e.g. what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. Transgendered individuals experience their gender as in some way transcending traditionally-assigned categories of gender. Coming out as transgendered, then, refers to the process of realizing or revealing aspects of one’s gender identity that transcend or even transgress typical, bimodal categories of gender.

The term ‘transgender’ refers to a range of experiences of gender identity. Some people who identify as transgender, for example, express their gender by wearing clothing typically associated with the so-called opposite sex. Others experience their physical bodies as wholly incongruent with their felt-sense of gender identity and may decide to alter their bodies with surgery or hormones. Depending on a person’s experience of his/her gender, then, the coming out process may vary quite a lot. A person who elects to have sex-reassignment surgery will probably have a complex and many-stepped process of coming out, which may involve coming out to family, friends, and co-workers. Alternatively, a person who cross-dresses may come out only by wearing clothing.

Coming out as transgendered is usually a process rather than a one-time event. At different times in this process, an individual may experience and speak of his/her gender in different ways. For instance, some transgendered individuals see themselves as in-between genders or as both genders. For other transgendered individuals, a bi-gendered identity is one stop on the road to a male or female identity. There is a great deal of variability in gender identities, and it is important to neither rush a transgendered individual nor prematurely impose a category that may not fit.

It is also important to bear in mind that surgery and hormones (which are undertaken by some but not all transgendered individuals) have profound effects on one’s body and feelings. Many transgendered individuals liken taking hormones to undergoing a second-adolescence with the attendant moodiness and increase in sexual desire. Elements of this experience may be difficult for the transitioning person to tolerate even if the ultimate outcome is very much desired.

Intimate Relationships and Coming Out

Sometimes transgendered individuals come out in the context of an intimate relationship or partnership. This process can deeply affect the partner of the transgendered individual in a number of ways. For starters, significant others/ partners may be surprised or confused by the disclosure. Accommodating a change in one partner’s gender can place a strain on a relationship. Partners and significant others may have their own coming out process as well, as they may need or want to reveal their partner’s (apparent) change in gender to family, friends, and associates. The ambivalence, stress, and relief involved in this process are often overlooked.

Costs and Benefits to Coming Out and Staying In

Benefits to coming out as transgendered are in many ways similar to the benefits L,G, B people derive from coming out. Realizing and acknowledging to oneself that one is transgender can allow a person a more integrated and authentic sense of identity. Coming out and being out with others can also permit more intimate and honest relationships. In general, after coming out to oneself and others, a person may have more energy and be more relaxed or more creative, as energy that was once consigned to conceal one's identity is now available for other purposes and pursuits.

When individuals come out, this can benefit the group as well as the individual. Coming out decreases the sense of invisibility that sometimes surrounds transgendered people and transgendered lives. Once one person comes out in an environment, it is often easier for the next transgendered person to come out in that environment. Thus, coming out has important benefits for the community. Additionally, when transgendered people come out to non-transgendered people, this can benefit non-transgendered people: it is more difficult to rely on stereotypes once one either meets real people who fit some category or one learns that someone one has known for some time fits into a certain category. Consequently, when a transgendered person comes out, non-transgendered people have the opportunity to dissipate the fog of stereotypes that sometimes affects how others are seen.

There are barriers to coming out as transgendered. Where nondiscrimination policies that include and protect lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are becoming more common, those same policies often neglect gender identity and gender expression. In fact, there are relatively few laws and policies that protect transgendered people. Among other things, this means that transgendered individuals can often be discriminated against with impunity. Many people are confused and made uncomfortable by gender non-conformity, perhaps because it challenges something – one's own sense of gender – which many people prefer to think of as basic or immutable. This can translate into fears (and the reality) of inter-personal rejection, institutional discrimination, or violence. In this context, coming out as transgendered can be both a liberating and a frightening process.

It is important to remember that gender identity and sexual orientation are related but distinct: a person can identify as transgendered and heterosexual or transgendered and lesbian, gay, or bisexual. If someone comes out to you as transgendered, they are telling you something about their gender identity. If someone comes out to you as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, they are telling you something about their sexual orientation.

ISSUES OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Most people's identity development involves the consolidation of more than simply an identity based on sexual orientation. People often have to also develop their identity in many areas such as gender, race, and religion. One's sexual orientation is rarely confronted in isolation from other aspects of oneself. Integrating the many areas of identity is an important task for all college students and perhaps particularly for LGBT students.

Religion

During college years, students begin to make decisions about what role religion will play in their lives. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students, coming to terms with their religious beliefs can be a difficult task in light of the fact that homosexuality and bisexuality are not accepted in many religious communities. This issue may be particularly difficult for individuals whose religion has served as a buffer from racism and anti-Semitism.

While some religious institutions are particularly unwelcoming to LGBT students, some religions are welcoming and affirming towards people of all sexual orientations. It is important to be knowledgeable about which churches, synagogues, and other faith-based groups in our community are LGBT friendly. On the national level, at the time of this writing, the first gay Episcopalian Bishop had been appointed amidst controversy within the denomination. Additionally, the Methodist Church had decided to stop avoiding a vote regarding the Church's position on same-sex marriages.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Students of Color

The experience of each racial/ethnic group is different depending on cultural values and beliefs about being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. While each person should be considered individually for the effects on his or her life of having experienced multiple sources of oppression, individuals from a similar racial/ethnic group may face similar issues due to their shared experience.

People who are oppressed and/or marginalized tend to form community around them that emphasizes what makes them similar sometimes to the exclusion of that which makes them different. This can be a problem for people who are members of multiple groups facing oppression. It may be very difficult for a person of color who is LGBT to find a safe community. Unfortunately, people often confront racism within LGBT communities and homophobia with communities of color. For example, a person often finds themselves in situations where they are the only person of color at an LGBT group or the only gay person among a group of people of color. Within these situations, a person may face racism or homophobia – that can range from subtle to overt - and feel alone and unsafe. A person may also not be understood and valued for their whole person within these contexts. LGBT groups and/or groups of color may exclude race or sexual orientation issues from their political agenda, forcing people to choose which identity to defend. Finally, people may be confused by subtle racism or homophobia. For example, an out African-American gay man who feels marginalized in both

the LGBT community, as well as within the African American community may wonder what role their race or sexual orientation played in this phenomenon.

Coming out to one's community of color can feel particularly risky to some people. Because people often rely heavily on their communities of color to deal with the pressures of racism and because they may feel the strongest sense of affiliation and belonging among people of color, they may feel the least safe coming out within those communities. At the same time, coming out to one's communities can have many benefits. By coming out, a person can make it feel safer for other LGBT people of color to come out. Additionally, coming out can strengthen the relationships one had within their community.

While people may find it difficult to come out within their communities of color, they may also find that people within the LGBT community often do not understand the reality of a person of color living in a racist world. For example, a group of LGBT individuals may have little sensitivity for the comfort level of their friend of color within a majority White situation. Due to the difficulties people may face in both communities, LGBT people of color may elect to minimize other aspects of their identities in order to fit into a community in which they find refuge.⁸ Additionally, the pressures of an additional form of oppression may feel like too much to handle for some. On the other hand, others may feel like they've developed 'transferable' skills for dealing with oppression in addition to the racial/ethnic oppression they have encountered their entire lives.

There are some commonalities between sexual identity and racial/ethnic identity development. For example, in both cases one may have to move the reality of the experience of oppression from unconscious to conscious awareness, and then may need to address issues raised by changed awareness of oppression. However, there are issues that may be unique to a person of color who is LGBT. For example, this individual may face two or more communities in which they suffer oppression.

One identity development model has been developed for visible racial/ethnic LGBT individuals attempting to incorporate their dual statuses.⁹ This model includes a phase in which an individual denies conflicts between their identities and the groups to which they belong. At various points in one's life, a person may then move to a place where they experience conflicts around which groups to which they feel allegiance. This person may then establish priorities in their allegiances and, sometimes, reach points where they have integrated the various communities into their lives. This model emphasizes the concept of flexible states/statuses vs. linear stages.

In sum, when a person is both a student of color and a gay, lesbian or bisexual person, that person may feel that only one part of his or her identity can be important. For many it is difficult to strike a balance that allows them to be empowered and liberated in both their identities. Multiple oppressions affect their lives because they may feel misunderstood by each group if they consider both parts important; they may feel it is important to choose which part of themselves is more important; they may have difficulty dealing with one part of themselves oppressing another part of themselves; and they may not have anyone to talk to about the split they feel in their identity.¹⁰

Morales suggests that LGB people of color balance three identities: “the gay/lesbian community, the ethnic minority community, and the predominantly White mainstream society” (p. 217)¹¹.

International LGBT Students

International students comprise approximately 12% of the population at the University of Illinois. The 3 main countries of origin for international students are China, India, and South Korea. As one might expect, there is a great deal of variety in the experiences of LGBT international students. An international student’s LGBT identity will be affected by numerous factors including cultural norms about sexuality in general and LGBT issues in particular, whether and when the student began to think of him/herself as LGBT identified, etc. Current research tells us a number of things specific to the experiences of international students.

- Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals tend to migrate in greater proportions than would be otherwise demographically expectable.¹²
- Migration can unmask a previously unknown LGBT identity. Individuals who might have kept their incipient LGBT identity secret from others or even themselves might reveal it in a more accepting culture. Thus, some international students may begin their coming out process only after arriving in the United States.¹³
- Among the LGB immigrant population in the West, specifically in the U.S., there is a greater proportion of heterosexually married LGB individuals from developing countries. In other words, it is best not to foreclose the possibility that someone is LGBT because s/he is heterosexually married.¹⁴
- For some LGBT international students, the US will be or will seem more repressive than their country of origin.

Immigration Issues

Until 1991, homosexuality was grounds for exclusion from admission to the United States, because gay men and lesbians were classified as "sexual deviants" under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The Immigration Act of 1990 saw triumph for gay men and lesbians as they were removed from this category.¹⁵

Couples' issues

US immigration law, which has family unification as a value, currently allows US citizens and legal permanent residents to sponsor spouses and other family members for immigration purposes. Since same-sex partners are not considered partners or family members, they are excluded from family-based immigration rights.

While this has long been true, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act stipulates that for federal purposes – including immigration -- marriage is defined as possible only between a man and a woman. Thus, even if same-sex marriage is recognized in other jurisdictions (or countries), it will not be countenanced by the US federal government.¹⁶

The Permanent Partners Immigration Act (H.R. 832) has been introduced into the U.S. Congress but has not yet passed. This bill would modify existing law to add permanent partners to the list of categories recognized as family. Thus same sex relationships would be recognized for purposes of immigration.¹⁷

14 countries currently recognize same-sex couples for purposes for immigration: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Asylum

Homosexuals who have experienced or fear persecution in their homelands have been eligible for asylum in the United States as members of a particular social group since June, 1994 when *Toboso-Alfonso*, 20 I&N Dec. 819¹⁸, the Board of Immigration Appeals case involving a Cuban gay asylum-seeker, was designated as precedent.¹⁹

In February 1989, an immigration judge granted political asylum -- for the first time -- to a Cuban gay man, Fidel Armando Toboso-Alfonso, because he was persecuted by his country for being a member of a particular social group (lesbians and gay men). The decision was upheld in March 1990 by the Board of Immigration Appeals. On June 19, 1994, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno deemed the decision to be a legal precedent, directing immigration and asylum officials to allow lesbians and gay men to be considered a "social group" for purposes of determining eligibility for political asylum.²⁰

On April 1, 1998, an unprecedented one-year filing deadline on asylum claims will take effect, requiring that all asylum applicants file within one year of arrival in the United States unless they can prove "exceptional circumstances" for their failure to file.²¹

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FAMILY ISSUES

Families Our Students May Come From

As we all know, the kinds of families students come from vary greatly. Some of our students, regardless of their own sexual orientation, will come from households headed by gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered parents. In the past, many LGBT people with children had children before they came out, when they were in heterosexual marriages. More and more frequently, LGBT people are having children within LGBT relationships. The ability for LGBT people to adopt and conceive children has created a mini baby-boom among LGBT people. We will increasingly encounter students who grew up in these households. To the extent that our campus literature and programs (e.g. orientation) mentions or involves parents, it ought to account for and make space for LGBT families.

Families Our Students May Form

Although in the past families headed by transgendered, lesbian, gay, or bisexual people tended to be invisible, they are increasingly recognized in policy and programs. Employers and universities often have nondiscrimination statements, domestic partner benefits, or other programs that may be important and useful for LGBT students. When you are advising a student or helping a student plan for his/her future, it may be helpful to keep these things in mind.

Graduate School

If a student is planning on attending graduate or professional school, he or she will, of course, be most interested in the quality and reputation of the program in the student's chosen field. In deciding between different programs, however, it may be helpful to assist the student in evaluating how supportive the university or program is to LGBT people. Some students are assertive and able to advocate for themselves; these students may not require assistance in considering some of the matters listed below. Other students may be reticent to ask about programs; sometimes having a mentor or advisor discuss the matters listed below can help a student feel more able to ask about programs. For still other students, the availability and importance of access to certain programs simply may not occur to them – these students may be unfamiliar with the importance of health insurance, for instance. As the student ages and moves on to new phases of life, these matters may become more salient.

Helping LGBT students anticipate the importance of these life matters and plan accordingly can be very useful: just like a heterosexual student, an LGBT student may not think twice about health insurance. But unlike the heterosexual student, the LGBT student may not automatically be able to enroll a partner in an insurance plan. LGBT people cannot take for granted the kind of access to programs and services available to straight people. Learning how to anticipate and gather this kind of information so that it can be factored into decisions is an important life skill for LGBT people.

In evaluating different graduate programs, here are some questions that may be helpful for LGBT students to consider.

- Does the university have a statement of nondiscrimination that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and marital status? {note: the University of Illinois has a nondiscrimination statement prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and marital status; gender expression is not protected.}
- If the university offers “family” or “married student housing” does the university consider same-sex couples or same-sex headed families to qualify for the family housing? This may be especially important in areas of the country where housing is very expensive or difficult to find. {note: University of Illinois family housing is available to same sex couples.}
- Most universities offer some kind of student insurance program. Is it possible for students to enroll their same sex domestic partners in the insurance program? {Note: the University of Illinois student insurance plan allows legally married spouses to be enrolled but not domestic partners.}
- Some universities allow spouses or partners access to services at the university. These services can include the ability to borrow from the library, access to student recreation facilities and programs, and the ability to obtain services at the student health center. If the university under consideration allows this kind of access, is it available both to legally married couples and to domestic partners? {Note: the University of Illinois allows graduate students to pay a “graduate spousal fee” that entitles legally married spouses to access services at McKinley Health Center [proof of major medical insurance coverage and proof of legal marriage is required]; domestic partners are not eligible for McKinley Health Center services. Both legally married spouses and domestic partners of students are eligible to purchase memberships to Campus Recreation facilities. The University of Illinois library system allows borrowing privileges to the domestic partners of students. The domestic partner needs to present a “Spousal I-Card.” Spousal I-Cards can be obtained at the ID Center: the students and his/her domestic partner both need to present a photo identification as well as proof that they live together.}

Employment

When a student is considering a job offer, there are similar kinds of questions that may be asked. Since the acceptance of a job may mean a more or less permanent relocation, it will also be important to learn information about the city, state, or country where the job is located. The laws or resources in different areas can sometimes have a dramatic effect on a person’s quality of life. Some of the questions below are best directed at the potential employer, while the answers to others are available on-line. The Human Rights Campaign’s web site (<http://www.hrc.org/>) is an especially helpful source of information in this regard.

The Job Itself

- Does the company offer domestic partner benefits? This is a crucial piece of information, as the Human Rights Campaign estimates that up to 40% of an employee’s compensation comes through the benefits package offered.²² Important things to learn include the following.

1. Can employees enroll domestic partners in health, dental, and vision plans?
 2. Can an employee take sick leave to care for an ill domestic partner?
 3. Can an employee take bereavement leave (if bereavement leave is part of the benefits package) to attend his/her domestic partner's funeral or the funeral of members of his/her domestic partner's family (the equivalent of in-laws)?
 4. Under what circumstances can an employee take maternity, paternity, or family leave for the birth or adoption of a baby? (For instance, are women able to take family/maternity leave when their female partner gives birth?)
 5. Do domestic partners have the same entitlement to an employee's retirement package as legally married spouses?
 6. Are domestic partners welcomed at company events such as picnics or firm dinners?
- If the employer has a nondiscrimination statement, does it prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and marital status?
 - Does the company have an "employee network group" for LGBT employees? These groups offer opportunities for networking or support for employees. A list of companies with these groups is available at the Human Rights Campaign web site at <http://www.hrc.org/worknet/empgroup/index.asp>.
 - If the company may ask the employee to relocate at some point, where may the employee be sent? Can the employee decline a transfer? National and state laws vary from one jurisdiction to another and these laws can have important implications for the quality of life of LGBT people. If the employee does relocate, will the relocation package include domestic partners and children/family?

The Place Where the Job Is Located

- Does the city or state have a law that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and marital status?
- How does the city, state, or nation legally recognize same sex couples: is it possible to register as domestic partners; if the job is in another country, is it possible for same sex couples to legally marry; if the job is in another country, is the country one that recognizes same sex relationships for purposes of immigration?
- Does the state allow "second-parent adoption"? Several states and many areas of the United States allow two adults of the same sex to adopt children. This allows both parents to have a legal relationship with the child and affords the family important legal protections.
- Are there laws that actively discriminate against LGBT people? For example, the state of Florida explicitly forbids gay men and lesbians to adopt children. If a gay student who someday may want to have children, for example, is deciding between two jobs that are roughly equal, one of which is in Florida, he may want to consider the job located elsewhere.

- Is the company located in a place that has resources for LGBT people? Some of these resources include welcoming or affirming religious institutions, health clinics or providers that specialize in services to LGBT people (or health providers experienced in working with LGBT people), neighborhoods or places where LGBT people gather socially.

SECTION III

HOMOPHOBIA & HETEROSEXISM

HOMOPHOBIA

Homophobia: “The fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians, gay men, or any behavior that is outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles. Homophobia can be manifested in fear of association with lesbian or gay people or being perceived as lesbian or gay. Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbian and gay people to physical violence against people thought to be lesbian or gay.”²³

Heterosexism: “The societal/cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, acceptable sexual orientation.”²⁴

Homophobia refers to the many ways in which people are oppressed on the basis of sexual orientation. Sometimes, homophobia is intentional with a clear intent to hurt lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Homophobia can also be unintentional, when there is no desire to hurt anyone, but when people are unaware of the consequences of their actions. Stereotypes and conformity play a large part in homophobia. When people base their opinion of others on a simplistic, one-dimensional image, it is difficult to see them as a whole person. Two studies, Asch 1951 and Vine 1981, have shown that conformity is a strong influence on people’s behavior, influencing 74% of participants to give obvious wrong answers in order to conform to the dominant group.²⁵

There are four distinct but interrelated types of homophobia: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. Institutional and cultural homophobias are also referred to as **heterosexism**. Many prejudices faced by transgendered individuals are based on homophobic and heterosexist beliefs because society often confounds gender with sexual orientation variance.

1. **Personal homophobia** is prejudice. It is the personal belief that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are sinful, immoral, sick, inferior, or incomplete men and women. Prejudice towards any group is learned behavior; people have to be taught to be prejudiced.

Personal homophobia is sometimes experienced as the fear of being perceived as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and the fear that one will be treated as if they were sinful, immoral, sick, or inferior. Coming from a common mistaken belief that there is a positive correlation between sexual orientation and sex roles, many people spend time and energy trying to fit the prevailing cultural image of what it means to be female or male to avoid being perceived as lesbian or gay and to quiet their personal fear. For heterosexuals, this fear sometimes leads to trying to “prove” one’s heterosexuality. When lesbian, gay, or bisexual people experience this fear, it is sometimes called “internalized homophobia.”

2. **Interpersonal homophobia** is the fear, dislike, or hatred of people believed to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This hatred or dislike may be expressed as name-calling, jokes, verbal and physical harassment, and individual acts of discrimination. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are often attacked for no other reason than their assailants’ homophobia. Relatives who shun their lesbian, gay, or bisexual family members,

employees who are unfriendly to lesbian, gay, or bisexual co-workers, and heterosexual friends who are uncomfortable or uninterested in hearing about gay or lesbian friends' relationships are all demonstrating interpersonal homophobia.

3. **Institutional homophobia** (or **heterosexism**) refers to the many ways government, schools, churches, businesses, and other institutions and organizations discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation. These organizations and institutions set policies, allocate resources, and maintain unwritten standards for the behavior of their members in ways that discriminate.

For example, institutional homophobia is reflected in organizations that prevent gay, lesbian, and bisexual people from accessing domestic partner benefits, state laws that prevent gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals from becoming foster or adoptive parents, school districts that attempt to fire lesbian or gay teachers, and governments that fail to insure the rights of all citizens. Business or institutional norms for social events that discourage lesbian, gay, or bisexual employees from bringing their same-sex partners while heterosexual employees are encouraged to bring their partners are also demonstrating institutional homophobia or heterosexism.

4. **Cultural homophobia** (or **heterosexism**) refers to social standards and norms that pervade the culture insidiously, often consciously unnoticed. The message is that being heterosexual is better and more moral than being lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The unwritten standard is that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual. It is communicated throughout the culture each day in television shows and commercials, print advertisements, and social situations. The "normal" heterosexual orientation of all children is assumed and unquestioned. Gay men or lesbians portrayed on television, stage, or in movies, are usually depicted as unhappy, engaged in self-destructive behaviors, ambivalent about their sexual orientation, or an undeveloped caricature displaying only stereotypically defined sexual behavior.

Heterosexuals don't realize these standards exist; lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are acutely aware of the standards. The painful result is feeling like an outsider in society or being excluded from social goods and services.²⁶

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GAY & LESBIAN PEOPLE²⁷

Isn't homosexuality fairly infrequent?

The prevalence of gay men and lesbian women has been shown over time in various cultures and in many studies to be approximately 10% of the population.²⁸ Lesbians and gay men work in every profession and career. Approximately 10% of everyone you know is gay or lesbian.

Homosexuality doesn't seem "natural"; does it exist in nature anywhere besides in human beings? Isn't it dysfunctional?

From a scientific point of view, it is "natural." Any animal, including human beings, is capable of responding to homosexual stimuli. Research suggests that homosexuality is almost universal among animals. It is even more frequent among highly developed species.

Is it a conscious decision or choice to be lesbian or gay?

Researchers continue to disagree on the specific "causes" of homosexuality. However, they mostly agree that there is some predisposition or genetic relationship involved. The "decision" may be more about whether or not to acknowledge their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors rather than whether or not they are going to be gay. Most research supports a natural occurrence in the population, just like heterosexuality or any other orientation on the continuum.

Aren't the majority of child molesters gay?

No. The majority of child molestation against young girls and boys is committed by heterosexual men. The majority of gay men or lesbians have no sexual interest in children or adolescents.

Do gay or lesbian teachers try to convert their students to the gay lifestyle?

Homosexual conversion or seduction is no more common than heterosexual seduction. Many gay teachers live with the fear that they will be fired if they are "found out." Most, if not all, gay men and lesbians have no desire to convert students. Unfortunately, their efforts to provide support for younger gay men and lesbians may be misconstrued. If the data are correct, it appears that sexual orientation is established by age 3-6 years; contact with teachers would have no effect. Regardless and ironically, some heterosexuals engage in "conversion" or "reparative therapy" in an attempt to alter the sexual orientations of LGBT people.

Don't most gay people regard themselves as members of the opposite sex?

The vast majority of gay men and lesbians are comfortable with their gender. It is important not to confuse being gay with transgender (one who experiences their gender as something other than the traditionally assigned bimodal categories of male or female).

Is homosexuality something that is learned or taught?

99% of gay people originate from a heterosexual home where both parents are straight. If sexual orientation were solely dependent on social learning, there would be no gay people at all in homophobic societies.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BISEXUAL PEOPLE²⁹

Are bisexuals more promiscuous than other groups?

Promiscuity is no more prevalent in the bisexual population than in other groups of people. Just like others including gay, lesbian, and heterosexuals, bisexuals may have one long-term committed partner, multiple partners, and sometimes go through periods of time without any partner.

Are bisexuals equally attracted to both sexes?

Sexuality is on a continuum. Based on research by Fritz Klein, his Sexuality Continuum explains sexuality on a scale with homosexuality at one end and heterosexuality at the other. Shades of gray exist all along the scale. Indeed, some bisexuals are equally attracted to both sexes and would be in the middle of the continuum. Some are attracted in varying degrees to both sexes while leaning more toward one or the other.

Isn't it true that bisexuals are just denying their lesbianism or gayness?

Bisexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation that incorporates gayness and attraction to people of the other gender. Most bisexuals consider themselves part of the generic term "gay." Many are quite active in the gay community, both socially and politically. Some use more descriptive terms such as "bisexual lesbian" to increase their visibility.

Aren't bisexuals incapable of being monogamous?

Bisexuality is a sexual orientation. It is independent of a lifestyle of monogamy or non-monogamy. Bisexuals are as capable as anyone of making a long-term monogamous commitment to a partner they love. Bisexuals live a variety of lifestyles, as do heterosexuals, gay men and lesbians.

Is bisexuality a "developmental transition" on the way to being gay?

Some people go through a transitional period of bisexuality on their way to awareness of their true identity, be it gay, lesbian, or heterosexual. For some, it may be that homosexuality is the transitional phase in the coming-out process toward awareness of their bisexual identity. For many others, however, bisexuality remains their long-term orientation.

Are bisexuals confused about their sexuality?

It is natural for bisexuals, gay men and lesbians to go through a period of confusion. When you are told by society that you don't exist or that how you feel is wrong or immoral, confusion is an appropriate reaction. The coming-out process is about self-awareness, acceptance, and expression of one's true self to others. Even heterosexuals can go through a period of confusion about their sexuality during the teen years or at other times in their lives. Having the support of the dominant orientation in society, they often resolve their questions more easily.

Don't bisexuals spread HIV to everyone, both lesbian and heterosexual?

The label "bisexual" refers to sexual orientation and says nothing about sexual behavior. HIV occurs in, and is spread by, people of all sexual orientations. HIV is contracted through unsafe

sexual practices, shared needles, contaminated blood transfusions and contact with contaminated blood through a cut in the skin.

Do bisexuals try to hide in the heterosexual community when it benefits them?

To “pass” for straight and deny your bisexuality is as painful and damaging for bisexuals as it is for gay men and lesbians to deny their identity.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TRANSGENDER & TRANSSEXUAL PEOPLE³⁰

Research on and information for transsexual/transgender people is not as readily available as it is for the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities. Below are some of the most frequently asked questions about the meaning of trans- or intersexed people.

What does “transgender” mean?

Transgender is a broad term that covers many aspects in the gender experience. People who identify as transgender feel that their prescribed gender role does not fit with their experience of their gender. The term ‘transgender’ encompasses a range of experiences of gender; transgender people can be, but are not always, transsexuals. Some people decide to redefine themselves by changing their gender expression only and others feel that they also need to change their bodies. Sex hormones, electrolysis, plastic surgery, or sex reassignment surgery can help people make a physical change that feels more congruent with their self-image. The term transgender includes the following.

- **FTM (female to male):** People who were born female but see themselves as male.
- **MTF (male to female):** People who were born male but see themselves as female.
- **Intersexed:** Some babies are born with genitalia of both sexes. Some parents and doctors elect surgery for the infant and assign a gender. Because a person’s true gender cannot be known by their genitalia, an assignment at birth can be wrong. Intersexed people have been treated differently by different societies over history. In some other cultures they are given special places in the group and revered as special. Generally, the more homophobic a society, the less understanding and acceptance there will be for trans- or inter-sexed people.

What is meant by drag queen, drag king, and cross-dressing?

Drag Queen refers to a gay man who dresses in flamboyant and glamorous clothes usually associated with female movie stars and singers for theatrical entertainment and sometimes with the intention of poking fun at gender roles. Drag King refers to a lesbian woman who dresses in clothes often worn by male entertainers for the purpose of entertaining an audience. A person who cross dresses, also a transvestite, enjoys dressing in clothes typically worn by the other gender. This is not a reference to sexual orientation and many cross-dressers are heterosexual married men.

Are transgender people gay?

Sexual orientation spans the continuum with transgender people just as it does with everyone else. Some FTM men are attracted to women and would likely identify as a heterosexual man. Some FTM men are attracted to men and would identify as a gay man. Likewise, MTF women may be attracted to men and would identify as a heterosexual woman. A MTF woman attracted to women would likely identify as a lesbian woman.

How may transgendered people experience discrimination?

Many people are confused and made uncomfortable by gender non-conformity, perhaps because it challenges something – one’s own sense of gender – which many people prefer to think of as basic or immutable. Where nondiscrimination policies that include and protect lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are becoming more common, those same policies often neglect gender identity and gender expression. In fact, there are relatively few laws and policies that protect transgendered people. Among other things, this means that transgendered individuals can often be discriminated against with impunity. They are more likely to lose their jobs, become the target of attacks, suffer emotional trauma, and physical abuse. It has only been recently that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have accepted transgendered people into the broader gay family and organizations. Tension exists between GLB people and transgendered people in many of these organizations.

How do I deal with transgender people?

Refer to a transgender person by their chosen gender. If you are not sure, it’s good to ask. For someone in transition, you may see them as male in one setting and female in another. Some prefer to be addressed by the gender they are expressing. Some may have a different preference. Again, it’s fine to ask if you’re not sure.

What is involved in sex reassignment surgery?

For more information about this surgery, go to <http://www.transproud.com/transition.html>

LEVELS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS LGBT PEOPLE³¹

Homophobic Levels of Attitude:

- **Repulsion:** Homosexuality is seen as a “crime against nature.” Gay men and lesbians are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, etc., and anything is justified to change them. (i.e. prison, hospitalization, behavior therapy)
- **Pity:** Characterized by the following sorts of attitudes, pity is a sort of homosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of becoming straight should be reinforced and those who seem to be born “that way” are to be pitied.
- **Tolerance:** Characterized by the following sorts of attitudes: Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people “grow out of.” Thus, gay men and lesbians are less mature than straights and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gay men and lesbians should not be given positions of authority (because they are still working through adolescent behaviors).
- **Acceptance:** Still implies there is something to accept, characterized by such statements as “You’re not gay to me, you’re a person.” “What you do in bed is your own business,” “That’s fine as long as you don’t flaunt it.”

Positive Levels of Attitude:

- **Support:** Work to safeguard the rights of gay men and lesbians. Such people may be uncomfortable themselves, but are aware of the climate and the irrational unfairness.
- **Admiration:** Acknowledges that being gay/lesbian in our society takes strength. Such people are willing to truly look at themselves and work on their own homophobic attitudes.
- **Appreciation:** Value the diversity of people and see gay men/lesbians as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.
- **Nurturance:** Assume that gay and lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view gay men and lesbians with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be gay advocates.

CONTINUUM OF RESPONSES TO HETEROSEXIST AND HOMOPHOBIC ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS³²

1. **Actively Participating.** This state of response includes actions that directly support lesbian/gay oppression. These actions include laughing at or telling jokes that put down lesbian women or gay men, making fun of people who don't fit the traditional stereotypes of what is masculine or feminine, discouraging others and avoiding personal behavior that is not sex-stereotyped, and engaging in verbal or physical harassment of lesbian women, gay men, or heterosexuals who do not conform to traditional sex-role behavior. It also includes working for anti-gay legislation.
2. **Denying or Ignoring.** This stage of response includes inaction that supports LGBT oppression coupled with an unwillingness or inability to understand the effects of homophobic and heterosexual actions. This stage is characterized by a "business as usual" attitude. Though responses in this stage are not actively and directly homophobic or heterosexual, the passive acceptance of these actions by others serves to support the system of gay and lesbian oppression.
3. **Recognizing, But No Action.** This stage of response is characterized by a recognition of homophobic or heterosexual actions, and the harmful effects of these actions. However, this recognition does not result in action to interrupt the homophobic or heterosexual situation. Taking action is prevented by homophobia or a lack of knowledge about specific actions to take. This stage of response is accompanied by discomfort due to lack of congruence between recognizing homophobia or heterosexism yet failing to act on this recognition. An example of this stage of response is a person hearing a friend tell a "queer joke," recognizing that it is a homophobic, not laughing at the joke, but saying nothing to the friend about the joke.
4. **Recognizing and Interrupting.** This stage of response includes not only recognizing homophobic and heterosexual actions, but also taking action to stop them. Though the response goes no further than stopping, this stage is often an important transition from passively accepting homophobic or heterosexual actions to actively choosing anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexual actions. In this stage a person hearing a "queer joke" would not laugh and would tell the joke teller that jokes putting down lesbian and gay people are not funny. Another example would be a person who realized that s/he is avoiding an activity because others might think s/he is lesbian or gay if s/he participates in it, and then decides to participate.

5. **Educating Self.** This stage of response includes taking action to learn more about lesbian women, gay men, heterosexism, and homophobia. These actions can include reading books, attending workshops, talking to others, joining organizations, listening to lesbian or gay music, or any other actions that can increase awareness and knowledge. This stage is also a prerequisite for the last three stages. All three involve interactions with others about homophobia and heterosexism. In order to do this confidently and comfortably, people need first to learn more.
6. **Questioning and Dialoguing.** This stage of response is an attempt to begin educating others about homophobia and heterosexism. This stage goes beyond interrupting homophobic and heterosexist interactions to engage people in dialogue by attempting to help others increase their awareness of and knowledge about homophobia and heterosexism.
7. **Supporting and Encouraging.** This stage of response includes actions that support and encourage the anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist actions of others. Overcoming the homophobia that keeps people from interrupting this form of oppression even when they are offended by it is difficult. Supporting and encouraging others who are able to take this risk is an important part of reinforcing anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist behavior.
8. **Initiating and Preventing.** This stage of response includes actions that actively anticipate and identify homophobic institutional practices or individual actions and work to change them. Examples include teachers changing a “Family Life” curriculum that is homophobic or heterosexist, or counselors inviting a speaker to come and discuss how homophobia can affect counselor-client interactions.

SECTION IV:

HOW TO BE AN ALLY

WHAT IS AN ALLY?

According to Webster's *New World Dictionary of the American Language*, an ally is someone "joined with another for a common purpose."

Being an ally on gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender issues is the process of working to develop individual attitudes, institutions, and culture in which gay, lesbian, bisexual people feel they matter. This work is motivated by an enlightened self-interest to end homophobia and heterosexism.

-J. Jay Scott and Vernon Wall, 1991

FOUR STEPS TO BECOMING A STRAIGHT ALLY TO LGBT PEOPLE³³

1. Awareness / Accessing Resources

Become aware of who you are and how you are different from and similar to LGBT people. Such awareness can be gained through conversations with LGBT individuals, reading about LGBT people and their lives, attending awareness building workshops and meetings, and by self-examination.

2. Knowledge / Education

Become educated on the issues, knowing facts, statistics, laws, policies and culture of LGBT people.

3. Creating an Open and Supportive Environment

Encourage and promote an atmosphere of respect. Acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate differences among individuals and within groups. Be a safe and open person to talk with.

4. Take Action

Teach, share your knowledge. Action is the only way to change society as a whole. Stand up for and fight for human rights.

QUALITIES OF AN ALLY³⁴

An ally to LGBT individuals is a person who . . .

1. Believes that it is in her/his self-interest to be an ally to LGBT individuals.
2. Has worked to develop an understanding of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues. Works to be comfortable with her/his knowledge of gender identity and sexual orientation.
3. Is comfortable saying the words "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender."
4. Works to understand how patterns of oppression operate, and is willing to identify oppressive acts and challenge the oppressive behaviors of others.
5. Works to be an ally to all oppressed groups.
6. Finds a way that feels personally congruent to confront /combat homophobia and heterosexism.
7. Similar to how an LGBT person "comes out of the closet," an ally "comes out" as an ally by publicly acknowledging her/his support for LGBT people and issues.
8. Chooses to align with LGBT individuals, and represents their needs--especially when they are unable to do so themselves.
9. Expects to make some mistakes, and does not give up when things become discouraging.
10. Promotes a sense of community with LGBT individuals, and teaches others about the importance of these communities. Encourages others to also provide advocacy.
11. Is aware that she/he may be called the same names and be harassed in similar ways to those whom she/he is defending. Whenever possible, a heterosexual ally avoids "credentializing," which involves disclosing their heterosexual identity in order to avoid negative or unpleasant assumptions or situations.
12. Works to address/confront individuals without being defensive, sarcastic, or threatening.

BENEFITS OF BEING AN ALLY³⁵

- You open yourself up to the possibility of close relationships with an additional 10% of the world.
 - You become less locked into sex role stereotypes.
 - You increase your ability to have close and loving relationships with same-sex friends.
 - You have opportunities to learn from, teach, and have an impact on a population with whom you might not otherwise interact.
 - You may make a profound difference in the life of someone you love who finds something positive in their sexual identity.
-

WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU

Don't be surprised.

Respect their confidentiality, they have placed a trust in you. A breach of this confidence can be devastating.

Be supportive.

Explain that many people have struggled with these issues in the past. Admit that dealing with one's sexual or gender orientation can be a difficult and confusing process. Recognize, too, that coming out can bring relief and excitement. There are no easy and fast answers. Keep the door open for further conversations and help. If you are feeling uncertain or don't think you can be supportive, refer them to someone who can be.

Do not put words in their mouth.

It is not our jobs to tell people what their issues are, but rather to help them deal with the issues they present. If a supportive environment is provided, people who would like to talk about issues of sexuality or gender orientation will know that this is all right. Allow them to define their own issues. Listen.

Remember that everyone is a complex and unique individual.

Sexuality is only a part of the whole of a person. Other factors, such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, family history, geographic location, and many others, may also be important components of an individual's identity.

HOW TO SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE

In your personal life....

1. Be a vocal and open supporter of LGBT people and issues. Remember that silence is complicity.
2. Do not assume that everyone you meet is a heterosexual person. Assume that wherever you go there are LGBT people.
3. Have a good understanding of sexual orientation and be comfortable with your own. If you decide to disclose your sexual orientation to others, be aware of why you are doing it.
4. Change your language to be inclusive of people of all sexual orientations. For example, instead of asking, "Do you have a boy/girlfriend?" ask, "Are you seeing anyone?" or "Do you have a romantic partner?"
5. Confront your own feelings about gay people, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Challenge your own stereotypes and fears.
6. Do not assume that a gay man or lesbian of your own gender is attracted to you.
7. If you are in a heterosexual romantic relationship, mention that your partner is of the other sex, thereby implying that he/she may not have to be.

At work.....

8. Include LGBT people in mission statements, affirmative action statements, and policies. Create policies that explicitly state that harassment of LGBT individuals is unacceptable.
9. Use fliers, brochures, posters, and handbooks that take into account differences in sexual orientations.
10. In your office, have LGBT-friendly posters, buttons, and books visible.
11. Devote equal training time to LGBT issues.
12. Assume that there are LGBT people (patrons, coworkers) who are wondering whether your workplace is safe for them. Provide safety by making clear your support of LGBT people.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH LGBT STUDENTS³⁶

Don't be surprised when someone comes out to you. Be prepared for this to happen.

Respect students' privacy. It is imperative that you can be trusted.

Be informed. It is important that you are aware of the needs of LGBT students. Know the available resources on and off campus. Know when and where to seek help. Seek consultation when necessary. (See the section in this manual called "Educating Yourself about LGBT Issues.")

Examine your own biases. If you are uncomfortable dealing with LGBT issues and believe you cannot be open and accepting, refer the student to someone else.

Maintain a balanced perspective. Though important, sexual orientation is only one component of a person's identity. Most people have many important components in their identity, such as gender, race, spirituality, and so on.

Understand that each person's sexual orientation is unique to them. While there are some similarities among LGBT people, be aware that there are also many differences between individuals in these communities.

Deal with feelings first. You can be helpful by simply listening to LGBT individuals.

Allow LGBT students to move at the pace at which they feel most comfortable.

Use gender-free and inclusive language.

EDUCATING YOURSELF ABOUT LGBT ISSUES

Below are some tips about how to familiarize yourself with the issues facing LGBT individuals.

- Attend monthly ALLY Network meetings.
- Attend workshops on LGBT topics.
- Read about LGBT issues and/or homophobia.
- Talk about these issues with others.
- Attend LGBT cultural and community events.
- Watch films or TV shows with LGBT characters or themes.
- Learn about local support networks and national organizations.
- Join organizations (PFLAG, 85% Coalition, NGTF, etc.).
- Dialogue with LGBT friends and colleagues.

¹ Adapted from Adams, M., Bell, L. & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

² Girshick, L. B. (2002). The societal context of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. In L. B. Girshick, *Woman-to-woman sexual violence: Does she call it rape?* (pp. 31-48). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

³ Adams, M., Bell, L. & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

⁴ <http://www.gaydelaware.com/iconindex/html>

⁵ Adapted from Rochlin, M. (1995). The heterosexual questionnaire. In: Kimmel, M. and Messner, M. (Eds). *Men's Lives*. California: Hazelden Press, p. 407.

⁶ Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 105-126.

⁷ McCarn, S. R. & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24, 508-534.

⁸ Fukuyama, M. A., & Ferguson, A. D. (2000). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people of color: Understanding cultural complexity and managing multiple oppressions. In R. M. Perez, K. A. DeBord, & K. J. Bieschke (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients* (pp. 81-105). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

⁹ Morales, E. S. (1989). Ethnic minority families and minority gays and lesbians. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 17, 217-239.

¹⁰ Wall, V. A. & Washington, J. (1991). Understanding gay and lesbian students of color. In N. J. Evans & V. A. Wall (Eds.), *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus* (pp. 60-78). Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Assn.

¹¹ Morales, 1989

¹² Akhtar, S. (1999). *Immigration and identity: Turmoil, treatment, and transformation*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

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- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ <http://immigration.about.com/library/weekly/aa111599.htm>.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.lgirtf.org>.
- ¹⁷ http://www.hrc.org/issues/federal_leg/ppia/quickfacts.asp.
- ¹⁸ BIA, 1990.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.hri.ca/publicat/new/asylum-claims/>.
- ²⁰ <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=39>.
- ²¹ <http://www.hri.ca/pulicat/new/asylum-claims/>.
- ²² http://www.hrc.org/worknet/dp/dp_reasonwhy.asp.
- ²³ Adams et al., 1997.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ <http://pages.zoom.co.uk/lgs/facts2.html>.
- ²⁶ <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~rucc/homophobia.html>.
- ²⁷ Adams et al., 1997.
- ²⁸ Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W., & Martin, C. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: WB Saunders.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Riddle, D. I. (1991). Scale of Homophobia. In N. J. Evans & V. A. Wall (Eds.), *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus* (pp. 60-78). Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Assn. This scale was developed by Dr. Dorothy Riddle, a psychologist in Tucson, AZ. It has also been referred to as the Riddle Homophobia Scale and The Riddle Scale – Attitudes Towards Differences.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Adapted from SAFE on Campus material.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Adapted from ally training information at www.debradavis.org/gecpage/ally.html.
- ³⁶ Adapted from PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) material.